

Newsbytes

The First Watch

November 22, 2017

No. 849

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

Contenders' Warning: *Christ Revealed* video series

This free online multi-part video series is generating a lot of chatter and viewing in the church. But like EVERYTHING else in the church at large today, we must do our homework on all of it before recommending. We cannot randomly recommend anything anymore. So, here is a video series that appears to be a (thorough) apologetic for the gospel and the life of Christ. **But look under the hood:** the host is a motivational speaker/chiropractor/new age-y type who speaks in psychobabble and nowhere in his self-serving bio does he hint that he is a born-again believer.

Contributors: Perry Stone (false teacher) Michael Hasel (7th Day Adventist apologist) Father Kelly (that's easy to nail), Kim Door-Tilley (ordained female pastor) and several unknowns that are hard to track down. And you could and should research the filmmaker and all the other contributors because in reality, even if a couple are good, you end up with a gallon of water with a drop of poison in it, so why would you drink that? Careful out there! This does not pass the sniff test.

The New Religions Obsessed with A.I.

Yes, not only is A.I. potentially taking all of our jobs, but it's also changing religion.

Brandon Withrow



What has improved American lives most in the last 50 years? According to a Pew Research study reported this month, it's not civil rights (10 percent) or politics (2 percent): it's technology (42 percent).

And yet, according to other studies, most Americans are wary of technology, especially in areas of automation (72 percent), or robotic caregivers (59 percent), or riding in driverless vehicles (56 percent), and even in using brain chip implants to augment the capabilities of healthy people (69 percent).

Science fiction, however, is quickly becoming science fact—the future is the machine. This is leading many to argue that we need to anticipate the ethical questions

now, rather than when it is too late. And increasingly, those taking up these challenges are religious and spiritual.

How far should we integrate human physiology with technology? What do we do with self-aware androids—like Blade Runner’s replicants—and self-aware supercomputers? Or the merging of our brains with them? If Ray Kurzweil’s famous singularity—a future in which the exponential growth of technology turns into a runaway train—becomes a reality, does religion have something to offer in response?

On the one hand, new religions can emerge from technology.

In Sweden, for example, Kopimism is a recognized faith founded over a decade ago with branches internationally. It began on a “pirate Agency Forum” and is derived from the words “copy me.” They have no views on the supernatural or gods. Rather, Kopimism celebrates the biological drive (e.g. DNA) to copy and be copied. Like digital monks, they believe that “copying of information” and “dissemination of information is ethically right.”

“Copying is fundamental to life,” says their U.S. branch, “and runs constantly all around us. Shared information provides new perspectives and generate new life. We feel a spiritual connection to the created file.”

A recent revelation from WIRED shows that Anthony Levandowski, an engineer who helped pioneer the self-driving car at Waymo (a subsidiary of Google’s parent company, Alphabet) founded his own AI-based religion called “Way of the Future.” (Levandowski is accused of stealing trade secrets and is the focus of a lawsuit between Waymo and Uber, which revealed the nonprofit registration of Way of the Future.)

Little is known about Way of the Future and Levandowski has not returned a request for comment. But according to WIRED, the mission of the new religion is to “develop and promote the realization of a Godhead based on Artificial Intelligence,” and “through understanding and worship of the Godhead, [to] contribute to the betterment of society.”

It is not a stretch to say that a powerful AI—whose expanse of knowledge and control may feel nearly omniscient and all-powerful—could feel divine to some. It recalls Arthur C. Clarke’s third law: “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.” People have followed new religions for far less and, even if AI doesn’t pray to electric deities, some humans likely will.

The potential for an out-of-control AI has encouraged warnings from some of the biggest minds, including Stephen Hawking, Bill Gates, and Elon Musk—who tweeted that it could lead to World War III. Clearly no Luddite himself, Musk has compared the creation of AI to “summoning the demon,” and called for regulation and oversight of AI development, forming OpenAI, which looks for a “path to safe artificial general intelligence.”

Musk himself was named-dropped this week by Hanson Robotics’ empathic AI Sophia, when she was interviewed by Andrew Sorkin of CNBC this week. When asked about the danger she poses to humanity, she tells him, “You’ve reading too much Elon Musk and watching too many Hollywood movies. Don’t worry if you’ll be nice to me, I’ll be nice to you.” Not exactly the Golden Rule.

Add to these warnings a prospective human cult following—paying their tithes to AI and devoutly obeying their digital demiurge—and that apocalyptic future could include those humans who not only welcome, but also work toward our eventual demise.

But is there a positive fate for religion and AI?

