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Can Humanity Be Saved without Being Overcome? Christian Anthropology and Transhumanism

Raymond R. Tjandrawinata[1]*, Andreas B. Atawolo[2]
School of Bioscience, Technology and Innovation Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia Jakarta, Indonesia[1]
Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Driyarkara, Indonesia[2]
Email: raytjan@yahoo.com[1]*

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Abstract

Contemporary transhumanism seeks to overcome biological limitations through technological enhancement, raising theological questions concerning embodiment, vulnerability, personal identity, and human salvation. This study aims to examine whether Christian anthropology can support human enhancement without allowing technology to replace or eliminate the embodied human subject. Using a constructive theological approach, the research conceptually compares representative transhumanist claims with Christian teachings on creation, incarnation, salvation, resurrection, and theosis, while incorporating perspectives from disability and vulnerability studies. The findings distinguish three forms of human limitation: privative harms requiring healing, creaturely finitude constituting human existence, and relational dependence that may become either communion or injustice. The discussion proposes non-eliminative transformation as a theological criterion for assessing artificial intelligence, genetic intervention, radical longevity, neural enhancement, and mind uploading. Technological interventions may contribute to human flourishing when they preserve embodied continuity, protect dignity, promote relational justice, respect gifted freedom, and avoid transforming finite technological benefits into promises of ultimate salvation. The study concludes that Christianity need not reject technological advancement, but should evaluate whether innovation genuinely serves embodied persons rather than replacing them with optimized successors. Accordingly, responsible enhancement must remain directed toward communion, participation, and protection of vulnerable people while preserving the human subject as the beneficiary of transformation.

INTRODUCTION

The desire to become more than we are is not new. Human beings have always used tools, medicine, education, ritual, and social institutions to extend capacities that nature does not simply hand to us. Writing externalizes memory. Vaccination recruits biological mechanisms against disease. Eyeglasses alter the practical limits of vision. Anesthesia changes the experience of surgery. In this broad sense, human life has never been technologically untouched. Contemporary transhumanism, however, makes a stronger proposal. It invites humanity not merely to repair injuries or extend familiar capacities, but to take deliberate

control of its own biological future, potentially overcoming aging, cognitive limitation, involuntary suffering, and even death (Bostrom, 2005; More, 2013; Humanity, 2009).

That proposal creates a difficulty for Christian theology. Christianity cannot respond by simply defending limitation as such. The Gospel is not a cult of sickness, incapacity, or death. Christian communities built hospitals, developed practices of care, and have long prayed for healing. The New Testament itself speaks of a new creation and of a final victory over death. The tradition of theosis or divinization speaks, even more daringly, of participation in divine life. A theology that rejects technological transformation merely because it changes the human condition would therefore risk contradicting its own account of redemption.

At the same time, Christian hope is not interchangeable with the transhumanist project. The difference cannot be reduced to a competition between supernatural and technological means, as though both aimed at the same final state but relied on different instruments. Nor is the difference adequately expressed by saying that Christianity values nature while transhumanism changes it. Human nature is already historical, social, educable, and technologically mediated, and Christian theology has never treated every natural condition as morally normative. The more fundamental question is what kind of transformation counts as the fulfillment of the human being and what kind begins to make the existing human subject disposable.

This question has become particularly pressing. Recent scholarship has moved beyond caricatures of transhumanism as either an inevitable technological paradise or an obviously anti-Christian ideology. Christian thinkers have identified both serious conflicts and areas of possible convergence. Some argue that moderate forms of transhumanism can be compatible with Christian faith (Göcke, 2017; Eberl, 2022; Mørch, 2026). Others emphasize tensions concerning embodiment, resurrection, grace, personal identity, disability, and the meaning of salvation (Peters, 2015; Sloane, 2023; Hershenov, 2025). The debate has also become more precise about theosis. Rather than assuming that Christian divinization and technological enhancement are simply opposites, scholars have asked where the analogies are real and where they break down (Daly, 2011; Cole-Turner, 2018; Torrance, 2019; Delport, 2023).

The publication of the International Theological Commission's Quo vadis, humanitas? in 2026 adds a new reference point. The document does not deny the legitimate desire to overcome what harms human life. It instead insists that the human condition contains tensions that cannot be resolved by suppressing one pole in favor of another. Greatness and fragility, freedom and givenness, individuality and relation, bodily existence and spiritual openness belong to a dramatic unity rather than to a list of defects awaiting technical elimination (International Theological Commission, 2026). This is important because the deepest disagreement with strong transhumanism may concern not technology itself but the ontology of limitation.

This article therefore asks: Can humanity be saved without being overcome? The question is intentionally paradoxical. Christian salvation undeniably includes overcoming: sin is forgiven, alienation is healed, death is defeated, and humanity is raised to communion with God. Yet the subject of salvation is not replaced by a superior species or liberated from embodiment. The humanity assumed by the Word is not discarded at Easter. Christian

transformation is radical precisely because it transforms the human without rendering the human obsolete.

The article advances two claims. First, debates about transhumanism become confused when all limitations are treated as morally equivalent. A disease that destroys bodily function is not the same kind of limit as embodiment itself; social exclusion is not the same kind of limit as mortality; dependence on others is not simply a defect analogous to a tumor. Christian anthropology needs a more discriminating account of limitation. I distinguish three categories: privative harms that rightly call for healing; creaturely finitude that constitutes the form of human existence; and relational dependence that can become a site either of communion or injustice.

Second, I propose the concept of non-eliminative transformation. By this I mean transformation that can heal, intensify, educate, augment, and even radically transfigure human life without making the embodied, dependent, historically situated person into raw material for replacement. The concept is not a disguised defense of the biological status quo. It permits substantial technological intervention. Its purpose is to identify a specifically Christian criterion: human fulfillment must remain the fulfillment of the human subject, not the triumph of an abstract capacity after the person who bore it has been bypassed.

