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Identifying evangelical organizations: A new look at an old problem

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Summary: This article explores some weaknesses of existing approaches to defining "evangelical" for the purpose of quantitative identification, classification and comparison of evangelical organizations. It builds an argument for the necessity of a different way of looking at the definitional task. An approach to definition is described which is broad enough to encompass variations among organizations but can be applied narrowly to differentiate organizations from each other without excluding fringe organizations and without relying on sufficient or dominant characteristics. "Evangelical" as a descriptive characteristic is shown to be ambiguous but "evangelical" as a class of organizations sharing a limited number of necessary characteristics and a large number of general characteristics remains useful.

Résumé : Cet article examine certaines faiblesses des approches qui visent à définir le terme «évangélique» pour des fins d'identification, de classification et de comparaison quantitatives touchant des organisations évangéliques. Il construit une argumentation pour montrer la nécessité de jeter un regard différent à la tâche de définition. Une approche plus ample de la définition permet d'inclure les écarts entre les organisations, tout en étant suffisamment restreinte pour permettre de différencier ces organisations l'un de l'autre sans exclure les organisations marginales et sans se limiter à des caractéristique suffisantes ou dominantes. Le terme «évangélique» comme caractéristique descriptive s'avère ambiguë, mais quand il désigne une classe d'organisations partageant un nombre limité de caractéristiques nécessaires et un grand nombre de caractéristiques générales, il demeure utile.

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1   Introduction

"Evangelicals" are spotted more often in Canada than they used to be;
not because of rapid growth or because of an effective publicity campaign
but because both the popular media and academics are beginning to note
their presence as an interesting element of Canadian culture (see pollster
Grenville 1997; historian Rawlyk 1996; and journalist Swift 1993). How-
ever, despite increased attention and study there is little consensus about
what makes a Christian organization an evangelical organization.

Identifying evangelical organizations is like recognizing family mem-
bers: you can tell they belong together and can pick out some features
that they have in common but you cannot quite tell how you know that
they are from the same family. Likewise sociologists and historians of reli-
gion believe they know which organizations are evangelical and can pick
out some features that they have in common but they have been unable to
agree on exactly what it is that justifies classifying them together and what
distinguishes them from other types of Christians. A series of sessions at
the American Academy of Religion on defining "evangelical" failed to
produce anything near consensus—the scholars could not even agree that
the term "evangelical" was useful (Dayton and Johnston 1991).

The task of defining "evangelical" is confused by the diversity of evan-
gelical organizations and is further complicated because evangelicals, by
their own admission, can not agree on what they stand for (Noll 1984;
Smith 1986). Despite these ambiguities, some sort of definition is neces-
sary to identify and describe evangelical organizations, to group like evan-
gelical organizations together, to distinguish evangelical organizations
from other types of Christian organizations, and to facilitate comparison
and contrast in both historical and sociological studies.

The difficulty scholars have had accomplishing these tasks is partially
rooted in their reliance on a particular type of definition. According to
Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, a definition is "a statement express-
ing the essential nature of something" or "the action or power of describ-
ing, explaining or making definite and clear." Definitions of "evangelical"
are trying to make the "essential nature" of evangelicals "definite and
clear." This is impossible because there are no characteristics which are
shared among all evangelicals and are not shared with any other organiza-
tions. That is, there are no characteristics which in and of themselves are
adequate to define "evangelical." Such characteristics are known as "suf-
ficient" characteristics.

This article points out the problems in existing definitions of "evangeli-
cal" and describes an approach to defining "evangelical" that accepts
some ambiguity and does not require sufficient or dominant characteris-
tics for classification, but does provide a quantitative way to identify, clas-
sify and compare evangelical organizations. An argument is built for the

necessity of a different way of looking at the definitional task. The paper concludes with a discussion of what one different approach to defining "evangelical" for the purpose of studying evangelical organizations would look like.

2   Definitional proliferation

Three common scholarly approaches to defining "evangelical" are historical, theological and social-scientific (Hunter 1981, Marsden 1987: 58). This section will evaluate their usefulness for identifying evangelical organizations.

