

Drawing Aside the Purple Curtain

The Papal System Today: an Analysis of the News

A Presbyterian Deceiver Visits the Roman Pope

Shaun Willcock

This article is about a Presbyterian ecumenicist who recently visited the Roman pope, and came back singing his praises and distorting Scripture to justify fellowshiping with Francis. His name is Steve Stockman. The following quote from an article exposing him, entitled “Steve Stockman: Shaking Hands with ‘The Devil’?” was written by my brother in Christ, Cecil Andrews of “Take Heed” Ministries in Northern Ireland:

“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 newspaper¹.... In many ways it has been an ‘open secret’ that Steve Stockman has been a huge fan of Pope Francis... and it culminated in Papal support for the ecumenical ‘Four Corners Festival’ that was the subject of my article earlier this year...² As well as the BBC and Irish News reports, Steve Stockman himself also wrote a ‘blog report’ of his time in Rome”.³

Denying His Confession of Faith, Working with Jesuits, Praising the Pope of Rome

But why did this particular visit make so much news? After all, Protestant ministers are constantly visiting the Roman pope these days! There is nothing new in this. However, there were two reasons why this particular visit was newsworthy. The first was that Stockman had become quite well-known for his ecumenical gestures, a co-organiser – along with a Jesuit priest, no less! – of an annual cross-community festival called the Four Corners Festival. And the second reason was that this was a Presbyterian minister from *Northern Ireland* – once (and not that long ago) a bastion of robust Protestantism, where Protestants actually still lived up to their name and *protested* against the Roman Papacy, vigorously and vociferously. There are more Protestants who identify as Presbyterians than anything else in Northern Ireland, so the visit of a Presbyterian pastor to the man declared to be the biblical Antichrist *by the historic Presbyterian confession of faith itself* was newsworthy indeed. Here is what the Westminster Confession of Faith states: “There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ: nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be the head thereof; but is that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God.”⁴

Before he went to see Francis, Stockman wrote: “I have no doubts that many in my denomination and other Protestants will call me a heretic.”⁵ And so he is, as evidenced by his next statement: “From what I have read and heard about Pope Francis I see him as a fellow follower of Jesus.” If a Presbyterian minister views the biblical Antichrist as a fellow follower of Jesus, the Presbyterian is no more a follower of Jesus than the Roman pope! He added: “I am particularly drawn to his humility and efforts to live outside the ostentatious ways of the Vatican.” Except that Francis *lives* in the Vatican, surrounded by its ostentatious wealth, and calls himself (and is called by others) the “Holy Father”, the “Vicar of Christ”, “His Holiness”, etc. Hardly the language of a humble follower of Jesus.

The Spider and the Fly

So if that is what he wrote *before* he visited Francis, what did Stockman have to say *after* his visit? He could hardly stop blubbering out his praise and admiration for the Jesuit deceiver sitting in his

palace on the seven-hilled city.⁶

“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... 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.” As Cecil Andrews commented at this point: “this link to the words of the poem ‘The Spider and the Fly’ seems appropriately fitting.”⁷ It certainly does.

“Sensing” the “Christlikeness” of the Pope of Rome

Let us continue looking at the fawning words of Mr Stockman:

“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.” Many will be fooled by these honeyed words. But here’s the thing: personal warmth is no sign of being a Christian. Gandhi by all accounts had “a warmth about him”, but he was a Hindu. If the test of whether one is a Christian or not is “personal warmth”, then all kinds of people are Christians who don’t even know it, including politicians of all stripes, religious leaders of every type, or for that matter the dear old lady down the road who believes her daily horoscope is divine truth!

As for Stockman “sensing” that all he had thought about Francis was true, *that’s* certainly no kind of proof. Imagine it: we are expected to believe that Francis is a wonderful Christian man because some deceived Presbyterian false shepherd says he “senses” it, somewhere deep down in his inward parts. That would require us to put an awful lot of faith in Mr Stockman’s sensory perceptions. No thanks – we will believe the Word of God.

As for Francis’ “Christlikeness”, Stockman failed to tell us in what way he is “Christlike”. It’s certainly not in his worship of Mary. Nor in his support for the most evil politicians on the face of the planet. Nor in his lies. Nor in his two-facedness on various matters. And that’s just for starters. Again, we’re just supposed to believe he is “Christlike” because Steve says so.

Read the Gospels – Now There’s a Novel Idea!

Stockman seemed awestruck by the fact that Francis told those at the papal audience to get a little book of the Gospels and carry it around with them, and read it whenever there was an opportunity. In better times, become ever more familiar with the Gospels by constant reading would be something a Presbyterian minister would always be engaged in. But he spoke of it as if the idea had never struck him before Francis suggested it. He also spoke admiringly of Francis because he said that if they wanted to share the Gospel with their friends they should not go around preaching to them. Strange – I thought preaching was the calling of all true ministers, and witnessing was the calling of all Christians.

