

Forcing Change



A Christian Critique: *Religious Transhumanism Considered and Compared*

By Carl Teichrib (www.forcingchange.org)

Forward: As many readers of *Forcing Change* know, I was a guest speaker at last year's annual meeting of the Mormon Transhumanist Association, held in Salt Lake City, Utah. Because I was an invited participant, I have since been asked to submit my talk in essay form to be considered for inclusion in the MTA's 2013 proceedings report. This essay will be peer reviewed by select MTA members, and if accepted, will be circulated to the MTA membership and other interested parties. The first revised draft has already been sent to the review panel.

With the above in mind I'm publishing the first revised draft for your interest. It is my hope that the text will challenge you to think about the core considerations of orthodox/Biblical Christianity as compared to other worldviews, especially "Christian Transhumanism."

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Carl Teichrib, Editor



Sometimes doors open that are wholly unexpected.

This was the case in May, 2012, when Lincoln Cannon, the president of the Mormon Transhumanist Association (MTA), contacted me by email. Would I be willing to attend the 2013 MTA conference and present a “Christian critique” of “Christian transhumanism”?

I was surprised by the request, but thankful for the opportunity, and appreciative that the MTA would consider bringing a critic to the table. This was an open door, and I agreed to participate. So how did this happen?

In 2010 I attended the MTA *Transhumanism and Spirituality* conference in Salt Lake City, Utah, and thereafter wrote an essay critical of the movement - both in the general sense and with what transpired at the event.¹ This led to emails and blog comments between members of the MTA and myself, and on one occasion when I gave a presentation on transhumanism to a Christian conference that was subsequently posted on YouTube, Lincoln responded with helpful criticisms. Obviously there was a connection before receiving the invitation. Nevertheless, it was unexpected.

It was also appropriate, for many conservative minded Christians are starting to grasp the significance of transhumanism and its potential to shape religious, social, and political discourse. Although the concept of transhumanism – whether it was called that or not - can be traced through the Twentieth Century and beyond,² the idea has steadily gained momentum during the past two decades. Thus, as transhumanist organizations increasingly intersect with general society, and as conservative Christians develop an awareness, we will find that religious transhuman advocates and traditional Christians will inevitably bump into each other as we engage in the marketplace of ideas.

In contemplating what to share with the MTA, I considered the more obvious paths of likely contention, including bio-ethical arguments, the use of technology to influence values and social boundaries, and premises regarding what it means to “be human.” But each of these debated topics are in no way exclusive to concerned Christians, for the religious transhumanist community wrestles with these same themes. I was compelled, therefore, to explore the core tension between these two camps – the “religious transhumanist” and historical Christianity, particularly from an evangelical, conservative perspective.

Before this main tension is evaluated, three qualifiers need to be laid on the table that will help you understand some of the underlying context. The first demonstrates that followers of orthodox Christianity are not opposed to science,³ and this is being stated be-

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cause I have encountered some in the transhumanist community who feel Christians have done very little (or nothing) to advance the human condition from a material/technical position. The second qualifier affirms the references I'll be using in this paper, and the third recognizes that historical Christianity's end-point speaks to similarities found within religious transhumanist circles.



1. Historical Christianity is not opposed to achieving human betterment, longevity, expanding capabilities, striving for medical breakthroughs, or overcoming human problems through technology. David F. Noble, an historian of science and technology who taught at Toronto's York University, recognized that the modern history and growth of Western technological development is inextricably rooted in Christian thought and philosophy.⁴ The French sociologist, Jacques Ellul, also noted the important role of Christianity in the modern context of technical advancement, as did the American cultural-historian and Christian thinker, Francis A. Schaeffer, who not only recognized Christianity's influence in the Scientific Revolution, but the part it played in progressing art and culture.⁵

Although Noble, Ellul, and Schaeffer likewise acknowledge schisms and shortcomings in respect to the Christian influence upon science, the larger context remains firm: The Judeo-Christian worldview played a monumental role in forwarding modern science for the bettering of human knowledge and development. Indeed, while the publicly declared cleft between science and religion is frequently bantered by commentators, the fact remains that Christians and adherents of theological thought⁶ have and are an important part of the scientific community, and have contributed much to our world; From Pascal to Isaac Newton (who wrote voluminously on theology) to Michael Fara-

day to Werner Heisenberg to Francis Collins of the Human Genome Project to synthetic chemist and nano-tech engineer, James Tour.⁷

Furthermore, Christianity has a long and unprecedented track record of human betterment through the establishment of countless hospitals, schools, orphanages, safe houses and shelters. Likewise, it formed the foundation for many universities – think Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Columbia, Brown and Dartmouth, among others.

Generations of Christians have followed the command of Jesus Christ to “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39), tangibly exemplifying the calling of the New Testament book of James to live with “faith and deeds.” True, there are examples of Christian's faltering and failing in this calling, yet the fact remains that Christians – spurred through a Biblical worldview – have done much to advance science for the enhancement and betterment of humanity.

