

WHY ANGLICAN?

Introduction

As a working minimum, let's say that being Anglican entails a commitment to at least these features of being a church:

- An assent to the sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for salvation.
- A recognition of the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed as statements of faith which are to be received and believed, because their affirmations may be proved from Scripture. And along with that recognition, a belief that the 39 Articles of Religion faithfully bear witness to Christian truth.
- A belief in the threefold order of ministry (bishop, priest and deacon) as a beneficial, though not absolutely necessary, means of serving the church. In other words, Anglicans have always taken the threefold order as essential to our own way of being church, but would not say that churches which are differently ordered are not really churches.
- A commitment to the worldwide fellowship of the Anglican Communion.
- A valuing of worship which is liturgically structured.

What's the alternative?

There are a lot of alternatives (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist . . .), but the most attractive alternative for Evangelicals today is what we might call the 'Year Zero' approach. This is an approach that holds that if we are to be a truly gospel centred church in the twenty-first century we need to be willing to jettison any or all of our traditions. On this view, the ordering of ministry and a liturgical structure for worship – even maybe the Creeds – are all merely human traditions which have crept in since apostolic times, and may need to go out of the window if they get in the way of building the church. Like revolutions, on this view, we need to declare a 'Year Zero' where all existing structures are levelled and we start again from Scripture. 'Let's get back to Acts 2' is often the watchword.

Why is such a view attractive today? Here are three possible reasons:

1. It rings bells theologically. The Reformers called the church back to scripture, and away from medieval 'tradition', and so should we. It fits neatly with Jesus' critique of the 'traditions' of the Pharisees (e.g. Mark 7.1-13).
2. It seems validated by experience. 'Traditional' churches seem to be doing poorly. The growth that we see tends to be in churches which have jettisoned inherited ways of doing things. Even within Anglicanism, the big churches are often the ones which have left behind a lot of the traditional trappings of Anglican worship.
3. It fits with contemporary culture. Businesses need to focus on their primary aim, and structure everything towards achieving that goal. It is easy for us to assume that we should 'do' church the same way, because it is an attitude deeply ingrained in our culture.

So, why Anglican?

Is it worth maintaining a way of being the church which is both Evangelical and Anglican? Why not just go with the 'Year Zero' approach? After all, it works!

The problem is, it doesn't work completely. Churches which try to chop out two thousand years of Christian history, and hope they can connect with and replicate Acts 2, are doomed to ultimate disappointment.

The attempt to replicate the original church proves to be unsustainable. The radical pioneering ministry of today remarkably quickly becomes just another denomination – just as soon as it buys a building, employs staff, defines its belief and acquires its own traditions. Almost as soon as it is achieved, the revolution has to be done all over again.

So, which is right? The radicals have long criticised Anglicanism as a kind of half-reformed church which went so far along the right road, then stopped. But in fact Evangelical Anglicanism has its own coherence and consistency.

It is worth looking again at passages such as these:

Matthew 28.20, 'And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

John 14.16-17, 'I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth.'

John 16.13 'When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth'.

As Evangelicals, we believe that the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches have made too much out of promises such as these, when they have taught that the church can never be in error. In this, we are in line with the view of the 39 Articles. Article 19 maintains that even the ancient churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria and Rome have fallen into error on some points. Any development in doctrine or practice has always to be measured against the yardstick of Scripture.

But as Anglicans we also believe that these promises of Jesus do guarantee something. We trust that the words of Jesus mean what they say and that the church has been guided into the truth. Churches may be neglectful of that truth and continually need to be called back to reform in the light of Scripture. But if we think that we can ignore everything which has happened since the time of the apostles, then we are (whatever we claim to believe about the Spirit's work) effectively saying that Jesus was wrong, and the Holy Spirit has failed to do what Jesus promised he would do.

This is why as Anglicans we value especially those features of Christian faith and life which were established in the early centuries when the church was still essentially undivided: the Creeds, the threefold ministry, and the ideal of a liturgical worship. They are not on the same level of authority as Scripture. But we value them as part of the gracious and Spirit-guided provision which Jesus promised for his church.

Questions: How can we be Anglican today?

1. What's the best thing and what's the worst thing for you about being Anglican?
2. Have you had experience of belonging to a non-Anglican church? If so, how did it compare with Anglican churches you've known? If not, is there anything which would make you consider joining a non-Anglican church?
3. Can a church be faithful to the Word and still keep certain 'traditional' elements (like liturgical worship, or bishops)? Have we got to be radical about such things, or are they worth keeping?

