

# **AN EVANGELICAL MANIFESTO**

## **A Declaration of Evangelical Identity and Public Commitment**

**May 7, 2008; Washington, D.C.**

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Keenly aware of the hour of history in which we live, and of the momentous challenges that face our fellow humans on the earth and our fellow Christians around the world, we who sign this declaration do so as American leaders and members of one of the world's largest and fastest growing movements of the Christian faith: the Evangelicals.<sup>1</sup>

Evangelicals have no supreme leader or official spokesperson, so no one speaks for all Evangelicals, least of all those who claim to. We speak for ourselves, but as a representative group of Evangelicals in America. We gratefully appreciate that our spiritual and historical roots lie outside this country, that the great majority of our fellow-Evangelicals are in the Global South rather than the North, and that we have recently had a fresh infusion of Evangelicals from Latin America, Africa, and Asia. We are therefore a small part of a far greater worldwide movement that is both forward looking and outward reaching. Together with them, we are committed to being true to our faith and thoughtful about our calling in today's world.

The two-fold purpose of this declaration is first to address the confusions and corruptions that attend the term *Evangelical* in the United States and much of the Western world today, and second to clarify where we stand on issues that have caused consternation over Evangelicals in public life.

As followers of "the narrow way," our concern is not for approval and popular esteem. Nor do we regard it as accurate or faithful to pose as victims, or to protest at discrimination. We certainly do not face persecution like our fellow-believers elsewhere in the world. Too many of the problems we face as Evangelicals in the United States are those of our own making. If we protest, our protest has to begin with ourselves.

Rather, we are troubled by the fact that the confusions and corruptions surrounding the term *Evangelical* have grown so deep that the character of what it means has been obscured and its importance lost. Many people outside the movement now doubt

that *Evangelical* is ever positive, and many inside now wonder whether the term any longer serves a useful purpose.

In contrast to such doubts, we boldly declare that, if we make clear what we mean by the term, we are unashamed to be Evangelical and Evangelicals. We believe that the term is important because the truth it conveys is all-important. A proper understanding of *Evangelical* and the Evangelicals has its own contribution to make, not only to the church but to the wider world; and especially to the plight of many who are poor, vulnerable, or without a voice in their communities.

### **Here we stand, and why it matters**

This manifesto is a public declaration, addressed both to our fellow-believers and to the wider world. To affirm who we are and where we stand in public is important because we Evangelicals in America, along with people of all faiths and ideologies, represent one of the greatest challenges of the global era: living with our deepest differences. This challenge is especially sharp when religious and ideological differences are ultimate and irreducible, and when the differences are not just between personal worldviews but between entire ways of life co-existing in the same society.

The place of religion in human life is deeply consequential. Nothing is more natural and necessary than the human search for meaning and belonging, for making sense of the world and finding security in life. When this search is accompanied by the right of freedom of conscience, it issues in a freely chosen diversity of faiths and ways of life, some religious and transcendent, and some secular and naturalistic.

Nevertheless, the different faiths and the different families of faith provide very different answers to life, and these differences are decisive not only for individuals but for societies and entire civilizations. Learning to live with our deepest differences is therefore of great consequence both for individuals and nations. Debate, deliberation, and decisions about what this means for our common life are crucial and unavoidable. The alternative — the coercions of tyranny or the terrible convulsions of Nietzsche's "wars of spirit" — would be unthinkable.

We ourselves are those who have come to believe that Jesus of Nazareth is "the way, the truth, and the life," and that the great change required of those who follow him

entails a radically new view of human life and a decisively different way of living, thinking, and acting.

Our purpose here is to make a clear statement to our fellow-citizens and our fellow-believers alike, whether they see themselves as our friends, bystanders, skeptics, or enemies. We wish to state what we mean by *Evangelical*, and what being Evangelicals means for our life alongside our fellow citizens in public life and our fellow humans on the earth today. We see three major mandates for Evangelicals.

### **1. We Must Reaffirm Our Identity**

Our first task is to reaffirm who we are. *Evangelicals are Christians who define themselves, their faith, and their lives according to the Good News of Jesus of Nazareth.* (*Evangelical* comes from the Greek word for *good news*, or *gospel*.) Believing that the Gospel of Jesus is God’s good news for the whole world, we affirm with the Apostle Paul that we are “not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation.” Contrary to widespread misunderstanding today, we Evangelicals should be defined theologically, and not politically, socially, or culturally.

