

## Fake theology – fake news

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*By Vr. Rev. Anders Gadegaard*

*Dean of Copenhagen Cathedral*

### FAKE NEWS

We have all come to know what “Fake News” is about since the present President of the US came into power. A study reveals that during the 18 months including his electoral campaign and the first period of his Presidency, 69% of the entire amount of his statements were genuinely false, while 16% of them contained elements of truth, and the rest, merely 15% could be considered to be overall true.

(Quoted from B.K.I.Simon: “Fake News and Christian Freedom”, Kairos, Ev.Journal of Theology, 2018, no. 1, p.97)

Not, of course, that such kind of distributing so called “alternative facts” is a new thing. People with power have always tried to explain or interpret or even cover facts in order to serve their own interests. If not, why should we at all invest in critical journalism? But rightly because we can be ascertained that this is happening everywhere all the times, we are heavily dependent on a free and critical press.

But something new has after all apparently happened in recent years since The Oxford Dictionary in 2016 declared the concept of Post Truth the word of the year. And in 2017 the same questionable honor was given to the expression of Fake News. I assume this illustrates that the general use of conscious lies when informing the public is more widely expected and accepted than before. Perhaps it also indicates that we are moving *from* a culture of “lying with a twist” meaning that we do agree that telling the truth is a moral obligation and therefore lying must be twisted in order to be accepted *to* a culture of moral acceptance of pure and uncovered lies for the sake of a higher political purpose which legitimizes the lying.

We have a certain Danish expression which everyone understands, but I don’t believe it exists in any other language: To be in the Field of the Lord. It means something like to find oneself in a completely helpless and perplexed situation – and therefore necessarily dependent on help from above. And definitely we are “in the Field of the Lord” when we have to distinguish between what is fake and what is truth when it comes to news. But the good news is that precisely out there, in the Field of the Lord, right in the shepherds field outside Bethlehem, truth was revealed to humankind. And ever since a criteria for judging about truth has been given to us. The story itself about the revelation of truth according to Luke begins: And it came to pass – which in the original latin New Testament reads: Faktum est.

Meaning for us as Christians that *this* revelation is the fact by which all other facts have to be measured. The little baby who as an adult said: I am the Truth. The little baby who was born outside marriage in rough poverty, who soon became a refugee – and the rest of the story is well known to all of us: Experiencing hatred and contempt from the powerful, but admiration from the poor and

outcaste, before betrayal, imprisonment, torture and violent death became his destiny. THIS son of man is truth to us, the incarnation of selfgiving love as the truth. When you look at the world and shall try to decide what is fake and what is truth, use this criteria, the man on the cross, the selfgiving love primarily turned to those who have no one to turn to. So, wherever you find that the message you hear or receive is in accordance with this Truth, establishing and confirming the eternal value and meaning of every individual human life, you will not be mistaken.

Faktum est.

So much about not only the importance, but the necessity to have a fundamental criteria from which you can distinguish Truth from Falsehood. And Christians believe there is no other criteria than Christ himself, the words he spoke, the deeds he did, the life he lived. And he proclaimed that with him The Kingdom of God came near.

Precisely because we know what perfect life is all about from his life, words and deeds, and precisely because we believe this perfect life, the kingdom of God, did not disappear once and for all with his death, but returned to be present among us as Holy Spirit, a divine power of course not visibly realized in the world, but still active within us and among us, we have the perfect tool for being constantly critical to any human administration of power. I will claim that only in societies inspired by Christian values it is possible to find institutions and news media truly critical to the ruling political powers be it political parties or persons or private financial mega powers, critical in constructive solidarity with society, established and financed by society itself. It is not a coincidence that it is from the Western Protestant tradition that the idea of an Ombudsman has risen. Yes, it is a Danish invention. Imagine, it is the ruling power itself, the government and the parliament, that have decided to establish an entire office with the only purpose to investigate and reveal misuse of power by the persons and parties themselves who are in power! This can only originate from a source of wisdom about the temporal state and imperfectness of any society being as fair and democratic as it may. And likewise, you will see that in such societies inspired by Christianity the will to fund and support critical institutions like news agencies and human rights organizations is prominent. Even paid with tax money, funds that are controlled by the state itself. Criticism of the power administration funded by the power institutions themselves. This is Christian social ethical values working at its best. Consequently, on the other hand, wherever you see tendencies in societies that like to understand themselves as building on Christian values where a critical journalism is turned into biased or even purchased journalism it is a sign of decay in Christian moral. Which unfortunately is happening more and more under the name of privatization.