This criterion helps distinguish legitimate technological cooperation from technosalvation. It also makes vulnerability a central test rather than a marginal concern. A future that counts only the cognitively optimized, independent, and indefinitely extendable life as fully successful risks turning persons with disabilities, the elderly, the chronically ill, and eventually every dependent body into preliminary versions of something supposedly better. Christian anthropology cannot accept that logic because dignity does not rise and fall with performance. Yet neither can it romanticize suffering. The task is harder: to heal what wounds human life while refusing to identify the human person with the fantasy of invulnerability.

METHOD

This is a work of constructive theological anthropology rather than a prediction about the technical feasibility of future enhancement. The argument proceeds by conceptual comparison. It places representative transhumanist claims in dialogue with Christian sources on creation, incarnation, salvation, resurrection, and divinization, and tests both against scholarship on disability and vulnerability. The method is intentionally asymmetrical in one respect: Christian theology is not treated merely as one ethical preference among others, because the paper asks an internal theological question about what Christian salvation permits Christians to affirm in projects of human enhancement. At the same time, transhumanism is read from its own programmatic texts and sympathetic interpreters rather than only through ecclesial criticism.

Three distinctions are necessary at the outset. First, transhumanism and posthumanism are not identical. Transhumanism generally remains human-centered and seeks to use science and technology to overcome biological limitations and expand human capacities. Posthumanism is more internally diverse and often critiques the very humanist subject that transhumanism seeks to enhance. It may question anthropocentrism, fixed species boundaries, and the priority of a stable human essence. The International Theological Commission

acknowledges this distinction even while noting overlaps between the movements (International Theological Commission, 2026). This article concentrates primarily on transhumanism, particularly where enhancement becomes a program of radical self-transcendence.

Second, transhumanism itself is plural. The Transhumanist Declaration presents a broad aspiration to overcome aging, cognitive shortcomings, and involuntary suffering while expanding human potential (Humanity, 2009). Max More describes transhumanism as the continuation and acceleration of intelligent life's evolution beyond current human form and limitations by means of science and technology (More, 2013). Ray Kurzweil's singularitarian vision imagines increasingly intimate integration between biological and nonbiological intelligence and a future in which current biological constraints are progressively exceeded (Kurzweil, 2005). Yet not all transhumanists endorse mind uploading, species replacement, or radical life extension in the same way. The existence of moderate transhumanism matters because theological criticism is weakened when it attacks only the most extreme scenario and then assumes the conclusion applies to every enhancement.

Third, therapy and enhancement do not form a perfectly clean moral boundary. The literature on human enhancement has shown why the distinction is unstable. Education, vaccination, prosthetics, reproductive medicine, psychopharmacology, and cognitive aids can restore a function in one person while expanding it beyond a previous norm in another. Allen Buchanan therefore cautions against treating the natural as a self-interpreting ethical limit, while Nick Bostrom and Julian Savulescu frame enhancement as a broad field of interventions that increase human capacities beyond ordinary levels (Bostrom & Savulescu, 2009; Buchanan, 2011). Christian discernment cannot rest on the formula "therapy good, enhancement bad."

The argument instead works at a deeper level. It asks what view of the person is presupposed when a limit is named as something to overcome. That question allows a more charitable engagement with technology. A cochlear implant, insulin pump, neural prosthesis, gene therapy, or future anti-aging intervention cannot be judged merely by asking whether it changes nature. Human beings are already agents within nature. Catholic social and theological teaching repeatedly recognizes science and technology as real expressions of creativity and responsibility, even while warning that technological power can become a paradigm of domination (Francis, 2015; Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and Dicastery for Culture and Education 2025).

The constructive proposal developed below is thus not a prohibition principle but a discernment principle. Non-eliminative transformation asks whether a technology serves the flourishing of embodied persons and their relationships or whether it gradually redescribes the person as an inferior platform for transferable capacities. The distinction is especially relevant where enhancement becomes linked to immortality, substrate independence, or the removal of dependency. Those projects do not simply change a human function; they can change the meaning of the human subject who is being changed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Grammar of Overcoming

Transhumanism is often described as a philosophy of enhancement, but enhancement alone does not explain its cultural power. Its deeper grammar is overcoming. The human condition is interpreted as unfinished and technically revisable. Aging is not simply a stage of life but a problem. Cognitive limitation is not merely an invitation to education and cooperation but a constraint that might be redesigned. Bodily vulnerability is not simply something medicine should relieve when possible but a sign of biological architecture that may be superseded. The Transhumanist Declaration is careful to speak in terms of possibilities and responsible choices, yet its governing horizon is clear: human potential can be widened by overcoming aging, cognitive shortcomings, involuntary suffering, and confinement to present biological conditions (Humanity, 2009).

There is much in this horizon that Christians need not reject. Preventable suffering should be prevented. Diseases that can be treated should be treated. Cognitive tools can expand education and communication. Technologies that restore mobility, hearing, vision, or metabolic function can embody solidarity rather than hubris. Christian hospitals and scientific institutions would be unintelligible if creaturely givenness meant passivity before every biological condition. The problem appears when the category of defect expands from pathological privation to include creaturely existence as such.

This expansion can happen subtly. The transhumanist project is frequently presented as a defense of choice rather than a coercive program. That is morally significant. Yet cultural ideals do not remain neutral simply because individuals may choose them. Once health is imagined as indefinite optimization, ordinary embodiment can be experienced as failure. Once cognitive enhancement becomes a competitive norm, the unenhanced person may appear irresponsible. Once radical longevity becomes the benchmark of success, aging may cease to be recognized as a shared human condition and become a stigmatized technical deficit. A project of liberation can therefore generate a new hierarchy of acceptable bodies.

