

Catholic Faith Character or Caricature?

I've always thought that the word "caricature" was, somehow, derivative of the word "character." After all, the words sound similar when you hear them spoken. However they actually emerge from two different root words: Caricature comes from a Latin word meaning "*the act of loading or exaggerating:*" Whereas, character comes from a Greek word meaning "*to stamp or to bear a distinctive mark or trait.*"

We are most familiar with the idea of "caricature" from the carnival or amusement park: They are pictures of a person or thing in which certain striking characteristics are exaggerated in order to create a comic or grotesque effect.



Like the President and so many others, the Church is often portrayed as a caricature of itself: And this is not always done with an eye toward light-hearted humor. More often than not, the caricature is presented as the real thing to people who don't know any better or are not willing to research the matter. And so, unfortunately, many people make decisions about the Faith based on grotesque distortions. The following are some examples:

Caricature: The Sacraments and the Priesthood get in the way of real, personal faith.

Response: A purely un-mediated faith (no 'middle man') is a distortion of the Christian Gospel. Christ himself instituted the Sacraments and the Church to mediate his continued presence. In this way his divine wisdom and revelation is conformed to our human nature: Sacraments involve physical elements, human touch and human voice. After all,

Christ came to us in human form. The myth of un-mediated faith is a reaction against corrupt people in the Church, not the reality of the Church herself.

Caricature: Because Catholics don't go about proclaiming that they are "*saved,*" the Catholic Church doesn't preach the Gospel of Salvation: Rather, the Church keeps people in a state of doubt.

Response: At the root of this is a fundamental difference in the understanding of what Salvation means. It is the difference between "*forensic justification*" (Protestant) and "*sanctification*" (Catholic) respectively. "Forensic Justification" simply means that, because Christ took all the sins of the world on himself, God is able to look at human believers and declare them "*justified*" or "*guilt free*". By contrast, Catholics understand the saving work of Christ as having initiated a process which makes us truly holy: Hence, we are not simply "declared" just or righteous in the eyes of God, but really and truly transformed into holy people . . . saints!(See Phil. 2:12)

Assertion: The Church is a big institution which exists for its own sake: It is a man-made bureaucracy which uses Christianity to make money and to control people's lives.

Response: Actually the Church lives in hope of ceasing to exist altogether. "*Until everything is subject to him, 'until there be realized new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells, the pilgrim Church, in her sacraments and institutions, which belong to this present age, carries the mark of this world which will pass . . .'*"(CCC #671)

A good summary statement and source of perspective comes in the next section of the Catechism, (#672): "*On her pilgrimage, the Church has also experienced the 'discrepancy existing between the message she proclaims and the human weakness of those to whom the Gospel has been entrusted.'*" Indeed, do we not see this in the narrative of the Gospels themselves?