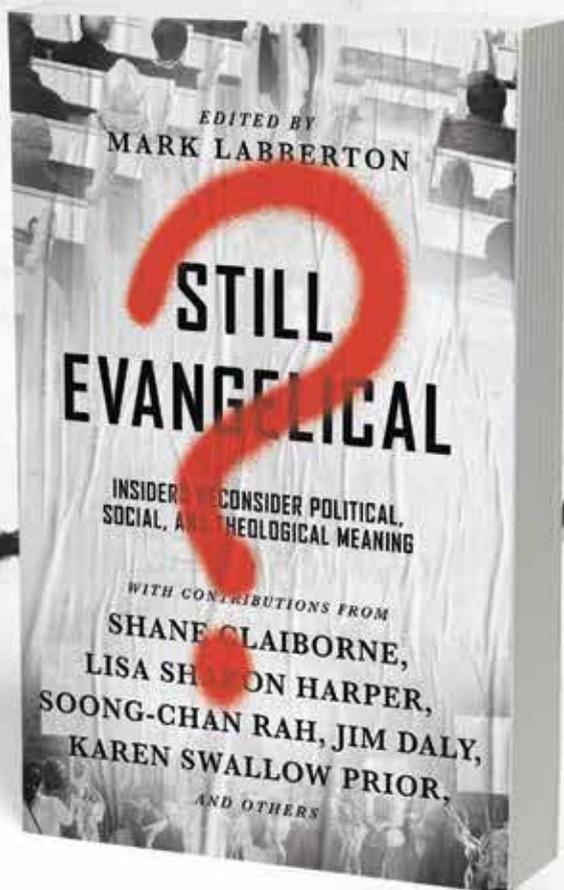


EVANGELICAL

IDENTITY CRISIS



“**Evangelical** should mean Bible believing, gospel preaching, justice seeking, and Spirit filled. Instead it has become known more by its politics than by its commitment to the Word of God. This book . . . provides a way forward to help us recover the good news of Jesus that our world desperately needs to hear.”

—**AARON GRAHAM**,
lead pastor, The District Church, Washington, DC

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What is an evangelical? That question brings more people to the website of the National Association of Evangelicals than any other search. It's not just those outside the community looking for answers. Evangelicals themselves seek to understand and communicate what "evangelical" really means — and some are wondering whether it still speaks to who they are.

The question is not new. When asked what "evangelical" meant in a 1987 interview, Billy Graham — arguably the most prominent evangelical preacher in modern history — answered, "Actually, that's a question I'd like to ask somebody, too."

Evangelicalism doesn't have a pope. It is a vibrant and diverse group of "good news" people, including believers found in many churches, denominations and nations. Evangelicalism brings together Reformed, Holiness, Anabaptist, Pentecostal, Charismatic and other traditions — all of whom believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and take the Bible seriously.

Not having a singular authority in the movement has spurred creativity, innovative evangelism tools, different expressions of worship, biblical scholarship and more, but it has also led to some confusion. When researchers started becoming interested in studying "born again" Christians, they used varying definitions to identify these Christians. Some equated evangelicals or "born again" Christians with politics or race — neither of which was helpful.

In this issue of *Evangelicals* magazine, we consider the biblical roots of "evangelical," the history and use of the term, and how evangelicals have been defined in research. We look back, because it helps us understand and communicate who evangelicals are to people who want to know. We also remember that evangelicals are not all about U.S. politics and that there are many more evangelicals outside the United States than in it.

Some who hold evangelical beliefs may distance themselves from the name due to cultural misunderstanding and confusion. Others may find that the term provides an opportunity to explain what "evangelical" means and to share the good news with others. How people choose to identify themselves or their organizations is not *the important thing*. What is important is believing in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and taking the Bible seriously.

A Good News Name

“The word ‘evangelical’ is associated with something good — that is, ‘good news.’ It also suggests a vibrant and enthusiastic faith that leads Christians to share this good news with others.”

John Hopler, director of Great Commission Churches

“The term ‘evangelical,’ though recently politicized in ways that complicate its usefulness as a helpful theological label in the United States, is still of value in a global context. It signals, both globally and historically, the communities of Christian faith that emphasize personal commitment to the good news of the gospel (the ‘evangel’), a high view of Scripture, and a commitment to put faith into practice for the good of others. It behooves us to be sensitive to the current connotations of the word in our own national context, especially to its association with conservative politics and with certain ethnicities more than others. Nevertheless, I believe it is worth pro-active effort to keep the word as a useful, helpful and hopeful term in our society — if for no other reason that there are no obvious alternatives.”

Shirley Mullen, president of Houghton College

“Evangelicalism is a theological term which defines a commitment to salvation through Christ, the authority of Scripture, and sharing our faith in word and deed. If evangelicals are to remain credible with future generations we must resist, at all cost, political and partisan definitions of this term.”

Gabriel Salguero, president of the National Latino Evangelical Coalition

“Evangelical focuses on the gospel. From the 18th century forward it has emphasized the supreme authority of the Bible, the redemptive work of Christ, personal conversion, evangelism and the social implications of the gospel.”

Roy Taylor, stated clerk of the Presbyterian Church in America



Dreamers Wait for Congress to Act

“For far too long in this country, Hispanic young people have been the political bargaining chips of our powerful politicians ... Our elected members of Congress have time and again professed concern for the Hispanic community, and yet have chosen to do nothing. We will not distinguish between Republicans and Democrats but between those who stand for righteousness and justice and those who do not.”

Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference



Watch our new video highlighting different voices on who evangelicals are at [NAE.net/evangelical](https://www.nae.net/evangelical).

The Bible's New Space

“ We believe that this book is exactly what it claims to be — that there is a God, and that [Museum of the Bible visitors] will come to see that what we believe is true. In the museum, we don't cross that line. We don't say whether it is true or whether it is good. We let the visitors decide. But I believe it is — both true and good. And, it is a message for all people. We would hope people would see that.”

Steve Green, president of Hobby Lobby and chairman of the board of Museum of the Bible, on Today's Conversation podcast at [NAE.net/greenpodcast](#)



Responding to the Las Vegas Shooting

“ Knowing we live in a fallen world permits me to stop trying to place blame and instead place hope. Today's world is in trouble, yet Jesus' world wasn't much different. The night before he went to the cross he said, 'I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world' (John 16:33).”