Behind this affirmation is the awareness that identity is powerful and precious to groups as well as to individuals. Identity is central to a classical liberal understanding of freedom. There are grave dangers in identity politics, but we insist that we ourselves, and not scholars, the press, or public opinion, have the right to say who we understand ourselves to be. We are who we say we are, and we resist all attempts to explain us in terms of our “true” motives and our “real” agenda.

Defined and understood in this way, Evangelicals form one of the great traditions that have developed within the Christian Church over the centuries. We fully appreciate the defining principles of other major traditions, and we stand and work with them on many ethical and social issues of common concern. Like them, we are whole-heartedly committed to the priority of “right belief and right worship,” to the “universality” of the Christian church across the centuries, continents, and cultures, and therefore to the central axioms of Christian faith expressed in the Trinitarian and Christological consensus of the early church. Yet we hold to Evangelical beliefs that are distinct from the other traditions in important ways — distinctions that we affirm because we see them as biblical truths

that were recovered by the Protestant Reformation, sustained in many subsequent movements of revival and renewal, and vital for a sure and saving knowledge of God — in short, beliefs that are true to the Good News of Jesus.

Evangelicals are therefore followers of Jesus Christ, plain ordinary Christians in the classic and historic sense over the last two thousand years. Evangelicals are committed to thinking, acting, and living as Jesus lived and taught, and so to embody this truth and his Good News for the world that we may be recognizably his disciples. The heart of the matter for us as Evangelicals is our desire and commitment, in the words of Richard of Chichester and as Scripture teaches, to “see him more clearly, to love him more dearly, and to follow him more nearly.”

We do not claim that the Evangelical principle — to define our faith and our life by the Good News of Jesus — is unique to us. Our purpose is not to attack or to exclude but to remind and to reaffirm, and so to rally and to reform. For us it is the defining imperative and supreme goal of all who would follow the way of Jesus.

Equally, we do not typically lead with the name *Evangelical* in public. We are simply Christians, or followers of Jesus, or adherents of “mere Christianity,” but the Evangelical principle is at the heart of how we see and live our faith.

This is easy to say but challenging to live by. To be Evangelical, and to define our faith and our lives by the Good News of Jesus as taught in Scripture, is to submit our lives entirely to the lordship of Jesus and to the truths and the way of life that he requires of his followers, in order that they might become like him, live the way he taught, and believe as he believed. As Evangelicals have pursued this vision over the centuries, they have prized above all certain beliefs that we consider to be at the heart of the message of Jesus and therefore foundational for us — the following seven above all:

First, we believe that Jesus Christ is fully God become fully human, the unique, sure, and sufficient revelation of the very being, character, and purposes of God, beside whom there is no other god, and beside whom there is no other name by which we must be saved.

Second, we believe that the only ground for our acceptance by God is what Jesus Christ did on the cross and what he is now doing through his risen life, whereby he exposed and reversed the course of human sin and violence, bore the penalty for our sins,

credited us with his righteousness, redeemed us from the power of evil, reconciled us to God, and empowers us with his life “from above.” We therefore bring nothing to our salvation. Credited with the righteousness of Christ, we receive his redemption solely by grace through faith.

Third, we believe that new life, given supernaturally through spiritual regeneration, is a necessity as well as a gift; and that the lifelong conversion that results is the only pathway to a radically changed character and way of life. Thus for us, the only sufficient power for a life of Christian faithfulness and moral integrity in this world is that of Christ’s resurrection and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, we believe that Jesus’ own teaching and his attitude toward the total truthfulness and supreme authority of the Bible, God’s inspired Word, make the Scriptures our final rule for faith and practice.

Fifth, we believe that being disciples of Jesus means serving him as Lord in every sphere of our lives, secular as well as spiritual, public as well as private, in deeds as well as words, and in every moment of our days on earth, always reaching out as he did to those who are lost as well as to the poor, the sick, the hungry, the oppressed, the socially despised, and being faithful stewards of creation and our fellow-creatures.

Sixth, we believe that the blessed hope of the personal return of Jesus provides both strength and substance to what we are doing, just as what we are doing becomes a sign of the hope of where we are going; both together leading to a consummation of history and the fulfillment of an undying kingdom that comes only by the power of God.

