

God Wants Your Vote

Political Theology and Voter Turnout in Campus Ministry Students

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On election night 2012, University of Mary Washington's campus ministries were doing their usual fellowship and prayer, but also showing off their "I Voted" stickers and waiting for the results to return. Contemporary political theology, responding to the political participation of evangelical churches, includes theological justifications for Christian participation in politics not just as citizens, but as Christians. Churches develop voter guides, resources for lobbying, and information about registration; denominational publications such as websites and theological journals describe voting in religious terms, as not only a civic but a spiritual duty. However, it is unclear how effective these efforts are. Does a political theology that encourages voting for religious reasons actually get out the vote? This study examines the political theologies of three denominations: the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Episcopal Church, and the Southern Baptist Convention. These theologies are then compared to survey data on religious beliefs and voting behavior of students in two campus ministries at University of Mary Washington: Canterbury Club, which serves Episcopal and Lutheran students, and Baptist Campus Ministries. Though the small sample size and limited nature of the survey prevent me from drawing broad conclusions, it provides an interesting starting point for considering the implications of denominational theology for voter turnout. Despite encouraging political participation the most of the three denominations, the Baptist group had the lowest voter turnout; internal diversity within the campus ministry prevents the denomination's message from effectively increasing voter turnout.

Several national studies examine the relationship between religious affiliation and political ideology, but none of these spend very much time on how this relationship impacts political participation. The Pew Forum on Religion and the Public Life collects data on religious affiliation, religious beliefs, and political beliefs. According to their most recent version of their

U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, published in 2008, mainline Protestants make up 18.1% of Americans, while evangelical Protestants make up an additional 23.6%. Within those groups, Lutherans make up 2.8% of Americans, Episcopalians 1.4%, and evangelical Baptists 10.8%. Combined, the denominations considered in this study make up 15% of possible voters.¹ The Pew Forum tracks partisan affiliation, and finds that 50% of evangelical Protestants and 41% of mainline Protestants consider themselves Republican (compared to 34% and 43% Democrat, respectively), reflecting the significant role of religious communities.² Regular church attendance also contributed significantly to partisan affiliation, with denomination and church attendance both creating larger “gaps” in the 2004 election than most other factors: White Protestants voted for Bush 22.8% more often than any other religious groups, and weekly church attenders voted for Bush 17% more than those who attended less often. This was a greater difference than that created by income, region, gender, age, or education.³ The Ray C. Bliss Center for Applied Politics, which conducted its last report around the same time as the Pew Forum, showed similar findings. Rather than focusing on individual denominations, the Bliss report divided mainline Protestants and evangelical Protestants by ideology, and found that evangelical Protestants have remained strongly conservative for several elections while mainline Protestants were ideologically divided.⁴ Ideology and political party are both influenced by religious denomination.

1 The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2007, “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Affiliations: Diverse and Dynamic,” Religion and American Culture, <http://religions.pewforum.org/>, p. 5, (accessed September 12, 2012).

2 The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2007, “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Beliefs and Practices: Diverse and Politically Relevant,” Religion and American Culture, <http://religions.pewforum.org/>, p. 85, (accessed September 12, 2012).

3 Green, “Fifth National Survey,” p. 17.

4 John C. Green, 2008, “The Fifth National Survey on Religion and Politics: A Baseline for the 2008 Presidential Election,” Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics, p. 2.

The association of evangelical Christians with conservative, religiously-charged politics began with the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan. Evangelical Christians had been a growing constituency since the 1960s (today they outnumber mainline Protestants), and with their new numbers came new political power.⁵ The new “Christian Right” movement became central to the Republican party, and made bold promises about its electoral goals – Pat Robertson announced in 1991 that he expected his group to control Congress and 35 state legislatures by 1996.⁶ The Christian Right was not entirely synonymous with evangelical faith, and many evangelical Christians did not support the policy agenda of the Christian Right or hesitated to work with competing faith groups.⁷ However, leaders of evangelical churches such as Jerry Falwell were heavily involved in the political activities of the Christian Right, and even if they did not support organizations such as the Moral Majority, evangelical Christians did support the Republican party, and continue to do so.⁸ In 2008, 56% of evangelical Protestants identified as Republican, and 76% voted for John McCain.⁹ In 2012, exit polls showed 76% of evangelical Protestants voting for Mitt Romney.¹⁰ Since the rise of the Christian Right, evangelical Christians have remained a significant political constituency.

Mainline Protestant theology, though less politicized, responded to the new religiously motivated politics of the Christian Right. Though less collectively mobilized than evangelical Protestants, they have created organizations and resources to encourage political participation.

Several studies show that mainline clergy have become more politically active since

5 Robert Booth Fowler, et al., *Religion and Politics in America*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 2010), p. 95.

6 Clyde Wilcox, “The Christian Right and Civic Virtue,” in *Religion and Democracy in the United States*, ed. Alan Wolfe and Ira Katznelson, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 176-177.

7 Fowler, *Religion and Politics*, p. 97.

8 David T. Morgan, *New Crusades, the New Holy Land: Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention, 1969-1991*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996), also available EBSCOhost (accessed November 14, 2012). p. 163.

9 Fowler, *Religion and Politics*, pp. 84-88.

10 Joshua Bickel, “How the Faithful Voted: 2012 Preliminary Analysis,” The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, <http://www.pewforum.org/Politics-and-Elections/How-the-Faithful-Voted-2012-Preliminary-Exit-Poll-Analysis.aspx> (accessed November 13, 2010).

approximately the 1970s.¹¹ The Episcopal Church opened an Office of Government Relations and started a grassroots Public Policy Network, which advocate for left-of-center positions.¹² The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America approved a statement on the Church in Society which encouraged the church to speak out on political issues.¹³ Though mainline Protestants have not collectively organized against the Religious Right, the increasing visibility of faith in electoral politics has opened up space for mainline churches in the public sphere as well. Contemporary political theology of both mainline and evangelical denominations reflects the changed role of religion in American elections.