Scott Ridout, president of Converge Worldwide



Image of God

“ At times, it can seem like the forces pulling us apart are stronger than the forces binding us together. Argument turns too easily into animosity. Disagreement escalates into dehumanization. Too often, we judge other groups by their worst examples while judging ourselves by our best intentions — forgetting the image of God we should see in each other.”

President George W. Bush at the Bush Institute's national forum in New York, New York

If only I could compel all evangelicals to listen to this @NAEvangelicals podcast w/ @josephcumming & @leithanderson
Matthew Soerens @MatthewSoerens

Thank you for mentioning @SmTwnVineyard & for dedicating a whole issue to small town pastoring & planting
Small Town Vineyard @SmTwnVineyard

WORKING TOGETHER, WE CAN CHANGE THE CULTURE OF MARRIAGE!

NationalMarriageWeekUSA.org

National Marriage Week USA (Feb. 7-14th) is a collaborative campaign to strengthen individual marriages, reduce the divorce rate and build a culture that fosters strong marriages. We are the only national annual public relations campaign for marriage. We can all maximize our impact when marriage champions across the country work together on this annual effort. Here's how you can take part:



- 1 HOST** a marriage event and **POST ANY EVENTS** to strengthen marriages for free under “National Calendar” on NationalMarriageWeekUSA.org. We are the only online clearinghouse where events can be posted all year.
- 2 SIGN UP** to stay informed at nationalmarriageweekusa.org/join-the-campaign. Only by working together will we change the culture of marriage.
- 3 GROW YOUR CHURCH** by reaching out to neighbors with a marriage evening or class. Distribute our **CHURCH BULLETIN INSERT** during National Marriage Week.
- 4** National Marriage Week is an opportune time to **GET MEDIA ATTENTION** for your efforts – our **TOOL KIT** can show you how to get coverage.

JOIN US TO HELP STRENGTHEN MARRIAGES IN YOUR COMMUNITY!

EVANGELICAL CALENDAR

Please join the evangelical community at these events hosted by the NAE and its members. **Your prayers are welcome too.**

Many of these events include downloadable resources for promotion and participation.



FEBRUARY 1-2, 2018

Preaching: New and Now

Nampa, ID

Northwest Nazarene University
WesleyCenter.NNU.edu/wesley-conference

This conference invites experienced ministers to explore what it means to preach today, while encouraging new preachers to discover how to faithfully communicate the message of Scripture.



MARCH 7, 2018

NAE Talk

Wheaton, IL

National Association of Evangelicals

The NAE Talk offers a safe space for high-level evangelical leaders to dialogue and resource on practical challenges they face as they minister in today's culture.



FEBRUARY 7-14, 2018

National Marriage Week

Let's Strengthen Marriage
NationalMarriageWeekUSA.org

Join with others across the country and organize a local marriage event during the week leading up to Valentine's Day. Focus on practical ways to strengthen marriages in your church and community.



MARCH 3, 2018

Grow!

Willmar, MN

GrowMN.org

God has strategically placed churches in rural areas and small towns in order to impact our culture for the kingdom of God. This conference will provide pastors and board members with information on how to minister effectively and encourage them to see their unique role in God's plan.



MAY 18, 2018

PULSE Twin Cities

Minneapolis, MN

PULSE
PulseMovement.com/tc

PULSE Twin Cities will bring the message of Jesus to the Twin Cities in a major outreach event at U.S. Bank Stadium. They hope to fill all 66,200 seats with people who need Jesus.

FEBRUARY 21-23, 2018

Christ-Centered

Orlando, FL

Association for Biblical Higher Education
ABHE.org/annual-meeting

This annual meeting serves as the rallying point for 200 institutions of biblical higher education in North America. Leaders in biblical higher education gather to confer and sharpen their gifts and abilities.



Find additional Evangelical Calendar opportunities online at NAE.net/calendar.

✓ Natural Disasters Spotlight Church Efforts

The second half of 2017 brought a flood of natural disasters. From Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria to a deadly earthquake in Mexico and fires in California. Local churches are present before, during and after natural disasters, and they become an obvious avenue to distribute aid and assist with relief. Denominational relief arms and other faith-based organizations mobilize to coordinate funds and materials, often partnering with local churches and the government.

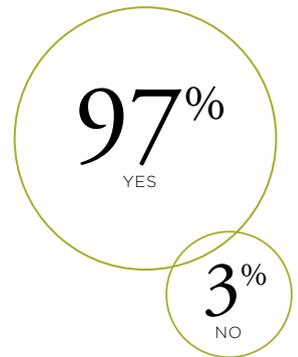
In September, USA Today ran an article titled, “Faith Groups Provide the Bulk of Disaster Recovery.” The article cited Greg Forrester, CEO of the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, who noted that “about 80 percent of all recovery happens because of nonprofits, and the majority of them are faith based.”

Many member denominations and nonprofits of the National Association of Evangelicals have served as first responders for recent disasters, including Assemblies of God, Christian Reformed Church, Church of the Nazarene, Converge Worldwide, Convoy of Hope, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, International Pentecostal Holiness Church, Presbyterian Church in America, The Alliance, The Foursquare Church, The Salvation Army, The Wesleyan Church, World Relief and World Vision, among many others.



November 2017 Evangelical Leaders Survey

Should faith-based groups be eligible to apply for assistance on the same basis as secular groups when public funds are made available to help rebuild properties damaged by natural disasters?



✓ Calling Congress to Act for Dreamers

This fall, President Trump announced the end of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), a program that temporarily protected the children of undocumented immigrants from deportation. The National Association of Evangelicals turned to Congress, calling it to pass legislation that permanently protects these individuals and allows them to fully integrate into American life.

“Congresses have convened and adjourned from one election cycle to the next while Dreamers have waited,” said Leith Anderson, NAE president. “May this Congress step up to legislate for Dreamers and turn waiting into promise and hope.”

The NAE has long advocated for a comprehensive reform of our broken immigration system. Protecting the children of immigrants is an important aspect of this overhaul.



A group of Christian Dreamers share why they're thankful. Watch their video at bit.ly/VCDthankful.

Read the NAE resolution at NAE.net/immigration-2019.

