A Conversation with Archbishop Lazar Puhalo

Advanced Technologies and Transhumanism

Q1. Future role of technology

Lazar: That is what we discuss at futurist conferences but it is really difficult to say because so much of the technology we have consists in spin-offs, usually from the military/industrial complex. A lot of the technology has been and is being developed in secret. We have good ideas of what some of it is, but by no means all of it. I think in 30 years time though, we will have got used to almost continuous surveillance, even on public thoroughfares, and that to me is really one of the most ominous aspects of the element of technology. We will accept it because of fear, and fear is the strongest conditioner. In many cases, technology is developing in relationship to a war on terrorism, both real and imagined and this conditions us to accept the surveillance of people in all circumstances. I think probably we will have a lot less personal freedom and there will be technologies that will help to distract us from having these personal freedoms. I think part of the technology that is developing is intended to distract us away from thinking and toward become less aware of about what is going on in our governments and in our military. Social media has been used in popular protests to considerable effect, but it can be swamped and used for disinformation just as easily.

Katina: That is really interesting. A lot of people I speak to from political science believe that the advent of email has caused the dulling of our senses. We are more concerned and distracted by the frequency of these messages than the content of these messages. We are losing our ability to look up and outside and see the bigger picture of all this distraction and I think that plagues us in all our spiritual lives when we don’t have control. Geronta, your observation of the increasing nature of surveillance is accurate. Can you tell me what you think about the new innovations now, like body wearable devices?

Lazar: As you know cameras are so miniscule now. We have things such as small ballpoint pens that can actually record videos. Our freedoms and our privacy are being impinged upon by other individuals, not only by government officials and police... What we will have to get used to is the loss of privacy and the loss of private space. In a way this helps to cripple us because privacy itself and private space are something that are so valuable to us and our emotional well being...New technologies can actually read brain-waves and decipher what is going on in the mind in a general sense. I think that this technology in developed initially for good purposes, then we will see mind reading technologies of one degree or another...and you can see the application for that in the destruction of freedom of the mind as well. So these technologies can be useful but also very invasive. They can be so beneficial and yet they can be so destructive at the same time. All technologies are that way and I worry that these technologies are proceeding along ways that ethics is of no consideration in the creation of them and how they are used. Ethics is one of the first casualties on this side of the road.
Katina: Having spoken to so many innovators, I think I would have to concur. Many of them think that ethics is irrelevant to begin with. And when I question them about ethics they say that ethics is a moot point. In June 2013 I had the fine opportunity to host an international conference in Toronto Canada. And I met a small start-up, Interaxon, who have a device called MUSE. The CEO has demonstrated that MUSE can do some very novel things including pouring beer. Then there are the other breakthroughs at Browns University for disabled persons that are helping them to gain functions that they have lost through chip implants in the brain. The question however from a technological deterministic perspective as Jacques Ellul has written so well on, if we unleash these advanced technologies, which really should not be compared to the invention of a knife for example with which we can cut some bread versus killing or maiming someone, do you think these technologies have inherent qualities (the one’s that are being developed today) that are more dangerous for example, than the one’s we used for survival at the beginning of time.

Lazar: I do subscribe to Alexander Panov’s Panov Curve Theory, Panov curve, in the process of the evolution of these things... Part of the problem, particularly in America is that the American economy is based on a military substructure, so that their economy cannot survive without the military/industrial complex. In a very dramatic way, war and international police actions drive the technology, and this forms base of national economy and GDP. It is a form of fascism. Fascism properly defined as a coalition between government and industry in ruling a country. But the continued development of these technologies and their application to military uses and destruction as well as weapons exports, is at the very root of the wartime economy and that is what is really worrisome. The technologies that we are developing today are on the one hand we could say, some of them are a great good for people who need them but at the same time they have military applications without a doubt and that of course involves more efficient and more savagery ways of killing people. So the technology is really a double-edged sword, even the best of it that helps people who are disabled because even these figure into military robotics.

Katina: Is there a danger, I remember reading a book titled: “Hype or Hope” which was about transhumanism. Is there a possibility of overstating the short-term technological possibilities?