2. For this essay “religious transhumanism” will be considered as that side of the transhumanist movement identifying with or through a religious or spiritually-oriented framework, whether it's a recognized world faith, a branch of mystical philosophy, or a new movement such as Terasem which self-labels as a trans-religion.

“Christian transhumanism,” an extension of “religious transhumanism,” will, for the purpose of this paper, include one or more of the following dimensions,

A) Advocates of transhumanism who claim a Christian identity and place their view of technical human advancement within a decidedly Christian-orientation.

B) An organized religion, sect, branch or faith-based movement that attaches a Christian persuasion or label to beliefs of human-induced ascension.

C) Those who have opposed orthodox Christianity yet openly employ Christian sentiment within arguments for human development. A broad brushstroke is required for this classification, and it is chiefly being included for historical purposes, as those in question would likely claim an atheistic or agnostic status. Saint Simon, a 19th century social thinker, would fit this categorization as one who considered the notion of God “out-worn,” yet envisioned a “New Christianity” - “to pronounce anathema upon theology, and to condemn as unholy any doctrine trying to teach men that there is any other way of obtaining eternal life, except that of working with all their might for the improvement of the conditions of life of their fellow man.”⁸

Moreover, when considering Christian transhumanism, two modifiers must be noted, especially for positions A and B; Just because an individual, group, or religion claims a Christian orientation does not mean an orthodox/historical view is held. In fact, the nature of Christian transhumanism – using the examples listed later in this essay – would be considered outside the norm of traditional Christianity.

Second, just because a Christian designation is used doesn't mean it's universally accepted or beyond contesting. For example, in a 2012 Pew Research report it was demonstrated that 97% of Mormons consider their faith a “Christian religion,” yet at the

same time a sizable percentage of evangelical Protestants (47%) did not, and even more, 66%, said that “Mormonism and their own religion are very or somewhat different.”⁹ Moreover, Protestant/evangelical theologians and apologists routinely take the position that Mormonism is a *unique religion* based on Joseph Smith's message, while pointing out fundamental doctrinal differences with orthodox Christianity and criticisms of Smith's teachings, including his claims of divine revelation.¹⁰

Nuances exist as we try and define “Religious Transhumanism” and “Christian Transhumanism,” but in both designations we find the language and concepts of immortality, perfection, and salvation – typically religious constructs – as being core reasons for transhuman endeavours.

3. An end result that traditional Christianity speaks to could be labeled “transhuman” in the sense that it points to a time of bodily/material redemption, immortality, and perfection – a transformation away from the flaws of our present human condition, now marked by disease, moral failings, troubles and death. Thus, a future and final enhancement is anticipated as Christians await the promise of Jesus Christ who said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25-26a).¹¹ Job, the Old Testament personality who lived many centuries before Christ, spoke of this promise of redemption with great anticipation; “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:25-27).

Therefore, salvation that comes from Christ lifts people up from the way of sin and death, and brings us back to the way of Life – and this is understood first in terms of spiritual salvation and then, at an appointed time, physical translation.

Obviously there are commonalities between traditional Christianity and religious transhumanism, and transhumanism in general; Both camps agree that our present human condition is troubled, limited, and flawed. Both desire a better existence and an enhanced reality. Both long for the “death of death.” But while these two camps hold future-perfect aspirations, this is where the core tension exists between historical Christianity and Christian transhumanism.

As Dr. Brent Waters, a fellow with The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity, wrote in his essay, “Whose Salvation? Which Eschatology?,”

“For transhumanists humans have fallen short of achieving their true potential, whereas for Christians humans have not yet become the kinds of creatures God intends them to be. In response both agree that humans require release from their current condition. For transhumanists this release is attained through technological transformation, whereas for Christians humans are transformed by their life in Christ.”¹²

Granted, Dr. Waters was comparing general transhumanism with historical Christianity, but the division holds true with Religious/Christian Transhumanism. To understand this tensions better, we need to explore orthodox Christianity and “Christian transhumanism” in two short surveys. The first, a four-part examination of historical Christianity – admittedly longer than the next survey – is conducted through an evangelical lens. Please understand that this is only an abbreviated review, as rooms have been filled with books over these four points.

Traditional Christianity:

An Evangelical Survey in Four Points

1. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” Genesis 1:1. Here, the identity of the one who created is expressed; God did it. Furthermore, in Genesis 2:4 we are given a more precise title; *Yahweh Elohim*, the personalized name for the God of the Israelite people is expressed as He engages in the act of creation.



A few items to note emerge from this Scriptural encounter. First, Yahweh is introducing Himself to His creation, and in doing so we see an implied relational setting: God wants to be known, and as *identity* is being communicated, a meaningful relationship between Creator and the creation is conceived.

