

STEVE STOCKMAN

and his

‘ALTAR of CORRECT THEOLOGY’

The following ‘blog’ was posted to social media on 5th February 2018 by **STEVE STOCKMAN** who is the minister of **Fitzroy Presbyterian Church** in Belfast. In the picture he is the person without the beard.

Following the text of the blog I shall make some comments about it and then reproduce my own **FACEBOOK** post of 6th February that was my response to the ‘blog’. I shall also reproduce some of the comments that people made in response to my **FACEBOOK** post and then I will move on to address a few other matters relating to Mr Stockman and his church.

05/02/2018

THE IDOL OF CORRECT THEOLOGY... AND ITS OBSTACLE TO PEACE MAKING



For some years I have been surmising that we in Northern Ireland have fallen for the most subtle deception of idolatry. We worship at the **Altar of Correct Theology**. I have been surmising that it has is one of the biggest stumbling blocks to Churches working for peace and reconciliation.

Now, don't get me wrong, **I believe in theology**. My life is driven passionately, and I hope compassionately, by the words and example of Jesus as I read it in the Gospels. My understanding of God, that I discern from all 66 books of the Bible, is what gets me out of bed and fires what I believe my vocation to be.

So I am not dismissing theology, not at all. However, even that clarification is a response to the **Idol of Correct Theology**. In Northern Ireland, and particularly in the Churches, I have to explain what I did not say as well as what I did say. Why? There are always those who are sussing out what I have heard described as my "soundness". From their judgement they will decide whether to damn me or embrace me. I have lived with deep bruising in my soul from such judgementalism.

Theology becomes an idol when we elevate it to the most important thing and when our own arrogant theological position excludes others from fellowship. I remember Charles Ringma, in a lecture at **Regent College, Vancouver**, teaching me that **mission was the mother of theology. That is a vital order of things**. When theology and particularly a Purity of Theology is our source then we can find it polluting all of the waters.

Let me talk about the photograph at the top of this blog as an example. I love this selfie. **My dear brother in Christ Jim Deeds** took it at the **4 Corners Festival Radio Service**. In the places where Evangelical Correct Theology is god I would be told that Jim couldn't be my brother in Christ. **He is a Catholic...** Roman Catholic they might add for heft. His theology is in error. **His theology on justification by faith? His views on The mass? He might use Rosary Beads? What about praying to Mary?**

Now, can I say that I have no idea what Jim thinks about any of those things. Indeed if and when those subjects come up in our friendship we'll have a good discussion. **In a world where we worship at the Altar of Theology those things matter most**. Not as far as I can see in the Bible. **I know Jim is my brother in Christ because he is passionate about Jesus, has a deep, deep love for his Lord, knows him in personal ways that I aspire to. By faith through grace Jim is a follower of Jesus**. That is the reality and Paul tells me in Ephesians 2 that that is enough. It is enough whether Jim and I define it theologically the same ways or not. That work of God subverts the boundaries of theological purity.

I love Fredrick Buechner's definition of sin. The Presbyterian minister and author writes:

"The power of sin is centrifugal. When at work in a human life, it tends to push everything out toward the periphery. Bits and pieces go flying off until only the core is left. Eventually bits and pieces of the core itself go flying off until in the end nothing at all is left. "The wages of sin is death" is Saint Paul's way of saying the same thing. Other people and (if you happen to believe in God) God or (if you happen not to) the world, society, nature—whatever you call the greater whole of which you're part—sin is whatever you do, or fail to do, that pushes them away, that widens the gap between you and them and also the gaps within your self."

The Idol of Theological Correctness is a pusher away. Those who worship at its feet exclude those without the same meticulous theological definitions as themselves. **We will therefore not meet with certain people, groups, Churches and we will judge who we even define as Christian.** The pushing away is sin, its centrifugal force at gale force.

Our fallen nature as described so articulately in those first few chapters of Genesis is a fertile soil for a grim harvest of prejudice, racism, sectarianism and self righteousness. Grace is God's interruption on a planet that loves to push away others, God and themselves. Grace is a gap closer. Grace in our lives makes us humble. We realise that we all see "through a glass darkly" as Paul put it, in surely his greatest poem in 1 Corinthians 13. Theology comes after grace does its thing, to help us understand how the utter miracle of it all works, so that us humans might attempt to express something so mysterious that we dare not feed our fallen arrogance to think we have it sussed this side of heaven's fullest revelation!

