

A Glossary of Some “Churchy” Terms

Anglican/Anglicanism This refers to the tradition and the churches comprising the worldwide Anglican Communion. Anglicanism emerged when the Church of England claimed a distinctive identity in Catholic Christendom, apart from the Church of Rome. This transition took place with the English Reformation in the middle half of the sixteenth century, catalysed (though not accounted for) by Henry VIII breaking from Rome because the Pope would not agree to his divorce from Catherine of Aragon.

Following British and then American colonial expansion, Anglicanism became a worldwide family of national churches with ties of common liturgical heritage and shared culture. Formally, there is a defining allegiance to scripture, creeds, the two sacraments directly instituted by Jesus (Baptism and Eucharist), and the traditional threefold ministerial order of deacon/priest/bishop. The rest of the traditional seven sacraments are widely recognised and practiced, albeit less so at the low-church end of Anglicanism. Other defining features of Anglicanism include worship in the vernacular, the right of clergy to marry, the Archbishop of Canterbury as the chief international figure of unity—though he has no canonical authority outside the Church of England, and he is certainly no Pope—and a Lambeth Conference of all the communion’s bishops for taking counsel together, traditionally held every decade.

Emerging from the established Church of a religiously-divided England, Anglicanism is good at holding diverse, even conflicting convictions together in a unity of fellowship. Though in recent decades women’s ordination and now debates over same sex unions are straining that unity to breaking point and beyond.

Catholic This word means universal, referring to the Church understood as consistent and continuous across space and time. It is an important self-definitional principle for many high-church Christians to maintain visible continuity with the earliest Church. The term is used widely in these traditions, though not usually by Protestants (some of whom, if they say the creed, substitute “universal” for “Catholic”, making clear that they are not to be confused with the Church of Rome).

Rome teaches that the Catholic Church “subsists” in its fellowship, though they also recognise the Eastern Orthodox as part of the Catholic Church while not sharing its fullness because those churches are not in communion with the Pope. Despite their own opinions to the contrary, Anglo-Catholics have not succeeded in getting Rome to formally acknowledge Anglicanism as part of the Catholic Church.

Creed (adj. credal) The creeds are early official statements of the articles of Christian faith, namely God the Father who is known through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, the saving death and resurrection of Jesus, the Church, the communion of saints and eternal life. The two major creeds—the Apostles Creed (traditionally declared as part of baptism) and the Nicene Creed—are regularly proclaimed in the liturgical worship of high-church traditions. The creeds arose to define the content and boundaries of Christian belief as it evolved and solidified in the face of alternative opinions, to a point of wide consensus. As part of that process creeds were compiled and made official. The adjective is credal (e.g., credal articles, credal orthodoxy).

Doctrine/Dogma The theological teachings of Christianity are set out as various doctrines—doctrines of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Church etc. Dogma often refers to doctrines of particular importance in the Roman Catholic Church. These rely on slim biblical warrant, while being officially defined by Popes and Councils and widely believed. They are sometimes quite distinctive, especially the Marian dogmas (i.e., that Mary the mother of Jesus was conceived without sin [the Immaculate Conception], was assumed bodily into

heaven without having died [the Assumption], and was crowned as Queen of Heaven and Earth). Protestants universally reject the Roman Catholic dogmas as unbiblical (e.g., the Marian dogmas, along with the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine of the Eucharist, and the infallibility of the Pope), while Anglo-Catholics are more sympathetic (though usually not with the last of these).

Ecclesial/Ecclesiastical Ecclesial is an adjective referring to the Church from a theological perspective (e.g., ecclesial belonging, ecclesial thinking). Whereas ecclesiastical is an adjective referring to the Church in its architecture, liturgy, or hierarchy (e.g., ecclesiastical history, The Ecclesiastical Society [like trainspotters or birdwatchers, but enthusing instead over old church buildings], and ecclesiastical persons [an old name for members of the clergy]).

Eucharist This is the central sacramental act of traditional Christian worship. It is named from the Greek word *Eucharistia*—giving thanks—while its roots are in the Jewish feast of Passover, recalling and re-enacting Jesus’s last supper with his disciples (Mark 14:22-24, Matthew 26:26-28, Luke 22:19-20, 1 Corinthians 11:23-25). The Eucharist (also known as the Mass, the Holy Eucharist, the Holy Communion, The Lord’s Supper) is a gathering of God’s people with their priest to hear the Gospels and other scripture read and expounded, and then to share the consecrated gifts of bread and wine.