Historical definitions

Historical definitions classify evangelicals by connecting them to a particular stream of history (this includes connections to shared lineage, shared perspective on doctrine, organizational structure, classic emphases and so on). For example, Stackhouse argues that evangelicalism

is defined by the character of those Christians who belong to the broad historic stream that flows out of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, down through the Puritan and Pietist channels, and into the so-called evangelical revivals of the eighteenth century. Those who (a) descend from these sources *without departing from the central convictions that defined them in the first place,* or who (b) later join up with the mainstream, are likewise identified as "evangelical." (Stackhouse 1993: 7, emphasis in the original)

Stackhouse argues that the identification of evangelicals does not "depend in the first place upon some abstract definition" but rather "the abstract definition come[s] out of the study of indubitably evangelical groups" (1993: 7; see also Johnston [1991: 260] on "*evangelical* as description, not definition"). This type of definition facilitates Stackhouse's examination of groups commonly considered to be evangelical. However, as an instrument to compare evangelical organizations with each other and to differentiate evangelical organizations from other Christian organizations this definition is less useful because it has some significant ambiguities. For example, how are groups who have departed from the central convictions of evangelical history (such as, "the unique authority of scripture . . . salvation through faith alone in Jesus Christ . . . concern for warm piety in the context of a disciplined life . . . the evangelism of all people" [Stackhouse 1993: 7]) identified? It is also unclear if an organization needs all of these characteristics to be evangelical: How much of an organization needs to have these characteristics? For example, does a church cease to be evangelical if 60 percent of its members do not hold to these central convictions? What if the Pastor and the church's statement of faith still hold to them? Finally, what is it about these central convictions that distin-

guishes evangelical organizations from other Christian organizations?
Stackhouse himself notes that many individuals in the United, Anglican
and Presbyterian denominations, which he contrasts with "evangelicals,"
would share these central convictions (Stackhouse 1993: 3-5). Stackhouse
is aware of many of these ambiguities and as a result the first chapter of
his book explores a variety of factors that may suggest a group is evangeli-
cal. He does not coalesce these indicators into a concise definition be-
cause he recognizes that evangelicalism, if it can be described as a
movement at all, is not a movement with clear boundaries or central orga-
nization and his primary concern is description not definition. Thus,
Stackhouse's definition illustrates the need for a different type of defini-
tion for "evangelical." Stackhouse's definition requires careful attention
to organizations individually in order to compare them. This article seeks
a definition which can quantify "evangelicalness" to allow a less time-
consuming comparison between a large number of organizations.

Although historical definitions can be adequate when used for a spe-
cific purpose or for looking at a particular organization at a particular
place and time, the historical lineage and characteristics of evangelical
organizations are too ambiguous for the larger task of differentiating
evangelical organizations from each other and from other types of Chris-
tian organizations beyond very general categories. Nonetheless the tend-
ency of historical definitions to describe an organization based on a
variety of different elements is an insight that will prove useful for devel-
oping a definition useful for quantitative purposes.

Theological definitions

Given the amount of effort put into theological clarification by Christian
organizations and the amount of controversy surrounding perceived or
actual transgressions of a given orthodoxy, we might expect a high degree
of clarity and exactness could be obtained from a definition based on the-
ological characteristics. Unfortunately, this is not the case; the many con-
troversies, rather than clarifying the task of definition, have produced
almost endless diversity within Christianity with the result that classifica-
tion systems have often glossed over important differences within classes
or important similarities between classes. For example, when about 70
churches left the United Church of Canada over the issue of homosexual
ordination they insisted that they "were fully comfortable with the basic
statement of faith of the United Church" (Greenshields and Robinson
1992). Theological definitions can rarely differentiate between churches
who share similar statements of faith but interpret them differently.

A list of theological characteristics most common among evangelicals
can be helpful as an ideal type, but it provides only limited assistance in
differentiating between evangelicals. An example of this within evangelical

churches is the disagreement biblical literalists have over the role of women in Christian ministry (Dueck et al. 1993). An additional problem is the difficulty of deciding what a defining characteristic of evangelicalism is and what degree of adherence to a given characteristic is required to be identified as an evangelical. It would be difficult to find a set of commonly understood, doctrinal characteristics that are shared by all evangelicals and are not shared with non-evangelicals.

In view of the difficulty of finding characteristics that are shared exclusively by all evangelicals, some scholars have turned to classification schemes that divide evangelicals into different types. Three common approaches are classification according to specific theological history, classification according to responses to theology and classification according to theological focus (Johnston 1991; Moberg 1997; Weber 1991).

