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May 4, 2008: The May 7 Evangelical Manifesto

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Title: The May 7 Evangelical Manifesto

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5/4/2008--Unbeknownst to most people, especially most secularists, a group of leading Evangelical Christians are scheduled to unveil a Manifesto this coming week. According to World Magazine, The document is entitled "An Evangelical Manifesto: The Washington Declaration of Evangelical Identity and Public Commitment". The group is composed of, among others, Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals and several well-known ministers, such as Rick Warren ("A Purpose Driven Life"). If the document is read by secularists, it will surprise them. For one thing, it contains confessions of failure—something we secularists hardly ever do—concerning a range of matters, including the feel-good gospel: "commercial, diluted, and feel-good gospels of health, wealth, human potential, and religious happy talk." The Manifesto also criticizes the lives and lifestyles of the movement as slavish to modernity. Obviously the heart of the document is a confession of faith in Jesus Christ. And it promises protection for the unborn and heterosexual marriage. So there will be plenty here for people to take issue with. But listen to these promises and ask yourself if you know any movements that can say the same—even just say it: "What we are about is... care for the poor, the homeless, and the orphaned; our outreach to those in prison; our compassion for the hungry and victims of disaster; and our fight for justice for those oppressed by slavery and human trafficking." No movement outside religion that I know of can say all this. Liberals in my neighborhood have long considered the homeless to be enemies—and I include myself. Theologically, the Manifesto will also surprise many, for it distinguishes Evangelical Christianity from both "liberal revisionism and conservative fundamentalism." Nor does it call for a "Christian America". Its vision of the public square is right out of Hallowed Secularism—citizens of all faiths free to engage the public square, including the secularist (so named) in a just and free public space. It sounds pretty impressive to me and I urge you to watch for the announcement this week.