Wounded Glory and Borrowed Light

Transhumanism Read through the Theology of the Cross

Toward a Cruciform Discernment of Accommodation, "Transition," and Enhancement

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Prologue: The Gospel According to Upgrade

He comes to us with a bright briefcase and a clean conscience. He speaks in the future tense the way preachers speak in the imperative. He lays his hand upon the human condition and calls it a design flaw. *Pain* is information—delete it. *Aging* is a bug—patch it. *Death* is a solvable problem—hire better engineers.

He is not entirely wrong. Some pain is brute vandalism. Some aging is a long theft. Some deaths are not the ripening of days but the snapping of a thread. Christians who anoint with oil, who pray for healing, who set broken bones and bandage wounds—Christians cannot pretend to be indifferent to suffering. The church is not asked to be stoic; it is asked to be faithful.

But it must be faithful at the foot of the cross, not at the podium of progress.

The theology of the cross begins where the world refuses to linger: at the place where God is most scandalously Himself—hanging, bleeding, mocked, and hidden in His opposite. "The cross alone is our theology."[1] Not the cross as jewelry, not the cross as brand, not the cross as mere mechanism of forgiveness, but the cross as God's manner of being God for sinners: concealed majesty, cruciform mercy, power perfected in weakness.[2]

So when a shining new salvation is offered—when the old human question is answered with a new human technology—the theologian of the cross does not ask first, *Is it impressive?* He asks, *What kind of god does it assume? What kind of human does it require? What kind of future does it promise?* And then, harder still: *Who gets crucified in order for this glory to be purchased?*[3]

If transhumanism is a river, it is not a single stream. It is a watershed. It has tributaries of mercy and tributaries of hubris. It has clear water and glittering poison. Our task is not to damn all tools, nor to baptize all aspirations, but to distinguish the spirits—especially the spirits that arrive dressed as compassion.[4]

2. Three Things We Must Not Confuse (or: The Ethics of Lumping)

Late modern moral discourse has developed a lazy appetite for bundling. If two things share a surface resemblance, we lump them; if they are lumped, we treat them as identical; if identical, we either bless all of it or curse all of it. That is not discernment. That is a riot of analogies.

For the sake of theological clarity—and for the sake of actual neighbors whose lives are damaged by our rhetorical shortcuts—we must distinguish at least three different projects that are often shoved into the same argumentative suitcase:

- Physical accommodation for the disabled: technologies and practices that remove barriers, enable access, or restore lost function so that persons may participate in ordinary human goods—communication, mobility, learning, work, worship, friendship.[5]
- Trans-gender accommodations: social, medical, and institutional practices intended to reduce distress and risk for persons experiencing gender dysphoria (or related incongruence), to enable them to live with greater safety, stability, and coherence—often amid contested claims about the relation of body, self, and identity.[6]
- Super-human adaptations (enhancement): interventions not primarily ordered toward restoration or access, but toward surpassing species-typical capacities—engineered intelligence, radical longevity, augmented cognition, gene editing for traits, cybernetic upgrades for competitive advantage, and the promised arrival of the "posthuman."[7]

To confuse these is to commit a category error with pastoral consequences. A ramp at the sanctuary door is not the same moral question as the dream of mind-uploading. A pacemaker is not the same spiritual project as the abolition of creaturely dependence. A policy meant to reduce harassment is not identical in meaning to a metaphysical claim that the body is merely clay for the sovereign self.

Theology must be precise here not because precision is cold but because imprecision harms. When we collapse these domains, we end up either baptizing everything under the name of mercy or condemning everything under the name of tradition. Both are shortcuts masquerading as conviction.

3. Heidelberg's Knife: *Theologia Crucis* as a Way of Seeing

Luther's Heidelberg Disputation is not a museum piece. It is a blade. It cuts away our romanticism about God and our vanity about ourselves.

