

Christian Unity & Rev Allen Sleith

APPENDIX added 12 November 2013

**In the Belfast Telegraph of Saturday 17 January 2004,
Rev Allen Sleith, one of a panel of contributors to the weekly
'THOUGHT FOR THE WEEKEND'
had the following article published**

TOMORROW is the beginning of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. If church life is becoming a minority sport in this part of the world, then how much more so the attempt to give expression to the unity or oneness of the Christian Church? Nonetheless, for some of us, myself included, the significance of this particular week in the ecclesiastical calendar ought not to be overlooked or undermined.

Space does not permit me here to interpret at length the undeniable thrust of such crucial Biblical texts as **John 17, Ephesians 4, Colossians 1** and a whole host of others, all of which make crystal clear the unity of the Church amidst - or often, in spite of - the differences that doubtless still exist. And I mention these Scriptural passages fully aware that other people see things rather differently, emphasising, as they do, those texts which speak in more exclusive or separatist ways.

So to anyone who is opposed to or apathetic towards the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, or other similar ventures in the field of what is variously called 'inter-church relations' or 'ecumenism' or 'fellowship', I wish to put a series of questions for further reflection and possible discussion:

- (1) How do you read, and practically respond to, the many 'all' and 'one' passages that reside in the New Testament? Are they to be ignored, suppressed or twisted?
- (2) If you still insist on emphasising the Biblical texts that urge separation from other communities who also take the name of Christ at the expense of those texts that speak of the unity of the community, otherwise known as communion or fellowship, how then do you express and embody the unity of the Church? In other words, show us that you're not just a suspicious sect!
- (3) Might it not be the case, irony of ironies for 'true Bible believers', that the way in which you interpret Scripture is not quite so pure or sound or spiritual as you suppose but is, in fact, more indebted to, and determined by, a particular 'tradition' of interpretation than you care to admit, thus, and perversely, denying the Holy Spirit the freedom to shape your understanding of the text?
- (4) How is the Church's message of reconciliation heard in the world when the Churches are still not reconciled within, and to, each other?
- (5) And in case anyone thinks I'm being hard on the 'hardliners' and letting others off lightly, what are you, the reader, whoever you may be, doing to love God, and neighbour, and self, and in that order?

In response to Mr Sleith's 'THOUGHT' I sent the following letter to the Belfast Telegraph and a very slightly edited version of it was published in the Belfast Telegraph of 24 January 2004.

Dear Editor,

Rev Allen Sleith [Thought for the Weekend 17 January] seems to infer that there is some undue tension or even contradiction in the notion that Christians can be both 'united' and also 'exclusive or separatist'. If that were true then it would call into question the Christian example and testimony of people like the Apostle Paul [author of Ephesians and Colossians mentioned by Mr Sleith] and the beloved disciple John [author of John 17 also referred to].

Why do Christians such as myself, who are, as Mr Sleith said, 'opposed to...ecumenism' follow the path of 'separation'? We do so simply because that is what God's Word clearly teaches. We are to have no 'fellowship' with those whose professed faith and practice constitute a false 'gospel' – Paul clearly teaches that, not only in Ephesians [5:11] and Colossians [2:8] but also in Romans [16:17], 1 Corinthians [5:9-13], 2 Corinthians [6:14-17], Galatians [1:8], Philippians [3:17-18], 1 Timothy [6:3-5] and 2 Timothy [2:16-21]. The apostle John was also quite clear on the issue of 'separation' as we read in 2 John [6-11].

'Exclusivity or separation' is obedience to God's own command and is one of His means of safeguarding the practice of doctrinal purity by His Church. It is also a powerful means of bearing witness for God's true gospel to those led astray by error. The Lord Himself warned that not everyone who professes to be a Christian actually is one [Matthew 7:21] and He Himself issues warnings against false prophets and false Christs [Matthew 7:15; Matthew 24:24] – why would He do so if it were not to warn us against having 'fellowship' with them? What would have been the purpose of John's exhortation to "test the spirits whether they are of God because many false prophets are gone out into the world" [1 John 4:1].

