NEITHER CATHOLIC, PROTESTANT, OR EVANGELICAL by Al Diestelkamp

Back during the days when churches had tract racks filled with short articles bound in little booklets, one that was popular among brethren was titled *Neither Catholic, Protestant Nor Jew.* It was in a time when people in our nation categorized all religious people into one of three ways. The tract was an effort to distinguish true Christians from those simply professing to be God’s people and to issue an appeal to be simply Christians.

The religious makeup of our nation has changed greatly over the decades, creating even more categories. With the addition of the many eastern religions, to publish a tract denying affiliation with all the available houses of worship would require a ridiculously long title. Today, among those claiming to be followers of Jesus the prevailing thought is that they must be either “Catholic Christians,” “Protestant Christians,” or “Evangelical Christians.”

Just where do you and I fit in this denominational mindset? Though we claim not to fit into any one of these categories, the world doesn’t seem to “buy” our protests and view us as just one denomination among many. Even *The Babylon Bee,* a satire website, when featuring “A Guide to All the Christian Denominations,” included: “Churches of Christ — Another non-denominational denomination.” Ouch!

It’s one thing for the general public to fail to recognize the undenominational aspect of the church that Jesus built (Matt. 16:18) and lump us in under the evangelical label, but it’s another thing altogether when brethren endorse or identify with evangelicalism. Part of this may be that brethren mistake the word *evangelical* with *evangelism*; and since we preach and teach the importance of evangelism, we must be evangelicals.

I grant that a dictionary definition of the word *evangelical* may be vague enough to seem to include the Lord’s people, but we know dictionaries are not always a reliable source for biblical terminology (i.e., “baptism”). Consider the definition from the viewpoint of popular culture:

Ev*angelicalism*, also called evangelical Christianity, or evangelical Protestantism, is a worldwide trans-denominational movement within [Protestant Christianity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestantism) that maintains the belief that the essence of the [Gospel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel) consists of the doctrine of [salvation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salvation_in_Christianity) by [grace alone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sola_gratia), solely through [faith](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faith_in_Christianity) in [Jesus'](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus_in_Christianity) [atonement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atonement_in_Christianity). [Wikipedia]

Besides the doctrinal errors that are espoused within the movement, present-day evangelicalism is perceived as an arm of one political party. While that party’s platform might conform more closely to my personal views, and its success might prove more accommodating to righteous living and the spread of the gospel, the Lord’s kingdom is not “of this world” (Jn. 18:36).

Many years ago I worked with a church that met in rented facilities. The property was owned by a sitting U.S. senator. One year, as election day drew near, we found the church’s sign surrounded by campaign signs. Though the senator was one whom I personally appreciated, I objected to the signs, noting that we didn’t want to leave the impression that the church endorsed political candidates. Besides that, we didn’t want to discourage people from the opposing party from hearing the gospel.

Even though the Lord’s church is “catholic” (universal), we don’t call ourselves “Catholic”; and even though we “protest” the errors of Catholicism, we don’t call ourselves “Protestant.” Likewise, although we have more in common with evangelicals, I believe it is a mistake to identify with a “trans-denominational movement.” We are simply Christians!