

STEVE STOCKMAN:

Shaking hands with 'The Devil'?

News broke on 25th April 2022 that Presbyterian Minister, **STEVE STOCKMAN** had met with **POPE FRANCIS** at The Vatican. It was reported by both the BBC and The Irish News newspaper. The following links will take you to their reports –

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-61222863>

<https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2022/04/26/news/pope-meets-fr-martin-magill-and-presbyterian-minister-behind-belfast-cross-community-festival-2652005/>

In many ways it has been an 'open secret' that **STEVE STOCKMAN** has been a huge fan of **Pope Francis** (see his review of a book by The Pope on <https://belfastmedia.com/steve>) and it culminated in Papal support for the ecumenical '**Four Corners Festival**' that was the subject of my article earlier this year and that is located on -

<https://www.takeheed.info/pdf/2022/January/four-corners-festival-belfast.pdf>

As well as the BBC and Irish NEWS reports, **STEVE STOCKMAN** himself also wrote a 'blog report' of his time in Rome and that is located on -

<https://stocki.typepad.com/soulsurmise/2022/04/surmising-the-day-i-met-pope-francis.html>

This is what **STEVE STOCKMAN** wrote –

It is not every day that you get to meet the Pope. Even less chance if you are a Presbyterian minister. Yet, today, that is exactly what my wife Janice and I did. It was very moving and inspirational.

We woke up to Rome on a Bank Holiday. It was buzzing and crowded. Arriving in St Peter's Square, it was already filling up. All day long people were queuing up to just get into St. Peter's Basilica. Quite a bombardment of stimuli.

Soon though we were out of the maddening crowd and ascending the stairs in the Apostolic Palace to empty rooms and finally reaching Pope Francis' private library.

My dear friend Fr Martin Magill and I were there in recognition of our work with the 4 Corners Festival. **Austen Ivereigh** as the Pope's biographer and co-writer had pulled some strings! Thank you, **brother**.

Austen also made it possible for the Catholic Chaplaincy at Queen's University Belfast, celebrating their 50th year, to have a personal meeting too. So we reached that library with that group and there was Pope Francis to welcome us. **It was moving to receive his welcome. As he reached to shake my hand I leaned in and told him that I was a Presbyterian and he took my other arm and kindly welcomed me even more.** (Cecil, this link to the words of the poem 'THE SPIDER and THE FLY seems appropriately fitting - <https://www.poetrybyheart.org.uk/poems/the-spider-and-the-fly-2/>)

Pope Francis has a warmth about him. He has a humility that is perhaps not expected of Popes or world leaders. Very quickly I sensed that all that I had thought about him was true. He has an open and gracious heart. He is keen to make you at ease, to feel special. **He has a Christlikeness.**

He is also funny. He had given us his written script but quickly told us we could read that later so instead what did we want to ask. That is a brave decision for a man of 86. He hands over control to whatever questions are thrown. He has to be sharp and think quickly to answer. His answers were wise and full of great Biblical content. Fr Martin and I were keen that the students got to ask the questions. They asked good ones about sharing Jesus and living out their faith.

Pope Francis started by easing their intensity and told them to live like students. He shared his own experience. How he had done just enough work to get through. How important humour and friendship was to those student years.

He told us to get ourselves a little book of the Gospels. Have it on our pockets. Read it when the opportunities came. Then most of all, he told us, wear it. If we want to share it with our friends we shouldn't go around preaching at them. **(Cecil – it would appear from this that the Apostle Paul got it wrong when he told Timothy “PREACH the word: be instant in season, out of season” 2 Timothy 4:2)** He said that the soul is moved by witness. Live the Gospel out in our lives.

Perhaps it was having a couple of Presbyterians in the room but he then shared about being out walking with his grandfather at around the age of 5 and bumping into two women from the Salvation Army. He said it was his first ecumenical moment. He encouraged the students to see their Protestant friends as brothers and sisters in Christ.

He talked about how we should send all the theologians out onto an island where they could debate the theological differences while the rest of us stayed in the real world and got on with it. That 'it' was very clearly the living out of the Gospel, working together in Kingdom building, justice and peace.

Near the end, I thanked the Pope for his message to our 4 Corners Festival and how amazing it was to have his message open this year's festival and then having Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, to close it. I then asked about how he felt we were working together now.

This gave him the opportunity to speak fondly about his brother Justin Welby and their working together for peace in South Sudan.

South Sudan means a lot to Janice, myself and Fitzroy as we funded a school in Arua, Uganda just about 40 miles from the South Sudan border. Pope Francis told us that they were keen to meet the South Sudan leaders in July but refused to respond to their invite until Justin Welby was invited on an equal footing to himself. That humility again. That working together.

I am sure many will not agree with me visiting a Pope in the Vatican. I will graciously understand and beg to differ. **For me it was an honour that Pope Francis recognised the work that the 4 Corners Festival does. As the leader of the Catholic Church it was an honour to be invited into his presence.**

Yet, I did not feel that I had met with some head of Church as much as an elder in the faith, someone ahead of me in the journey who could impart wisdom and inspiration. A little like what Presbyterian ministers Ken Newell and Trevor Morrow have been doing for some years.

I know that I will unpack that hour in the Apostolic Palace for some time, pulling out everything said. The most vital thing I take away is his challenge to wear Jesus, be an authentic witness to Christ. To be as humble and human and redeemed as he obviously is.

As we left he asked that I would pray for him. I heard from a Belgian priest outside that Francis has arthritis in his knees and is in some pain. I told him I would pray for him, especially his knees. **He thanked me and I was gone... gone to continue to follow the same Jesus my brother Francis follows.**

As you will see I have highlighted some statements in what **STEVE STOCKMAN** wrote and, in many ways, I don't think I need to elaborate on why I have highlighted them except to say they demonstrate the spiritual blindness that engulfs him and exemplify his total lack of understanding of what Roman Catholicism teaches and stands for. By way of explanation for what I have written I would direct you to two resources. The first is video of a talk I gave some years ago on 'The Papacy' and it is located on –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qa31DGXHWo>

and the second (prefaced by a reading from **Acts 13:13-39**) is video of a recent talk I gave on the subject of 'Roman Catholicism' and it is located on –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJioG2WxNbA>

In closing, perhaps you may be wondering why I subtitled this article **Shaking hands with 'The Devil'**? Well, bearing in mind what I said about 'The Papacy' in my talk (from 49.50-52.35) **where I compared some 'Papal features' to Judas Iscariot** and remembering also what we read in **Luke 22:3** "Then entered **Satan** into Judas surnamed Iscariot" this photo that **STEVE STOCKMAN** shared explains my 'subtitle'



Cecil Andrews – ‘Take Heed’ Ministries – 26th April 2022