

Compartmentalized Christianity

In a Doonesbury cartoon a minister describes his congregation to a friend. "It's an interesting congregation, Mike. Members are far more consumer conscious than they used to be. The church has to deliver for its members! Counseling, social events, recovery programs, tutoring, fitness center--we have to offer all!" Mike asks, "Where does God fit into all this?" The minister replies "God? Well, God's still the draw for sure. He's got the big name." And Mike asks in, turn, "But do you ever evoke it anymore?" The minister replied, "Um...frankly, Mike, God comes with a lot of baggage. The whole male, Eurocentric guilt thing." This cartoon is an apt illustration of the modern church's surrender to the spirit of our times. It has become as focused on the individual person as our modern consumer society.

Even the evangelical branch of Christianity has come to think of the faith solely in terms of one's personal relationship to Jesus Christ. Even the doctrine of the covenant is personalized. The evangelical does not think of himself as a member of a redeemed community. His faith has been reduced to a personal experience. Of course, we must have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This is fundamental. You can't be a Christian without being born again. But when the Christian faith is reduced to, a private experience, it becomes irrelevant. Dr. Williams of Dordt College points out that when the individual is thought of as unrelated to anyone but God, he is not responsible to or for anyone or anything outside his own soul and spiritual (i.e. inner) life. And he says that the logical consequence is that the Christian faith no longer touches the work-a-day-world life at the office or in the factory; it is not relevant to political life or educational experience.

Extreme Individualism In religion, emphasizing personal needs, is no threat to our society. The Christian who has privatized his faith will defend his right to worship in church and home but he does not challenge the pagan thinking of our times. Even holiness has become only a matter of private concern. He does not see himself as a citizen of the Kingdom, as a member of the people of God. But the Bible makes plain that Christians are part of the body. They are not a collection of individuals. The Bible rejects both extreme collectivism and extreme individualism. Christians are Kingdom citizens. "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness Into his wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

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