A "theologian of glory," Luther insists, calls evil good and good evil. He looks for God where God appears plausible: in strength, success, obviousness, ascent.[8] He reasons from what is seen to what is supposed to be. He calls the world's ladder "spiritual." He expects God to behave like an improved human being: larger, louder, more victorious.

A "theologian of the cross," however, calls the thing what it actually is.[9] He looks for God where God has bound Himself to be found: in the suffering and the cross of Christ. He reasons not from human visibility to divine invisibility, but from God's self-revelation to a proper judgment of what counts as power, wisdom, and righteousness.[10] He learns to speak about God under the form of the opposite—*sub contrario*—because that is how God has chosen to act for sinners: "He deserves to be called a theologian… who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross."[11]

This is not an aesthetic preference for darkness. It is a confession about the way God saves: not by flattering our desire to climb but by killing our desire to climb without Him. The cross is God's "No" to the human attempt at self-justification, and God's "Yes" to sinners through the alien righteousness of Christ.[12]

If transhumanism is, as some of its prophets suggest, a program for human self-overcoming—an ascent into engineered glory—then the theology of the cross will not merely raise ethical questions about safety. It will raise theological questions about salvation.

Because the real rivalry is not between church and technology. The real rivalry is between two gospels:

- A gospel of self-salvation by optimization, and
- A gospel of God's salvation by crucified love.[13]

4. Disability Accommodation: Mercy with Bolts and Hinges

Let us say this plainly and early: physical accommodation for disabled persons is not transhumanist glory. It is often neighbor-love made structural. It is mercy given a handle.

A ramp is an architectural confession. It proclaims that the body that moves differently is not a theological embarrassment but a neighbor to be welcomed. Cap-

tioning is a liturgy of attention. A screen reader is hospitality translated into code. A prosthetic limb is not necessarily a denial of creatureliness; it may be a witness that creatureliness is not disposable.

Here the theology of the cross becomes tender and practical. The crucified Christ is not ashamed to be found in bodies that ache, in nerves that misfire, in joints that swell, in minds that do not keep time with the world's demands. God is not repelled by vulnerability; God enters it. The church should therefore be the one place on earth where no one must be improved in order to belong.[14]

4.1 Disability as Truth-Telling Against the Idol of "Normal"

Disability theology has insisted—correctly—that "normal" is a fragile idol. The so-called "able" body is not the standard human; it is a temporarily fortunate human. Human life is contingency from the first breath to the last. The disabled body does not introduce vulnerability into the human condition; it reveals the vulnerability that was always there.[15]

And so accommodation is not about erasing difference to appease an imagined standard. It is about removing unnecessary barriers so that persons may participate in goods that belong to them as persons: learning, friendship, worship, work, beauty, play, love.[16]

This distinction matters. A wheelchair is not a bid for superiority; it is a tool of access. Insulin is not an attempt to outrun humanity; it is a means of living inside it. A hearing aid is not a metaphysical revolt; it is neighbor-love refusing to let silence become exile.

The theology of the cross, with its suspicion of glory, does not therefore require a suspicion of medicine. Luther could call medicine a gift and still resist the idol of self-salvation.[17] The question is not whether we use tools but what story we tell about them.

4.2 Restoration, Not Erasure; Participation, Not Performance

There are, of course, hard questions at the edges. Some interventions are experienced by particular communities as cultural loss rather than liberation. The church must learn to listen before it presumes it knows what counts as "fixing."[18]

But in general, disability accommodation aims at participation rather than performance. It does not say, "Become more than human." It says, "Come into the room. Come to the table. Come to the font. Come to the bread and wine. Come as you are and let us build the path together."

That is not a theology of glory. That is cruciform hospitality.

5. Trans-Gender Accommodations: When the Mirror Becomes an Altar (Pastoral Nearness without Anthropological Panic)

Here the air tightens. Here language sweats. Here we are tempted—almost immediately—to enlist the suffering of real people as ammunition for our preferred certainties. But the theologian of the cross is not permitted to practice theology as a distance weapon. The cross forbids contempt, and it forbids haste. It pulls our chairs close to the hospital bed. It makes us speak softly in rooms where souls are tender.