Pew Forum's data does give some insight to the role that religion plays in political decisions beyond just party affiliation. Protestants are slightly more likely to be registered to vote than the population on average.¹⁴ However, despite their increased registration rates, few Americans cited their religious beliefs as the “primary emphasis” on their political thinking. Only 8% of mainline Protestants considered religion the primary influence on their political thinking, and 28% of evangelical Protestants. This percentage increased, however, among people for whom religion was more important, as measured by a variety of behaviors and beliefs such as attending church regularly and expressing absolute belief in a personal God.¹⁵ Despite the fact that a minority of believers describe religion as the primary influence on their political thinking, the Pew Forum concludes that, “Not only does religious affiliation influence Americans’ attitudes on important social and cultural questions, it is also closely related to Americans’ basic political

11 Paul A. Djupe and Christopher P. Gilbert, "Politics and Church: Byproduct or Central Mission?" *Journal For The Scientific Study Of Religion* 47, no. 1 (March 2008): pp. 45-62, OmniFile Full Text Mega (H.W. Wilson) (accessed September 18, 2012), p. 45.

12 Episcopal Church, Public Policy, The Episcopal Church, <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/public-policy> (accessed November 13, 2012).

13 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Church in Society, 1993, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/Church-in-Society.aspx> (accessed November 10, 2012).

14 Pew Forum, “Religious Beliefs and Practices,” p. 81.

15 Pew Forum, “Religious Beliefs and Practices,” pp. 78-79.

orientation.”¹⁶ The Pew Forum's exit poll analysis from the 2012 election can be used to draw some conclusions about religion and voter turnout. For example, evangelical Protestants make up 26.3% of Americans according to the 2008 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, and white evangelicals made up 23% of the electorate, suggesting fairly high voter turnout. Similarly, 49% of 2012 voters nationally say that they attend worship once a week or more, and 42% of voters said that they attend worship once a week or more; churchgoers of all denominations do seem to make it to the polls.¹⁷ In fact, the 2004 National Survey on Religion and Politics found that people who attend church once a week or more have higher voter turnout, about 66% compared to 60.9% nationally.¹⁸ Though the extent to which religion inspires individual political activity is ambiguous in the Pew Forum's reports, there clearly exists a link between political and religious beliefs. However, less work has been done on the theological underpinnings which inspire a religious approach to politics, and how effective they are at motivating action.

Despite a lack of clear causal relationship, observers of American politics generally agree that religion can act to encourage civic participation. For example, a study by Allison Calhoun-Brown found that even in conservative traditions which tend to emphasize women's dependence on men, women who attended church frequently had an increased sense of political efficacy.¹⁹ Studies have shown that church involvement and the denomination one attends also impacts acquisition of civic skills and political involvement: “Churches can potentially increase individual levels of civic skills, political efficacy, and political knowledge.”²⁰ In fact, in many churches, this process is entirely explicit, with churches “directly recruiting congregants into

¹⁶ Green, “Fifth National Survey,” p. 65.

¹⁷ Bickel, “How the Faithful Voted.”

¹⁸ Green, “Fifth National Survey,” p. 62.

¹⁹ Alan Wolfe, “Political Science, Democracy and Religion,” in *Religion and Democracy in the United States*, ed. Alan Wolfe and Ira Katznelson, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 35.

²⁰ Amaney Jamel, “Muslim Americans: Enriching or Depleting American Democracy?” in *Religion and Democracy in the United States*, ed. by Alan Wolfe and Ira Katznelson, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 98.

political processes.”²¹ Religious groups are also particularly effective at mobilizing voters around cultural conflicts, though analysts disagree about whether this is a good or bad thing for democracy as a whole.²² When it comes to voting specifically, religion influences an individual’s vote in several possible ways. The first is religious affiliation; as demonstrated by the Pew Forum and Bliss national surveys, different denominations have different partisan tendencies. However, other factors related to religion also have significance for voting. The second is ethno-religious identity; African American Protestants, for instance, have different voter turnout and party affiliation trends than white Protestants. Finally, religious salience impacts politics; more religious people tend to hold different political belief than less religious people, also illustrated in the Pew Forum study.²³ Which issues religious voters are mobilized around also impacts voter turnout; for example, George W. Bush was able to get out the vote among religious “values” voters, but when economic concerns came to outweigh social concerns nationally the benefit Republicans gained from “values voters” was lost.²⁴ The passionate politics inspired by “cultural war” issues has been criticized as harmful to democracy by discouraging compromise; however, Kenneth Wald and David Legee argue that these “values voters” can in fact have a positive impact on voter turnout. Strong opinions on a “cultural war” issue does not necessarily translate into single-issue voting, but may help inspire more active political engagement.²⁵ The role of religion in mobilizing voters means that denomination impacts not only ideology, but also who actually turns out to vote.

21 Jamel, “Muslim Americans,” p. 98.

22 Wolfe, “Political Science,” p. 39.

23 Fowler et al., “Religion and Politics,” pp. 83-84.

24 Fowler et al., “Religion and Politics,” p. 82.

25 Kenneth D. Wald and David C. Legee, “Mobilizing Religious Differences in American Politics,” in *Religion and Democracy in the United States*, ed. by Alan Wolfe and Ira Katznelson, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 40.

