

# Where Church and State Meet: *Spectrum* Surveys the Adventist Vote

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*By the side of every religion is to be found a political opinion, which is connected with it by affinity. If the human mind be left to follow its own bent, it will regulate the temporal and spiritual institutions of society in a uniform manner, and man will endeavor ... to harmonize earth with heaven.*

—Alexis de Tocqueville<sup>1</sup>

If all U.S. voters were Seventh-day Adventists, George W. Bush would be reinstated as U.S. president in November! In a national sample of committed Adventists we found that a total of 44 percent plan to cast their ballots for President Bush, whereas only 16 percent plan to vote for Senator John Kerry and 26 percent are undecided. How do we know? A very recent groundbreaking study reported in this article provides an unprecedented opportunity to examine how committed Adventists in the United States relate to the most salient social and political issues that face the nation.

The United States has been going through a very exciting political year. Not only is control of the presidency and Congress at stake, but many public and social issues are also being hotly debated. Most of these concern moral and religious values. The United States faces a stark and very consequential decision come November 2: deciding who will lead the nation as president at an extraordinary time in its history.

This is the time of an unprecedented “terrorist war” that knows no geographical bounds and is being fought without a visible enemy, a time in which the occupation of Iraq, which lacks

an exit strategy, is increasingly more difficult and fraught with missteps; where an increasing number of Americans live without health insurance and in poverty; where the traditional wall of separation between church and state is being threatened seriously; and in which heated debate about same-sex marriage has polarized the country.<sup>2</sup>

Religious and nonreligious voters are processing all of these issues and many others in one of the most heated presidential races in modern history. Key to understanding the social-political attitudes and behaviors of Americans in the upcoming election are their



religious life and commitments.

Among Americans, religion continues to play a persistent role in all matters related to politics. As a result, within the last seven years major research universities and think tanks have devoted and received significant resources to study the role of religion in public life.<sup>3</sup>

How do American Adventists—particularly those most closely affiliated with the Church—fit into the mix of all these issues? The authors of this article have been writing on the relationship between Adventists and politics since the 1980s, and they covered the presidential elections of 1984 and 1988 (Dudley and Hernandez, 1992). Here, thanks to the support and encouragement of *Spectrum*, we return to the topic. But first let us provide a bit more context.

Kenneth Walt (2003), a key researcher in the field of religion and politics, notes, “religion is more important in American politics than most people realize but in different ways than they imagine. That is, religious influences are visible in all aspects of political life—the ideas about politics we entertain, the behavior of political elites and ordinary citizens, the interpretation of public laws, and the development of government programs” (xiv). Furthermore, in the last fourteen years or so no other factor has divided the electorate in more predictable ways than church attendance.\*

Recent research reports by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press show that those who attend church regularly are two times more likely to vote Republican than those who do not. Researchers have termed this phenomenon the “God gap,” and according to Brookings Institution political scientist Thomas Mann church attendance “is the most powerful predictor of party ID and partisan voting intention, ... and in a society that values religion as much as [this one] ... that’s significant.”<sup>5</sup> Can the same “God gap” be found among Adventists?

In his important volume, *Adventism and the American Republic*, Adventist historian Douglas Morgan chronicles the history of the Adventist Church in relationship to political and public issues since its beginnings in the middle 1800s through 2000. One unifying theme in this engaging historical analysis is how Adventist apocalyptic identity led Adventists to promote vehemently religious freedom and separation of church and state, so much so that Adventists have made major contributions that have affected America’s ongoing understanding of church-state relations.

In particular, Morgan notes how Adventist leaders during the 1980s pointed out the dangers of the resur-

gence of fundamentalists allied with right-wing politics. He documents that their concern was not so much that Adventists did not share common concerns with fundamentalists about moral decline in society, but rather the danger and suspicion of the Moral Majority’s aggressive agenda to legislate morality and weaken the wall of separation between church and state.

In the presidential election of 1992, the editors of *Liberty* magazine again raised this concern, warning that the growing influence of the religious right “posed a great danger to freedom in America” (Morgan, 2002, 203). Adventist apocalyptic thinking remained the “animating factor” that kept Adventists from being fully aligned with the religious right. However, political opinions are not always informed by theological commitments, as we clearly documented in our 1992 book, *Citizens of Two Worlds*.

In the 1984 elections, we showed how Adventists overwhelmingly voted for the Republican presidential candidate, Ronald Reagan. Thus, despite the concern of many in church leadership about the close alliance between the Republican party and fundamentalist right-wing evangelicals, Adventists as a whole found close affinity with the Republican presidential candidate and the party’s political platform in 1984 and 1988 (Dudley and Hernández, 1992). Pitted against other factors, the threat to freedom informed by our apocalyptic did not figure significantly in the social and political choices.

Furthermore, we found that religious commitment and values were not as consequential in shaping political values and actions compared to social-demographic factors such as race, class, and education. At present, the anticipated closeness of the election has led the Bush election team to lure and rally the churchgoing troops—the true believers who are more likely to vote and support the Republican agenda.

Today, the affinity between right-wing evangelical thinking and the Republican party is key to the reelection strategy and closer than ever before.<sup>6</sup> One key agenda already evident during the first four years of Bush’s presidency is a frontal critique—some would call it an attack—on the doctrine of separation between church and state. As has recently been noted, “the Bush initiative represents a strategic change in thinking about church-state relations and signifies a move away from a strict separation toward greater accommodation of religion by government” (Formicola, Segers, and Weber, 2003, 3).





Are church-attending, tithe-paying, church-volunteering Adventists more likely to be aligned with one party over another? How civically engaged are Adventists? What role do Adventist pulpits have in shaping congregants' social-political attitudes and behavior? What significant shifts—if any—have there been in how Adventists relate to contemporary politics? What are the current issues that Adventists most favor or oppose? How do Adventists feel about hot button social issues like the war in Iraq, homosexuality, abortion, universal health care insurance, the Faith-Based Initiative, capital punishment, and other issues? How does religion relate to these social issues, which include civic participation?

We hope to provide some answers to these important questions, but first let us define and explain the methodology and sample used in this study.

## Methods and Sample

Recognizing the critical nature of the upcoming election, *Spectrum* magazine sponsored a national study of Adventists in the United States titled *2004 Religion and Public Issues Survey*, which was conducted during the months of June and July 2004. A four-page eighty-nine-item survey was designed to include questions on demographic background, religious commitment, and numerous social-political attitudes and behaviors.

The survey was mailed to 1,500 randomly selected Adventists from a sampling frame of approximately 180,000 Adventist households made available by TEACH Services, Incorporated.<sup>7</sup> A total of 100 surveys were undeliverable, which resulted in a final sample of 1,400. The survey was mailed twice with a reminder letter between. We ended up with 860 usable surveys, for a 61 percent response rate. The Institute for Church Ministry at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University managed the data collection process. The article uses crosstabs and chi-square statistics to determine level of significance.

How representative is the sample of the total Adventist population in the North American Division (NAD)? A good way to begin to answer this question is to compare our sample with the single largest study of Adventists and more than fifty different denominations ever conducted—the U.S. Congregational Life survey (USCL).<sup>8</sup> The USCL is perhaps the best available source for understanding the regular church attending population of the Adventist Church in the NAD (Sahlin, 2003).

Table 1 (*opposite*) compares the background demographic variables of our sample with findings from the USCL Adventist sample. Compared to the total population of Adventists who attend church, our sample is overwhelmingly male, older, white, fairly stable financially, well educated, second generation Adventist, and affiliated with the Church throughout life. Also, compared to the USCL study, our sample is much less ethnically diverse. The most recent church data on ethnic diversity in the NAD comes from its Human Relations Office, which estimates the breakdown to be 53 percent white, 31 percent black, 12 percent Hispanic, and 5 percent Asian (Office of Human Relations, 2003).

Clearly, the sample in this study does not truly represent the membership that regularly attends the Adventist Church in the United States.<sup>9</sup> Another way to assess the representative nature of the sample is to examine the level of religiosity. How religious is the sample? Table 2 (*page 42*) summarizes key religious variables in our survey. It shows that our sample is very committed to the Church. Religiously speaking, the sample is composed of local church leaders who attend at least once every week, are extremely devout, afford strong financial support for the Church, and have a religious perspective that is mostly religious conservative/fundamentalist.

Although the sample plainly does not represent the total membership of the U.S. Church, its strength lies in how it captures a strata of highly committed local church leaders who strongly support the Church with their finances and share a common cultural and social-economic standing. These are key, influential folks who make critical decisions and whose financial support sustains many Adventist institutions across the NAD.

In summary, this sample enables us to learn much about the politics of longtime Adventists deeply imbued in the Church's culture. This is the group whose social-political attitudes and behaviors we describe below.

## Adventists at the Voting Booth

Adventists tend to be conservative both politically and theologically (Dudley and Hernández, 1992; Morgan, 2001). In this survey, 58 percent identified themselves as politically conservative, 32 percent as moderate, and only 4 percent as liberal. The remaining 6 percent were not sure. As to political affiliation, 54 percent claimed to be Republicans and 16 percent Democrats; the rest (30%) are independents.

Does this hold true when members go to the polls?



## Table 1

Demographic Characteristics:  
Comparisons Between the 2004 Religion and Public Issues Survey and the U.S.  
Congregational Life Survey—Adventist (USCL)

|                                       | 2004 Religion/Public Survey<br>(N=860) | USCL<br>(N=5,596) |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>1. Length of time as Adventist</b> | %                                      | %                 |
| a. Less than one year                 | —                                      | —                 |
| b. 1 to 5 years                       | .4                                     | —                 |
| c. 6 to 10 years                      | .2                                     | —                 |
| d. 11 to 20 years                     | 3.4                                    | —                 |
| e. More than 20 years                 | 96.0                                   | —                 |
| <b>2. Generation as Adventist</b>     |                                        |                   |
| a. First generation                   | 31.0                                   | —                 |
| b. Second generation                  | 69.0                                   | —                 |
| <b>3. Place of birth</b>              |                                        |                   |
| a. United States                      | 88.0                                   | —                 |
| b. Outside the United States          | 12.2                                   | —                 |
| <b>4. Gender</b>                      |                                        |                   |
| a. Male                               | 61.5                                   | 41.0              |
| b. Female                             | 38.5                                   | 59.0              |
| <b>5. Marital status</b>              |                                        |                   |
| a. Married                            | 76.5                                   | 48.0              |
| b. Divorced or separated              | 4.1                                    | 8.0               |
| c. Single, never married              | 3.6                                    | 19.0              |
| d. Widowed                            | 15.8                                   | 6.0               |
| <b>6. Age</b>                         |                                        |                   |
| a. 19 years or younger                | —                                      | 9.0               |
| b. 20 to 35 years                     | .7                                     | 18.0              |
| c. 36 to 50 years                     | 9.4                                    | 27.0              |
| d. 51 to 65 years                     | 26.7                                   | 24.0              |
| e. Over 65 years                      | 63.2                                   | 21.0              |
| <b>7. Level of formal education</b>   |                                        |                   |
| a. Less than high school              | 3.4                                    | 14.0              |
| b. High school graduation             | 8.7                                    | 52.0              |
| c. Some college study                 | 24.4                                   | —                 |
| d. Four-year college degree           | 14.2                                   | 21.0              |
| e. Post-college graduate study        | 49.4                                   | 13.0              |
| <b>8. Ethnic background</b>           |                                        |                   |
| a. Asian or Pacific Island            | 1.2                                    | 3.0               |
| b. Black/African American             | 5.2                                    | 10.0              |
| c. Hispanic/Latino                    | 1.5                                    | 7.0               |
| d. White/Euro-American                | 89.3                                   | 71.0              |
| e. Other                              | 2.8                                    | 2.0               |
| <b>9. Family income</b>               |                                        |                   |
| a. Under \$20,000                     | 11.8                                   | <\$24K<br>36.0    |
| b. \$20,000 to \$50,000               | 49.0                                   | \$25-49K<br>27.0  |
| c. \$51,000 to \$80,000               | 21.9                                   | \$50-74K<br>17.0  |
| d. More than \$80,000                 | 17.3                                   | >\$75K<br>19.0    |