We must begin with a simple pastoral confession: persons experiencing gender dysphoria are not abstractions. They are neighbors. They are often afraid. Many have been mocked, rejected, or harmed—sometimes by strangers, sometimes by family, sometimes by the church's own careless tongue. A church that follows a crucified Lord cannot treat the suffering of the neighbor as a political prop,[19] nor as a problem to be solved loudly. The crucified Christ is not found in our slogans. He is found in the one who is trembling.

And yet—at the same time—the church cannot pretend that embodiment is merely a grammatical question. Christianity is stubbornly bodily: creation's dust, incarnation's flesh, baptism's water, the Supper's bread and wine, resurrection's scars. The body is not a costume draped over a "real self." It is part of the self's givenness and calling[20]—mysterious, meaningful, and not finally self-invented. If we speak here, we must speak like those who know the body is neither god nor garbage.

But now we must add a further confession—one that John M. G. Barclay's patient labor on Paul's theology of gift (in his work *Paul and the Gift*) forces back into the center of the room:

> A gift is not an object you possess in isolation. A gift is a relation that claims you. In the ancient moral worlds Paul inhabited, gift was not a sterilized donation dropped through a slot; it was a bond. To receive a gift was to be drawn into a social and moral gravity—a "fit" response, a return that did not purchase the gift but honored the giver and sustained the relationship. Reciprocity did not cancel gift; it named gift's intended trajectory: from giver to receiver and back again in thanksgiving, loyalty, praise, or embodied devotion.[21]

This matters here because the body—sexed, finite, given—is not merely *matter*. It is gift. And gift, if Barclay is right, is never merely "free from conditions" in the modern sense of being immune to response. It can be unconditioned in its bestowal—given without regard to worthiness—and still summon a fitting return: not repayment, but honor; not purchase, but praise; not self-authorship, but gratitude.[22]

So the question is not only, *How do we reduce harm?* It is also, *How do we help the neighbor receive creaturehood as gift in a way that honors the Giver—especially when the mirror feels like an accusation?*

5.1 A Cruciform Distinction: Accommodation vs. Apotheosis (Mercy without Metaphysical Shortcuts)

One of the most important—and most neglected—distinctions in this domain is between:

- Practical accommodations intended to reduce immediate harm and stabilize the neighbor (protection from harassment, pastoral care that refuses mockery, prudential forms of address in certain contexts), and
- Ontological claims about what the body means, what sex and gender are, and how identity is constituted.

Institutions often make accommodations for prudential reasons—care, safety, harm reduction—without thereby settling metaphysics. A theology of the cross can support mercy in practice while continuing to deliberate carefully about anthropology.[23] This is not cowardice. It is the refusal to crucify the neighbor in order to win the argument faster.

But Barclay's grammar of gift presses the distinction deeper, into the spiritual grain. There is a difference between receiving help as mercy and remaking the self as a project of glory. The church can, at times, make room—clear the thorns from the path, quiet the mob, bind wounds—without pretending that every inward ache is an infallible oracle about what the body *is*.[24]

Because there is another temptation, quieter and more liturgical, that hides inside compassion-talk like a splinter:

There is a difference between seeking relief and seeking sovereignty.

The theologian of the cross knows that human beings do not only want to stop hurting. We also want to be author, artifact, and audience—to craft ourselves into something that finally compels our own approval. And when the self becomes both sculptor and stone, the mirror can become an altar. The question is no longer only, *How can I live?* It becomes, *How can I become—at last—my own finished masterpiece?*

Barclay helps us name what is at stake: gift received without return becomes, not freedom, but theft. Not because the recipient "pays God back" (God is not a creditor), but because refusing the fitting response severs the relation the gift was meant to create. In Paul's world, and in Paul's gospel, grace creates a new community and a new habitus; it pulls the receiver into a life that *answers* the gift—not by earning it, but by living in a way that publicly honors the Giver.[25]

So the cross interrupts the mirror-altar promise—not by mocking anguish, but by exposing the ladder hidden inside it. It says: *You are not saved by self-interpretation. You are not secured by self-remaking. You are not justified by the*

clarity of your own reflection. The Gospel does not hand you a chisel and command you to carve a self that can finally be worshiped. It hands you Christ—crucified gift—and calls forth the only "return" that does not corrupt grace: thanksgiving that becomes obedience, praise that becomes love, honor that becomes patience with creaturehood.