The adjective is “Eucharistic” (e.g., Eucharistic worship, Eucharistic celebration, Eucharistic mysteries, Eucharistic adoration, etc.). Traditionally presided over by a priest or minister, the Eucharist is increasingly the major Christian worship event of Sundays and Holy Days in mainstream churches, along with providing a regular context for ordinations, some marriages (Nuptial Eucharist), and some funerals (Requiem Eucharist). In monasteries, cathedrals, Roman Catholic and most high-church Anglican parishes and institutions it is celebrated daily.

The Eucharist comes with more or less ceremonial and costuming, from a simple gathering with the priest or minister around a kitchen table or a campfire to a Solemn Pontifical High Mass in an ornate church or great cathedral with an orchestra and soloists performing a Mass setting by a classical composer, all presided over by a lavishly decked-out archbishop with many clergy assisting.

Protestant traditions have traditionally celebrated the Eucharist less frequently and held it in lesser veneration than Catholics, Orthodox, and high-church Anglicans, among whom the elements of bread and wine are understood to become Christ’s body and blood (this is known as the real presence). Some (e.g., Baptists and Pentecostals) have regarded the Lord’s Supper even more minimally as a memorial action done in obedience to Christ’s command, rather than the wellspring of his continuing presence among his people.

Evangelical—also Evangelism, Evangelistic, Evangelization This word translates the New Testament *eaungelion* (good news). It refers to a major branch or component of Protestant Christianity where the priorities are proclaiming Jesus Christ’s saving death, conversion of life understood as being born again in response to that proclamation, and obedience to the word of God. The focus is on reading the bible and shaping a holy life according to its teachings, as well as the expectation that faith will be shared by all Evangelicals with a view to winning souls for Christ. Evangelicals tend to treat church traditions as of secondary importance and emphasise the teaching and fellowship dimensions of the worship service. They are characteristically wary of any practices that might usurp their central focus on Christ alone, including traditional worship rituals that can be seen as empty distractions.

Evangelicals are often the most dedicated and serious of Christians, yet the movement has also tended toward biblical literalism and a moral strictness giving little quarter. There are stand-alone Evangelical churches and congregations, with Evangelical wings found in mainstream Protestant churches and in Anglicanism.

Evangelism is the proclamation of Christ's saving gospel to those who have not heard it or been converted by it. *Evangelistic* is an adjective expressing the Evangelical nature of an undertaking (e.g., evangelistic outreach). Roman Catholics, especially with the encouragement of Pope Francis, are embracing their own version of what they call the *New Evangelization*. The best high-church Christianity is marked by evangelistic intent and evangelical joy in the gospel while not being otherwise Evangelical. Evangelism in today's West has to take our cultural moment seriously and be centred on listening, solidarity, and then dialogue—not indoctrination, as has too often been the case.

Gospel, the This refers to four canonical testimonies to Jesus as Lord that commence the New Testament, with a Gospel reading in every Eucharist for which the people stand. The term also refers to the good news of Jesus Christ as it might be put forward in preaching or evangelistic outreach. What is this good news? The creeds sum it up, but in every age a new way of putting it will commend itself. It is about God doing for humanity what we cannot do for ourselves, centred on the ministry, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, restoring our capacity for relationship with God and for rightly ordered relationships with self, other and the world. Its wellspring is God's love for the world, with salvation no longer rightly understood as escape from the world.

The gospel is not just about personal salvation, then, but is increasingly seen as promising the renewal of creation with the triumph of God's justice and mercy. Like the sacraments, the proclamation of the gospel in preaching brings a foretaste of living under God's liberating reign. You know that you have heard the gospel truly preached when you are touched (sometimes deeply) with humble gratitude, reinvigorated purpose, and joy. It is surely misguided for the Church to talk about mission and seek to proclaim the good news if gospel joy has not first taken root. High-church Eucharistic liturgy should be viewed as an enactment of the gospel in the key of cosmic drama—and if the Eucharist is regarded as a mystery, it is a gospel mystery.

High Church (Low Church) This is a rough measure of how relatively important the Church is in the way a particular denomination understands its Christianity, or indeed within a single denomination (e.g., we talk about high-church and low-church Anglicans). High Church is typically more sacramental, more formally liturgical, using more traditional church music with choir and organ, with more people in robes, liturgical processions, and decorated churches—as with some other things, you best know it when you see it!! Low church is usually present when worship is simpler, less formal, with less liturgical elaboration, or none, also with less emphasis about the Eucharist. It is more concerned with helping the believing individual or newcomer to connect than with external performance. In Anglicanism, the extremes are Evangelical and Anglo-Catholic (indeed, the latter can make modern Roman Catholic worship look low church!).