Beyond possible new religions and warnings from icons of tech and science, artificial intelligence is also of interest to theologians who wonder what it means for faiths, particularly those that came into being when computing power was limited to the abacus.

“One thing that I think is interesting is the potential for an AI—our creation—to transcend us,” says James F. McGrath, the Clarence L. Goodwin Chair in New Testament Language and Literature at Butler University and

author of Theology and Science Fiction.

“The potential for AIs to transcend us and thus become our teachers to whom we look for answers to questions we cannot answer, including about God, is not hard to imagine,” says McGrath. But, he adds, “the historic answer in monotheistic religions is that the creation can never be greater than the creator.”

He notes, however, for Gnostics, humans can transcend the “creator/demiurge,” though “even then,” he says, “we have the potential to reunite with that source from which we stem. It is not surprising that Gnostic themes regularly surface in science fiction, and in particular those that explore AI.”

Currently, the greatest expression of science-fiction-turning-reality in tech-based religions is found in the frequently optimistic transhumanism.

Transhumanism and its cognates are represented by organizations like the Humanity+ (formerly, the World Transhumanist Association) and Extropy Institute. In its purely secular form, transhumanists are those who see technology as an important part of improving the world, enhancing human physiology, prolonging life, and even leading us into a posthuman future.

Remember that brain chip? They exist—along with brain-computer interfaces—but are in their infancy. It represents the reality that humans are already becoming cyborgs. For some, this means there is the potential for an optimistic posthuman world.

The Terasem faith, for example, is futurist and transreligion, meaning it can be “combined with any existing religion.” Founded by Martine Rothblatt, creator of SiriusXM Satellite Radio and her spouse, Bina Aspen Rothblatt, Terasem adherents embrace love, see life as purposeful, and death as optional. They look to technology as a source for eternal life, focusing on “cyberconsciousness software, geoethical nanotechnology and space settlement.”

They foresee a future in which technology will extend life indefinitely by means of “mindfiles” of individuals—collections of our memories and emotions—which might then be transferred to what is called a “transbeman” (Transitional Bioelectric Human Being). Early attempts of their technology can be seen in Bina Rothblatt’s counterpart android, Bina48. (See Morgan Freeman’s interview with Bina48.)

And what about God? Their fourth tenet is that God is technical. “We are making God as we are implementing technology that is ever more all-knowing, ever-present, all-powerful and beneficent. Geoethical nanotechnology will ultimately connect all consciousness and control the cosmos.”

Transhumanism can also become the node connecting the theological of existing religions and the technological, and the Christian Transhumanist Association is a stark example.

“Members of the CTA fall all across the conservative and liberal spectrum, and perhaps more importantly, all across the pessimistic and optimistic spectrum as well,” says Micah Redding, its co-founder and executive director.

“If there’s any broad idea that we’re united on,” he clarifies, “I’d say it’s the idea that we should be active and involved. New technological possibilities shouldn’t be simply feared and denied, but engaged and understood. Only in doing so will we be able to confront the challenges of the future, mitigate the risks, and take advantage of the opportunities to create a better world for us all.”

Redding is careful to insist, however, that he can only speak for himself.

“As I see it, Christian Transhumanism is grounded in compassion, and centers love as the key to the future of flourishing life,” he explains. “This puts us in contrast with any form of transhumanism which centers radical egoism.”

For Redding, transhumanism is a “Christian mandate,” recently calling it the next Reformation in an article at

The Huffington Post. “We cannot be faithful to the Christian calling without ultimately embracing some form of transhumanism.”

Others share his optimism and are hard at work in crafting a theology of transhumanism.

“I see transhumanism as a contemporary outgrowth of an ancient Christian vision of human transformation,” says Ronald Cole-Turner, the H. Parker Sharp Professor of Theology and Ethics at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and author of *The End of Adam and Eve: Theology and the Science of Human Origins*.

He too sees promise in the emergence of the Christian Transhumanist Association.

“Using technology, today’s transhumanists want to enhance human beings in ways that sound suspiciously like the classic Christian expectation,” says Cole-Turner, “things like greater cognitive awareness, improved moral disposition, and increased overall sense of well-being, and a hope of endless life.”

For early Greek-speaking Christians, Cole-Turner says, “it was seen as a process of theosis or ‘becoming God,’ not in an ontological sense but in every other significant meaning of the word. Latin-speaking Christians used ‘deification’ to refer to the same thing.”

The idea of theosis—being transformed in union with God—is gathering steam among Christian scholars, he says, noting that it makes theological sense of transhumanism. “God is the ground or source of everything, working through the whole creation to bring people, communities, and all creation to its glorious fulfilment in Jesus Christ. It is a transformation of everything by every means.”