5.2 Suffering, Dysphoria, and the Church's Refusal to Weaponize Pain (The Gift Is Not a Bludgeon)

The theology of the cross takes suffering seriously. Dysphoria, when present, is not a punchline and not a mere confusion to be ridiculed. It is often experienced as distress that reaches into mirror, memory, family, and future. The cross teaches the church to approach suffering with reverence, because the suffering neighbor is precisely where Christ has promised to meet us.[26]

But the cross also warns us against a subtle trap: the belief that the relief of suffering automatically validates every interpretation of the self. Christians know that suffering can be alleviated in ways that are locally effective while still raising broader questions about meaning, telos, and truth.[27] The removal of pain is a real good. It is not, by itself, a final theology.

Here Barclay's gift-logic steadies the church's hands.

In a world trained to equate "gift" with "no strings," it sounds merciful to declare: *You owe nothing. You answer to nothing. You are accountable to no giveness but your own desire*. Yet Barclay reminds us that this modern fantasy of the "pure gift" is not the only way gift has been understood—and it is not the way gift commonly functioned in antiquity. Gifts, precisely as gifts, were meant to generate bonds and responses. A return—often gratitude—was not an insult to generosity but the honoring of it.

So, the church must hold together two obligations that modern discourse loves to tear apart:

- Reduce harm—because the neighbor is not a thought experiment.
- Pursue truth—because the neighbor is not served by a lie, even a soothing one.

This is where the theology of glory becomes especially dangerous: it offers a quick, shining resolution. It tempts us to believe that if we can just achieve a seamless self, if we can eliminate dissonance by technique, we will have purchased peace. But seamlessness is not the Gospel. And the demand for seamlessness—whether imposed by traditionalists or progressives—can become its own cruelty.

The cross tells a stranger story: not "*Become seamless,*" but "*You may be held even while you are torn*." Not "*Win coherence by mastery*," but "*Receive identity as*

gift—first in Christ, and then, slowly, in the ordinary vocations of creaturely life." And—now with Barclay's clarity—receive gift in the only way gift can be received: with a return that honors the Giver.

Pastoral care here therefore must be cruciform: close enough to hear the shaking breath, humble enough to admit complexity, steady enough to resist the liturgy of immediacy that demands instant decisions and permanent declarations. The church must become a place where no one is mocked into silence, and no one is rushed into irreversible paths by fear, fashion, or faction.

5.3 The Body as Gift (And the "Return" of Creaturely Honor)

Christian tradition has never treated the body as irrelevant matter. Nor has it treated the body as ultimate. The body is meaningful gift, but not deity. It is creaturely given, yet destined for transformation—not by our engineering, but by God's resurrection power.[28] The final future of the body is not self-designed radiance. It is received glory—glory that comes through death and out the other side by promise, not by self-authoring.

And here Barclay helps us speak with sharper tenderness.

If the body is gift, then the question is not simply: *What can I do with it?* The question is also: *How do I honor the One who gave it?* In the economy of grace, honoring the Giver is not barter; it is the fitting echo of the gift. It is the return of thanksgiving, worship, and a life oriented away from the self's altar and toward God's communion. Reciprocity is not a price tag attached to grace; it is grace's intended fruit.

This is where the mirror becomes spiritually perilous.

Because the mirror can become an altar in two opposite ways:

- By despising the gift—treating the body as a prison, a mistake, an enemy to be escaped.
- By deifying the gift—treating the body as an instrument of self-glory, clay for the sovereign will.