Host (sacred Host, Blessed Sacrament, communion wafer) The unleavened wafer bread consecrated by the priest in the Eucharist to become the body and blood of Christ is known as Christ's "Host" (sometimes called "the bread" in lower church traditions, where there is no belief that Christ is really present in the bread and wine of the Eucharist, and where normal bread is often used—though such bread is also used in high-church traditions in certain circumstances, often more informal).

In high-church traditions, the consecrated Host is typically reserved in a prominent place in the sanctuary (in an altar-mounted tabernacle or a wall-mounted aumbry), usually with a white light burning perpetually, for carrying to the sick and housebound, or for use in extra-Eucharistic devotions. These include processions of the Blessed Sacrament and the rite of Benediction, where the Host is brought out to the altar in an often elaborate artistic object called a monstrance for veneration, honoured with incense, and then used for the blessing (benediction) of the people by the priest. The primary point, however, is for the faithful to receive Holy Communion in the Eucharist.

Liturgy (adj. liturgical) This word refers to formal worship and means the work of the people of God. It captures the idea that common prayer honouring God is the primary work and obligation of Christians, grounding and orienting every other dimension of Christian prayer and life. The Eucharist is a liturgy, and the sort of things done in church (e.g., people kneeling, sharing the greeting of peace, and the priest giving the blessing) are liturgical acts.

A “service”, on the other hand—the word used for worship and liturgy in Protestant contexts—is rooted in the quite proper idea that our worship is service to God (i.e., Divine Service), though many assume that it means a service provided for religious consumers by the clergy (for which reason I refuse to use the word). I suggest that a “service” most appropriately refers to something involving your car, or your pedigree dog at breeding time.

Ordination This is a public act of setting apart and commissioning for a life of symbolic and actual service (deacons), of gathering the Christian community in word and sacrament (priests/presbyters), and of overseeing the life and worship of a diocese in accord with the faith of the apostles whose successors they are (bishops). In Protestant churches, functionally similar roles are given different names (e.g., minister, pastor, moderator), though the emphasis there is not on the visible continuity of those given these new ministries with the period of Christian origins, symbolised by the laying on of hands by the bishop in high-church traditions (e.g., Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Swedish Lutheran).

Orthodox, Orthodoxy There are two meanings of this word in Christianity. The first has to do with conformity to the apostolic faith of the creeds, such as acknowledging the divinity and humanity of Christ, his resurrection, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Church, etc. The alternative would be heterodoxy or heresy—such as saying that Jesus was a human creature but not God with us, or that he was a God on earth and not fully human, or that his resurrection was merely a metaphor for new life (heresies both ancient and modern). One who affirms the apostolic faith might then be described as an orthodox (small “o”) Christian.

The other meaning refers to the families of Christians originally centred in the East of what was the Roman Empire, along with Egypt and the Middle East. Those who follow in the tradition of Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul) are called Eastern Orthodox (Greek, Russian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Finnish, American, etc., etc.). There are also the Oriental Orthodox Churches: the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria (Egypt), the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, and the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church. The Oriental Orthodox understanding of Jesus was not quite “orthodox” by Eastern and Western standards, but their roots and rites go back to the very earliest centuries, representing something of a time capsule.

The undivided Church of the East and the West finally split in 1054, with mutual excommunications. In part the division was over the Holy Spirit, who in the East was conceived as less derived from Christ and less committed to a monolithic Church than in the West. Married Orthodox men can be ordained priest, but not bishop. There are Orthodox

traditions that later come into full communion with Rome—so-called Eastern Rites such as the Melkites and Maronites—and they too admit married men to the priesthood.

Pentecostal/Charismatic This term refers to a burgeoning type of Christianity that concentrates on powerful manifestations of the Holy Spirit in contemporary congregations, like ecstatic speech and singing in tongues, claims of healing miracles, spiritual warfare and exorcism. The key emphasis is on a second event after baptism with water called Baptism in the Holy Spirit, which is regarded as a necessary step to the fullness of Christianity and key to the release of spiritual gifts.

Pentecostalism is constantly spawning new denominations and congregations. Where it takes the form of a renewal movement within traditional churches, chiefly Roman Catholic and Anglican, it tends to be called charismatic renewal or the charismatic movement, after the New Testament word for gift: *charis*. In these contexts, the charismatic influence has contributed to a significant loosening up of traditional worship styles over the last half-century, with warmer and more personal elements now more widely welcomed.

