

The Evangelical Movement

Martin Luther, during the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s, adopted the Greek word “evangelion,” meaning the “good news,” or “gospel,” and called his breakaway movement the “evangelische kirke,” or “evangelical church.”

In America, the term “Evangelical” was first used as a result of a series of revivals, featuring the likes of John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards -- in the 18th and early 19th centuries that led to the rise of the Baptists and Methodists in this country.

Before the Civil War, Evangelicals took an active role in various social movements featuring such issues as temperance, the women’s suffrage, and the abolition of slavery. Over the years, as modern influences, such as industrialization and urbanization, began to shape the nation, a Christian group known as “Fundamentalists” rebelled against these changes, sometimes refusing to have anything to do with people of opposing views.

“**New Evangelicals**” was a coalition that arose during the mid-20th century, perhaps best personified by evangelist Billy Graham. Unlike the Fundamentalists, Evangelicals favored engagement with the culture.

Graham’s first major Evangelistic crusade took place under a tent in Los Angeles in 1949. Newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst, upon hearing of Graham’s revival, helped begin an unprecedented era of mass evangelism by telling his editors to “puff Graham.” This made these crusades front-page news.

“**Christianity Today**,” a new magazine “of Evangelical conviction” was launched by Graham in 1956. Other key institutions in this movement included Moody Bible Institute, Wheaton College, the National Association of Evangelicals, and Youth for Christ.

In 1957, at his first New York crusade, Graham broke with Fundamentalists by choosing to work with the more liberal Protestant Council of Churches. He said that the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) was “willing to work with all who were willing to work with us.”

The BGEA has consistently followed that approach over the years, and it has succeeded. In the past half-century, Graham has preached the biblical Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ to nearly 215 million people in 185 countries and territories. As a result of his leadership, millions have made commitments to Christ.