Identity in Genesis 1 and 2 also demonstrates legal ownership. As Creator, Yahweh, and no one else, has the first and final legal claim to the universe, visible and invisible. This ownership aspect is seen in Deuteronomy 10:14, “Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the Lord your God, also the earth with all that is in it.” Ownership extends to people too, placing *God above humanity*; “Know that the Lord [Yahweh] is God; It is He who made us, and not we ourselves...” (Psalm 100:3).

This concept of legal ownership also speaks to His creative capacity; Yahweh did not use pre-existing material to fashion the “heavens and earth,” materials that could be recalled or revoked by another. Rather, as Genesis tells us, He spoke all things into existence. Psalm 33:6 reiterates this commanded creation; “By the word of the Lord [Yahweh] the heavens were made, and all the host them by the breath of His mouth.” God – thinking; speaking the thought; Creating.

Judaic scholar, Dr. Yehezkel Kaufmann, in contemplating Old Testament cosmology tells us that, “Nowhere do we find that the cosmic elements – e.g., earth, heavens, sun – were fashioned out of pre-existing stuff... the Bible has no need of a pre-existent realm. To be sure, the biblical God fashions some of his creatures out of matter already

at hand. But this matter is not alive, charged with divine forces; it neither opposes nor participates in creation.”¹³

God spoke-and-breathed matter and life into existence; How this *technically* came about remains a mystery, and the complexity and scale of creation causes us to marvel. Considering God's ways, King David penned the following, “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; And His greatness is unsearchable” (Psalm 145:3). And the Apostle Paul writes, “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?” (Romans 11:34). God's greatness and positional authority are unmatched, confirming uniqueness in the universe. This is amplified in Isaiah 44 where Yahweh declares that He is Israel's Redeemer; “I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God... Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one.”¹⁴ Again in Isaiah 45, “And there is no God besides Me, a just God and a Savior; There is none besides Me. Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the Earth! For I am God, and there is no other.”¹⁵

Finally, the New Testament brings a fuller understanding. Jesus Christ [*Yeshua* in the Hebrew, meaning “Savior” and “Liberator”¹⁶], who parallels the claim of Isaiah 44 as “the First and the Last” (Revelation 22:13), is God manifested in the flesh – deity literally participating in the nature of humanity with the purpose of redemption – and subsequently acknowledged as Creator; “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.” (Colossians 1:16-17). John 1:3 affirms this position; All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”

Jesus Christ; Creator [author of Life], God-in-flesh, revealed to His creation – and thus extending relationship as the author of Love.

2. Mankind is created in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27). This does not imply equality with Yahweh, or the idea of becoming “God,” although it does speak to a physical quality. John 4:24 tells us that God is spirit, but it could be argued that He created us in a physical way reflective of how He expresses Himself to us. There are numerous Old Testament metaphors, analogies and examples that speak to this, but it is in the New Testament where we find the most profound implication – God revealed by incarnating within a human body for the purpose of salvation; *Yeshua*, Jesus Christ as Savior.¹⁷ Moreover, Jesus Christ parallels Genesis when He is given the title “last Adam” and the “heavenly Man” (1 Corinthians 15:45,49). As the Apostle Paul noted, we who are in Christ Jesus “shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.”¹⁸ Finally, in language reminiscent of Genesis, Christ is upheld as the “image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15), *par excellence*.

Another aspect is that humanity as an “image bearer” contains qualitative and communicable attributes, reflecting some of God's characteristics; the capacity to enter into

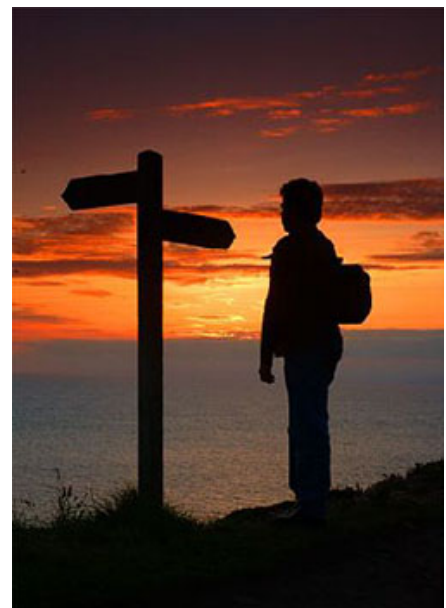
relationship, love and empathy, moral consciousness, rationality, righteousness, and conscious knowledge. All of these traits demonstrates that humanity is a special creation designed to exhibit and transmit transcendent values. Thus, God's "likeness" imparted within mankind is communicating an inner spiritual reality that is meant to reflect His goodness, love, and righteousness. The practical application is this: A meaningful relationship between the Creator and humanity can take place, as exemplified in the events of Genesis 2 where God provides for the first human couple's needs and directly communes.