One element of church life which could have a significant impact on voting is political theology, which provides a religious perspective on the public sphere and its relationship with the church. For example, a conviction that Christians are called to be separate from worldly concerns might discourage political participation, while a belief that God works through the state might encourage it. I am describing those theologies which provide theological justification for participating in political life as active political theologies. Of the denominations I considered, the Lutheran and Episcopal churches did encourage political participation, but the Southern Baptist Convention had the most active political theology. However, their denominational theology is not necessarily embraced by all Baptist churches, due to the independent nature of churches within the Southern Baptist Convention.

In the Lutheran church, the central doctrine which informs the understanding of the role of church in politics is the Two Kingdoms doctrine established by Martin Luther. Under this doctrine, the church and the state are distinct realms which should not interfere with each other.²⁶ Though this has sometimes been taken to mean that the Gospel has no relevance to secular life, Luther disagrees; he says that they are linked and only the methods differ. Contemporary interpreters of the doctrine explain that the kingdom of the world, or the left, is best ruled by human authorities and what one theologian calls “the laws of nature,” while the kingdom of God, or the right, is ruled by the Gospel and the sacraments, but both are established and governed by God.²⁷ The Church is “a watchdog in the world, called to discern whether churchly and worldly orders support or neglect the divine intention of maintaining a good creation,” but individual

²⁶ Thorsten Prill, “Martin Luther, the Two Kingdoms, and the Church,” *Evangel* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2005), *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 7, 2012), p. 18.

²⁷ Mark Ellingsen, “The Two Kingdoms in America,” *Dialog: A Journal Of Theology* 45, no. 4 (Winter 2006) *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 7, 2012), p. 368.

Christians also have an important role to play.²⁸ However, contemporary Lutheran theologians give little emphasis to the role of individual Christians in favor of discussing the role of the church more broadly. Wanda Diefelt, in her article “Advocacy, Political Participation, and Citizenship: Lutheran Contributions to Public Theology,” emphasizes community service and advocacy as more important dimensions of citizenship than merely voting or holding public office.²⁹ She argues that for Christians, citizenship is best understood as “advocacy on behalf of social groups, communal causes, or collective efforts for the promotion of the common good.”³⁰ For Christians who want to live their faith in the public sphere, the emphasis is on promoting certain causes of religious concern. Mark Ellingsen, another contemporary Lutheran theologian, agrees that not all political activity undertaken need be explicitly Christian; “Martin Luther actually claimed that many political issues do not concern the Christian, as Christian.”³¹ He argues that Christians should engage government from the perspective of natural law rather than from a religious perspective, and therefore avoids the language of religious purpose or duty to describe political participation.³² Ellingsen says that, while the Lutheran idea of Two Kingdoms and their conception of humanity as prone to sin and selfishness both converge well with the political reality of the United States, it is most important for Lutherans to participate in the public sphere not as Christians but as citizens with shared concerns regardless of religious background.³³ Though there is disagreement within Lutheran theology about the extent to which the church can engage with the public sphere, the emphasis on law as the ruling principle of the

28 Wanda Diefelt, “Advocacy, Political Participation, and Citizenship: Lutheran Contributions to Public Theology,” *Dialog: A Journal Of Theology* 49, no. 2 (Summer 2010), *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 18, 2012), p. 111.

29 Diefelt, “Advocacy,” p. 112.

30 Diefelt, “Advocacy,” p. 113.

31 Ellison, “The Two Kingdoms,” p. 367.

32 Ellison, “The Two Kingdoms,” p. 369.

33 Ellison, “The Two Kingdoms,” p. 369.

Kingdom of the Left is generally shared. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America publishes social statements with policy recommendations on a range of issues, suggesting that the church does have a role in considering public policy, but Robert Benne argues that shared theological convictions do not necessarily lead to shared policy agendas. While faith might provide a motivation for engaging with particular political issues, it does not necessarily provide any answers which believers might use to guide political decisions.³⁴ Such a limited understanding of the role of the church in the public sphere does not lend itself to an active public theology, even though the government is understood to be established by God and the church is empowered to take the government to task when it fails at its duties.

Though Lutheran political theology is thoroughly discussed in Lutheran journals, Lutherans have not been studied much as a political group, except as part of mainline Protestantism more generally. Some scholars argue that their Two Kingdoms doctrine leads to political passivity, as believers focus on the kingdom of God over the kingdom of earth. Though ECLA clergy tend to be strongly liberal and approve of private political activism by clergy, few encourage political activity in their congregations: In one survey, only half of clergy encouraged congregants to register and vote.³⁵ The denominational website reflects this uncertainty. Though the church does create a variety of “Social Statements,” “Social Messages,” and “Social Policy Resolutions,” and these statements are readily available on the ECLA website, it provides little information about how to transform these stances into political action. The heavily promoted “Our Faith in Action” section of the webpage encourages congregational action on issues such as hunger and poverty, but says little about individual action; voting is not mentioned anywhere in

34 Robert Benne, "How Should Religious Convictions be Expressed in Political Life?" *Dialog: A Journal Of Theology* 51, no. 2 (June 2012), *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 10, 2012), p. 109.

35 Daniel Hofrenning, Janelle Sagness, and L. DeAne Lagerquist, “Evangelical Lutheran Church of America,” in Corwin E. Smidt, *Pulpit and Politics: Clergy in American Politics at the Advent of the Millennium*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2004. Also available at EBSCOhost.(accessed November 10, 2012), p. 55.

the section, and contacting elected representatives gets only a single reference. Though one ECLA-run blog posted about political participation around election time, these pages were not promoted, and were difficult to locate from the homepage.³⁶ The limited political information available on the ECLA website indicates that political participation is not a priority of the ECLA despite the thorough consideration it gives to social issues.