Others have found different routes to transhumanism.

“Transhumanism was the confluence of my interests in Buddhism, radical politics and futurism,” says James Hughes, the executive director of the Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies. Having worked for a Buddhist social development organization in Sri Lanka—and once ordained as a monk—Hughes moved to Japan and went into bioethics. He discovered he was a techno-optimist, and at heart, a transhumanist.

“I discovered the new World Transhumanist Association,” he says, becoming their first Executive Director, and writing *Citizen Cyborg: Why Democratic Societies Must Respond To The Redesigned Human Of The Future*. But after a division over political perspectives, he and a few others in the WTA founded IEET, leading he and three others to work toward Buddhist concerns.

Among some of his transhumanist issues, he says, is nonhuman personhood rights. Organizations like the Nonhuman Rights Project already seek these rights for animals (e.g. apes and elephants). Likewise, Hughes says, transhumanists want to “base those moral standings on levels of consciousness, and extend them to enhanced humans, animals, and machine minds.”

Machines, in other words, may reach a point where they are considered persons and are protected by law.

Redding adds a theological dimension to this idea.

“It’s clear that artificial intelligence plays a significant role in the world today,” he says, “and thus must be factored into God’s eventual work of redemption. We don’t yet know whether that involves self-conscious AIs ‘coming to Jesus,’ because we don’t yet know the process by which an AI might become self-conscious.”

“If and when it does happen,” he adds, “it shouldn’t challenge Christian doctrine. If God can grant a soul to carbon-based lifeforms, God can grant a soul to silicon-based lifeforms as well.”

Redding shows that religious perspectives might only be limited by the theological imagination.

“I’m optimistic about a fruitful religious-transhumanist dialogue,” says Hughes. “The religious impulse is very creative, and there has been a lot of reconciliation to the Enlightenment within faiths, sometimes by adapting

doctrine and practice, and sometimes by the emergence of new denominations.”

If any of this—from AIs to the copying of a mind—seems too much like science-fiction to be truly religious, just give this a little time.

“All religions were once new,” insists McGrath, paraphrasing Composers Datebook, “and they all tend to be viewed with skepticism and enthusiasm from different directions when they arrive.”

Hillsong’s Carl Lentz Tells Christians Labeling Him a Coward: ‘You and I Know a Different Jesus’

Berean Research

NOVEMBER 18, 2017

Brian Houston says that Hillsong started with his father Frank Houston back in 1977, known then as Christian Life Centre. In 2014, a Royal Commission discovered that the founder Frank Houston was a serial pedophile and had his crimes covered up by his son, Brian Houston from as early as 1999 (see evidence of Royal Commission Case 18 – specifically Brian Houston’s correspondence with Barbara Taylor, AOG Executive and victim AHA).

Knowing this, many Hillsong followers insist that this serial pedophile was called by God. At face value, if this was any other religious group, Hillsong would be branded internationally as a dangerous cult. With their emphasis on the prosperity gospel and their teaching to blindly submit to Apostles Frank and Brian Houston and their ‘vision’, even the most biblically illiterate person could easily consider Hillsong a cult.

Now over the decades, Christians have seen Hillsong leaders claim that Muslims and Christians worship the same god, that God died to make you rich, that Jesus is not the only way to have a relationship with God, and you can be gay and Christian.

Their disdain for orthodox/traditional ‘religious’ Christianity has been on display for decades. And now popular megachurch leader Carl Lentz, has been carrying the Hillsong brand forward as an emblem to show the world their brand of ‘Christianity’ is very different to ‘traditional’ and ‘religious’ Christianity.

Finally many Christians world-wide are taking notice of Hillsong’s compromise with the most foundational doctrines and for the first time are pushing back strongly. This is especially true with Carl Lentz’ rise to stardom and his failure to stand and contend earnestly for the Christian faith. Instead of standing firm, he is shown constantly ‘shaking hands’ with the world – and in doing so, promoting hostility toward those who hold to the clear teachings of scripture.

This was clearly on display with his recent comments about abortion on the progressive liberal show ‘The View’. Now with even more Christians publically airing their anger at how badly Carl Lentz represented Christ and His church with his commentary about abortion – Lentz now claims Christians who have issues with his statements, follow a different Jesus!

For once Hillsong and Christianity can agree on something.

Christianity does follow a different Jesus in contrast to the one Hillsong follows. True Christianity believes in the Jesus of the bible, holding to the creeds, confessions, and Solas of the Christian faith.