Seventh, we believe all followers of Christ are called to know and love Christ through worship, love Christ’s family through fellowship, grow like Christ through discipleship, serve Christ by ministering to the needs of others in his name, and share Christ with those who do not yet know him, inviting people to the ends of the earth and to the end of time to join us as his disciples and followers of his way.

At the same time, we readily acknowledge that we repeatedly fail to live up to our high calling, and all too often illustrate the truth of our own doctrine of sin. We Evangelicals share the same “crooked timber” of our humanity, and the full catalogue of our sins, failures, and hypocrisies. This is no secret either to God or to those who know and watch us.

## **Defining features**

Certain implications follow from this way of defining Evangelicalism:

*First, to be Evangelical is to hold a belief that is also a devotion.* Evangelicals adhere fully to the Christian faith expressed in the historic creeds of the great ecumenical councils of the church, and in the great affirmations of the Protestant Reformation, and seek to be loyal to this faith passed down from generation to generation. But at its core, being Evangelical is always more than a creedal statement, an institutional affiliation, or a matter of membership in a movement. We have no supreme leader, and neither creeds nor tradition are ultimately decisive for us. Jesus Christ and his written word, the Holy Scriptures, are our supreme authority; and whole-hearted devotion, trust, and obedience are our proper response.

*Second, Evangelical belief and devotion is expressed as much in our worship and in our deeds as in our creeds.* As the universal popularity of such hymns and songs as “Amazing Grace” attests, our great hymn writers stand alongside our great theologians, and often our commitment can be seen better in our giving and our caring than in official statements. What we are about is captured not only in books or declarations, but in our care for the poor, the homeless, and the orphaned; our outreach to those in prison; our compassion for the hungry and the victims of disaster; and our fight for justice for those oppressed by such evils as slavery and human trafficking.

*Third, Evangelicals are followers of Jesus in a way that is not limited to certain churches or contained by a definable movement.* We are members of many different churches and denominations, mainline as well as independent, and our Evangelical commitment provides a core of unity that holds together a wide range of diversity. This is highly significant for any movement in the network society of the information age, but Evangelicalism has always been diverse, flexible, adaptable, non-hierarchical, and taken many forms. This is true today more than ever, as witnessed by the variety and vibrancy of Evangelicals around the world. For to be Evangelical is first and foremost a way of being devoted to Jesus Christ, seeking to live in different ages and different cultures as he calls his followers to live.

*Fourth, as stressed above, Evangelicalism must be defined theologically and not politically; confessionally and not culturally.* Above all else, it is a commitment and devotion to the person and work of Jesus Christ, his teaching and way of life, and an enduring dedication to his lordship above all other earthly powers, allegiances and loyalties. As such, it should not be limited to tribal or national boundaries, or be confused with, or reduced to political categories such as “conservative” and “liberal,” or to psychological categories such as “reactionary” or “progressive.”

*Fifth, the Evangelical message, “good news” by definition, is overwhelmingly positive, and always positive before it is negative.* There is an enormous theological and cultural importance to “the power of No,” especially in a day when “Everything is permitted” and “It is forbidden to forbid.” Just as Jesus did, Evangelicals sometimes have to make strong judgments about what is false, unjust, and evil. But first and foremost we Evangelicals are *for* Someone and *for* something rather than against anyone or anything. The Gospel of Jesus is the Good News of welcome, forgiveness, grace, and liberation from law and legalism. It is a colossal Yes to life and human aspirations, and an emphatic No only to what contradicts our true destiny as human beings made in the image of God.

*Sixth, Evangelicalism should be distinguished from two opposite tendencies to which Protestantism has been prone: liberal revisionism and conservative fundamentalism.* Called by Jesus to be “in the world, but not of it,” Christians, especially in modern society, have been pulled toward two extremes. Those more liberal have tended so to accommodate the world that they reflect the thinking and lifestyles of the day, to the point where they are unfaithful to Christ; whereas those more conservative have tended so to defy the world that they resist it in ways that also become unfaithful to Christ.

