

## **Bush Fever: Amish and Old Order Mennonites in the 2004 Presidential Election**

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*Abstract:* The 2004 presidential election stirred considerable controversy among Old Order people in Pennsylvania and Ohio. Republican activists in these states aggressively sought to register Old Order people. Previous studies of Old Order voting have rarely if ever provided accurate evidence of the registration and voting patterns of these people. Using interviews, public voting records and excerpts from Amish writings, the authors trace the debate about voting in Old Order communities. They also describe the Republican campaign to register Old Order voters. In the Lancaster (Pa.) area the Old Order Amish were more likely to cast a ballot than the Old Order Mennonites. The results show that voting in the 2004 election varied considerably from state to state as well as among congregations in Old Order settlements. A vision to improve moral conditions in the larger society appeared to motivate many Old Order voters.

### BUSH FEVER

The 2004 presidential race between President George W. Bush and Senator John F. Kerry was a spirited contest.<sup>1</sup> With early opinion polls showing a tight race, Democratic and Republican campaigns commenced well before the traditional election season. Party activists aggressively searched for new voters, especially in the crucial swing states that could determine the presidency. Two key states, Ohio and Pennsylvania, held about half of the national Amish population.<sup>2</sup>

The G.O.P., scouring the country for unregistered groups who shared the Bush-Cheney accent on traditional values, targeted evangelical Christians, Second Amendment proponents and anti-abortion advocates.

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1. The authors thank Prof. Steven M. Nolt for insightful suggestions and corrections that have improved the final version of this article.

2. Ohio and Pennsylvania had an estimated 55,000 and 48,000 Amish residents, respectively, which is well over half of the North American Amish population of adults and children. About 49 percent (N=687) of the 1,408 North American Amish congregations are in Ohio and Pennsylvania. Sources include Donald B. Kraybill and C. Nelson Hostetter, *Anabaptist World USA* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2001), and David Luthy, *Amish Settlements Across North America: 2003* (Aylmer, Ont.: Pathway Publishers, 2003), as well as community directories.

Republican strategists soon added new groups that supported the Bush-Cheney campaign's interpretation of traditional values: Amish and Old Order Mennonites. At least a few Old Order members responded with enthusiasm. One Amishman, Eli Fisher, for example, gleefully noted by early August that the Lancaster (Pa.) Amish were "swept up with Bush fever."<sup>3</sup> Explaining the support for Bush and his running mate, Dick Cheney, Fisher said, "We hate that abortion issue. We're totally against it. And as far as gay issues, that's [sic] completely contrary to the Bible."<sup>4</sup>

Already in the 2000 presidential election campaign, Republican officials had urged Lancaster's Amish to register and vote for George W. Bush. Fisher attended the Bush inauguration in January 2001, which in his words was "a moving experience." The crusade to capture the Amish vote, however, greatly intensified in the 2004 election. Several articles on "the Amish vote" in the national press suggested a massive Amish turnout might influence the election's outcome in the swing states. Was there a major Old Order turnout? Did Bush fever change the election?

In this paper we explore several questions regarding the Amish and Old Order Mennonite participation in the 2004 presidential election: 1) Was the Pennsylvania G.O.P. successful in registering more Amish and Old Order Mennonite voters in Lancaster County than in previous elections? 2) Did registered individuals turn out to vote? 3) Did Lancaster County Amish and Old Order Mennonites register and vote at similar levels? 4) To what extent were Old Orders in other communities energized by the campaign? 5) Was Old Order participation in the 2004 election an anomaly or a new trend in American politics?

The sources for our account of the 2004 election include interviews, letters by writers in Old Order publications, media reports and voter registration databases for Pennsylvania and Ohio. Although our primary focus is on the Amish of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, we also provide data on two Old Order Mennonite groups in Lancaster; Amish voters in Holmes County, Ohio; and other Old Order individuals beyond Pennsylvania and Ohio.<sup>5</sup> The two Old Order Mennonite groups are the

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3. Eli Fisher is the pseudonym for an Amishman who asked that his name not be used. Likewise, Amos Miller, cited in other sections of the text, is the pseudonym for another Amishman.

4. The quotes were reported in an Associated Press release, Aug. 5, 2004. The inclusion of the story in the AP's top seven worldwide releases was reported to Donald B. Kraybill on Aug. 5, 2004, in an e-mail message from Lara Jakes Jordan, the AP reporter.

5. Letters and articles in various Old Order publications—including *The Diary*, *The Budget*, *Die Blatt*, *Die Botschaft*, *Family Life* and *Young Companion*—in the summer and fall of 2004 provided helpful sources of information, as did interviews conducted by the authors. The numerical data reported in this project were gathered from several sources: the Lancaster County Voter Registration Database; the Ohio Voter Registration Database; *The Ohio Amish Directory of Holmes County and Vicinity* (2005); the *Lancaster County Amish*

car-driving Hornings (Weaverland Conference) and the horse-and-buggy-driving Wengers (Groffdale Conference).

Our analysis provides a statistical summary of registration and voting in Lancaster County for the three Old Order groups (Amish, Hornings, Wengers) in every election from 1997 to 2004, as well as voter registration increases over the eight-year time span, and new registrations prior to the November 2004 election. Information on party identification and gender was also compiled for each group. A profile of all Lancaster County voters provides a point of comparison with the Old Orders.

### OLD ORDER VIEWS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

“Is it really our duty to see that a God-fearing president is elected? Are we called to oppose the candidate who has liberal ideas on these issues [abortion and gay rights]? Are we shirking our duty if we don’t vote? Have times changed from the days of our forefathers who took a firm stand against involvement in government? Should we gather at the polls and let our voice be heard?”<sup>6</sup> These questions, posed in the Old Order magazine *Family Life*, were on the minds of many Old Order people in 2004. Some Old Orders wondered if nonresistant people could conscientiously support a “war president.” In the minds of others, domestic moral issues outweighed any reservations they had about the U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The traditional Amish view of the state reflects a position of *subjection* rather than *citizenship*. Unlike citizens in the modern state who display a sense of civic duty and responsibility for the welfare of their country, Amish understandings of the state parallel those of subjects to a king. This stance of subjection is reinforced by biblical injunctions to respect and pray for rulers ordained by God. The posture of subjection diverges

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*Directory* (2002); and two Old Order Mennonite directories: the *Weaverland Conference Directory* (2000) and the *Groffdale Conference Directory* (2002). A list of Old Order voters was identified by cross-referencing individual information in the voter registration databases with the Old Order directories. The list of registered voters in the Lancaster County database, for example, includes each individual’s name, address, gender, party affiliation and voting record for the past fifteen general and primary elections. (The database reports whether or not a registered voter cast a ballot but does not indicate for whom they voted.) The surnames of members in each Old Order group were identified and then all the people on the Lancaster County database with those surnames were identified. Registered Old Order voters were identified by matching names and addresses in the database with entries in the Old Order directories. This procedure enabled the authors to track Old Order voting behavior across fifteen elections from the spring 1997 primary to the 2004 presidential election.

6. Marcus Nolt, “Casting Our Votes,” *Family Life*, Nov. 2004, 17. Paton Yoder provides a good historical overview, “The Amish View of the State,” in *The Amish and the State*, 2nd ed., ed. Donald B. Kraybill (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 23-40.

from modern assumptions of citizenship—of individual and collective responsibility for the civic order as well as the accountability of elected officials. The Amish rarely speak of their “rights” but typically espouse an attitude of deference and homage toward the state. Because of this posture of subjection as well as their preeminent orientation to the welfare of their own community, the Amish historically have shown little interest in voting and political affairs.<sup>7</sup>

Old Order attitudes toward voting have fluctuated by historical period and region of the country as well as by local church sentiment.<sup>8</sup> Some Amish were energized by the 1896 presidential contest between the Republican candidate, William McKinley, and the Democratic challenger, William Jennings Bryan, and expressed support for Bryan who sympathized with farmers and the working class.<sup>9</sup> Old Order interest in voting also intensified during the presidential election of 1960 when Vice President Richard Nixon, a Quaker, ran against Senator John F. Kennedy, a Catholic. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Old Order voting spiked in that election because of fears of having a Catholic president. One study of the 1960 election provided some evidence of higher rates of Amish voting in Lancaster County.<sup>10</sup> An Old Order Mennonite noted, “Kennedy won and God then removed him from office . . . we can see what happens when people attempt to run ahead of God, or to take things into their own hands [by voting].”<sup>11</sup>

In general, Amish and Old Order Mennonite leaders have typically discouraged voting—especially in state and national elections—but they nevertheless have tolerated it, making voting a *de facto* matter of individual choice. Members who do vote generally are not sanctioned or excommunicated but, depending on the community, they may face some social stigma.

The Amish Steering Committee, a national network of representatives that formed in 1966, serves as a liaison between the Amish and government officials and occasionally discusses voting. Although not an official church group, it consults closely with ordained leaders. In 1982

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7. For an elaboration of the distinction between subject and citizen, see Donald B. Kraybill, “Negotiating with Caesar,” in *The Amish and the State*, 2nd ed., ed. Donald B. Kraybill (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 14-16.

8. The local district or congregation is the final ecclesiastical authority for the Amish. A ministers’ conference, representing a cluster of congregations, is the ecclesiastical authority for Old Order Mennonites.

9. For more detail on the Amish interest in the 1896 election, see Steven M. Nolt, *A History of the Amish*, rev. ed. (Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 2003), 254-255.

10. William W. Hummel, “The Election of 1960 in the Amish Section of Lancaster County,” *Der Reggeboege* 2 (July 1968), 12.

11. Marcus Nolt, 18.

the steering committee noted that "it would be much more fitting for Old Order Amish since they are apposed [sic] to hold public office, take part in military or serve on jury duty, to remember on Election Day to pray that, Thy Will Be Done, rather than to vote on [candidates and issues] which we usually also are not familiar with."<sup>12</sup> The steering committee sentiments were echoed again in 1983 with these words: "...voting for the Old Order Amish was discouraged. It was explained that if you vote for one [candidate] you are in affect [sic] against the other. Would it not be much better on Election Day to Pray to Our Almighty, Thy Will Be Done."<sup>13</sup> The committee frowned upon voting again in the fall of 1986, 1987 and 1988.<sup>14</sup> However, by 1991, the committee recognized a growing variation by region and local church when it noted that, although voting was discouraged, it "differs in different localities."<sup>15</sup> After pleading for members to pray instead of vote in 1994, the committee recognized that voting "of course varies by communities and we wish to leave it up to each community and the home bishops."<sup>16</sup> The committee fell silent on voting until the fall of 2004 when Bush fever was spreading and the committee once again declared that it "did not encourage voting."<sup>17</sup> One member reported, "The committee was really distressed over this whole thing [of pushing the Amish to vote]."<sup>18</sup>

A book published by the Amish in 1992 summarizes Amish beliefs in a question-and-answer format, with seven questions on the subject of voting. All are answered in the negative. The first one asks, "Should Christians vote in a government election?" The answer is "No."<sup>19</sup> Although various statements have discouraged voting, it is not forbidden by the Ordnung of Old Order Mennonite or Old Order Amish groups. Some Old Orders who vote in a presidential election may vote for local or state candidates, but skip the presidential candidates because they cannot conscientiously vote for the commander in chief of the armed forces. Republican activists in Holmes County, Ohio, in 2004

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12. "Minutes of Old Order Amish Steering Committee, Oct. 23, 1981 to Sept. 10, 1986, Third Volume," 15-16.

13. *Ibid.*, 17.

14. *Ibid.*, 76; also, "Minutes of Old Order Amish Steering Committee, Sept. 9, 1987 to Sept. 13, 1989, Fourth Volume," 8, 30-31.