The Episcopal Church has been heavily involved in social issues within the church itself, but their leadership and the laity have tended to disagree over the appropriate role of the church in politics. The denomination and its leadership have leaned towards liberal positions; conservative Episcopalians have responded by developing an evangelical strand within the tradition.³⁷ James Fenhagen, former dean of General Theological Seminary, the Episcopal Church's oldest seminary, defies "holy worldliness" as a key part of "the Anglican way" - "[cherishing] the divine presence in everyday affairs."³⁸ However, how and why Christians should be involved in the world is not uniformly articulated in Anglican theology.

Traditional Anglican theology offers some insight to how the Church conceptualizes its role. Archbishop of York William Temple argues that the church has a unique role in public life, because it has a unique understanding of God's purpose.³⁹ Archbishop Temple's book, *Citizen and Churchman*, has been a significant source for later Anglican theologians, and it presents a view of church-state relations which involves an active church cooperating with the state to address moral and spiritual issues. In a theology which shares features with the Two Kingdoms doctrine of the Lutherans, Temple says that the Christian citizen "is a member of two societies ...

³⁶ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Home – Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, <http://www.ecla.org/> (accessed November 14, 2012).

³⁷ David Hein and Gardiner H. Shattuck Jr., *The Episcopalians*, (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004), pp. 148-149.

³⁸ Hein, *The Episcopalians*, p. 154.

³⁹ Bradley Pace, "Public Reason and Public Theology: How the Church Should Interfere," *Anglican Theological Review* 91, no. 2 (Spring 2009): p. 277, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 28, 2012).

The distinctive functions of the two are governed by different principles, or rather by different relationships to one ultimate end—the glory of God in the welfare of his people.”⁴⁰ However, Temple distinguishes Anglican theology from Lutheran by seriously blurring the distinction between these two kingdoms. He insists that Christianity leads to good citizenship (such as valuing justice and equality,) and thus that Christians can address worldly problems in a way that non-Christians cannot.⁴¹ Interpreting this position, Bradley Pace argues that the church can act as an authority on what goals society should have in order to conform with God’s will, though it is not necessarily qualified to suggest specific means for accomplishing them.⁴² However, this theology was developed in World War II England, where the Anglican church held significantly more power and higher membership. American Episcopal theologians seem to agree that the church should have significant influence, but are not quite sure how individual Episcopalians contribute to that.

The evangelical strand of the Episcopal church, in response to the social activism of the church from the 1960s on, also draws on traditional Anglican theology; however, they go back further, to the 19th century, whose theologians held conflicted views about the role of the Church and individual believers in the public sphere.⁴³ William Wilberforce, an early Anglican voice against the slave trade, shares the belief that the world would benefit from the involvement of the Church in the public sphere, and argues that individual Christians should perform well in their duties, including political ones, to do credit to Christianity as a whole.⁴⁴ J. C. Ryle, on the other hand, believes that Christians should not “neglect their duty in the world,” but finds worldly

40 William Temple, *Citizen and Churchman*, (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, Ltd., 1941), p. 69.

41 Temple, *Citizen and Churchman*, pp. 77-79.

42 Pace, “Public Reason,” p. 285.

43 Jeffrey P. Greenman, “Anglican Evangelicals on Personal and Social Ethics,” *Anglican Theological Review* 94, no. 2 (Spring 2012): p. 183, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 28, 2012).

44 Greenman, “Anglican Evangelicals,” p. 192.

concerns less important than spiritual ones overall.⁴⁵ Rather than trying to influence the world through worldly activities such as participating in politics, Ryle follows the “Personal Influence Strategy,” which states that evangelicals should exert influence primarily by modeling proper moral behavior and building relationships.⁴⁶ David Gitari, a more contemporary evangelical Anglican theologian who retired in 2002, agrees with the importance of personal influence, but returns to the Episcopal Church’s commitment to involvement in the world, arguing that Christians should be active in bringing the moral values of the Church into their political lives.⁴⁷ Though social unrest in the church has made some parts of its membership wary of involvement in politics, Episcopalian political theology overall indicates a sense that the Church has some obligation to act as a moral compass for the world and that towards this end individual believers should be active in it. However, the emphasis placed on that activity varies across the tradition.

The Episcopal Church website emphasizes the church’s role in the public sphere; “Public Policy” is the first item listed under the heading “What We Do.”⁴⁸ This link directs to the Episcopal Church’s Office of Government Relations, which focuses on federal lobbying, and includes a “Take Action Here” link to a recently launched (October 2012) Action Center website. Like the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America’s advocacy pages, the Episcopal Church website emphasizes focus on specific issues (education and the environment are the two most recently highlighted.)⁴⁹ However, only a few clicks in is a resource called Faith and Citizenship, which encourages individual political participation in several ways, with detailed information about registering to vote, contacting elected representatives, and learning more about specific

45 Greenman, “Anglican Evangelicals,” p. 195.

46 Greenman, “Anglican Evangelicals,” p. 195.

47 Greenman, “Anglican Evangelicals,” p. 200.

48 Episcopal Church, Public Policy.

49 Episcopal Church Office Of Government Relations, The Episcopal Church Public Policy Network, The Episcopal Church, <http://episcopal.grassroots.com/act-now> (accessed November 14 2012).

