

Newsbytes

The First Watch

No. 817

April 12, 2017

Since 2001

Newzbytes is a ministry of Calvary Chapel of Appleton

www.ccapleton.org

“Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him.” Tozer

E.U. Leaders Sign Rome Declaration and Proclaim a ‘Common Future’ (Minus Britain)

By JAMES KANTER and ELISABETTA POVOLEDO nytimes.com



European Union leaders on March 25 in Rome during a meeting on the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. Credit Tony Gentile/Reuters

ROME — Proclaiming “Europe is our common future,” 27 leaders of the European Union signed a statement on Saturday in Rome declaring their commitment to integrating the Continent even as a series of crises has badly weakened the efforts and Britain prepares to leave the bloc.

The statement, known as the Rome Declaration and signed on the anniversary of the day the bloc’s foundations were laid 60 years ago, underscored the aspirations of a “unique union with common

institutions and strong values, a community of peace, freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.”

In a nod to reality, however, the leaders acknowledged that they were “facing unprecedented challenges, both global and domestic,” including “regional conflicts, terrorism, growing migratory pressures, protectionism and social and economic inequalities.”

The ceremony took place in a hall in Rome that was richly decorated in frescoes depicting scenes from the ancient world. It is the same room where the Treaty of Rome was signed on March 25, 1957, by six countries. That event helped lay the groundwork for today’s union.

Moments after signing, Christian Kern, the Austrian chancellor, raised his fists in triumph. A keynote speaker, Donald Tusk of Poland, the president of the European Council, recalled that his 60th birthday this month made him the “same age as the European Community,” a forerunner of the union, and a beacon for freedom and dignity for Poles during the Communist era, when “it was forbidden to even dream about those values.”

But behind the pomp and ceremony were concerns about the prospect of the project’s failure — even its collapse. With Britain starting this Wednesday a two-year timetable to leave the union, Prime Minister Theresa May was absent from the gathering. And in a speech at the Vatican on Friday, Pope Francis warned the leaders

that their union “risks dying” as nations, and citizens, turned inward.

Underlining the disaffection with the union, protesters took to the streets on Saturday afternoon, shutting down Rome neighborhoods and railing against European technocrats, capitalism and shadowy economic powers.

Met by a large police presence, they marched under a number of banners, including those of trade unions and left-wing parties. Smoke bombs went off, and tensions rose between protesters and officers, but the march did not degenerate into rioting. Tight security measures were put into place days before.

“Europe was a dream that has turned into a nightmare,” said Mario De Giorgi, 50. “We are Italians who want more rights and a better life, what we had before the euro.”

That single currency, the bloc’s flagship economic project, is viewed by many as unfairly benefiting countries like Germany while imposing painful austerity on others like Greece.

“The euro is a killer currency; it has destroyed the world,” said Chiriac Tiberiu, who said he was part of the Romanian branch of the Five Star Movement, an anti-establishment party. “Europe has to disappear and be replaced with something that guarantees real freedom,” he said.

There also is rising dissatisfaction with Europe’s claims to moral leadership on human rights since the introduction of tougher policies to limit the entry of refugees and migrants fleeing war-torn and poverty-stricken countries in the Middle East and Africa.

But at other marches and sit-ins, many celebrated the treaty. The March for Europe held a rally close to the Roman palazzo where the signing took place. “Europe gave us 60 years of peace, so I felt I had to give something back,” said Mauro Armadi, 23, who had traveled to Rome from Taranto, in Puglia, to show his support for the treaty.

Tobias Lundquist, 26, who had traveled to Rome from Sandviken, Sweden, said, “With the European Union, we cast off our dark history and came together to solve problems at a table, not a battlefield.” Mr. Tusk encouraged the demonstrators filling the streets of European capitals this weekend to connect with the bloc’s history to understand how far the Continent had come.

Since the signing of the treaty, which created important precursor institutions to the European Union, the bloc has more than quadrupled in size. It is the largest trading bloc in the world and the biggest donor of development and humanitarian aid; it has absorbed formerly Communist countries in Eastern Europe and has created a giant single market with more than 500 million consumers.

It has also knocked down barriers to freedom to travel and work in neighboring states, creating lifelong bonds across frontiers that were formerly guarded. Above all, the bloc’s founding idea of making war between nations with mutual self-interest unthinkable has held.