Lazar: Oh yes, because people make a profit by overstating things. Most of the pop-ups on your computer, and most of the ads on television are always overstated and that is what makes them sell and of course that is what makes us vote for certain politicians as well. The trouble with the electorate is that people will vote for false hope, they’ll never vote for truth... In the case of transhumanism, of course it is going to be hyped and overstated. As an actual construct, transhumanism, doesn’t worry me so much, it’s the people who believe in transhumanism as an ideology that concerns me, but not the actual construct itself because it is not going to happen the way they desire for it to. Transhumanism suggests an engineered spiritual evolution as much as anything else, and it is gnostic in that presumes that the soul and the body are totally separate
entities so that the soul can function outside the body and be downloaded into an avatar and also that it can be evolved to be totally independent of the human body... Of course, transhumanism is a religion. Any movement that aims at affecting the afterlife or talks about immortality, must be classed as a religion per se, because just the idea of attaining immortality by some means is at the basis of religion. That is transhumanism, and it can impact the mentality and spiritual understanding... That this can be achieved by human beings through some form of technological development opens the door to some new spiritual dimension that diminishes the value of humanity and mankind’s relationship with the divine..

Katina: What do you think the consequences of such a belief are? That there are some who believe that this is the correct way forward. What will be some of the short term consequences of this?

Lazar: Well, some very foul experiments involving humans... It is possible that transhumanism can downgrade our regard for human beings. One might surmise that some of the people that get involved in transhumanism are in the highest levels in industry or associations, and that their reasons for it have to do with power... The idea of posthumanism in which we have gone from a kind of directed evolution to a condition in which we no longer can be defined as human, in the present sense of the word, anyway, is floating around in the transhumanist world. Some of these people, probably correctly, believe you can download the contents of the brain into an avatar, essentially, the memory, which means our knowledge and consciousness of self... and that may very well become feasible in future. However, there is also a concept that one could actually download the human soul into an avatar..... That is the real proximate. We are created in the image and likeness of God, and in our understanding, that is what identifies us as humans. So what identifies us as humans in a transhumanist era with that mentality? It is the degrading of the vision of what makes us human that worries me most.

Katina: Very interesting to see what is happening in countries like China. I know from sources that I trust that some young people, for instance, are choosing to donate a kidney for a very small sum like 300 US dollars, just so they can raise enough money to purchase a new mobile phone. And the hospitals are selling these kidneys to patients requiring the kidney for a cost 30 times the rate.

Lazar: Part of this is, as you say, the hyperbole of television. But the hyperbole of advertising likely helps to convince the students that the mobile phone is so essential to their human value that it is worth a kidney... It is unbelievable what young people will do to get the latest thing that is advertised as a “must have,” telling that you “deserve it.” This is corrupting our whole concept of the value of our humanity and that is one of the great disasters.
Katina: Geronta, I see this corruption visibly, because what I see is, this moving from outside our homes to inside our homes. We are in actual fact hyperconnected anywhere in the world that we are so long as there is some infrastructure. Now we are seeing large search giants investing in infrastructure inside the home. So instead of us having search engines so we can conduct searches online and they can listen in on our private conversations. It is not just the smart television but now also thermostat controls and smoke detectors. So the idea is that you place a piece of kit in various rooms, like a camera or a device that can detect all the movements in the house and all the audio in the house. And there are devices now where you can talk to a piece of equipment orally, and expect to receive a response you can act on. Again, this is being logged and sent back to the Cloud for further analysis. And the contradiction here is, that instead of us saying this is a surveillance device, we are saying this is a life-saving device, a device that will help our family, and our spirit and provide convenience. But we are blind to the fact that it is another source of infiltration.

Lazar: The experiments with microchip implantation were conducted, to test their acceptability. These tests included a system in which one could go shopping in a market where microchips had also been attached to all the merchandise. The microchip implanted in the finger or back of the hand of the consumer contained all their banking information, but perhaps also information that the wearer was not aware was there. The convenience factor was obvious. You could fill your cart and proceed through the check out without stopping. One would just walk through the checkout stand, and and a receiver reads the chips in all of the items, reads the chip implanted in the consumer, and transfers the money from your bank account to the store’s bank account.... It is rather ironic that people will sell their souls for convenience....Convenience is marketed in such a way that it seems to be a normal goal of life. Many people will actually trade any amount of privacy or initiative, and ultimately sell our freedoms for convenience. It is a form of conditioning. Like Pavlov’s Dog, we are being conditioned to trade freedom for convenience. We will also trade freedom and privacy for security if we are frightened enough, and we’re being conditioned in that direction also. Fear is a great conditioner... Much of our spiritual struggle is toward de-conditioning ourselves from the passions and desires that are born of our egoism and self-focus. Ironically, while we think that we are struggling against these things, we are being conditioned to seek them...