✓ Master Case for Religious Freedom

In December, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments for an important religious freedom appeal regarding whether business owners must provide artistic or expressive services that would violate their deeply held beliefs. The particular case involves Jack Phillips, owner of Masterpiece Cakeshop in Lakewood, Colorado, who declined to design a cake for the wedding celebration of David Mullins and Charlie Craig based on his Christian faith. The couple filed discrimination charges against Phillips and won before a civil rights commission and in Colorado court.

In a Supreme Court brief, Phillips' lawyers said that "[Phillips] is happy to create other items for gay and lesbian clients," but his faith requires him "to use his artistic talents to promote only messages that align with his religious beliefs."

The Supreme Court decision, which is expected this summer, may establish important precedent as to how religious freedom is protected in the context of public accommodations provisions in civil rights laws. The National Association of Evangelicals joined a brief written by Thomas C. Berg and Douglas Laycock, two leading legal scholars, arguing that governments should protect the rights of business owners who are asked to violate their consciences. The Justice Department also filed an amicus brief supporting Phillips.



Listen to Today's Conversation on Religious Freedom and the Law with Leith Anderson and Thomas Berg at [NAE.net/bergpodcast](https://www.nae.net/bergpodcast).

✓ U.S. Resettles Fewer Refugees, Despite Increase in Need

For several decades, the number of refugees resettled in the United States has generally grown or shrunk with the overall refugee population, averaging 0.6 percent of the refugee population. For the 2017 calendar year, the United States had only resettled 28,000 refugees by October. The Pew Research Center said this puts the United States on track to accept just 0.2 percent of the world's refugee population for 2017.

In 2017, the Trump administration issued an executive order to reduce the number of refugee admissions to be less than half the ceiling set by the Obama administration. For 2018, the administration has capped refugees at 45,000, which is the lowest since presidents were given the power to set admission numbers in 1980.

"A refugee admissions ceiling of 45,000 is extremely troubling, especially as the persecution of many religious minorities, including Christians, is on the rise globally," said Scott Arbeiter, president of World Relief, the NAE's humanitarian arm.

✓ April is Second Chance Month

One in four American adults has a criminal record. Even after paying their debt to society, those with criminal records face barriers to education, jobs, housing and voting, among other things. In addition to widespread social stigma, there are more than 48,000 documented legal restrictions on people with a conviction.

The National Association of Evangelicals encourages its members to join Prison Fellowship, an NAE member, in celebrating "Second Chance Month" this April. Second Chance Month is an opportunity to raise awareness about prisoner recidivism and to bring hope to the 65 million Americans who have paid their debt to society. Prison Fellowship created numerous resources for churches, organizations and individuals who want to participate in Second Chance Month.



Find resources for Second Chance Month at [PrisonFellowship.org/second-chance-month](https://www.PrisonFellowship.org/second-chance-month).



Ed Stetzer is executive director of the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism at Wheaton College and previously served as president of LifeWay Research.

Defining Evangelicals In Research

In our complex religious landscape, quantifying solid research on evangelicals is essential. Yet this need has provoked a question which has frustrated researchers for half a century: Who is an evangelical?

Few identifiers are as ubiquitous but so poorly defined. The result has been that even premier polling groups are divided on who counts. To understand how we got here, I will give some background on research into evangelicalism and then offer a path forward.

In the wake of Jimmy Carter, existing and new polling agencies began to ask America’s first “born again” president and the evangelicals he claimed to represent what it was that made someone evangelical. Unfamiliar with evangelical language and belief, research institutions struggled to craft the right means of measuring the movement. This is reflected in the four initial Gallup polls listed below.

Notice that the meaning of the definition changes between each poll. Initially defining evangelicalism by behavior, Gallup switches to participation in a movement, returns to the original definition, and settles upon self-identification as an evangelical.

In the past 30 years, other research organizations have taken the lead in generating evangelical statistics. The Pew Forum on Religion and Life regularly publishes on the intersection of religion and politics, relying upon self-identification as means of defining evangelicalism. The Barna Group often publishes studies on evangelical social life and morality, depicting evangelicalism as the correlation of nine shared beliefs — ranging from the deity of Christ to certain specifics of the creation story of Genesis.

Yet these definitional variances predictably created a disparity in percentage of evangelicals studied, ranging from 7 percent (Barna, 1998) to 47 percent (Gallup, 1999). This variance across differing polls is largely the product of researchers categorizing evangelicals by one of three identifiers: behavior, belonging or belief.

The *behavior* approach to research examines church attendance, focusing on trends in religious participation and migration. However, limiting research to preset denominations leaves out evangelically-minded individuals who attend churches traditionally not associated with evangelicalism. This produces sensationalist headlines, yet presents data flawed by the exclusion of communities who consider themselves evangelical.

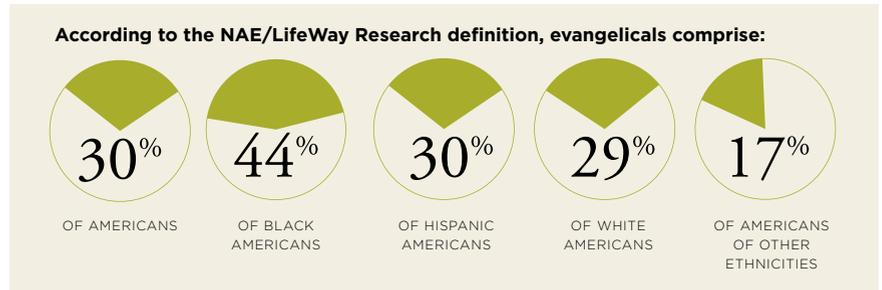
August 27-30, 1976	Would you say that you have been “born-again” or have you had a “born-again” experience — that is, a turning point when you committed yourself to Christ, or not?	35%
February 2-5, 1979	Which, if any of these do you practice: [“the evangelical movement” was included as an option among other religious groups]	7%
December 7-10, 1979	Would you say that you have been “born-again” or have you had a “born-again” experience — that is, a turning point when you committed yourself to Christ, or not?	39%
July-September, 1986	Would you describe yourself as a born-again, or evangelical, Christian? [becomes trend question]	31%

The *belonging* approach emphasizes self-identification over church attendance, asking the respondent if he or she is an evangelical. This tactic addresses the problem of the behavior approach in accounting for evangelicals across the denominational spectrum. However, emphasizing belonging is too simplistic. As seen in the Gallup polls above, through asking broad questions such as “Are you born again?” the poll is loaded with unintended baggage.