Yet the project is reeling from recent crises that helped push the British to vote to leave the bloc in a referendum last June. Britain’s rejection prompted concerns that populist leaders opposed to the European project could be on the cusp of taking power in other countries.

That threat was beaten back this month in the Netherlands, where the center-right party of Prime Minister Mark Rutte won more votes than Geert Wilders, who opposes the European Union.

Still, uncertainty remains over the outcome of the French presidential election in April, with a second round in May, and Germany’s elections in September.

But Jean-Claude Juncker, the president of the European Commission, the bloc’s executive body, said, “Let us not lose perspective.” As daunting as the challenges may feel today, he said, they were “in no way comparable to those faced by our founding fathers.” Europe, he said, had already “managed to achieve almost eternal peace.”

Did Russia Just Recognize Jerusalem as Israel's Capital?

Posted By TheTower.org Staff April 6, 2017

Russia on Thursday said it considers Israel's capital to be western Jerusalem, making it the first country in the world to recognize Israeli sovereignty over any part of the city.

Moscow's unexpected announcement reflects "a sharp shift in Russian policy," which had previously supported placing Jerusalem under the governance of an unspecified international regime, The Jerusalem Post reported [1].

In a statement [2] "regarding Palestinian-Israeli settlement," Russia's Foreign Ministry announced:

"We reaffirm our commitment to the UN-approved principles for a Palestinian-Israeli settlement, which include the status of East Jerusalem as the capital of the future Palestinian state. At the same time, we must state that in this context we view West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel."

The statement also reiterated Moscow's "support for the two-state solution as an optimal option that meets the national interests of the Palestinian and Israeli people, both of whom have friendly relations with Russia."

Israel has ruled western Jerusalem since the country's establishment, and assumed control of eastern portions of the city after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

"Russia's ambassador to Israel will meet with Foreign Ministry officials in the coming days to discuss Moscow's decision and its ramifications," the Post reported. While Russia means for this declaration to be effective immediately, "there is currently no intention ... of moving Russia's embassy to Jerusalem."

The Russian declaration comes as the Trump administration considers moving its embassy to Jerusalem, which would signal its recognition of Israeli sovereignty in the city. "No other country in the world," the Post observed, "recognizes any part of Jerusalem as Israel's capital."

A diplomatic source told the Post that Russia's motivation for recognizing western Jerusalem as Israel's capital could be a way of deflecting criticism [3] over its support of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, whose regime was accused of killing more than 70 people in a chemical attack on Tuesday. The source also suggested that Russia sees increased interest on the part of the United States in reviving peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, and wants to play an active role in the diplomacy.

In an article published in the March 2017 issue of The Tower Magazine, Eylon Aslan-Levy observed [4] that while Western nations have resisted treating any part of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, a number of them already have diplomatic missions to the Palestinian Authority in the city.

Biometrics and facial recognition – a dangerous new frontier for data

By Michael Olaye

April 11, 2017

ITproportal.com



Biometrics and facial recognition will be the next great privacy battle – and it's one we are woefully unprepared for.

As a technology, facial recognition continues to make great strides. MasterCard has rolled out its “pay-by-selfie” verification technology, while Taser International is planning to incorporate facial recognition into US police bodycams this year.

And this is only the beginning. In the coming years, we'll see a host of applications that make use of facial recognition to personalise, verify or track people.

While the technology is improving at a rapid pace, thanks in part to developments in machine learning, as a society, we're simply not ready for it. Not without significant changes to our attitudes, our laws and the way we live our lives.

This is a dangerous new frontier in the growth of data, one that we ignore at our peril. And we need to have a proper conversation about it.

Our relationship with privacy

The battle for privacy has been more of a skirmish than a battle, with only niche groups making any real noise around the issue. Most will mumble some quiet dissatisfaction with how much Mark Zuckerberg knows about what they had for breakfast, before posting pictures of their house publicly on Facebook.

Yes, we do have an instinct to keep things private. We know that maintaining some level of privacy is what keeps us safe, especially in an interconnected world. Strangers knowing your holiday plans could mean coming home to a burglarised house. And you'd hope, perhaps optimistically, that most people know this.