The main problem with these approaches is the artificial nature of their boundaries. In order to classify an organization, one has to decide which characteristic(s) of that organization should be given prominence since they are likely to have characteristics in more than one of the classes. Identifying representative dominant characteristics is complicated by the influence of time, leadership and culture on dominant characteristics. Other scholars, recognizing these limits, have developed even broader classification schemes. The end result is sometimes a description of evangelicalism that is almost as complicated as a description of each organization individually (e.g., Webber 1978: 32, 33).

Despite such difficulties, these approaches to classification can be useful for identifying trends within evangelicalism, can help to identify sources of conflict and co-operation and can point to shared characteristics among evangelical organizations. However, their tendency to cluster organizations together that have very little in common and to split single organizations into different classes; their dependence on the identification of sufficient or dominant characteristics; and their reliance on ideal types rather than the unique characteristics of each individual organization limits their usefulness to scholars who aim to identify and compare evangelical organizations beyond the studies for which these schemes were designed.

Social-scientific classifications

There is a huge amount of social-scientific scholarship concerned with the classification of religious organizations. A summary of three of these approaches shows that they do not overcome the deficiencies of the historical and theological definitions.

Allowing religious organizations to classify themselves appears to be a solution to the definitional problem. However, a closer look reveals that self-classification is sufficiently problematic to be of limited use as a defini-

tional tool, although it can be an important aid in identification. People are often unaware of the appropriate classification of the organizations to which they belong (Smith 1990: 35-37). Furthermore, organizations (or individuals) need not identify themselves as evangelical to be evangelical (Bebbington 1994: 367). For example, organizations that are sometimes considered evangelical (e.g., Restorationists) often reject the label (Hughes 1991). In addition, other organizations use the term but mean something different by it. Evangelical Lutherans use the term "evangelical" according to its historical definition (i.e., gospel). Finally, religious groups such as Mennonites and denominations such as the Anglican/Episcopalian Churches often contain both evangelicals and non-evangelicals, sometimes in the same congregation (see Hunter 1981).

Another well-represented means of classifying religious organizations is the church-sect typology. This form of classification was first developed by Ernst Troeltsch and Max Weber and has since been pursued in various forms by numerous scholars (e.g., Dawson 1992; Niebuhr 1957; Troeltsch 1931; Weber 1958; Welch 1977). Troeltsch's objective was to distinguish between different types of Christian organizations. Troeltsch, influenced by his early 20th-century setting in Germany, divided Christian organizations into culturally connected churches and non-conformist, voluntarist sects. Evangelical organizations would be considered sects. Many scholars have taken Troeltsch's basic idea and developed classification schemes from it. The main problem with this sort of classification scheme is that it too relies on sufficient characteristics. The result is a typology that only partially applies to most organizations. Organizations that share two seemingly contradictory characteristics (e.g., an organization that is both introverted and yet aims to reform society) must be classified in such a way that significant aspects of its character must be downplayed. Such a scale requires that the researcher determine which characteristics are more prevalent than others—a task that may not be possible. Thus church-sect typologies have many of the same problems as theological classification systems (see Stackhouse [1993: 12-16] for further description of the inadequacies of the church-sect model as applied to evangelicals). However Dawson argues that "the church-sect typology was never meant to be a taxonomy" (1992: 15). He further suggests that church-sect theory might be better understood as some kind of continuum (1992: 18). This suggest that a more complex definition is needed for defining "evangelical."

A third social-scientific approach to identifying evangelicals is classification by belief. Hammond and Hunter's Index of Evangelical Beliefs can serve as an example of this definitional approach (Hammond and Hunter 1984). Their goal is to compare evangelical beliefs to worldviews in order to assess the impact of college education on evangelical beliefs. Although

the beliefs Hammond and Hunter have chosen to highlight are common among evangelicals they provide no reason to believe that they are necessary or sufficient characteristics of evangelicals. It even remains unclear what is distinctive about these beliefs that would allow them to distinguish evangelicals from Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox Christians (a differentiation that was unnecessary for the purposes of their study). In addition, their sample is based on a limited universe (i.e., college students) that may not be representative of the entire population. Thus, their index does not aid in identifying evangelical organizations and is an inexact tool for classifying or comparing evangelical organizations.