Turning to the *belief* approach, Baylor University launched a 2005 study to gather data on religion in America. Baylor went beyond simple questions to more in-depth inquires. Rather than asking, “Do you believe in God?” the respondent could define God (judgmental? forgiving? faithful?). This shift was a crucial step towards a workable definition, but it still raised questions about which beliefs are determinative of evangelicalism.

Enter National Association of Evangelicals President Leith Anderson. Responding to a LifeWay Research/ NAE research initiative I oversaw in 2015, Anderson concluded that evangelicals must be defined primarily by their beliefs rather than politics or race. In the hopes of crafting a consensus definition of core evangelical beliefs, we evaluated the statements of a diverse group of sociologists, theologians and evangelical leaders. In weighing the insights of these leaders, LifeWay Research developed a definition of evangelical belief around strong agreement with these four statements:

- The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe.



- It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.
- Jesus Christ’s death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin.
- Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God’s free gift of eternal salvation.

Mirroring historian David Bebbington’s classic four-point definition (conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism), research suggests that these beliefs form the interconnected statistical construct that points towards evangelicalism.

Under this rubric, about three in 10 Americans count as evangelical. Of all respondents, more than half *strongly agreed* that the Bible is their highest authority (52 percent) and that Jesus’ death is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of sin (58 percent). Almost as many *strongly agreed* that it is important for them to personally encourage non-Christians to trust Christ (49 percent) and that only those who trust solely in Jesus will receive eternal life (48 percent).

This belief-centered approach to research also aligns with the behavior and belonging approach. Those who strongly agree with all four are more likely to attend church frequently and identify themselves as evangelical.

In effective research, behavior and belonging provide important information on trends in broader culture, but measuring the constitutive beliefs of evangelicalism is vital in defining the movement.

Perhaps most important, this belief-centered approach includes evangelicals who are commonly missed by other studies. Although African American Christians have historically aligned with evangelical beliefs, they use the identifier language less frequently. Only 25 percent of African Americans who hold evangelical beliefs used the term, compared to 62 percent of whites and 79 percent of Hispanics. As for church affiliation, 23 percent of Catholics and 47 percent of Protestants hold evangelical beliefs.

As such, I believe a belief-centered approach offers a helpful pathway for researchers to more clearly identify the evangelicals and avoid the pitfalls of behavior and self-identification.

Most importantly, in a moment when “evangelical” is too often seen as “white evangelical” without connecting evangelicals with *a movement that is theological* misunderstands the nature of the movement. This, in turn, perpetuates an approach to identification that creates a picture of evangelicals that is white even as evangelicalism is now (and increasingly) diverse. **E**

Evangelical: What's in a Name?

Uncovering the History and Use
of the Word

The word “evangelical” seems to be in trouble — but for two different reasons. In the rough and tumble world of American politics, the label is now often used simply for the most active religious supporters of President Donald Trump. By contrast, in the rarified world of professional scholarship, academics now sometimes treat it as a term with so much ambiguity, fluidity and imprecision that it cannot meaningfully designate any single group of Christians.



Mark Noll is an emeritus professor of history from both Wheaton College and the University of Notre Dame. He is the author, among other books, of “Protestantism: A Very Short Introduction.”

For both of these contemporary opinions, there are some admittedly good reasons. Yet stepping back for a longer view historically and a wider view internationally opens up another possibility: Maybe the scholars are too fussy, and the pundits too shortsighted.

More Than Right Wing

In the media’s obsession with partisan politics, evangelicals are the white conservative voters who provide overwhelming support for the nationalistic populism of Donald Trump. A big recent book by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Frances Fitzgerald presents this narrative in carefully researched detail. The book, entitled “The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America,” devotes three-fourths of its over 600 pages to the white Christian Right, implying that this emphasis captures the essence of evangelicalism.

Yet if this identification makes considerable sense, its limitations are just as obvious. In a careful review of Fitzgerald’s book in *Christian Century*, Randall Balmer of Dartmouth College observes that in some past eras, evangelicals included as many social progressives as conservatives. Before the Civil War, the nation’s best-known evangelist, Charles Finney, and several of his converts like Theodore Dwight Weld, actively opposed slavery. After the Civil War, the firmly evangelical Frances Willard guided the Women’s Christian Temperance Union in its fight to protect women and children from abuses fueled by alcohol. Even in the recent past, international efforts for peace in the Middle East were led by Jimmy Carter, a Southern Baptist Sunday School teacher.

Observers like Balmer do not deny that evangelicals have often contributed substantially to conservative political causes, but they are certainly correct that throughout American history “evangelical” has always meant more than the right wing.

Beyond Bebbington

The conceptual challenge from scholars poses a more basic challenge than the simplistic equation of evangelicalism and right-wing politics. In 1989 the British historian David Bebbington provided a succinct definition in his book, “Evangelicalism in Modern Britain,” that has been widely referenced. That definition identifies evangelicalism as a form of Protestantism with four distinct emphases:

- conversion, or “the belief that lives need to be changed”;
- the Bible, or “the belief that all spiritual truth is to be found in its pages”;
- activism, or the dedication of all believers, especially the laity, to lives of service for God, especially in sharing the Christian message far and near; and
- crucicentrism, or the conviction that Christ’s death on the cross provided atonement for sin and reconciliation between sinful humanity and a holy God.

While many have employed this definition to good effect, others have pointed out difficulties. Most obvious in an American context are divisions created by race. Along with many white Protestant groups that have embraced these four characteristics, so have many African Americans. Yet the American reality of slavery, followed by culturally enforced segregation, means that whites and blacks who share these religious emphases share very little else, as Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith demonstrated in “Divided by Faith.” An evangelicalism that includes both blacks and whites might make sense in very narrow religious terms, but far less in the actual outworking of American history.

Yet for the terms “evangelical” and “evangelicalism,” ambiguity is not the only possibility ... They can still communicate reality and not just confusion.

A broader historical challenge has recently come from Linford Fisher of Brown University in the substantial article “Evangelicals and Unevangelicals,” published in *Religion and American Culture*, which argues that “evangelical” has often meant less, and sometimes more, than the Bebbington definition. From the time of the Reformation and for several centuries, the word usually meant simply “Protestant” or, almost as frequently, “anti-Catholic.” During the 18th century revivals associated with George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and the Wesleys, “awakened” believers in Britain and America did not use the word too frequently. When they did, it meant “true” or “real” religion as opposed to only formal religious adherence.