This is why the language of salvation appears repeatedly in theological discussions of transhumanism. Ted Peters argues that transhumanism can function as a technosalvific narrative, not because every transhumanist uses religious language but because technology can take on the role of final deliverer from finitude (Peters, 2015, 2018). Ronald Cole-Turner similarly notes that the decisive difference between Christian and transhumanist transcendence concerns agency and the form of the promised future: grace and communion cannot simply be translated into technical self-production (Cole-Turner, 2015). Recent studies continue to frame the debate in soteriological terms, especially when life extension, uploading, and the conquest of vulnerability become central (González López 2026; Mørch 2026).

Still, "technosalvation" can become too easy a label. It risks turning all technological hope into idolatry. A pacemaker also saves a life through technology, but no one needs to treat the pacemaker as a rival religion. The better question is when technological agency becomes totalizing. It becomes soteriological in the strong sense when it claims not merely to address a particular harm but to solve the problem of the human condition by replacing its constitutive structure. At that point, salvation is no longer healing within creaturely life; it becomes release from creatureliness.

This distinction illuminates the importance of mind uploading and substrate independence, even if such technologies remain speculative. Their significance is philosophical before it is engineering. Jason Eberl observes that some transhumanist visions detach personal identity from organic embodiment by imagining consciousness as transferable to another substrate (Eberl, 2022). David Hershenov's recent critique similarly focuses on the metaphysical and theological costs of preserving mental life while abandoning significant parts of the organic body (Hershenov, 2025). The issue is not that computers are impure. The issue is what must be true of a person for the replacement of the living body by informational continuity to count as survival.

Christian anthropology cannot answer this simply by appealing to a static concept of nature. Bodies already incorporate artifacts. A person with an artificial joint or implanted cardiac device is not less embodied because part of the body's functioning is technologically supported. Even neural interfaces, if they restore or extend capacities, need not destroy bodily identity. The decisive question is continuity of the embodied subject. Technology can become part of a person's bodily history; it does not follow that the person is reducible to a pattern that can be detached from that history.

Here the language of overcoming reveals its ambiguity. Some overcoming is the work of care: overcoming infection, isolation, hunger, preventable pain, and exclusion. Some overcoming is the work of education and culture: overcoming ignorance, prejudice, and incapacity through shared practices. But another form of overcoming is eliminative: a problem is solved by removing the kind of being for whom it was a problem. If mortality is solved by producing a digital successor while the mortal person still dies, or disability is solved conceptually by designing a society in which only enhanced bodies count as ideal, the language of overcoming has changed its subject. What survives is no longer clearly the person who was promised liberation.

Not Every Limit Is the Same

Theological debate becomes more precise once limitation is disaggregated. "Human limitation" can refer to very different realities, and treating them as one category produces both theological confusion and ethical harm. I propose a threefold distinction among privative harms, creaturely finitude, and relational dependence.

Privative harms are conditions in which a good appropriate to a person is damaged, obstructed, or unjustly denied. Disease, preventable pain, malnutrition, infection, trauma, and many forms of functional impairment can belong here. So can social conditions that unnecessarily restrict participation, such as inaccessible environments or discriminatory institutions. Calling these harms does not require believing that every body must conform to one ideal of normality. It means that there are real goods - mobility, communication, health, participation, freedom from avoidable pain - whose loss can rightly call forth medicine, rehabilitation, social reform, and technological assistance. Christian theology has no reason to sanctify a pathogenic process merely because it is natural.

Creaturely finitude is different. To be embodied is to be located rather than everywhere, to live in time rather than possess all moments at once, to learn rather than know everything immediately, and to receive life rather than author one's own existence from nothing. Finitude includes vulnerability, but it is not itself identical with pathology. The International

Theological Commission's 2026 document is especially useful here because it refuses both romantic resignation and technological denial. Human life is marked by real fragility, yet the response is not to imagine that fulfillment requires the suppression of every limitation (International Theological Commission 2026). The creature is not a failed version of God.

Relational dependence forms a third category. Human beings begin in radical dependence and remain interdependent throughout life. Dependence can become oppressive when power is abused, care is withheld, or social structures deny agency. But dependence as such is not a pathology. Thomas Reynolds's theology of vulnerable communion argues that the denial of vulnerability often sustains a false ideal of autonomous normalcy (Reynolds 2008). Hans Reinders likewise challenges accounts of human worth that depend on rational performance or social contribution, especially when profound intellectual disability exposes how narrow such accounts can become (Reinders, 2008). Dependence can therefore reveal a dimension of personhood that modern ideals of mastery tend to obscure: human identity is received and sustained in relation.

This threefold distinction prevents two opposite errors. The first is therapeutic quietism. If all limits are treated as meaningful features of creatureliness, medicine becomes suspect and suffering is romanticized. Disability theology has repeatedly warned against theological accounts that turn another person's pain into a lesson for the supposedly able-bodied. Nancy Eiesland's image of the disabled God was influential precisely because it challenged churches to recognize disabled embodiment not merely as a symbol of tragedy or a problem awaiting cure, but as part of the social body of Christ (Eiesland, 1994). Deborah Creamer similarly emphasizes the normality of limits and the theological significance of diverse bodies (Creamer, 2008). These perspectives do not prohibit treatment. They prohibit the assumption that a person's worth depends on successful normalization.

The second error is technological totalism. If every limitation is treated as a defect, care collapses into optimization. The person becomes a project whose legitimacy depends on future performance. The danger is not only speculative. Competitive societies already attach value to productivity, speed, independence, and cognitive efficiency. Enhancement technologies can intensify these pressures if access is unequal or if unenhanced states become socially disfavored. What begins as morphological freedom can become morphological expectation.

The doctrine of human dignity provides an important counterweight. Dignitas Infinita grounds dignity in the being of the person rather than in circumstance, ability, achievement, or recognition (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith 2024). This claim does not settle every enhancement question, but it changes the burden of proof. A technology cannot be justified by assuming that more capacity means more human worth. Nor can persons who lack a capacity be treated as incomplete moral subjects. The disabled child, the person with dementia, the elderly patient, and the cognitively enhanced scientist do not occupy different ranks of ontological dignity.

