

Scoff you Scoffers

“Know this first of all, that in the last days scoffers will come to scoff. . . .” 2 Peter 3:3

Hypocrites! In thought and utterance, the word is the delight of many, keen to dismiss Christ’s Church on earth as a mere human folly or purely man-made apparatus. *“Look! See with your own eyes the corruption of men who were power-drunk! Look at their house of card’s crumbling to the ground! It was all a farce! It should be crushed to the ground and wiped from history so that we can be freed from their moralizing and the irritant they are to our consciences!”* It is high season for the scoffers to scoff at any of us who cling to belief that the Church is the work of Jesus Christ and not some concoction of humans to manipulate or lord over others.

There was a time, perhaps between the 1930’s to the early 1960’s when “triumphalism” was a fashionable attitude in the Church. Triumphalism is a kind of arrogance of belonging to *“the one true Church,”* and *“having the fullness of the Faith.”* One should give his or her assent to those assertions, but it must not be without a profound sense of humility. Those assertions of faith are not, in any sense, about human achievement. And the triumphalistic attitude is akin to being a fan of the 6x Super Bowl Champions, New England Patriots, and thereby having the ability to brag and hold it over all of those Patriot haters out there. Its all fun and games when its football, but it is a toxic attitude if it resides in the Church. And, there was a time when it did.

Some of today’s scoffing, in the midst of the abuse crisis which preoccupies the Church at this time, can be seen as a reaction to the old triumphalism. Even in more modern times, one wonders if “residues” of the attitude remained in the life of the Church as an irritant to those of other faiths, skeptics and unbelievers.

And now, it is so satisfying for some to think or say, *“See! I knew it all along! It’s all baloney! They are not holy!”* And, therein, is liberation from the Church and all “institutional religion.” It is freedom from the guilty conscience and from the irritating clerics denouncing Abortion, “Gay Marriage,” and being the kill-joys of life.

Ok, you scoffers; then there is no “Church of Christ.” But Christ speaks of establishing a “church” and of giving it power and authority and structure! (Matthew 16:18). Then, perhaps according to a “Protestant” or “Non-Denominational” conception, the Church is not a visible reality but, rather, an invisible ideal of some sort. But, the writers of the New Testament convey an understanding of a visible, institutional, structural Church, (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, 1 Peter). Then, of course, the ultimate escape for a scoffer could be into agnosticism or atheism: The appalling behavior of Church leaders and people over history provides ample reason for any of these choices.

From a faith point of view, the institutional and human aspect of the Church is the sinful, weak and vulnerable part. Christ conceived it precisely in this way, (Matthew 26:31ff). If one does a fair reading of the Gospels and the New Testament, it is clear that this human element is not the whole reality encompassed by the word “church” (ecclesia). Holy Spirit, Holy Bible, and Sacred Tradition (Holy Spirit) are the realities which permit us to refer to the Church as “HOLY.” It is not triumphalistic Cardinals, Bishops or Priest’s prancing around in lacy finery! They are pretenders!



Consider, what more perfect assault on Christ’s Church than to strike at her clerics and her children! What more diabolical plan could there be than to find pretenders-in-the-ranks to commit the worst possible crimes against the most vulnerable and innocent! *“The devil is prowling like a lion looking for someone to devour!”* (1 Peter 5:8ff)

As I recently wrote in an Email to a survivor of clerical abuse, *“We now stand at the very base of the mountain of credibility as priests.”* But don’t reduce the Church to us sinners! It is not the Holy Church at which scoffers are scoffing. It is the sinners who are her soft underbelly. And evidence mounts that their crimes are all too common and pervasive in the human community as a whole. Scoffing is convenient denial.