Linford then documents the way that after World War II, former fundamentalists embraced the word as they sought a less combative, more irenic term to describe their orthodox theology and their desire to re-engage with society. Organizations like the National Association of Evangelicals and the wide-ranging activities of Billy Graham popularized the word. In the process some Pentecostals, Lutherans,

Mennonites, Christian Reformed and others who had not been associated with the main body of America’s earlier “evangelical Protestants” were now glad to join in using it to describe themselves. At the same time, other Protestants who had thought of themselves as evangelicals began to avoid the word as designating something too close to fundamentalism.

Evangelicals Around the World

Those who raise their sights to the world at large add more complexity. All careful scholars now find more evangelicals, however defined, outside of Europe and North America than in these former evangelical homelands. A full recent survey by Mark Hutchinson and John Wolffe, “A Short History of Global Evangelicalism,” and a new reference volume edited by Brian Stiller, “Evangelicals Around the World,” both describe an increasingly diverse worldwide network. Yet it remains a network linked by common religious convictions. Together they indicate that the politics and preoccupations of the American media should not be allowed to dictate what “evangelical” means.

A recently published study by Australian scholar Geoff Treloar, “The Disruption of Evangelicalism,” brings to a conclusion a five-volume history of evangelicalism in the English-speaking world that I have been privileged to edit with David Bebbington. These five volumes, published by InterVarsity Press, carry a coherent story from the early 1700s through the 20th century. It is coherent, however, not because all of the many individuals and organizations identified as evangelicals stood shoulder to shoulder on all questions of Christian belief and practice.

Instead, the books find it an easy matter to document multiple connections descending historically from the Great Awakening and the Evangelical Revival of the 18th century. They also document a clear historical trajectory marked by serious commitment to the authority of Scripture, the saving work of Christ’s death and resurrection, the possibility of lives revived and redirected by the converting power of the Holy Spirit, and the necessity for all believers to put their private faith into public action.

To put it differently, the books hang together because they record the history of English-speaking Protestant Christians who have defined themselves by their attention to the same foundational questions that George Whitefield and John Wesley addressed in their day.

A Term for Today

This approach to a broad history over a long period of time turns out to be helpful for narrow American issues in the very recent past. Yet some are still thoroughly disillusioned and, though once recognized as evangelicals, now are giving up on the term.

But others say, “not so fast.” In an online article at Faith & Leadership, Molly Worthen of the University of North Carolina insists that “evangelical” remains a viable term when considered as a “shared conversation” about how to reconcile faith and reason, what true salvation means, and how private faith relates to modern secular life. In turn, Worthen concludes about the contemporary United States that “the religious right is really the product of a civil war within evangelicalism. It represents the political efforts of a fairly narrow slice out of the myriad evangelical traditions that have been active in American and Western history.”

Considered from this perspective, “evangelical” and “evangelicalism” do remain flexible terms. Yet when individuals or organizations define their use of the terms carefully, they are not so flexible as to become meaningless. The website of the National Association of Evangelicals is one of the best places to view such clarifying specificity. It positions the terms against the background of a shared history and fleshes them out in specific affirmations about the Bible, Christ’s saving work, Christian activity, and the converting power of the Holy Spirit. It shows that the NAE, together with the tradition it represents, is not a tool of political partisanship, but a set of believers with a definite Christian stance.

Our world of rapid change and media rush-to-judgment threatens to destabilize all matters that once seemed fixed and secure. Yet for the terms “evangelical” and “evangelicalism,” ambiguity is not the only possibility. When used with responsible attention to history and careful focus on generally accepted norms of the Bebbington definition, they can still communicate reality and not just confusion. **E**



Theology Behind *Euangelion*

Jesus' first words in Mark's Gospel announce the impending arrival of God's reign. "'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'" (Mark 1:15). Although it is easy to think Jesus was the first to speak about the good news (*euangelion* in Greek), the origins of the "gospel" go further back. If we look for antecedents of announcements about "good news" tied to the reign of a king, we find two paths that prefigure Jesus' proclamation.

The Jewish Path to Good News

The first is a Jewish path. Isaiah, hundreds of years before Jesus, announced the good news of God's reign for Israel in exile, with no immediate hope of restoration.

How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those who bring good news
who proclaim peace,
who bring good tidings,
who proclaim salvation,
who say to Zion,
"Your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52:7)

In the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, "good news" is conveyed by the Greek verb *euangelizō*, which is related to *euangelion*.

Isaiah has a *gospel*: It is the news of the reality of God's powerful return to Zion to restore Israel (40:1-11). Isaiah sums up this good news as "Here is your God!" and "Your God reigns!" (40:9, 52:7). Isaiah looks ahead to the establishment of God's kingdom in this world. As Jesus comes proclaiming the nearness of the kingdom as the "good news," Jewish people would have expected the arrival of the great transformation anticipated in the wake of God's kingdom.

Much like Isaiah's "Your God reigns," Jesus announces the kingdom of God. He also enacts God's reign in this



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world — “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

And the Gospel writers connect the arrival of the kingdom directly to Jesus’ authority and ministry: “If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Luke 11:20).

The Roman Path to Good News

The second path for understanding this “good news of the kingdom” (Matthew 4:23, 9:35) may seem a more unlikely one — it comes from first-century Rome.

An inscription that heralds the supposedly benevolent reign of Caesar Augustus (27 BC-AD 14) reads: “... the birthday of the god [Augustus] was the beginning of the good news that came through him to the world.” In our contemporary context of a separation of church and state, it can be easy to assign this claim for Caesar to the political realm and to identify Jesus’ kingdom announcement as spiritual. Yet no person in that era would have conceived of such a separation. Instead, this inscription claims that Augustus was ordained as supreme ruler. Later coins minted with the image of Tiberius (AD 14-37), Rome’s ruler during Jesus’ ministry, identify Tiberius as emperor (“Caesar”), “son of the divine Augustus,” and “high priest.”

The New Testament Good News

What can we take away from these Jewish and Roman precursors for the *euangelion*?