Yet we're also pragmatic: there's a willingness to share a little more of our lives in exchange for little more value. People are happy to give their data to social networks in exchange for a service that lets them connect with their friends.

Everyone, on some level, understands the privacy that they are giving away for this service. And most of us calculate that the exchange is worth it.

The problem is when that sharing is involuntary and unconscious, something which facial recognition brings to the forefront.

How great technology helps bad people

Last year, an app called FindFace was launched in Russia. You take a picture of someone using your smartphone camera and the app, using facial recognition technology, scans for that person on Russian social network Vkontakte. It currently boasts a 70% accuracy rate of turning photos into social media data.

The app is a stalker's dream. Simply by taking a surreptitious photo while you're out and about on the streets or sitting on the train, a stranger can find your social media profiles, your friends and your whole life.

In a world where facial recognition technology becomes widespread, there is no such thing as anonymity in public anymore. Your face is the key to your life. And everything that you have ever shared, or that anyone else has shared about you, is now written all over it.

The implications of this are terrifying. An app like this facilitates predatory behaviour, as criminals can scan your

face to calculate how vulnerable you are based on your background, your social media activity and how far you are from home.

And that's far from the only way this technology could harm you.

Imagine sitting down for a job interview, only to find a camera glaring at you. Behind the lens is a piece of software analysing your body language and scanning your social media profiles to glean your personality traits.

It could even take a look at your facial structure to predict personality characteristics, much like the experiment two scientists from Shanghai Jiao Tong University did to predict who was most likely to be a criminal. The experiment was immediately condemned and accused of racism.

Mental illness could also become more fertile and pernicious grounds for discrimination, with symptoms previously concealable now easily detected in your face and posture.

With applications like this, we run the risk of discrimination being obfuscated (even "legitimised") by an algorithm.

We've had the argument about social media and what we can and should share about ourselves. But facial recognition brings with it a whole world of problems that could cause far more harm than intrusive technology ever has previously.

Facial recognition is a political issue

So as we face the prospect of technology outpacing our progress as a society, how do we tackle the issues facial recognition raises?

We need to recognise that facial recognition is not just a technological issue, but a political one. The public needs to be informed and protected against malicious uses of technology, through laws, awareness and social change.

Public officials, tech leaders and the wider public need to start a dialogue around the implications this technology could have for the way we operate as a society.

While stopping the incoming tide of technology is probably a futile exercise, taking some steps to make sure that it is not used improperly can help us avoid a great deal of problems.

People need to be educated on how to manage their online identities and their privacy settings so that they avoid sharing private information unintentionally or unnecessarily. Social media platforms and facial recognition services need to support this and provide safeguards that prevent their misuse. And regulation needs to be updated to ensure that technology doesn't open up loopholes that can be exploited by nefarious or ignorant actors.

Most importantly of all, we need to walk into this with open eyes. For the non-tech savvy among us, it's easy to be dismissive of technology treating it as just one of those things that you don't understand. But as citizens whose lives will be dramatically affected by this, in both good ways and bad, all of us need to understand what is going on.

Our lives today are dramatically different from what they were only a decade ago. In a decade's time, they will be more different still. The technology that develops and how we use it will shape our world immeasurably. Let's make sure it doesn't disappoint us.

Michael Olaye, CEO at Dare
Image: Shutterstock/Anton Watman

An Open Door Closes

By Jan Markell

April 4, 2017

When I began Olive Tree Ministries years ago, I ministered in hundreds of churches, home fellowships, women's groups, and even some men's groups. Every week I would pile my small vehicle with a 12-string guitar, sound and audio-visual equipment, books, and a map, and head toward destinations large and small. My audiences were enthusiastic as I shared messages focusing on Bible prophecy, Israel, Israel in prophecy, Christ in the Passover, Jewish evangelism, and current events.

I could not keep up with the demand. I could have ministered 5-6 times a week. This was more than a decade after Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth*. That book opened the eyes of a lot of people and caused them to want more insight. Many thought end-time issues were irrelevant until John Darby in the 1800s. The one-third of the Bible that referenced prophecy was for real and could no longer be ignored. It was for today.

If church pulpits didn't want me to talk about it, then I was invited to classes and retreats sponsored by churches from every denomination.