In Eden humanity reached for the fruit, in order that we might know as much as God. It is still so tempting. The altar of Theological Correctness is still under that tree. We still want to be God. We still want to know it all. We still want to be the judge and jury. Meantime God gets over that damning trait in humanity and through grace and his son's humble life, death and resurrection forgives our over reaching... and closes the gap with love... love for those who actually do not know it all... but he includes none the less!

When we have no other gods but God then **we see this grace as a force** even more powerful than sin. When **that force** works through our redeemed lives it has the power to make peace, to reach out across whatever boundaries and by **the same grace** that God showed is to reconcile we too become reconcilers. It is what we were saved for. It is the calling of Jesus on our lives!

I want to comment on some portions that I have highlighted either in red or in brown (with a yellow highlight). In the first 6 paragraphs a word (as well as others) that I have highlighted in red is **'theology'** – so what is **'theology'**? In my **'Dictionary of Theological Terms'** by Alan Cairns I read this concerning **'theology'** –

Greek *theos* 'God' and *logos* 'word'; the systematic study of the being, attributes PURPOSES and works of God and of the world, MAN and history in relation to Him... it should be conducted by the investigation of the OBJECTIVE DATA of divine revelation which has its full expression in the WRITTEN and incarnate word – i. e. IN THE BIBLE and its Christ-centered message. This basis in an OBJECTIVE DIVINE REVELATION is what makes the difference between **'theology'** and philosophy or metaphysical speculation. However, with the spread of SUBJECTIVISM and the decline into more and more man-centered methods, much of what passes for **'theology'** grows increasingly like speculative philosophy.

Simply put, **'theology'** is our knowledge of God revealed to us by Him in the Bible and in the life of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as recorded for us in the Bible. So how are people to come to understand **'theology'**? Well, in simple terms they must be taught. Taught what you might ask? Well, the Bible instructs us what should be taught by referring many times to **'doctrine'**. So, what is **'doctrine'**? To answer that let me quote from **Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words** –

Denotes teaching, that which is taught or the act of teaching... in the pastoral epistles occurs fifteen times... used in the active and passive senses i.e. the act of teaching and what is taught.

Clearly the Apostle Paul laid great emphasis upon the vital importance of **'sound doctrine'** when he wrote to Pastor Timothy **"the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine"** (2 Timothy 4:3) and in the previous verse he had prescribed the antidote to this spiritual malaise that was coming when he wrote **"Preach the word... exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine"**. The upshot of all of this is that if our **'theology'** is to be correct then we must be taught and be well-versed in **'sound doctrine'**.

Switching now to a different highlighted portion namely where Mr Stockman wrote – **'mission was the mother of theology'** – for me that is a complete reversal of the order revealed to us in the Bible and especially by the Apostle Paul. In for example his letter to the Ephesians – in chapter 1 he outlines **'The Will of God'**; in chapters 2 & 3 he outlines **'The Work Wrought by God'**; in chapters 4 & 5 he outlines **'Our Walk with God'** and in chapter 6 he outlines **'Our Warfare for God'**. **'Theology'** is set out first in chapters 1-3 and having taught the readers **'sound doctrine'** Paul then goes on to explain in chapters 4-6 how that **'sound doctrine'** should guide and govern their **'mission'** in life. **Psalm 119** constantly follows this order – teaching about God (**'theology'** and **'sound doctrine'**) followed by personal application – NOT the other way around as stated by Mr Stockman.

Mr Stockman then mentioned areas of concern for Christians where Roman Catholicism is concerned such as **'His theology on justification by faith? His views on The mass? He might use Rosary Beads? What about praying to Mary?'** and follows it by saying **'Now can I say that I have no idea what Jim thinks about any of those things'** and goes on to say **'I know Jim is my brother in Christ'**. Apparently, the fact that Jim **'is passionate about Jesus (and) has a deep, deep love for his Lord etc'** is totally sufficient for Steve Stockman to set aside any possible erroneous **'theology'** or **'doctrine'** on Jim's part.