The liberal revisionist tendency was first seen in the eighteenth century and has become more pronounced today, reaching a climax in versions of the Christian faith that are characterized by such weaknesses as an exaggerated estimate of human capacities, a shallow view of evil, an inadequate view of truth, and a deficient view of God. In the end, they are sometimes no longer recognizably Christian. As this sorry capitulation occurs, such “alternative gospels” represent a series of severe losses that eventually seal their demise:



First, a loss of authority, as *sola Scriptura* (“by Scripture alone”) is replaced by *sola cultura* (“by culture alone”);

Second, a loss of community and continuity, as “the faith once delivered” becomes the faith of merely one people and one time, and cuts itself off from believers across the world and down the generations;

Third, a loss of stability, as in Dean Inge’s apt phrase, the person “who marries the spirit of the age soon becomes a widower;”

Fourth, a loss of credibility, as “the new kind of faith” turns out to be what the skeptic believes already, and there is no longer anything solidly, decisively Christian for seekers to examine and believe;

Fifth, a loss of identity, as the revised version of the faith loses more and more resemblance to the historic Christian faith that is true to Jesus.

In short, for all their purported sincerity and attempts to be relevant, extreme proponents of liberal revisionism run the risk of becoming what Søren Kierkegaard called “kissing Judases” – Christians who betray Jesus with an interpretation.

The fundamentalist tendency is more recent, and even closer to Evangelicalism, so much so that in the eyes of many, the two overlap. We celebrate those in the past for their worthy desire to be true to the fundamentals of faith, but Fundamentalism has become an overlay on the Christian faith and developed into an essentially modern reaction to the modern world. As a reaction to the modern world, it tends to romanticize the past, some now-lost moment in time, and to radicalize the present, with styles of reaction that are personally and publicly militant to the point where they are sub-Christian.

Christian Fundamentalism has its counterparts in many religions and even in secularism, and often becomes a social movement with a Christian identity but severely diminished Christian content and manner. Fundamentalism, for example, all too easily parts company with the Evangelical principle, as can Evangelicals themselves, when they fail to follow the great commandment that we love our neighbors as ourselves, let alone the radical demand of Jesus that his followers forgive without limit and love even their enemies.

*Seventh, Evangelicalism is distinctive for the way it looks equally to both the past and the future.* In its very essence, Evangelicalism goes back directly to Jesus and the Scriptures, not just as a matter of historical roots, but as a commitment of the heart and as the tenor of its desire and thought; and not just once, but again and again as the vital principle of its way of life. To be Evangelical is therefore not only to be deeply personal in faith, strongly committed to ethical holiness in life, and marked by robust voluntarism in action, but to live out a faith whose dynamism is shaped unashamedly by truth and history.

Yet far from being unquestioning conservatives and unreserved supporters of tradition and the status quo, being Evangelical means an ongoing commitment to Jesus Christ, and this entails innovation, renewal, reformation, and entrepreneurial dynamism, for everything in every age is subject to assessment in the light of Jesus and his Word. The Evangelical principle is therefore a call to self-examination, reflection, and a willingness to be corrected and to change whenever necessary. At the same time, far from being advocates of today's nihilistic "change for change's sake," to be Evangelical is to recognize the primacy of the authority of Scripture, which points us to Jesus, and so to see the need to conserve a form behind all re-form.

We therefore regard reason and faith as allies rather than enemies, and find no contradiction between head and heart, between being fully faithful on the one hand, and fully intellectually critical and contemporary on the other. Thus Evangelicals part company with reactionaries by being both reforming and innovative, but they also part company with modern progressives by challenging the ideal of the-newer-the-truer and the-latest-is-greatest and by conserving what is true and right and good. For Evangelicals, it is paradoxical though true that the surest way forward is always first to go back, a "turning back" that is the secret of all true revivals and reformations.

In sum, to be Evangelical is earlier and more enduring than to be Protestant. Seeking to be Evangelical was the heart of the Protestant Reformation, and what gives the Reformation its Christian validity for us is its recovery of biblical truth. In some countries *Evangelical* is still synonymous with *Protestant*. Yet it is clear that the term *Evangelical*, and the desire to be biblical, both predate and outlast the Protestant project in its historical form, for the word *protest* has increasingly lost its original positive

meaning of “witnessing on behalf of” (*pro-testantes*), and the term *Protestant* is more and more limited to a historical period. Other labels come and go, but the Evangelical principle that seeks to be faithful to the Good News of Jesus and to the Scriptures will always endure.

