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The Human Being - between Deification by Grace and Biotechnology Augmentation

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Abstract
In the last twenty years, digital technology has developed in an explosive manner and continues to do the same today, at a speed previously hard to imagine. Moore's Law states that electronic devices double in power and halve in size every 18 months, and even that time frame is decreasing. Today's average smartphone contains 120 million times more technology than the Apollo 17 space shuttle that is said to have landed on the moon.
An equally rapid development, but, as its producers themselves warn, unpredictable, seems to have artificial intelligence, which is still not regulated ethically or morally. Recent research and results in the field of biotechnology prophesy and promise man physical and cognitive augmentation and warns him that, in the absence of bio-improvement of his condition, he could become, in just a few years, "irrelevant", a kind of "pariah", compared to augmented organisms.
Against these predictions and promises, Orthodox theology offers a vision of man who - despite the "wounds of sins", at the origin of which lies ancestral sin - can, with God's help and through personal effort, achieve immortality, understood as salvation, perfection or deification by grace and work.

Keywords:
digital technology, artificial intelligence, transhumanism, augmentation, salvation, deification

Through artificial intelligence we summon the demon.
(Elon Musk)

I. Introduction

The world we live in is undergoing a fascinating technological evolution, unprecedented in its history. In a matter of months or weeks, tools whose discovery and use took years of intense research to discover and use are said to be obsolete and replaced. These new devices have made life easier and, in many cases, more beautiful.

The Abbot Paisie Aghiorite (transferred to the Lord in 1994 and canonized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 2015) called and counted them "mercies"[1]. However, the spiritual Father observed, instead of bringing peace and peace of mind to man, they have brought stress and anxiety to his soul under the guise of progress, comfort and civilization. When the "benefits" outweigh the needs, the rush to acquire and possess them leads to a state of emptiness of soul, under the guise of wealth and material surplus, to a feeling of inadequacy and uselessness, to a sense of emptiness and existential failure.

Knowing and participating in the suffering of the world and the sorrows of all mankind, trying to take them upon himself, his heart and soul became "minced". Everywhere, restlessness, poverty and unemployment, debt and interest, sickness and cancer, sadness and depression. The spiritual solution he gave to these existential anxieties was to simplify life and, he believed, in this way peace of mind and peace would return. A simplification of material life, in the sense of restricting it only to the things necessary for an austere and ascetic life, which would help spiritual progress.

In such a material civilization and culture of the body, among tools and machines of steel, he believes, the human heart has become one of iron, insensitive to the spiritual register, to the relationship with God and with fellow human beings, and even with one's own inner life[2] .

[1] Paisie Aghioritul, *Spiritual Words. I. With sorrow and Love for Contemporary Man*, translated from Greek by Ieroschim. Ștefan Nuțescu, Lacu Hermitage - Holy Mount Athos, Evanghelismos Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003, p. 146.

[2] Paisie Aghioritul, *Spiritual Words I...*, p. 146.

And the future, both immediate and more distant, does not seem to be improving morally. Sin and passions are fashionable, "in trend", and are considered expressions of emancipation, democratisation and liberalisation of morals, while virtues - humiliated and shamed, considered forms of backwardness, are banished from society, in the souls of the few Christians who still respect and fulfil them.

Only great tribulations, heavy trials, deep existential upheavals in the form of natural catastrophes and deep physical and inner sufferings can apparently stop man from this mad race, from falling and sinking into the material, illusory and limited world. But even this apparent awakening of the world and this "coming to himself" of man is short-lived, that is, until the trial passes and temptation arises, man then returning to the former, easy and sweet to the body, but harmful and soul-killing.

The spiritual X-ray, which the Abbot Paisie Aghiorite made "with pain and love" to the world and the soul of contemporary man, seems more topical than ever. More and more and more and more varied technology incorporated, to the point of a supposed fusion of man with machines; comfort and pleasures a click away, but less and less moral discernment and a weaker spiritual life.

The massive intrusion of technology, not only in the material, external world, but in the very life and future of the human being, calls for deep moral reflection.