Another criteria derived from a Christian approach to life in society is the concept of civil disobedience. Or better: Civil courage. Yes, I do realize that it was primarily invented and brought to its finest level of influence by a Hindu, Mahatma Gandhi, but don't be mistaken about his inspiration from the Gospel of Jesus and *his* civil disobedience or better courage when he practised the concept of the law for the sake of human beings and not the opposite. Again and again he criticized the law when it didn't serve the good of all humankind, and he claimed it to be not of God, but of the Devil itself. Consequently, every Christian is called to be civil courageous wherever the law is used or rather misused to the benefit of the few at the cost of the many.

## FAKE THEOLOGY

Similar to such deliberations on the criteria for truth and false in the secular world you can find a not less intensive discussion among Christian theologians on the criteria for a true theology and a fake theology.

Truth is never unambiguous. For the same reason as I have just explained: We are living in a sinful imperfect world where good and evil are intertwined and inseparable and not even always possible to distinguish from one another. What seems to be true actions or attitudes may be used as a cover up for exploitation or other evil intentions.

Consequently, a theology that claims to possess the truth in its pure unambiguous form will always be fake. All kinds of fundamentalist religion is fake – and basically an abuse of religion. Primarily because it renounces criticism as valuable or even labels it as infidelity. The truth of the reformation movement lies in this principle of continued uninterrupted reform – also and not least of the church, its dogma and all its institutions themselves. *Ecclesia semper reformanda* – which is as much true for the societies we live in – they must continually be renewed to which purpose critical journalism is a prime tool. As critical theology is to the health of religious communions.

Another trend of a similar thinking is the kind of fake theology that believes that God's activity can be deciphered unambiguously in the world. And that you therefore are able to take side with God so to speak. You see it, when people claim to be agents of God's will One example could be terror in the name of God or making war with the so-called axe of evil like George W. Bush did.

Yet another trend of the same kind of thinking you meet in the so-called Prosperity Theology. This is clearly also Fake Theology, because again you are convinced that God is acting visibly and concretely in the world in favour of those who are doing well.

Another kind of fake theology: the theology that claims that the spiritual world and the human natural world are two completely different kingdoms and therefore shall be kept free from one another is a fake theology. It is primarily seen among Lutheran churches as a misinterpretation of Luther's doctrine on the two kingdoms, the spiritual and the secular. Like the doctrine on the two natures of Christ: They are united without confusion or mixing the two natures and still also without division or separation. This theology leaves this world to a struggle for the survival of the fittest without any kind of guidance from a set of ethical values originating from faith. This would be regarded as inappropriate idealism.

And lastly:

The nationalist theology that claims the right to a certain area of land in the name of God is fake theology (Zionism, *blut und boden*, ...). God's chosen people is all believers wherever they may be and whoever they are. And as we all know: Believers are not directly recognizable. Consequently a distinction between Us and them is impossible in the name of Christianity. And would be far from the teachings of Christ. Christian faith is not national, nor international, but rather trans-national. It transcends all ideas of nationalism. Nothing wrong in national identity. We need personal and national identities. But only in so far as we regard it as being constantly renewed and enriched in the meeting with other identities. Jesus came to his people, the Jews, he said. But constantly he was including foreigners and praising them for their faith-fulness.

Therefore, all kinds of hatespeech is per se a contradiction to a Christian attitude and should be opposed in the name of Christianity.

So much more appropriate and timely is this conference.