Yes, it does. In the 2000 presidential election, George W. Bush won a landslide 60 percent of the Adventist vote. Only 20 percent supported Al Gore, and Ralph Nader picked up only 3 percent. Only 17 percent did not vote, which demonstrates that Adventists were much more likely than the general population to cast ballots.

Will it happen again? Our research indicates that it will. As we said at the outset, about 44 percent of our respondents plan to vote for George W. Bush and only 16 percent for John Kerry. The president lacks majority support at this time, but 26 percent are undecided. At this point, even if every undecided voter were to go for Kerry—a highly unlikely scenario—he would receive only 42 percent. Of the remaining 14 percent, 2 percent say they will vote for Nader, whereas the rest don't plan to vote at all.

Do personal characteristics such as age, ethnicity, and education predict who will vote for whom? Length of time in the Church and Adventist upbringing are not related significantly to voting plans, although Bush gets 72 percent of his vote from Adventists reared in the Church, compared to the 60 percent of Kerry's supporters. However, this difference barely misses significance at .09.





**Table 2**

Religious Background  
(N = 860)

|                                                                               | Weekly or more often | %    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|------|
| <b>1. How often do you:</b>                                                   |                      |      |
| a. Pray privately                                                             |                      | 97.5 |
| b. Study the Bible                                                            |                      | 94.5 |
| c. Read religious books or journals                                           |                      | 93.8 |
| d. Family worship                                                             |                      | 73.9 |
| e. Volunteer for the church                                                   |                      | 60.1 |
| <b>2. How often attend church?</b>                                            |                      |      |
| a. Rarely or never                                                            |                      | 1.4  |
| b. Once every month or two                                                    |                      | 1.3  |
| c. Two or three times a month                                                 |                      | 6.6  |
| d. At least once a week                                                       |                      | 90.7 |
| <b>3. How active in outreach/witnessing activities?</b>                       |                      |      |
| a. Rarely or never                                                            |                      | 20.1 |
| b. Once every month or two                                                    |                      | 17.7 |
| c. Two or three times a month                                                 |                      | 25.2 |
| d. At least once a week                                                       |                      | 36.9 |
| <b>4. Amount of gross income given to church:</b>                             |                      |      |
| a. Less than 5%                                                               |                      | 1.8  |
| b. 5% to 9%                                                                   |                      | 3.7  |
| c. 10% to 14%                                                                 |                      | 32.7 |
| d. 15% to 19%                                                                 |                      | 26.5 |
| e. 20% or more                                                                |                      | 35.3 |
| <b>5. Hold office or other service position in church?</b>                    |                      |      |
| a. Yes                                                                        |                      | 71.4 |
| b. No                                                                         |                      | 28.6 |
| <b>6. How would you identify yourself in regard to religious orientation?</b> |                      |      |
| a. Fundamentalist                                                             |                      | 28.4 |
| b. Conservative                                                               |                      | 48.0 |
| c. Moderate                                                                   |                      | 21.1 |
| d. Liberal                                                                    |                      | 2.4  |

Age is not a significant predictor, but education level is. We will ignore the "less than high school" group since its numbers are so small. Bush gains a greater percentage of voters among those with some college, whereas Kerry has somewhat larger proportions with high school and postgraduate education. But increase in education is not correlated with any particular candidate since the education variable is not linear. The biggest contrast is that smaller percentages of undecided voters have postgraduate education than do supporters of either candidate.

Also significant for related voting patterns is yearly family income, which offers a clearer picture: Kerry

enjoys support from greater percentages of voters with incomes over \$50,000 than does Bush (Table 3).

Another important background variable in social-political issues is race. As has been shown, race makes a difference in political attitudes among Adventists (Dudley and Hernandez, 1992) and the general population (Smith, Hali, and Fluher, 2003; Harris, 2001; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995). Thus, we divided our sample between whites (N = 762) and nonwhites (N = 91).<sup>10</sup> As expected, the findings show significant differences (Table 4, *opposite*).

Whites are much more likely to be conservative and Republican, to have voted for Bush in 2000, and to vote for him again in 2004. The nonwhite group is significantly different from whites on all measures. Its members are more likely to identify as moderate and liberal, align with the Democratic party, have a history of voting as Democrats in 2000, and plan to vote in 2004 for John Kerry.

### Positions on the Social-Political Issues

How do Adventists align themselves with current social policy issues? We presented respondents with twenty-eight "hot-button" issues, most of which might be influenced by religious or moral values. On a five-point scale we asked if they opposed or favored the particular position. To simplify the reading, we have combined the percentages for "strongly oppose" and

**Table 3**

Presidential Candidates by Demographic Background  
(N=860)

|                           | % Bush | % Kerry | % Undecided |
|---------------------------|--------|---------|-------------|
| <b>1. Gender (***)</b>    |        |         |             |
| a. Male                   | 68     | 66      | 53          |
| b. Female                 | 32     | 34      | 47          |
| <b>2. Education (***)</b> |        |         |             |
| a. High School            | 7      | 11      | 8           |
| b. Some College           | 26     | 19      | 24          |
| c. College degree         | 12     | 12      | 15          |
| d. Graduate degree        | 53     | 57      | 49          |
| <b>3. Income (***)</b>    |        |         |             |
| a. < \$20,000             | 10     | 6       | 14          |
| b. \$20,000 - \$50,000    | 49     | 43      | 50          |
| c. \$51,000 - \$80,000    | 23     | 29      | 21          |
| d. > \$80,000             | 18     | 22      | 15          |

Note: Significant at the \*\*\* .001 level.



## Table 4

Racial Differences by Electoral Politics  
(N=860)

|                                                                | White<br>(N=762) | Nonwhite<br>(N=91) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| <b>1. What is your political orientation? (***)</b>            | %                | %                  |
| a. Conservative                                                | 61.1             | 36.0               |
| b. Democrat                                                    | 30.4             | 40.7               |
| c. Liberal                                                     | 4.0              | 8.1                |
| d. Don't really know                                           | 4.5              | 15.1               |
| <b>2. In politics today, do you consider yourself a: (***)</b> |                  |                    |
| a. Democrat                                                    | 11.5             | 51.1               |
| b. Republican                                                  | 57.4             | 21.6               |
| c. Independent                                                 | 24.6             | 23.9               |
| d. Other                                                       | 6.4              | 3.4                |
| <b>3. For whom do you plan to vote in 2004? (***)</b>          |                  |                    |
| a. George Bush                                                 | 47.1             | 22.5               |
| b. John Kerry                                                  | 13.4             | 40.4               |
| c. Ralph Nader                                                 | 2.2              | 2.2                |
| d. Undecided                                                   | 25.6             | 28.1               |
| e. Don't plan to vote                                          | 11.8             | 6.7                |

Note: Significant at the \*\*\* .001 level.

party draws its basic constituency.

Different ideas about religious liberty seem to drive Adventist disagreement with conservatives on the issues discussed above. The Adventist Church has long championed separation of church and state. In contrast, the religious right has been attempting to remove this barrier and promote the United States as a Christian nation. Perhaps as never before, there is a clear and present danger to religious freedom emanating from the Supreme Court itself (Hammond, Machacek, and Mazur, 2004). Faced with a choice between a conservative

“somewhat oppose” into simply “oppose.” Likewise, we have combined “strongly favor” and “somewhat favor” into “favor.” To the extent that percentages for oppose and favor do not total 100 percent, the difference represents the percentages of those who answered “uncertain” (Table 6, page 45).

Although solidly Republican and conservative in their voting practices, Adventists disagree in some cases with conservative positions and take more moderate or liberal stances on others. For example, about three-fourths oppose the Faith-Based Initiative—a prominent part of the Bush agenda. Another strong deviation from the conservative viewpoint is opposition to government vouchers to attend parochial schools. The vast majority also opposes changing the law to allow churches to campaign for or against political candidates. Current law prohibits congregations from doing this on pain of losing tax-exempt status, and leading conservative legislators have been working hard to change it.

A majority of Adventists also oppose teacher-led prayer in public schools and do not believe the nation of Israel has a special place in God's plan for today. Both of these are major beliefs of the conservative evangelical right, from which the Republican

agenda and church-state separation, the majority of Adventists reject their conservatism and opt to keep the government out of religion.

But where it really counts—the voting booth—Adventists do not align their commitment to religious freedom and belief in separation of church and state with their voting behavior. In essence, by voting for the party that threatens religious freedom most, Adventists negate their convictions on religious liberty issues. Clearly, other issues are more important. Either there is significant misinformation, or religious liberty concerns as Adventists have traditionally understood them no longer hold sway.

Aside from matters of religious liberty, majorities of our respondents also reject conservative positions on several other issues. About two-thirds oppose the Patriot Act, a law proposed by the Bush administration and enacted by Congress. This law allows the government to examine citizens' records—such as library borrowings—without a court order. Likewise, the majority opposes the indefinite holding of people suspected of supporting terrorism without any formal





charges. These positions again show concern for individual human rights. Adventists also seem to depart from the conservative position by favoring close government cooperation with the United Nations—something anathema to conservatives.

In contrast, Adventists have a conservative view of positions such as posting the Ten Commandments in government buildings, teaching “creation science” in public schools, opposing elimination of the phrase “under God” for mandatory recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools, and forbidding same-sex marriage. This obviously reflects strong Adventist beliefs in the law of God, the seven-day creation, and biblical marriage. Yet a willingness to have these values promoted by government seems to be in conflict with separation of church and state, which is also a strong value.

