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What do we make of the overtures of friendship by Christian Evangelicals? How do we evaluate the merits of such friendship when some Christian groups have – or have had – as part of their agenda, the conversion of Jews? Some Jewish communal leaders today argue that we need to take our friends where we can get them; others maintain that friends with ulterior motives are not friends to be trusted. And who are Evangelicals, anyway? Yehiel Poupko writes about the critically important differences among Christian groups, and the pages that follow his essay offer a number of responses – some that support and others that oppose aligning ourselves with these Evangelical Christians.

**Jews & Evangelicals:
 From Missionizing to Partnership?**

Yehiel Poupko

Viewed by some Jews as friends, by others as foes, the one thing certain is that Evangelical Christians pose a great conundrum for American Jews.

“Evangelical Christian” is a term that is descriptive and deceptive. It is descriptive both because these are Christians who believe in the calling to spread the “good news” of the New Testament and because it is the preferred term of this segment of Americans, which is rapidly growing both in numbers and influence. It is deceptive because many Christians, including those in mainline Protestant denominations, can be described as evangelical — and because Evangelicals include several groupings, including Fundamentalist, Charismatic, and Pentecostal Christians. The Jewish community has so very little experience with Evangelicals. Where there are large Jewish communities, such as the West Coast and the Northeast, there are relatively small Evangelical communities, and in the areas where large Evangelical communities exist there are few Jews.

Every faith system should be understood in the words of its faithful. The pre-eminent historian of American Christianity, himself a pious Evangelical, Professor Mark Noll, writes:

“Evangelicalism at its best is an offensive religion. It claims that human beings cannot be reconciled to God, understand the ultimate purposes of the world, or live a truly virtuous life unless they confess their sin before the living God and receive new life in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.”

This statement is at the heart of the challenge for American Jews. Many Americans see Evangelicals as coming from a lower socioeconomic class, being less cultured, and subscribing to a form of Christianity that is anti-modern and conservative. This impression is not accurate. The popular media play a critical role in shaping American attitudes about Evangelicals. For many Americans, the face of evangelical Christianity is that of people such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Ralph Reed.

On important social positions, Evangelicals generally hold a set of positions that are different from those held by a majority, but not all of American Jews. Some of the social positions of Evangelicals are: homosexuality is a sin; no absolute right to

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