By the fact that we are created in God's image, mankind's value is not ultimately measured by human marketing standards or political edicts, but by God Himself. In understanding that we are created in the likeness of God, each person therefore has intrinsic and eternal value, and it is in this that we discover the foundation for human dignity. Ideally our individual and collective actions, including our technical and scientific endeavours, should be aimed at upholding and advancing this fundamental vision of human worth.

3. God is the author of love, and choice is required if love is to exist. For love without choice is bondage. In Genesis 2 a choice is placed before Adam and Eve – the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the option is open to partake of it or obey God and abstain. However, with this choice comes a warning; If you eat of it, you will die. The rationality for this seemingly harsh consequence is logically considered; As God is the author and legal holder of Life, to intentionally choose a path other than His design – His blessing of life – is to automatically enter the way of death.

In Genesis 3 humanity is faced with a tempter, variously called Satan or the Devil. While artistic interpretations of this adversary have spanned the gamut from a medieval-inspired monster to a comic-book figure with horns to a suave businessman, 2 Corinthians 11:14 tells us that he comes as an "angel of light."

Here, in Genesis 3, the tempter offers the justification to disobey God's earlier command, reversing God's warning; "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."¹⁹ The intention sounded good – to be "as God" through special knowledge, the "gaining of wisdom,"²⁰ with the promise of immortality. The first human couple eat, and in so doing make the choice to follow a path of self direction, therefore removing themselves from the Giver of Life in the pursuit their own directed divinity. Thus, the "angelic" promises of divine knowledge and eternal life were shattered as the blessing of God's fellowship was broken. Contrary to gaining wisdom, the relational severing of Man from



God distanced humanity from the source of true wisdom. Spiritual and physical death followed, and since then we have constantly struggled to fulfill the vision of becoming “as God” and subsequently re-capture immortality.

Two verses from Proverbs speak into the error and the cure of Man's dilemma. “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12). “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10).

Yet, since the Fall of Man, humanity has striven to regain that which was lost through rituals, techniques, religions and esoteric teachings, endless cycles of good works, burdens of obligations, personal enlightenment, and the unending weight of attempted but failed acts of self-perfection – including the dream of technological perfectibility.²¹ The claim that Man can become God through evolutionary self-discovery and/or initiatory experiences is legion,²² often with angelic or other-worldly revelations acting as the catalyst to inspire another repetition of the same promise.

4. Two thousand years ago God entered humanity's domain through Jesus Christ, literally God-in-flesh among men, as the antidote to our problem of sin and death - “manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin” (1 John 3:5).

This “taking away our sins” and *abolishing death* “brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10). It required that Jesus Christ Himself, the Savior and liberator, experience separation and death – foreshadowed in the sacrificial system of the Jews for hundreds of years beforehand – and more importantly, to overcome death through bodily resurrection. In this the fullness of God was revealed as God the Father raised Jesus (Romans 10:9), Jesus raised Himself (John 19:19-22), and the Spirit raised Him; “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Romans 8:11).

As the book of Hebrews relates, this act of Jesus Christ was a finalizing work. For how else could anything be added? The Old and New Testament repeatedly tells us that there is no one equal to God, no one who matches His holiness. Instead, we find out that to God our “righteousness are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6) and that we have *all* sinned and fallen short of His standard (Romans 3:23). We are, therefore, unable to justify ourselves in our own power.

However, even in this sacrificial act of Christ, love is presented with a choice – to believe that Jesus Christ alone restores the broken relationship between Man and God, and that He alone provides salvation, the promise of immortality, and perfection. This requires that we, in humility, acknowledge our inability to do this very thing. It is a recognition of our disobedience, the pride of our proclamation of self-deity and the sin this produces.

We see a foreshadow of this with King David in Psalm 51. David, confronted with his own sin, realizes that what God wants isn't sacrifices, which were performed daily by

the priests, but “a broken and contrite heart – These, O God, You will not despise.” This opens to grace; Unmerited flavor.

A striking example of this takes place at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Placed between two convicted thieves, Jesus begins to receive curses from one being executed. The other thief, recognizing the situation, calls out in fear of God and asks Jesus to remember him “when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42).

It is notable how Jesus Christ did not respond. He didn't say to the thief, “first, get down off your cross and go do good works,” or, “go find a technical solution to your problem of death,” or, “too bad you weren't baptized,” or, “sorry, you need to be part of the priesthood and perform your obligations before I can accept you.” Instead, Jesus said, “today you will be with me in paradise.” The language here is important too, for Jesus is not telling the thief that he will make it “partway to paradise” or to a certain level of existence. Rather, the thief will enjoy full fellowship with Christ.

The thief could do nothing of works or actions to save himself, except the one thing required; fear God and have a contrite heart.

As Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us; “For by grace you have been saved, through faith, and not of yourselves. It is a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Romans 4, drawing from the Old Testament, provides more insights.