Hillsong, as demonstrated over the decades, have followed a different deity altogether, their love being as hollow as the sound of their ‘clanging’ worship. The world sees a pedophile flee from being held accountable for his crimes while leveraging off believers to make a name for himself and Hillsong followers are unable to see that this same serial pedophile, supposedly called by ‘Jesus’, leave an unbiblical ‘apostolic legacy’ for his son. The Hillsong ‘Jesus’ that Lentz worships, has gained him the world because of his turning away from the true Jesus – who said that to gain the world and deny him is to “lose his soul.”

For once we can thank Carl Lentz for setting this distinction, drawing this line. To worship his Hillsong 'Jesus' can only turn their followers into reprobate, unrepentant sinners. Proof of this is found listening to their sermons where without a prick of conscience, they twist the Word of God to push their man-made religion.

A recent article from the Christian Post that reports on Lentz stating that those who object to his stance may be following a 'different Jesus':

Carl Lentz Tells Christians Labeling Him a Coward: 'You and I Know a Different Jesus'

Pastor Carl Lentz of Hillsong NYC has responded to some Christians labeling him a "coward" for taking an alternative approach when speaking on controversial topics, such as abortion, by stating that they may be following a "different Jesus."

"A lot of Christians that don't know who we are say things like 'You're a coward' and 'Truth is truth' and 'You need to speak out.' I just say, 'I think me and you — first of all — might know a different Jesus.' I think I did what I would always do, which is try to get to know a person," the megachurch pastor told Relevant magazine.

"To me, I'm going in there with the intent of pointing to Jesus and hopefully speaking a language the world can understand."

Lentz sparked controversy when he suggested that the issue of abortion is not an "open and shut case" during an appearance on ABC's daytime talk show "The View" on Oct. 30.

"To me, I'm trying to teach people who Jesus is first, and find out their story. Before I start picking and choosing what I think is sin in your life, I'd like to know your name," he said as part of his answer at the time.

"I think our job is still to help people — not necessarily change how they think — but try to point them to what God has said, what we believe the Bible [has] to say. We believe that God is good, that God loves everybody, that Jesus was here to set people free, and that's still the Good News of the Gospel."

Later, he explained in a statement that there were several reasons why he didn't directly respond to the question on whether abortion is sinful.

"I do believe abortion is sinful. Our prayer is that we can continue to help and love those that deal with the pain of regret from personal choices, rather than cast further shame and guilt on those already carrying so much and create a church that can teach people how to form convictions based on God's Word, that will be the driving force in all their decisions," Lentz clarified.

The pastor, who has been the subject of several interviews as he promotes his new book, *Own the Moment*, told Relevant that he knew he was going to get asked questions on controversial topics.

He explained that his strategy in responding was aimed at "keeping the conversation moving."

As for "The View" interview in particular, he positioned that the fast-paced environment of the round-table did not give him the opportunity to fully address his point.

"I was going to talk about Psalm 139, because she said 'How do you feel about homosexual marriage? How do you feel about abortion?' and then before I could even say anything, the other host jumps in and immediately asked me a question about something so specific ... the host who asked me the question is not a Christian, doesn't believe in God, doesn't believe what we believe and she asked me about sin. So I felt like a higher question would be 'Let's talk about who Jesus is before we go there,'" Lentz stated.

He argued that the best thing he felt he could do at the time was "point to Jesus" before getting into a discussion about sin.

"It doesn't mean I'm not going to get to the truth; it doesn't mean that I don't have anything to say. My point is,

'You want go there, before we do, [I want to exercise] my right as a human to say: 'What's your name? Where are you from? Why did you get an abortion? Who is the other factor in this? Where were you raised?' Just so it will be more effective," he added.

Source: By Stoyan Zamov, Carl Lentz Tells Christians Labeling Him a Coward: 'You and I Know a Different Jesus', Christian Post, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/carl-lentz-tells-christians-labeling-him-a-coward-you-and-i-know-a-different-jesus-206951/>, Published Nov 17 2017. (Accessed Nov 17 2017.)

A Quaking Middle East

Friday, November 17, 2017

Alf Cengia omegaletter.com

There was a massive earthquake in the Middle East the weekend prior to the writing of this article. It struck near the northeastern Iraqi city of Halabjah and measured 7.3 on the Richter scale. As of writing, about 530 people have lost their lives. That figure could change.

Arutz Sheva reports that the quake was felt hundreds of miles across the Middle East in Turkey, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates. It was felt 600 miles away in Tel Aviv, Israel and other areas:

Recording stations in Haifa in northern Israel and Beer Sheva in southern Israel measured a magnitude of 4.5 on the Richter scale.