The fact that 59 percent of our sample supports capital punishment whereas only 26 percent oppose it probably also reflects a high regard for law among Adventists. Of course, this one simple statement cannot probe the complexities of the death penalty, particularly the inequities in its administration.

Comparisons between whites and nonwhites on these same social issues show important differences (Table 5). On five of seven issues, where significant differences were found, nonwhites were more likely to hold liberal views, with the exception of the Faith-Based Initiative and teacher-led prayers in public

schools. Nonwhites were less likely than whites to support the war in Iraq and laws that forbid same-sex marriage, but more likely to support universal health care, gun control, and the United States working closely with the United Nations. In contrast, nonwhites were more likely to support the Faith-Based Initiative and teacher-led prayer in public schools. These findings illustrate the elusive character of religion and politics—conservative positions do not always translate into conservative voting behavior, and vice versa (Dudley and Hernandez, 1992).

From a research perspective, it is ideal to be able to connect people’s thinking on issues closely with behaviors that are consistent with a particular line of thinking. Although election day is still in the future, we can deduce fairly accurately that Adventists will, indeed, vote their preferred candidate, based on the high correlation ( $r = .51$ ) between our respondents’ voting behavior in 2000 and their anticipated presidential choice in the 2004 election. Thus, we can compare how Bush and Kerry voters responded to the list of twenty-three social-political issues. By doing this, we can determine the level of consistency between one’s attitudes and voting behavior (Table 6, *opposite*).

Adventist voters know very well the social issues that separate the Republican and Democratic parties. In fact, the findings clearly show that Adventists who anticipate voting for Bush or Kerry in November 2004 hold significantly different social-political opinions on all issues

except one, on which they agree: churches should not be allowed to campaign for political candidates.

In some cases, both groups overwhelmingly favor or oppose an issue, yet still differ from each other. For example, on the issue of teaching “creation science” in public schools (question 11) the majority of both groups favor it (Bush [82%] and Kerry [62%]). Yet Bush voters are significantly more likely than Kerry’s supporters to do so.

The issues that most separate the two groups of voters are the war in Iraq

**Table 5**

Racial Differences by Social-Political Issues  
(N=860)

|                                                                                    | White<br>(N=762) | Nonwhite<br>(N=91) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
|                                                                                    | % who favor      |                    |
| 1. Going to war with Iraq                                                          | 38               | 29 ***             |
| 2. Health insurance for all citizens regardless of ability to pay                  | 44               | 63 ***             |
| 3. Increased gun control                                                           | 46               | 64 ***             |
| 4. U.S. working closely with the United Nations                                    | 55               | 71 **              |
| 5. Giving illegal immigrants a chance to obtain legal status                       | 36               | 57 ***             |
| 6. Faith-based Initiative (government funds churches in providing social services) | 11               | 22 *               |
| 7. Teacher-led prayer in public schools                                            | 28               | 48 ***             |
| 8. Laws forbidding same-sex marriages                                              | 77               | 68 *               |

Note: Significant at the \*\*\* .001; \*\* .01; \* .05 levels.



## Table 6

Presidential Candidates by Social-Political Issues in the 2004 Election

| Social-Political Issues                                                             | George Bush<br>(N=369) |          | John Kerry<br>(N=136) |           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------|-----------------------|-----------|
|                                                                                     | % Favor                | % Oppose | % Favor               | % Oppose  |
| 1. Going to war with Iraq                                                           | 67                     | 19       | 6                     | 88 ***    |
| 2. Health insurance for all citizens regardless of ability to pay                   | 35                     | 44       | 69                    | 18 ***    |
| 3. Giving illegal immigrants a chance to obtain legal status                        | 35                     | 50       | 46                    | 38 +(.06) |
| 4. U.S. working closely with the United Nations                                     | 48                     | 37       | 83                    | 8 ***     |
| 5. Increased gun control                                                            | 38                     | 44       | 69                    | 24 ***    |
| 6. Government support for stem cell research                                        | 36                     | 35       | 61                    | 14 ***    |
| 7. Elimination of the phrase "under God" from the mandatory Pledge of Allegiance    | 9                      | 85       | 23                    | 62 ***    |
| 8. Government vouchers to attend religious schools                                  | 22                     | 66       | 13                    | 82 **     |
| 9. Law to allow churches to campaign for or against candidates for political office | 8                      | 81       | 6                     | 87        |
| 10. Increasing role of United States as police force for world affairs              | 17                     | 61       | 8                     | 84 ***    |
| 11. Teaching creation "science" in public schools                                   | 82                     | 11       | 62                    | 20 ***    |
| 12. Putting part of social security tax into personal mutual accounts               | 43                     | 31       | 25                    | 54 ***    |
| 13. Prescription drugs covered by Medicare                                          | 65                     | 14       | 73                    | 10        |
| 14. Faith-based Initiative (government funds churches in providing social services) | 18                     | 67       | 7                     | 78 **     |
| 15. Teacher-led prayer in public schools                                            | 35                     | 53       | 18                    | 70 ***    |
| 16. Posting of Ten Commandments in public buildings                                 | 67                     | 22       | 32                    | 54 ***    |
| 17. The recent tax cuts enacted by Congress                                         | 70                     | 9        | 10                    | 69 ***    |
| 18. The Patriot Act (government can investigate private records of citizens)        | 28                     | 52       | 4                     | 85 ***    |
| 19. The nation of Israel having a special place in God's plan today                 | 16                     | 55       | 8                     | 72 **     |
| 20. Capital punishment (execute people convicted of serious crime)                  | 72                     | 18       | 38                    | 41 ***    |
| 21. Indefinite holding without formal charges of persons suspected of terrorism     | 30                     | 51       | 7                     | 84 ***    |
| 22. Laws or Supreme Court decisions making abortion illegal                         | 61                     | 29       | 19                    | 65 ***    |
| 23. Laws forbidding same-sex marriages                                              | 85                     | 13       | 54                    | 38 ***    |

Note: Significant at the \*\*\* .001; \*\* .01; \* .05 levels.

(question 1), the recent tax cuts (question 17), laws to make abortion illegal (question 22), gun control (question 5), universal health care (question 2), and capital punishment (question 20) (Table 6). The close alignment between the issues and the respective presidential candidate is remarkable.

What other similarities and differences distinguish Bush and Kerry supporters? First, we present the similarities. They are both as likely to be religiously committed, born in the United States, be lifelong Adventists, volunteer for church office, hold leadership positions, be of the same age and gender, and be just as well educated. As for differences, we have already mentioned that whites are two times

more likely than nonwhites to vote for Bush, but there are also others.

Among those differences is Adventist generational background—respondents with at least one Adventist parent are more likely to support Bush than Kerry. Since Bush supporters are vehemently against gun control, they are more likely to own a gun (37%) than Kerry voters (24%). And since Bush supporters are more likely to support the war in Iraq, it is not surprising that as an expression of support for the troops or out of sheer patriotism 72 percent display the U.S.





flag at home, in their office, or on their cars, in contrast to only 49 percent of Kerry's supporters.

Incidentally, U.S. Adventists display their flags just a bit more than the 69 percent of the American population at large that do (Pew Research Center, 2003). Perhaps most interestingly is the fact that those who favor Bush are significantly more likely (58%) to say they are religiously conservative, in contrast to Kerry voters (29%).<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Kerry supporters are three times more likely (44%) than Bush supporters (14%) to say they are religiously moderate (36%) or liberal (8%).

The emerging conclusion is that the reason Adventists are closely aligned with the Republican party is related, in part, to the fact that they adhere to an increasingly conservative social agenda and religious identity. As we shall show below, this is so because an increasing number of Adventists have adopted a view of the Bible that sees it as inerrant, which makes them feel ideologically at home with the American right-wing evangelical moral-political agenda.

## Discerning Religion's Impact on Politics

As mentioned above, our sample of highly committed Adventists points to a very religious group of people. Recognizing the multidimensional character of religion (Leege and Kellstedt, 1993), we used a number of religious measures in the survey to make this determination. Earlier

in this article we asked whether a God gap existed among Adventists. The answer is clearly No (see Table 2, page 42). Instead, we see a "hermeneutical gap"—that is, our sample of core Adventists is divided on the way respondents interpret both the Bible and Ellen White.

On most indexes of religion the sample demonstrates a high level of commitment. Differences of opinion—or variance—on a particular variable or area under study are fundamental to any social scientific analysis. So what does one do with a sample that does not show much variance in religious perspective—meaning that no God gap exists—because all respondents go to church and pay tithe, and many serve as church leaders? Fortunately, we also asked about perspectives on how respondents viewed the Bible and Ellen White's ministry (see numbers 1 and 2 in Table 7).

Some of those who checked "fundamentalist" in Table 2 (page 42, number 6) probably thought of themselves only as solid Adventists and did not understand that the term is usually applied to the far-right group of evangelicals that holds to verbal inspiration of the Bible and inerrancy in every detail.

However, more than one-fourth opted for a theory of verbal inspiration, which would necessitate inerrancy for the Bible, not only in its saving message, but also in all historical, scientific, and cultural details. The 28 percent who chose this option probably did not think through to

**Table 7**

The Bible and Ellen White Interpretation and Adventist Orthodoxy  
(N = 860)

|                                                                                                                             |                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>1. Which of the following comes closest to describing your understanding of the inspiration of the Bible?</b>            | <b>%</b>              |
| a. The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word.                                         | 28.4                  |
| b. The Bible is the inspired word of God, but it must be interpreted according to its historical and cultural context.      | 71.6                  |
| <b>2. Which of the following statements comes closest to your understanding of the work of Ellen White?</b>                 |                       |
| a. Ellen White was inspired by God and presented God's message in terms of her own place and time.                          | 42.8                  |
| b. Ellen White presented the message just as God gave it to her, and all her instructions are still applicable to our time. | 57.2                  |
| <b>How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?</b>                                                     | <b>% of agreement</b> |
| <b>3. God created the world in six literal days only a few thousands years ago.</b>                                         | 90.8                  |
| <b>4. The investigative judgment began in the heavenly sanctuary on October 22, 1844.</b>                                   | 87.6                  |
| <b>5. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is the true remnant church of prophecy.</b>                                          | 88.4                  |



the logical implications of their choice; they just responded to the language that seemed to honor the Bible most. However, some Adventists in the fundamentalist category consciously hold to that understanding of Scripture.

Because Adventists also believe in the inspiration of Ellen White, we asked a similar question, with quite interesting results! This one was really the same question as the one on biblical inerrancy, but note the reversed outcome. Although the question may be a bit tricky, careful reflection shows that it also deals with verbal inspiration and denies Ellen White any human responsibility in transmitting the message. It also holds her readers to nineteenth-century applications to Christian living.