II. "Memories of the Future"[3] or "Brave New World"[4], in augmented version

There is a wise saying that "even the future is not what it used to be". Fundamental changes, in rapid succession, characterise today's world and the times to come.

[3] Erich von Däniken, *Memories of the Future*, translated from German by Gh. Doru and S. Stanciu. Foreword and annotations by Ion Hobana, Lifestyle Publishing, Bucharest, 2011.

[4] Aldous Huxley, *Wonderful New World*, translated by Suzana and Andrei Bantaș, POLIROM Publishing House, Iasi, 2011.

Primarily targeting the peripheral areas and outer aspects of human life, technology and artificial intelligence have insinuated themselves into all aspects of our existence, private and public, professional and personal. Devices have entered our homes, and today we speak of an increasingly integrated technology[5] .

Experts talk about a bright and beautiful side of the "internet of things". Jamie Suskind, a highly educated Oxford University scholar and analyst concerned with the future of the human being in an increasingly technological world, notes that by 2020 there will be around 50 billion devices connected to the internet, and it is estimated that at some point in the very near future 99% of material objects will be connected to the internet and to each other, through increasingly intuitive and powerful applications[6] .

Moore's Law estimates that also at 18 months, and this time frame tends to drop to 12 months, information and technology doubles in volume and speed. Translated into practical terms, this means smaller and cheaper, but increasingly accessible devices. The TVs of yesteryear were of considerable size. Today's plasmas are 1-2 cm thick. Personal computers were also the size of TV screens, installed in a fixed place, wired for power and internet. Now tablets or laptops are small and can be carried and used everywhere: on the plane, in the office or in the bedroom. Even the bulky and cumbersome mobile phone has given way to the smartphone, the smart phone, which, reduced in size, has more and more functions: calendar, phone, TV, camera and video, tape recorder, monitoring body functions: number of steps, pulse, weight, even menstrual cycle frequency in women. Or, to further understand the meteoric advance of technology, consider the fact that all the technology from the Apollo 17 space shuttle that landed on the moon is now incorporated into a medium-sized smartphone.

There is now talk of "smart cities", first autonomous cars and then flying cars, in the near future. In such a city,

[5] Jamie Suskind, *Politics of the Future. Digital Technology and Society*, translation from English by Adina Ihora, preface Claudiu Degeratu, Corint Books, Bucharest, 2019, p. 35.

[6] Jamie Suskind, The *Politics of the Future...*, p. 58.

> "in the public space, smart bins will know when they are full, roads will know when cracks appear, and supermarket shelves will know when they are empty. Each of these will send information to the people or computers responsible for fixing the problem. Signposts, streetlights and smart traffic lights will interact with driverless cars passing by. Smart cities will multiply"[7].

Not only cities, but also homes will incorporate and integrate more and more high-performance technology:

> "At home, the same author believes, fridges will monitor what you eat and update your shopping list online, ovens and washing machines will respond to voice commands, coffee makers will brew your coffee the moment you get out of bed. Sensors will monitor the heat and brightness in your home, adjust the temperature and open blinds accordingly. Your home could be protected with «smart locks» that use biometric information, such as handprint, face or retinal images, to control entry and exit"[8] .

Artificial intelligence programs such as Deep Blue, which defeated world chess champion Garry Kasparov, or Watson, the unbeatable winner over human contestants on the American televised quiz show Jeopardy, have since moved from the recreational to the medical space. In this field, an artificial intelligence program can diagnose numerous forms and stages of cancer in just a few tens of seconds, based on consulting, "in the cloud", the opinions of several thousand oncologists and specialist articles, which an oncologist would have done in 38 years of uninterrupted documentation, day and night[9] .

If we want to know about a more "cool", "radical" form of these supposed technological developments, Ray Kurzweil, the "brains behind Google", offers us one for the year 2099:

[7] Jamie Suskind, The *Politics of the Future...*, p. 59.
[8] Jamie Suskind, The *Politics of the Future...*, p. 58.
[9] Jamie Suskind, The *Politics of the Future...*, p. 45.