## **2. We Must Reform Our Own Behavior**

Our second major concern is the reformation of our behavior. We affirm that to be Evangelical or to carry the name *Evangelicals* is not only to shape our faith and our lives according to the teaching and standards of the Way of Jesus, but to need to do so again and again. But if the Evangelical impulse is a radical, reforming, and innovative force, we acknowledge with sorrow a momentous irony today. We who time and again have stood for the renewal of tired forms, for the revival of dead churches, for the warming of cold hearts, for the reformation of corrupt practices and heretical beliefs, and for the reform of gross injustices in society, are ourselves in dire need of reformation and renewal today. Reformers, we ourselves need to be reformed. Protestants, we are the ones against whom protest must be made.

We confess that we Evangelicals have betrayed our beliefs by our behavior.

All too often we have trumpeted the gospel of Jesus, but we have replaced biblical truths with therapeutic techniques, worship with entertainment, discipleship with growth in human potential, church growth with business entrepreneurialism, concern for the church and for the local congregation with expressions of the faith that are churchless and little better than a vapid spirituality, meeting real needs with pandering to felt needs, and mission principles with marketing precepts. In the process we have become known for commercial, diluted, and feel-good gospels of health, wealth, human potential, and religious happy talk, each of which is indistinguishable from the passing fashions of the surrounding world.

All too often we have set out high, clear statements of the authority of the Bible, but flouted them with lives and lifestyles that are shaped more by our own sinful preferences and by modern fashions and convenience.

All too often we have prided ourselves on our orthodoxy, but grown our churches through methods and techniques as worldly as the worldliest of Christian adaptations to passing expressions of the spirit of the age.

All too often we have failed to demonstrate the unity and harmony of the body of Christ, and fallen into factions defined by the accidents of history and sharpened by truth without love, rather than express the truth and grace of the Gospel.

All too often we have traced our roots to powerful movements of spiritual revival and reformation, but we ourselves are often atheists unawares, secularists in practice who live in a world without windows to the supernatural, and often carry on our Christian lives in a manner that has little operational need for God.

All too often we have attacked the evils and injustices of others, such as the killing of the unborn, as well as the heresies and apostasies of theological liberals whose views have developed into “another gospel,” while we have condoned our own sins, turned a blind eye to our own vices, and lived captive to forces such as materialism and consumerism in ways that contradict our faith.

All too often we have concentrated on great truths of the Bible, such as the cross of Jesus, but have failed to apply them to other biblical truths, such as creation. In the process we have impoverished ourselves, and supported a culture broadly careless about the stewardship of the earth and negligent of the arts and the creative centers of society.

All too often we have been seduced by the shaping power of the modern world, exchanging a costly grace for convenience, switching from genuine community to an embrace of individualism, softening theological authority down to personal preference, and giving up a clear grasp of truth and an exclusive allegiance to Jesus for a mess of mix-and-match attitudes that are syncretism by another name.

All too often we have disobeyed the great command to love the Lord our God with our hearts, souls, strength, and minds, and have fallen into an unbecoming anti-intellectualism that is a dire cultural handicap as well as a sin. In particular, some among us have betrayed the strong Christian tradition of a high view of science, epitomized in the very matrix of ideas that gave birth to modern science, and made themselves vulnerable to caricatures of the false hostility between science and faith. By doing so, we

have unwittingly given comfort to the unbridled scientism and naturalism that are so rampant in our culture today.

All too often we have gloried in the racial and ethnic diversity of the church around the world, but remained content to be enclaves of separateness here at home.

All too often we have abandoned our Lord's concern for those in the shadows, the twilight, and the deep darkness of the world, and become cheerleaders for those in power and the naïve sycophants of the powerful and the rich.

All too often we have tried to be relevant, but instead of creating "new wineskins for the new wine," we have succumbed to the passing fashions of the moment and made noisy attacks on yesterday's errors, such as modernism, while capitulating tamely to today's, such as postmodernism.

We call humbly but clearly for a restoration of the Evangelical reforming principle, and therefore for deep reformation and renewal in all our Christian ways of life and thought.

We urge our fellow-Evangelicals to go beyond lip-service to Jesus and the Bible and restore these authorities to their supreme place in our thought and practice.

We call our communities to a discerning critique of the world and of our generation, so that we resist not only their obviously alien power but the subtle and seductive shaping of the more brilliant insights and techniques of modernity, remembering always that we are "against the world, for the world."

