"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

Europe: Making Totalitarianism Great Again

by Judith Bergman   January 31, 2018

https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/11814/europe-totalitarianism

✸The European Union has programs in place that seek heavily to influence mainstream news outlets and journalists with its own agendas -- such as that of continued mass-migration into Europe from Africa and the Middle East. For this purpose, the European Commission recently funded the publication of a handbook with guidelines for journalists on how to write about migrants and migration.

✸It is seemingly in the interest of these media representatives to label competition from alternative or new media, "fake news".

✸A proposed French law would allow authorities to block websites during election seasons, a draconian measure to combat political opponents, which would place France in the same category as countries such as China and Iran that block websites that do not suit the agendas of the regime.

The European Union is intensifying its efforts to censor and marginalize voices that disagree with its policies, under the convenient euphemism of combating "fake news".

"The Commission needs to look into the challenges the online platforms create for our democracies as regards the spreading of fake information and initiate a reflection on what would be needed at EU level to protect our citizens," wrote Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, in May 2017. How considerate that Juncker, in totalitarian fashion, wishes to protect EU citizens from news that does not fit the Commission's narratives and agendas.

In October 2017, the European Commission announced its "fake news" policies and how it intends to "design solutions to address the spread of fake news". According to the Commission, "Fake news consists of intentional disinformation spread via online social platforms, broadcast news media or traditional print". Furthermore, according to the Commission, the EU's fake news policy is guided by, among other things, "the freedom of expression, media pluralism, and the right of citizens to diverse and reliable information".

This assurance of freedom of expression and pluralism comes across as rather laughable: the EU already does what it can to eliminate "media pluralism and... diverse and reliable information". The EU, for example, has programs in place -- such as the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (REC) -- that seek heavily to influence European mainstream news outlets and their journalists with its own

agendas -- such as that of continued mass-migration into Europe from Africa and the Middle East. For this purpose, the European Commission recently funded the publication of a handbook with guidelines for journalists on how to write about migrants and migration. The handbook was launched on October 12 by the International Press Institute (IPI) -- an association of media professionals representing leading digital, print and broadcast news outlets in more than 120 countries. Specifically, with regard to Muslims, the guidelines recommend:

"... Take care not to further stigmatise terms such as 'Muslim' or 'Islam' by associating them with particular acts... Don't allow extremists' claims about acting 'in the name of Islam' to stand unchallenged. Highlight... the diversity of Muslim communities..."

The EU also financially supports a campaign, "Media Against Hate" run by the European Federation of Journalists (EJF), the largest organization of journalists in Europe, which represents over 320,000 journalists across 43 countries. That campaign aims to:

"... improve media coverage related to migration, refugees, religion and marginalised groups... counter hate speech, intolerance, racism and discrimination... improve implementation of legal frameworks regulating hate speech and freedom of speech..."

To further its nascent "fake news" policies, the European Commission recently appointed 39 "experts" to a so-called "High Level Group (HLEG) on Fake News and online disinformation":

"It comprises representatives of the civil society, social media platforms, news media organisations, journalists and academia....

"The High Level group will advise the Commission on scoping the phenomenon of fake news, defining the roles and responsibilities of relevant stakeholders, grasping the international dimension, taking stock of the positions at stake, and formulating recommendations".

The media representatives have been almost exclusively picked from the mainstream media -- giants such as ARD, RTL, Swedish state television, Sky News, AFP and News Media Europe, which renders any sort of balanced outcome that these "experts" might reach a rather illusory option. To the extent that they even view new or alternative media as a threat, it is seemingly in the interest of these media representatives to label competition from alternative or new media, "fake news". The high-level group held its inaugural meeting on January 15, 2018.

The European Commission will poll EU citizens and conduct a Eurobarometer public opinion survey to be launched early 2018 "to measure and analyse the perceptions and concerns of the European citizens around fake news". The Commission will also be organizing a "multi-stakeholder conference on Fake News" which, will "define the boundaries of the problem, assess the effectiveness of the solutions already put in place by social media platforms and... agree on key principles for further action".

The EU is not alone in threatening the shutting down of free speech under the cover of combating "fake news". In France, President Emmanuel Macron has announced that he wants to introduce new legislation aimed at regulating "fake news" during election seasons, including "emergency legal actions" that would allow the French government to remove "fake news" from a website or block sites entirely. Macron said:

"If we want to protect liberal democracies, we must be strong and have clear rules. When fake news is spread, it will be possible to go to a judge ... and if appropriate, have content taken down, user accounts deleted and ultimately websites blocked."

A law like this would mean that the French state -- or whoever is placed in a position to act as thought police on its behalf -- would become the arbiter of what constitutes "truth", much in the same way as the new German censorship law requires social media networks to act as the privatized thought police of the German state.

The proposed French law, however, would go even further than the German censorship, in that it would allow French authorities to block entire websites during election seasons, a draconian measure to combat political opponents, which would place France in the same category as countries such as China and Iran that block websites that do not suit the agendas of the regime.