The cross refuses both.

It refuses the contempt that says the body is nothing but betrayal. And it refuses the pride that says the body is nothing but material. The cross teaches a third posture: tragic realism with worship. In a fallen world, there are situations where every available option carries loss. Pastoral discernment cannot be replaced by a meme, and ecclesial faithfulness cannot be outsourced to the loudest voices in the room.

So, a cruciform pastoral ethic, at minimum, must include:

- Refusal of contempt: no jokes, no sneers, no reduction of persons to categories.
- Commitment to accompaniment: the church stays near even when answers are incomplete.
- Honest speech: the church does not lie about its convictions, but speaks them as confession rather than as cudgel.
- Protection of the vulnerable: especially the young, the mentally fragile, the socially isolated, the economically constrained—those most susceptible to coercion and shame.[29]
- Patience with complexity: careful discernment, competent medical and mental health counsel, community support, attention to long-term consequences.[30]

But now we must also name the spiritual center with Barclay's help:

The church must not only say, "Your body is gift." The church must also teach the grammar of receiving: that gift received rightly becomes gift returned as honor.

Not honor as self-hatred. Not honor as denial of distress. Not honor as pretending the mirror never hurts. But honor as the slow, communal schooling of the heart into creaturely gratitude: learning to say, even through tears, *I am given. I am not self-made. I am not my own god. I belong to Another*.

And it names the central danger with precision and pity:

When the human project becomes self-remaking into self-chosen glory, the body is no longer received as gift; it is recruited as raw material for a private apocalypse. The self becomes a little creator, demanding light from its own word—*Let it be so*—and the flesh is commanded to obey.

But the Gospel does not say, "Make yourself."

The Gospel says, "You are made—by Another. And you are redeemed—by a Crucified One."

And if Barclay is right about gift, then the Gospel also says: "Receive—and let your receiving become return: thanksgiving, worship, love of neighbor, a life that honors the Giver."

And your final glory will not be your own invention. It will be God's gift, and even then—astonishingly—your wounds will not be erased as though they were shame. They will be gathered into a resurrection that tells the truth.

And so, the mirror's demand for a finished masterpiece becomes the first lesson in transhumanism's wider catechism: not merely accommodation, not simply therapy, but the surpassing of creaturely limits—the old *theologia gloriae* that would rather shed "the human" like larval skin than wait for wounds to be transfigured.

6. Super-Human Adaptation: The Old *Theologia Gloriae* Wearing New Skin

Now we come to the bright heart of transhumanism proper: not accommodation, not therapy, but enhancement—the project of surpassing species-typical human capacities and eventually leaving "the human" behind as a larval stage.[31]

If disability accommodation says, "Let us remove barriers so you can enter the room," enhancement says, "Let us replace the room with a sky—and then replace the sky with a server."

It is here that Heidelberg's knife goes deep. For enhancement is frequently not merely a set of technologies; it is a secular soteriology—a doctrine of salvation by means of mastery.

6.1 The Spiritual Logic of Enhancement: Salvation as Control

Enhancement is often narrated as liberation: freedom from limitation, freedom from finitude, freedom from dependence. But Christian theology sees that dependence is not merely a defect; it is part of love's architecture.

To be human is to receive life, not to originate oneself. We are born, not manufactured. We are taught, not downloaded. We are forgiven, not self-justified. We belong to one another before we belong to ourselves.[32]

Transhumanism, in many of its influential articulations, imagines salvation as control. If we can control biology, control desire, control aging, control death, then the human problem is solved. But the theology of the cross names the deeper problem: the human problem is not finally lack of control. It is sin—curved-inwardness, the refusal to trust God, the insistence that we will author ourselves into glory.[33]

This is why transhumanist rhetoric so often echoes the old Edenic whisper: "You will be like God." Not like God in love, but like God in sovereignty. Not like God in holiness, but like God in autonomy.

The cross stands in the garden like a flaming sword. It says: you cannot climb into divinity by the ladder of technique. God has come down to you.