policy issues.⁵⁰ The church's positions on issues are a little bit harder to find, but are available in an online library, where the Office of Government Relations posts regular statements on political issues, which encourage readers to take specific actions.⁵¹ Because the website is so new, it is hard to say how effective it will be; it invites laity to contribute stories of their own political advocacy and thoughts about the church's role in public life, but so far has very little content. However, the accessibility of political information indicates that the denomination takes encouraging political participation to be part of its role

The Southern Baptist Convention makes its position on the church in politics, both theologically and practically, quite clear on its website. "The Baptist Faith and Message," the denomination's doctrinal statement, includes a section on "The Christian and the Social Order," which states: "Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause."⁵² The denomination also has a commission dedicated to explaining the role of the church and individual Christians in politics to its members, called the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention (ERLC), which describes "Christian Citizenship" based on the 2004 Southern Baptist Convention Resolution of the same name. The Resolution clearly lays out the theological underpinnings of Baptist participation in public life. It states that "Government is ordained by God to reward good and to punish evil ... God holds all societies accountable to His standards of righteousness ... [and] Jesus taught that Christians are

⁵⁰ Faith and Citizenship: An Episcopal Guide to Advocacy, The Episcopal Church, http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/publicPolicy/109350_116746_ENG_HTM.htm (accessed November 14 2012).

⁵¹ Episcopal Church, Library – Office of Government Relations, The Episcopal Church, <http://library.episcopalchurch.org/author/office-government-relations> (accessed November 14, 2012)

⁵² Southern Baptist Convention, The Baptist Faith and Message: The Christian and the Social Order, Southern Baptist Convention, <http://sbc.net/bfm/bfm2000.asp#xv> (accessed November 14 2012).

the salt of the earth and the light of the world.”⁵³ In order to be fulfilling the role which God intended it to play, government must be run according to Biblical values. To this end, the Resolution states that all Christians have a “God-given responsibility” to vote, and that churches should participate in voter registration and education.⁵⁴ Vice President of the Commission Barrett Duke says that “We have a responsibility to help our government fulfill its God-given task,” because if it fails the voters are ultimately responsible, and “history is filled with the evidence of God’s judgment on nations for their failure to honor Him with their laws.”⁵⁵ This somewhat dire warning reflects the tone of urgency found in most Southern Baptist writing on political participation, and significant resources are provided to allow individuals and churches to participate as fully as possible.

Southern Baptist clergy and theologians consistently reflect this view of political involvement. In their study of the political ideology of Southern Baptist clergy and laity, James Guth found that the clergy largely shared orthodox views.⁵⁶ Though the relationship between church and state was not frequently discussed in the theological journals of Southern Baptist seminaries, where it was, the authors, all affiliated with Baptist seminaries, tended to agree with each other. In one article, a forum of several writers on questions of church and state, each repeated the core concept that the government is put in place by God and so deserves some measure of obedience and respect.⁵⁷ There is some debate about the extent to which churches

53 Southern Baptist Convention, SBC Resolutions: On Christian Citizenship, Southern Baptist Convention, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=1136> (accessed November 14 2012).

54 SBC Resolutions.

55 Barrett Duke, Vote: It Matters, The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, <http://erlc.com/article/vote-it-matters/> (accessed November 14 2012).

56 James Guth, “Southern Baptist Convention,” in Corwin E. Smidt, *Pulpit and Politics: Clergy in American Politics at the Advent of the Millennium*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2004. Also available at EBSCOhost. (accessed November 10, 2012).

57 D. A. Carson, Michael A. G. Haykin, Jonathan Leeman, and Thomas R. Schreiner, “The SBJT Forum: Christian Responsibility in the Public Square,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 11, no. 4 (Winter 2007), http://www.sbts.edu/resources/files/2010/07/sbjt_114_win07-forum.pdf (accessed 14 November 2012).

should participate. James Hamilton warns of the danger of becoming too involved with politics to the detriment of other religious commitments, and argues that churches should put their spiritual roles first.⁵⁸ On the other hand, Richard Land and Barrett Duke, of the ELRC, state that Christians have both a religious and a civic responsibility to be involved in politics.⁵⁹ However, this disagreement about tactics for changing the world underlines a fundamental agreement about the activity of God in the political sphere and the responsibility that Christians have, through either spiritual or secular means, to bring the world into alignment with God's will.

The relatively united front presented by the Southern Baptist Convention could hide more diverse perspectives within the denomination. Before the fundamentalist takeover of the Convention which began in the 1970s, the church had not participated in political action as a denomination or taken positions on political issues. However, fundamentalists within the SBC and the Religious Right shared goals and interests, and some SBC leaders were active in right-wing political causes.⁶⁰ Studies of Southern Baptist clergy show relatively high levels of political activity, including 60% of clergy urging their congregations to vote, and a strong affiliation with the Republican party.⁶¹ However, the structure of the Southern Baptist Convention allows for flexibility in individual churches; the denomination states that "a Southern Baptist church is about as independent as you can get and still be counted as part of a denomination."⁶² As a result, greater diversity about the role of individual Christians in politics could well exist in local churches and go unreflected in Southern Baptist theological journals and public resources. In

58 James Hamilton, "The Church Militant and her Warfare: We Are Not Another Interest Group," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 11, no. 4 (Winter 2007): pp. 78-79, http://www.sbts.edu/resources/files/2010/07/sbjt_114_win07-hamilton.pdf (accessed November 14 2012).

59 Richard Land and Barrett Duke, "Being Salt and Light in an Unsavory and Dark Age: The Christian and Politics," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 11, no. 4 (Winter 2007): pp. 85-86, http://www.sbts.edu/resources/files/2010/07/sbjt_114_win07-landef80a2duke.pdf (accessed November 14 2012).