In fairness to Hammond and Hunter, their study was not designed for the quantitative identification, classification and comparison of evangelicals beyond a specific goal and was not designed to be used on organizations. However an evaluation of their study's usefulness for this purpose again illustrates the weaknesses of characteristic lists for defining "evangelical." Nonetheless, their study has illustrated how the examination of selected characteristics may provide significant data for examinations of religious organizations.

Bebbington's definition

Yet another approach to defining evangelicals is to combine historical, theological and social-scientific elements into a single definition. This is David Bebbington's approach (Bebbington 1989: 2-17). His definition of "evangelical" deserves special comment because it is currently one of the more popular definitions in use by historians of evangelicalism (see its usage in Rawlyk 1997), because it avoids many of the common pitfalls of the other definitional schemes by emphasizing the importance of a variety of different types of characteristics, because it highlights the main weakness of most current definitions of "evangelical" and because it is a first step towards a new approach to identifying evangelical organizations.

Christians, argues Bebbington, are evangelicals if they possess four necessary characteristics: "biblicism (a reliance on the Bible as ultimate religious authority); conversionism (a stress on the New Birth [conversion]), activism (an energetic, individualistic approach to religious duties and social involvement), and crucicentrism (a focus on Christ's redeeming work as the heart of essential Christianity)" (Bebbington's definition as interpreted by Noll et al. 1994: 6). The combination of these four characteristics is considered sufficient to identify evangelicals. This definition has become widely adopted because it accurately describes most organizations commonly considered evangelical. However, it also includes organizations commonly not considered evangelical. For example, some Roman Catholic organizations would share these characteristics but may be rejected as being evangelical because of other characteristics such as their belief in

the authority of the Pope and the role the virgin Mary plays in a Christian's relationship with God. An additional problem with Bebbington's definition is the gap between the actual practice of evangelical organizations and their theoretical ideals. At times one or more of these four characteristics appear to be missing from organizations commonly understood to be evangelical (e.g., Christian Reformed churches, many of whom self-identify as evangelical, can act as if evangelism is not important to them). Related to this problem is the difficulty of deciding what degree of adherence to these characteristics makes an organization evangelical. For example, should organizations which believe in the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible be classified with organizations that believe that the Bible has ultimate authority in each individual's life but is not inerrant. Bebbington's description of evangelicals is inadequate for the quantitative examination of evangelical organizations in part because it was not designed for that purpose. Nevertheless, if the scholar's goal is only to describe a particular type of conservative Christian then Bebbington's definition is entirely adequate. Furthermore, Bebbington's definition is another step towards a definition that takes into account a variety of different types of characteristics in order to identify evangelical organizations.

Summary

Bebbington's definition highlights the main deficiency running through all these attempts at definition and classification when applied to a quantitative study of organizations. They rely on sufficient or dominant characteristics to determine who is and who is not an evangelical. This results in ideal types that are hard to match to actual organizations. Thus, attempts to define "evangelical" beyond the narrow confines of a singular purpose have not been successful, largely because most commentators have been more interested in the description of an already identifiable organization. Furthermore definitions designed to identify evangelical individuals may not be useful for the identification and comparison of evangelical organizations.

   Given these divergent definitions and the problems associated with them, the temptation is to give up and agree with Leonard Sweet that the only "indisputable facts about the evangelical tradition" are that it is important, it is understudied and it is diverse (in Johnston 1991: 252). However, these many different approaches to defining "evangelical" have highlighted some of the features a definition of "evangelical" useful for the study of organizations should have. A definition of "evangelical" adequate for quantitative identification, classification and comparison of evangelical organizations would identify necessary characteristics, would take into account ranges of belief of a given orthodoxy in the entire popu-

lation (rather than focussing on sufficient or hard-to-determine dominant characteristics), would not place firm boundaries on definitions, and would be concerned with ideals and actions.