Is that approach by Steve Stockman scriptural? Absolutely not when we see the example of the Apostle Paul as outlined in his letter to the Galatians. **Paul** had thoroughly checked out the **'theology'** and **'doctrine'** of the **Judaisers**, who for their part were no doubt **'passionate about their Jesus'** and no doubt had a **'deep, deep love for their Lord'** but because their **'theology'** and **'doctrine'** was at variance with God's revealed truth he **roundly condemned them and their 'gospel'** and **publicly chastised the Apostle Peter** for fellowshiping with them.

In his book **'Salvation, The Bible and Roman Catholicism'**, former Roman Catholic, **William Webster** wrote the following (p 90)–

The ceremonial worship of the Jews would therefore include the following elements: an altar, daily sacrifices, a laver of water, priests, a high priest, special priestly and high priestly vestments and robes, candles, incense and shewbread. Then in the routine religious life of the average Jew there would be feasts days, the giving of alms, prayers, fastings and adherence to certain dietary restrictions and laws. ALL of these things would be involved in the JUDAISAERS' teaching. It was Jesus plus the Jewish system... The essence of what the Judaisers taught is included in Roman Catholicism. The same basic error is clothed in a different garment.

Steve Stockman then wrote **'By faith through grace Jim is a follower of Jesus'**. That could have been written by the Jesuits. For Roman Catholics, **'faith'** is following all the requirements stipulated by the Roman Catholic Church and **'grace'** is a 'supernatural substance' transmitted to them via the priestly sacraments to enable them to adhere to the **'faith'** and so please God and earn merit in His eyes, merit that will count towards eventual 'justification' and 'salvation' – Let me quote **the Council of Trent** on 'justification' – **'to those who work well unto the end and trust in God, eternal life is to be offered, both as a grace mercifully promised to the sons of God through Christ Jesus, AND AS A REWARD promised by God himself, to be faithfully given to their good works AND MERITS'** (p 41).

In his book, **'On the Edge of Apostasy'**, former Roman Catholic, **Rob Zins** wrote (pp 43 – 44) when critiquing the book **'Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences'** by **Norman Geisler** and **Ralph MacKenzie** –

The authors continue with a sentence that needs to be challenged. They say "The transgression of Adam and Eve resulted in the loss of sanctifying grace (i. e. the spiritual life of the soul). There is no definition of grace given after this sentence... Romanists see grace as a substance infused by God which transforms from within (Cecil – I'd like to add at this point that God's gracious gift to us at the time of our conversion, His indwelling Holy Spirit, is the author of any transformation from within). Christians see grace just the opposite. Grace is the disposition of God wherein He is propitious (favourable) toward His own. Grace, like love, is viewed by Christians as the kindness of God. It is His kindness to us on account of Christ (Ephesians 2:7). It is not a substance which is transmitted. We concur with Chemnitz who wrote the most comprehensive refutation of the Council of Trent on justification (when he said) 'grace' is to be understood of the gratuitous (freely given) mercy, goodness, good will or favour of God who embraces in His grace and receives into grace the unworthy for the sake of His Son, the Mediator... Rome can assert so easily that Adam lost sanctifying grace. In so doing Rome sets the stage for recapturing sanctifying grace through the Romanist system... Rome rewrites the fall to make it fit their solution.

Steve Stockman then wrote **'I love Fredrick Buechner's definition of sin'** and he goes on to quote Mr Buechner who asserts that **'the power of sin'** basically divides people here on earth – at least that's the best understanding I can take from his phraseology (and I'm willing to be corrected if in error). Whilst there is an element of truth in that, I really prefer to adhere to what God's Word says about sin, what it is and what its consequences are. As to what it is, the Apostle John states in **"Whoever committeth sin transgresseth the law; for sin is the transgression of the law"** (1 John 3:4) and as to what its consequences are, the prophet Isaiah stated clearly **"your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you that he will not hear"** (Isaiah 59:2)

Mr Stockman then wrote – **'The Idol of Theological Correctness is a pusher away... We will therefore not meet with certain people, groups, Churches and we will judge who we even define as Christian'** – clearly by his use of the expression **'a pusher away'** Mr Stockman is attributing such action to **'the power of sin'** as defined by Frederick Buechner. I utterly reject such an assertion based upon the teaching of God's Word. The Apostle John wrote in 1 John 4:1 **"Beloved, believe not every spirit but try (test) the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world"**.