Andrew Sloane's analysis of intellectual disability and transhumanist resurrection scenarios makes this point sharply. If the desirable future is defined primarily by the preservation or amplification of cognitive capacities, persons whose identities cannot be redescribed in those terms become difficult to include (Sloane 2023). Christian resurrection hope, by contrast, concerns the person rather than the survival of a preferred faculty. This is

why disability is a powerful test case for theological anthropology. It reveals whether a theory values persons or merely the capacities persons happen to instantiate.

The category of creaturely finitude also helps clarify mortality. Christianity does not call death good. Death is named as an enemy, and resurrection is central to Christian hope. But mortality is not simply interchangeable with finitude. To say that creatures are finite is to say that they do not possess life as self-originating infinity. Even resurrection does not turn creatures into uncreated beings. Eternal life is participation, gift, and communion, not possession of autonomous indestructibility. Therefore, the Christian rejection of death does not imply a theological mandate to abolish every dimension of creaturely limitation.

The distinction matters for radical life extension. Extending healthy life may be an expression of medicine, and there is no obvious theological age at which treatment becomes rebellion. Yet a project that defines death as a technical failure and indefinite continuation as the primary human good risks narrowing the meaning of life to duration. Benedict XVI's Spe Salvi argues that science can make life more human but cannot itself redeem the person, because redemption finally concerns the unconditional love that gives life a meaning death cannot cancel (Benedict, 2007). The point is not to discourage longevity research. It is to resist the conversion of longevity into an eschatology.

Once these distinctions are in place, the enhancement debate no longer has to choose between a sacred status quo and unlimited self-redesign. Christian anthropology can support aggressive action against privative harms, remain open to technologies that expand human capacities, and still defend creaturely finitude and relational dependence as dimensions of human existence that should not be redescribed as diseases. This middle position is not compromise for its own sake. It follows from a theological claim: salvation perfects creatures as creatures.

Incarnation and Non-Eliminative Transformation

The central Christian argument for non-eliminative transformation is Christological. Gaudium et Spes states that the mystery of the human being becomes clear in the mystery of the incarnate Word and, crucially, that the human nature assumed by Christ is raised rather than annihilated (Second Vatican Council 1965). This formula offers more than a devotional affirmation. It establishes a grammar for salvation. God does not save humanity by becoming something other than human in place of us. The Word assumes human nature, lives a bodily history, suffers, dies, and is raised. The subject transformed by salvation is the subject who has been assumed.

The International Theological Commission develops this logic in Quo vadis, humanitas? by describing salvation through the humanity of Christ and by concluding with divinization as true humanization (International Theological Commission 2026). The phrase is decisive. Divinization is not de-humanization. The human is opened to a destiny beyond its unaided powers without being treated as a disposable shell. This is why Christian transcendence can be more radical than technological enhancement while remaining less eliminative.

The resurrection narratives make the point symbolically and materially. The risen Christ is transformed, but continuity with the crucified Jesus is not erased. Christian confession does not describe Easter as the successful copying of Jesus' consciousness into a superior

medium. The wounds remain the marks by which identity is recognized. The risen body is not reducible to the pre-Easter biological state, but neither is the history of that body discarded. Continuity and transformation belong together.

This pattern allows the concept of non-eliminative transformation to be stated more precisely. A transformation is non-eliminative when the good achieved remains the good of the person who is transformed, when continuity of embodied and relational identity is respected, and when enhancement does not require declaring constitutive dimensions of creaturely existence to be mere defects. Non-eliminative transformation can be radical. A healed body is genuinely different from a sick body. A prosthetic limb can reorganize bodily agency. A neural device could conceivably expand memory or communication. A gene therapy may alter biological processes at a fundamental level. None of these changes necessarily eliminates the subject.

The concept therefore differs from biological conservatism. Michael Sandel's critique of enhancement emphasizes giftedness and warns that mastery can corrupt humility and solidarity (Sandel 2007). His concern remains important, but a Christian account cannot simply infer that the given must remain unchanged. Creation is gift, yet gifts can be cultivated. A field is given and also farmed; a body is given and also trained, medicated, and healed. The question is not whether human agency modifies what is given but whether agency receives the person as gift or treats the person as material whose worth depends on successful redesign.

This is where Antiqua et Nova is useful beyond the specific question of artificial intelligence. The document argues that human intelligence is embodied, relational, morally responsible, and situated within a larger vocation, in contrast with accounts that reduce intelligence to computational performance (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and Dicastery for Culture and Education 2025). That analysis supports a broader anthropological point: a single enhanced capacity cannot stand in for the whole person. Intelligence without embodiment, relation, responsibility, truth, and moral agency is not simply a higher quantity of the same human reality.

The danger of reductive enhancement is therefore not only that technology becomes powerful. The deeper danger is metonymy: one part of human excellence is allowed to name the whole. Cognitive speed becomes intelligence; information persistence becomes personal immortality; independence becomes freedom; absence of pain becomes flourishing. Christian anthropology resists these substitutions because the person is an integrated unity whose fulfillment is relational and vocational, not merely functional.

This does not mean vulnerability is sacred in every form. The crucified Christ does not command Christians to preserve wounds when wounds can be healed. Jesus' ministry repeatedly relieves suffering. The Paschal pattern is therefore not a romantic preference for brokenness. It is a refusal to define redemption as escape from embodied history. The wound can be healed without denying that the one healed remains the one who was wounded.