6.2 Enhancement as Eschatology: A Future Without Resurrection

Transhumanism offers an eschatology: a story of the end, a promise of what the future is for. Its horizon is not resurrection but replacement—replacement of bodies, replacement of biology, replacement of vulnerability with engineered invulnerability.[34]

But Christian eschatology is not an exit from the body; it is the body's redemption. Resurrection is not the soul's escape from flesh; it is God's "Yes" to creation.[35] And the risen Christ, astonishingly, retains His wounds—not as defects, but as identity.[36] True glory does not erase scars; it transfigures them.

Here the theology of the cross offers a fierce criterion: any future that requires the abolition of vulnerability as such is not the Kingdom of God. God's reign is not a sterilized showroom of invincible beings. It is communion—reconciled creatures whose power is for service, whose life is gift, whose love remains love because it can be wounded.

6.3 Enhancement and the Market: The New Sacraments of Inequality

One need not be a prophet to see where enhancement technologies will flow first: toward those who can pay. The liturgy of upgrade will not be administered equally. It will amplify inequality and create tiers of access to cognition, longevity, beauty, advantage.[37]

The theology of the cross is allergic to salvations that require the poor to remain "unimproved." Christ is found among the last, not among those who purchase first place.[38] A church that blesses enhancement without critique risks becoming chaplain to a new aristocracy of engineered advantage.

Even if enhancement were widely distributed, another problem remains: the moral meaning of the practice. If the driving story is that the unenhanced are obsolete, then the gospel's proclamation—that every person bears dignity as creature and neighbor—begins to rot. In such a world, old age becomes shame. Disability becomes failure. Ordinary bodies become "legacy hardware."

But God did not become "legacy hardware." God became flesh.[39]

6.4 The Idol of Invulnerability (Or: When "More" Means Loving Less)

At the deepest level, enhancement is often about invulnerability. It is the attempt to build a self that cannot be broken.

But love requires vulnerability. To love is to risk grief. To be human is to be exposable—to time, to loss, to sickness, to betrayal, to death. The cross does not eliminate vulnerability; it reveals that God enters vulnerability, not as tourist but as participant.[40]

Therefore the most spiritually dangerous possibility is not that we will build machines too smart for us. It is that we will build selves too proud to kneel.

The theologian of glory wants a crown without a cross. The transhumanist dream is frequently a crown built from circuitry: shining, expensive, and hollow.

7. Sorting the Moral Goods: A Cruciform Discernment Framework

The church does not need a single sentence to solve every question. It needs a faithful grammar—a way to test spirits without crushing neighbors. What follows is not a verdict-machine but a cruciform framework.

7.1 Telos: What Is This For?

Ask first: *What is the purpose?*

- Accommodation seeks access to shared goods.
- Therapy seeks healing toward ordinary flourishing.
- Enhancement seeks advantage, superiority, or transcendence.

Purpose matters. The same technology (say, a neural implant) may serve mercy or domination depending on its telos.[41]

7.2 Anthropology: What Does This Assume a Human Being Is?

Does the intervention assume:

- the body is disposable raw material?
- the self is sovereign and unbounded?
- identity is a product of will alone?
- worth is measured by performance?

The theology of the cross answers with a different anthropology: the body is meaningful gift; the self is relational creature; freedom is for love; worth is bestowed by God.[42]

7.3 Solidarity: Who Bears the Cost?

Who is pressured to participate? Who is left behind? Who profits? Technologies are never only tools; they are social forces. Enhancement especially can become coercive: "Upgrade or become irrelevant." The cross interrupts coercion by centering those who cannot compete.[43]

7.4 The Hidden God: Does This Bypass the Cross?

Does the practice embody the logic of the cross—patience, humility, care for the weak—or the logic of glory—speed, conquest, contempt for limits?