Now of course, let’s be glad that the Roman pope *discourages* his followers from preaching the false “gospel” of Roman Catholicism; but since Stockman was so convinced Francis was a true Christian, one would have thought Francis’ statement would have set alarm bells ringing. What about 2 Tim. 4:2? What about Rom. 1:16?

Stockman was again thrilled when Francis “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.” This is the very usual ecumenical attitude to doctrine: “doctrine divides, love unites”, as the ecumenical slogan has it. Except that it is a blatantly unbiblical position! Not only that, but Francis was being deceptive when he said this – because he well knew that Roman Catholicism has a very definite set of doctrines (theology) which Papists are required to uphold.

A Brother of Antichrist

In his concluding remarks about his Vatican visit, Stockman could barely contain himself: “I am sure

many will not agree with me visiting a Pope in the Vatican.” No true Christian with a Bible in his hand and heart would agree with him; but then a believer is likely to see right through this false shepherd anyway. “I will graciously understand and beg to differ. For me it was an honour that Pope Francis recognised the work that the Four Corners Festival does.” Imagine rejoicing that the Antichrist of God’s Word recognises your work! “As the leader of the Catholic Church it was an honour to be invited into his presence.” Recall Jesus’ words: “How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?” (Jn. 5:44).

But Stockman sunk lower still. “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.” No true Christian with any understanding of Romanism could make such a statement! Francis most certainly *is* Stockman’s elder in the faith – but it is *not* the faith of Christ. He most certainly is ahead of Stockman, for the Jesuits are way ahead of other false shepherds. They are far advanced in wickedness, false doctrine, subtlety, deception, lies and all else that is evil.

Stockman desired to be “as humble and human and redeemed as he [Francis] obviously is.” How exactly is all this “obvious” to Stockman? He gave us absolutely no biblical criterion for judging Francis (and yes, we do have to judge! – Jn. 7:24). We are supposed to believe it simply because Stockman “sensed” it, remember. No proof needed. No biblical evidence of salvation required. Just warm, fuzzy feelings in Stockman’s inward parts.

“I told him I would pray for him, especially his knees [Francis has arthritis in his knees]. He thanked me and I was gone... gone to continue to follow the same Jesus my brother Francis follows.” Many years ago I pointed out in a series of lectures that Billy Graham was the brother of Antichrist, for he called the Roman pope his brother.⁸ The same could be said of Steve Stockman. If Francis is his brother, then he serves the same devil Francis serves. He has declared himself to be the brother of the Papal Antichrist. I tremble for him on the Day of Judgment, unless the Lord grants him repentance unto life.

Peter and Cornelius vs. Stockman and Francis

Stockman continued to praise Francis in a recording of a Sunday service on 15 May.⁹ Seeking to justify his visit to the Vatican, he turned to Acts 10 and 11 – the account of Peter going to the household of Cornelius, where he preached the Gospel to those Gentiles and then ate with them. Stockman said he now understood the text – being criticised for eating with uncircumcised people, “with those who were outside the pale, as such.” The problem for Stockman is that this incident in Acts is in no way similar to his fellowshiping with Francis.

Cornelius was a Gentile and a Roman centurion, but he was also “a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway” (Acts 10:2). So already we see a world of difference between Cornelius and the Roman pope!

When he began to preach to the household of Cornelius, Peter said, “Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean” (Acts 10:28). Jews had to maintain a separation from Gentiles. But true Christians are sent to the heathen to proclaim the Gospel to them. The difference between this meeting and that of Stockman with the Roman pope, however, is that, unlike Peter, Stockman did not go to the Vatican to *preach* to Francis or his henchmen – he went there to *fellowship* with Francis, as one Christian brother with another (as he thought)!

Peter said, “And he [the Lord] commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:42,43). He preached the Gospel and called on his hearers to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of sins! Is this what Steve Stockman did in the Vatican palace and in the presence of Francis? No. He was awestruck, he “sensed” that Francis was a brother in Christ and an elder in the faith, and he

promised to pray for the healing of Francis' arthritis. Then, casting around for some Scripture to use to try to justify his sin, he hit on Acts 10 and 11 – a most unfortunate choice as it does not support his actions in the least.