A similar distinction applies to artificial replacement. Suppose a future technology could gradually substitute synthetic components for biological ones while preserving consciousness, agency, and relational continuity. Christian anthropology would need more than a simple percentage of organic tissue to decide whether personal identity remains. Embodiment is not identical with carbon composition. Yet a threshold question remains: is the technology

sustaining the embodied subject or producing a successor while redescribing the transition as survival? The answer cannot be supplied by technology alone because it is a metaphysical judgment about personal identity.

Non-eliminative transformation thus functions as a theological principle of continuity-in-transfiguration. It neither freezes the human organism nor authorizes every future form of self-redesign. It asks whether the transformed future remains recognizably the fulfillment of persons rather than the supersession of persons by selected capacities. In Christian terms, the normative image is not the optimized machine but the risen Christ: transformed beyond ordinary biological possibility, yet still the one whose embodied history is neither denied nor forgotten.

Vulnerability as a Theological Test

Vulnerability is often treated in enhancement debates as an unfortunate but temporary feature of current biology. Christian theology must be more careful. Some vulnerabilities are indeed avoidable and should be reduced. A person vulnerable to infection because a vaccine is unavailable suffers a remediable vulnerability. A worker vulnerable to injury because of unsafe conditions suffers an unjust vulnerability. A patient vulnerable to severe pain that can be treated has a claim on care. The reduction of such vulnerabilities can be a work of justice.

Yet vulnerability also names the fact that embodied persons can be affected by one another and by the world. To be bodily is to be touchable, woundable, dependent on food and environment, and exposed to loss. To love is to become vulnerable to another's suffering. To belong to a community is to accept that one's flourishing is not self-contained. A fully invulnerable being would not merely be healthier; it would inhabit a different mode of relation.

This is why disability theology is not an optional special topic. It tests whether an anthropology can affirm persons whose lives visibly contradict ideals of autonomy and optimization. Reynolds describes vulnerability not as a deficit that disqualifies communion but as a condition through which hospitality and mutuality become possible (Reynolds 2008). Reinders asks what remains of human worth when rational achievement and social contribution cannot bear the weight placed upon them (Reinders 2008). Creamer's account of embodied limits likewise challenges theology to stop taking an idealized nondisabled body as the silent norm for human nature (Creamer 2008).

Theological engagement with transhumanism sometimes acknowledges disability only as a reason to support enhancement: technology might prevent or repair impairments. That is important but incomplete. If disability is discussed only as a future technical problem, persons presently living with disability are unintentionally made into evidence for the superiority of another possible kind of body. The moral horizon then shifts from inclusion to eradication. A Christian account must be able to say two things at once: some disabling conditions can rightly be prevented or treated, and disabled persons do not become more worthy of dignity when treatment succeeds.

Dignitas Infinita strengthens this point by distinguishing ontological dignity from the conditions in which dignity is expressed or recognized (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith 2024). Technological culture often speaks the language of empowerment, but empowerment can conceal a conditional anthropology: you are empowered insofar as you can acquire the

capacities that count. Ontological dignity reverses the logic. Technology is judged by how it serves persons who already possess dignity; dignity is not conferred by technological success.

This criterion also reveals an economic dimension. Enhancement technologies are rarely distributed in a social vacuum. Expensive interventions can create positional advantages in education, employment, reproduction, and health. Buchanan is right that distributive concerns do not automatically defeat enhancement and that beneficial technologies can diffuse over time (Buchanan 2011). Still, when enhanced performance becomes a competitive baseline, inequality can shift from unequal access to unequal recognition. The unenhanced may not simply have less; they may be treated as less suitable for participation.

A Christian ethic of enhancement must therefore ask who becomes newly vulnerable when vulnerability is technologically reduced for others. Radical longevity could intensify intergenerational inequalities if access is concentrated. Cognitive enhancement could increase pressure on workers and students to modify themselves in order to remain competitive. Genetic selection could reshape parental expectations and stigmatize lives that fall outside preferred traits. None of these outcomes is inevitable, but they expose why individual consent cannot be the only moral category.

The 2026 International Theological Commission document is striking in its warning that a perfectionist culture can make existing human beings appear superfluous if acceptance depends on becoming more perfect (International Theological Commission 2026). This is not an argument against excellence. It is an argument against an anthropology in which worth is indexed to distance from ordinary human fragility. Theologically, the measure of progress must include the place given to those who cannot compete in the race toward optimization.

Vulnerability is therefore a test of the direction of transformation. A technology that reduces suffering while strengthening participation is different from one that reduces social discomfort by excluding those who embody dependency. A prosthesis that enables agency is different from a norm that makes prosthetic enhancement a condition of employability. Genetic medicine that prevents a devastating pathology is different from a reproductive market that increasingly treats unselected children as negligent outcomes. The devices may overlap; the social meaning does not.

Christian anthropology does not ask society to preserve vulnerability for its own sake. It asks whether the pursuit of invulnerability destroys the conditions of solidarity. The wounded person is not a failed prototype. Dependence is not evidence of lesser personhood. The most important technological future may therefore not be the one in which no one needs anyone, but the one in which technical power is organized so that dependency does not become abandonment.

Resurrection, Theosis, and the Difference Between More Life and New Life

The strongest theological challenge to transhumanism is not that Christianity prefers limits, but that Christianity has its own account of going beyond the human. The language of resurrection and theosis prevents theology from retreating into a defensive humanism. Christian hope is not simply the preservation of present biological conditions. It is transformation into a form of life that exceeds current experience.

This creates a real analogy with transhumanism. Both refuse to identify the present state of humanity with its final destiny. Both can name death as an enemy rather than a permanent

good. Both can imagine a future in which capacities exceed present biological limits. Todd Daly, Ronald Cole-Turner, Eugenia Torrance, Brandon Gallaher, and Khegan Delport have all explored, from different angles, the relation between technological transcendence and Christian deification (Daly 2011; Cole-Turner 2018; Torrance 2019; Gallaher 2019; Delport 2023). The analogy must be taken seriously if the critique is to avoid triviality.