15. "Minutes of Old Order Amish Steering Committee, Sept. 12, 1990 to Sept. 14, 1994, Fifth Volume," 25.

16. *Ibid.*, 77.

17. "Minutes of Old Order Amish Steering Committee, Sept. 12, 2001 to Sept. 21, 2005, Seventh Volume," 56-57.

18. David Yoder, telephone interview by Donald B. Kraybill, Apr. 4, 2006.

19. *1001 Questions and Answers on the Christian Life* (Aylmer, Ont.: Pathway Publishers, 1992), 158-159.

worried that “Amish voters would skip the presidential question when they vote.”<sup>20</sup>

Old Order reluctance to vote reflects a theology of two kingdoms that sees the church as a spiritual kingdom separate from the political kingdom of the world. An Amish statement on voting and involvement in government affairs says, “We are dealing with two separate kingdoms. Jesus said to Pilate, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If my Kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight,’ (John 18:36). No doubt Jesus would say to us, ‘If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants vote.’”<sup>21</sup> The 1632 Dordrecht Confession of Faith, a catechism used by most Amish and Old Order Mennonite groups, does not mention voting, but it does call members to “recognize” the government as a “minister of God.” The confession urges members to “honor and obey” the government, to pay taxes and to “pray constantly and earnestly” for rulers, “so that we may dwell under their protection, earn our living, and lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty.”<sup>22</sup>

Although Old Order groups teach respect for government, payment of taxes and prayer for elected leaders, they support a sharp separation of church and state—often refusing to accept direct government subsidies, participate in the Social Security system or hold public office beyond the local level. For Old Order members, nonresistance to evil means that on the personal level Christians should not retaliate against adversaries, use violence in their personal life, join the military or instigate litigation. Yet despite this personal commitment to nonviolence, two-kingdom theology regards the state as a God-ordained institution that *may* use violence in a sinful world for the purpose of preserving order—to protect the good and punish evildoers. Thus, while refusing to kill others themselves, Old Orders are not necessarily antiwar or critical of the government for engaging in war. Those decisions are matters for the worldly kingdom of the state to decide, not the church.

Old Orders teach that members should “honor and obey [the government] and be ready to perform good work on its behalf insofar as it is not in conflict with God’s law and commandment.”<sup>23</sup> Even more deeply rooted is the belief that government is not the ultimate authority on any matter—only God may act as a supreme authority. Old Orders

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20. Reported in an Associated Press story that appeared in the *Miami (Ohio) Herald*, Oct. 17, 2004.

21. *1001 Questions and Answers on the Christian Life*, 159.

22. “Dordrecht Confession of Faith, Article 13,” in *Meiner Jugend* (Aylmer, Ont.: Pathway Publishers, 2000), 45.

23. *Ibid.*

teach that one should respect and obey the government, as long as its laws do not conflict with their religious beliefs.<sup>24</sup> Based on the teachings of Christ in John 18:36, Old Orders believe that God's "kingdom is not of this world." Because secular government is a worldly kingdom, Old Orders discourage most forms of political involvement—especially those that exercise the use or threat of force or hold responsibility for taking human life, such as holding public office, serving on juries, filing lawsuits, swearing oaths or joining the military.

In addition, Old Order groups generally forbid members from engaging in political campaigning. An Old Order Wenger Mennonite in 2004 said, "Our *Ordnung* only has one written rule that forbids something for our ministers. They are forbidden from signing political petitions. All other rules are unwritten and are not a test of membership."<sup>25</sup> These longstanding traditions against political participation created a challenge for strategists who wanted to mobilize the Old Order vote in 2004.

#### THE BUSH CAMPAIGN IN PENNSYLVANIA

In 2004 Pennsylvania held 21 electoral votes and Ohio 20 electoral votes. Bush needed at least one of the states to win. In 2000, he won Ohio by only 165,000 votes, while his opponent, Vice President Al Gore, took Pennsylvania by 200,000. Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and Holmes County, Ohio, hold the two largest and most densely populated Amish settlements in the nation. In 2004, Ohio had an Amish population of about 55,000, while Pennsylvania had some 48,000. However, less than half of the Amish population is of voting age. Fifty thousand might be a reasonable estimate of voting-age Amish in both states. If 10 percent of them actually cast a ballot, that would yield 5,000 votes or about 2,500 per state—certainly fewer than some journalists imagined.

Because the political makeup of Pennsylvania splits evenly between Democrats and Republicans, the parties constantly vie for political advantage. Although the Republican Party controlled the Pennsylvania General Assembly from 1990 through 2006, the electorate is moderate in its political orientation. In 2004, Democrats claimed 47.6 percent of registered voters, while Republicans held 40.7 percent.<sup>26</sup> Statewide officeholders have typically been divided between Democrats and

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24. Marcus Nolt, 17.

25. Allen Hoover, interview by Donald B. Kraybill, Dec. 15, 2004.

26. The Pennsylvania Department of State—Bureau of Elections, Commissions, and Legislation (Nov. 2004), <http://www.dos.state.pa.us/bcel/cwp/view.asp?a=1099&Q=444853-&PM=1> (accessed Apr. 30, 2005).

Republicans. The past seven gubernatorial administrations in Pennsylvania have alternated between Republican and Democratic officeholders. Thus, in recent history, Pennsylvania has demonstrated a strong tradition of political moderation, which makes it an interesting swing state.<sup>27</sup>

Pennsylvania's delicate political balance favors no political party in presidential elections. Indeed, in every presidential contest from 1972 to 2000, Pennsylvania cast its electoral votes for the candidate who received the national popular vote. Although Pennsylvania reelected Governor Tom Ridge, a Republican, to a second term in 1998, Al Gore, a Democrat, won the state in 2000 by four percentage points over George W. Bush. And in 2002, Pennsylvania elected Ed Rendell, a Democrat, to succeed Republican Governor Ridge. Politicos knew that the state's scales could tilt in either direction in 2004.

Bush's campaign advisor, Karl Rove, urged operatives to focus on Republican and conservative-dominated communities in 2004. Thus, President Bush frequently visited the central Pennsylvania Republican stronghold. Excepting Texas, Bush had visited Pennsylvania more often than he had any other state since he took office in January 2001. He made a total of forty-four trips to the Keystone State prior to Election Day 2004.<sup>28</sup> Considering all official campaign stops in Pennsylvania, one quarter of Bush's visits included Lancaster County or one of its neighboring counties. State Republican officials were eager to gather information on the size of the Amish population to determine how much effort to invest in the Amish vote.<sup>29</sup>

Bush made three campaign visits to the Lancaster area during the 2004 campaign. He spoke at Lapp Electrical Services, five miles east of Lancaster City, on July 9. After addressing an invited crowd of 250, he met privately with a group of some fifty Amish adults and children. This crucial meeting energized the Amish community. Two other campaign

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27. For an analysis of Pennsylvania's political history of moderation, see Randall Miller and William Pencak, *Pennsylvania: A History of the Commonwealth* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

28. One trip to Lancaster County was a noncampaign visit to Safe Harbor hydroelectric dam near the village of Conestoga on May 18, 2001. The other two visits were campaign stops in Lancaster (July 9, 2004) and Lititz (Oct. 27, 2004). Vice President Cheney made nineteen official White House or campaign appearances in central Pennsylvania from early 2001 to Nov. 2004, including visits in Berks County, Dauphin County and Lebanon County; slightly over one quarter of all Cheney's visits were to central Pennsylvania. The information on President Bush's visits was provided by the White House Political Affairs Office.

29. Josh Wilson, then political director of the Pennsylvania State Committee, contacted Donald B. Kraybill by e-mail on July 6, 2004, regarding the size of Pennsylvania's Amish population.



visits used elaborate rock concert and fanfare entrances. On October 18, Bush arrived aboard Marine One, the presidential helicopter, to a cheering crowd at Hersheypark Stadium (ten miles northwest of Lancaster County). Some Amish attended the rally. About a week later at the Lancaster Airport, Bush thrilled the crowd by arriving in Air Force One on a narrow runway for a rally that attracted dozens of Amish. In addition to these rallies, one Amish voting advocate attended a Bush campaign event in September in King of Prussia, fifty miles east of Lancaster County, and spoke directly with the president.

In August of 2004, Bush made a brief campaign stop in Dover, Ohio, in Tuscarawas County, a conservative region near a large Amish community. The stop included a visit to a candy store with Karl Rove, Ohio Governor Bob Taft and Senator Mike DeWine, who were traveling with the president. It was quite an event for this rural county because the last time that a president had visited Tuscarawas County was in 1912 when William Howard Taft was president.<sup>30</sup> Making public appearances in pro-Republican towns across the nation was a key to mobilizing and energizing Bush supporters.

#### REPUBLICAN CONNECTIONS TO THE LANCASTER AMISH

Pennsylvania's Old Order communities had strong historic ties to the Republican Party because they shared its conservative values and worldview.<sup>31</sup> Some Old Orders occasionally joked that even if they did not vote Republican, they prayed Republican! Pennsylvania Republicans had a unique tie to the Amish through Chet Beiler, whose parents left the Amish church when he was 3 years old.<sup>32</sup> In 1999 the 36-year-old Beiler became actively involved in Republican politics as the coordinator of U.S. Senator Rick Santorum's Lancaster campaign, and served the following year as the Lancaster County G.O.P. chairman. After leaving

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30. Ann Swinderman, "Hello Mr. President," *The Budget*, Aug. 4, 2004.

31. While most Amish in various states likely affirm Republican sentiments, the historian Steven M. Nolt reported that two Amish informants said that the Amish in St. Mary's County, Maryland, vote Democratic because the drivers who transport Amish in St. Mary's County tend to be Democratic. This suggests that the local political ethos and Amish exposure to it may influence their political alignment. Steven M. Nolt, e-mail message to Donald B. Kraybill, June 28, 2006.

32. Because Beiler's parents were baptized in the Amish church and then left and joined a car-driving Amish-Mennonite church, they were "under the ban" and were shunned—not in a malicious way, but they could not engage in business with the Amish. Beiler, on the other hand, is able to engage freely with the Amish because he was not baptized in the Amish church. In Beiler's words, "I have terrific relationships with my Amish relatives, my cousins, aunts and uncles." Beiler graduated from Lancaster Mennonite High School in 1981 and completed an undergraduate degree in political science at Pepperdine University in California. Chet Beiler, interview by Kyle C. Kopko, Aug. 18, 2005.

the chairmanship, Beiler became active in statewide politics and was responsible for overseeing all Pennsylvania G.O.P. candidates running in the 2003 municipal elections. In the spring of 2004, he developed plans to register new Amish voters in preparation for Bush's reelection campaign in 2004.

Because of his Amish background and ability to speak Pennsylvania German, Beiler had contacts with many of his Amish relatives and was well-known within Amish circles. As chief executive of Amish Country Gazebos, he employed numerous Amish workers. These connections served him well in his role as the architect of the G.O.P.'s efforts to mobilize and register Amish voters.

As the Lancaster County G.O.P. chairman during the 2000 Bush/Gore campaign, Beiler had urged his Amish contacts to vote.<sup>33</sup> In the spring and summer of 2004, Beiler delivered voter registration forms to Amish businesses throughout Lancaster County. He believed that the Amish vote might tilt the scales in the upcoming election: "Pennsylvania and Ohio are just absolute battleground states, and to think that the Amish could weigh in to the tune of thousands of voters that are clearly going to be Republican—that could be very significant for Bush."<sup>34</sup> Officials in both parties, in addition to Beiler, remembered that several hundred votes in Florida had determined the outcome of the 2000 presidential election.