> The question is not "Is it powerful?" but "What kind of power is it practicing?"[44]

7.5 Eschatology: What Future Does This Imply?

Does it imply that salvation is technological, that death is finally defeated by engineering? Christianity agrees death is an enemy—but insists death is defeated by Christ, not by our upgrades.[45] A cruciform eschatology can celebrate medicine and resist idolatry at the same time.

8. A Cruciform Affirmation: Vocation, Medicine, and the Artisan Mercy of God

The theology of the cross does not demand passivity. Christians are not called to romanticize suffering or refuse healing. Christ healed. The early church cared for the sick. Christian hospitals were not accidents; they were doctrine made visible.[46]

Luther's theology of vocation is helpful here. God serves the world through creaturely means—through farmers and bakers, through parents and magistrates, through physicians and nurses.[47] The hand that lifts the fallen neighbor may be the hand of God hidden in a human calling. That hiddenness does not reduce the calling; it dignifies it.

So there is a kind of technological work deeply consonant with the cross: the slow, unglamorous labor of care. It does not seek to make the strong stronger. It seeks to keep the vulnerable from being crushed. It does not dream of becoming gods. It stoops to wash feet.

In that sense, a wheelchair, a pacemaker, insulin, a hearing aid, a screen reader, a ramp—these can be secular sacraments of mercy: outward and visible signs of an inward commitment to make room for one another.

The church should be the first to build such rooms.

9. A Cruciform Warning: When Our Tools Start Preaching Another Gospel

Yet we must also be honest: tools teach. They catechize. They train the imagination. And certain technologies—especially enhancement technologies—begin to preach a rival gospel: you can be justified by performance, secured by control, saved by upgrade.

The theology of the cross answers: no. You are justified by grace, secured by promise, saved by Christ.

Here the Lutheran distinction between Law and Gospel becomes pastoral gold.[48] The Law always demands: become, achieve, ascend, optimize. The Gospel gives: forgiven, loved, raised, received. If enhancement becomes a new Law—an endless demand to overcome limitation—then it will crush souls and sort bodies into winners and waste.

And if enhancement becomes a new Gospel—promising immortality, transcendence, salvation—then it becomes idolatry.

The cross is God's judgment on all self-salvation. And it is God's mercy for those exhausted by the demand to be more or other than they are.

10. Epilogue: The Tree That Refuses to Become a Ladder

Transhumanism imagines salvation as ascent. The cross is a tree that refuses to become a ladder.

It is fixed in the ground of creaturely life—wood, blood, breath. It does not offer a route around suffering. It offers God within suffering, and beyond it. It does not promise we will never be weak. It promises that weakness will not be wasted when carried in love, and that death will not win.

So, we must be careful and we must be bold:

- We can affirm disability accommodations as tangible neighbor-love, the church's architecture of welcome, mercy made accessible.
- We can approach trans-gender accommodations with cruciform pastoral care: refusing contempt, resisting slogans, protecting the vulnerable, speaking truth with humility while continuing the church's long work of naming embodiment faithfully.
- We must critique super-human adaptations whenever they function as a new *theologia gloriae*: salvation by upgrade, eschatology by optimization, a dream of invulnerability that would leave the crucified Christ behind as an embarrassment.

In the end, the question is not whether technology can change us. It already has. The question is whether, in changing, we will become more capable of love—or merely more capable.

The crucified God does not ask us to become angels. He makes us saints: forgiven, embodied, finite, beloved—and destined not for upload but for resurrection.

And resurrection—this matters—does not come as a product release. It comes as a gift.