The difference lies first in the form of agency. Theosis is participation in divine life by grace, not the autonomous accumulation of capacities. Cole-Turner emphasizes that Christian deification is not simply self-expansion; it involves self-giving and communion (Cole-Turner 2018). Torrance's engagement with Maximus the Confessor is especially useful because it shows that Christian tradition can affirm a dynamic and open-ended human nature without collapsing transformation into technological self-production (Torrance 2019). Human beings are not closed systems, but their openness points toward communion with God rather than limitless control over themselves.

The difference lies second in the meaning of identity. Resurrection is not the survival of a detachable information pattern. Sloane's critique of virtual transhumanism argues that Christian resurrection offers a more adequate hope precisely because it concerns embodied persons, including persons whose identities cannot be reduced to intellectual performance (Sloane 2023). Eberl likewise identifies embodiment as a central point of divergence between Christian anthropology and visions of substrate independence (Eberl 2022). Christian hope is bodily even when the resurrected body exceeds ordinary biological conditions.

The difference lies third in the meaning of immortality. Radical life extension seeks more of the life we now possess, perhaps without a fixed upper limit. Eternal life in Christian theology is not simply an infinite quantity of chronological duration. Benedict XVI argues that Christian hope cannot be reduced to endless continuation; what is desired is a transformed relation to life itself, grounded in communion with God (Benedict XVI 2007). The difference is qualitative as well as quantitative.

This matters because indefinite extension can preserve the very structures that make ordinary life unjust or empty. More years do not automatically produce reconciliation, virtue, or solidarity. Ted Peters's recurring criticism is that enhancement does not solve the problem of sin: greater capacities can magnify disordered desire as easily as they can serve the good (Peters 2015, 2018). A cognitively enhanced oppressor remains an oppressor with more effective tools. A longer-lived society can preserve injustice for longer. Enhancement changes power; it does not by itself determine the good toward which power is ordered.

Theosis therefore provides a criterion that is both more ambitious and more restrictive than transhumanist optimization. It is more ambitious because it does not settle for greater efficiency, health, or longevity. The telos is communion with God and transformation in love. It is more restrictive because no increase in capacity can substitute for that telos. Technological power may become an instrument of love, but it cannot become the content of salvation.

Here Quo vadis, humanitas? makes a useful distinction between a positive going-beyond, in which human beings are opened to fulfillment beyond their unaided powers, and a negative overcoming that replaces or suppresses the human (International Theological Commission 2026). The document's concluding identification of divinization with true humanization captures the logic of non-eliminative transformation. Grace does not solve the

human problem by abolishing humanity. It brings creaturely life into a communion it could not generate by itself.

This framework also clarifies why Christian theology can support substantial technological development without baptizing transhumanism as an eschatology. Medicine may prolong life because life is good. Neural technologies may restore or even extend capacities because intelligence and communication are goods. Genetic interventions may prevent serious disease because the relief of suffering is an act of care. But none of these goods becomes ultimate simply because technology can increase it.

The distinction between more life and new life is therefore decisive. More life means extension within the horizon of present existence: additional years, capacities, memories, choices. New life names a transformed mode of relation to God, self, others, and creation. Christian hope includes the first when it serves the good, but it is ordered to the second. Transhumanism becomes theologically problematic when more life is asked to carry the weight of new life.

The Strongest Counterargument: Moderate Christian Transhumanism

A serious argument must confront the strongest form of the opposing position. The strongest counterargument is not radical mind uploading but moderate Christian transhumanism. Benedikt Paul Göcke argues that Christians need not reject technological enhancement as such and can affirm moderate transhumanism oriented toward compassion and human flourishing (Göcke 2017, 2018). Jason Eberl similarly maintains that Christians can support moderate enhancements that sustain the flourishing of embodied, social, rational animals, even while rejecting substrate independence (Eberl 2022). Michael Agerbo Mørch has recently defended the compatibility of moderate transhumanism with Christian faith under conditions that prevent technological hope from replacing eschatological hope (Mørch 2026). Jorge Ricardo González López likewise develops a prudential framework that admits restorative and inclusive technologies while rejecting strong technosalvific forms (González López 2026).

These positions are important because they expose an ambiguity in Christian criticism. If every enhancement is condemned as a refusal of creatureliness, then ordinary medicine becomes difficult to defend. If the boundary is drawn at "natural" human capacities, then spectacles, literacy, vaccination, and digital memory already destabilize it. Moderate transhumanism therefore presses theology to explain why some forms of self-transformation are cooperation with creation while others become rejection of the created person.

The concept of non-eliminative transformation accepts much of this challenge. It does not require Christians to reject the label transhumanism in advance, and it does not assume that every enhancement beyond statistical normality is wrong. Indeed, theologically responsible enhancement may sometimes be extensive. A future intervention that dramatically prolongs healthy life, if safe and justly accessible, would not be immoral merely because previous generations could not imagine it. A neural interface that substantially expands communication for disabled and nondisabled users might deepen participation rather than threaten human identity. A genetic intervention that prevents a severe inherited disease can be understood as medicine even if it permanently changes descendants.

Where, then, does disagreement remain? Moderate transhumanism often treats enhancement as compatible with Christianity so long as it does not replace grace, violate justice, or destroy embodiment. That is close to the position developed here. The deeper issue is whether the term transhumanism continues to do useful conceptual work once its strongest commitment to overcoming the human condition has been limited in this way. If "transhumanism" comes to mean only responsible use of technology for human flourishing, then much of the distinctively transhumanist horizon has been surrendered.

This is not merely a dispute about labels. The term carries a teleological orientation. More's classical formulation describes the continuation of evolution beyond current human form and limitations (More 2013). The Humanity+ declaration imagines a future in which fundamental biological constraints can be overcome (Humanity+ 2009). Moderate Christian transhumanism therefore lives in a productive tension: it adopts the technological openness of transhumanism while importing theological limits that prevent the human from becoming obsolete.