"Human thought is merging with machine intelligence, which the human species itself has created. Reproduction of the human brain by means of reverse engineering seems to be complete. Hundreds of specialised regions have been scanned, analysed and fully understood. Machine analytics are based on these human models, which have been developed and extended, along with many massively parallel new algorithms. These advances, combined with the enormous speed and capacity advantages of electronic/photonic circuits, provide a substantial boost to machine intelligence. Machine intelligences, derived exclusively from models of human intelligence, claim to be human, even though their brains are not based on processes produced in carbon-based cells, but on their electronic and photonic «equivalents» Most artificial intelligences are not linked to a specific computational processing unit (i.e. hardware). The number of software-based humans far exceeds the number of humans still using native neural computation. Software-based intelligence is capable of manifesting bodies at will: one or more at different levels of virtual reality and physical bodies resulting from nanoengineering, which use swarms of nanobots and are instantly reconfigurable. Even among human intelligences that still use carbon-based neurons, neural implant technology is ubiquitous, providing enormous amplification of perceptual and cognitive capabilities. People who do not use such implants are not able to participate meaningfully in dialogues with those who possess them. There are a multitude of ways in which these scenarios combine. The concept of what is human has changed significantly. The rights and powers of different manifestations of human and machine intelligence and their various combinations are a major political and philosophical issue, although the fundamental rights of machine intelligence have also been enshrined"[10].

[10] Ray Kurzweil, *Age of Spiritual Machines. When computers surpass human intelligence*, translation from English by Bogdan Chircea, Paralela 45 Publishing House, Pitesti, 2012, pp. 337-338.

Artificial intelligence is now used in financial reporting, sports articles, as lawyers, and even in the "creation" of literary, musical or artistic works, activities that until just a few years ago were reserved for human genius and creativity. And this raises a new problem: the threat of robots gradually replacing human employees. It is estimated that today, if they so wish, countries with a highly unsustainable and technologised economy could "give" more than 50% of jobs to robots, putting human workers out of work, which would create more problems, not only ethical but also social[11]
.

Even more surprising is the fact that many forms of artificial intelligence have machine learning or self-learning algorithms, whereby, working in a network, they become self-improving and, in the absence of human control, in extreme situations, they will no longer follow the system designers' initial commands.

Mindful of the moral aspects of the relationship with digital technology and artificial intelligence, even an author such as Manfred Spitzer, author of "Digital Dementia", appreciated that

> "digital environments are a part of our culture. They increase our productivity, make our lives easier and are an important factor in entertainment. The modern world, from food supply to mobility, from administration to medicine, would collapse without digital information processing. It is not, therefore, a question of fighting digital media or eliminating them. But we do know that these tools have great addictive potential and are harmful in the long term to the body (stress, insomnia, obesity, with all their side effects) and especially to the mind"[12].

The solution he proposes is to exercise discernment and control over its contents.

[11] Bill Gates' proposal to tax robots is interesting.

[12] Manfred Spitzer, *Digital Dementia. How New Technologies Cloud Our Minds*, translated from German by Dana Verescu, HUMANITAS Publishing House, 2020, p. 258.

As moralists, concerned about the fate of the human being and the evolution of the world in the future, we cannot fail to notice the power of the preaching words of the same Athonite spiritual Father - the Abbot Paisie the Aghiorite. Fantastic technological progress, unprecedented, has not, however, led, as was normal and happy, to proportionate moral progress. On the contrary, all these high-performance artifacts seem to have diverted man from the meaning and purpose of his life - salvation, occupying his time and consuming his physical and spiritual powers exclusively in the increasingly attractive, captivating and addictive material and virtual world.

With more and more tasks and activities, whether analogue or digital, he no longer has time for his inner life - soul and spiritual. It is not without reason that psychologists speak of "traveller's syndrome". We are guests and travellers - often strangers - through our own lives, with the important moments of our lives being stops, often non-stop.

Constantly carrying intelligent devices on his body, or even embedded in his body, man no longer pays attention to his inner life, the only one capable of bringing him not the increase of physical or mental functions, but spiritual improvement, peace of mind and salvation.