First, the connection between the “gospel” and the arrival of God’s kingdom is built into the Jewish

Scriptures. We can imagine that the Jewish people experiencing Jesus’ early preaching would have heard its echoes of Isaiah and understood Jesus to be announcing the promised and long-awaited in-breaking of God’s reign. Israel’s God was now coming to make all things right and to send the Messiah to rule (Zechariah 9:9-10).

Some hearers might well have been wondering if this one announcing the kingdom might be its Messiah-King. The New Testament writers confirm that this is the case. God’s reign breaks into this world definitively in Jesus. His mission of compassion and restoration culminates in his representative death. And God resurrects him, vindicating Jesus and his mission: “God has made this Jesus ... both Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:36). In this way, the New Testament story moves from Jesus preaching the kingdom *to the early church preaching Jesus as its reigning King* (Acts 17:7; Revelation 17:14) *and Lord* (Romans 1:4; Philippians 2:11).

Second, given the everyday and everywhere placement of Roman propaganda about Caesar as lord and king, those who heard Jesus and those who read and heard the apostolic testimony would have understood that announcing the reign of Israel’s God challenged Caesar’s universal lordship. Instead of thinking of Caesar as political ruler and Jesus as spiritual ruler, they reckoned with Jesus’ preaching of “the good news of the kingdom” as an all-encompassing claim of God’s truly benevolent reign in this world.

Christians are called to allegiance to God alone — all other loyalties must answer to that allegiance: “Above

all pursue [God’s] kingdom and righteousness” (Matthew 6:33 NET). Following Jesus, the true “Lord of all,” involves unswerving loyalty (Acts 10:36).

The Good News for Today

Finally, our part is to “live the gospel” — to live in light of the reality of Christ as King and Lord. When we look at the world today — from natural disasters to human violence toward one another, to hunger and starvation — it may seem difficult to speak with conviction, “Jesus is Lord.”

Yet that is precisely the faith stance the New Testament leads us to confess (Romans 10:9). And if Jesus, the one who brought justice and mercy in his ministry (Matthew 12:18-21), is reigning and working to bring justice even in the center of such present ambiguities, we know that all things will be brought under his gracious and benevolent reign in the end (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). And this, truly, is good news!

The truth of the “gospel” is the announcement of the kingdom of God — now firmly planted in this world in Jesus’ reign (Matthew 28:18). We are called to pass this good news along — to proclaim and teach it (Matthew 29:19). We are called to pray, “May your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10 NET). And we are called to live in light of kingdom values. Those who follow Jesus are to live out the final day reality in the present by being people of mercy, integrity, peace and justice (Matthew 5:7-10). **E**



NAE's Beginning

Seeking a Thoughtful Middle Way

With the arrival of the 20th century, evangelicals found themselves at a crossroads. They were losing conservative influence in the mainline denominations, and a reactionary fundamentalist movement was booming. In response, a thriving evangelical subculture began to form. Evangelicals sought a thoughtful middle way and channeled their energies into building institutions independent of established mainline denominations, including churches, denominations, mission agencies, Bible institutes, conference grounds and publishing houses.

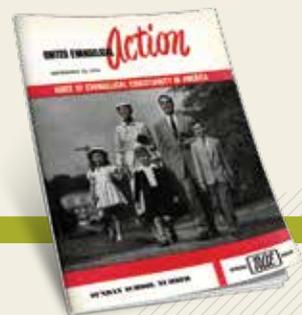
They focused on evangelism and found the radio to be an effective medium for broadcasting their message. Lacking a central organizing body, the community centered around engaging personalities and independent institutions. The downside to this emerging popular movement was that many radio preachers, Christian college presidents and pulpiters spoke and acted independently. At times they acted like rivals, weakening meaningful Christian witness. This was particularly disheartening to J. Elwin Wright of the New England Fellowship. Wright's New England Fellowship operated a summer conference to inspire and bring together evangelicals of all stripes throughout New England. The fellowship struck a chord in a location that many considered lost to the evangelical cause. By the end of the 1930s, the idea of duplicating the fellowship on a national scale emerged, and Wright crisscrossed the continent promoting the idea.

APRIL 1942

Evangelical leaders across the United States met in St. Louis to draft a constitution and statement of faith for an evangelical association

AUGUST 1942

The group publishes its first issue of the magazine, United Evangelical Action



LATE 1930s

J. Elwin Wright of the New England Fellowship travels across the country to promote a national fellowship of evangelicals



MAY 1943

More than 1,000 participants representing nearly 50 denominations gather in Chicago to officially create the National Association of Evangelicals and appoint Harold Ockenga as president

At the same time, Ralph Davis of Africa Inland Mission sensed the need for greater cooperation in missions and for representation before civil authorities. With these ideas brewing, Will Houghton, president of Moody Bible Institute, called for an exploratory meeting in October 1941 in Chicago. At that meeting, a temporary committee for United Action Among Evangelicals was created, Wright was named chairman, and a national conference was slated for April 1942 in St. Louis.

Harold Ockenga of Park Street Church in Boston gave his “The Unvoiced Multitudes” speech at the 1942 St. Louis meeting lamenting that the cause of evangelical Christianity in America had been reduced to individuals and individual congregations. He challenged those single voices to put aside differences for the sake of a more consolidated witness for Christ.

The 1942 conference drafted a constitution and statement of faith and called for a constitutional convention a year later. The group committed to a positive testimony to the gospel and determined “to organize an Association which shall give articulation and united voice to our faith and purpose in Christ Jesus.”

In May 1943, more than 1,000 participants gathered in Chicago and represented, by some estimates, nearly 50 denominations with a constituency of 15 million Christians. After amending the proposed constitution and doctrinal statement, they adopted the documents, named the organization the National Association of Evangelicals and appointed Harold Ockenga president. (In addition to the NAE, Ockenga helped found Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Fuller Theological Seminary and Christianity Today.)

In 1943 an NAE office opened in Washington, D.C., to help on a number of fronts, such as supporting evangelical chaplains, assisting mission agencies in dealings with the State Department, championing the cause of religious broadcasting, and defending religious liberty. Continued concern over radio prompted the NAE to form the National Religious Broadcasters at its 1944 convention.

Also in 1944 the NAE created the Chaplains Commission to assist evangelical chaplains in the military, and the War Relief Commission, which would eventually become a subsidiary known as World Relief, NAE’s humanitarian arm. The following year, the NAE created the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association (now Missio Nexus), chartered to handle the special needs of missionaries and their agencies.