3   Toward a polythetic definition

Family resemblance

A definitional approach known as family resemblance can be used to meet many of these requirements. The term "family resemblance" was used by Ludwig Wittgenstein to explain the complex intertwining and overlapping features of the members of a class. Wittgenstein explains that "these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all—but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways" (1963: 31). He goes on to use the example of games, noting that, although elements are shared between games, all the same elements do not exist in all games (e.g., compare baseball with ring-around-the-rosie). Moreover it is not at all clear where to set the boundary between a game and a non-game (e.g., are military wargames games?). This problem does not render the definition of game useless as exact boundaries are only necessary for exact purposes (1963: 33). Sometimes, explains Wittgenstein, an inexact definition is the best way to describe something. Such definitions are like a thread where "the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres" (1963: 32). Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance shows us that definitions do not have to be exact to be useful and that a given class of things does not have to have necessary or sufficient characteristics to be recognized.

Related ideas which view evangelicals as a mosaic or a network are common in the popular and the academic literature (Mackey 1995, Nash 1987, Noll and Wells 1988, Noll et al. 1994, Stackhouse 1993). These ideas show that the family resemblance concept is not an entirely new idea for defining "evangelical" as much as it is a complement to existing scholarship which can be translated into a definition useful for the quantitative study of evangelical organizations. Family resemblance is a useful starting point for this task but it does not yet have enough specificity to serve as a sociologically useful definition of "evangelical." This can be accomplished by an approach to definition drawn from biology known as a polythetic definition.

A polythetic definition

The problem with the definitional and classification schemes that have been discussed thus far is not the information they have available to them, but rather their way of grouping that information. Most scholars who have

written in this area have used what Smith (1982: 2) calls a monothetic clas-
sification scheme. In a monothetic system the scholar looks for one (or
more) unique defining characteristic(s) (e.g., doctrine, history, culture)
without which the item would be something else. Smith explains that
although "uniqueness is an *ordinary* presupposition of definition and clas-
sification" there is no reason to suppose that there is one unique charac-
teristic that distinguishes a given group from any other as there is also no
reason to assume that any of the characteristics of a group are unique to
that group (1982: 5, 6). It is, in fact, more reasonable to assume that all
identifiable groups in society share some of their characteristics with other
groups in that society (although all groups do not share all characteris-
tics). This, argues Smith, is why classification of religious groups should be
based on a polythetic definition. A polythetic definition would retain "the
notion of necessary but [abandon] the notion of sufficient criteria for
admission to a class" (1982: 4). A class would be "defined as consisting of
a set of properties" of which each individual of the class must possess a
"large" but unspecified number of these properties and each property
should be possessed by a "large number" of individuals in the class with
no single property necessarily being possessed by everyone (1982: 4).
Table 1 provides a graphic representation of the differences between poly-
thetic and monothetic classifications.

TABLE 1

Polythetic and monothetic definitions[a]

| | Groups | | | | | | |
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	A		A	A			
	B	B	B				
Characteristics	C	C		C			
		D	D	D	D		
					F	F	F
					G	G	G
						H	H

a Based on a chart by Sokal and Sneath in Needham 1975: 357.
Note: Groups 1-4 form a polythetic grouping, whereas groups 6 and
        7 form a monothetic grouping. Notice that no one characteris-
        tic is shared by all of the polythetic groups. Group 5, although
        it shares a single characteristic with groups 2-4, would not be
        classified with them because it does not share the majority of
        its characteristics with other members of the group. Character-
        istic D is a necessary characteristic for groups 2-4 (which is also
        a polythetic grouping) but it is not a sufficient characteristic as
        it is also shared with group 5.

Application to evangelicals

To define "evangelical" using a polythetic definition, a set of the most common characteristics of evangelical organizations could be drawn up. Some of these characteristics would be the "defining" characteristics highlighted in the previous sections such as conservative doctrine (e.g., the divinity of Jesus, the Bible as ultimate authority), specific history (e.g., the Protestant Reformations, the evangelical awakenings) and individual characteristics (e.g., personal spiritual experience centred on Jesus Christ, a sense of the degeneration of the moral and spiritual world and an affectionate affiliation with other evangelicals), to name but a few possibilities. Many of these characteristics would not be shared by all organizations and none of them would be sufficient. A small number of these characteristics would be identified as necessary characteristics (possibly based on characteristics most considered necessary in existing definitions) and would be shared by all "evangelical" organizations but could also be shared with some non-evangelical organizations. An organization could be identified as "evangelical" if it has all the necessary characteristics and a large number of the other common characteristics of evangelicals. Thus, organizations could be assigned a numeric score based on the number of characteristics they had. Organizations could be classified according to this score or on their score in individual sections of the index.