We call all who follow Jesus to keep his commandment and love one another, to be true to our unity in him that underlies all lesser differences, and to practice first the reconciliation in the church that is so needed in the wider world. In a society divided by identity and gender politics, Christians must witness by their lives to the way their identity in Jesus transcends all such differences.

We call for an expansion of our concern beyond single-issue politics, such as abortion and marriage, and a fuller recognition of the comprehensive causes and concerns of the Gospel, and of all the human issues that must be engaged in public life. Although we cannot back away from our biblically rooted commitment to the sanctity of every human life, including those unborn, nor can we deny the holiness of marriage as instituted by God between one man and one woman, we must follow the model of Jesus,

the Prince of Peace, engaging the global giants of conflict, racism, corruption, poverty, pandemic diseases, illiteracy, ignorance, and spiritual emptiness, by promoting reconciliation, encouraging ethical servant leadership, assisting the poor, caring for the sick, and educating the next generation. We believe it is our calling to be good stewards of all God has entrusted to our care so that it may be passed on to generations yet to be born.

We call for a more complete understanding of discipleship that applies faith with integrity to every calling and sphere of life, the secular as well as the spiritual, and the physical as well as the religious; and that thinks wider than politics in contributing to the arts, the sciences, the media, and the creation of culture in all its variety.

Above all, we remind ourselves that if we would recommend the Good News of Jesus to others, we must first be shaped by that Good News ourselves, and thus ourselves be Evangelicals and Evangelical.

### **3. We Must Rethink Our Place in Public Life**

We must find a new understanding of our place in public life. We affirm that to be Evangelical and to carry the name of Christ is to seek to be faithful to the freedom, justice, peace, and well-being that are at the heart of the kingdom of God, to bring these gifts into public life as a service to all, and to work with all who share these ideals and care for the common good. Citizens of the City of God, we are resident aliens in the Earthly City. Called by Jesus to be “in” the world but “not of” the world, we are fully engaged in public affairs, but never completely equated with any party, partisan ideology, economic system, class, tribe, or national identity.

Whereas fundamentalism was thoroughly world-denying and politically disengaged from its outset, names such as John Jay, John Witherspoon, John Woolman, and Frances Willard in America and William Wilberforce and Lord Shaftesbury in England are a reminder of a different tradition. Evangelicals have made a shining contribution to politics in general, to many of the greatest moral and social reforms in history, such as the abolition of slavery and woman’s suffrage, and even to notions crucial in political discussion today, for example, the vital but little known Evangelical

contribution to the rise of the voluntary association and, through that, to the understanding of such key notions as civil society and social capital.

### **Neither privatized nor politicized**

Today, however, we Evangelicals wish to stand clear from certain positions in public life that are widely confused with Evangelicalism.

First, we Evangelicals repudiate two equal and opposite errors into which many Christians have fallen recently. One error has been to privatize faith, interpreting and applying it to the personal and spiritual realm only. Such dualism falsely divorces the spiritual from the secular, and causes faith to lose its *integrity* and become “privately engaging and publicly irrelevant,” and another form of “hot tub spirituality.”

The other error, made by both the religious left and the religious right in recent decades, is to politicize faith, using faith to express essentially political points that have lost touch with biblical truth. That way faith loses its *independence*, the church becomes “the regime at prayer,” Christians become “useful idiots” for one political party or another, and the Christian faith becomes an ideology in its purest form. Christian beliefs are used as weapons for political interests.

Christians from both sides of the political spectrum, left as well as right, have made the mistake of politicizing faith; and it would be no improvement to respond to a weakening of the religious right with a rejuvenation of the religious left. Whichever side it comes from, a politicized faith is faithless, foolish, and disastrous for the church – and disastrous first and foremost for Christian reasons rather than constitutional reasons.

Called to an allegiance higher than party, ideology, and nationality, we Evangelicals see it our duty to engage with politics, but our equal duty never to be completely equated with any party, partisan ideology, economic system, or nationality. In our scales, spiritual, moral, and social power are as important as political power, what is right outweighs what is popular, just as principle outweighs party, truth matters more than team-playing, and conscience more than power and survival.

The politicization of faith is never a sign of strength but of weakness. The saying is wise: “The first thing to say about politics is that politics is not the first thing.”

The Evangelical soul is not for sale. It has already been bought at an infinite price.