Two Amishmen in Lancaster County worked closely with Beiler to register fellow Old Orders and get them to the polls. These ardent proponents of voting were businessman Amos Miller, a first cousin to Beiler, and Eli Fisher, a retired farmer. Miller often accompanied his car-driving cousin Chet to distribute voter registration forms in the Amish community while Eli Fisher wrote weekly columns in *Die Botschaft* filled with pro-Bush statements and information on how to register. Although Miller and Fisher were clearly encouraging registration, they typically qualified their statements about voting by saying, "if you vote," to protect themselves from charges that they were campaigning for the Republican Party.

At a meeting in Amos Miller's home on May 27, 2004, leading Republican officials met with about twenty-five Amish people. The officials included Chet Beiler, Congressman Joseph Pitts, State Senator Noah Wenger and State Representative Gordon Denlinger. They provided updates on issues they were addressing on behalf of the Amish, such as photo identification and child labor. The meeting laid a

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33. Eli Fisher [pseud.], *The Diary*, Sept. 2000.

34. Lara Jakes Jordan, "G.O.P. Hopes Amish Go to Polls for Edge in Battleground States," *The Patriot-News*, Aug. 10, 2004.

de facto foundation for the campaign to register new Amish voters for the fall election. Shortly after the meeting, Fisher asked “all Plain People to keep” Beiler and other elected officials such as Pitts, Wenger and Denlinger in their prayers because of the officials’ continued support of the Amish.<sup>35</sup> In many ways these elected Republicans had listened to the concerns of Old Order communities and had supported legislation on their behalf. Most notably, Congressman Pitts had worked for years to ease child labor laws so that Amish youth could help in family-owned stores and workshops. Child labor legislation favoring the Amish was signed into law by President Bush in January 2004. Pitts had also led a protest in the U.S. Congress in the summer of 2004 against the CBS reality TV show “Amish in the City.”

The registration drive was an opportunity to reward the Republican representatives—especially State Senator Wenger and Congressman Pitts—who had labored faithfully to represent Amish interests in both Harrisburg and Washington. In addition, the G.O.P.’s position on abortion and gay marriage, combined with Bush’s open religiosity and his homespun personality, all harmonized with Amish sentiments.

#### A QUILT FOR THE PRESIDENT

The campaign really took off, according to Chet Beiler, when his Amish cousin Amos Miller and a handful of other people in the Amish community discovered how “easy it was to register voters and how enthused they were when invited to participate. The registration drive just built on itself!”<sup>36</sup> For ten weeks, the cousins spent a day each week going out to Amish businesses and homes urging those they met to register. Miller estimated that he was able to register 1,000 new potential voters.<sup>37</sup> Beiler, Miller and other Lancaster G.O.P. volunteers set up voter registration booths at auctions, community fairs and other events frequented by the Amish and other local people. Party volunteers offered free transportation to take Amish people to register as well as to vote.

The critical event that boosted Bush fever among Lancaster’s Amish happened on July 9, 2004, when the president’s motorcade came through the heart of the Amish community and stopped for a campaign rally at Lapp Electrical Services, a business owned by an Amish-born entrepreneur. The Bush motorcade entered the eastern end of Lancaster County on Route 340 and headed west through the village of Intercourse and the heart of the old Amish settlement. An Amish observer described

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35. Eli Fisher [pseud.], *The Diary*, June 2004.

36. Chet Beiler, interview.

37. Amos Miller [pseud.], interview by Donald B. Kraybill, Dec. 28, 2005.

the fanfare: "All the side roads were blocked. What a show it was with Secret Service vehicles, police on motorcycles, and more cars and buses than we expected to see. The president himself was standing in the front of the bus waving as he went by."<sup>38</sup> In the words of another Amish observer, "from gray-haired grandparents to tiny babies, whole families stood along [Route] 340 . . . perhaps 8,000 people [Amish and non-Amish] were waiting in the village of Intercourse . . . shops closed down, farmers quit making hay, hitched up in the carriage and took the whole family to the village to see the president. Some came on scooters, girls on roller blades, and gray-haired Amish bishops came."<sup>39</sup>

When the presidential motorcade arrived at Lapp Electrical Services, west of Smoketown, Bush asked for an impromptu private meeting with some fifty Amish people who were standing across the road watching the fanfare. First, the president spoke to a crowd of 250 invited guests inside the Lapp building. After security officers emptied Amish pockets of pocketknives and tools, the group had a twenty-minute private meeting with President Bush in a side room. An Amish quiltmaker who lived across the road presented him with a quilt with the wording, "I Love America." The president tried on an Amish straw hat, "wore it for a spell" and accepted it as a gift. Chet Beiler noted, "The Amish were thrilled, and they had some just beautiful discussions. . . . When it came to issues of faith, he [Bush] affirmed them in the most touching way . . . his eyes welled up. . . . Something special happened there."<sup>40</sup> This was the moment, in Eli Fisher's words, when the Amish "caught Bush's heart." After describing this meeting, Fisher told his *Die Botschaft* readers, "So all of us Americans must do our part to get George's leadership for four more years."<sup>41</sup> Although it was President Bush's first direct encounter with Amish people, an Amishman attending the meeting remarked that "he seemed relaxed and just like an old neighbor."<sup>42</sup> During the gathering, Bush reportedly told the group, "I

38. J. Omar and Nancy Stoltzfus, *The Budget*, July 14, 2004.

39. Eli Fisher [pseud.], *Die Botschaft*, July 12, 2004. An historical overview of the Amish meetings with U.S. presidents is provided by Vernon Miller, "Amish and Mennonites Shake Hands with Presidents," *Heritage Review* 10 (Jan. 2001), 1-6.

40. Chet Beiler, interview. This was not the first time a U.S. president interacted with Amish people. Vernon Miller, "Amish and Mennonites Shake Hands," notes four other occasions, the most noteworthy being a visit by George H. W. Bush with twelve Old Order Mennonite and Amish leaders at Penn John's School in Lancaster County (a rural public school with mostly Amish and Mennonite pupils). A warm description of this meeting can be found in Miller's article as well as in Luke N. Good, *My Visit with President Bush: Mar. 22, 1989* (Lititz, Pa.: L.N. Good, 1990).

41. Eli Fisher [pseud.], *Die Botschaft*, July 21, 2004.

42. Jack Brubaker, "Bush Quietly Meets with Amish Here; They Offer Their Prayers," *Lancaster New Era*, July 16, 2004.

trust God speaks through me. Without that, I couldn't do my job."<sup>43</sup> Enthusiastic accounts of this meeting spread like wildfire in Amish communities across the country, despite the fact that it was not reported by the press for more than a week.<sup>44</sup>

Fueled with new passion, more Republican volunteers joined in the effort to mobilize Amish voters. Willard and Beth Stoltzfus, for example, owners of Black Horse Animal Hospital, actively promoted registration and voting among their Amish clients after Bush's July visit. Although not Amish himself, Stoltzfus, a veterinarian, had excellent contacts throughout the Amish community in eastern Lancaster County. The Stoltzfuses prepared a widely distributed poster that said: "America stands at a crossroads politically, morally, and spiritually. President Bush stands for the Christian values that you hold in the Amish community. The other candidate wants to usher in a very different America that would be even more hostile to the Christian values we hold. I urge you to become involved in this very important election. As close as this election could be this year every vote counts. A few thousand votes from your community could make the difference for Pennsylvania, and with it the Presidency." The couple offered assistance with voter registration and lined up sympathetic drivers to provide free transportation to the polls on Election Day.<sup>45</sup> Aggressive efforts such as these by non-Amish volunteers boosted the registration and turnout of Old Order people.

The push for Amish votes received international attention when The Associated Press told the world that "Republicans Look to the Amish for Support." Lara Lakes Jordan, a reporter, spent a day with Chet Beiler and Amos Miller. After her story hit the press, Beiler received dozens of media calls. Worried that all of the media attention would "spook the Amish," he stopped assisting the media, even refusing a request from ABC Evening News.<sup>46</sup>

In September, when the president made a campaign stop at King of Prussia, fifty miles east of Lancaster, Beiler arranged to have Amos Miller and a minister in the Plain community escorted through a back

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43. Ibid.

44. The first press report appeared in the *Lancaster New Era* on July 16. Eli Fisher [pseud.], who did not attend the meeting, provided his secondhand account of it to the *New Era*. The meeting was later reported in the broader media. Printed versions of the meeting also appeared in two of Eli Fisher's letters in *Die Botschaft*, on July 21, 2004, and on Aug. 25, 2004.

45. A copy of the poster is in the authors' files. The story of the veterinarian's efforts to round up Amish voters was reported in the *Intelligencer Journal* on Sept. 9, 2004, and in *The Daily Telegraph* in London on Oct. 27, 2004.

46. Chet Beiler, interview.

door to front row seats in the auditorium to avoid photographs. According to Miller, when President Bush arrived, "He winked at me. It was a rush! It was really something! I was worried there would be photos of me in the paper the next morning, but there weren't any and I was greatly relieved."<sup>47</sup> After the speech, Bush greeted Miller, put his hands on Miller's shoulders and said, "Tell the Amish churches how I need their prayers so I can run the country as God wishes." Bush's request for prayer, wrote Eli Fisher later, "puts a weight on our shoulders to remember our country's leaders in our prayers. . . . If you can't make it to the polls on Election Day you can vote by sending an absentee ballot. Pick one up at your post office."<sup>48</sup> Indeed, some Amish reportedly submitted absentee ballots indicating that they could not go to the polls because Election Day fell on the first Tuesday in November, the opening day of the traditional Amish wedding season in Lancaster County.

#### "WE MUST DO WHAT WE CAN"

Clearly, the issues associated with the 2004 election touched a nerve in the Old Order community. In the words of one Amish writer in September 2004, "There is [sic] more worries about elections out there than I ever recall before."<sup>49</sup> Underscoring the importance of the presidential contest, one Amishman said, "I doubt there's ever been more of a difference, morally and spiritually, in two candidates than this time. And probably never more at stake, morally than this time. Actually, its coming down to this, is [sic] there enough of God fearing people left in this country to elect a God fearing man for this Nation's leader?"<sup>50</sup> Amish advocates for voting offered four reasons for registering and casting a ballot: growing moral decay (abortion and gay marriage) in the country, President Bush's religious convictions, his personal down-to-earth Amish-style charm and "our ancestors voted."

A young Old Order Mennonite mother said that she "absolutely" planned to vote for George W. Bush, "because he's opposed to abortion and gay marriage and is doing a lot of good things [e.g., building schools] in Iraq."<sup>51</sup> "People were really fired up about the election because of abortion and the kind of stuff that Kerry pushed," said a pro-voting Amish activist.<sup>52</sup> Reflecting after the election, one well-informed

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47. Amos Miller [pseud.], interview by Donald B. Kraybill, Dec. 18, 2005.