“For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as [King] David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin'.”

But works do play a vital role in that they demonstrate the existence of a living faith, just as the book of James takes note of when citing the life of Abraham. Noah too exhibited this in a tangible way (Genesis 6:9-22); First hearing God and believing God – having faith that what Yahweh said was true – and then acting on this faith with works. God seals Noah and his family, God protects and ultimately saves, and Noah works in accordance to his faith.²³

Ephesians 2:10 helps put this into perspective: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

So how do we reconcile “by grace alone” - the writings of Paul – with “a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” - the writings of James? Without going into a long-winded discussion, the point with James is that he is combating an intellectually derived

faith that bears no evidence of a changed life, as seen when he rightly said; “Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is only one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble!” (James 2:18-19). Paul on the other hand, is combatting the error of having faith in an object; law and works.

Dr. Douglas J. Moo, New Testament scholar at Wheaton College Graduate School, has this to say; “The difference between Paul and James consists in the sequence of works and conversion: Paul denies any efficacy to pre-conversion works, but James is pleading for the absolute necessity of post-conversion works.”²⁴

In all of the above, the words of Hebrews 10 comes to mind, that Christ Jesus “offered one sacrifice for sins forever... For by one offering He has perfected those who are being sanctified.”

Christian Transhumanism

In giving a few examples of Christian Transhumanism it is my hope that the difference between Religious/Christian Transhumanism and orthodox Christianity is evident.

1. As previously noted in the qualifier, Christian transhumanism can cover a broad spectrum, and could, in fact, include mystical elements and Gnostic sects. Historically, we could place Saint Simon in the mix, for while he rejected Christian orthodoxy and the Roman Catholic church in particular, he nevertheless called for a “New Christianity” and thus employed a social-religious sentiment in the quest for a new order. With this, he wished for a “proper use of material aims... to procure the highest degree of felicity attainable by the human race on earth...”²⁵

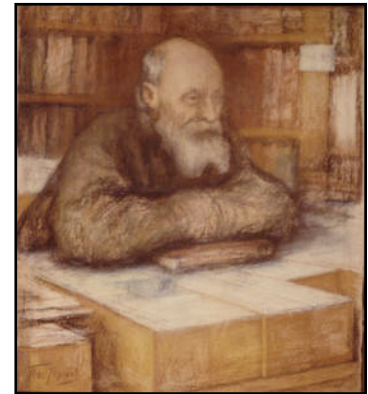
He believed that “New Christianity” as a morally strong, materialistic and brotherly faith, would become the “universal religion.” All peoples would thus be allied under the rule of “scientists, artists, and industrialists” who would become “the managing directors of the human race.” Arts, science and technology would become a “sacred study,” and “worship” would be “a means of reminding men, on the day of rest, of philanthropic feelings.” Bible study would be ruled out as a waste of energy, especially as it pulls people away from “working for a political system in which common interests will be managed by the ablest men in science, art, and industry.”²⁶ The traditional Christian doctrine of salvation through Jesus Christ would be disavowed, replaced by “working with all their might for the improvement of the conditions of life...”²⁷

To call Saint Simon a “transhumanist” may be an overstatement, as he lived in an era that didn't yet know the term or could envision the biological/technological out-



come. However, his idea of a scientifically derived society as a new way of ordering humanity fits within the transhuman context. For transhumanism, in its desire to change humanity, will inevitably transform cultures, politics, and other social structures.

2. Orthodox Russian and Cosmist, Nikolai Fedorov (1829-1903), pictured on right, certainly fits the larger scope of Christian transhumanism. Combining Russian Orthodox beliefs with strands of thought from Theosophy and other occult lines, and mixing this with scientific and technical achievements – current and futuristic, such as spaceflight – Cosmism presented a transhuman dream of engineered immortality and the technical resurrection of the dead. Mankind's "common task," therefore, was the scientific escape of death, and through this process the material universe would be perfected on Earth and in the heavens.



George M Young, in his book *The Russian Cosmists*, points to the universal end-nature of Cosmism; "Another feature of Russian thought relevant to Cosmism is its totalitarian cast, its tendency toward total, universal solution."²⁸ Cosmism spoke to the need of a technically constituted *whole*, a reality where all participated in the transcendence of humanity; An unending unity that would extend into every area of existence, including religion and all social contexts. No one, alive or dead, would stand outside the scope of transformation. As Young writes,

"By uniting all people alive in a task to overcome the only true enemy of all people alive, namely death, the project of literal, active, physical resurrection would represent a great step toward the solution of many other problems which seem insoluble today. Energies and resources now directed toward war would be directed toward resurrection."²⁹

Fedorov, a quiet and reclusive librarian, would eventually exert an unassuming yet important influence upon men like literary giant Tolstoy, biosphere/noosphere theorist Vernadsky, and Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, the pioneer of Russian rocketry. Space exploration would be more than just a scientific quest for discovery, but a step toward resurrection.