Likewise, the Apostle Paul gave clear instructions to the believers in Corinth as to what their attitude should be to false teachers and their teachings **“Come out from among them, and be ye separate saith the Lord and touch not the unclean thing and I will receive you”** (2 Corinthians 6:17). Separating oneself from **‘certain people, groups, Churches’** is not bowing to **‘The Idol of Theological Correctness’** but rather being obedient to the Word of God.

Finally, in his last paragraph, Mr Stockman again expressed views on his understanding of **‘grace’** that dovetail perfectly with Rome’s erroneous teaching on **‘grace’** as was explained earlier in this article.

I want now to reproduce the text of what I posted to **FACEBOOK** on 6 February.

There is a very revealing post by an ordained Presbyterian minister called **STEVE STOCKMAN** and I will shortly give the link to it. I got 'called out' after speaking at a meeting in December by a 'disgruntled' listener for pointing out that in a Radio Ulster broadcast service from his church earlier in 2017, Mr Stockman had invited a Roman Catholic priest to be the guest preacher and so he was in effect undermining and reversing the recovery of 'truth' that the Reformation brought about on 'justification'. This man (Mr Stockman) is quite simply an enemy of **“the doctrine of Christ”** (2 John 9)

By the way, during the Radio Ulster broadcast service last Sunday morning from the conference at which this 'selfie' was taken, the female 'preacher' referred to the Lord as 'the crazy, beautiful God-man' - sheer blasphemy and not true theology. This is the link –

<http://stocki.typepad.com/soulsurmise/2018/02/the-idol-of-correct-theology-and-its-obstacle-to-peace-making.html>

PS Correct 'theology' is simply 'the biblical truth revealed by God about God' and the Lord said we are to worship God **“in spirit and in truth”** (John 4:24) – John himself said **“I rejoice greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth”** (2 John 4) – was this 'beloved apostle' worshipping at Mr Stockman's 'Altar of Correct Theology'? Truly we are living in **“perilous times”** (2 Timothy 3:1)

Here now are some extracts from helpful comments posted in response

Had to sit in a lecture under this man before.

To say he caused an uproar would be an understatement.

He tried to come across as a 'cool' speaker at that lecture that xxx refers to.

It was so sad that many of his listeners thought he was great.

We must all guard against worshipping idols, but correct theology is a tool to help us to avoid idolatry. Would Steve accuse St Paul, the theologian of theologians, of worshipping at the shrine of correct theology? Steve says he has no idea what Jim believes about justification by faith. Surely that's one of the things he needs to discuss with Jim as it is central to an understanding of our relationship with God. What was the Reformation all about?

Many hirelings (I won't call them pastors) here in France have spread the lie that "doctrine" is a dirty word, and should be banished. They also want "user-friendly" terms instead of the Biblical words like resurrection, salvation, redemption, justification, etc, they call it the "patois de Canaan", like insider jargon among Christians! But secular journalists even use words like resurrection when they talk about football players and other sportsmen and women who make a spectacular comeback! And everyone knows what that means!

This is one of the weirdest positions I have ever seen a minister take. It can be true only if truth is relative, and really doesn't matter. It can be true only if it really doesn't matter what you believe. It can be true only if we are to close our eyes to really bad theology, against which correct theology is our bulwark. And if he really believes he doesn't know what his friend believes about those major points of Catholic doctrine, let me assure him, I do. **I was raised Catholic** in the pre-Vatican II era, and I was taught by priests and nuns on those very theological positions of the RCC. If his friend is a priest in good standing with the RCC, Mr. Stockman need only pick up a Catholic catechism and look for himself to see what his friend believes and confesses. Correct theology can protect Mr. Stockman against error, but only if he allows it. It appears thus far, he does not.