Priest, priesthood, ministerial priesthood (adj. priestly) The priest or presbyter occupies the traditional order of ministry that emerged from the fourth century between the bishop and his assistants the deacons. The priest lives to proclaim the gospel in word and sacrament, with a particular responsibility for building up the Christian community. Priests and their functional equivalents in low-church traditions tend to be congregational leaders and pastors, guiding and caring for Christians on the journey of faith. In Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and high-church Lutheran traditions, the priest retains the traditional functions of presiding at the Eucharist, declaring God's forgiveness of sins, and pronouncing God's blessing.

In more recent decades the priestly character of the whole people of God has been rediscovered, challenging the medieval idea of the priest as a quasi-bureaucratic mediator of salvation through the Church. However, in high-church traditions the ministry of priest remains integral to the Church's identity and not just useful for its well-being. The adjective is "priestly" (e.g., priestly vocation, priestly ordination, priestly character).

Protestant, Protestantism This refers to churches that first emerged in sixteenth-century Europe, breaking ties with Rome and its papacy to chart a new course in supposed greater fidelity to scripture. The great Protestant families are Lutheran, Reformed, and Baptist, each with its own distinctive theology and worship within the broad definition given above. Low-church Anglicans are happy to be called Protestant, though high-church Anglicans believe that they never left the Catholic Church—they simply reformed it. The Church of Sweden, like the Church of England, retained the key features of traditional Catholic faith and order (minus the papacy), while other Scandinavian and German Lutheran churches did not. Some Protestant churches have bishops, though unlike the Swedish Lutherans they do not regard visible continuity of episcopal ordination, or apostolic succession through the laying on of hands, as of the essence.

Since the sixteenth century, new Protestant families have arisen out of older traditions, such as Congregationalists from Presbyterians, and Methodists from Anglicans. The Pentecostal churches are the latest version of Protestantism, though older Protestant families are often disapproving of their doctrinal emphases and practices.

Reformation see **Protestant, Protestantism**

Sacrament (also noun & adj. **sacramental**) A sacrament is a traditional rite in which Christ and his saving work is made present through the Church's ministry in a particular context. There is the context of Christian initiation, with *baptism* and then strengthening by the Holy Spirit in *confirmation* (with adults, these can be combined in a single, albeit two-stage rite of

initiation). There is the *Eucharist* which stands at the heart of a sacramental vision of God's all-embracing love, welcome, forgiveness and empowerment in Jesus Christ, reconstituting the Church at each celebration. There is the forgiveness of sins announced by the priest (also by Lutheran pastors) called *confession* or *reconciliation*. It takes place either in the worshiping assembly, or less often in private pastoral ministry with troubled souls or with those who make this sacrament a matter of regular spiritual discipline. Then there are sacraments that shape the whole life of those touched by them, making them particular sacramental agents of God's grace and blessing in the world, namely *marriage* (*Holy Matrimony*) and *ordination* (*Holy Orders*). The clergy are normally ministers of baptism though anyone can do it in an emergency. The married couple minister the sacrament to each other in the Western tradition, with the priest present to witness and bless, while in the Eastern Church the priest ministers marriage to the couple. The priest and bishop absolve after confession, while the bishop ministers the sacrament of orders (with priests or bishops joining in the laying on of hands with prayer when a new priest or bishop is being ordained).

All these are properly sacramental acts. Other things and actions of a sacrament-like nature are called *sacramentals* (e.g., the architecture of sacred space in the church building, the liturgical year, icons, Eucharistic vestments of the priest, use of blessed water and incense, ritual gestures in the conduct of public worship like the sign of the cross, etc.). These contribute to the sense that our world is shot through with the glory of God in Jesus Christ, which comes to particular palpable expression in worship.

Worship The praise of God in the assembly of Christians is collectively called worship, though it has various forms that are more or less liturgical. The Eucharist is the central act of worship, but there are also daily offices (said or sung, such as Anglican Evensong), prayer and praise services (especially beloved of Evangelicals and Pentecostals), and other gatherings where worship provides the context such as ordinations, weddings, funerals, commissioning for new ministries etc. The word "worth" is central to understanding what worship means—who or what has ultimate worth in our life. Luther taught that whatever matters most to us is what we worship, which for many is success, wealth, beauty, youth, winning, etc., etc.