

The Seeds of the Word

St. Justin Martyr is one of the most revered Fathers of the early Church because he WITNESSED to the TRUTH of the faith in his DEATH and ALSO during his LIFE to help others to discover the truth of Christianity. Justin himself was a philosopher and a convert to the faith and so he saw the value of philosophy. At the same time he saw its INADEQUACY for leading one to the divine.

When he engaged with the culture around him, particularly Greek philosophy, he saw that there were elements of truth found in platonic philosophy and he called them “seeds of the Word”.

The concept of a “seed” captures two elements held in tension that although there are ELEMENTS of truth found in our culture but it does NOT possess the FULLNESS of truth. The good that is found in our cultures is the “seed(s) of the Word or of truth” but they are not THE TRUTH. The Catholic Church makes the AUDACIOUS CLAIM that the FULLNESS of truth can ONLY be found in the Catholic Church because Christ has established the Church as the bulwark of truth. Either we are COMPLETELY INSANE or...we are ABSOLUTELY RIGHT.

St. Justin believed in this truth so much that he was willing to be beheaded by the emperor in 165 AD! Yet at the same time he recognized that if we watered the “seeds of the Word” found in other cultures with the WATERS OF EVANGELIZATION, we can lead people to the fullness of truth **IN CHRIST**.

To put this concept in simple terms: in our work of evangelization, it is about meeting people where they are at and recognizing the elements of truth AND error in order to lead them through the Catholic Church to Jesus Christ who is the WORD made flesh, THE Way, THE Truth, and THE Life.

Think about how St. Paul engaged with the Greeks in the book of Acts. He saw the ERROR of their idolatrous statues but he recognized at the same time how they had one statue made “to an unknown god”. St. Paul saw the “seeds of the Word”, he sees deep down the goodness of their desire to worship God but they do not know to whom they should worship and so he takes the opportunity to share the Gospel with them: “What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:23).

A few years ago, Bishop Barron received an e-mail from Dan, a twenty-three-year old skeptic who was actually disgusted by Catholicism and thought that priests were nothing more than despicable child abusers. Although he hated priests, he loved Bob Dylan, and one day as he was surfing youtube for Bob Dylan songs he came across Bishop Barron's commentary on Bob Dylan (the bishop himself was also a big fan). Seeing the Catholic priest on the video, Dan wanted to exit the video immediately, thinking, 'What could a priest possibly have to say to me about Bob Dylan?'

"Yet something compelled me to watch. Turns out, I enjoyed the video and thought your insights were interesting. Then, as YouTube does, the site suggested other videos I might like based on the one I finished. That led me to your other Bob Dylan videos, then to your movie commentaries, then to your videos on theology and philosophy, and eventually I found my way to your website, WordOnFire.org. I started browsing your articles and following you, and I've been quietly lurking for a few months now. But I felt it was time to reach out to you and let you know this: through your helpful work, you've not only convinced me that God exists, but yesterday I signed up for the R.C.I.A. program at a nearby Catholic parish. I've decided to become Catholic."

On her decree on the missionary activity of the Church, she writes:

"Let them gladly and reverently lay bare the seeds of the Word which lie hidden among their fellows...And so, whatever good is found to be sown in the hearts and minds of men...is HEALED, UPLIFTED, and PERFECTED for the glory of God, the shame of the demon, and the bliss of men."