Katina: So what is all this deception doing to our minds? For example, my husband and I along with our research students have investigated what we’ve typically called the 3C’s- control, care and convenience applications in the context of implantable devices that have been launched since the 2000 period. The take up has been minimal but still we have studied the applications stemming from this. Our premise is that even if something is sold as “convenient” it still has an underlying factor of control, and as you add there “conditioning”, yet another “C” word.

Lazar: Yes of body and soul.
Katina: Yes. Even if you are elderly and suffering from dementia, let us put a chip implant in you so your loved ones can know where you are all the time. Or you are a minor, your parents are scared you will be abducted, here put a chip in the kid so you can have security and know where they are. But we always argue, you might know where the child is physically but it doesn’t mean they are alive or you can dupe these devices. So there is no foolproof technological solution and when I hear about implantables I say why would you want to go down that path? Because the minute you do not have access to the device embedded in your body, then you do not have control over it, you cannot throw it in the bin, you cannot destroy it. So we are leaving ourselves open to vulnerabilities in this way. There are many implications of the embedded surveillance devices, which my husband has termed uberveillance. And the question now is what is happening to our minds? Geronta, you have qualifications in neurobiology, is that correct?

Lazar: Yes, I do. I think about these things when I go to the airport. I see people who have registered with the complete details of their lives, and taken an iris scan which is kept on file, together with all this information. Now, they can go to the scanner at passport control, eyepiece to have their iris read by a machine. The scanner compares the iris with the one on file, and the person conveniently passes quickly through passport control. Now, there are also e-passports as an option since 9/11. E-passports also offer convenience, but one has to surrender privacy with a form of total registration. These may take the form of a chip on your driving license which can be read at a distance by a receiver. But this is more convenient isn’t it? Moreover, if the authorised receiver can read it, so can criminals who can certainly obtain the necessary devices.... Conditioning for convenience, it seems, makes us use our brains less. Human beings cannot cope with things that denigrate or totally distract the human brain...We are not using the brain in a disciplined way... The brain needs to think in an orderly and structured way to have freedom of thought and action.. Grammar and language structure disappears in the age of texting, because it becomes possible to communicate some things in a vague way without them. But when we don’t use appropriate language and proper grammar, we cannot really be certain of what is being said, and this goes for proper punctuation as well. We become conditioned to vagueries, incomplete ideas and nebulous reasoning. In this manner, structure in the brain, and the structure in how the brain functions is being degraded, and the degradation that comes with lack of structure is bound to have a negative impact on the organisation of the brain...

Katina: Yes. I have been approached by numerous individuals who have undergone brain operations. And these are not psychologically disturbed persons. These are persons who have received implants for example for things like epilepsy treatment so they don’t have to take drugs for the rest of their lives or have unexpected seizures. And very sadly quite a few who have contacted me have begun to suffer side effects which are not well documented. And I think the moment that we place electrostimulators in our body, especially in the brain, we need to be very cautious, yes there is a prosthetic purpose to the operation to a given endeavour, but right now I am seeing lots of grant money in research institutes all over the world and governments, really focusing on brain implantables. Already, we are going down the path of having sufferers of major depressive disorder to adopt electrostimulators. So right now it is a correct practice, but how long will it be before these...
individuals begin to speak out en masse because of the side effects they are enduring. For example, some of them are feeling some disturbed emotive senses in their body, as a result of additional or over stimulation, others are hearing voices when they never previously did, others are having extreme feelings of joy when they do not wish to be feeling so high. So what do you see in the future that we will be told to get these devices for convenience, for diagnostic purposes, for not cure but for prevention, will these stimulations be used for various parts of the body, what do you see happening?