48. Eli Fisher [pseud.], *Die Botschaft*, Oct. 6, 2004.

49. Levi E. Stoltzfus, *The Diary*, Sept. 2004.

50. Eli Fisher [pseud.], *Die Botschaft*, Oct. 6, 2004.

51. Sylvia Nolt, interview by Donald B. Kraybill, Aug. 31, 2004.

52. Amos Miller [pseud.], interview, Dec. 18, 2005.

40-year-old Amish father in Lancaster County said, "Moral issues were more of a concern than economic or foreign affairs. I think there was somewhat of a paranoid misperception of the influence John Kerry would have on social and moral issues such as abortion and gay marriage, driven in no small way by Religious Right rhetoric. Gay marriage, abortion, euthanasia and such is very abhorrent and repulsive to our Plain people, but so is political activism."<sup>53</sup> A church leader in Indiana explained that "the gay marriage and abortion things really energized some of our people. These things make our people really feel uneasy."<sup>54</sup>

In Lawrence County, Pennsylvania, a civic group called People Concerned for the Unborn Child tapped Amish sentiments against abortion in order to register new voters. Twenty-three non-Amish volunteers working for the anti-abortion group registered more than 400 new Amish voters. The leader of the effort said the Amish "were just appalled and shook their heads that this [abortion] could go on in our country. They are very innocent and we alerted them to the horrible things going on in our country."<sup>55</sup>

Especially remarkable was the fact that the separatist Amish had a moral vision for the larger society. Abortion and gay marriage are not issues within Amish society. Caught up in Bush fever, some traditionally separatist Amish were propelled into political action, not because of their own self-interest, but because of their moral vision for the larger society—to prevent the erosion of traditional moral values in American society. In their minds, prayer was not enough. God needed Amish help to elect the right president. An Amish woman, urging her friends to register to vote, said her "non-Amish friends tell us it's important if we want our freedom yet as Christians."<sup>56</sup>

Christian faith should produce action, fruits and votes, argued some. "If the Christians do not vote who will?" asked an Ohio writer. "If the salt has lost its savor wherewith shall it be salted? . . . While it is true that God is in control, he still chooses to work through his people. . . . It is not scriptural to pray without having works, James 2:14-17."<sup>57</sup> "Is it then right, not to do our duty to help a president that stands up for moral rights, like President Bush does....which may save thousands of unborn

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53. Benueel Riehl, personal correspondence to Donald B. Kraybill, Mar. 16, 2006.

54. David Yoder, telephone interview.

55. Diane Marcella quoted in *The Vindicator*, Nov. 14, 2004.

56. Mrs. Christ Glick, *Die Botschaft*, Oct. 1, 2004.

57. Philip L. Yoder, *The Budget*, Oct. 6, 2004.

children? . . . I believe in prayer but I also believe we must also do what we can,"<sup>58</sup> said another writer.

In citing moral values and concerns as their motivation for voting, the Amish were joining other Americans. Some 22 percent of American voters declared moral values as the most important issue in the election compared with 20 percent who named the economy, 19 percent who named terror and 15 percent who named the war. Indeed, based on pro-voting writers in Amish publications, an exit poll of Old Order voters would have likely shown more than 22 percent pointing to moral values as their prime motivation for going to the polls.<sup>59</sup>

Amish advocates of voting argued that people should pray *and* vote. Prayer alone was not enough. If Christians should not vote, does that mean then, "that all other voters are not Christian?" asked one writer. "Why was a [Democratic] governor elected to our state [Pa.] who brings in gambling, slot machines, and wants to put liquor in the grocery stores? Did our people just not pray enough?"<sup>60</sup> Amos Miller reportedly said, "We are encouraged to pray for our government. You can pray all you want but sometimes you still have to do something."<sup>61</sup> Speaking to the *New York Sun*, Miller was clear: "You can be on your knees all day, but it doesn't mean the cows will get milked."<sup>62</sup>

Another reason for voting was Bush's professed Christian faith. "I really think Bush relies on God and prays for help," said Miller.<sup>63</sup> Writing in June 2004, Eli Fisher encouraged his people to vote by saying, "Look how Bush spoke many times of the need to pray, and [he] does use many Christian principles."<sup>64</sup> In another account, Fisher described President Bush as having a "practical Christian approach to being president." Fisher occasionally repeated what the president is said to have told the Amish at Lapp Electrical Services: "I trust God speaks through me. Without that, I couldn't do my job." After some Amish promised to pray for him, Bush reportedly said, "For me, believing in God is the only way I can do my job."<sup>65</sup> At the campaign stop in King of Prussia, Pa., the president asked for the prayers of Amish churches.<sup>66</sup>

58. Mel Troyer, *The Budget*, Oct. 13, 2004.

59. See Stephen Kalberg, "The Role of Moral Values in the American Presidential Election," *ASA Sociology of Religion Section Newsletter*, Fall 2005, 2-7, for a thoughtful discussion of the role that moral values played in the 2004 election.

60. Anonymous, *The Diary*, Oct. 2004.

61. Amos Miller [pseud.], quoted in a *MySa.com* story, Sept. 26, 2004.

62. Amos Miller [pseud.], quoted in the *New York Sun*, Oct. 27, 2004.

63. Amos Miller [pseud.], interview, Dec. 28, 2005.

64. Eli Fisher [pseud.], *The Diary*, June 2004.

65. Eli Fisher [pseud.], *Die Botschaft*, July 16, 2004.

66. Eli Fisher [pseud.], *Die Botschaft*, Oct. 6, 2004.



The fact that Bush “is a man of faith, that he appreciates the Amish . . . made our job of reaching out to the Amish extremely easy,” according to Chet Beiler. “They were just ready to go.”<sup>67</sup> These explicit references to the president’s Christian convictions of solidarity, trust and confidence created a bond with some Old Orders.

Beyond Christian values, Amish advocates for voting felt an affinity for Bush’s down-on-the-farm manner. Eli Fisher described Bush’s homespun style when meeting the Amish group at Lapp Electrical Services: “The president shook hands all around, took time to get their names. He seemed just like an old-time farmer.” The Old Orders were pleased that the president tried on an Amish straw hat and accepted it from one of the men.<sup>68</sup> Roy Miller, an Ohio Amishman who invited the president and the first lady, Laura Bush, to his home for an Amish-cooked chicken dinner, said, “I think he is a good man, I really do. I think he wants what is right for this country.”<sup>69</sup> When Bush spoke at the Lancaster Airport on October 27, 2004, an Amishman portrayed him as a down-to-earth Lancaster County farmer. “He walked up to the podium just like a Lancaster County farmer. He said ‘Good morning’ to everyone. . . . Here you see a man with integrity, Christian principles. On September 11, 2001, we saw what he was made of.”<sup>70</sup>

In addition to moral concerns, Bush’s religious views and his personal charm, the final reason that Amish voters cited for casting ballots was an appeal to tradition. As in other areas of Old Order life, tradition plays an important role in shaping voting behavior. The Lancaster Amish history of voting in the past offered another reason for registering and going to the polls in November 2004. “The most common justification for voting that I heard,” said one Amishman, “was that our ancestors did it in the early 1900s. You know tradition is the biggest factor in our way of life for anything.”<sup>71</sup>

### “VOTING ON OUR KNEES”

If the voting issue stirred interest in some Old Order communities across the country in the summer and fall of 2004, in others, it met with resistance or garnered very little attention. Those Old Orders who favored a clear separation of the spiritual and political kingdoms argued against voting for several reasons: prayer is more effective than voting;

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67. Chet Beiler, interview.

68. Eli Fisher [pseud.], *Die Botschaft*, July 16, 2004.

69. Quoted in *Voice of America* worldwide press release, Oct. 5, 2004.

70. An anonymous Amishman from Gordonville, Pa., cited in *The Patriot-News*, Oct. 30, 2004.

71. Benueel Riehl, interview by Donald B. Kraybill, June 26, 2006.

God decides the outcome of elections; faithful and righteous living is more important than voting; it is inconsistent for Christians to vote for a war president. An Amish feed mill employee in western Pennsylvania described the non-Amish who were stopping at his mill: "They want our support to keep Bush in there [the White House]. But, I think if we put our faith in a higher hand, He [God] will take care of it in his way."<sup>72</sup>

Prayer was the most consistent theme expressed by the non-voting Amish. "So what if some of our people vote one way and some the other way, what good will it do?" asked one Amish writer. "I rather believe as a Bishop once said, 'One Christian on his knees is worth more than twelve at the polls.' If we vote we can be just one vote, if we pray to the Lord we depend on Him to make the right decision. We are so little, the Lord knows what is best for our Nation."<sup>73</sup>

The author of an essay titled "Voting on Our Knees," which was published in an Amish youth magazine, was appalled to see Plain People standing in line to register to vote at a consignment sale at a local fire station. At the registration table a life-sized figure of President Bush stood next to posters urging Plain People to vote, with offers of free car rides to the polls. "To me, it was a sad day," the writer concluded. "In our desire to remain a separate and holy people, why should we want to get all tangled up in the world's system of government and politics? If we register to vote, how can we be exempted from military duty should the draft come back?" Emphasizing the traditional two-kingdom view, the writer opined, "The church has one calling, and the state a quite different one. . . . What about the words of Daniel, 'He changeth the times and the seasons; he removeth Kings and setteth up Kings'? (Daniel 2:21). Do we accept that it is God who sets up Kings and removes them? If we believe this . . . our responsibility is complete if we do our voting on our knees and not at the polls."<sup>74</sup>

An Old Order Mennonite, Marcus Nolt, pressed the same argument in an essay titled "Casting Our Votes," in response to an English neighbor who urged him to vote against same-sex marriages and abortion. "Is it really our duty to see that a God-fearing president is elected?" asked Nolt. "Are we shirking our duty if we don't vote?" Nolt proposed five ways that Old Orders should "cast their vote": by praying, living a holy life, keeping a solid family life, appreciating their freedom and applying scriptural principles.<sup>75</sup> An editorial in *Home Messenger*, an Old Order

72. Allen B. Shetler, *Die Botschaft*, Oct. 13, 2004.

73. Anonymous, *The Diary*, Oct. 2004.

74. Anonymous, "Voting On Our Knees," *Young Companion*, Nov. 2004, 5.

75. Marcus Nolt, 17-18.

Horning Mennonite newsletter, urged members neither to vote nor participate in “political solicitations” [campaigning].<sup>76</sup>

One of the most direct and thoughtful refutations of voting appeared as a full-page editorial in *Die Blatt*, an Indiana Amish newsletter, under the title “Which Kingdom?” The Amish author, a member of the Amish Steering Committee, argued that in the past Amish people have “relied on God’s hand to direct the Nation as he sees fit to protect his children. . . . If we start supporting one party and God sees fit to put the opposite party in power, they [the government] could deal less kindly with us.” The writer argued that “serious results” might happen if Amish people get involved in elections. “If we vote, how will we explain that we don’t believe . . . in service in the Armed Forces?” Citing I Corinthians 5:20, which calls Christians to be ambassadors of Christ, the Amishman wrote, “An ambassador does not vote in the country where he lives. . . . We serve a Kingdom that is not of this world. At baptism we cut ties with this world and desire to serve Christ at all costs. For us, as ambassadors of Christ, it would be improper for us to take part in elections in the country in which we are strangers and pilgrims.”<sup>77</sup>

Responding to an outsider who was urging the Amish to vote, a New Order Amish bishop in Indiana wrote,

The traditional belief of the Amish is separation of Church and State. This is scriptural. The scriptural way to move God to put in leaders is to pray for them. This moves God. What if we vote and we lose? Did God lose the election then? No. Let the world vote and all Christians get on their knees and call mightily on God who sets in leadership whoever He wants there. No Christians should vote. . . . Jesus said, “My Kingdom is not of this world.” Which Kingdom do we belong to?<sup>78</sup>

A great-grandfather from Ohio, disturbed by all the controversy over voting, used tradition to argue against voting. “We have been discouraged to vote for any office that has the power to pardon or condemn to death, [that] is the reason not to vote as per our forefathers.”<sup>79</sup> An Amish bishop in Ohio reported that Amish leaders in his area were appalled that the Republican Party was targeting Amish votes. The leaders were urged to tell their congregations, “Do not listen to these political parties. The politicians’ Kingdom is of this world, but our Kingdom [the church] is not of this world. We live here. We enjoy it.