Stockman's take on Acts 10 was that, when the Holy Spirit came on the people of Cornelius' household, "Suddenly Peter realises that this is not about a theological issue over circumcision. This is about the work of the Holy Spirit in people's lives." It is true that being circumcised, or not being circumcised, never saved anyone (Rom. 4:11; 1 Cor. 7:18; Gal. 5:6). What is essential is the *spiritual* circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:25-29). However, what Stockman fails to understand is this: no-one who remains a Roman Catholic has yet been spiritually circumcised (i.e. regenerated)! When the Lord regenerates any Roman Catholic, He *draws him out* of the Roman Catholic system. He does not remain within it (Rev. 18:4,5). Therefore, the issue of circumcision in Acts 10 has nothing to do with the issue of a Presbyterian minister visiting the pope of Rome.

The comparison should not be with Peter seeing through the wrong understanding and application of circumcision, but rather with Paul confronting Elymas the sorcerer and saying to him, "O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" (Acts 13:10). For of a truth Francis bears no resemblance to Cornelius and every resemblance to Elymas. He is a false prophet (v. 6) who withstands the true preachers of God's Word and seeks to turn men away from the faith (v.8), full of all subtilty and mischief, a child of the devil, an enemy of all righteousness who perverts the right ways of the Lord. And if Steve Stockman was a true Christian and minister, he would have followed Paul's example.

When the other apostles and the brethren in the church of Jerusalem heard Peter's report of what had occurred at Cornelius' house, "they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). *Repentance unto life!* Stockman, as we have seen, identified with Peter visiting the house of Cornelius – thus in his mind he identified Francis with Cornelius. But did Stockman preach the Gospel to Francis, and did Francis repent of his sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving the forgiveness of sins? Not at all. Instead, Francis welcomed Stockman and proceeded to preach to Stockman and the others who were present. So then, *if* Stockman's use of Acts 10 and 11 was justified (which it was not, but let us suppose it was for a moment, for argument's sake), this would be like Cornelius preaching to Peter!

Peter visited the household of Cornelius so that he could preach the Gospel to them, a message "whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved" (Acts 11:14). This is *not* why Steve Stockman visited Francis. And being criticised for going was *not* the same thing as Peter being criticised at first by the other apostles for visiting a Gentile! Those apostles were wrong, and they had to learn that God had indeed granted repentance unto the Gentiles and that it was right to go and preach to them (Acts 11:18); whereas no minister of Christ, and no true Christian, is wrong if he criticises a professing Protestant minister for visiting the Roman pope *as if he was visiting a Christian brother*. There is no similarity between what Peter visited Cornelius for, and what Stockman visited Francis for.

Roman Catholics Are NOT Christians

During his Sunday service Stockman posed the question, "Are Catholics Christians?" There is only one biblical answer to this: no, they are not. Roman Catholicism is not a Christian church, it does not preach the true Gospel and its adherents are not Christians.¹⁰ Stockman said that he knew some Roman Catholics who were Christians, adding: "It's not an issue of theological debate" – for example about the Lord's table or the Lord's mother. "I believe they can be Christians because I know some. In fact, some of them are my dearest friends and have led me closer to Jesus... than many of those who are Protestant... have," he went on.

Let's be clear on this: his reason for accepting that some Papists are Christians is because *he knows some?* Remember when he said he was sure Francis was a brother in Christ because he "sensed" it. We cannot receive or reject a man as a brother in Christ based on nothing more than some minister

saying he “knows” he is! It *is* a matter of theology. If a man believes that Mary is “Mother of God”; that she was immaculately conceived like Jesus Himself; that she assists her Son in His work of salvation; that she hears and answers prayer like a goddess – these are theological (doctrinal) matters. If a man believes that instead of the Lord’s supper being a simple memorial of the death of Christ, he should believe in the Popish mass, which is held to be a sacrifice, and moreover one that is necessary to salvation – this is a theological matter. Doctrine matters. It matters greatly. “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds” (2 Jn. 9-11).

There are such things as “damnable heresies” (2 Pet. 2:1) and “doctrines of devils” (1 Tim. 4:1), and Roman Catholicism is full of both. And since there are damnable heresies, and doctrines which are from the pit of hell, then very obviously one cannot be saved regardless of what one believes. “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” (1 Jn. 5:1). But this means much more than just saying, “I believe that Jesus is the Christ.” It means to believe *everything* that the Word of God reveals about Him – including that He is the *only* Lord and Saviour, and that salvation is *only* by faith in Him. When Philip preached the Gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch, he did not say, “Theology isn’t important.” Instead he preached a lengthy sermon to him, beginning with Isa. 53 (Acts 8:30-35), teaching who Christ is, what He came to do, and how. His message was full of true doctrine! When Paul preached the Gospel to the Jews in Antioch, he went into great detail about the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 13:15-41). His message was full of sound doctrine! These men knew there were many false “gospels” and false “Christs”, and men cannot simply pick the one they like most and expect to be considered Christians!