Mørch's recent article makes this tension explicit by engaging Göcke's proposal and asking whether moderate transhumanism can remain compatible with the incarnation and Christian hope (Mørch 2026). The answer depends heavily on how moderation is defined. If moderation means proportional interventions that preserve embodied identity and remain subordinate to theological goods, compatibility is plausible. If it is merely an incremental strategy toward the same posthuman end, the theological conflict returns.

The concept of non-eliminative transformation therefore supplies a sharper criterion than the moderate/radical distinction alone. A technically dramatic intervention can be non-eliminative, while a socially ordinary practice can be eliminative in meaning. For example, a highly sophisticated prosthesis can deepen the agency of an embodied person. By contrast, a seemingly mundane reproductive selection practice can become eliminative if it establishes that certain forms of human life should not be welcomed at all. Technical intensity and anthropological intensity are not the same.

The counterargument also highlights a needed correction to anti-transhumanist theology. Christian critics sometimes speak as though finitude were a single sacred package. Yet disease, ignorance, violence, and premature death are not simply features to be accepted. The Christian story itself is one of healing, liberation, and resurrection. A credible theology of technology must therefore articulate not only limits to enhancement but reasons for enhancement. Compassion, stewardship, solidarity, and the vocation to cultivate creation provide such reasons (International Theological Commission 2004; Francis 2015).

The most defensible Christian position is thus neither bioconservative refusal nor technological maximalism. It is discriminating openness. Technology should be welcomed where it heals privation, expands responsible agency, and strengthens participation; questioned where it turns capacities into measures of worth; and resisted where it defines fulfillment as release from embodiment, dependence, or the human subject itself. Moderate transhumanism can overlap substantially with this position, but the theological norm remains humanization in Christ rather than transhumanization as an independent good.

A Normative Framework for Human Enhancement

If non-eliminative transformation is to be more than a theological slogan, it must generate practical questions. Five criteria can organize discernment across different enhancement technologies. These criteria do not produce automatic answers, but they identify what a Christian anthropology should examine before calling an intervention genuinely humanizing.

First, the criterion of healing and flourishing asks what human good the intervention serves. The relevant good cannot be defined only by preference. Some preferences are formed by stigma, competition, or unjust social norms. An intervention aimed at reducing severe pain, preventing disease, restoring communication, or expanding participation has a different moral structure from one aimed primarily at meeting a prestige norm. The same technology may serve different goods in different contexts. The question is not whether enhancement exceeds normality but whether it contributes to an integrated human flourishing.

Second, the criterion of embodied continuity asks whether the intervention remains the transformation of the person or becomes the production of a functional successor. This criterion is especially important for mind uploading and radical neural substitution. It does not require preserving every organic component. Human bodies already undergo continuous material change and can incorporate prosthetic technologies. What matters is the continuity of the embodied subject, including memory, agency, relation, and personal history. Where a technology requires treating embodiment as an accidental container for information, Christian anthropology has reason for serious doubt (Eberl 2022; Hershenov 2025).

Third, the criterion of relational justice asks how the intervention redistributes vulnerability. A technology can benefit an individual while creating coercive pressure or exclusion for others. Cognitive enhancement in education and employment is a clear example. If enhancement becomes necessary simply to compete, formal voluntariness can coexist with practical coercion. Genetic selection raises a parallel problem when parental choice gradually constructs a social message about which lives are welcome. Christian discernment therefore includes the unenhanced, the disabled, the poor, and future generations among the subjects of moral evaluation.

Fourth, the criterion of gifted freedom asks whether agency is exercised as reception and cultivation or as total mastery. Sandel's language of giftedness remains valuable when interpreted non-statically (Sandel 2007). Freedom does not require leaving gifts untouched. It requires recognizing that the self is not self-created. The more powerful the technology, the more important it becomes to remember that the subject acting upon the body is also the subject received through that body, history, and network of relations. Freedom that denies every prior gift can become captivity to self-production.

Fifth, the criterion of eschatological non-substitution asks whether a finite good is being made to bear the weight of salvation. Technologies should be evaluated on their actual goods and risks rather than on promises of ultimate deliverance. Life extension can be good without becoming immortality. Artificial intelligence can aid reasoning without becoming wisdom. Genetic medicine can reduce disease without creating a perfected humanity. When a technological good is absolutized, disappointment is not the only danger; other human goods can be sacrificed to sustain the promise.

These criteria can be illustrated briefly across four domains. In artificial intelligence, the central issue is not simply whether machines become more capable. AI can augment diagnosis, translation, research, accessibility, and education. The theological question arises when intelligence is reduced to computational performance and human judgment is reorganized around what machines optimize. Antiqua et Nova insists on an integral account of human intelligence that includes embodiment, relation, truth, and moral responsibility (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and Dicastery for Culture and Education 2025). Non-eliminative transformation therefore supports AI that extends human agency while resisting substitution of accountable persons by opaque systems in decisions where moral responsibility cannot be outsourced.

In radical longevity, the key distinction is between extending health and turning indefinite duration into the measure of human fulfillment. Research that prevents age-related disease can be an extension of medicine. Yet the social consequences of extreme longevity - access, intergenerational power, resource allocation, and the meaning of life's temporal structure - require more than an individual right-to-choose framework. The criterion of eschatological non-substitution prevents longevity from becoming the secular equivalent of resurrection while leaving space for substantial medical progress.

In genetic enhancement, embodied continuity is usually less problematic than justice and gifted freedom. Germline intervention could prevent devastating inherited conditions, but enhancement can also create asymmetrical power between designers and future persons. The moral issue is not that parents inevitably shape children; they already do through education, environment, and culture. The issue is whether a child is increasingly received as a project whose traits must justify the choices made before birth. Non-eliminative transformation asks whether genetic agency remains ordered to the welcome of persons or begins to make welcome conditional on specification.