I remember this man (Steve Stockman) when I was at the Irish Baptist College... we had to hear him speak at BBC (Belfast Bible College) as a class exercise; it was an exercise in futility & a waste of time.

True theology is erected upon the Word of God, the divine revelation. Theology is neither philosophical nor academic. It is the queen of all sciences, the science of God. The Church is called to be 'the pillar and ground of the truth' and we are called to contend earnestly for the faith. This faith is objective, it is unchanging as God is immutable. This article is indicative of apostasy within Irish Presbyterianism. When are the evangelicals going to bring charges against these reprobates who push this liberal and ungodly agenda? And if the charges fail to gain support will they leave this polluted house? Believers within Irish Presbyterianism - be alert to the betrayal of the Gospel which is in ongoing and continual.

Additional points raised in the comments related to other problems associated with Mr Stockman and his church. Two comments included these words –

If you recall Cecil I contacted you at that time re his views on the rock band U2. He's obviously getting worse

And on the subject of idolatry, it seems to me that Steve has a tendency to worship at the shrine of U2 and Bono, the lyrics of whose songs Steve drools over as if they were inspired scripture

From these comments you will have gathered that Steve Stockman has a high regard for **Bono** of the rock band **U2** as being a Christian and he has on occasions used the pulpit to 'expound' the lyrics of songs rather than the Word of God. So, what can I say about **Bono**? Well in recent years I have expressed some views to other people about him and so I'll copy now what I wrote to them –

Through another 'post' on Facebook my attention was drawn to comments made about Jesus by BONO the lead singer of U 2 who is respected by many as a Christian. His comments can be viewed on –

<http://www.charismanews.com/culture/43324-watch-bono-s-unexpected-response-to-who-is-jesus-question>

I wrote the following comments on the 'post' that had alerted me to this interview –

'Whilst the comments made by Bono about the Lord Jesus Christ would accord with the views of 'biblical' Christians they are also held by the non-Christian Roman Catholic Church that finds favour with Bono - back in March 2007 in an article I wrote these words - "In an interview Bono commented on the Roman Catholic Church and a meeting he had with the late Pope (John Paul II) and he said – 'Let's not get too hard on the Holy Roman Church here. The Church has its problems, but the older I get, the more comfort I find there...'**

The Pontiff was about to make an important statement... During the preamble, he seemed to be staring at me. I wondered. Was it the fact that I was wearing my blue fly-shades? So I took them off in case I was causing some offence. When I was introduced to him, he was still staring at them. He kept looking at them in my hand, so I offered them to him as a gift in return for the rosary he had just given me. Not only did he put them on, he smiled the wickedest grin you could ever imagine. He was a comedian'.

The papal Antichrist is many things but not 'a comedian'. In the light of these words of admiration for both the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church we need to be careful before perhaps viewing Bono as a faithful brother in Christ - always keep in mind the damsel of Acts 16:16-18 who whilst speaking words that were true was also guided by 'another spirit' and Paul had to confront and deal with that situation.

Hi xxx, the following might be of interest to you. The article on this link gives some interesting insights about BONO

<http://herescope.blogspot.co.uk/2016/04/he-still-hasnt-found-what-hes-looking.html>

For me, apart from his endorsement of 'The Message', **it was of special interest to note he had attended the annual political Davos get-together in 2008.** This is when the rich who control the world's purse strings get together with leading politicians from around the world to determine strategy for the next 12 months. Often, they invite 'religious' people who will serve their world agenda and as well as Bono, emergent Brian McLaren and purpose-driven Rick Warren have attended on other occasions.

It should also be noted that BONO is a great fan of Pope Francis <https://aleteia.org/2015/06/04/bono-listen-to-pope-francis-and-it-will-end-corruption-and-hunger/> and indeed doesn't really have problems with the likes of The Mass and Catholicism in general.