In addition to Bebbington, there are at least two scholars who have developed a definition similar to this idea. They both illustrate how a polythetic definition could be used and highlight why more work needs to be done. Andrew Grenville (1995) has developed a 10-item polythetic scale for use with Angus Reid group surveys which has proved to be a useful tool for the study of individual evangelicals (Rawlyk 1996). This scale has two weaknesses for the study of evangelical organizations. First, it does not take into account the existence of necessary characteristics. Grenville's study leaves open the possibility that someone who denies the deity of Christ and someone who does not attend church regularly will be given the same score on the scale. Second, the scale is designed to identify individual evangelicals as part of a large survey and of necessity must be easily understood and relatively short. The result is a scale which does not take into account the complexity of religious organizations.

Lyman Kellstedt (1989) has developed a polythetic scale for the study of the political behaviour of evangelicals. His scale begins with minimalist criteria of Christ's divinity, Christ as the only way to salvation, an inerrant Bible, and a commitment to spreading the Gospel and adds to them "necessary but not sufficient" beliefs (i.e., God, having a religious preference, life after death, importance of faith, consolation from religion). Although Kellstedt shows his conceptualization to be useful for differentiation between religious individuals with different political beliefs, he has also

made choices which eliminate people and organizations from the classifi-
cation "evangelical" unnecessarily. For example, the doctrine of inerrancy
is widely misunderstood in North American culture and organizations
sometimes do not use the word to avoid controversy (see Ammerman
1982 for a critique of the use of inerrancy as a defining feature of evangel-
icals). Thus people or organizations would be excluded from evangelical-
ism if they do not hold to all the details of the doctrine or do not identify
with the term. In addition, Kellstedt uses "get consolation from religion"
as a filter to eliminate people from consideration as evangelicals (1989:
15). However it is unclear what this is measuring. Is this measuring an
individual's current feelings or doctrinal expectations (e.g., I am sup-
posed to, therefore I do)? Furthermore such a filter is of little meaning
when applied to the study of organizations.

   These two studies and the others highlighted in this paper have many
of the elements necessary for a new approach to defining "evangelical"
for the purpose of studying evangelical organizations but also point to the
need for a more complex polythetic definition that focusses specifically on
organizations.

4   Conclusion

A polythetic definition of "evangelical" as applied to organizations could
be broad enough to encompass variations in theological opinion but
could be applied narrowly to differentiate organizations from each other
without excluding fringe organizations and without relying on sufficient
or dominant characteristics. A polythetic approach should focus on char-
acteristics that can be applied to organizations, it should include a diver-
sity of characteristics to take into account the nuances of organizations,
and it should measure degrees of acceptance of characteristics in response
to the collective nature of organizations. It should allow self-definition to
be a factor in identifying organizations but should not rely exclusively on
it. It could acknowledge the diverse nature of the characteristics of reli-
gious organizations but should also take into account that some character-
istics are necessary to group an organization within a class. It could take
into account ideals and actions by including characteristics that emphasize
both. It could take into account ranges of belief and differing structures,
and need not place firm boundaries on definitions.

   Undoubtedly a polythetic definition is more complicated than standard
definitions, given the large amount of material that has to be dealt with,
but it carries "less risk of an arbitrary exclusion of significant features"
(Needham 1975: 358). Nonetheless, there are clearly some difficulties to
be worked out before this definition can be fully used. How many charac-
teristics have to be shared? What makes a characteristic important enough
to be included in the set? Is this set of characteristics static or dynamic? A

polythetic definition can be developed which responds to these concerns. Taking into account some important cautions and the definition's complexity, it has the potential to be a productive manner of defining evangelicals for the purpose of quantitative identification, classification and comparison of their organizations.

"Evangelical" as a descriptive characteristic is ambiguous and of limited use for quantitative identification, classification and comparison of organizations (Dayton 1991) but "evangelical" as a class of organizations sharing a limited number of necessary characteristics and a large number of general characteristics remains useful. What identifies organizations is not any one unique characteristic but rather a particular combination of non-unique characteristics that may or may not be unique.

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