

Why would an Evangelical group erase the word 'Evangelical'?

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“It’s Not Easy Being Green,” Jim Henson, creator of The Muppets, famously sang in character as Kermit the Frog.

These days, it’s not easy being an “Evangelical,” either.

The very word is attacked as “code” for a certain political orientation. Or it’s derided as a kind of faith that harms rather than heals: the so-called “Ex-vangelical” boomlet of people “deconstructing” their Christian faith is an example.

Perhaps the latest body blow to the word “Evangelical” will come in September, when the board of the [Evangelical Press Association](#) — a trade group of Evangelical Christian publishers and writers of which I am a member — asks members to vote on a name change.

More than 300 periodicals, organizations and individuals are currently members, according to the group’s [website](#). EPA member publications, the organization says, “have a combined readership of more than 20 million readers.”

The Christian Post is among EPA member publications, as is Decision magazine, Focus on the Family’s Brio magazine, and The War Cry, published by The Salvation Army, among many others.

The proposed moniker — “Christian Communicators Network” — consigns a name used for 78 years to the trash heap.

Before explaining why I believe that’s a mistake, it’s worth saying plainly what the word “Evangelical” actually stands for — because that, more than the politics of the moment, is what’s at stake in September’s vote.

“Evangelical” comes from the Greek *euangelion* — “the good news,” or the Gospel. It’s not a cultural label or a voting bloc; it names a conviction about what Jesus Christ accomplished and what that requires of the people who believe it.

Historians who study the movement generally point to four marks that have held across a remarkably diverse set of denominations and traditions: a “born-again” conversion experience that reorients a life; a high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority; the belief that Christ’s sacrifice on the cross makes possible the redemption of humanity; and a conviction that the Gospel has to be expressed and demonstrated, not just privately held.

That’s a fuller, more durable definition than “not mainline” — and it’s the definition an organization forfeits, in public perception if nothing else, when it removes the word from its own name.

In 1943, more than a thousand delegates gathered in Chicago and formally constituted the National Association of Evangelicals, charting a more moderate course than the fundamentalists while retaining a strong allegiance to the authority of Scripture, the historic Protestant doctrines of salvation and the Church, and the need for individuals to have a personal “born again” experience.

The Evangelical Press Association arrived five years later. In 1948, 35 editors meeting in Chicago organized the group, adopted a doctrinal statement crafted by the NAE, and set out a statement of purpose. The EPA has carried the name ever since.

That history is exactly what’s on the table in September. Other Christian denominations, the so-called “mainline” groups, are often less committed to these basic beliefs. Some, such as today’s Presbyterian Church (USA), affirm same-sex marriages and welcome

practicing gay and lesbian persons to serve as ministers, deacons and elders.

That's certainly their privilege, but it is also a clear line of demarcation between more liberal Christian churches and Evangelical ones. Both camps claim the name of "Christian" — along with other groups far outside those doctrinal orientations — but there are clear distinctions.

To its credit, the EPA board isn't hiding why it wants this change. In its own words, the recommendation "recognizes that the word 'Evangelical' increasingly carries political, cultural, and sociological meanings that often obscure its theological intent."

The board says the new name would "better reflect the broader community of Christian communicators we now serve," and points out that the professional disciplines EPA has always served — "journalism, writing, editing, publishing, design, and storytelling" — are "practiced across many platforms" now, from podcasts and blogs to social media, not just print magazines.

Broadening the tent could mean more members, more relationships, and greater relevance to a media landscape that EPA's founders never imagined.

It's also a tension worth naming honestly. A wider net catches more than a narrower one does. The board insists nothing else changes — "our theology remains Evangelical. Our public identity becomes more clearly Christian," they say — and the group's Statement of Faith, Code of Ethics, and doctrinal standards would stay exactly as they are.

Yet organizations that soften or drop distinctly Evangelical language in pursuit of that "broader appeal" don't always stay where they started; a name is one of the few things a membership organization has that quietly polices its own boundaries. Once it's gone, the next board, or the one after that, inherits a "network" with no name-level signal for who does and doesn't belong.

That's not a hypothetical worry so much as the question the name change itself invites. If a "Christian" can believe — as one prominent Texas politician and Presbyterian seminary student asserts — that God is "non-binary" or that there are "six genders," what

happens to those who believe "God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them"? (Genesis 1:27, NIV).

If more liberal "Christians" can pick and choose which parts of the Bible have authority for their lives, what becomes of those who line up with the Apostle Paul when he says: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness"? (2 Timothy 3:16, NIV).

And if an association of "Evangelical" writers, editors, and publishers becomes a "network" of "Christian communicators," what's to prevent those of radically differing theologies from claiming a right to membership?

The EPA board says it will keep the group's current statement of faith. I believe them. But a statement of faith is a document a prospective member must look up; a name is the first thing everyone sees, every time. If the theology isn't changing, the name is the most visible way to say so.

I'll put myself on the line here: I'm an Evangelical Christian — one who had to carefully evaluate and reaffirm what I believe (and why) in recent years. That name is worth something, not as a slogan, but as shorthand for a conversion experience, a high view of Scripture, a belief in the cross, and a conviction that the Gospel must be lived out, not just held.

EPA's members have spent 78 years building recognition under that name among the 20 million readers the organization itself cites. We did this alongside sister organizations — the National Association of Evangelicals and the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association among them — that have kept the word in their own names despite the same cultural pressures EPA's board now cites.

If there are those who misunderstand what "Evangelical" means, then it's incumbent upon the rest of us to clarify and exemplify that meaning, not to retire the word because the job of defending it got harder.

It's my hope the hundreds of EPA members decisively vote against this change. If not, perhaps an alternative organization, unafraid to be Evangelical, needs to emerge.

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