Those who pray for Christian 'unity' seem oblivious to the fact that 'separatist' Christians do acknowledge that such 'unity' [Ephesians 4:3] already exists amongst Christians, those truly 'born again' of the Spirit of God. It has been my great joy over the past almost 20 years to enjoy 'fellowship' and 'unity' with such fellow Christians.

Some of these were, before their spiritual regeneration, members of groups claiming to be Christian [but whose creeds and catechisms etc clearly identified them to be proclaimers of false 'gospels'] but since their conversion they realise, as I likewise do, that with such groups there can be no 'fellowship' or 'unity'. To engage in such sinful, false ecumenical 'fellowship' would be to disobey God's Word.

In closing let us never forget that the Lord Himself will separate the 'sheep' from the 'goats' [Matthew 25:32-33] so 'separation' on that great judgment day will be nothing new to the obedient Child of God.

**Cecil Andrews
'Take Heed' Ministries
Ballynahinch**

The following excellent letter was also submitted to the Belfast Telegraph by my brother in Christ in America, Rob Zins but unfortunately it was not published in the Belfast Telegraph of 24 January 2004.

Dear Editor,

Mr. Sleith in his article extolling the value of prayer for Christian Unity conveys the idea that the New Testament makes it “crystal clear” that the unity of the Church should be the goal beyond “differences that doubtless exist.” This sounds suspiciously like a ‘unity at all cost’ dogma. We should all strive to be gracious to one another and tolerant in the Body of Christ on points of difference that are inconsequential.

But, before getting on to Christian unity, let us be certain of the big point. **Christians can only have unity with other Christians for there are many false gospels abounding here and there.** There are many doctrinally deficient churches that hang onto the name ‘Christian’ but deny Christianity’s distinctiveness at every turn. Hopefully, Mr. Sleith is not recommending, against the New Testament, that Christians should have ‘concord with Belial’ [2 Corinthians 6:15]

Mr. Sleith has called for approval of an enterprise that he likens to ‘inter-church relations’, ‘ecumenism’ and ‘fellowship.’ The trouble is that Mr. Sleith gives us no boundaries. Unity with apostate religions and cults would not be a good thing yet he offers us no ‘port of safety’ for our ‘unity’ ships and boats. This is a dangerous thing. Would any Christian want unity with what the apostle Paul calls ‘the temple of idols?’ [2 Corinthians 6:16.]

To insist on a week of prayer for unity without taking into consideration what unites Christians is more than a little reckless and heading for the rocks. Mr Sleith issued a challenge and herewith are my answers to his five questions.

1. What do you do with the many ‘all’ and ‘one’ passages in the New Testament?

I answer that the ‘all’ and ‘one’ passages assume a Christian unity already existing among true followers of Jesus Christ. This unity is fashioned by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of God’s elect.

2. What do you do with other communities who also take the name of Christ?

I answer that we test their metal first. If they are of Christ and comply with the Word of God in their faith and practice, we rejoice in our unity.

3. What if you ‘true Bible believers’ (who oppose a week of Prayer for Christian Unity) are not sound in your interpretation of the Bible?

I answer that this question could be posed to any group claiming Christ. **This is precisely why doctrinal agreement on the essentials of Christianity should precede all attempts at unity within and among those who claim Christ.**

4. How is the Church's message of reconciliation heard in the world when Churches are still not reconciled within, and to, each other?

I answer that the Body of Christ is reconciled to itself in and among Believers. The assumption that all denominations, cults, sects and religions are a part of the "Church" is an unwarranted and unbiblical assumption. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a truth upon which unity depends. Unity is not a truth upon which the Gospel depends.

5. What are you, the reader, doing to love God, and neighbour and self in that order?

I respond that to truly love God is to obey His Word and live a life in harmony with God's revealed truths as found only in His Word. **To love my neighbour is to speak the truth in love and avoid all false gospels and whatever else is falsely called Christian.** To love myself is to recognize that I am utterly selfish and have need of a perfect saviour for my many sins.