Little by little, he begins to become an immigrant, a misfit in the cold, strange silicon world that a few brilliant minds have created in the labs of Silicon Valley. And this is because the human mind, despite its neuroplasticity, does not have the capacity to change with the speed at which technology is advancing. The human brain has developed in whole "eras" over long periods of time, and adapting to technology makes it difficult. More responsive and in sync seem to be the generations of "iKids", now "Generation K", those who, from birth, live their lives behind screens of a digital blue "serene", but with profound effects on their physical and mental health.

The human being feels emotionally or emotionally stunted in this fascinating "new world", digital, which demands its involvement, artificially potentiating psychological vulnerabilities through compulsive loops of emotion or feeling.

More and more AI experts, realising the ethical danger posed by an addictive relationship with digital technology, have been exposing the

huge financial interests behind the software and apps they create. They revealed that millions of dollars were invested in their construction, in cyberpsychology and neurocerebrology studies, carried out using high-performance brain-scanning technologies, to identify - and it didn't take long - and "supercharge" or "superpower" so-called "digital pleasure points", on the brain's crust and, with the help of targeted sounds, colours, techniques, methods and strategies, to lead, especially in children and adolescents with limited self-control, to excessive consumption and compulsive behaviour. Because, as it turns out, digital apps with a particularly addictive potential were not created by genius brains concerned with making the world a better and more beautiful place for all, but a wider consumer market and their consumers addicts or, as the creator of one of them confessed, "The App Store wants your souls!"[13]

The purpose of their creation is not simply entertainment, but their ultimate target is the root of the brain stem. Their strategies are linked to the mechanism of desire, to small and gradual infusions of dopamine, the molecule of pleasure and reward, and lead to addictions or cyberaddictions much stronger than the passions or vices that the Holy Fathers of our Orthodox Spirituality talk about[14] .

Technologically ill-adapted, man becomes a recluse and a loner in this cold world of screens and devices. It is paradoxical that social media, while designed to facilitate connection and communication, seems to have led to the undermining of community. The human being was created to receive and share love, to communicate intimate moods, to listen and resonate with those close to them, to convey verbally and nonverbally, assertively and empathetically, feelings and beliefs, directly, face to face, not through inanimate devices. The effect this has led to is the deprivation of direct, quality, live, personal relationships in favour of digital, mediated and artificial ones. We have come to connect with a lot of people, from the

[13] Cal Newport, *Digital Minimalism. Focus on Your Own Life in A Noisy World*, translation from English by Raluca Chifu, Publica Publishing, 2019, p. 27.

[14] In 2017, Sean Parker, Facebook's founding CEO, spoke candidly at an event about the attention-manipulation techniques used at his old company, "In building these apps, Facebook being the first of them, the basic idea was, «How can we consume as much of your available time and attention as possible?» That meant we had to give you a dopamine boost every once in a while because someone liked a photo or a post, commented on it or something". Cf. Cal Newport, *Digital Minimalism...*, p. 35.

ends of the earth, but distancing and isolating ourselves from our nearest and dearest. Because therein lies the real danger of these technologies. Not in what it offers us: connection, entertainment, speed, speed. But in what they take away from us - the time we should be giving to others and to ourselves, in what is most useful for our lives: culture, reading, prayer, relationships, personal, social and spiritual development and improvement.

It is no longer surprising that the average man, husband or father, spends 38 hours a week in the company of technology, but only 24 minutes with his wife and only 3.5 minutes with his children. Because of this, the ignored child also takes refuge in the screens, in technology, which, in the course of time, turns from a "digital nanny" into a favourite companion.

III. From "reparative medicine" to "technobody"

Initially penetrating from the periphery of life, through devices designed to improve our lives and work, to save time and resources, technology has increasingly come to be used in the medical field. Genetic engineering, robotics, nanotechnology, intracorporeal and, more recently, intracerebral, intracranial, neural implants have begun to be used to remedy medical, somatic and mental problems. Today, telomeres, the ends of chromosomes, markers of general health and ageing, are being intensively studied with a view to prolonging their life and, by extension, human life.