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76. Edward N. Weaver, *Home Messenger* 41, no. 10 (Oct. 2004), 2.

77. Anonymous, “Which Kingdom?” *Die Blatt*, Oct. 7, 2004, 15.

78. Monroe Hochstetler, *The Budget*, Sept. 29, 2004.

79. Melvin E. Hershberger, *The Budget*, Oct. 27, 2004.

But we are looking for a future Kingdom.”<sup>80</sup> Another Amishman in Ohio warned that voting would lead to officeholding.

If we as Christians . . . dare to vote, then why dare we not also undertake to hold high office duties? . . . What if we vote for such [a president] and he then decides to make war and shed blood? Would we not then also be guilty of the same, because we have put our voice in to put such in office?<sup>81</sup>

A Beachy Amish minister from Virginia argued for prayer instead of voting with these words: “Amish, Mennonites, Christians have no more business being involved in the political process than government officials have in giving their voice for an ordination in the church! There are two Kingdoms! Let the voting be done by those of the other Kingdom. . . . Let us therefore pray that God’s will be done. God has never lost an election.”<sup>82</sup>

Other voices expressed concern about the prospects of nonresistant Old Orders voting for a war president. A respected Amish leader in central Pennsylvania noted that President Bush’s popularity with Plain People arose because he agrees with “our thinking in many things.” However, he cautioned, “Bush is a war president and if we vote for him, but don’t want to send our boys to Iraq, how will this look to people who have relatives among the soldiers in Iraq? . . . Will a truly nonresistant person vote?”<sup>83</sup> A Michigan Amishman asked, “Can we with a clear conscience display the flag and cheer our leaders, ‘for going after Saddam,’ and for building up military strength? Shame on us! I believe that our nonresistance should include not exercising our right to vote.”<sup>84</sup>

A pro-voting Amishman, Eli Fisher, responded to the charge that Bush was a war president. “Now let’s be honest, if our country hadn’t made war throughout history it would not be a free land and our Plain churches wouldn’t have religious freedom. What would have transpired if Bush wouldn’t have taken action against Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein?”<sup>85</sup> In a September 15 letter to *Die Botschaft* readers, Amos Miller listed “Some Good News Finally” about Iraq that he had received from Republican leaders. The list of good things the United States was doing in Iraq included renovating schools, providing clean drinking water for the first time ever, opening and staffing hospitals, providing telephones and much more. Impressive statistics accompanied the list of

80. David Kline quoted in *Voice of America* press release, Oct. 5, 2004.

81. David Byler, *The Budget*, Oct. 20, 2004.

82. Ralph Miller, *The Budget*, Oct. 20, 2004.

83. C. J. Stoltzfus, *Die Botschaft*, Oct. 13, 2004.

84. John M. Miller, “A Godly Heritage,” *Family Life*, July 2004, 7-9.

85. Eli Fisher [pseud.], *Die Botschaft*, Oct. 20, 2004.

good things. Miller continued, "We are doing a good job in Iraq and I challenge anyone, anywhere, to dispute me on these facts. No, I'm not in favor of the war, but I don't think in our wildest imaginations we can realize how these people have had to live. Arms cut off or legs cut off just for talking about Saddam or worse yet shot or killed." The Amish activist concluded, "Let's not take our freedom for granted. The differences in the upcoming election between the two candidates are so big; please pray for our country so that we can enjoy the freedom we now have. Also, *if you are not against voting* please register before October 2<sup>nd</sup>. Your local post office has the forms."<sup>86</sup>

In a later edition of *Die Botschaft*, Fisher again defended Bush's record as a war president: "[Bush] reports what America is doing in Iraq. Schools are being repaired and more children are going to school. Hospitals are being updated. Immunization programs are underway. . . . So remember on [Election Day] *if you feel to do so* you are voting for a man who's rebuilding Iraq not just a war president."<sup>87</sup>

#### VOTER REGISTRATION IN LANCASTER COUNTY

In the fall of 2004 approximately 10,350 Amish adults in Lancaster County were 18 years or older and thus eligible to register and vote. The Amish settlement is organized into church districts—local congregations whose members live in a designated geographical area. The Lancaster Amish settlement had 155 church districts; however, seventeen of these were located in adjacent Chester County and two in York County, leaving 136 in Lancaster County.<sup>88</sup> If a church district straddled two counties, only the members with a Lancaster County residence were included in the study. The following voter registration data and analysis pertains only to Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonites who live in Lancaster County.

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86. Amos Miller [pseud.], *Die Botschaft*, Sept. 15, 2004. Italics added.

87. Eli Fisher [pseud.], *Die Botschaft*, Oct. 20, 2004. Italics added.

88. The estimated 10,350 Lancaster County Amish who are 18 years and older was calculated using an average number of seventy-five adults (age 18 and over) per district, plus 150 adults who lived in Lancaster County but were affiliated with one of the seventeen Chester County church districts. The estimate of 150 adults was determined by reviewing the residential addresses of all members in the seventeen Chester County districts. The estimate of seventy-five adults per district included baptized members as well as youth living at home who were 18 and older but not yet baptized. In the fall of 2004, 133 Amish districts had all their members living in Lancaster County; three had a majority of members living in Lancaster County; eleven were located in Chester County; and six had the bulk of their membership in Chester County with a few members in Lancaster County. For Amish data at the district level, we used 136 districts. However, for individual analysis, we used all Amish (10,350) who held a Lancaster County residence.

The combined adult membership in the Wenger and Horning Mennonite groups in the fall of 2004 was 5,654—slightly over half of the Amish membership.<sup>89</sup> The two Mennonite groups were about evenly divided with some 2,800 adults each. The voting behavior of the two Mennonite groups was very similar and thus is combined in the data presentations, except for Table 8, which details some of the differences between the Wengers and Hornings.

Lancaster County's political makeup favors the Republican Party by almost 100,000 registered voters.<sup>90</sup> The county is considered a conservative Republican stronghold and, indeed, 60 percent of the registered voters claim Republican affiliation, compared with only 25.7 percent who are registered Democrats (Table 1).<sup>91</sup> If the county is a Republican stronghold, the Old Orders are a Republican haven, with 93 percent of registered Amish and Mennonite voters affiliated with the Republican Party. Less than 1 percent of Old Orders aligned themselves with the Democratic Party, but about 7 percent registered as independent, without affiliation or attached to a third party.

Party	Old Order Amish		Old Order Mennonites		Lancaster Countians	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Republican	92.6	1,977	93.0	501	60.0	172,442
Democratic	.3	7	.6	3	25.7	73,886
Other	7.0	150	6.4	35	14.3	40,999
Total	100.0	2,134	100.0	539	100.0	287,327

Note: "Other" includes independent, no affiliation or third party. Due to rounding errors, some percentages do not total 100.

89. The Mennonite analysis only pertains to individuals because the church directories did not provide congregational affiliation—eliminating the possibility of doing congregational-level analysis. The Old Order Mennonite membership estimates are based on the Wenger and Horning directories and updates by informants in each group.

90. The figures used for Lancaster County's overall population, voter registration levels and voter turnout include members of the Old Order Amish and Mennonite groups.

91. The actual number of registered voters in Lancaster County may be slightly lower than that reported in Table 1 because of a lag time in removing from the voter registration list those voters who die, move out of the county or become inactive. Voters who are inactive for five years are sent a notification and then removed if they do not vote in the next two federal elections. Those who die or move away are deleted more promptly.

While such a Republican bastion should be a bonanza for party activists, the percent of Old Order members who were registered by Election Day in 2004 was rather modest—20.6 percent among the Amish and 9.5 percent among the Mennonites. The Amish were twice as likely to be registered as were Mennonites. Among the Old Orders, Amish women (27.9 percent) were more likely than Mennonite women (15.2 percent) to be registered, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Registered Voters in Lancaster County in November 2004 by Gender

Gender	Old Order Amish		Old Order Mennonites		Lancaster Countians	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Female	27.9	595	15.2	82	51.3	147,367
Male	72.1	1,539	84.8	457	47.3	136,034
Unknown					1.4	3,926
Total	100	2,134	100	539	100	287,327

Among all Lancaster Countians, female registrants (51.3 percent) outnumbered male registrants (47.3 percent), but, among Old Order Mennonites, men were more than five times more likely than women to register as voters. In the Amish community, men were two and a half times more likely than women to register.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Old Orders are most likely to register and to vote in local elections when issues such as zoning are at stake and the candidates are personally known by Old Order people.<sup>92</sup> However, the data on voter registration over fifteen election cycles, from 1997 through the 2004 presidential contest, show that Old Order participation in Lancaster County spikes with presidential elections, as shown in Table 3. Higher voter turnout in presidential elections is typical among American voters. Pennsylvania holds primary elections each May except in presidential election years when the primary is held in April. Municipal and general elections rotate every other November.<sup>93</sup> Every

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92. John A. Hostetler says that voter turnout is heaviest in local township elections because Amish people vote for candidates they know and have learned by experience to trust. See John A. Hostetler, *Amish Society*, 4th ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 257. In some Pennsylvania townships, up to 40 percent of the Amish have voted. Some Amish do not vote in presidential elections because they consider it inconsistent for a nonresistant person to vote for the commander in chief of the armed forces.

93. Municipal elections occur in the odd-numbered years and feature local races for positions such as township supervisors, judges and school board members. The general elections held in even-numbered years feature presidential and gubernatorial races, as well

fourth year the general election coincides with the presidential contest. The municipal elections focus on local races while the general elections involve more statewide contests.

The increase in voter registration for Lancaster County as a whole was very stable and consistent, ranging from 2.2 to 3.2 percent over the thirteen nonpresidential elections. Among the Old Order Amish and Mennonites, voter registration fluctuated more. Amish registration increases for nonpresidential elections ranged from .7 percent in the primary elections of 2000 to 9.9 percent in the 2002 primaries. For Old Order Mennonites, registration increases over the thirteen nonpresidential contests varied from 1.4 percent to 6.8 percent in the 1999 municipal election.

In the 2000 presidential election year, Amish voter registration rose 32 percent (N=145 new voters) between the spring primary and the fall election. Registration increases in the 2000 presidential election for Mennonites (8.7 percent) and Lancaster Countians (7.1 percent) were very similar, but the 32 percent Amish spike was four times higher than the Mennonite upturn as shown in Table 3. In 2004, Amish voter registration shot up a staggering 169.4 percent (N=1,342 new voters) between the spring primary and the fall election. These data verify the effectiveness of aggressive efforts to register potential Amish voters. The gradual increase in Amish registration from 1997 to 2003 may reflect normal population growth within the Amish community; however, the bounces in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections show new interest in voting. In contrast, Mennonite registrations for the 2004 presidential election increased 24.5 percent, while the general county registrations rose a modest 13.6 percent.

#### “DID WE PEAK TOO EARLY?”

In the fall of 2004, voting advocates began to worry that they “had peaked too early, that the campaign for Amish votes might lose momentum,” or worse yet, that the bishops might “shut it down.”<sup>94</sup> Excessive national publicity, ardent pleas from outsiders urging the Amish to vote, growing dissent about voting in some areas of the church, worries that network television cameras would show up at the polls and reservations from the national Amish Steering Committee were ominous developments that worried campaign strategists. G.O.P. activists wondered whether the vigorous summer registration drive might create a backlash that would discourage voters from showing up at the polls. A

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as those for U.S. congressional and state offices.