Mind uploading is the clearest limiting case. Even if technical feasibility were granted for the sake of argument, a Christian anthropology would still ask what has been preserved. An informational replica with memories and behavioral patterns may be extraordinarily similar to a person without being that person. If bodily death still occurs and the copy continues, the promise of survival depends on a controversial theory of identity. Christian resurrection does not solve this problem by offering a different upload. It promises that the person is raised, which is precisely why bodily continuity-in-transformation remains the relevant analogy.

The framework also has implications for institutions. Universities, hospitals, technology companies, and churches should not discuss enhancement only at the level of individual ethics. They shape the norms that determine which capacities are rewarded and which vulnerabilities are hidden. A society that celebrates enhancement while underfunding care for those who cannot be enhanced reveals its anthropology more clearly than its public statements do. The measure of a technology-friendly Christian culture is therefore not how many innovations it permits but whether innovation expands the circle of participation.

This is where the language of stewardship is more adequate than either domination or passivity. Communion and Stewardship presents human beings as created in the image of God, embodied and relational, with responsibility for the created world and for their own biological integrity (International Theological Commission 2004). Stewardship does not mean preserving

creation in a museum. It means acting within a reality that is gift before it is project. Such action can be inventive, courageous, and technologically ambitious. But it remains accountable to the good of persons who cannot be reduced to the success of the project.

Discussion: What Would Count as a Truly Post-Human Failure?

The transhumanist debate often imagines failure as insufficient transformation: humanity remains sick, short-lived, cognitively limited, or trapped in obsolete biology. Christian anthropology introduces another possibility. Failure may occur when technical success is achieved at the cost of the subject for whom success was promised. A civilization could become extraordinarily capable while losing the ability to recognize dependency, receive unchosen persons, or distinguish intelligence from wisdom. It could solve many privative harms and still become less hospitable to the human.

This possibility explains why the category of the posthuman is theologically ambiguous. If posthuman means nothing more than future persons whose capacities differ greatly from ours, Christianity need not fear the word. Human beings of the twenty-first century already inhabit technological and medical conditions that earlier generations could scarcely imagine. There is no theological requirement that future humanity resemble current statistical norms. But if posthuman means a successor whose identity depends on leaving embodied, dependent, creaturely existence behind, then the issue is not progress beyond a historical stage. It is the replacement of the subject of Christian anthropology.

The deepest Christian objection to strong transhumanism can therefore be stated without nostalgia. Humanity is not valuable because its present genome, average lifespan, or cognitive range must remain fixed. Humanity is valuable because the human person is the kind of creature whose destiny is disclosed in the incarnate and risen Christ. Gaudium et Spes does not identify Christ as the perfect human because he exemplifies an optimal performance profile. He reveals human vocation through embodied freedom, relation, self-gift, suffering love, and communion with the Father (Second Vatican Council 1965).

The criterion of Christological humanization also unsettles some Christian habits. Churches can participate in eliminative logics when they treat disability only as lack, aging only as decline, or dependence only as burden. The theological critique of transhumanism is credible only if Christian communities embody an alternative social imagination. Otherwise, the church condemns technological perfectionism while practicing its own form of ableist perfectionism.

Quo vadis, humanitas? is therefore most useful not as an ecclesiastical verdict against technology but as an invitation to hold together polarities that technological narratives are tempted to simplify. Human beings are given and self-forming, finite and open to the infinite, bodily and spiritual, individual and communal, vulnerable and capable of extraordinary agency (International Theological Commission 2026). These tensions are not excuses for passivity. They are the structure within which responsible action takes place.

Non-eliminative transformation names the same insight in normative form. The future is not faithful merely because it preserves the present, and it is not humane merely because it exceeds the present. Theologically, a transformation is worthy of the human when the person can still be recognized as the one whose good is being served, when the vulnerable are not

converted into failed prototypes, and when greater power remains ordered to communion rather than autonomy without remainder.

This proposal also reframes the common question, "How far is too far?" Distance from current biology is not the best measure. Some very distant transformations might remain humanizing; some small changes could carry dehumanizing social meanings. The better question is, "What does this transformation ask us to believe a person is?" Once that question is asked, technological ethics becomes inseparable from theological anthropology.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Christian anthropology need not reject technological enhancement, but it must distinguish healing and human flourishing from projects that render embodied humanity obsolete. Through constructive theological comparison, the study identifies three distinct forms of limitation: privative harms that should be healed, creaturely finitude that constitutes human existence, and relational dependence that may become either communion or injustice. On this basis, the concept of non-eliminative transformation is proposed as a criterion for evaluating transhumanist technologies. Technological interventions are ethically defensible when they preserve the continuity and dignity of the embodied person, promote relational justice, respect gifted freedom, and avoid replacing Christian hope with promises of technological salvation. Artificial intelligence, genetic intervention, life-extension technologies, and neural enhancement may therefore serve genuine human goods, provided that increased capacity remains directed toward participation and communion rather than autonomy, exclusion, or functional substitution.

Future research should apply the proposed framework to specific emerging technologies through interdisciplinary studies involving theology, bioethics, medicine, disability studies, law, and technology governance. Comparative analyses could examine how non-eliminative transformation informs concrete decisions concerning germline editing, cognitive enhancement, artificial intelligence in morally consequential settings, radical longevity, neural replacement, and mind uploading. Empirical research should also investigate how enhancement technologies redistribute vulnerability, influence perceptions of disability and aging, and create social pressure on individuals who remain unenhanced. Further theological inquiry is needed to clarify personal continuity amid extensive bodily modification and to compare Christian perspectives on embodiment, resurrection, and theosis across different traditions. Such research would strengthen the framework's practical relevance while ensuring that technological progress continues to serve embodied persons, especially those most vulnerable to exclusion.

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