Undeniable religious themes based on Christian motifs were and are woven into the Cosmist worldview: Christ is a "model" for resurrection, the Kingdom of God is to be established through human action, and salvation is achieved through scientific ends.

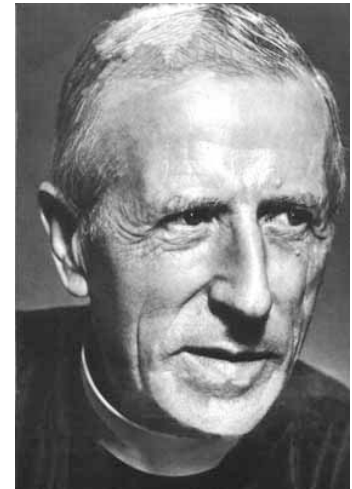
3. Controversial Catholic mystic, Teilhard de Chardin, often emerges when discussing the history of transhuman thought. Although best noted for his hypothesis of the noosphere, a planetary/spiritual network of awakened global consciousness, he did employ the term "trans-human" in describing human futures. Speaking of a trans-human tipping point in the 1950s, Chardin envisioned an evolutionary trend in human development

where spiritual, social, and technological breakthroughs would *psychically* unify humanity into a common soul to be converged with the “Cosmic Christ.”³⁰ This, he stated, would move us toward the Ultra-human.

As John L. Reed penned in his critical history of technique; “Chardin... fused the utopian visions of the superman and the super society in his concept of the 'superhuman'.”³¹

Technology, to Chardin (pictured right), allows mankind to hold the power of changing futures. This power of technology, furthermore, would lead to “an upward leap in the consciousness of man” for “every pair of hands freed means a brain freed for thought.”³² Deciding futures could not be merely accidental; “life can no longer proceed at random – technology brings with it the inescapable necessity of an ideology.”³³

Two ideological stratum were considered: Materialism, with technique and organization, and spirituality, particularly a mystical extension of Christian works that would offer a “divine centre” and become the religion of progress - “God is inexhaustibly attainable in the *totality* of our actions” [*italics in original*].³⁴



Universal, planetary humanity – Chardin's “Christian transhumanism” postulated salvation and apotheosis through Mankind's social, spiritual, and scientific collectivism. Power and technique would shape us into a utopian synthesis.

4. A “New Man” is rising; Organizing and collectivizing – directing evolution – through the power of technology and knowledge, and what will the end result be?

From the late 1950s until the early 70s, a plethora of social thinkers, academics and scientific researchers published on the question of future human evolution through technology. This upsurge of interest was based on a number of factors: From the posthumous publishing of Chardin's essays to Julian Huxley's 1957³⁵ call for a new humanist-based spiritual existence – “transhumanism” - to the emergence of computational organization. The dizzying pace of the space and arms race were important contributors, as was Dr. Jose Delgado's control of animals through brain-radio implants. Social/cultural changes also added to this shift, pushing a new psychological and metaphysical dynamic through the advent of psychedelics and a markable increase of interest in Eastern philosophies. It was evident then that a socio-techno New Man was being born.

Systems thinking and technique were being contemplated as a means to a new human end, and books like Herbert J. Muller's *The Children of Frankenstein* explored the possibilities of the technological society. In fact, Gordon Taylor's *The Biological Time Bomb* provided a suggested timeline for extensive human transformation. Writing in the 1960s, he speculated that by 1975 we would be able to transplant limbs and organs,

have the “extensive power to postpone clinical death,” and be able to erase memories. By the year 2000 we would witness “extensive mind modifications and personality reconstruction,” memory editing, the first cloned animals, man-animal chimeras, and enjoy prolonged youthful energy. After 2000 we would see the “control of aging,” brain-computer links, cloned people, disembodied brains, gene manipulation, the “indefinite postponement of death” and “man-machine chimeras.”³⁶

It wasn't a surprise, therefore, that by the early 1970's a growing segment of the Christian community looked to technological development as a means of changing humanity. “A new species of man is being born in our midst,” wrote Clyde Reid for the United Church of Christ.

Reid's book, *21st Century Man Emerging*, while arguably not highly influential, nevertheless spoke to the growing interest within theological circles of a technically-based human future. Compelled in large part by Chardin and the scientific changes of the day, Reid laid out a case for the coming “World Man. Global Man. Universal Man.”³⁷ Evolving humanity would experience a new moral freedom, desire an active participation in creating the new world, embrace an expansion of consciousness, encounter religious ecumenicalism and fresh spiritual experiences, and become a “Cosmic Man.” As a professor of theology, Reid focussed much of his work on the social/cultural aspect of this shift, but technology was acknowledged as a catalyst and conduit.

