

Leaders Seek to Reclaim the “Evangelical”™ Label

Dozens of evangelical leaders including Os Guinness signed a manifesto urging U.S. Christians to be “evangelicals” as an expression of their faith, not their voting preferences.



[] Dozens of prominent evangelical leaders signed a manifesto Wednesday urging Christians in the U.S. to be “evangelicals” as an expression of their faith, not their voting preferences.

Addressed to fellow believers as well as the American public, the document dubbed “An Evangelical Manifesto: A Declaration of Evangelical Identity and Public Commitment” states that “the confusions and corruptions that attend the term evangelical” have grown so deep that “the character of what [evangelical] means has been obscured and its importance lost.”

The declaration, which was released Wednesday, was also meant as an appeal for other leaders to sign and adopt and was notably missing support from prominent Christian conservatives such as Focus on the Family’s James Dobson, Family Research Council’s Tony Perkins and Richard Land of the Southern Baptist Convention. “The closed group of people working on the [Evangelical Manifesto] apparently excludes traditional conservative and pro-family evangelical voices,” said Janice Shaw Crouse, senior fellow at the Beverly LaHaye Institute, a conservative think tank for the Washington, Concerned Women for America.

Crouse said the timing of the manifesto during a major election year causes it to emerge as a “political document” through which its authors and endorsers “appear to be making a power play to launch new public faces for evangelicalism.”

Yet the declaration is significantly self-critical,

disapproving of all the political forms evangelicals might assume, both conservative and liberal. "As followers of 'the narrow way,' our concern is not for approval and popular esteem," the document says. "Too many of the problems we face as evangelicals in the [U.S.] are those of our own making. If we protest, our protest has to begin with ourselves."

Three "mandates" outlined in the 19-page document called on believers to reaffirm their Christian identity "according to the Good News of Jesus of Nazareth"; reform church behaviors to reflect true worship, sacrifice and discipleship and not "commercial, diluted, and feel-good gospels of health, wealth, human potential, and religious happy talk"; and lastly, rethink Christians' place in public life by not using Christian beliefs "as weapons for political interests."

"Christians become 'useful idiots' for one political party or another," the document warns of the consequences relating to the politicization of faith.

The document was drafted by several prominent evangelicals, including social critic Os Guinness, author and professor Dallas Willard and Rich Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary. Among the more than 70 charter signatories were Jack Hayford, president of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel; Stephen Strang, founder and publisher of *Charisma*; and Bible teacher Kay Arthur.