



In the contemporary world, few religious phenomena have grown as rapidly as the evangelical movement. Its presence is increasingly visible in Latin America, Europe, and Africa; its preaching is fervent, its language direct, and its call to conversion intense. Many Catholics today live alongside family members, friends, or coworkers who belong to evangelical communities.

But an essential question arises for the Catholic believer: **what exactly are evangelicals from a theological perspective? What do they teach? Where do they agree with Catholic faith and where do they depart from it? How should a Catholic respond pastorally?**

This article offers a profound, apologetic, and pastoral reflection—rigorous in theology, approachable in language, and oriented toward spiritual discernment.

What Does It Mean to Be “Evangelical”?

The term “evangelical” comes from *Gospel*, meaning “good news.” In a strict sense, **every Christian should be evangelical**, because he believes in the Gospel of Christ. However, historically the term today refers to a set of Protestant communities that emerged from the Reformation and developed especially during the eighteenth to twentieth centuries.

These communities are characterized by several common features:

- Absolute centrality of the Bible as the sole authority.
- Rejection of the doctrinal authority of the historic Church.
- Denial of several Catholic sacraments.
- Emphasis on immediate personal conversion.
- Individual interpretation of Scripture.

Although they present internal diversity, they share a common historical root.

Historical Origins: The Break with the Apostolic Church

To understand the evangelical phenomenon, one must go back to the sixteenth century and



the crisis of Western Christendom.

The Protestant Reformation

The movement arises indirectly from the Reformation initiated by **Martín Lutero** in 1517, when he challenged the doctrinal authority of the Church and proposed new teachings:

- *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone).
- *Sola fide* (faith alone).
- Rejection of the sacramental priesthood.
- Rejection of Apostolic Tradition.

Over time, Protestant fragmentation produced multiple denominations. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, revivalist movements in England and the United States gave rise to modern evangelicalism.

The Catholic Vision: Church, Scripture, and Tradition

According to the teaching of the **Iglesia Católica**, the principal theological problem of evangelicalism is its rupture with the full deposit of faith transmitted from the apostles.

1. The Authority of the Church Founded by Christ

The Church teaches that Christ founded a visible community with doctrinal authority:

| *“You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church” (Mt 16:18).*

For Catholic theology:

- Revelation is transmitted through Scripture and Tradition.
- The Magisterium authentically interprets the faith.
- Doctrinal unity requires apostolic authority.

By rejecting this structure, evangelicalism historically leads to thousands of contradictory interpretations of Christianity.



2. Private Interpretation of the Bible

Evangelicals uphold the free interpretation of Scripture. However, Scripture itself warns:

“No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation”
(2 Pt 1:20).

Catholic theology emphasizes that:

- Scripture was born within the Church.
- The biblical canon was defined by the Church.
- Interpretation requires apostolic continuity.

Paradoxically, the doctrine of “Scripture alone” does not explicitly appear in the Bible.

3. Reduction of the Sacramental Mystery

One of the greatest points of divergence is the denial of several sacraments.

Evangelicalism generally rejects:

- The Eucharist as the real presence.
- The ministerial priesthood.
- Sacramental confession.
- Apostolic succession.

Yet Christ affirms concerning the Eucharist:

“My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink” (Jn 6:55).

For Catholic faith, the sacraments are not merely psychological symbols but **real channels**



of grace instituted by Christ.

4. The Doctrine of Justification

Many evangelicals maintain that salvation depends exclusively on faith without cooperation of works.

The Church teaches instead:

- Grace is freely given.
- The human person cooperates freely.
- Living faith produces works.

As Scripture teaches:

| *“Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (Jas 2:17).*

Positive Elements Catholics Should Recognize

An honest apologetic acknowledges valuable elements present in many evangelical communities:

- Sincere love for Christ.
- Desire for personal conversion.
- Knowledge of Scripture.
- Missionary zeal.
- Intense prayer life.

The Second Vatican Council taught that “elements of sanctification” exist outside full visible communion. This invites respectful dialogue, not contempt.

Theological critique must not become hostility but a search for truth.



The Pastoral Problem: The Risk of Religious Subjectivism

From the traditional Catholic perspective, the greatest danger of evangelicalism is **religious subjectivism**:

- Each individual decides doctrine.
- Emotion replaces dogma.
- Personal experience replaces Tradition.
- Community becomes optional.

This can produce:

- Doctrinal instability.
- Fragmentation of Christianity.
- Loss of the sacramental sense.
- Reduction of the mystery of the Church.

Historic Christianity, by contrast, is visible communion, apostolic continuity, and sacramental life.

The Present Challenge: Global Expansion of Evangelicalism

Today the growth of evangelicalism responds to social and pastoral factors:

- Simple and direct language.
- Strong affective community.
- Emotional preaching.
- Immediate response to spiritual needs.
- Active evangelization.

This deeply challenges Catholics: **have we neglected doctrinal formation? Have we weakened sacramental life? Have we lost missionary zeal?**

The evangelical phenomenon is also a call to the renewal of the Church.



Keys for Catholic Spiritual Discernment

1. Love Truth with Charity

The defense of the faith must be united with love for one's neighbor.

2. Acquire Doctrinal Formation

Many abandon the Catholic faith due to lack of formation.

3. Rediscover the Sacraments

Christian life is not merely feeling, but real grace.

4. Know Sacred Scripture within Tradition

The Catholic must read the Bible deeply within the Church's teaching.

5. Bear Witness through Life

The most convincing apologetics is holiness.

How to Dialogue with an Evangelical

An authentic pastoral attitude includes:

- Listening before arguing.
- Avoiding aggressive polemics.
- Explaining the faith clearly.
- Inviting others to discover the historic Church.
- Showing the richness of sacramental life.

The goal is not to "win debates," but to lead to the fullness of truth.



The Spiritual Dimension of the Problem: The Unity Desired by Christ

Christ prayed for the unity of his disciples:

| *“That they may all be one” (Jn 17:21).*

Division among Christians is a historical wound. From traditional Catholic theology, the fullness of that unity subsists in the Church founded by Christ and safeguarded throughout the centuries.

The challenge is not only doctrinal but spiritual: to work for truth and communion.

Conclusion: Firmness in Faith, Charity in Relationship

The evangelical phenomenon represents simultaneously:

- A doctrinal challenge.
- A call to Catholic renewal.
- An opportunity for witness.

The authentically Catholic response is neither visceral rejection nor relativism, but:

- doctrinal clarity,
- solid formation,
- intense sacramental life,
- pastoral charity.

For truth without charity becomes harshness, but charity without truth becomes confusion.

The believer is called to live the fullness of the faith transmitted by the apostles, safeguarded in the Church and enlivened by the sacraments, always remembering the words of the Lord:



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“You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (Jn
8:32).