“Rapid transportation, space travel, electronic communication, all these and many more [technological developments] could be elaborated. Perhaps it is enough to say that there seems to be a response to the accumulated pressure of these factors which is beginning to change the style of human behavior.”³⁸

Immediately following on the recognition of technological change, Reid points to a core concern; “The real question before us is whether the new man will emerge in time to save us from self-destruction. We are clearly in a race with ourselves.” Hope, however, was to be found in the premise of the question. “There is a future. There is a new day dawning and a new man coming.”³⁹

The term, “Christian transhumanism,” was obviously not in use as it relates to the above examples, yet from Fedorov to Chardin to Reid, the vision was there. Today, the term is being considered and used by those who attach a Christian conception to the notion of transhumanism. Without question there will be variances and nuances of meaning to those who identify with this label, but the qualitative difference as it relates to traditional/orthodox Christianity – and the stress underlying this difference – will remain in play as transhumanism, by its nature, seeks a technical salvation to the problem of death and imperfection.

Here, then, is the tension: One says that salvation, resurrection and perfection is found in Jesus Christ alone, without human attachments, without obligations, and with-

out technological works as a necessary add-on, and then expresses that faith – wherever and however possible – through words and deeds. It is a faith that harkens back to before the Fall, recognizing that God alone provided (Genesis 2), and in that provision “works” had a meaning that was not based on salvific merit but on relationship. It is a faith that says, “God alone” provides perfection, and I will trust Him to that end for I cannot save myself. Therefore, if an “angel from heaven” preaches “any other gospel,” thus pulling away from the “grace of Christ” as Galatians 1:8 tells us, then we are to flee this “other gospel” – be it a message of salvation from the *angel of technology* or the *angel of good works*.

The other says that humanity can indeed save itself, and I am obligated to try and do all I can to that end, for while Jesus Christ died and was resurrected – the only one who defeated death – He is somehow not enough. Although this is not stated explicitly, it forms the backdrop upon which we try and paint our own picture of future immortality and perfectibility. It is akin to the post-Fall faith of Genesis 3: Through our wisdom, and by extension the works of our hands, humanity can achieve perfection. Jesus Christ may enter the picture, but He is given the position of an appendage – important, but not enough – as we attempt to save ourselves by adding good works, technology, obligations, rituals, etc. Like any movement or religious system that asks for “works plus,” the plusses continue *ad infinitum* as we strive, but never reach, perfection – and thus the renewed relationship – that comes through the uncreated Creator. **FC**

¹ Carl Teichrib, “The Rise of Techno-Gods: The Merging of Transhumanism and Spirituality,” *Forcing Change*, October 2010.

² See, David F. Noble, *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention* (Penguin Books, 1999), for an interesting historical discussion of human development and dreamed-of ascension through the lens of technology.

³ This does not preclude that some historical and contemporary aspects of Christendom have, indeed, battled with scientific thought. The controversial and complex case of the Roman Catholic Church and Galileo – himself a believer in Scripture – is often cited. And while the evolution/creation/intelligent design issue is used by many critics of religion to demonstrate scientific illiteracy by Christians, it must be noted that some religious and secular scientists do question the theory of macro-evolution on scientific grounds. For example, famed nano-tech engineer James Tour, while questioning creation and admitting to not being a theologian, likewise publicly admits his disbelief of macro-evolution from a scientific standpoint. While Dr. Tour's situation is interesting, his disbelief of macro-evolution is not unique.

⁴ This Christian-technology theme makes up the bulk of his book, *The Religion of Technology*.

⁵ Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (Vintage Books, 1964), pp.32-38; Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Then Shall We Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Fleming H. Revell, 1976), see chapter 7 regarding Christianity's impact on the Scientific Revolution.

⁶ This does not imply that all were or are in agreement on every theological and doctrinal point, but that each identify in a serious way a Christian perspective and/or identity, and that Christianity was/is a fundamental part of their lives.

⁷ Tour, as a scientist who openly proclaims his Christian faith, wrote a fascinating article on the question of Evolution/Creation. His article is titled “Layman's Reflections on Evolution and Creation: An Insider's View of the Academy,” and can be found at the James M. Tour Group website; www.jmtour.com. Furthermore, Tour recently gave his testimony at Georgia Tech's Veritas Forum, where he detailed his work with nanotechnology and then answers, in a provocative way, a question on the issue of evolution/creation. This lecture can be viewed here; <http://youtu.be/PzrxTH-UUdI>.

⁸ Henri de Saint-Simon, “New Christianity,” *Social Organization, the Science of Man and Other Writings* (Harper Torchbooks, 1952), p.105.

⁹ *Mormons in America: Certain in Their Beliefs, Uncertain of Their Place in Society* (Pew Research Center/The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, January 2012, study directed by Luis Lugo), p.10-11. Side note: The polling research discovered that Catholics are more inclined to accept Mormonism as a Christian faith.