Scientists, deeply involved and well versed in these realities, appreciate that the attempt to

> "modify human DNA, to merge with machines, using implants, prostheses and interfaces, and to appropriate their non-human power as if it were our own, to manufacture organs and tissues, to tailor medical treatment to each patient's genetic make-up - such things could change the meaning of the word «human» forever".

Human perfection is no longer the stuff of fiction.

> "Our descendants are expected to be able to increase their physical strength and endurance with the help of bionic limbs, organs and exoskeletons. They will greatly improve their instincts, mood and memory. They will be able to reduce the effects of pain and the need for sleep. They will sharpen their senses, gaining superhuman sight and hearing. They will have access to a whole new universe of emotions, sensations and desires. They will have the ability to determine the traits their unborn children will have. They will slow or stop the ageing process, postponing death itself"[15].

There is thus increasing talk of "human bio-enhancement" through "technodeterminism" and of restorative and human augmentation medicine, which will ultimately create a "technobody". By 2030, medical robots will be widely used, and by 2035 the practice of using intracerebral nanobots, attached to our neurons, to amplify physical or mental functions, is intended to be commonplace. It is thus intended to drive things towards the "technological singularity".

Ray Kurzweil, the "Google mastermind" and proponent of trans-humanist theory, says that

> "in terms of transforming our bodies, we are already further along in the process than we are in developing our minds. We have titanium devices replacing jaws, parts of the skull and hips. We have artificial skin of various kinds. We have artificial heart valves. We have synthetic vessels to replace arteries and veins, together with disposable stents, which provide structural support for weakened natural vessels. We have artificial implants for the arms, legs, back and feet. We have all kinds of joints: jaw, hip, knee, elbow, hand, finger and toe joints. We have implants that control our bladders. We're developing machines - some from artificial materials, others combining new materials with

[15] Jamie Suskind, The *Politics of the Future*..., p. 408.

> cultured cells - which will eventually be able to replace organs like the liver and pancreas"[16].

His dream is to achieve the "technological singularity", the moment of fusion between man and machine. This moment is prepared for by the creation of a supercomputer, a quantum supermind, a billion times more powerful than all human minds put together. He predicts the year 2045. To this end, work is being done to emulate the brain, scanning, mapping, copying and downloading it digitally using genetic reverse engineering. The goal is to create an interface between artificial intelligence and the human brain. The new "spiritual machines", a synthesis of the fusion of man and artificial intelligence, which are expected to emerge from the most advanced laboratories, would place "classic" human beings in a position of physical and mental inferiority, which, in the absence of augmentation implants, would become inferior and inefficient, a kind of "pariah" of the past. Although the process of brain research is extremely advanced, it would seem that the greatest difficulties it faces are in deciphering and imitating human feelings, mental and emotional states.

Adam Gozzaley, in his book "The Distracted Mind", points out that

> "we are moving towards the deployment of technologies that revolve around our brains and bodies, as highlighted by the European Commission's Human Brain Project and President Obama's BRAIN initiative, as well as an increase in neuropsychological research, using resources such as functional magnetic resonance imaging and functional near-infrared spectroscopy, to find out how and why our brains react to stimuli and situations, and to improve our ability to use other high-tech tools. Add to these research tools body-worn devices and various presentation and recording technologies that have ‚augmented' reality. Just think about virtual realisation, motion sensors, smart watches, brain stimulators, implanted sensors, eye scanners and

[16] Ray Kurzweil, *The age of Spiritual Machines...*, p. 198.

even 3D printers that can make human organs. It looks like we are indeed entering a new wave of biotech"[17].

Although these projects seem futuristic and unattainable, we must not deny or forget the fact, noted by experts, that "all these Luciferian ambitions are not mere phantasmagoria, but «guiding principles», not just distractions for many of the most influential technology specialists"[18].

IV. The "death of death" vs. the Christian virtue of contemplating death

The Christian faith, based on Divine Revelation and on the Church's two-thousand-year experience, through the voice of her Holy Fathers, considers death to be the effect of the fall into sin of the pro-parents Adam and Eve, a stumbling block to sin and a culminating effect. It is anticipated during life through the experience of suffering, pain and illness.