A central accomplishment of the NAE was its ability to pull together a new, broader coalition of theologically conservative Protestants. While the fundamentalist movement that preceded the NAE was largely the domain of Baptists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians, the NAE also embraced Pentecostal, Holiness and Anabaptist traditions.

Much has changed in the 75 years since the NAE first gathered. Yet the central commitments at the NAE remain. The NAE Statement of Faith, the gold standard of evangelical belief, remains unchanged from its adoption in 1943. The NAE’s commitment to a positive testimony to the gospel filters into all of the association’s work. And the NAE community remains a large, diverse body of Christ followers gathered to give a “united voice to our faith and purpose in Christ Jesus.” 

1944

The NAE forms World Relief, the Chaplains Commission and the National Religious Broadcasters



1957

The NAE forms a committee to explore the possibility of a new translation of the Bible, resulting in the New International Version

1945

The NAE establishes regional offices in Detroit, Minneapolis, Portland and Los Angeles, in addition to its Washington, D.C., office

1950

President Dwight Eisenhower is the first president of many to welcome an NAE delegation to the White House





Apostle's Table
at University of
Northwestern

“He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, from within him will flow rivers of living water.” John 7:38

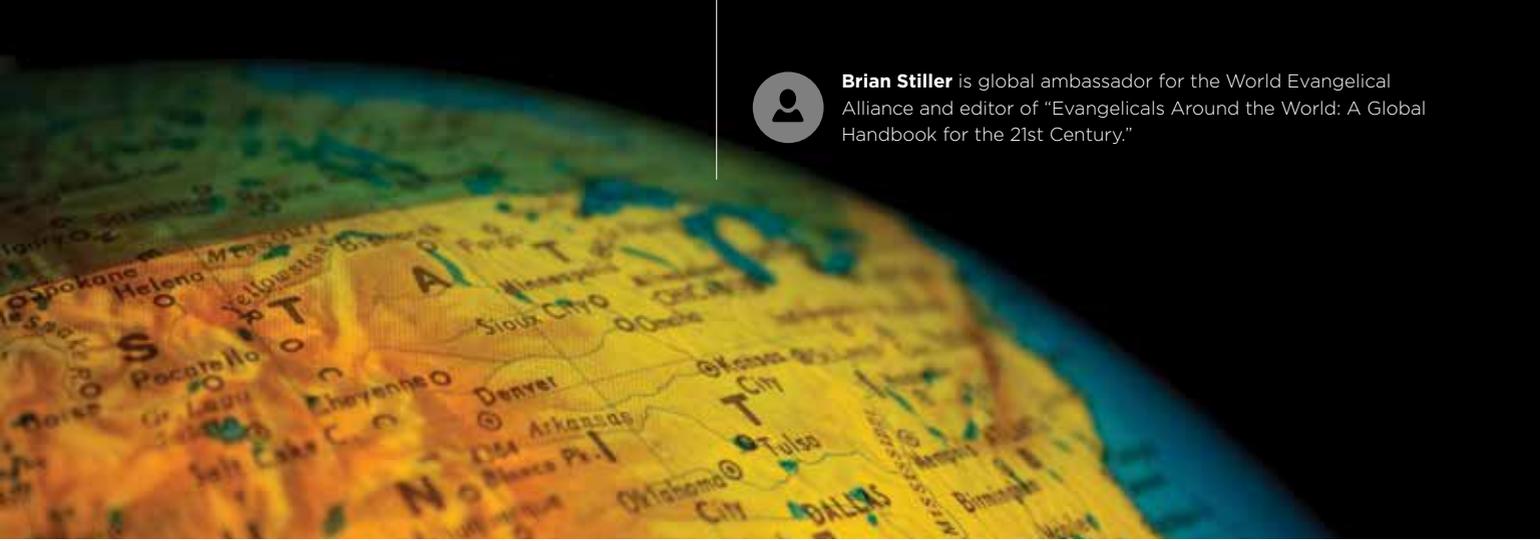
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Not Just About U.S.

Evangelicals Around the World

The evangel or “good news” is New Testament language for the gospel Jesus came to announce. Today “evangelical” has come to mean Protestants who hold four essential beliefs informing their faith: personal conversion, active witness and service, faith nurtured by the Bible, and conviction that salvation comes only by Jesus’ death and resurrection.

The term was popularized by Martin Luther and his German evangelischel congregations. William Wilberforce, who pressed the British Commonwealth to outlaw slave trading, brought the term and its usage into the public forum at the turn of the 1800s as a social force for good. In time the word became synonymous with Protestants who pressed society to consider human value within a biblical framework. But it was in the 20th century that its usage took full stride in Europe and North America.

The Protestant community at the turn of the 20th century experienced a growing divide: Some scholars and seminaries driven by a more rationalistic view of the Bible, divided its liberal and conservative wings. Those espousing a more liberal interpretation of the Bible questioned — among other matters — the uniqueness of Jesus. Conservatives came to be known as fundamentalists, insisting on the fundamentals of the Christian faith. In time, the term “evangelical” stuck and fundamentalism became more a word of derision.

While actual estimates vary, globally there are some 600 million evangelicals with remarkable growth especially in the Global South (Africa, Latin America and Asia). In 1900, there were 50,000 in Latin America; today some 100 million are evangelical. Patrick Johnstone, author of the first six editions of “Operation World,” estimates that within the past 50 years evangelicals have grown faster than any religious community in world history.

Secular assumptions were that as people became more learned and sophisticated, religion would tank. The global growth of evangelism shows how wrong they were. People of all countries, ethnicities and languages are finding hope and life in this good news that he is risen. **E**

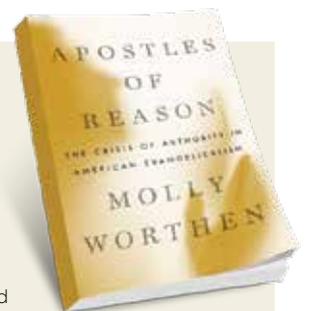


Evangelicalism's Crisis of Authority

Reconciling Head Knowledge and Heart Religion

Secular intellectuals have not been kind to the evangelical mind. They are inclined to see evangelicals as a menace to progress and free thought. Yet their scorn cannot ease a vexing fact: American evangelicals, so maligned as anti-intellectuals, have a habit of taking certain ideas very seriously. True conversion is, of course, a matter of the heart. One cannot cogitate all the way to Jesus. However, if your heart is right with Christ, your head must be in order too. Evangelicals have always understood the sins of modern life as both the misadventures of the unsaved souls and as the fruit of the intellectual error, even as they have disagreed on both the best path to salvation and enlightenment.