Lazar: The idea of stimulating various parts of the brain or body as medical treatments sounds very good. It is being used for Parkinson’s Disease and clinical depression as well as experiments in neurological areas. Neuroscientists are trying to figure out the locus of human consciousness and whatever else one can discover with the use of probes that are implanted into the brain. Overstimulation is a possible problem with some of them. Allow me to speculate that we could create psychiatric illnesses in people using these or similar devices because one can artificially stimulate parts of the brain that are not normally stimulated in this manner. This could surely create a dependency after a while.... No technological device will ever be used exclusively for good. Evil can be very subtle and, to borrow Hanna Arendt’s pithy expression, quite banal. Only seldom is it self-evident and dramatic. That is why in the short-term we can use these things for medical and prosthetic uses, but we might also be able to create mental illnesses, or forms of schizophrenia so people start hearing voices, or they are overstimulated in ways that can resemble bipolar syndrome. They could, perhaps, be controlled like Sergeant Shaw in THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE.

Katina: Yes, geronta, indeed. I am hoping to write up some case studies. But I anticipate the medical fraternity will likely attempt to dismiss these as one off scenarios but I think we have to start somewhere.

II

PART II

Lazar: Antichrist means “in place of Christ” not “against Christ.” And that is the whole deception. You know some people look at aspects of transhumanism as something beneficial. Dimitry Itskov, for example, is a humanitarian, and he is profoundly interested in prosthetic devices. From his point of view he’s looking at a new freedom for mankind, at mankind’s survival in the long term. He represents the highest elements of this field... But on the other hand, I think there are a lot of people who want to peddle immortality in this life, and without the effort of faith...This does prepare us for the concept of a whole lot of rewards without the necessity of what is required. We will get all these things ourselves through some form of technology. In fact we are being conditioned to accept the Antichrist by becoming antichrists ourselves...
Katina: I’ve often thought about the whole notion of how the Antichrist will come into fruition or will come as a person to the Earth. We know that he will be born of a woman but we can speculate how science will allow for a particular type of birth and life in the future. That he will come, we know because it has been prophesied throughout the Bible and especially in the Book of Revelation.

Lazar: It is a set of prophecies that we read at the beginning of great lent. The Antichrist will sit in a rebuilt temple and demonize the whole world from that place. In former times, the question always arose, “how could he do this.” In the late 1600s, the holy prophet Saint Kosmas the Aitolian explained it in a prophetic vision of technology, that included satellite broadcasts and monitors... If we have enough war, fear, and terrorism, somebody who comes along and can suddenly offer peace and proper distribution of food and water, who would not follow him? In fact, we are being desensitized. It is a desensitisation of Christians. That is part of the issue too, desensitisation and conditioning go together...

Katina: I am very appreciative that you have emphasized “in place of” because when we look at the notion of the mark of the beast, this is also in place of the seal of baptism, the mark is an overriding of that seal of baptism given to us.

Lazar: We have a lot of people who come to the Monastery for our liturgies, and in the first week of the month Holy Unction is offered. We anoint on the forehead and the hands. I tell people ahead of time, “now remember we are putting the seal of Jesus Christ in the place where the Antichrist would like to put his seal and we do not leave space for him. We do this also in order to keep people from becoming desensitized.

Katina: Yes, and I think when we look at Holy Unction for the healing and care of our body and soul, I as a parishioner feel exactly what you have said, but the only person who has ever said that to me is my husband, because of the forehead and right hand mentioned in Revelation 13: 16-18. This is when we leave the Church, when we are absent from the services and do not participate in the Holy Sacraments, then we forget about the seal. And if we are being distracted, and we are being conditioned, then it becomes easy for us to be manipulated, we become like marionette puppets.

Lazar: Oh yes, indeed. You know the things that draw away our focus so often take our focus away from Christ, away from the condition of our own soul, and away from the struggle that we have, as individuals as well. And it is too easy to forget that we are not called to a “Christianity,” but rather to a life in Christ.... Humanity is really made in the image and likeness of God, no matter how dark and dim it has become, that beauty remains. The life in Christ leads us to regain that free humanity instead of trying to create a new humanity in our own distorted image. Everything is being seen in some kind of distorted view that leads people to want to perpetuate fallen-ness rather than to lift one up to something higher and better. So isn’t transhumanism essentially trying to make our fall immortal? Our sinful nature immortal? Death was certainly not a punishment from God, but rather a result of separation from God, and a certain benefit in that because of death, sin could not become immortal. Immortality can come only by grace through Jesus Christ... And yet we have a life-span
within which to repent and receive that grace. Yet when we look at transhumanism, and set our hope on it, there is no need for repentance or grace at all, is there? So what the concept here is to perpetuate the fallen and sinful human nature, and to do so through human ingenuity and our technology.

