

# Shades of Evangelicals: Recognizing the Differences

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## **Introduction:**

1. The reason for this workshop is the simple reality that a “one size fits all” does not work regarding evangelicalism—Brian McLaren and Mark Dever cannot meaningfully be described as evangelicals of the same sort. Like the term fundamentalism, evangelical must be modified in some way.
2. The growing gaps among those who claim the title evangelical should be of interest to separatists.
  - a. There are concentrated efforts to restate and reclaim the “center” of evangelicalism due to the drift in certain quarters.
  - b. Some of these efforts imply or call for separation of some sorts from those who have abandoned the “center” of evangelical faith.

## **I. Problems of Definition**

Evangelicals themselves have struggled with self-identity for four decades! The initial clashes over the issue of inerrancy gained steam through the 1960s and hit full scale war with Lindsell’s *Battle for the Bible* in 1976. Given the centrality of Scripture, it’s not surprising that this prompted many self-examinations and attempts to formulate some kind of theological center.

- “The history of American evangelicalism is one long narrative of a search for identity. It seems that every decade or so evangelicals involve themselves in a new fit of identity crisis” (Al Mohler, “Reformist Evangelicalism,” in *A Confessing Theology for Postmodern Times*, ed. Michael Horton [Wheaton: Crossway, 2000], p. 131.).
- “Much ink has been spilled over the past quarter-century in attempts to define *evangelicalism* and to describe the essence of this vast and varied collection of movements and traditions. In recent years, the debate over evangelical identity has turned toward whether there is in fact an ‘essentialist’ evangelicalism that can cover all varieties” (Joel Carpenter, “The Fellowship of Kindred Minds” in *Pilgrims on the Sawdust Trail* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004], p. 29.).
- “Evangelicalism needs to be relinquished as a religious identity because it does not exist. In fact, it is the wax nose of twentieth century American Protestantism. Behind this proboscis, which has been nipped and tucked by savvy religious leaders, academics, and pollsters, is a face void of any discernible features. The nonexistence of an evangelical identity may prove to be, to borrow a phrase from Noll, the real scandal of modern evangelicalism, for despite the vast amounts of energy and resources expended on the topic, and notwithstanding the ever growing volume of literature on the movement, evangelicalism is little more than a construction” (D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004], p. 17).

The development in the past few years of efforts to forge new alliances and coalitions only confirms the fact that the contemporary world of “evangelicalism” remains jumbled. For example: Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals; Together for the Gospel; Gospel Coalition

- A. Rooted in Its Foundation
- B. Tied to Its Disposition
- C. Aided by Its Students and Promoters

## **II. A Movement Destined for Disintegration**

- A. It was governed by pragmatism.
- B. It was oriented toward individualism and the parachurch.
- C. It was reactionary.

## **III. An Attempt at Taxonomy**

- A. Unifying Principle: Conservative vs. Post-Conservative
- B. Realms
  - 1. Theological
    - a. Formal principle
    - b. Material principle
  - 2. Cultural
    - a. Political
    - b. Moral
    - c. Ministerial