Orthodox spirituality, however, does not view death with tragedy and drama, with horror and pessimism, with panic and existential anguish. It recommends us to look at it with responsibility and hope, preparing ourselves at every moment to be able to give a "good answer to the Terrible Judgement", first of all individual and then universal.

Through the voice of the Holy Fathers, she recommends that we acquire the virtue of thinking about death (*melete thanatou* or *memento mori*), which should help us to live each moment of life with responsibility, with the thought and awareness that any of them could be the last moment of life. And this will lead us to introspection, to self-examination, in order to see, with discernment, the good deeds in our lives, which we should intensify; but also the sins and mistakes, for which we should repent and free ourselves.

[17] Adam Gozzaley, Larry D. Rosen, *The Distracted Mind. Old Brains in a Highly Technologized World*, translation from English by Ruxandra Vișan, Trei Publishing House, Bucharest, 2019, pp. 161-162.

[18] Max Tegmark, *Life 3.0. Man in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*, translation from English by Vlad Zografi, HUMANITAS Publishing House, Bucharest, 2019, p. 86.

Awareness of the imminence of death should lead to reconciliation with God, Who will judge all our thoughts, words and deeds, as the Just and Immortal Judge, but also with our fellow human beings, towards whom we should cultivate the virtue of love in its many forms. And thus, reconciled with his Heavenly Father and with his fellow men, man finds peace and tranquillity with himself.

Orthodox spiritual literature abounds in apophthegms and exhortations to keep our minds alert to these ultimate truths of life. St. Anthony the Great says that "death, having it in the mind of man, is immortality, and not having it in the mind, is death"[19] , and St. Isaac the Syrian exhorts us, "Be like the dead in your life, that you may live after death"[20] . The wilderness ascetics advised young disciples to go to the tombs and meditate on the brevity of life, and St. Basil the Great is absolutely right, saying that the whole philosophy of life is contained in pondering death. Aware of the precariousness of his physical condition and the ephemerality of his existence in this fleeting world, the Christian needs to grasp for eternal and happy life in the Kingdom of Heaven.

After a life of asceticism and neediness, asking for a "Christian end, without pain, without suffering, in peace", the Christian moves with his soul into the spiritual world, awaiting the moment of the Universal Judgement. His body "rests", until the Resurrection of the Body, in the "cemetery", which in Greek means "dormitory", not in the "necropolis" of the pagan world, those "cities of the dead".

So, for the Christian faith, death is an irreversible reality, a law of nature, whereby the human being passes from this fleeting life, however short or long, to eternal life.

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[19] St. Anthony the Great, "Teachings on the Moral Life of Men and on Good Conduct, in 170 heads", 49, in: *The Philokalia or Collection from the Writings of the Holy Fathers Showing How Man Can Purify, Enlighten and Perfect Himself*, volume 1, translation from Greek, introductions and notes by the Rev. Professor Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Publishing House of the Biblical and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 2008, p. 23.

[20] St. Isaac the Syrian, "Words on the Holy Needs", Word XLIV, in: *The Philokalia or Collection from the Writings of the Holy Fathers Showing How Man Can Cure, Enlighten and Perfect Himself*, volume X, translation, introduction and notes by Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, published by the Biblical and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1981, p. 231.

But the secular and transhumanist currents do not preach the same thing.

