

An Executive Summary of

AN EVANGELICAL MANIFESTO

**The Washington Declaration of Evangelical Identity
and Public Commitment**

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A Declaration of

Evangelical Identity and Public Commitment

Keenly aware of this hour of history, we as a representative group of Evangelicals in America address our fellow-believers and our fellow-citizens.ⁱⁱ We have two purposes: to clarify the confusions that surround the term *Evangelical* in the United States, and to explain where we stand on issues that cause consternation over Evangelicals in public life.

The global era challenges us to learn how to live with our deepest differences—especially religious differences that are ultimate and irreducible. These are not just differences between personal worldviews but between entire ways of life co-existing in the same society.

1. Our Identity

First, we reaffirm our identity. *Evangelicals are Christians who define themselves, their faith, and their lives according to the Good News of Jesus of Nazareth.* (The Greek word for good news was *euangelion*, which translated into English as *evangel*.) This Evangelical principle is the heart of who we are as followers of Jesus. It is not unique to us. We assert it not to attack or to exclude, but to remind and to reaffirm, and so to rally and to reform.

Evangelicals are one of the great traditions in the Christian Church. We stand alongside Christians of other traditions in both the creedal core of faith and over many issues of public concern. Yet we also hold to Evangelical beliefs that are distinct—distinctions we affirm as matters of biblical truth, recovered by the Protestant Reformation and vital for a sure knowledge of God. We Evangelicals are defined theologically, and not politically, socially, or culturally.

As followers of Jesus Christ, Evangelicals stress a particular set of beliefs that we believe are true to the life and teachings of Jesus himself. Taken together, they make us who we are. We place our emphasis on ...

1. Jesus, fully divine and fully human, as the only full and complete revelation of God and therefore the only Savior.
2. The death of Jesus on the cross, in which he took the penalty for our sins and reconciled us to God.
3. Salvation as God's gift grasped through faith. We contribute nothing to our salvation.
4. New life in the Holy Spirit, who brings us spiritual rebirth and power to live as Jesus did, reaching out to the poor, sick, and oppressed.
5. The Bible as God's Word written, fully trustworthy as our final guide to faith and practice.
6. The future personal return of Jesus to establish the reign of God.
7. The importance of sharing these beliefs so that others may experience God's salvation and may walk in Jesus' way.

Sadly, we repeatedly fail to live up to our high calling, and all too often illustrate our own doctrine of sin. The full list of our failures is no secret to God or to many who watch us. If we would share the good news of Jesus with others, we must first be shaped by that good news ourselves.ⁱⁱⁱ

2. Our Place in Public Life

Second, we wish to reposition ourselves in public life. To be Evangelical is to be faithful to the freedom, justice, peace, and well-being that are at the heart of the good news of Jesus. Fundamentalism was world-denying and politically disengaged at its outset, but Evangelicals have made a distinguished contribution to politics—attested by causes such the abolition of slavery and woman's suffrage, and by names such as John Jay, John Witherspoon, Frances Willard, and Sojourner Truth in America and William Wilberforce and Lord Shaftesbury in England.

Today, however, enormous confusion surrounds Evangelicals in public life and we wish to clarify our stand through the following assertions:

First, we repudiate two equal and opposite errors into which many Christians have fallen. One error is to privatize faith, 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*.

The other error, made by both the religious left and the religious right, is to politicize faith, using faith to express essentially political points that have lost touch with biblical truth. That way faith loses its *independence*, Christians become the “useful idiots” for one political party or another, and the Christian faith becomes an ideology. Christian beliefs become the weapons of political factions.

Called to an allegiance higher than party, ideology, economic system, 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, or nationality. The politicization of faith is never a sign of strength but of weakness.

Second, we repudiate the two extremes that define the present culture wars in the United States. On one side, we repudiate the partisans of a *sacred public square*, those who would continue to give one religion a preferred place in public life.

In a diverse society, it will always be unjust and unworkable to privilege one religion. We are committed to religious liberty for people of all faiths. We are firmly opposed to theocracy. And we have no desire to coerce anyone or to impose beliefs and behavior on anyone. We believe in persuasion.

On the other side, we repudiate the partisans of a *naked public square*, those who would make all religious expression inviolably private and keep the public square inviolably secular. 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.

We are committed 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 as well. Every right we assert for ourselves as Christians is a right we defend for all others.

Third, we are concerned that a generation of culture warring, reinforced by understandable reactions to religious extremism around the world, has created a powerful backlash against all religion in public life among many educated people. If this hardens into something like the European animosity toward religion in public life, the result would be disastrous for the American republic and would severely constrict liberty for people of all faiths. The striking intolerance shown by the new atheists is a warning sign.

We call on all citizens of goodwill and believers of all faiths and none to join us in working for a civil public square and the restoration of a tough-minded civility that is in the interests of all.

Fourth, we are concerned that globalization and the emerging global public square have no matching vision of how to live with our deepest differences on the global stage. In the Internet era, everyone can listen to what we say even when we are not speaking to everyone. Global communication magnifies the challenges of living with our deepest differences.

As the global public square emerges, we warn of two equal and opposite errors: *coercive secularism* and *religious extremism*.

We also repudiate the two other positions. First, those who believe their way is the only way and the way for everyone, and are therefore prepared to coerce them. This position leads inevitably to *conflict*.

Second, those who believe that different values are relative to different cultures, and who therefore refuse to allow anyone to judge anyone else or any other culture. This position sounds tolerant at first, but it leads directly to the ills of *complacency*. In a world of such evils as genocide, slavery, female oppression, and assaults on the unborn, there are rights that must be defended, evils that must be resisted, and interventions into the affairs of others that are morally justified.

Fifth, we warn of the danger of a two-tier global public square. This is a model of public life which reserves the top tier for cosmopolitan secular liberals, and the lower tier for local religious believers. Such an arrangement would be patronizing as well as severely restricting religious liberty and justice.

We promote a civil public square, and we respect for the rights of all, even those with whom we disagree. Contrary to those who believe that “error has no rights,” we respect the right to be wrong. But we also insist that “the right to believe anything” does not mean that “anything anyone believes is right.” Rather, respect for conscientious differences also requires respectful debate.

We do not speak for all Evangelicals. We speak only for ourselves, *yet not to ourselves*. We invite all our fellow-Christians, our fellow-citizens, and people of different faiths to take note of these declarations and to respond where appropriate.

We pledge that in a world of lies, hype, and spin, we publish this declaration in 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.

THE END

ⁱ This is an abbreviated version of the full Evangelical Manifesto which can be read at www.EvangelicalManifesto.com.

ⁱⁱ The terms “an Evangelical” and “Evangelicals” are proper nouns, rather than common nouns, and should be spelled with an upper case -- as are the terms Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant, or Christian, Jew, and Muslim.

ⁱⁱⁱ This brief expression of repentance is more fully developed in the full Evangelical Manifesto.