

RESPONSES TO Christian Unity & Rev Allen Sleith

After the publication of my letter in the Belfast Telegraph of 24 January 2004 the following two letters were published the next Saturday – 31 January 2004.

31 January 2004

IT is good to see the religious ideology of Cecil Andrews being challenged by ministers within the Reformed tradition (Writeback, January 24). No one is trying to force Cecil Andrews, or anyone else who thinks as he does, into taking any part in what they view as "sinful, false, ecumenical fellowship".

Other Christians, however, who do seek to worship God together have sometimes had to run the gauntlet of baying protesters outside such places as St Anne's Cathedral. I remember going into the cathedral for a church unity service to jibes of "Pope-head" and other jeers and howls from quite a large group of people. I wondered how these "Christians" would feel if they had to walk into their service of worship in the midst of such an ugly and intimidating atmosphere.

Mr Andrews and others such as him do not accept me and my fellow Catholics as Christians. Nevertheless, I and my fellow Catholics regard him and others who hold his views, as brothers and sisters in Christ.

For me, personally, it is simply irrelevant at this stage how people like Mr Andrews judge me and other Catholic Christians. He is entitled to his views. The rest of us, Catholic and Protestant, must simply get on with the business of being Christians together - loving and serving the Lord and working together to change our society.

There are far more things that unite Christians of the various traditions than divide them. Certainly, it is good and important for Christians to debate together charitably the areas of difference. However, it is also essential to strive together against such evils as poverty, hunger, injustice, racism and sectarianism - to name but some areas of common concern.

Mr Andrews referred to the great and final separation that will occur at the Last Judgment. Our Lord's criteria for separating people, one from another, is the very practical business of how we have shown love while we are in the world.

As Christians, we are called to separate ourselves - not from one another - but from the spirit of evil that is evident so much in the world. That evil spirit makes people hate one another and blinds us to the truth that all human beings, equally, are created in God's image and likeness.

'FATHER' PATRICK McCAFFERTY, Belfast 11.

31 January 2004

CECIL ANDREWS (Writeback, January 24) claims that Christian unity already exists among those who are "truly born again". I have been recently perusing the guestbooks of two "born again Christian" websites based in the north of Ireland. The comments from some of these apparently "united" Christians towards one another is anything but Christ-like and charitable. They are denouncing each other most colourfully over matters such as "Futurism" and "the God Channel" among other things.

There is a proliferation of "born again" groups - many of them making claim and counter-claim against one another. They are all very fragmented and divided. This could not possibly be what Jesus prays for in John 17.

As a Catholic on-looker, it seems to me that one thing that unites many of these fundamentalist groups is their anti-Catholicism.

SEAN DEVLIN, Belfast 11.

Alf McCreary, the religious affairs correspondent of the Belfast Telegraph also wrote the following in his 'Perspectives' feature of 31 January 2004 –

'...there remains a controversial brand of churchmanship here which claims that its adherents have the only true faith, and that they alone know the way to Heaven. This exclusivity gives religion a bad name.

Those who walk the path of separation quote selectively from the Scriptures but like latter-day Scribes and Pharisees they are long on the law and short on tolerance, understanding and simple Christian charity. In fact they are people whose exclusivity entraps them in holy huddles which have little or no attraction for the modern age.

The salvation of the Churches lies with outreach and co-operation, and in finding a common allegiance and witness to the same God they worship. Their future is not in retreating behind the doctrinal barricades, quoting the letter of Scripture but missing the spirit, and assuming that they are the only people fit to tread the path to heaven.

Boy will they get some surprise on the day of reckoning.'

Reference was also made in another 'religion-related' Belfast Telegraph article of 31 January 2004 to the recent remembrance of the Holocaust and so in response I sent the following letter to the Belfast Telegraph in the hope that it would be published in their edition of 7 February 2004. However, for whatever reason, it was not published and so it is reproduced here as a response to Mr McCafferty, Mr Devlin, Mr McCreary and as a 'follow-on' from the Holocaust article

Cecil Andrews – 'Take Heed' Ministries – 7 February 2004

Dear Editor,

Patrick McCafferty [writeback 31 January] urges **'Christians to debate together charitably the areas of difference'**. Our ministry organised 5 public debates to air the **'areas of difference'** between Roman Catholicism and Christianity of what he referred to as **'the Reformed tradition'** and he very willingly and helpfully participated in 3 of the debates. He knows that I would not condone any insulting **'jibes'** and when acting as chairman I made my position very clear on this at the outset of the debates.

Patrick speaks of **'things that unite'** but he should be fully aware, in the wake of these debates, that there is no soul-saving agreement between the Roman Catholic **'gospel'** and the Christian **'gospel'** and therefore any pretence of **'unity'** as being **'Christians together'** would be a mere sham. Patrick states that he **'accepts'** me but that I **'reject'** him - this demonstrates that he doesn't really understand my beliefs but that I do actually understand his beliefs. Those of **'the Reformed tradition'** who are **'separatists'** are simply holding to their Biblical convictions. Others whom Patrick views as challenging my **'ideology'** should in honesty, and to use Stormont Assembly parlance, **'re-designate their tradition'**.

Sean Devlin speaks of visiting **'born again Christian'** web sites and concludes that their uniting factor is **'anti Catholicism'**. Speaking only for **'Take Heed'** we highlight unscriptural error from many sources, not just Roman Catholic and linked web sites actually focus on errors that have no connection to Roman Catholicism.

Alf McCreary in **'Perspectives'** identifies **'separatists'** as holding to **'a controversial brand of churchmanship'**, of **'giving religion a bad name'**, of **'quoting selectively from the Scriptures'**, of being **'long on the law and short on tolerance, understanding and simple Christian charity'** of being **'entrapped in holy huddles'** of having **'no attraction for the modern age'** of **'retreating behind doctrinal barricades'** and of being in for **'some surprise on the day of reckoning'**.

Let me quote from God's Word, **'selectively'** yes but also relevantly - just as the Lord Himself did when being challenged for His teachings. Jesus said to His followers **"And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake" [Luke 21:17]** **"where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" [Matthew 18:20]** **"Fear not little flock; for it is your Father's pleasure to give you the kingdom" [Luke 12:32]**. Perhaps, with true Christian charity, I could ask Mr McCreary to consider which group of people these words of encouragement from the Lord's lips will apply to - to the narrow, unpopular **'separatists'** or the broad, popular **'ecumenists'**.

Finally there was the recent remembrance of the Holocaust and Rwandan atrocities. **'Separatist'** Christians likewise remember the murder of their fellow **'separatist'** Christians over the past 2000 years and have the comfort that God knows all about these terrible events and we are certainly not going to **'unite'** with any group identified [see **Revelation 17**] as and still **'inextricably linked'** to the perpetrators of those crimes against God's people.

Cecil Andrews
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