¹⁰ Recognizing that my Mormon friends will likely disagree or disfavor the positions made and their intended purpose, I am nevertheless listing these generally-geared sources as a starting point to consider the differences, criticisms, and arguments. A very short and basic view of differences between Mormonism and Christianity can be found in the online pamphlet, “Seven Differences Between Mormonism and Christianity,” (http://mormoninfo.org/files/tracts/Eng_Differences.pdf). An online source with many articles and essays demonstrating differences is the Mormon Research Ministry (www.mrm.org). For examples of contested aspects of Joseph Smith's teachings, see the video production, *The Bible vs. Joseph Smith*, based on an open discussion between Joel P. Kramer, an evangelical Christian, and Greg Gifford, a generational Mormon (Produced by Living Hope Ministries/SourceFlix, 2010). Finally, a dated but important source of critical review comes from Dr. Walter Martin's classic Christian apologetics text, *Kingdom of the Cults* (Bethany House Publishers, 1985), see chapter 6.

¹¹ Daniel 12:1-3, John 6:40, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and Revelation 20:4-6, along with many other Old Testament and New Testament passages, speak to resurrection.

¹² Brent Waters, “Whose Salvation? Which Eschatology? Transhumanism and Christianity as Contending Salvific Religions,” *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement* (Georgetown University Press, 2011), p.164.

¹³ Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (University of Chicago Press, 1960), p.68. This quote is a composite of two sections. The first is found on the top of page 68, and second in the middle of the same page.

¹⁴ Isaiah 44: 6,8b.

¹⁵ Isaiah 45:21b-22.

¹⁶ See Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *Recovering Jesus: The Witness of the New Testament* (Brazos Press, 2007), p.106. Neufeld is an Associate Professor at Conrad Grebel University College.

¹⁷ See John 14:9, Col. 2:9, and Hebrews 10:5.

¹⁸ I Corinthians 15:49.

¹⁹ Genesis 3:4b-5.

²⁰ Genesis 3:6.

²¹ See, David F. Noble, *The Religion of Technology*.

²² A few examples: Theosophy, which received its revelations through communications from shining and otherworldly Perfected Men, teaches that man becomes God through group initiatory processes and spiritual evolution; Levi, who received etherial visions and thus was able to decode his revealed book, *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*, teaches that man becomes God; *The Urantia Book*, a massive compilation of messages from “celestial personalities” teaches that man becomes God through spiritual evolution; The esoteric teachings of the Golden Dawn, which invokes angelic encounters through rituals, teaches that man can become “More than Human” - a divine and Perfected Man; The Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucis, acknowledging and transmitting the teachings of otherworldly Masters, points to human perfection and that man can arise as a cosmic Master through initiatory experience and spiritual evolution; Elizabeth Claire Prophet received angelic visitors and celestial messages proclaiming man is God; and the New Age Movement is rife with examples of angelic and cosmic visitations and communications, continually proclaiming man is God. Finally, Mormonism fits with this modus operandi, as Joseph Smith's teaching of man/God emerges from his angelic-divine encounters. Interestingly, when examining the Bible we see angels proclaiming two primary messages; the fallen angel of light promising man's divinity through special knowledge, and righteous angels pointing to the only God (two examples; The angels at Jesus birth as found in Luke 2, and the angel of Revelation 22 telling John not to worship him, but “only worship God!”).

²³ I want to thank James Carroll of the Mormon Transhumanist Association for pointing me to Noah's situation in a 2013 email. Although we likely disagree in part, I appreciated his criticism and his selection of the Noah event in our correspondence.

²⁴ Dr. Douglas J. Moo, *James* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), p102.

²⁵ Saint Simon, "New Christianity," *Social Organization*, p.99.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.105-107.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.105.

²⁸ George M. Young, *The Russian Cosmists: The Esoteric Futurism of Nikolai Fedorov and his Followers* (Oxford University Press, 2012), p.25. I would recommend this book for anyone wanting a better historical grasp of Cosmism.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

³⁰ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man* (Harper Colophon Books, 1969). See chapters 19 to 22, all written in 1950 and 1951, with a portion of chapter 22 - "Cosmic Life" - printed in 1968.

³¹ John L. Reed, *The Newest Whore of Babylon: The Emergence of Technocracy – A Study in the Mechanization of Man* (Branden Press, 1975), p.41.

³² Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Activation of Energy* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), p.160.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.161.

³⁴ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu: An Essay on the Interior Life* (Harper Torchbooks, 1965), p.63.

³⁵ Julian Huxley, "Transhumanism," *New Bottles for New Wine* (Harper & Brothers, 1957), p.17.

³⁶ Gordon Rattray Taylor, *The Biological Time Bomb* (The World Publishing Company/New American Library, 1968), pp.204-205.

³⁷ Clyde Reid, *21st Century Man Emerging* (Pilgrim Press/United Church of Christ, 1971), p.83.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.118.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.118.