



IS THERE A SUCH A THING AS FAITH WITHOUT CULTURE (AND VICE VERSA)?

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After the Second Vatican Council, the task of making faith culturally relevant was a welcomed endeavor. However, navigating successfully such cultural encounters, in all their complexity, could not simply be achieved by enthusiasm and goodwill. A better understanding of ‘culture’ and how it works was needed. In many approaches, culture was seen as something apart from faith and thus, separable. A common imagery was the corn with its husk where the former represented faith and the latter, culture. By peeling away the husk, culture could be stripped away from faith and transplanted within another cultural context. Often, the mistake of such thinking is the assumption that there is a true kernel of faith that can be unearthed after centuries of encounters with different cultures. What isn’t mentioned in analogies such as these is the fact that culture

is also viewed in a similar manner—culture is sometimes thought of as the corn, something that can be isolated from all other influences.

This complexity becomes apparent especially in places where Catholic belief is not the majority. A minority status highlights challenges especially when Catholic culture encounters religious beliefs that are embedded to the local culture. The strength of Catholicism then, lies in the way it faithfully continues to adhere to tradition while engaging new cultural realities. More sensitivity is shown today than in the past where local beliefs and practices were simply wiped away. The struggle to embrace local rituals shows a greater level of discernment than before. Therefore, the growth of Catholicism in remote

parts of the world has helped the West to better understand previous assumptions of faith and culture. Rather than separating the two like the corn and the husk, the transmission of faith already includes a cultural reality and the reception of faith does so as well.

As for culture, dare we say that it can be isolated when faith cannot?

Or dare we say that culture can stand alone when religious symbols and meanings have always been with us? It is this

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author’s belief then, that just as faith cannot be viewed outside a cultural context nor received void of one, culture cannot be understood outside of faith or truly engaged without one.