94. Chet Beiler, interview.



possible meeting in an Amish barn where invited Amish leaders could meet the president and first lady privately was scuttled for fear that the publicity it might generate would backfire and reduce voter turnout.<sup>95</sup>

Table 3. Percentage Increase of Registered Voters in Lancaster County from 1997 to 2004						
	Old Order Amish		Old Order Mennonites		Lancaster Countians	
	Increase	Registered	Increase	Registered	Increase	Registered
Election	%	N	%	N	%	N
Mun. 1997	2.3	408*	2.5	288	3.2	177,077
Prim. 1998	2.7	419	1.4	292	2.2	180,977
Gen. 1998	1.4	425	1.7	297	2.5	185,507
Prim. 1999	3.3	439	3.4	307	3.0	191,105
Mun. 1999	2.5	450	6.8	328	2.3	195,484
Prim. 2000	0.7	453	1.5	333	2.5	200,317
<b>Pres. 2000</b>	<b>32.0</b>	<b>598</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>7.1</b>	<b>214,572</b>
Prim. 2001	4.5	625	3.3	374	2.2	219,288
Mun. 2001	3.2	645	2.1	382	2.2	224,192
Prim. 2002	9.9	709	2.1	390	2.3	229,345
Gen. 2002	2.3	725	3.1	402	2.5	235,155
Prim. 2003	3.2	748	4.5	420	2.3	240,547
Mun. 2003	1.3	758	1.4	426	2.2	245,920
Prim. 2004	4.5	792	1.6	433	2.8	252,899
<b>Pres. 2004</b>	<b>169.4</b>	<b>2,134</b>	<b>24.5</b>	<b>539</b>	<b>13.6</b>	<b>287,327</b>
*Read "A total of 408 Amish people were registered to vote in the 1997 municipal election. This represented a 2.3 percent increase of registered Amish from the 1997 primary election."						

Concerns about backlash were not unfounded. A growing number of outsiders were adding pressure to turn out the Amish vote. In his regular "Life Lines" column in *The Budget*, Amish-born Les Troyer urged the Amish to vote. He reminded readers that they have a responsibility

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95. Ibid.

to vote to help “keep the moral standards of our Nation high. . . .”<sup>96</sup> John Hartman, a Minnesota contributor to the National Committee for Amish Religious Freedom, wrote an open letter to Amish bishops on September 1, 2004, which was printed in *The Budget* and *The Diary*. A non-Amish proponent of voting, Hartman wrote, “The American society needs all Amish to register and vote to stop John Kerry from becoming president, because he supports abortion, same sex unions, and has an ultra liberal attitude that threatens traditional family life. Kerry is in direct contradiction to the values and beliefs of the Amish.”<sup>97</sup>

The advice from outsiders such as Troyer and Hartman triggered many responses—mostly negative—from readers of *The Budget* and *The Diary*. Herman Bontrager, secretary of the National Committee for Amish Religious Freedom, made it clear that the committee “does not encourage Amish people to vote, nor does our organization endorse any candidate for president.”<sup>98</sup>

“The enthusiasm in Lancaster County raised a lot of eyebrows in other places,” said an Amishman in Indiana. Raised eyebrows were also cooling some of the Bush enthusiasm in Lancaster County. The Wenger Mennonite woman who “absolutely” planned to vote in August had changed her mind by late September after seeing a letter to the editor in a Lancaster newspaper by a Brethren in Christ writer who admonished the Amish to “remember who you are” and advised against supporting a war president “with your vote, [because] you will weaken your claim to conscientious objector status.”<sup>99</sup>

An anonymous letter sent to many Lancaster Amish leaders and activists in late October argued that the Amish were becoming “just another politics [sic] group like labor unions and lobby groups . . . and if we vote for commander and chief of Army . . . and draft comes back then they say Amish must fight or sit in jail. We become responsible if [we] vote for war president and have blood on our hands and what do we say at great judgment day???”<sup>100</sup> The letter, according to one Amish woman, chilled the excitement of some members of the community who decided to stay home on Election Day. On the eve of the election, one Amish woman’s thoughts surely reflected the sentiments of many church members across the country: “The World is in quite an uproar with the upcoming election tomorrow. Let’s hope and pray for the best.”<sup>101</sup>

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96. Les Troyer, “Life Lines,” *The Budget*, Oct. 13, 2004, and Oct. 27, 2004.

97. John Hartman, *The Budget*, Sept. 15, 2004, and *The Diary*, Sept. 2004.

98. Herman Bontrager, *The Diary*, Oct. 2004.

99. Sylvia Nolt, personal correspondence to Donald B. Kraybill, Sept. 27, 2004.

100. A copy of the letter dated Oct. 25, 2004, is in the authors’ files.

101. Mrs. Melvin Yoder, *The Budget*, Nov. 3, 2004.

ELECTION TURNOUT IN LANCASTER COUNTY

Registering voters for elections is essential, but the critical test, of course, is turnout on Election Day. Registrants may be deterred from voting because of lost interest in a campaign, the weather or personal issues. Voter turnout among Lancastrians in general dipped below 25 percent of registered voters in six of the fifteen elections from 1997 to 2004, as shown in Table 4. Among the Amish, turnout of registrants was below 25 percent in all fifteen elections except the presidential ones in 2000 and 2004. Indeed, the number of registered Amish who actually showed up at the polls was under 10 percent in eleven of the fifteen elections. The percentage of registered Old Order Mennonites who voted on Election Day exceeded the Amish turnout in all fifteen elections except for the primary of 2002 and the presidential election of 2004. In every election from the 1997 primary to the 2004 presidential, Old Order Amish and Mennonite turnout of registered voters was considerably below the general turnout.

Table 4. Percent of Registered Voters in Lancaster County Who Voted: 1997 to 2004						
Election	Old Order Amish		Old Order Mennonites		Lancaster Countians	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Prim. 1997	4.8*	19	17.4	49	21.1	36,167
Mun. 1997	7.6	31	16.3	47	31.9	56,534
Prim. 1998	1.4	6	4.5	13	12.2	21,992
Gen. 1998	8.0	34	28.0	83	47.4	87,951
Prim. 1999	12.1	53	18.6	57	25.9	49,431
Mun. 1999	8.2	37	19.5	64	29.3	57,257
Prim. 2000	2.9	13	6.6	22	21.7	43,520
<b>Pres. 2000</b>	<b>53.5</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>57.7</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>76.3</b>	<b>163,624</b>
Prim. 2001	5.9	37	7.5	28	14.7	32,331
Mun. 2001	8.4	54	12.0	46	27.1	60,756
Prim. 2002	13.3	94	7.7	30	21.7	49,649
Gen. 2002	23.5	170	33.6	135	52.4	123,300
Prim. 2003	8.0	60	16.0	67	20.1	48,415
Mun. 2003	7.7	58	19.7	84	30.7	75,505
Prim. 2004	6.6	52	12.9	56	28.0	70,783

<b>Pres. 2004</b>	<b>62.9</b>	<b>1,342</b>	<b>61.6</b>	<b>332</b>	<b>76.6</b>	<b>220,091</b>
*Read "4.8 percent (N=19) of registered Amish voted in the 1997 primary."						

In the contentious Bush/Gore election in 2000, the Lancaster County turnout of registered voters was 76.3 percent compared with 57.7 percent and 53.5 percent for the Mennonites and Amish, respectively. This turnout of 529 Old Order voters, who likely voted for Bush, was a small fraction of the 163,624 Lancaster Countians who cast ballots in the 2000 presidential election. Despite knowing the party identification of voters, it is impossible to know with certainty for whom they actually voted. However, based on party affiliations at registration, it is highly probable that virtually all Old Orders voted for President Bush in both the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. A young Amish father teased some of his friends by saying, "I voted for John Kerry." Smiles became frozen. Voices were strained as one said, "Well, I guess it's your choice."<sup>102</sup>

A news camera crew showed up on Election Day at the Leacock Township poll near Intercourse hoping to capture Amish entering the polls. Worried that it would repress the Amish turnout, Chet Beiler asked the camera crew to leave.<sup>103</sup>

Table 5. Voter Turnout in Lancaster County in the November 2004 Election			
	<b>Old Order Amish</b>	<b>Old Order Mennonites</b>	<b>Lancaster Countians</b>
Percent of registered voters who voted	62.9*	61.6	76.6
Percent of adults who voted	13.0**	5.9	61.0
*Read "62.9 percent of the registered Amish voters cast a ballot in Nov. 2004." **Read "13 percent of Amish adults (18 years and older) cast a ballot in November 2004."			

Nearly 77 percent of registered Lancaster County voters cast ballots in the 2004 presidential election, the highest countywide turnout since 1997. The Amish (62.9 percent) and Old Order Mennonite (61.6 percent) turnout, while lower than the county's, was the pinnacle of Old Order

102. Benuel Riehl, personal correspondence to Donald B. Kraybill, Mar. 16, 2006.

103. Despite the camera scare, a 75-year-old Amish farmer who lives near Intercourse said that he had never seen such a high turnout of Amish voters. — Chet Beiler, interview.

voting since 1997 as well. Still, the total number of registered Amish and Old Order Mennonite voters—about 1,674 people—was a small fraction of the 220,091 voters countywide who cast ballots in the 2004 election. Despite the record turnout of registered Old Order voters, the turnout of those eligible to register and vote was 13 percent for the Amish and 5.9 percent for the Mennonites—sharply lower than the 61 percent of eligible Lancaster County adults (360,584) who voted, as shown in Table 5.<sup>104</sup>

The backlash in October apparently tempered Bush fever. Indeed only 62.1 percent (N=834) of the 1,342 newly registered Amish actually came to the polls in November. Newly registered Amish women (73.3 percent) were more likely to vote than newly registered men (58.3 percent). Among Wenger and Horning Mennonites, the turnout of new registrants was 64 percent and 83 percent, respectively. Republican campaign strategists were somewhat disappointed with the Amish turnout. “The turnout was not what we hoped it would be among the Amish, but it was probably five to ten times better than before,” Beiler said.<sup>105</sup>

#### AMISH VOTING BY CHURCH DISTRICT AND REGION

Congregational affiliation was available in Old Order directories for the Amish but not for the Mennonites. This information enabled an analysis of voting behavior across Amish church districts, as shown in Table 6. In the Lancaster settlement, an Amish bishop typically oversees two church districts. A bishop’s attitude toward voting likely exerts considerable influence on the members in his districts. All of the 136 church districts in Lancaster County had at least one member who was a registered voter, but five districts had only one registered voter. About one third (48) of the districts had ten or fewer registered voters while about 12 percent (16) of the districts had more than forty registered voters. New registration activity prior to the 2004 election also varied greatly by district with five districts having no new registrants and fifteen reporting twenty-one to thirty newly registered voters after April 4 in 2004. Actual turnout also varied greatly across the districts. Eleven districts, despite having registrants, had no voters who turned out on Election Day. One district with 53 registered voters had 39 who cast ballots. Fifteen of the districts (11.6 percent) had twenty-one or more members who went to the polls.

Clearly, the mood of the local church district toward the 2004 election was a major factor in shaping Amish participation. Although most church districts had some voters, some districts were throbbing with

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104. “Adults” refers to individuals 18 years of age or older.

105. Chet Beiler, interview.

excitement while others were strongly opposed to voting. Traditional attitudes in the Amish settlement vary somewhat geographically.

Table 6. Voter Behavior by Amish Church District in the November 2004 Election						
Number of Members Who Registered and Voted	Districts with Registered Voters		Districts with Voters Registered after 4/04		Districts with Voters who Voted on 11/04	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
0-5	16.2*	22	27.9	38	39.7	54
6-10	20.6	28	36.0	49	22.1	30
11-20	37.5	51	26.5	36	27.2	37
21-30	15.4	21	9.6	13	9.6	13
31-40	8.1	11	0	0	1.5	2
41-55	2.2	3	0	0	0.0	0
Total Districts	100.0	136	100.0	136	100.0	136
*Read "16.2 percent (N=22) of the 136 Amish church districts had five or fewer members who were registered to vote.						

