

571 Long Acre Road
Palmyra, VA 22963
January 6, 2004

Dear Editor:

Ms. Camilla Curnow's letter ("Not all Christians agree", January 7, 2004) correctly clarifies my previous letter ("Christians could increase fellowship", December 10, 2003) in that I do not speak for any other Christians, only myself.

Ms. Curnow apparently does not consider the Bible as her source of faith and morals yet still considers herself "a Christian of deep faith". I am sure that there are many who feel as she does. There is no way that I would intentionally discourage such faith.

My suggestion, however, was not addressed to "all Christians" but only to those who actually do consider the Bible as their source of faith and morals.

Faith and reason together where when you take "A" by faith, then logic (reason) shows that "B" follows. When you take the Bible by faith ("A"), then the logic (reason) is the "reasonable interpretation" that produces the doctrine which follows ("B").

Now I have been in full fellowship with a number of different Bible believing Protestant denominations, none of which consider themselves as "fundamentalist". I have been accepted into official membership in some while participating in Holy Communion in all. These include Baptist (both American Baptist Convention and Southern Baptist Convention), Assembly of God, Plymouth Brethren, Evangelical Free, Nazarene, Methodist, Christian Missionary Alliance, and various independent churches.

My wife's mother played the piano for a Methodist church. When we visited there, we celebrated communion there. My brother-in-law attends a Baptist church. When we visited there, we also had communion there. My daughter attends an Assembly of God church. When we visited there, we also celebrated communion there. We have never seen enough of a difference between any of them to not be in fellowship with all of them.

Each church we associate with is a Bible believing church. Each lists the Bible as the source of faith and morals in the first article of their statement of faith. I never questioned their authenticity and they never questioned our fellowship with them.

The curious thing is that through all my fifty plus years

hearing sermons in all those churches, there was virtually none dealing with the differences of the denominations. I never heard a Baptist preach on the errors of the Methodists nor any other about another. Now if the preachers don't preach about the differences, are they not thus saying that these differences are really not all that important?

I have read or at least seen some really anti-catholic literature which claims the Roman Catholic Church is in a state of total apostasy and the pope and or papacy is the anti-Christ. Some depict the Catholic Church as the "whore of Babylon" referred to Revelation chapter 17 somehow confusing the Church with the old Roman Empire which terribly persecuted that very Church.

I have not, however, been in a church service where there was any actual preaching concerning any errors in the Catholic Church. Such anti-Catholic rhetoric, which was prevalent during the early days of the Reformation, has obviously faded, at least to some degree. While most Evangelicals don't speak against Catholics, most really do not know just what Catholics believe.

Back some years ago, I started looking into the actual beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church. Most Catholics have very little knowledge of the official doctrines of the church so I based my study on the official Catechism of the Catholic Church which was first published in English in the late 1990's.

I have been familiar with the various difference between those churches I was in fellowship with and, in my opinion, each held a position that was based on a reasonable reading of Scripture. As I read the Catechism of the Catholic Church, I saw doctrines which some held and others did not and then on other issues, the opposite was true. Examples would include the mode of water baptism while another would be infant baptism.

On the other hand, when I grew up as a Protestant in a Catholic neighborhood back in the 1950's, Catholics considered Protestants as heretics or non-Christians. Since the Second Vatican Council in the late 1960's, the position of the Church has been more tempered.

The Catholic Church has, since then, been reaching out to these "separated brethren" to increase understanding with the ultimate goal of re-unification. While their efforts with the Lutherans yielded success, their efforts with the Baptist ended in failure.

The way I see the situation is that the Lutherans follow a top down line of authority just as the Catholics do and the pre-Reformation church has always done. Jesus appointed apostles who later appointed elders in every city; a very "top down" line of authority.

The Baptist are different. They are more "congregational" in their approach. The congregation recruits and hires its own pastor. Each individual studies Scripture and makes his own private judgement concerning every issue. This is a bottom up approach which is similar to the modern business management models.

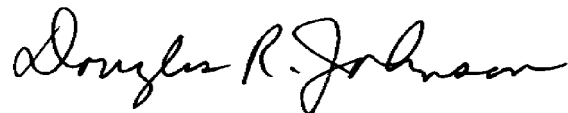
The point is that if you want to dialog with Baptist and other Bible believing churches, you need to do it with individual laymen and not just with clergyman nor the home office of the denomination, if any.

This comes down to what I am suggesting and attempting, working towards the reunification of the Christian Church at a "grass roots" level. This involves dialog with individuals on a one to one basis. I welcome such discussions. If anyone wished to write me in care of this newspaper, I will be pleased to answer whether published or not.

I will also do workshops explaining Catholic doctrine to Protestants and Protestant terminology to Catholics. These sessions are not "indoctrination" but are opportunities for discussion and mutual learning. While these workshops may be held at a specific church, it is open to all no matter what church one attends or if one does not attend church at all.

I am currently scheduled to do a series of four workshops on consecutive Wednesdays at 7:30 PM starting January 28, 2004 at St. Peter and Paul Church, 4309 Thomas Jefferson Parkway (Route 53), Palmyra.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Douglas R. Johnson".

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