If Steve Stockman believes there are Roman Catholics who have led him closer to Jesus, then it is plain that he knows nothing of the true Gospel. He is a deceived man who is deceiving others.

Francis is NOT a Christian

He went on: “Pope Francis is convincing. I was pretty convinced before I met him. But when you stand with this 86-year-old man... it’s a wonderful thing.” No biblical test here. Nothing but feelings. Stockman was greatly impressed by the fact that he was welcomed by Francis despite being a Presbyterian, and by his “humility”. Clearly Stockman knows nothing of the Jesuits and how they work. They are *trained* to be very convincing to Protestants! Their mission in the world is to conquer Protestantism, and one of the ways they seek to do this is by appearing very likeable, very convincing and sincere and yes – even humble. But where exactly is this “humility” of Francis to be seen? The man occupies the highest position within the Roman Catholic religion; he is addressed as “Your Holiness”; politicians have to appear dressed in black before him, while he wears white; men the world over bow and scrape to him; his headquarters in the Vatican itself is hardly a place to encourage humility, but a place of the ostentatious display of vast wealth and power; he accepts all the trappings and the vainglorious titles of a pope of Rome. Humility? There is none to be seen. What is seen is an act; a pretence.

“Within a short space of time,” Stockman blubbered on, “I knew that the same Holy Spirit who has met with me has met with him.” Here we go again. *How* did he know this? What biblical criteria did he apply for discerning this vitally important fact? None whatsoever. He just... “knew.” He “sensed” it. And all “within a short space of time” – even though faithful and sound Gospel ministers through the ages, carefully studying the Bible and not going by their feelings, have come to a very, very different conclusion.

“So who am I or others to say that Pope Francis is not a Christian, because of some theological view that he might have?” Hmm, let’s see. One of those “theological views” which Francis has is that he is the Vicar of Christ, the one who takes His place on earth. Another is that Mary is co-redemptrix with

Christ. Another is that by baptism one is born again and becomes a child of God. Another is that sins must be confessed to a priest, who has the power to forgive them. Another is that when a Papist partakes of the wafer in the mass, he eats the actual body and blood of Christ, and that without doing so he cannot be saved. Thus for him, salvation is not by God's grace through faith in Christ alone, but by one's works. He preaches "another Jesus" and "another gospel" (2 Cor. 11:4). Who am I, then, and who are other Christians, to say that Francis is not a Christian? Answer: in myself I am no one, but with the Bible in my hand I and others who know and love the same Bible are able to say with a "Thus saith the Lord": *Francis is not a Christian*. This is not a mere opinion; it is not something we "sense" or "feel"; it is judging according to the bright light of the Word of God. Both his doctrines, and his works, are all the evidence we need.

The Usual Ecumenical Error about "Loving One Another"

Lastly, Stockman appealed to an old favourite among ecumenicals: he said the Bible tells us we will not know if others are disciples by their theology, but by how they love one another. It is true that Jesus said in Jn. 13:34,35, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Love between the brethren shows the world that we are Christ's disciples. Stockman, however, ignores the words, "*one another*". Note well: the *world* will know *true Christians* by their love for one another. We have seen that Francis is not a true Christian; therefore this portion of Scripture does not apply in this case.

Doubtless Francis loves many people. Doubtless he loves his fellow-Jesuits, or many of them. Doubtless he even loves many ecumenical "Protestants" who fawn over him and refer to him as "brother". The world loves its own. Jesus said, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own" (Jn. 15:19). But Francis' love for other people, worldly people like himself, is in no way whatsoever a fulfilment of Jn. 13:34,35! That precious portion of Scripture applies only to true believers; to the love which exists between all those who are Christ's. The mere fact that Francis welcomed Steve Stockman, shook his hand, and thanked him for praying for him, is no evidence whatsoever of Christian love.

Stockman said: "It was [simply] two Christians shaking hands." It was two men of kindred spirit shaking hands, certainly; but two Christians? Absolutely not. Do not be deceived by the devil's ecumenical overtures. These are the lies of the serpent.

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ENDNOTES:

1. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-61222863> and <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2022/04/26/news/pope-meets-fr-martin-magill-and-presbyterian-minister-behind-belfast-cross-community-festival-2652005/>
2. <https://www.takeheed.info/pdf/2022/January/four-corners-festival-belfast.pdf>
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4. Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 25, “Of the Church.”
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-61222863>
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10. *Are Some Roman Catholics Christians?* by Shaun Willcock. Bible Based Ministries. <https://www.biblebasedministries.co.uk/pamphlets/are-some-roman-catholics-christians/>