Whereas 28 percent support biblical inerrancy, 57 percent see Ellen White's writings as inerrant. Thus, about one-fourth of the respondents seem to hold her writings to a stricter view of inspiration than the Bible (Table 7, *opposite*).

Are Adventists who hold to a literalist interpretation of the Bible also likely to hold to a literalist view of Ellen White? In contrast, are Adventists who believe that Scripture needs to be understood within its own cultural context and time also likely to hold that Ellen White's message needs to be understood in the same manner?

Table 8 shows the breakdown of what we call the "hermeneutical gap." Thirty-nine percent of the respondents are consistent in their belief that the Bible and Ellen White need to be interpreted in their own time and place. We call this group "Contextualists." In comparison, 24 percent are literalists both in their interpretation of Scripture and Ellen White. We call this group "Literalists." Thirty-seven percent hold a contextual view of the Bible but a literalist under-

|                                                                                     |                                                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bible Literalists/<br>EGW Contextualists<br>(N=37)                                  | Bible Literalists/<br>EGW Literalists<br>(N=196)<br><b>Literalists=24%</b> |
| Bible Contextualists/<br>EGW Contextualists<br>(N=317)<br><b>Contextualists=39%</b> | Bible Contextualists/<br>EGW Literalists<br>(N=299)<br><b>Mixed=37%</b>    |

standing of Ellen White. This group we have simply labeled "Mixed."

In what ways do these groups differ from each other? Contextualists are more likely than Literalists to be second generation Adventists, a bit younger, more educated, and earn higher incomes (Table 9). Given the way our sample is divided along the hermeneutical gap, what else can we learn about the

|                                                                                | % Literalists | % Mixed | % Contextualists |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------|------------------|
| 1. Second generation Adventists                                                | 63            | 67      | 77 ***           |
| 2. Age (over 65 years)                                                         | 77            | 68      | 50 ***           |
| 3. Education (graduate degree)                                                 | 36            | 43      | 66 ***           |
| 4. Income (< \$51,000)                                                         | 29            | 34      | 51 ***           |
| 5. Religious Ideology (***)                                                    |               |         |                  |
| a. Fundamentalist                                                              | 46            | 30      | 16               |
| b. Conservative                                                                | 48            | 53      | 43               |
| c. Moderate                                                                    | 6             | 16      | 36               |
| d. Liberal                                                                     | 0             | 1       | 5                |
| <b>% of Disagreement</b>                                                       |               |         |                  |
| 6. God created the world in six literal days only a few thousand years ago     | 2             | 4       | 10 ***           |
| 7. The investigative judgment began in the heavenly sanctuary on Oct. 22, 1844 | 2             | 3       | 9 ***            |
| 8. The SDA Church is the true remnant church of prophecy                       | 3             | 3       | 12 ***           |

Note: Significant at the \*\*\* .001 level.



## Table 10

### Religious Orientation by Electoral Politics

|                                                                  | % Literalists<br>(N=196) | % Contextualists<br>(N=317) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>1. Political orientation (***)</b>                            |                          |                             |
| a. Conservative                                                  | 66                       | 46                          |
| b. Democrat                                                      | 24                       | 43                          |
| c. Liberal                                                       | 3                        | 7                           |
| d. Don't really know                                             | 6                        | 4                           |
| <b>2. Who did you vote for in the 2000 election?</b>             |                          |                             |
| a. George Bush                                                   | 57                       | 59                          |
| b. Al Gore                                                       | 18                       | 24                          |
| c. Ralph Nader                                                   | 3                        | 3                           |
| d. Didn't vote                                                   | 22                       | 14                          |
| <b>3. Who do you plan to vote for in the 2004 election? (**)</b> |                          |                             |
| a. George Bush                                                   | 59                       | 46                          |
| b. John Kerry                                                    | 15                       | 22                          |
| c. Undecided                                                     | 26                       | 32                          |

Note: Significant at the \*\*\* .001; and \*\* .01 levels.

to favor conservative positions, whereas Contextualists tend to support liberal ones. However, the relationships are more elusive than consistent. For example, Contextualists are more conservative than Literalists in their support of the war in Iraq, government private school vouchers, teaching of "creation science" in public schools, the Faith-Based Initiative, the Patriot Act, and putting Social Security tax dollars into personal retirement accounts.

However, Contextualists espouse more liberal positions than Literalists by supporting the legalization of undocumented immigration, U.S. support of the United Nations,

religious beliefs and background of these groups, the two most important for our purposes?

In terms of religion, Literalists and Contextualists are just as likely to attend church, give generous tithes and offerings, and serve as church leaders. Literalists are more likely to see themselves as fundamentalists, whereas Contextualists are more likely to see themselves as moderates or liberals (Table 9, page 47). With respect to core Adventist doctrines, although the majority of both Literalists and Contextualists agree with the three core doctrines used in the survey, Contextualists are more likely than Literalists to disagree with them (Table 9).

How do Literalists and Contextualists differ with respect to social-political issues and the upcoming presidential election? Table 10 shows that Literalists are more likely than Contextualists to identify as political conservatives. Although there were no significant contrasts between Literalists and Contextualists in candidate preference during the presidential election of 2000, there is a difference in 2004. Contextualists are more likely than Literalists to vote for Kerry, and the majority of Literalists will vote for Bush. Interestingly, almost one-third of both groups is still undecided.

On social-political issues, Table 11 (*opposite*) reports differences worth noting. On most issues, Literalists tend

stem cell research, removing the phrase "under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance, elimination of prayers from public schools, absence of the Ten Commandments from government buildings, a woman's right to choose abortion, and opposition to restrictions on same-sex marriages.

Whatever else we might say about the hermeneutical gap, at the very least Contextualists and Literalists look at public issues from two very different perspectives.

## Guns, War, and Just War Theory

The war in Iraq is one of the most controversial issues in this presidential campaign, and one most motivated by moral concerns. As shown above, Adventists who support Bush and Kerry are divided on this issue. About one-sixth of members are still undecided as to the war's rightness or wrongness. Those opposed miss a majority, but have a ten-point spread over those who favor it (see Table 14, page 52). It is interesting to compare these figures with the three-fourths (73%) who oppose Adventists joining the military as combatants (see Table 12, page 50). Obviously, some respondents favor going to war but do not think Adventist youth should fight.

What position do Adventists hold on the morality of war? We asked respondents if, from the Christian perspective, they believed wars are: (1) mostly morally justi-



fied, (2) rarely morally justified, or (3) never morally justified. Sixty-one percent of the sample indicated that wars are rarely morally justified, followed by 16 percent who aren't sure. Fifteen percent indicated that wars are never morally justified, and 8 percent that most of them are.

How might religious orientation affect moral opinions about war? Interestingly, 22 percent of the Literalists say that wars are never morally justified, in comparison to 8 percent of Contextualists. In contrast, Contextualists (68%) are more likely than Literalists (54%) to say that wars are rarely morally justified (see Table 13, page 51).

Given the importance and volatility of the war in Iraq, its growing cost in Iraqi and American life, and its growing importance in the upcoming presidential election, we asked respondents if in the last twelve months

they had heard any sermons against it from their pastors. Astonishingly, only thirty-three (4%) of our respondents indicated that they had. Caution needs to be taken when interpreting findings on this variable given the small numbers; however, we wanted to know what effect these sermons had on respondents' opinions about the war. It is fascinating to note that 70 percent of those who had heard sermons against it indicated that they oppose it. In contrast, 45 percent of those who had not heard a sermon against the war oppose it.

Furthermore, those few who had heard a sermon against the war were significantly more likely to differ on the morality of war (see Table 13, page 51). No person who had heard a sermon against the war indicated that most wars are morally justified, in contrast to 9 percent

Table 11

Religious Orientation by Social-Political Issues

|                                                                                     | Literalists<br>(N=196) |          | Contextualists<br>(N=317) |          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------|---------------------------|----------|
|                                                                                     | % Favor                | % Oppose | % Favor                   | % Oppose |
| 1. Going to war with Iraq                                                           | 35                     | 47       | 38                        | 47 *     |
| 2. Health insurance for all citizens regardless of ability to pay                   | 46                     | 37       | 47                        | 34 *     |
| 3. Giving illegal immigrants a chance to obtain legal status                        | 32                     | 50       | 45                        | 34 **    |
| 4. U.S. working closely with the United Nations                                     | 46                     | 37       | 65                        | 19 ***   |
| 5. Increased gun control                                                            | 49                     | 33       | 49                        | 35       |
| 6. Government support for stem cell research                                        | 26                     | 43       | 53                        | 22 ***   |
| 7. Elimination of the phrase "under God" from the mandatory Pledge of Allegiance    | 10                     | 82       | 16                        | 73 ***   |
| 8. Government vouchers to attend religious schools                                  | 13                     | 75       | 20                        | 72 ***   |
| 9. Law to allow churches to campaign for or against candidates for political office | 8                      | 83       | 6                         | 84       |
| 10. Increasing role of United States as police force for world affairs              | 11                     | 73       | 16                        | 69 *     |
| 11. Teaching creation "science" in public schools                                   | 71                     | 18       | 77                        | 11 **    |
| 12. Putting part of social security tax into personal mutual accounts               | 26                     | 45       | 40                        | 35 *     |
| 13. Prescription drugs covered by Medicare                                          | 62                     | 15       | 68                        | 10       |
| 14. Faith-based Initiative (government funds churches in providing social services) | 10                     | 75       | 17                        | 72 ***   |
| 15. Teacher-led prayer in public schools                                            | 32                     | 52       | 25                        | 61 *     |
| 16. Posting of Ten Commandments in public buildings                                 | 58                     | 28       | 47                        | 39 ***   |
| 17. The recent tax cuts enacted by Congress                                         | 47                     | 26       | 45                        | 29       |
| 18. The Patriot Act (government can investigate private records of citizens)        | 14                     | 67       | 20                        | 62 **    |
| 19. The nation of Israel having a special place in God's plan today                 | 17                     | 53       | 13                        | 62       |
| 20. Capital punishment (execute people convicted of serious crime)                  | 61                     | 26       | 55                        | 29       |
| 21. Indefinite holding without formal charges of persons suspected of terrorism     | 27                     | 57       | 18                        | 65 *     |
| 22. Laws or Supreme Court decisions making abortion illegal                         | 49                     | 38       | 43                        | 45 *     |
| 23. Laws forbidding same-sex marriages                                              | 78                     | 18       | 71                        | 23 ***   |

Note: Significant at the \*\*\* .001; \*\* .01; \*.05 levels.