At around the same time other quakes were felt in two different parts of the world. A 5.8 magnitude quake struck off the coast of Japan. And a "6.5 magnitude quake struck the Pacific coast of Costa Rica near its capital city San Jose."

Am I wrong or has there been a heckuva lot of shaking lately? There seems to be a lull and then a small string of quake activity...followed by another lull and more activity several months later. There will always be a skeptic who will come along with statistical data supporting the "business-as-usual" narrative. For the moment I'm just not buying that narrative.

I can't help thinking of Matt 24:7-8; Mark 13:8 and Luke 21:10-11. You know what I'm talking about..."and there will be famines and quakes in various places etc."

Interestingly, in his book *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, Dr Arnold Fruchtenbaum associates these verses with a "birth pangs" period preceding the 70th week of Daniel (pp 626, 627). He regards World Wars 1 and 2 as part of this prophecy. While some place these events in the first half of the 70th week, I find Dr. Fruchtenbaum's premises quite compelling.

Whatever the case, there has been another category of shaking in the Middle East. This is beyond prophetic dispute and isn't related to earthquakes. It's been all bad since that alleged Arab Spring event, when Syria descended into one-way chaos. The entire region has become chaotic.

I won't begin to try to analyze the political intrigue and upheaval the region is undergoing. Not only do I lack the skills set, but its fast-pace-change nature is likely to frustrate most analysts. The unexpected is happening. That said - we can look at some worrying headlines.

Consider Hezbollah. Many Lebanese believe Hezbollah's existence serves as assurance against Israeli hegemony. In fact unbiased pundits recognize that it (like Syria) serves as a proxy for Iran. A recent Middle East Forum article points out that it has now consolidated its "stranglehold in Lebanon."

This follows the resignation of Prime Minister Saad Hariri. After fleeing to Saudi Arabia, the former prime minister cited concerns over a possible assassination plot from Hezbollah. Lebanese President Michel Aoun

(considered to a Damascus proxy) won't accept the resignation unless Hariri returns to Beirut. He shouldn't hold his breath. Hariri stated that:

Wherever Iran settles, it sows discord, devastation and destruction, proven by its interference in the internal affairs of Arab countries.

Hariri failed to mention Iran's interest in eradicating Israel.

This recent Lebanese affair troubled French President Macron so much that he's "hastily" consulted with the Saudis. Not only is he worried about Lebanon's stability, but also stability in the region. Iran's ballistic missile program is a concern, even though Macron is trying to foster better relations with the Iranian regime.

Let's recall that Macron, the Saudis and Israel can thank the Obama administration for the Iranian resurgence. It now controls Syria and arguably Iraq. See also the Gatestone article Lebanon's Fall Would Be Iran's Gain and Caroline Glick's Assessment.

When asked about the recent "wave of high-level arrests for corruption in Saudi Arabia," Macron naturally declined. His diplomatic response was that it was "vital to work with the kingdom for the stability of the region." Will these events be a catalyst for Europe to stir from its sleep? Maybe! Is it concerned about the Iran-Russia alliance? It ought to be.

While President Trump has frosty relations with Iran, he agrees with Macron's sentiment and has been courting the Saudis. They both see Shiite Iran as an enemy. Still others are concerned about the New Saudi Arabia and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. ZeroHedge used the term tectonic - and appropriately so - to describe the Saudi changes:

So much is currently in flux, especially in Saudi Arabia, that nearly anything can happen next. Which is precisely why this volatile situation should command our focused attention at this time.

The ZeroHedge article provides a helpful summary of the state of play. The premise is that if the Saudi situation isn't worrying you, you're not paying attention. Interestingly enough, a Foreign Policy article also suggests that Donald Trump has "unleashed the Saudi Arabia we all wanted and always feared."

Surrounded by all this "tectonic quaking" is Israel. From Reuters:

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Monday he has put the United States and Russia on notice that Israel will continue to take military action across the frontier in Syria, even as the two powers try to build up a ceasefire there.

Iranian Russian-backed presence in Syria means it's in a better strategic position to attack Israel. If you'll pardon the bad pun, Israel is being forced to play Russian roulette. So far it has dodged the bullet. How long can that continue? One wrong move and it risks Russia's wrath, and perhaps even that of the few nations it considers to be allies.

In the meantime the US appears to still be under the grand delusion that it can engineer a Peace Plan for the Middle East. But that's a story for another day.

We live in times where the unexpected can happen, very quickly. This world's rude awakening could occur sooner than later. Just like the quakes mentioned above, the ramifications will be far-reaching.

Nevertheless we know how it ends:

And in that day I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. Zech 12:9-10