Church districts in the southern end of Lancaster County tend to be more conservative in their practices and relationships with the outside society than those in the north. The districts were divided into five regions for our analysis in order to determine if voting behavior also varied by geographical location. Region 1 is in the northern part of the county and Region 5 is in the southern sector. Region 2 shows the highest amount of political activity with nearly 20 registered voters per district, 13 new registrants per district in 2004 and an average of 13.5 voters per district who turned out in 2004, as shown in Table 7. This politically active region lies east of Lancaster City in a wedge between Routes 340 and 23 in the oldest section of the settlement. In sharp contrast, Region 5 in the conservative lower end of the county had an average of only 7.6 registered voters and only 2.7 per district who actually voted. Clearly Amish political activity varies considerably by church district and the district's location in the county.

One Amishman, reflecting on the outcome fifteen months after the election, estimated that about 1,000 Amish voted: “I cannot imagine too many more. Probably eight or ten per district would be a decent average.”<sup>106</sup> His district estimates were close to the actual 9.7 per district, but his total was a bit lower than the 1,342 who voted according to the voter registration lists.

Table 7. Amish Voting by Region of Lancaster County in the November 2004 Election

Region	Number of Districts	Mean Number of Registrants	Mean Number of New Registrants	Mean Number of Voters
1	19	15.8	9.0	10.6
2	35	19.8	13.0	13.5
3	22	16.0	11.0	9.6
4	28	17.6	10.1	11.8
5	32	7.6	4.6	2.7
All Districts	136	15.4	9.6	9.7

Note: Regions are ordered from north to south (i.e., Region 1 is in the north; Region 5 is in the south).

OLD ORDER VOTING BY GROUP AND GENDER

Table 8 provides a summary of the voting behavior of the three Old Order groups – Amish, Wenger Mennonites and Horning Mennonites – at the time of the November 2004 presidential election. Several notable trends emerge from the data. The rate of voter registration among members of both Mennonite groups is virtually identical (9.7 percent for the Wengers and 9.1 percent for the Hornings) despite the fact that the car-driving Hornings interact more with the larger society than do the horse-and-buggy Wengers. The Amish level of voter registration is double the Mennonite rate. One out of five (20.6 percent) Amish are registered whereas only one out of ten (9.5 percent) Mennonites are signed up to vote. The G.O.P. strategy to target the Amish for voter registration paid strong dividends—62.8 percent of registered Amish voters had signed up since April 2004, compared with only 21 percent of the Mennonite registrants. Interestingly, more Wenger voters (27

106. Ibid.

percent) were new registrants for the 2004 election than were Hornings (14 percent). On Election Day, the turnout of registered Amish and Mennonites was virtually the same—62.9 and 61.6 percent, respectively. However, among registered Mennonites, 70.7 percent of the Hornings turned out, versus only 53.4 percent of the Wengers. The Amish turnout as a percentage of adult members (18 years and older) was 13 percent, compared with 5.3 and 6.4 percent, respectively, for the Wengers and Hornings.

Table 8. Voter Behavior by Church Group in Lancaster County, November 2004							
	Adult Members	Registered Voters	Registrants as % of Members	New Registrants after 4/04	% of Registrants who Registered	Voter Turnout	Voters as % of Members
	N	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Wengers</b>							
Men	1,363	225	7.9	52	23.1	126	9.2
Women	1,477	58	2.0	25	43.1	25	1.7
Total	2,840	283	9.9	77	27.2	151	5.3
<b>Hornings</b>							
Men	1,351	232	8.2	28	12.1	162	12.0
Women	1,463	24	0.9	8	33.3	19	1.3
Total	2,814	256	9.1	36	14.1	181	6.4
<b>Mennonite</b>							
Men	2,714	457	8.1	80	17.5	288	10.6
Women	2,940	82	1.5	33	40.2	44	1.5
Total	5,654	539	9.5	113	21.0	332	5.9
<b>Amish</b>							
Men	4,968	1,539	14.9	905	58.8	994	20.0
Women	5,382	595	5.8	436	73.3	348	6.5
Total	10,350	2,134	20.6	1,341	62.8	1,342	13.0
Note: "Mennonites" refers to the combined total of Old Order Wenger and Old Order Horning Mennonites. Due to rounding errors, some percents may not add to 100.							



Gender differences related to voting among the three Old Order groups are shown in Table 8. In terms of registration, 5.8 percent of adult Amish women are registered compared with 2 percent of Wenger women and .9 percent of Horning women.<sup>107</sup> The Horning women, members of the most progressive of the three groups in terms of technology, are least likely to register to vote. The data also show that, among registered voters in all three groups, more women than men registered just before the 2004 election, suggesting that the focus on family and gender issues (abortion and gay marriage) may have motivated some women to register. The percent of *all adults* in the Old Order groups who actually voted also varied by gender. About 9.6 percent of Amish men and 5 percent of Mennonite men voted, whereas only 3.4 percent of Amish women and less than 1 percent of Mennonite women voted. Gender was a major factor that influenced voting behavior in all three groups, but Amish women are three times more likely to be politically active than are Old Order Mennonite women.

Although Bush lost Pennsylvania by 120,000 votes, he easily carried Lancaster County, beating Kerry by more than 70,896 votes, nearly 1,700 of them coming from Old Order voters. If as one Old Order member said, "God never loses an election," God had won in Lancaster and lost in Pennsylvania! An Amish observer in Indiana was "greatly relieved to see that Kerry won the state of Pennsylvania by a wider margin than what the Amish vote was, so I knew the Amish vote didn't make a difference. I was worried that if the vote in Pennsylvania was close, people would say that the Amish made the difference."<sup>108</sup>

#### VOTING BEYOND LANCASTER COUNTY

Old Order participation in the election varied greatly across the state of Pennsylvania as well as in other states. An Amish bishop in the New Wilmington Amish community in Lawrence County in western Pennsylvania said that most of the people in his area usually go to the polls and they typically vote for Republicans: "It's just the way we're brought up or something."<sup>109</sup> An intensive voter registration drive by People Concerned for the Unborn Child that focused on abortion registered some 400 new Amish for the election—almost exactly the 410 votes by which Bush won the county, despite a 10,000-person Democratic registration advantage. A poll watcher in one precinct in

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107. A 70-year-old Amish woman confessed on election evening that "this was the first time in my life that I ever voted."—Anonymous interview by Donald B. Kraybill, Nov. 2, 2004.

108. David Yoder, telephone interview.

109. Quoted in *The Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, Aug. 7, 2004.

Lawrence County reported that every registered Amish person voted on Election Day.<sup>110</sup> Pennsylvania has some fifty different Amish settlements, and the members of more conservative ones undoubtedly had less Bush fever than did the Amish of Lawrence County.

Table 9. Amish Voting Behavior in Holmes County, Ohio, in the November 2004 Election		
	%	N
<b>All Registered Voters</b>		
Amish	18.5	3,297
Non-Amish	81.5	14,525
Total	100.0	17,822
<b>Amish Party Affiliation in Primary*</b>		
Democrat	1.5	10
Republican	98.5	620
Total	100.0	630
<b>Amish Registration by Gender</b>		
Women	36.8	1,213
Men	63.2	2,084
Total	100.0	3,297
<b>Amish Turnout</b>		
Percent of 3,297 Registrants	29.5	971
Percent of 7,715 Adults	12.5	971
<b>Amish Vote by Gender</b>		
Women	23.4	227
Men	76.6	744
Total	100.0	971
<p>Note: Holmes County Amish districts in 2004 (N=105) based on 2005 Directory. Total members in 105 districts=7,715 (73.5 per district). Registered voters in 2004=3,297 or 42.7 percent of the total membership of 7,715.</p> <p>*Party affiliation is only recorded in the county's voter database when people vote in a primary election. Affiliation is not identified at registration as it is in Pennsylvania. Thus it is impossible to identify the party affiliation of those who</p>		

110. Reported in *The Vindicator*, Nov. 14, 2004.

only vote in the general election.

In Ohio, Amish voting varied from virtually no activity among the conservative groups such as the Swartzentrubers to more participation in areas such as Holmes County and Geauga County, east of Cleveland. The fourth-largest Amish community in the country, Geauga County, typically is more politically active than Holmes County and other areas of Ohio, according to some Amish informants.<sup>111</sup> In Holmes County, the Amish constitute a much larger proportion of the population than they do in Lancaster County. In fact, in Holmes County, Amish account for 18.5 percent of all registered voters. Amish party affiliation is virtually completely Republican. About 43 percent of adult Amish are registered voters (more than double Lancaster County's 20.6) and among those, nearly 37 percent are women, as shown in Table 9.

Despite the high level of registered voters, the turnout rate on Election Day was only 29.5 percent—some 971 voters out of 3,297 registered Amish. Those who voted represented about 12.5 percent of the estimated 7,715 adult Amish members in Holmes County, a rate that was virtually identical to the 13 percent of adult Lancaster County Amish who voted. The Holmes County turnout of 29.5 percent of registered Amish voters, however, was only half of the 62.9 percent of Lancaster County's Amish registrants who cast a ballot.<sup>112</sup>

In the Gladwin area of Michigan, one Amishman reported little political interest among his people and no pressure from outsiders to register. In the past, the Amishman said, even when outsiders "rattled our chains on local political issues, very few Amish went and voted."<sup>113</sup> In nearby Hillsdale County, Michigan, election clerks said that no Amish were registered to vote and one Amishman noted that the five local bishops were against voting.<sup>114</sup>

A similar anti-voting sentiment hovered over the Amish community near Harmony, Minnesota. Several members interviewed in a media report had no interest in the election or voting. "We're not interested in

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111. David Yoder, telephone interview. The Amish in Geauga County demonstrated their bent toward political activism in Oct. 2005 when Amish leaders in one township circulated petitions and succeeded in placing a zoning issue on the ballot for the Nov. election. Joe Milica, Associated Press, "Amish Take Rare Step into Politics," *Yahoo News!*, Oct. 20, 2005, [http://news.yahoo.com/a/ap/20051020/ap\\_on\\_re\\_us/amish\\_politics\\_2](http://news.yahoo.com/a/ap/20051020/ap_on_re_us/amish_politics_2).

112. It is notable that in Holmes County, where the Amish constitute a much larger percentage of the general population than in Lancaster County, more of them are registered but fewer turned out to vote when compared with Lancaster County.

113. Quoted in the *Bay City Times*, Aug. 7, 2004.

114. Reported in the *Jackson Citizen Patriot*, Oct. 21, 2004.

any election, it's as simple as that," said 78-year-old Lydia Hershberger.<sup>115</sup>

In the conservative Swartzentruber Amish settlement in northern New York State, there was little interest in the 2004 presidential election or in other elections for that matter. An anthropologist noted that "the only time there is interest in local politics is when it has a direct impact on the community—such as attempts to locate a dump on good farmland across the street from a bishop's farm. . . . Few Swartzentrubers get local newspapers and much of their news comes from non-Amish via conversations."<sup>116</sup>

An Amish minister in the Arthur, Illinois, settlement, speaking after the election, said, "I doubt that anyone here [Amish] voted in the last [2004] presidential election."<sup>117</sup> A lay member in the same community said the presidential election was not talked about in Arthur: "It is tolerated to vote in local elections, but leaders discourage us from voting in national and state elections. I definitely think that less than five percent of our people voted in the last presidential election; maybe none of them did."<sup>118</sup>

Likewise, very few Amish showed up at the polls in the Dover, Delaware, community. "No one votes here that I know of," said a schoolteacher. "There was talk about voting during the 2004 election, but that's as far as it went. It's better to pray for our government and live a life that does not disturb or become a burden to our government."<sup>119</sup> An Amish shop owner in Dover said, "Perhaps a half dozen [Amish] people voted here. I think instead of voting we should be in prayer for the upper people of our land so the right one is chosen for our benefit. How can we vote for someone who we don't know or their past history? We would not feel qualified to vote."<sup>120</sup>

An Amish leader gave a similar report of voting in northern Indiana's large Amish settlement: "Probably less than a dozen, maybe more, voted here, but they sure weren't going to the polls in vanloads and standing in lines like in Lancaster. I don't know of one bishop in northern Indiana who would have encouraged his people to vote."<sup>121</sup> This sample of reports from various communities suggests that Bush fever was tepid in many Amish settlements.