## Table 12

Race and Religious Orientation by Adventist Political Engagement  
(N=860)

|                                                                    | % Favor | % Opposed | % U.S. Population |  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|-------------------|--|
| 1. The Adventist Church issuing statements on public issues        | 44      | 31        |                   |  |
| 2. Adventists running for political offices                        | 69      | 14        |                   |  |
| 3. Expressing views on social and political issues from the pulpit | 16      | 73        | 28 favor (1)      |  |
| 4. Adventists joining the military in combatant status             | 12      | 74        |                   |  |
| 5. Including religion in public debates on social/political issues | 26      | 54        | 52 favor (2)      |  |

|                                                                    | Whites<br>(N=762) |          | Non-white<br>(N=91) |          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|----------|---------------------|----------|
|                                                                    | % Favor           | % Oppose | % Favor             | % Oppose |
| 1. The Adventist Church issuing statements on public issues        | 31                | 44       | 42                  | 54 *     |
| 2. Adventists running for political offices                        | 69                | 13       | 69                  | 15       |
| 3. Expressing views on social and political issues from the pulpit | 16                | 74       | 19                  | 67       |
| 4. Adventists joining the military in combatant status             | 12                | 74       | 9                   | 75       |
| 5. Including religion in public debates on social/political issues | 26                | 54       | 20                  | 52       |

|                                                                    | Literalists<br>(N=196) |          | Contextualists<br>(N=317) |          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------|---------------------------|----------|
|                                                                    | % Favor                | % Oppose | % Favor                   | % Oppose |
| 1. The Adventist Church issuing statements on public issues        | 36                     | 38       | 47                        | 29 *     |
| 2. Adventists running for political offices                        | 58                     | 24       | 83                        | 5 ***    |
| 3. Expressing views on social and political issues from the pulpit | 9                      | 82       | 22                        | 65 ***   |
| 4. Adventists joining the military in combatant status             | 5                      | 85       | 16                        | 67 **    |
| 5. Including religion in public debates on social/political issues | 20                     | 63       | 31                        | 49 ***   |

(1) Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, *Faith-Based Funding Backed, But Church Doubts Abound*, April 10, 2001.

(2) Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "But Stem Cell Issue May Help Democrats: GOP The Religion-Friendly Party," August 24, 2004. ([www.pewforum.org](http://www.pewforum.org)).

Note: Significant at the \*\*\* .001; \*\* .01; \* .05 levels.

of those who had not heard such a sermon. Those who had listened to a sermon against the war were almost three times more likely to say that wars are never morally justified. These findings suggest and tend to confirm the powerful role that pastors have in cueing parishioners on social political issues, as recent research has shown (Guth, Green, Smidt, Kellstedt, and Paloma, 1997).

However, since 73 percent of the respondents (Table 12, above) oppose expression from the pulpit of views on social and political issues, it is not surprising that Adventist preachers abstain from such a controversial topic. American Adventists (16%) are less likely than the U.S. population in general (28%) to favor discussion of social-political issues from the pulpit (Pew Research Center, 2001). The exceptions are nonwhite pastors, mainly African Americans.

When we compared whites with nonwhites, nonwhites were twice as likely as whites to have heard a sermon

against the war in Iraq. This is not surprising given that nonwhites are less likely to support it (Table 5, page 44). But did the preaching change minds or are people likely to gravitate to hear preachers who share their views—or did these respondents happen to belong to a socially active ethnic church? Well-documented historical and social scientific evidence indicates that black churches tend to be active in progressive causes (Billingsley, 1999; Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990; Smith, Halisi, and Fluker, 2003), and African-American Adventists seem to share in this tendency.

Given the limited number of respondents who had heard sermons specifically on the war, we cautiously suggest that preaching can make a difference on the attitudes of regular church-attending folks.

Can one's private choices about owning a gun affect one's political choices? One of the most surprising findings of our study is that Adventists own guns in about the same proportion as the U.S. population in general. About one-



third (31%) of our Adventist sample has a gun at home, compared to 35 percent of the American population (Pew Research Center, 2003). Why do Adventists own guns at such high rates? A clear answer is beyond the scope of this article. However, we do know that owning a gun seems to be related to a respondent's opinions on war, peace, and efforts to proliferate guns.

More than half (55%) of our sample who owns guns are more likely to oppose gun control efforts. As one might expect, 57 percent of those who don't own a gun support efforts to control them. Nonwhites, who don't own guns (24%) at the same rate as whites (32%), are also more likely to support gun control efforts (Table 5, page 44). Furthermore, those who own guns are slightly more likely to support Adventists entering the military as combatants (.10 level).

It is clear from these findings that on the most important public policy issue that faces Adventist Americans today—the war in Iraq—most Adventist pastors are characteristically silent, and those respondents who hold a Literalist religious orientation are more likely to espouse a nonviolent, no-war-is-morally justified position.

The issue of war and peace is quite complex. No single variable can predict one action over another. However, we have found that preaching, owning a gun, religious orientation, and presidential choice affect how people view guns, war, and its morality.

## Adventist Churches and Civic Participation

Recent research has shown how religion—particularly churches—plays a very significant role in civic participation (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995), volunteering behavior (Campbell, 2003), welfare assistance (Cnaan, Boddie, and Yancey, 2002 and 2003), and strengthening social capital (Putnam, 2000; Smidt, 2003). Discussions about the role of faith-based organ-

**Table 13**

Morality of War and Preaching  
(N=860)

|                                      | % Literalists | % Mixed | % Contextualists |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|---------|------------------|
| 1. Most wars are morally justified   | 9             | 6       | 10               |
| 2. Wars are rarely morally justified | 54            | 59      | 68               |
| 3. Wars are never morally justified  | 22            | 18      | 8                |
| 4. Not sure                          | 15            | 17      | 14               |

**Have you heard a sermon preached in last twelve months against the war in Iraq? (\*\*\*)**

|                                      | % Yes | % No |
|--------------------------------------|-------|------|
| 1. Most wars are morally justified   | 0     | 9    |
| 2. Wars are rarely morally justified | 58    | 61   |
| 3. Wars are never morally justified  | 39    | 14   |
| 4. Not sure                          | 3     | 16   |

Note: Significant at the \*\*\* .001 level

izations and their capacity to serve communities—particularly members who are most vulnerable and at risk—has increased dramatically (Dionne and DiIulio, 2000; Wuthnow, 2004). How do Adventist churches fair in their ability to affect their communities and mobilize members for civic participation?

As indicated above, in 2000 Adventists voted and in 2004 plan to vote in significant numbers (83% and 89%, respectively), compared to 65.5 percent of the general population.<sup>12</sup> Given our sample of older people, these high rates are consistent with findings that show older people tending to vote at higher rates (Eisener, 2004). Overall, Adventists (69%) are comfortable with the idea of other Adventists running for political office (Table 12, *opposite*). Less than half (44%) favor the Church issuing statements on public issues, whereas about one-third (31%) is opposed. Perhaps due to Adventism's strong tradition of support for church-state separation, there is significant hesitancy on the part of respondents to embrace heightened engagement of religion in American public life.

Not only do we see this hesitancy in the respondents' opposition to the Faith-Based Initiative and their attitude toward the Church making statements on public issues, but it can also be seen in their opposition (54%) to inclusion of religion in public debates on social-political issues (Table 12). In contrast, barely half (52%) of the general American population favors includ-





**Table 14**

Social-Political Issues  
(N=860)

| Issue                                                                               | % Oppose | % Favor |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|---------|
| 1. Going to war with Iraq                                                           | 47       | 37      |
| 2. Health insurance for all citizens regardless of ability to pay                   | 35       | 46      |
| 3. Giving illegal immigrants a chance to obtain legal status                        | 44       | 38      |
| 4. U.S. working closely with the United Nations                                     | 26       | 57      |
| 5. Increased gun control                                                            | 35       | 48      |
| 6. Government support for stem cell research                                        | 33       | 38      |
| 7. Elimination of the phrase "under God" from the mandatory Pledge of Allegiance    | 79       | 12      |
| 8. Government vouchers to attend religious schools                                  | 73       | 16      |
| 9. Law to allow churches to campaign for or against candidates for political office | 82       | 7       |
| 10. Increasing role of United States as police force for world affairs              | 70       | 13      |
| 11. Teaching creation "science" in public schools                                   | 14       | 77      |
| 12. Putting part of social security tax into personal mutual accounts               | 38       | 33      |
| 13. Prescription drugs covered by Medicare                                          | 13       | 65      |
| 14. Faith-based Initiative (government funds churches in providing social services) | 74       | 12      |
| 15. Teacher-led prayer in public schools                                            | 57       | 30      |
| 16. Posting of Ten Commandments in public buildings                                 | 31       | 54      |
| 17. The recent tax cuts enacted by Congress                                         | 27       | 46      |
| 18. The Patriot Act (government can investigate private records of citizens)        | 66       | 18      |
| 19. The nation of Israel having a special place in God's plan today                 | 59       | 15      |
| 20. Capital punishment (execute people convicted of serious crime)                  | 26       | 59      |
| 21. Indefinite holding without formal charges of persons suspected of terrorism     | 61       | 22      |
| 22. Laws or Supreme Court decisions making abortion illegal                         | 40       | 48      |
| 23. Laws forbidding same-sex marriages                                              | 20       | 76      |

issues. In terms of the Contextualist-Literalist division, Contextualists are more likely to support a more active role for religion in public life. In fact, they are significantly more likely than Literalists to agree with all four statements, including acceptance of Adventist young men and women joining the military as combatants (number 4).

Those who believe that the Bible and the writings of Ellen White should be read within the context of time and place favor a more activist role for religion in public life. However, they do not share the evangelicals' right-wing enthusiasm to Christianize America or knock down the wall of separation between church and state.

Evidence from our study simply suggests that, compared to Literalists, Contextualists tend to accept heightened involvement for religion in public life—perhaps out of a desire to see their Church more socially relevant and

ing religion in such debates (Pew Forum, 2004). Thus, Adventists are distinctly different in their view of how and whether religion should affect public life. Could this be a factor that explains why they are less likely to be involved in community service?

Despite the fact that nonwhite Adventists are more likely than whites to vote for Democratic candidates and hold more liberal positions, whites and nonwhites agree on four statements that reflect a more activist role for religion in public life (Table 12, page 50; numbers 1, 2, 3, 5). However, nonwhites are more likely than whites to favor the Adventist Church issuing statements on public

concerned. However, even this suggestion needs to be taken cautiously because Adventists as a whole are less likely to become socially and civically engaged in their communities than other non-Adventist church-attending members.

The most extensive research that compares Adventist churches with those of other denominations has found that Adventist churches "are less involved in community service than are other faith groups... [Indeed] one of the most significant findings ... is that Adventist congregations need to get more involved in public service and social concern" (Sahlin,



2003, 57). Clearly this is a major challenge for the Adventist Church today.