Such a French law would also be in violation of the right to freedom of expression and information guaranteed in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, to which France is a party, and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights. Article 10 states that everyone not only has the right to freedom of expression but "to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers..." Governments are not supposed to interfere in that right -- with a few specific exceptions described in Article 10 -- because such interference constitutes government censorship.

Overall, Europe appears to be aspiring to make totalitarianism great again.

Erdogan and pope discuss Jerusalem as scuffles break out near Vatican
Philip Pullella

VATICAN CITY (Reuters) - Tayyip Erdogan made the first visit by a Turkish president to the Vatican in 59 years on Monday, discussing the status of Jerusalem with Pope Francis, as scuffles broke out between police and demonstrators nearby.

Police, who put much of the center of the city under lockdown for the visit, said two people were detained after demonstrators tried to break through cordons to get closer to the Vatican from an authorized protest several blocks away.

Returning a visit made by the pope to Turkey in 2014, Erdogan spoke privately with Francis for about 50 minutes in the pontiff's frescoed study in the Vatican's Apostolic Palace, which he uses mostly for ceremonial purposes.

A Vatican statement said the talks included "the status of Jerusalem, highlighting the need to promote peace and stability in the region (Middle East) through dialogue and negotiation, with respect for human rights and international law."

Both Erdogan and Pope Francis are opposed to U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, which many U.S. allies say could doom Middle East peace efforts..

At the end of the private part of the meeting, the pope gave Erdogan a bronze medallion showing an angel embracing the northern and southern hemispheres while overcoming the opposition of a dragon.

"This is the angel of peace who strangles the demon of war," the pope told Erdogan as he gave him the medallion, made by the Italian artist Guido Verol. "(It is) a symbol of a world based on peace an justice."

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan (L) is welcomed by archbishop Georg Ganswein as he arrives to attend a private audience with Pope Francis at the Vatican February 5, 2018. REUTERS/Alessandro

Bianchi The public part of the meeting, with reporters and Erdogan's entourage, was cordial, although both men seemed stiff at the start while seated at the pope's desk before journalists were ushered out.

Erdogan's motorcade entered a virtually deserted St. Peter's Square after the streets that are usually bustling with tourists were closed due to security fears.

An authorized demonstration of about 150 people including Kurds and their supporters outside nearby Castel Sant'Angelo, a fortress on the banks of the River Tiber, turned violent when police in riot gear pushed back shouting and shoving protesters who tried to break through their lines. At least one demonstrator was injured, a witness said.

Some 3,500 police and security forces were on duty in Rome and authorities declared a no-go area for unauthorized demonstrations that included the Vatican, Erdogan's hotel and Italian palaces where he is meeting the president and prime minister.

Matteo Salvini, head of Italy's anti-immigrant Northern League, said in a tweet that it was "shameful" that the government was receiving Erdogan, calling him "the head of a bloody, freedom-killing Islamic regime".

Erdogan and the pope spoke by phone in December after Trump made his announcement on Jerusalem and agreed that any change to the city's status quo should be avoided.

The Vatican backs a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, with both sides agreeing on the status of Jerusalem - home to sites holy to the Muslim, Jewish and Christian religions - as part of the peace process.

Palestinians want East Jerusalem as the capital of a future independent state, whereas Israel has declared the whole city to be its "united and eternal" capital.

Among Erdogan's delegation was the Mehmet Pacaci, Turkey's ambassador to the Vatican. Erdogan recalled Pacaci to Turkey in 2015 when Francis became the first pope to publicly call the 1915 killing of as many as 1.5 million Armenians "genocide" - something Turkey has always denied.

Biometrics could replace boarding passes on international flights within 4 years
Jefferson Graham, USA TODAY   Feb. 1, 2018

LOS ANGELES — Goodbye passport, so long boarding pass. And get ready for this — your means of entry at airports could soon just be your face.

Dan Tanciar, a top official with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency, told USA TODAY that biometrics for international travelers, which allow passengers to board a flight or clear passport control via a photo, is right around the corner.

Transportation Security Administration officers check passenger boarding passes and identification at a security screening checkpoint May 19, 2016, at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport in Seattle. (Photo: Ted S. Warren, AP)

"Our goal is to have this in place over the next four years," said Tanciar, who is a deputy executive director of the Customs and Border Protection agency.

The plan is to begin with international flights then expand to domestic, he added.

"On inbound international travel, you'll be able to leave the passport in your pocket," he added.

Tanciar says biometrics at the airport works by matching the picture the government already has, your passport photo, with a new image generated at the airport.

Using biometric technology for domestic flights will take longer to implement, he says, because the TSA doesn't have the same kind of national database of photos as the U.S. government does with passports. Each state would have to come together to merge their driver's license IDs.