Evangelicalism is a far more thoughtful and diverse world than most critics — and even most evangelicals themselves — usually realize. Yet it does host a potent strain of anti-intellectualism, a pattern of hostility and ambivalence towards the standards of tolerance, logic and evidence by which most secular thinkers in the West have agreed to abide. Contrary to the insinuations of many who have chronicled the fortunes of American evangelicals, this anti-intellectualism is not, primarily, due to “a potent and disturbing set of authoritarian tendencies” in conservative evangelical culture (Bible-Carrying Christians: Conservative Protestants and Social Power, 2002). There is no denying that the Bible has tremendous power among evangelicals, or that pastors, activists,



In *Apostles of Reason*, Molly Worthen recasts American evangelicalism as a movement defined by the problem of reconciling head knowledge and heart religion in an increasingly secular America. This excerpt from *Apostles of Reason* © 2013 by Molly Worthen has been edited for purposes of *Evangelicals* magazine and is used by permission of Oxford University Press. Order at Global.OUP.com/academic.

and other leaders wield influence over their flocks. However, evangelicals are less like Jesus and more like Jacob. They constantly wrestle with the forces that rule them.

The central source of anti-intellectualism in evangelical life is the antithesis of “authoritarianism.” It is evangelicals’ ongoing crisis of authority — their struggle to reconcile reason with revelation, heart with head, and private piety with the public square — that best explains their anxiety and their animosity toward intellectual life. Thinkers in the democratic West celebrate their freedom of thought but practice a certain kind of unwavering obedience — bowing to the Enlightenment before all other gods — that allows modern intellectual life to function. Evangelicals, by contrast, are torn between sovereign powers that each claim supremacy.

To some degree, this is a universal human problem. All of us, at one time or another, find ourselves tormented by rival pressures and drawn towards incompatible goods. Evangelicals’ theological heritage, however, has aggravated this plight. Their intellectual history is peppered with compromises, sleights of hand, and defensive maneuvers, a combination of pragmatism and idealism that has made evangelicalism one of the most dynamic and powerful phenomena in Christian history, as well as a minefield for independent thought.

This story’s most recent chapter began with the assembly of a small group of evangelical thinkers in the years after World War II. These men sought to banish the stereotype of evangelicals as unschooled rubes and to mold disparate believers into a single evangelical mind. Any consensus they achieved was imaginary, but sometimes fiction is nearly as powerful as truth. Their ideas spurred other thinkers across a spectrum of theological traditions to reconsider the essence of what it meant to be “evangelical” in modern America. Even if no single set of doctrines can neatly summarize evangelicalism, its leaders found themselves circling around a common set of questions that had preoccupied their communities for hundreds of years. They grappled with these dilemmas not in secluded cells cordoned off by creed, but in the same whirl of social change and global upheaval through which all Americans trekked toward the end of the 20th century. Like everyone else, they were looking for firm footing. They craved an intellectual authority that would quiet disagreement and dictate a plan for fixing everything that seemed broken with the world. They did not find it, and are still looking.

Few of the actors in these pages thought of themselves

as political activists (though a small number did). We cannot comprehend conservative Protestants, or their place in American culture, solely in terms of “values voting.” We have to take seriously the intellectual traditions — both those peculiar to Christian circles, and those circulating in the broader bazaar

This story’s most recent chapter began with the assembly of a small group of evangelical thinkers in the years after World War II. These men sought to banish the stereotype of evangelicals as unschooled rubes and to mold disparate believers into a single evangelical mind.

of ideas — that have influenced the way evangelicals think about the world. American evangelicals are not just followers of an ancient faith. In recent decades, they have proved themselves to be both the challengers and children of the Cold War age of ideology and the fight to save — or scrap — Western civilization.

These conservative Protestant thinkers and actors are, in part, the creatures of historical circumstances unique to 20th-century America, but they did not first appear crawling out from the primordial muck of the Scopes trial. Their story is part of the American political chronicle and the “culture wars” — but it is inseparable from the larger narrative of Western intellectual history. Their driving questions are the questions that defined the postmedieval age. Evangelicals were, in this sense, among the first moderns. In their attempts to subjugate reason to the rule of faith and personal experience, in some ways they anticipated postmodernity too. ❸



Evangelical ≠ Political

“Are you ready to abandon the term evangelical?” has become the most frequent question I’m asked as president of the National Association of Evangelicals. And, almost always, the question comes from fellow evangelicals and not from the mainstream press or non-evangelicals.

When I ask why “evangelical” should be abandoned, the answer is almost always about politics. They tell me that our name has been co-opted by politicians and policies that are polarizing and painful. They say they are being identified with policies contrary to the Bible and blamed for practices they don’t approve. They contend that self-described evangelicals claim to speak for them but don’t speak for them. Most of all, they lament that every news story with politics and “evangelical” in the same sentence is a barrier to evangelism and ministry.

Names and labels aren’t easily changed. Many of us refer to Scotch Tape and Post-it Notes even when the sticky items on our desks are not the actual 3-M products. “Evangelical” comes from the New Testament *euangelion* (“good news”). Evangelicalism is a worldwide movement including as many as 30 percent of the people in the United States and hundreds of millions more around the world. Most international evangelicals today and throughout history have little or no

Most simply, ... we are people of faith who take the Bible seriously and believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

knowledge of the details of American politics, Republicans, Democrats, Congress, courts or the White House. Most simply, they and we are people of faith who take the Bible seriously and believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

This is not to say that evangelicals should avoid the public square. Because we take the Bible seriously, we must seek social justice, advance religious freedom, advocate for the poor and protect the persecuted. Just let’s not conflate evangelical identity with political identity.

So, what are we supposed to do? Take a page from the early church when Nero disparaged, persecuted and martyred “Christians.” In the turmoil of first century Roman politics, Christians were called traitors. They were blamed for burning Rome by the emperor who probably set the fires himself. Did they abandon the name Christian? Some probably did. Labels aren’t always helpful and change with circumstances. St. Peter gave the best advice in the worst of times: “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Peter 2:12). 



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