Katina: Geronta, I know as followers of the Lord, we do not have fear of what is coming because we know as we have been told in the Book of Revelation that it is a book of victory. The enemy powers are no match for the Holy Trinity. But what is your personal human fear of the future you will live in still?

Lazar: I won’t be around much longer but the concern I have is this idea that the fallen human nature is the best form of the human nature. Remember that it is “through fear of death” that man kind is held I bondage. ..Transhumanism is, in many ways, motivated by this fear and a desire to conquer death through technology... That is just a reality. But for the future, if we continue in such a way that that the fallen human nature is seen as a kind of perfection then the world can only become less livable. That is my real concern about the future, since food and water shortages and other aspects of global climate change will test our humanity and moral concepts to the limit. Think of these crises taking place in a world where the human the pursuit of the fulfilment of the passions is thought to be the best possible mode of existence... The loss of the concept of a moral conscience and the idea that the passion of the moment is the ultimate reality is surely a definition of a hell on earth..

Katina: Yes, geronta. One of my fellow collaborators and I from the USA have been looking into online temptation, and online sin, and looking at how video games in particular. We could talk about the music industry and about the film industry in particular but I’ll park that for a moment. But if you look at video games, whereby people are soliciting sexually immortal behaviour, and engaged in this behaviour, they are murdering online, committing adultery online, respawning and measuring a kill rate ratio, measuring other aspects online. Some of the addicted gamers are clocking up more than 50% of their physical lifetimes in online virtual environments where they have 15 avatars. But is this perpetuating like a broken record as you’ve described this eternal sinful state because immortality on earth would be like this kind of battle. But do you think the video games are dulling the senses?

Lazar: One might suggest that most of these are dulling the senses. One of the biggest marital problems that we come up against is video pornography. But it has become a norm. Often it begins as a pop up, but eventually, for too many men, it becomes habitual... We ourselves can become so vacant and empty we have a huge vacuum in our own spiritual life and in our hearts that we ourselves can impact on the world around us only if we realise we are trying to struggle to acquire the Holy Spirit and to have a life in Christ rather than some “Christianity”.

Katina: Yes Geronta, I concur. And it is the title of that great book by Saint John of Kronstadt, “My Life in Christ” tells us this.

Lazar: Yes, indeed, indeed. People often ask me “what should I read? What should I read from the Holy Fathers?” Read Athanasios “On the Incarnation”. If you just read that and nothing else, then it is enough. What does it mean that Christ became man? If He wasn’t here to deliver our human nature
itself from its bondage what would we have? Yet we are being taught to keep our human nature in that bondage. It’s the fear of death that motivates this, and, what is hell but to be held in bondage? Transhumanism responds to that doesn’t it? It responds to it without God and without Christ, without morality. The result would be immortality without any sense of morality. It sounds like the worst nightmare you could possibly have. It sounds like hell.

Katina: Yes, not being able to see the light. And the image that was conjuring up in my imagination as you were describing what an immortality on earth would actually mean for us humans, I kept thinking of those old vinyl records, and you’ve got an old broken record that goes round and stops at the scratch? I thought imagine being locked up in a room in darkness and listening to one of those broken records for eternity. It would be just so painful, in fact it would be hell.

Lazar: We joke that hell is where Canadians have to listen to an eternal replay of the constitutional debates. But it is like any of the passions. Repeated fulfilment of any given passion eventually becomes boring, so it has to be made more exciting, more extreme. This is why the ultimate fulfilment of the sexual passions is death– generally someone else’s death, but sometimes even suicide. At a lower level, sexual boredom leads to sado-masochism, and that may explain the popularity of Fifty Shades of Grey. It may also explain the shocking increase in the sexual abuse of children and child pornography. It is a fact that the sexual abuse of boys is, in 80% of the cases, done by heterosexual near relatives or close family friends, not by homosexual men. This is likely a result of the boredom of excess sexual freedom. But one can explore the same route in other of the passions as well. In a way, feeding the passions has become a major aspect of our contemporary society, and it is driven in a large measure by the advertising agency – the modern serpent of Eden.

