

Are we Evangelical, Catholic, Charismatic?

Yes, but please let us explain.

Each of these terms can mean many things. Each of them is used pejoratively by some. Each of them is affirmed strongly by others. We have provided an explanation in greater detail for each term to describe what we mean by evangelical, catholic and charismatic.

Here, we want to say that we hold them *together*, and we think it is important to do so.

By evangelical, we mean that we hold to be true the "evangel," or "gospel," "the good news," that Jesus Christ, God's own Son, became human, lived among us, was put to death as a criminal under Pontius Pilate in ancient Judaea without having done wrong, bodily rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. The gospel tells us that in order to redeem humanity from diverting itself from relationship with God which will only result in permanent death, God entered our humanity, reconciled us to Himself by the actions of Jesus of Nazareth, leaving us all an open invitation to enter into permanent relationship with God resulting in eternal life.

God has spoken, and He chose to speak preeminently through a person which is what we each are. There is no higher form in which God could communicate with us.

This invitation comes to us via God's Word, which is meant in three ways. First, the Word of God is the person in God Who became one of us in order to accomplish our redemption, through Whom all things were created (see John 1 and Colossians 1). Second, the Word of God is the collection of the writings of the Hebrew prophets and the apostles of Christ (or the companions of the Apostles), that is, the Bible. Third, the Word of God is the proclamation of the gospel itself, which entails all of the Bible in scope, but it is importantly focused in the person of Jesus. Jesus referred to both this scope and this focus when He said,

"If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?" (John 5:46-47)

By catholic, we mean that Anglicanism is universal, meaning that anyone, anywhere can be an Anglican by believing in Jesus Christ, being baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and joining an Anglican congregation. This is limited only by the actual presence of an Anglican church in any given place. It is the Church's mission to make that possible for all people.

Catholic also means that Anglicanism does not separate itself from other members of Christ's Church in the world. It recognizes many other churches as sharing in the Body of Christ, even if it disagrees with them on various issues.

Some understand these three terms as descriptors of various aspects of the culture of the Church. So, evangelical, catholic, and charismatic would describe styles of the Church's worship, for example, or more exactly, styles of what people do when the Church gathers for worship. We think that any such styles result from the deeper principles that can be known by these names.

As a principle, the evangelical corresponds to the Word of God. Evangelicals value the Scriptures and give prominence to their reading and exposition because it is by God's Word that humanity can know God at all. In isolation, the evangelical principle would tend to move a church to become rationalistic, focusing on the intellect. The preacher would become the focal point of the Church and the hearing the preaching would constitute the bulk of worship.

As a principle, the catholic corresponds to the sacraments. Catholics value the sacraments and give prominence to them through regular and frequent celebrations of the Lord's Supper and stressing the necessity of baptism. In isolation the catholic principle would tend to move a church to become gnostic,

an unexplained or unexplainable mystery of salvation, focusing on what is kinetic (what they do) and social. The congregation as a group would become the focal point of the Church and the enacting of ritual would constitute the bulk of worship.

The two principles together express the faith and worship of the Church, truths that can be apprehended by the mind that yet transcend the mind. But there is a third principle.

By charismatic, we mean an openness to the immediate presence and Lordship of Jesus Christ through His Spirit. The Christian faith isn't primarily an experience, it is an entire life, having rational, kinetic, and social aspects. However, it is meant to be *lived*, and so it is entirely experiential. Up to the 18th century, experience of God's presence was implicit in discussion of faith in God. Experience was not abstracted out conceptually, as if faith and experience were two different things. Feeling (or awareness of) God's presence or not feeling God's presence was simply understood to be a varying part of a life of faith. Afterward, however, we have divorced experience from faith, as well as faith from reason. The Pentecostal and charismatic movements have come about in this climate where not biblical teaching, but we ourselves, have changed.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are the fulcrum here, because they require us to extend ourselves in some way to others. That is, it isn't simply that a person experiences the presence of God, but that the person experiences God's presence in a way that indicates His desire to speak to, heal, or do some other act of care and service for someone else, and the person receiving the gift (for the benefit of yet someone else) must in some way act to make that possible. Only someone wholeheartedly willing to experience God will be willing to do this, for it engages us internally and externally, privately and socially. We experience God, in other words, *among* us, interpersonally.

We understand that the Bible says nothing about the gifts of the Holy Spirit being required for, necessary to, or evidence of any individual's standing with God. Indeed, [1 Cor. 13](#) makes it clear that the gifts are not what is important in our life with God and one another, which is rather faith, hope, and love, and the greatest is love. The gifts are simply gifts, and that to the Church not to the individual exercising them, with the possible exception of praying in tongues. Furthermore, a very good argument can be made that the gifts are and remain the Holy Spirit's gifts, i.e. they never become ours in the sense of "I have this gift, and not that one." Is not God the Holy Spirit free to distribute His gifts as He wills, this one at this time to this person to meet this need, and that one at that time to that person to meet that need? If that is the case, then the most significant meaning of 'charismatic' is an ongoing openness to God, which means that our minds and hearts should be focused on God and not ourselves.

The charismatic principle refers to whole-hearted openness to God, yielding ourselves to God the Holy Spirit, so that the evangelical and catholic principles expressed in word and sacrament are fully received. In isolation, the charismatic principle would cause a church to become mystical without boundaries, promulgating new teachings and understandings of God, His ways, and His interaction with humanity. Its focus would be wholly on the charismatic personality in which the only real authority would reside.

Held together with the other principles, however, the charismatic principle describes our reception of the means of God's grace given to us in word and sacrament. Given our modern tendency to inward fragmentation and compartmentalization, the charismatic principle must be embraced along with the evangelical and the catholic for Christian worship to be the dialogue and interaction between God and humanity that is capable of transforming us further in the image of the One into Whose face we look:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (II Corinthians 3:17-18)

So, yes, we are evangelical, catholic, and charismatic, in the sense explained here and in the related pages, and we think it very important, indeed, that these be together and not separated.

Other Characteristics of Anglicanism?

There have been other identifying characteristics of Anglicanism suggested from time to time. For example, one writer puts it this way:

To be an Anglican, then, is not to embrace a distinct version of Christianity, but a distinct way of being a "Mere Christian," at the same time evangelical, apostolic, catholic, reformed, and Spirit-filled.

"Spirit-filled" in this statement functions as "charismatic" in our discussion above, but we explain elsewhere why we prefer the term "charismatic."

"Reformed" is accurate in the sense that *The Thirty-Nine Articles* and *The Book of Common Prayer* that are central to our beliefs and worship, reflect the sixteenth-century reform of the Church. However, if the reform was successful, it simply restored the Church to what it was beforehand. Thus, to call it "reformed" would be redundant, at best, and reactionary, at worst. So, while it would be true to say that Anglicanism is reformed in this sense, we prefer not to use that as a characteristic.

"Apostolic" refers both to the ancient roots of the Church in the apostolic era but most importantly to the apostolic teaching. The identifying marks of the Church according to the Nicene Creed are that it is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. In terms of the principles that we have described above, however, we would term the three, evangelical, catholic, and charismatic, as together being equivalent to "apostolic."