## **A Civil rather than a Sacred or a Naked public square**

Second, we Evangelicals repudiate the two extremes that define the present culture wars in the United States. There are deep and important issues at stake in the culture wars, issues on which the future of the United States and Western civilization will turn. But the trouble comes from the manner in which the issues are being fought.

In particular, what we as Evangelicals lament in the culture warring is not just the general collapse of the common vision of the common good, but the endless conflict over the proper place of faiths in public life, and therefore of the freedom to enter and engage public life from the perspective of faith. A grand confusion now reigns as to any guiding principles by which people of different faiths may enter the public square and engage with each other robustly but civilly. The result is the “holy war” front of America’s wider culture wars, and a dangerous incubation of conflicts, hatreds, and lawsuits.

We repudiate on one side the partisans of a *sacred public square*, those who for religious, historical, or cultural reasons would continue to give a preferred place in public life to one religion which in almost all most current cases would be the Christian faith, but could equally be another faith. In a society as religiously diverse as America today, no one faith should be normative for the entire society, yet there should be room for the free expression of faith in the public square.

Let it be known unequivocally that we are committed to religious liberty for people of all faiths, including the right to convert to or from the Christian faith. We are firmly opposed to the imposition of theocracy on our pluralistic society. We are also concerned about the illiberalism of politically correct attacks on evangelism. We have no desire to coerce anyone or to impose on anyone beliefs and behavior that we have not persuaded them to adopt freely, and that we do not demonstrate in our own lives, above all by love.

We repudiate on the other side the partisans of a *naked public square*, those who would make all religious expression inviolably private and keep the public square inviolably secular. Often advocated by a loose coalition of secularists, liberals, and supporters of the strict separation of church and state, this position is even less just and workable because it excludes the overwhelming majority of citizens who are still



profoundly religious. Nothing is more illiberal than to invite people into the public square but insist that they be stripped of the faith that makes them who they are and shapes the way they see the world.

In contrast to these extremes, our commitment is to a *civil public square* — a *vision of public life in which citizens of all faiths are free to enter and engage the public square on the basis of their faith, but within a framework of what is agreed to be just and free for other faiths too*. Thus every right we assert for ourselves is at once a right we defend for others. A right for a Christian is a right for a Jew, and a right for a secularist, and a right for a Mormon, and right for a Muslim, and a right for a Scientologist, and right for all the believers in all the faiths across this wide land.

### **The way of Jesus, not Constantine**

There are two additional concerns we address to the attention of our fellow-citizens. On the one hand, we are especially troubled by the fact that a generation of culture warring, reinforced by understandable reactions to religious extremism around the world, is creating a *powerful backlash against all religion in public life among many educated people*. If this were to harden and become an American equivalent of the long-held European animosity toward religion in the public life, the result would be disastrous for the American republic and a severe constriction of liberty for people of all faiths.

We therefore warn of the striking intolerance evident among the new atheists, and call on all citizens of goodwill and believers of all faiths and none to join with us in working for a civil public square and the restoration of a tough-minded civility that is in the interests of all.

On the other hand, we are also troubled by the fact that the advance of globalization and *the emergence of a global public square finds no matching vision of how we are to live freely, justly, and peacefully with our deepest differences on the global stage*. As the recent Muslim protests and riots over perceived insults to their faith demonstrate, the Internet era has created a world in which everyone can listen to what we say even when we are not intentionally speaking to everyone. The challenges of living with our deepest differences are intensified in the age of global technologies such as the World Wide Web.

As this global public square emerges, we see two equal and opposite errors to avoid: *coercive secularism* on one side, once typified by communism and now by the softer but strict French-style secularism; and *religious extremism* on the other side, typified by Islamist violence.

At the same time, we repudiate the two main positions into which many are now falling. On the one hand, we repudiate those who believe their way is the only way and the way for everyone, and are therefore prepared to coerce others. Whatever the faith or ideology in question communism, Islam, or even democracy, this position leads inevitably to *conflict*.

Undoubtedly, many people would place all Christians in this category, because of the Emperor Constantine and the state-sponsored oppression he inaugurated, leading to the dangerous alliance between church and state continued in European church-state relations down to the present.