Those who strive after a unity 'in the flesh' often find it. However, the unity from the Lord is both 'pure and peaceable' [James 3:17]. It is also supernatural. The true Church of the Living God is One. It is one in Christ. The fact is that no Christian is opposed to a week of prayer for Christians to be better with each other and more tolerant of minor differences. But this is quite a different thing than feigning 'unity' with false brethren.

Sincerely,
Robert M. Zins
N. Virginia U.S.A.

Cecil Andrews – 'Take Heed' Ministries – 24 January 2004

APPENDIX – 12 November 2013

On 29 October 2013, when giving details on Facebook of where members of Carnmoney Presbyterian Church were holding their ALPHA Course 'Holy Spirit Weekend' (at a Roman Catholic retreat centre called DRUMALIS) I wrote the following - **"So-called 'evangelicalism' is in a very sorry state in many places in Northern Ireland."**

In the Belfast Telegraph of last Saturday (9 November) the writer of **'Thought for the Weekend'**, another Presbyterian minister called **Allen Sleith**, began his 'Thought' in these words - **"Some members of our congregation are on a retreat this weekend in the wonderful setting of DRUMALIS in Larne. It's our fourth annual retreat to the same place and each time we return we find that its distinct atmosphere works quietly but powerfully on our collective spirits".**

Just by way of reminder the DRUMALIS centre is owned and run by the Sisters of the Cross and Passion, a congregation of Religious Sisters founded in Manchester in 1852 by Elizabeth Prout who became known as Mother Mary Joseph.

Perhaps some reading this may say - "Well, what's the problem? After all, it's only a centre and these Presbyterians are only using the facilities for Protestant, non-Roman Catholic spiritual devotions - they're not really getting into 'ecumenism'". Sounds reasonable, except for one thing - it contradicts the instructions given to true believers and which are found in God's Word, the Bible.

In 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 Paul gives clear instructions to the Christians in Corinth on how they MUST separate from any connection with false religion. The background to and context for these verses is of course that some professing believers in Corinth were not putting obvious 'clear blue water' between them and their FORMER pagan and immoral 'spiritual' background. Corinth was home to a large Temple dedicated to Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. It is clear from these verses that the 'unequal yoke' relates to having ANY PERCEIVED links with pagan/immoral 'spiritual' matters and connections. Verse 15 refers to 'Christ' [true God] and 'Belial' [a false 'god']; he that 'believeth' [spiritual believer] and an 'infidel' [spiritual unbeliever]. Verse 16 refers to 'the temple of God' [spiritual] with 'idols' [spiritual] and Paul also speaks of believers as being 'the temple of the living God' [indwelt by His Spirit].

Somehow I can't see Paul announcing to the Christians in Corinth that they are going to hold a 'Weekend Retreat' or a 'Holy Spirit Weekend' at the local 'APHRODITE Retreat Centre' because it's such a lovely setting and atmosphere.

Well, by going to DRUMALIS these Presbyterians are doing the modern equivalent of that ridiculous scenario. Presbyterianism, one of the major expressions of Reformed Christianity was 'born' in the wake of the great Reformation that delivered countless millions from the spiritual darkness of Roman Catholicism and it should, in obedience to Scripture, always put 'clear blue water' between itself and the spiritual darkness that is still promoted by Roman Catholicism. By going to DRUMALIS (and of course paying to use the facility) these Presbyterians are helping to fund and maintain the false 'gospel' perpetuated by Roman Catholicism.

Mr Sleith's enthusiasm for the location of the 'Weekend Retreat' comes as no real surprise for back in 2004 he wrote a '**Thought for the Weekend**' that was very supportive of the ecumenical '**Week of prayer for Christian Unity**'. The article I penned then is course the one to which this **APPENDIX** has now been added.

This latest Belfast Telegraph '**Thought**' from Mr Sleith serves only to confirm what I quoted at the start of this post - "**So-called 'evangelicalism' is in a very sorry state in many places in Northern Ireland.**"