WHY EVANGELICAL?

Introduction

Many people, including Evangelicals, dislike labels, and want to describe themselves simply and humbly as 'Christian'. Yet 'Christian' has been so variously interpreted that some further description is necessary. Evangelicalism is not a separate faith – Evangelicals believe that God saves us by grace, and not by correct doctrine! Perhaps we should think rather of five distinctive emphases:

- The Bible
- Mission and evangelism
- A Faith that involves conversion, commitment and holiness
- Generally simple and culturally relevant forms of spirituality and worship
- An emphasis on Relationships (with God, other people and self) rather than System.

The Bible

See 2nd Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 4:12, John 1:1, Matthew 4:4, Mark 7:13

Evangelicals take scripture very seriously, because God speaks through the written word. They encourage careful and academic study of scripture, not accepting negative presuppositions, nor attempts to force the re-interpretation of scripture in terms of some fashionable contemporary philosophy. They insist that scripture should shape the tradition of the Church (not vice versa), and that secular culture should be reformed in the light of biblical teaching.

The application of scripture will vary, but both Old and New Testaments will be used to understand the person and nature of God, his dealings with humankind, and his purposes. 'The Cross', as shorthand for the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus, occupies a central place in their theological thinking.

Mission and Evangelism

See Mark 3:14, Matthew 25:14ff, Luke 10:36f, Matthew 28:18-20

Evangelicals are not content to cherish personal faith. God sets us free for mission as His agents. It will vary from time to time and place to place, but will show God's love in practical ways. Evangelism is one part of mission, as we find appropriate ways to share with others the faith, forgiveness, salvation, and new life we have been given. Since that is our greatest gift, evangelism is of great importance.

Faith which involves conversion, commitment and holiness

See 1st Corinthians 15:2, Luke 1:75

Evangelicals see the living of Christian faith as something different from the so-called 'normal' course of life. By God's help we are turned from selfishness and error to a life focussed on God and his will. This may happen suddenly (as with St Paul in Acts 9), or more slowly. Evangelical faith involves a steady commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and so to obedience to revealed truth, and to standards of personal (and corporate) conduct. Holiness describes a quality of life 'set apart' for God, driven by a desire for his will and his ways of achieving it. 2nd Corinthians 7:1

Simple Spirituality and Worship

See Psalm 29:2, Matthew 6:5ff, Luke 18:10ff

Evangelical spirituality and worship will take many forms, and often borrow from other traditions, but is marked by simplicity, use of scripture, and the concerns above. Traditional or contemporary, language, music, and presentational style may come from local culture. The explanation of scripture through traditional preaching or in other ways is also central.

An emphasis on relationships

See John 17:3, Isaiah 53:6 Luke 5:8, Romans 8:28, 1st Corinthians 3:16

Evangelicals stress relationships (more than, for example, tradition or reason). At the heart of faith is a restored relationship with God – a relationship which is expected to be two-way and developing. This will affect relationships with other people, both among believers, and in the wider (unbelieving) world. It will also, at best, have profound implications for the person's self image, neither allowing delusions of goodness (the church is a community of those who fail to keep God's standards), nor letting them feel worthless, unloved, or unable to serve effectively.

None of these emphases is unique to Evangelicals, but the combination of them describes their understanding and practice of Christian faith.

Questions (use of the scripture references would probably be helpful)

1. In what ways do you use the Bible personally, and in worship in your church? How does this reflect what you believe about scripture?
2. Has your use of the Bible changed over time? What new ways of hearing / using / responding to scripture do you find helpful?
3. Which of the following have a part in mission, and why?
 - Concern for: the poor
 - peace
 - fair trade
 - ecology
 - right use of technology
 - education
 - ethical standards in society
4. How many of your friends are not Christian? What would you most wish for them? Why?
5. Give a simple account of the role faith has played in your life (it may help to divide your age by 6 and look at 6 points from birth to the present).
6. What does 'holiness' mean to you?
7. What do you find helps you to pray by yourself? Have you tried other ways of prayer?
8. What sort of service brings you close to God? What's special for you about these services?
9. How would you explain to a child what it means to 'know God'?
10. How would your relationships with other people change if you were not a Christian? How would your view of yourself change if you were not a Christian (or, if you were a Christian)?