60 David T. Morgan, *New Crusades*, p. 162.

61 James Guth, "Southern Baptist Convention," p. 111.

62 Southern Baptist Convention, A Closer Look – Why A Denomination? Southern Baptist Convention, <http://sbc.net/aboutus/clwhydenomination.aspa> (accessed November 14 2012).

particular, the historic Baptist commitment to separation of church and state, as well as an apathy for politics which might result from the conviction that Jesus is returning any day, are both trends which could discourage individual Baptists from political engagement based on their faith.

To test the impact that political theology had on voter turnout, I surveyed members of Canterbury Club, University of Mary Washington's Lutheran and Episcopal campus ministry, and Baptist Campus Ministry (BCM), one of two Baptist ministries on campus. My survey measured voting in the 2008, 2010, and 2012 elections; it also included statements on political theology, adapted from doctrinal statements by each church, and asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement. The first four questions were drawn from Baptist theology; the following two were from Lutheran texts, and the final three were Episcopalian. However, there was some overlap between the groups, with particularly significant overlap between Lutheran and Episcopalian theology, making all of the questions appropriate for students of any denomination. (See Appendix A for full survey.)

I collected the data at meetings of each campus ministry on November 6th, 2012. The survey questions were based on the methodology used by the Pew Forum for measuring voting behavior and likely turnout. I hypothesized that Southern Baptists, who had the strongest theological justifications for individual political behavior and the most denominational resources to encourage participation, would have higher voter turnout than Lutherans and Episcopalians. Among students who identified by a particular denomination, this was not the case. Lutherans had the highest percentage of voter turnout, with 100% of eligible voters voting any given year; however, since there was only one eligible voter in 2010 and two in 2012, this is not statistically significant. Episcopalians, also a small number, had the next highest turnout, with 82% compared

to only 59% turnout among the Baptists. Table 1 summarizes the voter turnout of each denomination by year.

Table 1: Voter Turnout by Denomination

Election Year	% Lutheran Voters	% Episcopal Voters	% Baptist Voters
2008	(no voters)	100% (n=1)	80% (n=5)
2010	100% (n=1)	67% (n=3)	25% (n=8)
2012	100% (n=2)	80% (n=5)	73% (n=11)
Averages	100%	82%	59%

However, analyzing the data by denomination left out significant numbers of students, who identified as belonging to some other denomination or as having no particular religious affiliation but nevertheless attended campus ministry meetings. Presumably, these students' perspectives would be influenced by the theology presented at the campus ministries they attended. Examined by campus ministry, a similar pattern emerged; members of Canterbury Club voted 79% of the time, while Baptist Campus Ministry students only voted 52% of the time. Table 2 summarizes the voter turnout of each campus ministry by year.

Table 2: Voter Turnout by Campus Ministry

Election Year	% Canterbury Club Voters	% BCM Voters
2008	100% (n=3)	50% (n=10)
2010	60% (n=5)	31% (n=16)
2012	78% (n=9)	74% (n=27)
Average	79%	52%

There are several factors other than religion which could have influenced the data. The surveys were distributed on election night, and Canterbury Club was spending their meeting watching the results; therefore, it is possible that only the most politically engaged students attended the meeting that night, skewing the results. Additionally, though the survey collected no information on demographics for each group, there was some visible difference between the

racial composition of the two groups, which may have affected the results in some way. The differences in voter turnout are also a few years old; in the 2012 election, equal percentages of Canterbury Club and BCM students voted, though there was a slight difference among denominations. Analyzing the differences from the 2008 and 2010 elections based on the theological statements made by students in 2012 is difficult, because there is the possibility that students' beliefs changed between elections. Despite these limitations, the presence of a sizable gap between Canterbury Club and Baptist Campus Ministry voters overall is worth considering in terms of religious differences.

The campus minister of Baptist Campus Ministries welcomed me to their meeting by inviting me to join him in scolding students who had not voted. While I explained the survey, the minister jokingly barred people who had not voted from entering the room. His enthusiasm would seem to match the political theology presented by the Southern Baptist Convention, which states that voting is a religious duty. However, the students at the ministry disagreed widely on the role of religion in their politics, suggesting diversity of opinion not visible at the denominational level. A majority of self-identified Baptist students agreed or strongly agreed with the statements “Christians have a responsibility participating in the political process” and “Voters should pray for God’s guidance in deciding who to vote for” (68% and 85%, respectively. Tables 3 thru 11 summarize the answers of each group on theological questions). However, on all other questions about religion and politics, no clear consensus emerged, and many students disagreed with the positions stated by the Southern Baptist Convention.

Table 3: Christians have a responsibility to participate in the political process.

	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree or Agree
BCM	4%	29%	68%
CC	0%	20%	80%

Meanwhile, at Canterbury Club, the TV was already turned to the news for election results, though the polls did not close for another half hour. The students at Canterbury Club largely disagreed with theological statements drawn from Southern Baptist doctrine, such as “Christians should participation in the political process in order to help fulfill the kingdom mandate” (10% agree, 50% disagree,). However, they also generally disagreed, though by narrower margins, with statements drawn from Lutheran and Episcopal doctrine, such as “God works through the state” (40% agree, 50% disagree). Despite this, they were strongly in favor of Christian political participation, with 80% agreeing with the statement, “Christians have a responsibility to participate in the political process,” compared to 64% of Baptist Campus Ministries students. Despite showing lower agreement with many beliefs about the role of the church in politics, the group showed a higher than average commitment to political participation.

Table 4: Christians should participation in the political process in order to help fulfill the kingdom mandate.