Three airlines are currently testing limited biometric entry: JetBlue, British Airways and Delta at airports in Boston, Atlanta and Los Angeles, but passports are still involved.

Delta, in its test, has ditched the boarding pass only for flights from Atlanta to Paris, while JetBlue offers the service from Boston to Aruba.

At Los Angeles International Airport, British Airways is offering biometric entry for some international flights, instead of a boarding pass. Lufthansa, Qantas and Korean Air plan to install similar offerings at LAX this month.

The San Jose airport hopes to go 100% biometric for international travels this year. "Our intention is to be the first airport in the United States" to feature the service for all international flights, says Rebecca Baer, the deputy director of Innovation and business development at SJC.

Baer, along with Tanciar, spoke this week at the APEX Tech conference in Los Angeles, put on by the Airline Passenger Experience Association.

For domestic flights, she sees a way around waiting for the TSA to join Customs in adding the services by using an opt-in system, similar to how fliers sign up (and pay) with the TSA for preauthorized clearances at airports.

"I could voluntarily give the airline or government my pictures and verify my ID the same way we do with a passport, like we do with a precheck," she says.

The advantage Customs has over the TSA in getting the program moving is that international travel is a smaller volume, she says, and there are different requirements for international travelers.

"If we created a system that relied on a voluntary submission, it could come a lot faster."

The Basics of Apostasy
Steve Schmutzer   2.6.18

Given my fascination with issues pertaining to the end times, I often find myself considering the matter of "apostasy." It's an inevitable theme that crops up within a comprehensive assessment of the prophetic Scriptures.

To illustrate, Paul urged the fledgling and predominantly-Gentile church of Thessalonica to not be deceived. He reminded them that the day of the Lord would not arrive "….except there come a falling away first" (2 Thess. 2:3). The Greek word for "falling away" is apostasia, and we get "apostasy" from it.

There is debate as to what exactly Paul might be talking about here. Is he referring to a falling away from the Christian faith, or is he referring to the antichrist or a revolt against God? Could he even be making reference to the Rapture? There are vocal proponents for each suggestion.

It's not my intent here to dissect Paul's specific intentions with his use of apostasia in 2 Thess. 2:3, but rather to consider the term as it's used more plainly elsewhere - in Acts 21:21, for example. Here, the Jewish elders in Jerusalem confronted Paul when they wrongly imagined he was advising Jewish believers to "abandon," "turn away from," or "forsake," their culture and customs. Various translations state it differently, but the general idea of "moving away from a previously-held religious belief" is consistent.

Seen in that light, apostasy is not a word we use much in today's overly-tolerant Christian culture - but I feel we should. The broad emphasis of apostasy in the Bible is a willful abandonment of God's truth, and insofar as the modern church is concerned, there are various ways this takes place. These include the suppression of the Gospel, the elevation of prescriptive worship, the substitution of sound doctrine with socially-acceptable pabulum, the claim that the church is a continuation of Biblical Israel, or any such choice to yield to worldly compromise where Biblical commitment is needed instead.

Apostasy was a seminal concern Jesus had when He questioned if the Son of Man would "….find faith on earth" at His coming (Luke 18:8). The implied answer is in the negative, and this seems to be further supported in Matthew 24:12 where Jesus states the end of human history will be a time when "….the love of many will grow cold." The bottom line is apostasy is a problem in the Christian faith, and it will become a greater problem as time wears on.

It's important to not confuse apostasy with apathy, though they may be cousins at times. Each can lead to the other. Each results in faith becoming dimmed, detached, and disengaged. The net effect is summarized by Tony Campolo who states, "Too many Christians come to church just as they are, sing five stanzas of 'Just As I Am,' then leave just as they were." There's a ritual happening, but there's no real relationship.

Because apostasy is often represented by an obsession with what we don't want to be rather than the passion of who we really are, the market-driven church is especially vulnerable to apostasy's invasion. In choosing to employ the world's ideas rather than the life-changing truth of God's Word, the church is flirting dangerously with the perils of apostasy.

Regardless of what body of believers we each may choose to be part of, it's crucial to understand that the greater church is an institution that is "called out." To be called out means to be "holy," and to be holy means to be "different" or "distinct." Because God intended for His truth to be preserved and proclaimed within the church, the unsaved person should find the church to be alien to his patterns, foreign to his worldview, but full of the answers he is seeking.

That's hardly happening anymore. Hard-hitting Biblical truth is what we most need from our pulpits, but political correctness is often what we are receiving instead. The result is we're sipping our doctrines through a straw rather than chewing on meat. Political correctness is "political" for sure but it is hardly "correct." It's a chief symptom of apostasy and it's nearly always an adversary to sound Biblical teaching.

As churches - or as individual believers for that matter - cower from the responses of a world that does not want accountability for its depravity, faith is weakened. It is insulated from the trials and challenges which must prove it and which strengthen it (James 1:2-4).

Real faith always suffers where apostasy invades.