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Notes

1. Martin Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation" (1518), in *Luther's Works*, vol. 31, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 53.
2. 1 Corinthians 1:18–25; 2 Corinthians 12:9.
3. Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," LW 31:40–42 (Theses 19–21).
4. 1 John 4:1.
5. John Swinton, *Disability in the Christian Tradition: A Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 1–10; Hans S. Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology, and Ethic*s (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 17–28.
6. For clinical and pastoral complexity as distinct from ideological simplifications, see discussions in moral theology and pastoral care literature; for a broad theological frame on embodiment, see Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 13–30.
7. Nick Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought," *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 14, no. 1 (2005): 1–25; Max More and Natasha Vita-More, eds., *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 1–6.
8. Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," LW 31:40–41 (Thesis 21).
9. Ibid., LW 31:40 (Thesis 21).
10. Ibid., LW 31:39–41 (Theses 19–21).
11. Ibid., LW 31:40 (Thesis 20).
12. Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian" (1520), in LW 31:327-377; see also the language of "alien righteousness" in Luther's early writings.
13. Compare the anthropology implied in enhancement narratives with the Pauline contrast between boasting and grace in Romans 3–5.
14. Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 99–105; Amos Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), 171–189.
15. Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship*, 31–57; Swinton, *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, 11–20.
16. Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church*, 13–35.
17. Luther's positive appraisal of ordinary means and callings is woven throughout his vocational writings; see Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 1–18.

18. On the moral importance of listening to disabled communities and resisting a purely "fixing" narrative, see Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship*, 75–100.

19. Matthew 25:31–46; Luther's insistence that God is found "in suffering" reorients how the church treats those in distress (Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," LW 31:40).

20. Genesis 1–2; John 1:14; 1 Corinthians 15. For theological ethics rooted in resurrection and embodiment, see O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 31–58.

21. John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), on gift as a relational practice in antiquity and the expectation of a fitting response (reciprocity), including gratitude and honor; see also discussion that reciprocity does not negate gift.

22. Barclay's critique of modern "pure gift" assumptions and his insistence that Greco-Roman gift-giving commonly entailed obligation/return (without thereby ceasing to be gift).

23. For the difference between prudential policies and metaphysical claims, compare O'Donovan's account of moral reasoning under the horizon of resurrection (ibid., 59–92).

24. Barclay's taxonomy of the "perfections" of grace/gift (including "non-circularity" as one possible "perfection," and the warning against assuming it is intrinsic to gift).

25. Barclay's reading of Paul as emphasizing *incongruity* (gift to the unworthy) while still portraying grace as *circular*/*reciprocal* in the sense that it generates a fitting, communal response that honors God.

26. Matthew 25:40; Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," LW 31:40.

27. On the complexity of suffering and meaning, see John Swinton, *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), 47–76.

28. 1 Corinthians 15:35–58; O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 13–30.

29. On vulnerability, coercion, and the moral stakes of medical/technological interventions, see Brent Waters, *From Human to Posthuman: Christian Theology and Technology in a Postmodern World* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 109–140.

30. For caution regarding technological "solutions" to human identity and suffering, see Ronald Cole-Turner, ed., *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 1–18.

31. Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought," 1–25; More and Vita-More, *Transhumanist Reader*, 1–6.

32. Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 19–35; Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," LW 31:327–377.

33. Augustine's classic description of disordered love and the inward curve of sin stands behind much Western theological anthropology; see Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), esp. bk. 2; compare Luther's own accounts of sin and bondage in Martin Luther, "The Bondage of the Will" (1525), in LW 33:3–295.

34. Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Viking, 2005), 7–30.

35. 1 Corinthians 15; O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 93–120.

36. John 20:24–29.

37. Waters, *From Human to Posthuman*, 141–170; Ted Peters, *Playing God? Genetic Determinism and Human Freedom* (London: Routledge, 2002), 135–162.

38. Luke 1:46–55; Matthew 20:16.

39. John 1:14.

40. Philippians 2:5–11; 2 Corinthians 8:9.

41. Peters, *Playing God?*, 17–40; Cole-Turner, *Transhumanism and Transcendence*, 19–34.

42. Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," LW 31:39–42; Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 1–18.

43. Waters, *From Human to Posthuman*, 171–201.

44. Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," LW 31:40–41 (Theses 20–21).

45. 1 Corinthians 15:26; Romans 6:23.

46. Gary B. Ferngren, *Medicine and Health Care in Early Christianity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 1–25.

47. Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 36–62.

48. For classic Lutheran framing, see C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1928), 1–40.

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