	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree or Agree
BCM	22%	30%	48%
CC	50%	40%	10%

It is important to note that no single question correlated neatly with voter turnout; there does not seem to be any particular belief which reliably causes people to vote, even questions which would seem to be clearly linked to political participation. For example, students at Baptist Campus Ministries were equally likely to vote regardless of how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement, “Christians have a responsibility to participate in the political process.” This makes sense, given the wide variety of factors which influence an individual's decision to vote, and the variety of interpretations different individuals might apply to the same

basic belief. However, differences within and between the groups influence the conditions within which individuals consider whether and why to vote. The questions with the strongest differences were the statement “Governing authorities are instituted by God,” which 43% (a plurality) of BCM students agreed with and 80% of Canterbury Club students disagreed with, and “Voters should pray for God's guidance in deciding who to vote for,” which 85% of BCM students agreed with and 60% of Canterbury Club students disagreed with. This reflects the differences between the political theologies of evangelical and mainline denominations, with Baptist Campus Ministries in general understanding God to be more active in political life; however, this did not translate into higher voter turnout.

Table 5: Social ills are making an impact in our society largely because Christians have withdrawn from society.

	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree or Agree
BCM	46%	29%	25%
CC	60%	30%	10%

A possible explanation for the lower turnout despite a more active political theology in general is the wider range of beliefs shown by Baptist Campus Ministries students. There was no majority opinion on all but the two questions listed above, and every question had students who agreed strongly and disagreed strongly. BCM also had higher numbers of non-Baptist students than Canterbury Club had non-Episcopal or Lutheran students. About 30% of Canterbury Club belonged to another denomination or no denomination, compared to 56% of Baptist Campus Ministries. BCM students also had slightly greater numbers of students answering towards the middle, with 30-40% of students answering 3 on all but one question. An answer of 3 meant that a student was neutral on the statement given, neither agreeing nor disagreeing, suggesting that many students did not feel particularly strongly about the theological statements given. Overall,

the data showed greater denominational and theological diversity within BCM, and also a greater number of students who did not feel strongly on theological issues. As noted above, the Southern Baptist tradition has a great deal of diversity not necessarily visible at the denominational level. This is reflected in the slightly greater variation in answers given in the survey. Though the SBC presents a very unified political theology, the survey data suggests that these views are not universally accepted by the laity, at least in this particular campus ministry.

Table 6: Governing authorities are instituted by God.

	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree or Agree
BCM	18%	39%	43%
CC	80%	20%	0%

John C. Green's description of how religious traditions impact elections is useful for explaining the significance of these differences. He says that religious traditions provide core values, internal cues on political issues, and external appeals from candidates or parties hoping to win the religious vote.⁶³ The latter is probably not at work here, given my focus on denominational theology. Core values, in the case of political theology, would include such things as a conviction that voting is a religious duty or that God works through the state. Internal cues describes the voter resources provided by the denomination, but also statements on the importance of voting made by campus ministers. The extent to which students accepted the core values of the denomination and recognize internal cues will influence their likelihood of voting. The diversity within BCM indicates that many students did not share the core values of the church, and as a result might have been less receptive to internal cues encouraging voting.

⁶³ John C. Green, *The Faith Factor: How Religion Influences American Elections*, (Westport: Praeger, 2007) p. 47.

Table 7: God works through the state.

	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree or Agree
BCM	15%	41%	43%
CC	50%	10%	40%

There are several reasons why the core values suggested by SBC political theology might have not made it down to the campus ministry level. Perhaps political questions simply are not regularly considered at Baptist Campus Ministries, preventing students from learning the denomination's view on religion and political participation. The significant number of students who chose to remain neutral on each question could suggest that these issues simply are not considered very important by many. Perhaps the students from other denominations and backgrounds provided perspectives which challenged the denomination's message, preventing students from identifying strongly with SBC theology. Though this survey has no way to measure why students answered the way they did, the variety of answers and lack of clear majority on most questions certainly implies that the beliefs of the SBC have not been widely accepted by students at BCM. The strong theological encouragement for voting described at length on the SBC website and in other resources means little if it is not conveyed to and embraced by the voters themselves.

Table 8: The Gospel cannot be legislated; most political issues do not concern Christians on religious grounds.

	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree or Agree
BCM	57%	25%	18%
CC	40%	20%	40%

My brief observation of each group while distributing the surveys leads me to believe that each group provided internal cues encouraging members to vote – certainly by the time the polls were closing they were telling their groups about the importance of political participation. In addition, each denomination provided internal cues on voting in the form of political information available on their websites and blogs, easily accessible for SBC members and only slightly harder to find for Lutherans and Episcopalians. Students also may have received information about voting at congregations in Fredericksburg or their home towns. Therefore, it is probably safe to assume that most of the students at Canterbury Club and Baptist Campus Ministries received some kind of information about voting. Green argues that certain kinds of beliefs about the role of religion in the public sphere “increase the believers' receptivity to internal cues”.⁶⁴ Had all of the students at Baptist Campus Ministries believed that “Voting is an act of Christian stewardship,” (68% agree, 4% disagree) for example, they might have paid more attention to reminders from the campus minister to go vote. However, the lack of broad acceptance for an active political theology suggests that while individual students might have been receptive to internal cues encouraging voting, the group as a whole was not.

Table 9: Church efforts in politics bring the world closer to the Kingdom of God.

	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree or Agree
BCM	29%	32%	39%
CC	60%	20%	20%

This combined lack of acceptance for the core political theological beliefs of the Southern Baptist Convention and low receptivity for internal political cues explains the relatively low turnout of Baptist Campus Ministries students despite belonging to a denomination which

⁶⁴ Green, “The Faith Factor,” p. 48.

actively encourages voting. The diversity of beliefs within Baptist Campus Ministries prevented the denomination's message from being effectively conveyed to the individual members.