With this context in mind, we asked participants in our study what interaction they had with the community during the previous twelve months. Table 15 summarizes the findings. Note that most Adventists do not seem to be very involved with what happens in their communities, particularly in such areas of direct involvement in the political process as attendance at a political rally or meeting (7%) or working for a political campaign or voter registration drive (3%). However, more than one-third (36%) has contacted an elected official about a matter of concern, almost one-third (28%) indicate membership in a service club that does community improvement work, and 26 percent have given money to a political candidate, party, or lobby group. Only 10 percent report hearing a community leader speak at their church.

Interestingly, nonwhites tend to be slightly more involved than whites in community improvement efforts, though the relationship is not quite significant (.10) (Table 18, page 55). As with whites, nonwhites are not likely to be very involved politically. However, nonwhites are almost (22%) three times more likely to say that a community leader has spoken at their local church, which indicates that ethnic churches—particularly

African-American churches—seem to be better connected with leaders in their communities and seek out opportunities to connect those leaders with church members.

How are these political activities related to respondents' voting plans in the 2004 election? A much higher proportion of Kerry voters (almost half) has contacted public officials about issues of concern (see Table 16, page 54). A slightly higher percentage of Kerry voters has contributed money to a political candidate, party, or lobby group, but the difference with Bush voters is minor.

The major finding in this area, seen in Table 16, is that only 16 percent of undecided U.S. Adventist voters have contributed money to any political entity during the previous year. By the way, only 10 percent of those who do not plan to vote in the 2004 election made similar contributions. As mentioned earlier, few of our respondents were likely to attend political meetings regardless of their voting plans. However, significantly larger proportions of Kerry voters were.

Religious orientation is also related to civic engagement. Contextualists are slightly more likely than Literalists to be engaged in community improvement efforts (.10) and significantly more likely to give money to a political candidate, party, or lobbying group (Table 19, page 56).

**Table 15**

Civic and Political Participation  
(N=860)

**Political activism:**

| In the past twelve months have you done any of the following?             | % Yes |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Been a member of a service club with projects to improve the community | 28    |
| 2. Contacted an elected official about a matter of concern to you         | 36    |
| 3. Given money to a political candidate, party, or lobbying group         | 26    |
| 4. Attended a political rally or meeting                                  | 7     |
| 5. Heard a community leader speak in your church on a local issue         | 10    |
| 6. Worked for a political campaign or voter registration drive            | 3     |

**Sermons:**

| In the last 12 months, have you heard a sermon in your church about?  |    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 7. Protecting the environment                                         | 11 |
| 8. Against the war in Iraq                                            | 4  |
| 9. The widening gap between rich people and poor people               | 9  |
| 10. The need for Adventists to be involved in their local communities | 61 |

**Church involvement in the community:**

|                                                                                             |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 11. Are you personally involved in any community or civic projects sponsored by the Church? |    |
| a. Yes, on a regular basis                                                                  | 21 |
| b. Yes, occasionally                                                                        | 56 |
| c. No, never                                                                                | 24 |



## Table 16

Presidential Candidates by Political Engagement  
(N=860)

| Public Involvement (% who said yes)                               | Bush | Kerry | Undecided |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-------|-----------|
| 1. Contacted an elected official about an issue of concern        | 38   | 49    | 30 ***    |
| 2. Given money to a political candidate, party, or lobbying group | 33   | 36    | 16 ***    |
| 3. Attended a political rally or meeting                          | 7    | 14    | 5 **      |

Note: Significant at the \*\*\* .001; \*\* .01; \*.05 levels.

## Preaching and Social Action

One important way to determine the level of social awareness and engagement in the Adventist Church is through the pulpit—preaching. Members were asked about sermons they had heard in their churches during the previous year. As shown in Table 15 (page 53), they could have heard four different types. The kind heard most often (61%) focuses on the need for Adventists to be involved in their local communities. Eleven percent heard sermons on protection of the environment, and, as already mentioned, 4 percent heard sermons against the war in Iraq.

Although preachers cannot campaign from the pulpit for or against political candidates, in accordance with Internal Revenue Service regulations, they may take

positions on various issues, as Adventists have historically done on temperance and religious liberty. Note from Table 15 that the kind of sermon heard most does not advance a moral position but simply admonishes Adventists to get involved. However, even here only 61 percent of respondents remember hearing a sermon the previous year that called for social action. At least pastors are aware of the need for more involvement.

The low rates for the other three types of sermons show the feeble condition of moral challenges from the Adventist pulpit. The failure to deal with the war in Iraq—perhaps the leading issue of 2004 and the one on which the election will likely hinge—indicates that our pastors do not see this as a moral issue, but only as politics.

As neutral reporters, we are not taking a stand. Moral reasons could be cited for favoring and opposing

## Table 17

Sermons and Civic Participation  
(N=860)

**In the past twelve months, have you heard a sermon about the need for Adventists to be involved in their local communities? In the past twelve months, have you also done any of the following?**

|                                                                                                  | % Yes,<br>heard sermon | % No, didn't<br>hear sermon |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Been a member of a service club with projects to improve the community                        | 32                     | 21 ***                      |
| 2. Contacted an elected official about a matter of concern                                       | 38                     | 32 *                        |
| 3. Given money to a political candidate, party, or lobbying group                                | 29                     | 22 *                        |
| 4. Attended a political rally or meeting                                                         | 9                      | 3 *                         |
| 5. Heard a community leader speak in your church on a local issue                                | 14                     | 5 ***                       |
| 6. Worked for political campaign or voter registration drive                                     | 4                      | 1 *                         |
| 7. Are you personally involved in any community or civic projects sponsored by the Church? (***) |                        |                             |
| a. Yes, on a regular basis                                                                       | 22                     | 18                          |
| b. Yes, occasionally                                                                             | 61                     | 48                          |
| c. No, never                                                                                     | 17                     | 35                          |

Note: Significant at the \*\*\* .001; \*\* .01; \*.05 levels.



## Table 18

Racial Differences by Civic and Political Participation  
(N=860)

|                                                                                                 | % White<br>(N=762) | % Non-white<br>(N=91) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>In the past twelve months have you done any of the following?</b>                            |                    |                       |
| 1. Been a member of a service club with projects to improve the community                       | 27                 | 36 +                  |
| 2. Contacted an elected official about a matter of concern                                      | 36                 | 31                    |
| 3. Given money to a political candidate, party, or lobbying group                               | 27                 | 22                    |
| 4. Attended a political rally or meeting                                                        | 7                  | 9                     |
| 5. Heard a community leader speak in your church on a local issue                               | 8                  | 22 ***                |
| 6. Worked for a political campaign or voter registration drive                                  | 3                  | 6                     |
| <b>In the past twelve months, have you heard a sermon in your church about?</b>                 |                    |                       |
| 7. Protecting the environment                                                                   | 10                 | 16 +                  |
| 8. Against the war in Iraq                                                                      | 3                  | 9 *                   |
| 9. The widening gap between rich people and poor people                                         | 8                  | 16 *                  |
| 10. The need for Adventists to be involved in their local communities                           | 60                 | 66                    |
| 11. Are you personally involved in any community or civic projects sponsored by the Church? (*) |                    |                       |
| a. Yes, on a regular basis                                                                      | 19                 | 31                    |
| b. Yes, occasionally                                                                            | 56                 | 54                    |
| c. No, never                                                                                    | 24                 | 15                    |

Note: Significant at the \*\*\* .001; \*\* .01; \*.05 + .10 levels.

the war. But surely given the upheaval in the United States the Church should provide some guidance. It seems that this guidance is being heard more within ethnic congregations, primarily African-American churches. Nonwhites are three times more likely than whites to say they have heard a sermon preached against the war in Iraq, and two times more likely to hear a sermon on the widening gap between rich and poor.

The most likely political message our respondents have heard from the pulpit is the need for community involvement, but do such appeals yield results? Does preaching about an issue really make a difference? Over half (56%) of our respondents said they are occasionally involved in church-sponsored community or civic projects, whereas 21 percent said they were involved on a regular basis and 24 percent indicated no involvement at all. Interestingly, those who have heard a sermon on the need for involvement in their community are more likely to be civically engaged (Table 17, *opposite*).

On all of our measures of civic involvement those who have heard a sermon calling for greater social action are significantly more likely to be involved civically. This includes volunteering to improve the community, contacting an elected official, attending a polit-

ical rally, or working for a political campaign. The prophetic role of the ministry seems to make a difference—a noteworthy issue with consequences for the public mission of the Church.

We realize that asking people about whether they heard a sermon on a particular topic within the last twelve months is a bit risky. People often hardly remember a pastor's sermon from one Sabbath to another let alone during a twelve-month period. Furthermore, we do not know whether the member agreed with the message. Yet we wanted to assess the impact of preaching on social issues because research literature has shown consistently that political cues from the pulpit have an impact on parishioners' attitudes and behaviors (Brewer, Kersh, and Petersen, 2003; Djupe and Gilbert, 2003).

In this sample of Adventists, the evidence is both consistent with the literature and simply overwhelming. Hearing or not hearing sermons that address specific social issues has a very significant relationship on all the major issues we have examined—a finding worth pondering and exploring further.





**Table 19**

Religious Orientation by Civic and Political Participation  
(N=860)

|                                                                                             | % Literalists<br>(N=196) | % Contextualists<br>(N=317) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>In the past twelve months have you done any of the following?</b>                        |                          |                             |
| 1. Been a member of a service club with projects to improve the community                   | 25                       | 33 +                        |
| 2. Contacted an elected official about a matter of concern                                  | 32                       | 39                          |
| 3. Given money to a political candidate, party, or lobbying group                           | 24                       | 31 *                        |
| 4. Attended a political rally or meeting                                                    | 7                        | 7                           |
| 5. Heard a community leader speak in your church on a local issue                           | 7                        | 13                          |
| 6. Worked for a political campaign or voter registration drive                              | 3                        | 4                           |
| <b>In the past twelve months, have you heard a sermon in your church about?</b>             |                          |                             |
| 7. Protecting the environment                                                               | 10                       | 10                          |
| 8. Against the war in Iraq                                                                  | 4                        | 4                           |
| 9. The widening gap between rich people and poor people                                     | 7                        | 8                           |
| 10. The need for Adventists to be involved in their local communities                       | 59                       | 64                          |
| 11. Are you personally involved in any community or civic projects sponsored by the Church? |                          |                             |
| a. Yes, on a regular basis                                                                  | 22                       | 20                          |
| b. Yes, occasionally                                                                        | 48                       | 58                          |
| c. No, never                                                                                | 29                       | 22                          |

Note: Significant at the \*\*\* .001; \*\* .01; \* .05 + .10 levels.