On this next link there are also some interesting thoughts shared by someone who lives reasonably close to Bono – obviously I can't personally vouch for all the claims made but if even some of them are true then it would add further question marks over Bono's claim to be a Christian. This is that link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUo_KYg3ULs&feature=youtu.be
Hope these are helpful

In the first item quoted above I put read asterisks ** when I made reference to something I wrote back in **March 2007** on this link under '**Concerns with Belfast Bible College**' <http://www.takeheed.info/news-from-the-front-march-2007/> - I will now copy what I wrote then and as you will see it is very pertinent to some of the comments made by several folks in response to my **Facebook** post –

This incident just compounds another worry that a student at the College alerted me to and that was his own concern about a lecture given by the 'trendy' Presbyterian Chaplain at Queens University, Steve Stockman who was endorsing favourably the 'spiritual walk' of rock-band U2 whose lead singer is the well-known Bono. In an interview Bono commented on the Roman Catholic Church and a meeting he had with the late Pope and he said – 'Let's not get too hard on the Holy Roman Church here. The Church has its problems, but the older I get, the more comfort I find there...The Pontiff was about to make an important statement... During the preamble, he seemed to be staring at me. I wondered. Was it the fact that I was wearing my blue fly-shades? So, I took them off in case I was causing some offence. When I was introduced to him, he was still staring at them. He kept looking at them in my hand, so I offered them to him as a gift **in return for the rosary he had just given me.** Not only did he put them on, he smiled the wickedest grin you could ever imagine. He was a comedian'. The papal Antichrist is many things but not 'a comedian'.

Finally, I will reproduce a comment that made reference to the predecessor minister of the church that Steve Stockman is now minister of which is **Fitzroy Presbyterian Church**. This was the comment -

“**Stocki**” (Steve Stockman) **didn’t follow Ken Newell into Fitzroy without good reason**

So, from that comment you will gather that the predecessor minister was one **Ken Newell**. Faithful Evangelical Christians in Northern Ireland know full well the huge role played by **Ken Newell** in promoting the cause of false ecumenical co-operation with Roman Catholicism. I’ll now supply links to a few items that show his efforts and involvement at promoting this cause via link-ups, conferences, book endorsements, ecumenical initiatives etc – Here is his link-up with **Clonard Monastery** -

<http://www.redemptorists.ie/about/peace-reconciliation-trust/>

The fruit of this link established by **Ken Newell** with **Clonard Monastery** is clearly also being maintained by his successor, **Steve Stockman** as you can read here –

<http://stocki.typepad.com/soulsurmise/fitzroy-presbyterian-church/page/8/>

Then as regards conferences, book endorsements, ecumenical initiatives -

http://www.takeheed.info/Assorted_Articles/Ecumenism/maynooth-conference-on-calvin-and-loyola.pdf

<http://www.takeheed.info/trevor-morrow-reformed-but-living-in-the-21st-century/>

<http://www.takeheed.info/kingdom-come-should-you-go/>

<http://www.takeheed.info/presbyterianism-and-state-sponsored-peace/>

<http://www.takeheed.info/the-abuse-by-alf-mccreary/>

<http://www.takeheed.info/the-spin-doctors-of-power-to-change/>

One short closing thought on the other man in the photo, **Jim Deeds**. He is obviously in ‘good standing’ with the Roman Catholic Church for on this link <http://www.downandconnor.org/living-church/living-church-office/> it states ‘**Jim took up post with the Living Church Office in May 2012. Having been born and lived all his life in the Parish of St. Teresa of Avila in Belfast, he has been involved in Parish work for some years there in music ministry, safeguarding and as a Minister of the Eucharist.**’

Then on this link <http://www.downandconnor.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Living-Church-Report.pdf> we learn that **Mr Deeds** is a member of the ‘**Steering Committee**’ of the Roman Catholic ‘**Living Church**’ initiative as is evidenced by the make-up of the rest of that committee that includes 8 priests (including a Jesuit) 1 ‘sister’ and 2 other presumably Roman Catholic lay-people. You don’t get to be in such an important position unless you are a ‘faithful’ Roman Catholic!

For God's faithful people I feel these words from **Ephesians 6:13**
are an appropriate way to end this deeply distressing subject

**“Wherefore, take unto you the whole armour of God,
that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day,
and having done all, to stand”**

Cecil Andrews – ‘Take Heed’ Ministries – 7 February 2018