We are not uncritical of unrestrained voluntarism and rampant individualism, but we utterly deplore the dangerous alliance between church and state, and the oppression that was its dark fruit. We Evangelicals trace our heritage, not to Constantine, but to the very different stance of Jesus of Nazareth. While some of us are pacifists and others are advocates of just war, we all believe that Jesus' Good News of justice for the whole world was promoted, not by a conqueror's power and sword, but by a suffering servant emptied of power and ready to die for the ends he came to achieve. Unlike some other religious believers, we do not see insults and attacks on our faith as "offensive" and "blasphemous" in a manner to be defended by law, but as part of the cost of our discipleship that we are to bear without complaint or victim-playing.

On the other hand, we repudiate all who believe that different values are simply relative to different cultures, and who therefore refuse to allow anyone to judge anyone else or any other culture. More tolerant sounding at first, this position leads directly to the evils of *complacency*; for in a world of such evils as genocide, slavery, female oppression, and assaults on the unborn, there are rights that require defending, evils that must be resisted, and interventions into the affairs of others that are morally justifiable.

We also warn of the danger of a *two-tier global public square*, one in which the top tier is for cosmopolitan secular liberals and the second tier is for local religious

believers. Such an arrangement would be patronizing as well as a severe restriction of religious liberty and justice, and unworthy of genuine liberalism.

Once again, our choice is for a civil public square, and a working respect for the rights of all, even those with whom we disagree. Contrary to medieval religious leaders and certain contemporary atheists who believe that “error has no rights,” we respect the right to be wrong. But we also insist that the principle of “the right to believe anything” does not lead to the conclusion that “anything anyone believes is right.” Rather, it means that respect for differences based on conscience can also mean a necessary debate over differences conducted with respect.

### **Invitation to all**

As stated earlier, we who sign this declaration do not presume to speak for all Evangelicals. *We speak only for ourselves, yet not only to ourselves.* We therefore invite all our fellow-Christians, our fellow-citizens, and people of different faiths across the nation and around the world to take serious note of these declarations and to respond where appropriate.

We urge our fellow-Evangelicals to consider these affirmations and to join us in clarifying the profound confusions surrounding Evangelicalism, that together we may be more faithful to our Lord and to the distinctiveness of his way of life.

We urge our fellow-citizens to assess the damaging consequences of the present culture wars, and to work with us in the urgent task of restoring liberty and civility in public life, and so ensure that freedom may last to future generations.

We urge adherents of other faiths around the world to understand that we respect your right to believe what you believe according to the dictates of conscience, and invite you to follow the golden rule and extend the same rights and respect to us and to the adherents of all other faiths, so that together we may make religious liberty practical and religious persecution rarer, so that in turn human diversity may complement rather than contradict human well-being.

We urge those who report and analyze public affairs, such as scholars, journalists, and public policy makers, to abandon stereotypes and adopt definitions and categories in

describing us and other believers in terms that are both accurate and fair, and with a tone that you in turn would like to be applied to yourselves.

We urge those in positions of power and authority to appreciate that we seek the welfare of the communities, cities, and countries in which we live, yet our first allegiance is always to a higher loyalty and to standards that call all other standards into question, a commitment that has been a secret of the Christian contributions to civilization as well as its passion for reforms.

We urge those who share our dedication to the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed to join with us in working to bring care, peace, justice, and freedom to those millions of our fellow-humans who are now ignored, oppressed, enslaved, or treated as human waste and wasted humans by the established orders in the global world.

We urge those who search for meaning and belonging amid the chaos of contemporary philosophies and the brokenness and alienation of modern society to consider that the gospel we have found to be good news is in fact the best news ever, and open to all who would come and discover what we now enjoy and would share.

Finally, we solemnly pledge that in a world of lies, hype, and spin, where truth is commonly dismissed and words suffer from severe inflation, we make this declaration in words that have been carefully chosen and weighed; words that, under God, we make our bond. People of the Good News, we desire not just to speak the Good News but to embody and be good news to our world and to our generation.

Here we stand. Unashamed and assured in our own faith, we reach out to people of all other faiths with love, hope, and humility. With God's help, we stand ready with you to face the challenges of our time and to work together for a greater human flourishing.

**THE END**

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<sup>i</sup> The terms *Evangelical* and *Evangelicals* should be spelled with an upper case as are the terms *Roman Catholic*, *Orthodox*, and *Protestant*, or *Christian*, *Jew*, and *Muslim*.