Katina: This reminds me very much of a presentation I once gave on technology upgrades, where I presented Zeno’s Paradox on getting from A to B. You’re always closer and closer to the final destination but you’ll never quote reach there. If all you are concerned about is the earthly “fix”, then you’ll never get there. We will never get immortality through earthly means.

Lazar: Zeno was ahead of Heisenberg with the uncertainty principle. Even if the arrow can reach its destination, one can never measure both its exact location and its speed. One sees people with food addictions, what we call gluttony– whatever they eat is never enough; there has to be more. That is why I say the advertising industry is a serpent of Eden. It is always telling us we need one more, you need another one, that happiness is only a purchase away. Not long ago, a young man in California actually killed another kid because he wanted a brand of tennis shoes that his friend had but were too expensive for his parents to buy. He just had to have that, so he killed the other boy and too them.

Katina: That just doesn’t make sense at all.

Lazar: But that is what the advertising industry can do to people, that is what its business is really. Some while ago, I was on the way to speak at the University of Miami and along the way, we passed a billboard that proclaimed, “IF YOU WANT IT, YOU NEED IT.” It is banal but evil, a slogan that Satan would be proud of.
Katina: Can you tell us about your forthcoming book?

Lazar: I call it “The Ethics of the Inevitable.” I deal with developments which are surely coming that we might consider best left undone. What are the ethical implications of such developments as artificial intelligence, robotics, life extension methods, avatarism, etc. Most of these developments take place in the military-industrial complex, and most of them have a primary function in more sanitised and less public killing. War has become an economic necessity, even while it costs nations vast sums. Technology can, overall, reduce the costs while keeping the military/war based economy afloat. Sales of arms and weapons is a major export income for industrialized nations. Rather like the war on drugs that actually sustains the drug trade, keeping the profits high enough that the risk of death or imprisonment is offset by the economics of the drug trade. The drug trade is a major aspect of the GDP in America today. We need to look at the ethics regarding all these matters; they are all inevitable.

Katina: Does it specifically look at robotics?

Lazar: It specifically looks at robotics, primarily the reality of robots as slave labour. You are likely aware of the development of robot prostitutes. The announced aim is the reduction of STDs, however, the reality is a robot as sex slave. One is reminded of the chilling theme of the novel, “Thw Stepford Wives.” But that theme is becoming more and more possible to one degree or another. The other aspect develops on a reality that we already deal with, the dispensable human. Another is the aspect of transhumanism, that involves the use of a robot surrogate. What are the ethical questions. I am avoiding too much the expression “morality” because it is, in effect, a subjective religious term. Even though every religion thinks that it has the absolute in moral terms, there are no absolutes this side of the heavenly kingdom, and I do not wish to deal with something that people will see either as an absolute, or as a challenge to their religion’s version of the absolute. In the end I can make an epilogue from an Orthodox perspective, here is what we see about the moral of the issues and how the main dogmas of the faith addressed them. This is something one of my theological heroes Anthony Khrapovitsky, Metropolitan of Kiev wrote about in the main dogmas of the faith. His idea was not to give an exposition of the dogmas but show that each of the main dogmas underpins our daily moral struggle in an existential manner. It is not just a bunch of words, but they have concrete meaning to our concept of humanity, to the moral dimension of being a human.

Katina: When will the book come out?

Lazar: I hope to finish it by January of 2016.

Katina: Wonderful. I was reminded of the Paschal Troparion. “Christ is Risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life.” And recently, I was reading a very small booklet that was put together by St Stephen Press. The book contained three sermons delivered by Anthony Bloom in the early 2000 period. The book was titled “Death and Bereavement”, but in actual fact it was a book on life. And it was really about our humanity and how we are to face death.
Katina: It is now easier for men to be with robotic prostitutes. Some of these men own a dozen different robots for sexual pleasure because it is easier to be with them because they are not expensive, it is a one off cost, you do not have the other baggage that comes with a human being that have problems and challenges and illness, but the birth rate has dropped so badly, and we have seen the same thing in China by female foetuses have been aborted and so female companions are scarce and women are being kidnapped from one rural location and forcedly told to marry a man from a different location because we have this imbalance we have created ourselves.