How Times Have Changed

Today about 90% of these doors have slammed shut. It is not just indifference, it is outright hostility towards topics that a few years ago generated great enthusiasm. Yes, there are small pockets of interest that remain but opportunities continue to shrink.

We are now in the days of 2 Peter 3:3: The mocking and scoffing generation as to end-time events. We are in a time when Israel has been so maligned that even within evangelicalism, she is seen as an "apartheid occupier" more than God's Chosen People. Anti-Israel sentiment is global. Anti-Semitism is raging. Entire denominations are engaging in the Boycott, Divest, Sanction Movement that harms Israel economically.

If I were to still make my living by visiting churches across America tapping into these very same topics, I would be out of business.

How Did This Happen?

I've reported on Pastor Tom Hughes' excellent article before about church indifference to eschatology. He pastored the Calvary Chapel 412 Church in San Jacinto, CA. Tom writes that many pastors refuse to touch the topics of Bible prophecy and Israel because (1) They don't understand it; (2) They fear offending members; (3) They are concerned about scaring people; (4) They fear losing the tithes if they talk about end-time events; (5) They are afraid of being identified with the "loony fringe" such as Harold Camping.

Consequently, 90% of our church pulpits today are totally silent on the good news that the King is coming.

The Cry of the Young: Social Justice!!

As a young person, I loved these topics. Bible prophecy ignited my spiritual life which was slipping into complacency. My trip to Israel at age 30, plus my Jewish heritage, allowed me to have an all-new worldview that was actually Israel-centric because the Bible is Israel-centric!

The Pre-Trib Research Center has an excellent article written by Dr. James Showers on the eroding evangelical support for Israel. He addresses one major area that is problematic: Young people are more troubled by injustice than they are inspired by Bible prophecy. They perceive some injustice and consider the "occupation" of the Palestinian territories. They have bought into the propaganda that Israel is an abuser of the Palestinians. I will list the Pied Pipers who have taught them this in a moment.

He suggests that the old adage that we support Israel "because the Bible tells me so" is over. As a result, there

is a trend among younger people to leave the evangelical nest previous young adults occupied to fit into their new postmodern worldview. Postmodern/Emergent leaders only reinforce this as across-the-board they are anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian, pro-Islam.

He accurately states that young adult evangelical events such as the Justice Conference, Empowered 21 and Catalyst have become pulpits for pro-Palestinian groups to come in the name of peace and blame the lack of peace on Israel. The Justice Conference emphasizes Leftist politics and features the likes of Marxist Cornell West. The annual Catalyst event will not have one Israel-friendly or prophecy-oriented representative.

Evangelicals Who Influence

We expect the postmoderns and the religious Left to distort truth, but in the last 20 years, evangelicals have been in the forefront of discouraging believers on these topics. I will now name some names that will cause many to unsubscribe from these emails. I am not attacking these individuals. I am just reporting on what they say.

Popular blogger Tim Challies wrote back on January 31 that there are seven "false teachers" in the church today. One category of false teacher he labels as "the Speculator." He says that, "Today, as in every age, the 'Speculator' obsesses about end-times and somehow his failed predictions dissuade neither himself nor his followers."

Dr. John Piper wrote in 2002 and again in 2014, "Israel has no warrant to a present experience of divine privilege when she is not keeping the covenant with God. Israel has no divine right to be in the land of promise when she is breaking the covenant of promise. For now, the people are at enmity with God in rejecting the gospel of Jesus Christ, their Messiah."

Lynne Hybels, wife of Willow Creek's Bill Hybels, has been an outspoken proponent of Palestinian issues and a prominent critic of Israel's wall of partition. This was built some years ago to stop the slaughter of innocent Israelis by the Palestinians. She states, "I believe that the ongoing military occupation of the West Bank and the continuing blockade of Gaza is a violation of human rights; as such, it deeply harms the security, freedom, and dignity of both peoples."

First, she states she is both "pro-Israel and pro-Palestine," but then she suggests there be a one-state solution. She is deceived thinking that the Palestinians want to live in a peaceful co-existence with Israel. Her one-state solution would only be for the Palestinians. Hybels softened her tone after a visit to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial.