More than ten years ago, the press was making a company popular in Switzerland, where euthanasia is legalised. It was a mortuary firm that worked closely with hospitals, particularly oncology and palliative care departments. As soon as a patient was diagnosed with cancer, it made a prognosis of the hope of survival and proposed a package of services to the sufferer. When the course of the disease, i.e. neoplasia or metastasis, was out of control, causing pain and suffering, he was advised not to wait to go through the whole ordeal of physical and mental degradation, to the horror of his loved ones, but, on the contrary, to part from them, smoothly and sweetly, sparing them the grotesque spectacle of his agony and death. To this end, he was invited to "drop in" at the company's headquarters, where he could choose the coffin and costume he wanted from a wide range of choices. At a mutually agreed date, when the suffering was becoming more intense, but before subjecting those around them to a desolate and dismal picture, one or two limousines would arrive at the patient's home, with drivers dressed solemnly in tuxedos, like butlers. They would "pick him up", and he could be accompanied by a number of people fixed by the initial contract. On arrival at the firm's premises, he would dress in the previously chosen costume, say goodbye to his companions and attendants and sit in the coffin ordered. The coffin is fitted with a lethal vial and a homemade hammer. With the latter, the "candidate for euthanasia" broke the ampoule, which caused his death, under the watchful eyes of those present, who watched safely through a large window in an adjoining room[21] .

There was another news report just a few years ago that a UK council had purchased expensive but "innovative" and truly "state-of-the-art" technology that used the heat from burning corpses in a crematorium to heat nearby homes. Now the City of Dublin, Ireland, is planning to use the heat energy from the city's crematoria to heat its residents[22] .

[21]https://www.capital.ro/monopol-elvetian-sinuciderea-asistata-o-afacere-de-milioanede-euro-125933.html, accessed 4 February 2022.

[22]https://stirileprotv.ro/divers/caldura-de-la-un-crematoriu-folosita-la-incalzirea-unui-oras-unde-se-analizeaza-aceasta-propunere.html, accessed 4 February 2022.

Recently, a Nobel Prize-winning Catholic cardinal asked that his body be cremated after his death, using a new technique, in water instead of fire, for ecological reasons, which has already happened. The practice is called cremation and is considered a more environmentally friendly method of burial[23] .

For those interested and willing, a small "death capsule" - SARCO - has recently been invented. Marketed in Switzerland, it can be bought and installed anywhere: in hospital, at home or in the garden. Death occurs within 50 seconds by inhaling a lethal gas inside[24] .

It is now fashionable for some wealthy people to use the services of jewellery companies, also in Switzerland, which use "high-grade" technology to transform the ashes of the deceased into a diamond that can be mounted on a ring. For each carat of the diamond, €4,000 must be paid. Even in the Romanian show-bizz, rich, extravagant and foreigners of the Orthodox faith have announced such an intention or even materialized it[25] .

If these devices hasten or "ease" death, the transhumanist movement has a totally different ambition, striving to delay and annihilate death or the "death of death". In the first stage, the aim is to improve health, through technologies and implants that eliminate disease, "cure" ageing and extend life.

The CALICO project, initiated in 2013 by Google, studies the speed of avoiding death by extending longevity. Some of the followers of transhumanism take hundreds of pills every day in the hope of delaying ageing and in the expectation that these drugs will keep them alive until the cure for eternal life is discovered. Others have requested that, in the event of death, their bodies be cryopreserved and deposited in banks of frozen organisms, in the hope that they will be reborn when the elixir of eternal life is discovered and will benefit them indefinitely[26] .

[23]https://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/ce-acvamatiaa-metoda-funerara-mai-ecologica-ceruta-episcopul-desmond-tutu-video-1_61d16c615163ec42713a8a71/index.html, accessed 4 February 2022.

[24]https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/mapamond/capsula-mortii-ar-putea-fi-aprobata-in-elvetia-pentru-sinuciderea-asistata-1764825, accessed 4 February 2022.

[25]https://www.descopera.ro/dnews/15929678-cenusa-mortilor-transformata-in-diamante, accessed 4 February 2022.

[26] https://www.yoda.ro/stiinta/calico-un-nou-proiect-ambitios-de-la-google.html, accessed 2 February 2022.

In its absence, there is also the option of cremation or burial and reunion, at the grave of the deceased or in front of the urn containing their ashes, with images of their life, in the form of holograms, which can be accessed using a digital code.

For all these illusions, a futuristic religion - the "Way of Future" or even the "Church of Google", already recognized by the State in Canada, has been specifically created. The followers of the "Church of Google" worship Google as a god for the following reasons they acknowledge: 1. Google is all-knowing; 2. Google is omnipresent; 3. Google answers all prayers (i.e. all questions in the search bar); 4. Google is immortal; 5. Google is infinite; 6. Google remembers everyone; 7. Google will not and cannot do harm: 8. Google is more sought after and loved than other gods: 9. Google is the only god whose existence is proven[27] .