Lazar: Well you know one of the things that bothers me the most about the abortion of female foetuses is that it develops a testosterone society, which is by nature violent. Of course the utter denigration of women is quite shocking.

Katina: So geronta, what is the solution? What are the steps forward? Is resistance to these new technologies a futile thing to be talking about; is societal education possible or are we powerless as a society in the face of big business? What are the ways to overcome this problem, or this set of big problems?

Lazar: One might suspect that if Christians begin to be what we are supposed to be we could have an impact. So much of Christianity is really based on hate and fear and that drives the majority of the younger generation away. It is notable that, at least in North America, Christians reshape their faith to match their political leanings rather than the other way round. Christ is seldom at the centre of either. We have to try and recapture what it means to have a life in Christ rather than trying to make Christ a spokesman for the political party we belong to. The only power that we can possibly have to influence the spiritual transformation of another person is co-suffering love.

Katina: So I deduce from that geronta that there can never really be a spirit in machinery. There can never be a God-breathed spirit in a machine anyway.

Lazar: There can never be any kind of spirit in such devices. No matter what we do with artificial intelligence, they will always do what we program them to do and what we tell them to do. We want mechanical slaves, so we would not want them to be sentient, have emotions or a soul.

Katina: Is the concept that is being proposed as the Singularity related to anything prophesied in the Book of Revelation. Has it got any implications for our faith?

Lazar: I certainly think it has implications for our faith, but I don’t know how it connects to the Book of Revelation. The singularity means that we come to an omega point of some kind, and there are two points of view with respect to the singularity. Alexander Panov relates it our general evolution where the Snooks-Panov curve of human development curves upward until it becomes perpendicular. Another view, related to this, suggests that the singularity is a point at which artificial intelligence outstrips human intelligence and the intellect. We are, of necessity, over simplifying the overall concepts here. This clearly has profound implications for our concepts of humanity. Mechanical devices, by whatever name, are likely to be amoral and amorality can be more powerful and destructive than clear immorality.
Katina: Yes, I think that helps greatly. I think when we look at the climax of the *Book of Revelation* and the number of the beast, 666. One of the responses is for us to keep focus on our faith and the events will take care of themselves whenever God deems for them to occur.

Lazar: When the mark of the beast actually comes along, people who are faithful will recognise it, I don’t think we will have to guess.

Katina: Oh I agree. There will be no guessing. I think those who will be taken over by the presence of the Antichrist, who will be fooled by the peace and security and joy of being conditioned, and welcoming that conditioning, won’t be duped either. I think the Lord will make it clear to us in these times. And there will be, as some of the early church fathers have written, there will be the period of calm and then the period of terror.

Lazar: Yes. But it is all about total dehumanisation. My book “Freedom to Believe” asserts that the ultimate freedom is only the freedom of the soul. Someone may can take away your physical freedom but you can maintain your freedom and the freedom in the soul, in the mind.

Katina: Yes. “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:28)

Lazar: Two things that Dostoyevsky wrote about in *Crime and Punishment*, were precisely about God’s co-suffering love manifested in the co-suffering love of a believer that brings Raskolnikov to total repentance and the renewal of his inner person. The power of co-suffering love and the power of repentance are primary in the transformation of the inner person into the “glorious freedom of God’s children.”

Katina: Which gets back to empathy, and so much more.

Lazar: Yes, God has empathy with us. And Christ has empathy with us, and we are commanded to have empathy with our neighbour.

Katina: Are we to expect Geronta, this mark or this number of the beast, to be a technological development of some sort, a payment scheme of some sort, or we best not enter into dialogue on that territory?

Lazar: It could as well be the mark of soul that has surrendered itself to bondage, bondage to material desires which can lead to a desire for bondage to a system that promises them; bondage to the passions that leads to bondage to a system that advances and approves of them.

Katina: Geronta, thank you for the blessing of being able to speak with you so openly on these topics.