Pastor Brian Brodersen, son-in-law of Calvary Chapel's founder Chuck Smith, recently told Calvary Chapel pastors to avoid the "gloom and doom" of eschatology. Calvary Chapel may be the last denomination in the world that has maintained an eternal perspective with an emphasis on end-time issues. Now they are encouraged to dump the topic and cater to younger people.

Pastor Rick Warren writes in his Purpose Driven Life book, "When the disciples wanted to talk about prophecy, Jesus switched the conversation to evangelism. He wanted them to concentrate on their mission in the world. Jesus said in essence, 'The details of my return are none of your business. What is your business is the mission I have given you. Focus on that.' If you want Jesus to come back sooner, focus on fulfilling your mission, not figuring out prophecy." (See pages 285-286)

Author and columnist Jim Fletcher reached out to **Russell Moore** of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. He asked him about his views on eschatology and Israel. Moore declined and later blocked Fletcher on Twitter.

I have previously written that the **Bible Answer Man, Hank Hanegraaff**, states often on his call-in radio program that God's Chosen People are only Christians. He says God is not a land-broker and suggests Israel does not belong to the Jews. Hank says the Rapture is "nonsense" and is forced into the biblical text. His listeners have had a nearly 30-year diatribe of error in these areas. Many have been turned off on these issues

for life. **(Note: Hanegraaff just recently (4/9) became confirmed in the Eastern Orthodox church. That should tell you everything on his epic slide from having any claim to being a "bible answer man". – MD)**

Space does not permit me to quote many other leading evangelicals and evangelical organizations who take negative positions on these topics. World Vision is just one organization that has been anti-Israel for decades. They were recently caught funneling their humanitarian funds to Hamas though they denied it.

Postmoderns and The Religious Left

Jim Fletcher also writes about leftists like Shane Claiborne. Fletcher writes, "Typically pro-Palestinian activists like Shane Claiborne portray Israelis as Nazi-like oppressors of the downtrodden Palestinians. It's all a toxic stew of political and religious claptrap designed to turn more Millennials against the Jewish state."

Every other year the patriarchs of the religious Left such as Jim Wallis and Tony Campolo, as well as ardent anti-Israel speakers and writers such as Wheaton's Gary Burge and the U.K.'s Stephen Sizer, gather at the Christ at the Checkpoint conference for a solemn assembly of Israel-bashing. Lynne Hybels is also a frequent speaker at this pretty shameful event.

Emergent Church leaders are far more interested in yoking with Rome than considering the things to come or looking at Israel-related issues. This is preparing them to receive a counterfeit Christ.

Dispensationalism Declines

Eschatology and pro-Israel sentiment have always found a home within Dispensationalism. Twentieth Century teachers John Walvoord, Dwight Pentecost, Tim LaHaye, Hal Lindsey, Chuck Missler, Mark Hitchcock, Ron Rhodes, Dave Reagan, Thomas Ice, Ed Hindson, and many more, have educated millions.

The rise of Amillennialism, Preterism, Dominion/Kingdom Now Theologies -- and what often comes with them, Replacement Theology -- are crowding out Dispensationalism. Dr. Jim Showers says, "Dispensationalism has become a dirty word in many corners of Christian higher education."

Showers continues, "The next generation of ministry leaders, at best, sees no value in studying future prophecy and, at worst, views it with disfavor or as something to be avoided entirely." He suggests even those who hold to Dispensationalism and a Christian Zionist view of Israel, born out of a literal interpretation of the Bible, are distancing themselves from these topics.

At a time in history when headlines are at best maddening and bleak, the very theologies that make sense of them are declining in favor of theologies that fill pews and offering plates.

This ministry encourages you to tell the inconvenient truth as it concerns our times no matter how unpopular it makes you. God will honor you some day.

But the conclusion here is that the days are gone when to be an evangelical Christian was nearly synonymous with being pro-Israel and pro-prophecy. It's a new day and not a happy one. Yes, the Bible states that Israel will be on her own someday (Zechariah 12:3), but watching the process unfold remains heartbreaking.

In spite of this, the King is still coming, stage-setting signs are escalating, a trumpet is about to sound, the Church will vanish, and the hoofbeats of the Four Horsemen will be heard in the distance.

Let your voice be heard!