## Hot Button Issues: Abortion and Homosexuality

Ever since *Roe vs. Wade*, the topic of abortion has led in what sociologist James Davison Hunter has called "The Culture Wars." Abortion is a very complex subject that involves such considerations as when human life begins and how much control a woman has over her own body. The world church has avoided taking a firm stand on this issue (and has been criticized both within and outside the Church), but it has issued some guidelines.<sup>13</sup> These basically set a high value on life but ultimately leave the decision of whether or not to abort to individual consciences.

In an attempt to probe Adventist thinking on abortion, we gave our respondents three options, realizing that others might also be possible with such a complex subject. Note that we are not considering laws here but questions of right and wrong (Table 20, *opposite*).

The first choice, selected by 13 percent of our sample, is the one adopted by liberals and feminists. Here only the needs of the woman are considered; debate over the life of the fetus is ruled out. The third choice, selected by 9 percent of our sample, is that of extreme conservatives. Here the fetus—or even the embryo—

gets all the consideration. The woman's needs do not matter. The middle choice is an attempt to compromise a very delicate situation. It says that abortion should not be used for birth control, but that there are situations beyond the woman's control. This position is reflected in the guidelines from the Church and is the one chosen by 78 percent of Adventists.

Fueled by the controversy over gay marriage, homosexuality may surpass abortion as the most controversial issue of 2004. We did not ask about laws or Supreme Court decisions. We have already reported that our sample was split on that subject, with 40 percent opposing laws and rulings on gay marriage and 48 percent favoring them. Here we are interested in the spiritual implications of homosexuality itself and how respondents interpret and understand what the Bible says on this topic (Table 20).

We asked respondents to choose one of the following statements regarding homosexuality: (1) rightly interpreted, the Bible does not condemn homosexuality; (2) homosexual unions are not sinful if they take place within loving long-term commitments; (3) it is not sin to be homosexual, but it is sin to practice homosexual behavior; (4) homosexuality is deviant and sinful and should be



changed through prayer and counseling; (5) not sure.

Adventists largely reject the first two options, although both have been argued within the Church. A few respondents were not sure. The third option is the one that Adventists generally adopt. As 40 percent recognize, we do not discipline celibate homosexuals. Yet the majority chose option four, which puts homosexuals outside of church practice. Furthermore, option four introduces the very complicated subject of what causes homosexuality and whether or not it is subject to change.

Does knowing someone who is gay change one's view of homosexuality? We asked respondents if they have a gay friend, colleague, or family member. In the general population, 45 percent of Americans say Yes, whereas 37 percent of Adventists in our sample say they do (Pew Research Center, 2003). Table 20 shows clearly that, indeed, knowing a gay person significantly affects perceptions of homosexuality. Adventists who know a gay person are significantly more likely to be welcoming, less judgmental, and willing to accept the position that homosexuality is not a sin without homosexual behavior.

## Voting and Sexual Issues

How are opinions about abortion and homosexuality likely to affect respondents' anticipated voting in 2004? Both subjects divide voters who plan to vote for Bush or Kerry (see Table 21, page 58). However, Kerry's supporters include a larger percentage of pro-choice advocates than do voters for Bush. This is not surprising since Bush opposes abortion and Kerry prefers to leave the decision to the woman, although he personally opposes abortion.

With respect to homosexuality, few respondents accept the position that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality. Only small numbers are unsure. Great majorities favor permitting homosexual orientation—but not homosexual behavior—or for deciding that even the orientation is wrong. Significant differences exist on these two positions. Kerry and undecided voters are much more likely to accept celibate homosexuals, whereas 60 percent of the Bush voters believe that the orientation toward homosexuality is sinful. Furthermore, they believe that

**Table 20**

Abortion and Homosexuality  
(N=860)

**(Abortion)**

**Which of the following statements comes closest to your own views on abortion?**

|                                                                                                |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 1. Abortion is entirely the woman's choice                                                     | 13 |
| 2. Abortion is acceptable in extreme circumstances (rape, incest, threat to the mother's life) | 78 |
| 3. Abortion is not acceptable under any conditions                                             | 9  |

**(Homosexuality)**

**Which of the following statements comes closest to your own views of homosexuality?**

|                                                                                            |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 1. Rightly interpreted, the Bible does not condemn homosexuality                           | 1  |
| 2. Homosexual unions are not sinful if they take place within loving long-term commitments | 2  |
| 3. It is not sin to be homosexual, but it is sin to practice homosexual behavior           | 40 |
| 4. Homosexuality is deviant and sinful and should be changed through prayer and counseling | 55 |
| 5. Not sure                                                                                | 2  |

**Do you have a friend, colleague, or family member who is gay? (\*\*\*)**

|                                                                                            | <b>% Yes</b>   | <b>% No</b>    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
|                                                                                            | <b>37</b>      | <b>63</b>      |
|                                                                                            | <b>(N=309)</b> | <b>(N=534)</b> |
| 1. Rightly interpreted, the Bible does not condemn homosexuality                           | 1              | 1              |
| 2. Homosexual unions are not sinful if they take place within loving long-term commitments | 4              |                |
| 3. It is not sin to be homosexual, but it is sin to practice homosexual behavior           | 51             | 33             |
| 4. Homosexuality is deviant and sinful and should be changed through prayer and counseling | 41             | 63             |
| 5. Not sure                                                                                | 3              | 2              |

Note: Significant at the \*\*\* .001; \*\* .01; \* .05 levels.



**Table 21**

Presidential Candidates by Abortion and Homosexuality  
(N=860)

|                                                                                                | % Bush | % Kerry | % Undecided |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|---------|-------------|
| <b>Abortion (***)</b>                                                                          |        |         |             |
| 1. Abortion is entirely the woman's choice                                                     | 11     | 25      | 13          |
| 2. Abortion is acceptable in extreme circumstances (rape, incest, threat to the mother's life) | 79     | 71      | 80          |
| 3. Abortion is not acceptable under any conditions                                             | 10     | 4       | 7           |
| <b>Homosexuality (***)</b>                                                                     |        |         |             |
| 1. Rightly, interpreted, the Bible does not condemn homosexuality                              | 1      | 3       | 1           |
| 2. Homosexual unions are not sinful if they take place within loving long-term commitments     | 1      | 7       | 45 ?        |
| 3. It is not sin to be homosexual, but it is sin to practice homosexual behavior               | 37     | 45      | 45          |
| 4. Homosexuality is deviant and sinful and should be changed through prayer and counseling     | 60     | 41      | 50          |

Note: Significant at the \*\*\* .001 level.

homosexual orientation can be changed. Also notice that, although the percentages are small, Kerry voters are more likely to accept the loving, long-term commitment view of homosexuality (Table 21).

How does one's reading of Scripture affect perceptions of homosexuality? On the two hot button issues of abortion and homosexuality, how one views the Bible and the writing of Ellen White, the sources of Adventist faith, makes a significant difference (Table 22, *opposite*). With respect to abortion, Literalists are significantly more likely than Contextualists to hold that abortion is not acceptable under any conditions. In contrast, Contextualists are more likely to say that abortion is a matter of private choice (Table 22).

A similar pattern emerges on the question of homosexuality. More than half (68%) of the Literalists selected the fourth option, which states that homosexuality is deviant and sinful and should be changed through prayer and counseling, whereas only 38 percent of the Contextualists did. Literalists (30%) are significantly less likely than Contextualists (52%) to have chosen the third option, which says that it is not a sin to be homosexual, but it is a sin to practice homosexual behavior.

A clearer and consistent picture begins to emerge. We indicated earlier that Literalists were more likely than Contextualists to support social policies to make abortion illegal and forbid same-sex marriages. It is no wonder that these two groups are voting for the presi-

dential candidate that fits their personal moral convictions. The two most divisive issues that face Americans are also the same two creating a wedge or a cultural divide within Adventism—the hermeneutical gap.

## Conclusion

Now that most Americans have watched or heard reports about the Democratic and Republican Conventions and the presidential race is heating up, one wonders to what degree religious values and beliefs will influence Adventist voting behavior. When we asked the Adventists in our sample, 89 percent said that their religious beliefs influence their voting behavior. But what exactly does this mean when we have identified so many differences within this sample, which at first glance seemed to represent a homogenous group?

The fact is that Adventists, even among this very highly religiously committed, white, well-educated, church volunteering, and male-dominated group, are very different in their social and political lives. Clearly, the majority is aligned with the conservative Republican party platform and presidential candidate. Despite Adventism's historically strong adherence to a strict separationist view on matters of church and state, the politics that a sizable group espouses—particularly those with a Literalist perspective—is closely aligned with the evangelical right-wing political movement in the United



States—a potentially risky and dangerous phenomenon.

Clearly, Adventists are multi-issue oriented, as most voters tend to be. That is, no single issue determines their support for a political candidate. Yet as we have shown, Adventists are fairly consistent in connecting their political and social values with party preferences. So at one level, Adventists are clearly very politically engaged. They know what the candidates and their respective parties espouse and they align themselves accordingly. However, it is one thing to vote and another to be civically engaged.

One core issue in our findings is what we have called the hermeneutical gap—which, as we have shown, differentiates Adventists on many important issues. What lies behind the differences in interpretation of Scripture and the writings of Ellen White? What is it about the mindset that accepts the appropriateness of contextual variables in interpretation that distinguishes its adherents from Literalist sisters and brothers? What consequences will this phenomenon have for the future of Adventism, particularly on such critical issues as women in ministry, cultural diversity, and the mission of the Church?

Sociologist Nancy Ammerman Taton has documented the critical role of hermeneutics in battles that have divided the largest denomination in America, the Southern Baptist Convention (Ammerman, 1990). To what degree will the hermeneutical battle threaten the unity of

Adventism? What other struggles might lay ahead? At the very least, Ammerman's book might be good reading for those responsible for the leadership of the Church.

There can be no doubt that each side of the Literalist-Contextualist division draws upon sources it considers authoritative to justify its positions. But can this gap be bridged, and if so, how? Is there a theological solution, or is this gap determined more by sociological forces such as age, race, and whether one is a first-generation member of the Church or has an ancestry in Adventism that reaches further back?

If this gap is so evident in what initially appeared to be a sample of a very homogeneous group, we wonder how it would look with a more representative sample and how this gap might impact other areas of Adventist church life. At the very least, we have learned once again that things are more complex than they initially appeared.

The hermeneutical gap affects how the Church and its public mission are viewed and lived. Those who seek a church more committed to a peaceable kingdom and nonviolence may find it reassuring that Literalists share their concerns. Those who seek a church that wants more engagement with the community and more tolerance of different lifestyles might see hopeful signs among the Contextualists. In the end, Adventism may need both groups to remind each other of corresponding blind spots. Hopefully, as is likely, both groups are worshipping with each other.

