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Everyday faith and the secular-sacred distinction

For the church it is important that in our gatherings and discussions we find opportunities to include people of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) heritage. There is often a useful, different perspective that BAME individuals can bring to conversations. On the subject of everyday faith, for instance, it is worthy to note that many BAME people do not normally make a distinction between the secular and the sacred. I am not suggesting that all BAME people think in the same way, but this is something we find that many BAME people have in common in the UK and elsewhere.

We should bear in mind that the culture we are trying to change is partly due to the common worldview that we hold here in the West (a worldview attributable to modernity), whereby God and the spiritual aspects of life are often marginalized.

This worldview makes the distinction between the sacred and the secular, but it does not stop there – it ends up marginalizing what we consider to be spiritual. Our view in the West tends to compartmentalize life, like the segments of an orange. This is vastly different from, say, a traditional African worldview, in which all of life is sacred and God is understood as active in all of life.

So, when we talk about changing our culture toward one of living whole-life discipleship, we should know how much we are challenging the common framework of the culture we are in. We must address the issue at this philosophical level or at least bear it in mind. How can we do this?

First, we can challenge the assumptions of modernity – challenge the compartmentalized understanding of life and challenge the marginalization of the spiritual. We will struggle to convince people to live out their faith in everyday life without addressing the long history of marginalizing the spiritual.

Second, we should be prepared to learn from people of non-Western cultures. Other parts of the world did not go through some of the changes that we went through here in the West. In many other cultures, it is still quite natural for people to develop their faith in their everyday lives. We can learn from these people.

Humility in everyday faith

Regarding what I like about the idea of everyday faith, at a purely personal level, not speaking for BAME people, I feel, unlike Sundays, everyday faith is less about the showy aspects of church. A Christian living out their faith every day humbly, unobtrusively, perhaps unnoticeably, worships God and loves their fellow human beings.

Everyday faith is also less about hierarchy. When we live out our faith in our everyday life, there is no hierarchical structure. We are all simple being God's children, equal in His eyes and living out our lives in front of Him.

Perhaps as a result of being less about show and hierarchy, everyday faith is also less about us and more about God.

What can church leaders do?

Some of the things we have done at Emmanuel Church Forest Gate can be applied more widely.

First, we have asked church members to talk about their work during a church service, in the place of a preached sermon. We have had services where three or four people have talked to the congregation about their normal days at work; and more than just taking the place of the sermon, we centre the whole service around that. In that way, we helped these people understand that the church values their work. It is not something they do aside from their Christian faith but part of their faith. It is not something they do separate from being members of the church but a part of their membership. We also prayed for them and their daily lives and work. This is something we can do more of as church leaders – finding opportunities for members of our church to share about their everyday lives, and doing that in a way that shows that we see their normal activity as part of Christian life.

Second, in my sermons I often refer to local places of work and schools. I do that as a way to show people in the congregation that the life they have outside of what we do in the church building is something important to us and also is part of how we make sense of what it means to be God's children and God's servants. This can draw in people's daily lives into the life of the church.

Third, we have developed weekday activities that church members can attend or volunteer for. We have a good range of projects – supporting those with mental health problems and projects for the homeless, for example. So, church is not just about individuals attending church service on a Sunday but the church itself is running activities in the world that members of the church can be part of.

By these actions, we seek to make it clear that the church values the everyday lives of its members and understands our everyday activities as part of our mission and contribution to God's Kingdom.

Find out more about Everyday Faith

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