In the face of such projects and practices, the Christian faith shows its esteem for the human person - body and soul - even to the last moments of his or her physical life, and even afterwards. Help, compassion, care and assistance to the sick and dying person are considered acts of physical and spiritual mercy, an expression of love of neighbour. And the same Father Paisius the Augustinian, like the whole of Orthodox teaching, considers that by caring for a sick or suffering person, we are in fact helping Christ the Lord. The love shown to the suffering person is a means of forgiveness of sins and acquisition of holiness.

Father Professor Dumitru Stăniloae, speaking about knowing God from the concrete circumstances of life, teaches that

> "in every poor and oppressed and sick person Christ meets us, asking us, by coming down, for our help. In the poor man's outstretched hand is Christ's outstretched hand, in his muffled voice we hear Christ's muffled voice; his suffering, because of the lack and humility in which we hold him, is Christ's suffering on the cross, which we prolong. In everything, God comes down to us and makes himself known to us. This very descent makes evident his mystery beyond all understanding; it makes evident

[27] Jean-Claude Larchet, *Captives on the Internet*, translation by Marinela Bojin, Sophia Publishing, Bucharest, 2018, p. 272.

> his love which surpasses all the loves of the world. All the circumstances and persons through whom God speaks to us are His living and transparent calls and faces; the simple God comes down to us in a multitude of forms and situations, literally in all the situations and forms of our life"[28].

At the funeral service, the deceased is placed in the middle of the church, not in an annex, storeroom or freezer, also as a sign of reverence, including for the body. Only suicides, sinning against the Holy Spirit, are not received in the church and have a different place, at the edge of the cemetery.

Respect for the human person, in Christianity, does not cease with his or her burial, for, according to St. Isaac Sirul, "love is sweeter than life"[29] . Memorial services, almsgiving, following their good deeds are some of the ways we show that they are still alive in our souls.

In front of all these facts, the Christian faith defends and preaches the dignity of the human being and its sacred vocation. Man, according to the biblical account of creation, was made by God, out of infinite love, through the work of the Most Holy Trinity, in the image and likeness of his Heavenly Father (Genesis 1, 26). Even after the fall of the first people into sin, God did not rejoice in their fall, but, through the prophets and life experiences, called them to return and rest in His love. At the "fullness of time" (Gal 4, 4), He sent His only Son "for us and for our salvation". During his earthly life and his public activity, the Saviour left us, as a testament, the commandment of love.

Telling us that "not everyone who says: «Lord, Lord» will enter the kingdom of God, but only he who does the will of my Father" (Matt 7, 21), He also shows us the way to the "passion of godhood": that of fulfilling His words and commands. This requires pronounced asceticism, a hard work of struggle against sins and passions, some of which are widely cultivated in the contemporary world. At the same time, the aim of Orthodox positive asceticism is the acquisition and practice of Christian virtues, which make

[28] Professor Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. I, third edition, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 2003, p. 148.

[29] St. Isaac the Syrian, "Words on the Holy Needs", Word XXXVIII, p. 205.

man well pleasing and more and more like God, the Source of all virtues, and lead him to union with Him, to "deification by grace and work". And one of the virtues is to endure tribulations with dignity, with nobility of soul and Christian hope in God's help, and not to rebel against them. Equally important is the virtue of contemplating death and Judgment, a virtue that leads to repentance and correction, with the hope of eternal reward from God.

The Christian faith teaches us that, in order to reach the happiness of Heaven, each of us must go through the ordeal of Calvary and carry, like the Saviour, the cross of our personal life. Therefore, in order to reach the Resurrection and eternal life, we must first go through the experience of death.

In the expectation of these, the true Christian must rely on his own powers, strengthened by divine grace, not on bio-improvement devices devised by human pride; he must place his hope in God's help, love and mercy, not in technology, however advanced and promising it may be.