**Table 22**

Religious Orientation by Abortion and Homosexuality  
(N=860)

|                                                                                                | % Literalists | % Contextualists |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|------------------|
| <b>Abortion (***)</b>                                                                          |               |                  |
| 1. Abortion is entirely the woman's choice                                                     | 8             | 18               |
| 2. Abortion is acceptable in extreme circumstances (rape, incest, threat to the mother's life) | 76            | 77               |
| 3. Abortion is not acceptable under any conditions                                             | 16            | 5                |
| <b>Homosexuality (***)</b>                                                                     |               |                  |
| 1. Rightly interpreted, the Bible does not condemn homosexuality                               | 1             | 1                |
| 2. Homosexual unions are not sinful if they take place within loving long-term commitments     | 0             | 4                |
| 3. It is not sin to be homosexual, but it is sin to practice homosexual behavior               | 30            | 52               |
| 4. Homosexuality is deviant and sinful and should be changed through prayer and counseling     | 68            | 38               |
| 5. Not sure                                                                                    | 0             | 4                |

Note: Significant at the \*\*\* .001; \*\* .01; \*.05 levels.



# FIND THE FUN

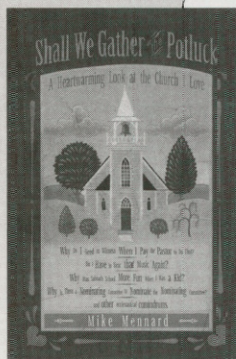
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Finally, we have added additional evidence to previous findings (Sahlin, 2003; and Dudley and Gillespie, 1992) showing that Adventist members—young and old alike, as well as churches—are not as involved in social service or community ministry programs as they could be. Earlier, we wondered if Adventist understanding of and support for separation of church and state has yielded the view that religion does not have much of a public role. We can only surmise at this point, but clearly the majority of Adventists, particularly preachers, are not connecting the dots of how theological positions inform public life issues.

More likely perhaps is the belief that individuals and their consciences should address these issues. Although we understand and respect this position, we wonder if collectively the Church should not stand and contribute more substantively to public dialogue on critical matters that face the United States and local communities.

We salute those few Adventist preachers who have chosen the “road less traveled,” to be prophetic in their critique of public issues, particularly the war in Iraq. Both of us remember vividly and with some degree of astonishment how Dwight K. Nelson of Pioneer Memorial Church at Andrews University spoke candidly and passionately earlier this year against the war in Iraq. Although he probably knew that his congregation was predominantly Republican—and thus prowar—he nevertheless spoke to a packed congregation, calling the war immoral and basing his position on the radical nonviolent teachings of the Bible.

Nelson reminded his congregation that our first allegiance as Christians is to the radical claims of the gospel and not to a president, political party, or popular war. Whether one agreed or disagreed, no doubt that Sabbath morning people were made to think more critically about their faith and its application to this important issue.

Perhaps most telling in terms of apathy and what appears to be increasingly socially irrelevant Adventist preaching is the absence of voices calling out for protection of the environment. We live at a time described by one of the most prominent U.S. environmental lawyers (Kennedy, 2004) as the “worst environmental times of our nation’s history.” Again, we note conspicuous absence of discussion.

Either our preachers are totally oblivious to this crisis, or they know about it but simply do not connect it to Adventist views of the creation and Sabbath theology. Given the moral and theological convictions and values of Adventists as “Keepers of the Garden” (Baldwin, 2001), shouldn’t Adventists be championing, alerting, lobbying, organizing, cleaning, writing letters, confronting powers, entering court briefs, and voting



accordingly, all for the sake of our responsibility as keepers or stewards of God's creation?

The gospel has significant social consequences, but it appears that a majority of Adventists are not hearing about it from their pulpits. On the most critical issues that face the United States today, Adventist clergy appear to be either too timid or misinformed, or they have adopted a strict separationist perspective so strongly that the connection between religion and devastating events like war and environmental crisis are disconnected.

Or perhaps we have succumbed so strongly to an individualist ethic that Adventist pastors figure such matters should be left to individual conscience. This raises the question of whether the Church should stand and be counted in some visible public way on pertinent social issues. It is one thing for the General Conference to issue statements, but what does that mean for a local church, family, or individual that claims a particular religious identity as Adventist?

Our findings on the social impact and power of preaching have significant implications that merit further study and reflection, particularly among those given responsibility for training, supervising, and promoting the Adventist ministry.

It is our hope that this discussion will ignite dialogue and provoke thought within the Adventist community about the many ways faith might inform the most critical social-political issues of our time. We also hope that Adventist pastors will lead congregations in reflecting seriously about these connections.<sup>14</sup>

We hope this dialogue will recognize above all that God is neither a Republican nor a Democrat. As Jim Wallis, editor in chief of *Sojourners Magazine*, recently stated at the People of Faith Luncheon during the Democratic National Convention:

Just because a Religious Right has fashioned itself for political power in one predictable ideological guise does not mean those who question this political seduction must be their opposite political counterpart. The Republican Party has misstepped in co-opting religious leaders. The Democratic Party should not make the same mistake. The best public contribution of religion is precisely not to be ideologically predictable or a loyal partisan, but to always raise the moral issues that will challenge both left and right, and governments who put power above principles. The best thing for the country and for politics is to let the prophetic voice of faith be heard.<sup>15</sup>

The Gospel stands quite apart from any political party, platform, or presidential candidate, beckoning us to a higher calling and level of responsibility. Whatever choices we make—on whatever basis—let us exercise the most important privilege given to us by a democratic free society: the power to vote.

## Notes

1. Quoted in Kenneth D. Wald, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, 4th ed. (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 158.
2. Larry Diamond, "What Went Wrong in Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* (Sept./Oct., 2004); <[www.census.gov/hhes/www/hlth-in03.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/hlth-in03.html)>; and <[www.census.gov/hhes/www/income03.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income03.html)>. For a good overview of the current debate on the Bush administration's Faith-Based Initiative, see Jo Renee Formicola, Mary C. Segers, and Paul Weber, *Faith-Based Initiatives and the Bush Administration: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (New York: Roman and Littlefield, 2003).
3. Thanks in large measure to the generous support of the Pew Charitable Trusts, which helped establish numerous research efforts. See <[www.pewtrusts.com](http://www.pewtrusts.com)>; <[www.pewforum.org](http://www.pewforum.org)>; <[www.fastennetwork.org](http://www.fastennetwork.org)>; <[www.religionanddemocracy.lib.virginia.edu](http://www.religionanddemocracy.lib.virginia.edu)>; and <[www.religionandsocialpolicy.org](http://www.religionandsocialpolicy.org)>.
4. Susan Page, "Churchgoing Closely Tied to Voting Patterns," *USA Today*, June 3, 2004, 1.
5. "Survey finds church attendance, party affiliation closely linked," <[www.churchcentral.com/nw/s/template/article.html/id/17590](http://www.churchcentral.com/nw/s/template/article.html/id/17590)>.
6. David D. Kirkpatrick, "A Call to 'Win This Culture War,'" *New York Times*, Sept. 1, 2004. See also, Carl M. Cannon, "Bush and God," *National Journal*, Jan. 3, 2004.
7. TEACH Services, Inc., <[www.teachservices.com](http://www.teachservices.com)> claims to have the largest mailing list selection of church members, more than 180,000 households. The mailing list can be rented. In this case, *Spectrum* received 1,500 randomly selected households. TEACH's mailing list is updated daily and is compiled from different organizations and sources. (See its Web site for more details.)  
A sample of the organizations that have provided mailing lists or used the list include: ADRA, Amazing Facts, American Bible Society, It is Written, Focus on the Family, Global Missions, Gospel Outreach, Holbrook Indian School, Project: Steps to Christ, United Prison Ministries, The Quite Hour, and Hope International.  
The fact that a large number of these households are supporters of the Church and various Adventist ministries suggests that the sample is biased toward more committed Adventists—meaning older white leaders, highly committed supporters of the Adventist





Church, and donors to independent Adventist organizations as well as various ministries within the Church.

8. The U.S. Congregational Life Survey <[www.uscongregations.org](http://www.uscongregations.org)> represents the largest and most representative profile of worshipers and their congregations ever developed in the United States. It encompasses a total of 300,000 individuals from 2,000 churches and represents 50 denominations, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As part of this unprecedented study, a total of 94 randomly selected Adventist congregations in the North American Division participated, resulting in a sample of 5,596 church-attending adults.

9. Every research effort has limits and strengths. Getting a representative sample of Adventists in the North American Division is a difficult proposition, particularly if one also wants to represent the multilingual ethnic membership of the Church. There is no complete master list of all the members in the NAD.

Our previous study on this topic, reported in the book *Citizens of Two Worlds*, was based on a random sample of the mailing list of the North American edition of the *Adventist Review*. In that study, Asians, African Americans, and Latinos were also underrepresented. Because of time and funding constraints, we were unable to assemble a more representative list of church members. The best option available to us was the national list provided by TEACH Services, Inc. (see note 7, above).

Although we recognize the weaknesses of this sampling frame, it represents a segment of the Adventist population that can be identified as strongly committed leaders and supporters of the Church.

10. As noted above, our sample underrepresents Asians, African Americans, and Latinos. Since the numbers are so low, we don't assume that our few cases represent Adventist communities of color. However, for purposes of analysis we have clustered them together and identified them as nonwhite.

How different is the nonwhite minority group from white members? Separate analysis showed that the individuals in the nonwhite group are as old, educated, religiously committed, and of the same social-economic status as those in the white group. Again, even the nonwhite group does not mirror their counterparts in typical NAD Adventist churches.

Nevertheless, we felt justified in dividing the groups given the importance of race on these issues, and more importantly from an analytical perspective, because of ethnic group similarities in their social-political attitudes and voting behavior.

The reader should keep in mind that almost half (48%) of the nonwhite group is African American.

11. Interestingly, within the general population an increasing number of nonreligious Americans are likely to be aligned with the Democratic party. See <[www.usatoday.com/news/politicssections/nation/2004-08-26-secular-democrats\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/politicssections/nation/2004-08-26-secular-democrats_x.htm)>.

12. Federal Election Commission, *Voter Registration and Turnout 2000* <[www.fec.gov/pages/2000turnout/reg&to00.htm](http://www.fec.gov/pages/2000turnout/reg&to00.htm)>.

13. "Seventh-day Adventist Guidelines on Abortion," *Liberty* 88 (Jan.-Feb. 1993): 12-13.

14. For a helpful article in this regard, see Brian McLaren, "Scared to Talk Politics in Church?" *Sojourners Magazine*, 33.9 (Sept. 2004).

15. Quoted in David Batstone, "Take Back our Faith—Successes and Next Steps" <[www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=sojo-mail.display&issue=040827#3](http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=sojo-mail.display&issue=040827#3)>.

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