115. Quoted in the *Star Tribune*, Nov. 2, 2004.

116. Karen Johnson-Weiner, e-mail message to Donald B. Kraybill, June 28, 2006.

117. David Schrock, interview by Donald B. Kraybill, Mar. 11, 2005.

118. Lynn Miller, interview by Donald B. Kraybill, Mar. 12, 2005.

119. Cristy N. Byler, interview by Donald B. Kraybill, Mar. 2, 2006.

120. Ivan Miller, interview by Donald B. Kraybill, Mar. 2, 2006.

121. David Yoder, telephone interview.

The political battle for the two big swing states ended in a draw. Kerry took Pennsylvania by a margin of 144,248 and Bush won Ohio by 118,601 votes, as shown in Table 10. Although Kerry took Pennsylvania, Bush garnered 65.8 percent of the votes in Lancaster County for a decisive 71,263 vote margin. Bush’s advantage was even higher in Holmes County, Ohio, where he ended with 75.5 percent of the votes – 5,771 votes over Kerry. Old Orders in Lancaster and Holmes counties clearly live in rural Republican strongholds, especially in Holmes County, where Bush had a 3 to 1 advantage over his Democratic opponent.

Table 10. 2004 Presidential Election Outcome in Pennsylvania and Ohio

	Bush		Kerry		Difference
	%	N	%	N	N
Lancaster County	65.8	145,591	33.6	74,328	71,263
Pennsylvania	48.5	2,793,847	51.0	2,938,095	144,248
Holmes County	75.5	8,468	24.0	2,697	5,771
Ohio	50.8	2,859,768	48.7	2,741,167	118,601

Source: Department of state Web sites for Pennsylvania and Ohio

“SHOULD WE JUST SIT BY WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN?”

Several obvious conclusions surface from the findings of our study. The evidence suggests that the flurry of voting activity from Bush fever in 2004 in Lancaster County was certainly not typical of most Amish communities across the country and may indeed have been a one-time bubble even in Lancaster County. Amish voting behavior appears to follow two patterns. In some settlements there is virtually no participation; in other settlements there is keen interest and significant participation. But, even in a politically active community such as Lancaster, voting rates fluctuate considerably from district to district, reflecting the leadership and tradition of the congregation. The findings suggest that Amish are more likely to register and vote than Old Order Mennonites, at least in Lancaster County. It is also clear that the Republican efforts to register Old Order voters were successful in accelerating registration and voting in the 2004 presidential election even

though the Amish turnout was lower than the expectations of voting advocates.

Will the rise in registration and voting endure or was it simply a one-time bounce? Chet Beiler, architect of the Amish registration drive, doubted that “there will be another surge like this [fall 2004] anytime soon. . . . We took the number [of registered voters] way up, but it won’t last. But I’m sure that there are many who will now vote in every election for the rest of their lives, as my [Amish] grandfather did; he voted throughout his life.”<sup>122</sup> Old Orders in the Lancaster area will likely vote above pre-2004 levels in future elections, but how much higher will hinge on the issues and the candidates.

As the heat of Bush fever cooled in the aftermath of the election, one of the Amish activists with a moral vision for American society had some nagging doubts: “Maybe I should not have done that [registered voters]. Maybe we went overboard too much, I don’t know. The politicians now want us to help again the next time. They’re not going to quit on us. They want me to come to more meetings to plan for the next elections.”<sup>123</sup>

Several factors coalesced in the Lancaster situation to produce a historic Amish turnout for a presidential election. One of the obvious reasons for Old Order enthusiasm was Chet Beiler’s familial, cultural and business connections with the Amish community as well as his strategic position in county and statewide G.O.P. circles. His access to strategists in the Bush-Cheney campaign made it possible to orchestrate campaign visits such as the motorcade through the heart of Amish country in ways that enhanced Old Order participation. The fact that Pennsylvania was a crucial swing state in the 2004 election raised the stakes and prompted the G.O.P. to invest time and effort in the county. Other factors, as we have noted, that partially explain the high Lancaster turnout were the platform differences between the Bush and Kerry campaigns and the strong Republican rhetoric about traditional family values that appealed to Amish sentiments—especially the repeated litany about abortion and gay marriage. Indeed one of the reasons, in Beiler’s mind, for the big Amish turnout was the perceived difference in moral standing between Kerry and Bush. “The package of President Bush fit so well, and because his opponent was decidedly more liberal, it created a distinction that was very appealing to the Amish.”<sup>124</sup>

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122. Chet Beiler, interview.

123. Amos Miller [pseud.], fax to Donald B. Kraybill, Dec. 21, 2005, and interview by Donald B. Kraybill, Dec. 28, 2005.

124. Chet Beiler, interview.

Another factor that played into the equation was the close working relationship that a number of Amish people in the Lancaster area have with state and national politicians who have worked hard to represent Amish concerns in Harrisburg and Washington over the last decade. One of the more articulate Amish proponents of voting spoke directly to the growing obligation that some Amish felt to vote in return for the assistance they have received from elected representatives. "We want political favors that help us on things like zoning for our *Grossdawdy* [grandparent] houses, Social Security issues, lower taxes and child labor, and yet then we turn the other way when we have a chance to vote the right people into office. It just seems sort of hypocritical to me [if we don't vote]." <sup>125</sup> Growing collaboration with political representatives had led to greater expectations to vote.

In addition, Bush's Christian identity and homespun style charmed some Amish. Here was a down-to-earth man of faith that they felt they could trust and who even asked for their prayers on his behalf. Moreover, he appeared to care deeply about the same traditional family values that they did. These were some of the seductive tugs that pulled a record number of Lancaster's Amish to the polls on Election Day.

The Old Order dialogue over the 2004 presidential election offers insights into the changing dynamic of Old Order identity and their changing relationship with the dominant society. "So all of us *Americans* must do our part to get George's leadership for four more years," wrote a voting proponent, Eli Fisher, to Amish readers. <sup>126</sup> The phrase "all of us Americans" suggests an identity with American citizenship and civic responsibility. Despite wearing separatist clothing and speaking a German dialect, voting proponents were no longer acting like strangers and pilgrims in a foreign land (Heb. 11:13). The call to vote reflected a degree of assimilation with American society. Voting, particularly in presidential elections, is an indicator of social assimilation and civic participation in the larger society.

It is important to distinguish between local and presidential voting. When Old Orders vote in local elections for township supervisor, county commissioner or school board directors, they declare their interest and stake in the local affairs that directly impact their lives. Voting for a president is different because it reflects a national identity, a sense of duty and citizenship in the nation. Moreover, for Old Orders, a presidential vote signals support for the commander in chief of the armed forces, support that conflicts with their historic commitment to nonresistance. Presidential voting marks a deep divide within the Old

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125. Eli Fisher [pseud.], telephone interview by Donald B. Kraybill, June 12, 2006.

126. Eli Fisher [pseud.], *Die Botschaft*, July 12, 2004. Italics added.

Order communities, a rift between those who have assumed a stronger sense of American identity and those who resist assimilation, who see themselves as strangers and pilgrims in the modern world.

Some Old Order proponents of voting have occupations that bring them into frequent contact with the outside world. Many of the Lancaster County Amish who were caught up in Bush fever, for example, are involved in small businesses.<sup>127</sup> The home church district of one vocal proponent of voting has only three of thirty-five families engaged in farming; the rest operate or work in a variety of small businesses where they interact with non-Amish on a daily basis. Daily interaction with outsiders in rural Republican areas exposes them to regular rounds of political chatter during the election season. A key conduit of influence is interaction with non-Amish drivers who transport business owners and tradespeople to work sites. Listening to radios—especially conservative talk shows—in these vehicles is another source of political opinion. One question that we were unable to test was this: Are Old Orders whose occupations require frequent interaction with outsiders more likely to vote? Such a relationship might explain higher rates of voting in some Amish church districts in Lancaster County and Holmes County. However, this argument would likely not hold for low-voting settlements in Arthur, Illinois, and northern Indiana where large numbers of Amish work in nonfarm jobs. The motivations for voting, while possibly shaped by occupational contacts, are too complex to be explained by a single factor.

Beyond becoming more assimilated in the dominant society and developing a greater sense of an American identity are deeper theological questions. The traditional Old Order two-kingdom theology assumed a sharp separation between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of this world. Citizens of the spiritual kingdom were expected to focus on religious matters in the church community and to refrain from participating in the kingdom of this world that is based on force and violence. Moreover, in the final analysis, God controlled even the kingdom of this world, setting up kings and taking them down, and God surely did not need a few votes from the citizens of his kingdom to execute his will.

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127. Interviews with Lancaster County Amish business owners in 1992-1993 revealed that some of them were members of the National Federation of Independent Businesses, a national lobby group for business concerns that provides advice for voters and urges political participation. Donald B. Kraybill and Steven M. Nolt, *Amish Enterprise: From Plows to Profits*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 153-154. Relationships with such organizations illustrate how Amish involvements in business may lead to greater interest in voting.



The gap between the two kingdoms narrowed in Old Order minds when a president used religious language—words that made it sound like he was a comfortable citizen of both kingdoms. The warm religious language of President Bush built a bridge that made it possible, even comfortable, for some Old Orders to step across at least momentarily on Election Day.

Beyond walking across the narrow bridge between the two kingdoms, a bigger surprise was that some pro-voting Amish crossed the bridge because of their moral vision for the larger society. Abandoning a singular focus on separatist concerns inside their community, they were voting to improve the moral conditions of the larger society, or to at least impede what they considered moral decadence. To be sure, part of their motivation was to protect their own religious freedom (a concern provoked by partisan politics), but they were also motivated by a desire to purify the larger society from what they considered the sins of abortion and gay marriage.

Reflecting on the Amish quandary in the aftermath of the election, one Lancaster County Amishman wrote, “Instead of being a strictly separatist society, there is a growing awareness that perhaps we have a unique cultural witness to make. But at the same time we’re not completely sure or totally agreed on the nuances of that witness. We know that in order to be unique we need to maintain our identity and most important is doing the Lord’s will for us. We can increase our voting power exponentially by praying “Thy will be done.””<sup>128</sup>

“Should we just sit by when bad things [abortion and gay marriage] happen?” asked a leading proponent of voting.<sup>129</sup> That question cut to the core of the old Anabaptist debate about Christian moral responsibility in society. Who should shoulder the moral responsibility for promoting virtue and restraining vice in the larger society beyond the church? It was not surprising to hear the age-old question raised again in the midst of a presidential election, but it was surprising to hear it on the lips of an Amishman. It signaled a new sense of American identity and civic responsibility, at least among some Old Order people.

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128. Benueel Riehl, personal correspondence to Donald B. Kraybill, July 5, 2006.

129. Amos Miller [pseud.], interview, Dec. 28, 2005.