Table 10: Voting is an act of Christian stewardship.

	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree or Agree
BCM	33%	26%	41%
CC	30%	30%	40%

Canterbury Club was not a model of perfect agreement with denominational policy, but it had several key differences from BCM which may have encouraged turnout. Canterbury Club had greater majorities on nearly all questions (with only 2 having no majority, compared to 6 in Baptist Campus Ministries.) This only indicates agreement with each other, not with the denomination. In fact, Canterbury Club disagreed with almost everything to a greater or lesser extent, regardless of which denomination the statement had been drawn from. Interestingly, one of the only exceptions was a statement drawn from the Lutheran Two Kingdom doctrine: A majority agreed with or were neutral on the statement that “The Gospel cannot be legislated; most political issues do not concern Christians on religious grounds” (40% agree, 20% disagree, 40% neutral). The other exception was the statement “Christians have a responsibility participating in the political process,” which 80% of students agreed with. Though they did not overall agree with any other theological statements about the church's role in politics, and in fact in several cases disagreed quite strongly, their disagreement could imply greater engagement with political theology than the greater neutrality shown by Baptist Campus Ministries. They find politics important or interesting enough to consider the denomination's position and reject it. This, combined with a greater amount of agreement among the group and a high number of

students who felt they had a responsibility to vote, creates a very different atmosphere than that of Baptist Campus Ministries.

Table 11: Voters should pray for God’s guidance in deciding who to vote for.

	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree or Agree
BCM	11%	4%	85%
CC	60%	20%	20%

Though Canterbury Club rejected several of the Lutheran and Episcopal church's political theological values, more students agreed with than disagreed with the Two Kingdoms doctrine, central to Lutheran theology and referenced by Episcopal theology, and a general conviction about the importance of voting for Christians, which could contribute to their higher than average voter turnout. Such beliefs have more ambiguous implications for the acceptance of internal cues – those who believe that most political issues do not concern Christians as such might not want to hear about political issues in church, after all. However, as discussed above, the Two Kingdoms does not necessarily imply political passivity on the part of Christians; rather, it recognizes that they are not only Christians but also citizens, and have responsibilities in both realms. Overall, while the political theology expressed by Canterbury Club students did not neatly match that expressed by their denominations, it did imply a community that generally agreed on the importance of voting and which was engaged in considering political theological questions. Therefore, despite less active political theologies than those put forward by the Southern Baptist Convention, students still showed higher turnout overall.

Religious affiliation plays a key role in ideology and partisan politics in the United States, but its impact on actual voter turnout is less clear. Protestants register to vote slightly more often than the average, and people who attend church regularly have relatively high voter

turnout. Contemporary political theology, influenced by the growth of evangelical Protestantism and the rise of the religious right, provides religious justifications for voting which might inspire higher turnout. In the Lutheran church, the Two Kingdom doctrine separates the spiritual and secular world, but reaffirms the responsibility of Christians to participate in both. The Episcopal Church has had internal conflicts over social issues which have led to a split between more liberal and conservative elements in the church, but both sides agree that Christians should participate in politics to act as a moral compass for the world. Southern Baptists have a great deal of internal diversity due to the independent nature of individual churches, but at the denominational level have a strong commitment to participation in politics as a way to bring the world in line with Christian principles. Despite having the most active political theology of the three denominations, a survey of students in Lutheran, Episcopal and Baptist campus ministries showed that Baptist students in fact have lower voter turnout. Diversity within the campus ministry – of theological opinion and of denominational affiliation – indicates that many Baptist Campus Ministries students have not embraced the core principles of the church. On the other hand, students at Canterbury Club had a strong commitment to Christian participation in politics, making them more receptive to internal cues about voting provided by the group, their churches, and the denomination. This study shows that the specific content of political theology is linked to voter turnout as long as it includes the belief that Christians have a responsibility to participate in politics, and if the religious group provides an atmosphere that encourages voting.

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Appendix A - Survey

Religious Beliefs

What denomination or church, if any, do you identify with most closely?

Baptist, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Something else, No Religious Affiliation

1 - Disagree strongly 3 - Neutral 5 - Agree strongly

1. Christians have a responsibility participating in the political process

1 2 3 4 5

2. Christians should participation in the political process in order to help fulfill the kingdom mandate

1 2 3 4 5

3. Social ills are making an impact in our society largely because Christians have withdrawn from society.

1 2 3 4 5

4. Governing authorities are instituted by God.

1 2 3 4 5

5. God works through the state.

1 2 3 4 5

6. The Gospel cannot be legislated; most political issues do not concern Christians on religious grounds.

1 2 3 4 5

7. Church efforts in politics bring the world closer to the Kingdom of God.

1 2 3 4 5

8. Voting is an act of Christian stewardship.

1 2 3 4 5

9. Voters should pray for God's guidance in deciding who to vote for.

1 2 3 4 5

Voting

Did you vote the 2008 presidential election between Barack Obama and John McCain?

Voted

Did not vote

If no, is it because you were not yet 18, or just something came up which kept you from voting?

Not 18

Other reason

In the 2010 midterm elections, did things come up that kept you from voting, or did you happen to vote?

Voted

Did not vote

If no, is it because you were not yet 18, or just something came up which kept you from voting?

Not 18

Other reason

In the upcoming presidential elections, How certain are you that you will vote?

Absolutely Certain

Fairly Certain

Not at all Certain