

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Why Barth changed his mind: retrieval and rejection of the *extra Calvinisticum* in the theology of Karl Barth

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Abstract

Over the course of his career, Karl Barth changed his mind on the *extra Calvinisticum*, moving from a robust early affirmation to a final rejection in the later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*. This article traces that theological shift, arguing that it was not incidental but necessitated by the internal logic of Barth's doctrine of revelation. In contrast to recent trajectories that seek to retrieve the *extra* in defence of divine impassibility, Barth's rejection was grounded in a conviction that God's being is identical with God's act – most fully revealed in Jesus Christ. This christological pressure led Barth to revise the scope and function of the *extra* until it became theologically untenable. The article situates this shift within the broader historical development of the doctrine and concludes by exploring its implications for reconciliation, kenosis, and divine ontology in contemporary theology.

Keywords: Karl Barth; Christology; *extra Calvinisticum*; Reformation

Few topics in Christian theology are as obscure as the *extra Calvinisticum*. In its most basic form, the *extra* is the teaching that during his incarnate life, the second person of the Trinity is 'at one and the same time, completely within the flesh of Jesus (spatially circumscribed) and completely without the flesh of Jesus (not limited by space)'.¹ That is, even as Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God, we must speak of a way of being the Son that is enfleshed (*Logos ensarkos*) and a way of being whereby the Son simultaneously rules from heaven, not tied to his human body (*Logos asarkos*). The *extra*, so the common perception goes, is entirely conditioned by its polemical Reformational context and so metaphysically abstract that it is at best an artefact of a

¹Bruce L. McCormack, 'Grace and Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology', in John B. Webster (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), p. 95.

question that no longer needs to be asked and at worst an angels-on-the-head-of-a-pin question that never should have been asked in the first place.

Yet the endeavour to protect the implications of a theology of the cross from violating divine impassibility seems to be driving a number of theological projects that have resourced the *extra Calvinisticum* in creative and challenging ways. Most notably, T. F. Torrance has defended the *extra* by arguing that while the Lutheran position 'had its extremely important truth in the insistence that a real and genuine incarnation took place', it unwittingly presupposes a 'receptacle' view of space, in which the role of the human nature was 'to contain the divine'.² Torrance connects this tendency to the more unsavoury fruits of Lutheran theology in modernity: 'If we press that to mean that in the incarnation the Word was resolved into this Jesus without remainder, so to speak, then insuperable difficulties arise – and solutions such as a metaphysical *kenōsis* or demythologising have to be found'.³ Yet a strongly Reformed interest in defending the *extra* as a means of safeguarding divine impassibility risks making the *extra* – God the Son ruling from above in heaven apart from the humanity of Christ – a justification for separating the being and activity of Jesus of Nazareth as the one who dies on the cross from that of God.

It is such a separation that troubled Karl Barth throughout his life and, as I will suggest, led to a seismic shift in his attitude towards the *extra*. Even a cursory reading of Barth's theology reveals that the concerns of the *extra* are also Barth's concerns; its questions are his questions. Indeed, I will contend that the question of the Son's putative existence *extra carnem* drives Barth's theology forward, chastens it, animates it, and focuses it in the end upon the divine-human reality of the God-human.

My thesis is simple: over the course of his career, Karl Barth changed his mind on the *extra Calvinisticum*, from wholeheartedly embracing it at the beginning of his career to rejecting it in the late volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*. The purpose of this paper is first to show what occasioned this change and, secondly, to affirm – against at least some current trajectories in contemporary systematic theology – that he had good reasons for doing so. Ultimately, I contend Barth changed his mind because developments in his own doctrine of revelation – specifically, his insistence that revelation is self-revelation – exerted increasing pressure on his theology, and most especially his Christology, requiring that he radically revise the scope of the *extra Calvinisticum* until it was unrecognisable. If God truly manifests himself through himself as himself in the God-human, then any doctrine that allows us to conceive of God's being apart from his act in Jesus becomes untenable.

First, however, we must dedicate a significant amount of attention to what precisely is being claimed in the Calvinist *extra* and the obscurity that such a question yields. Only then can we appreciate Barth's revision of the doctrine.

I

The *extra Calvinisticum* is, in the original expression, a highly polemical and rhetorical term, used by proponents of Lutheran orthodoxy against their Reformed counterparts.⁴

²T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time, and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2003 [1976]), p. 125.

³*Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁴For a rigorous account of the development of the term in its original polemical context, see David E. Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology: The Function of the So-Called Extra Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 1966).

Without exhaustively narrating the already well-documented history of Lutheran-Reformed eucharistic and christological debates, it will suffice to briefly articulate the more significant differences that emerged between the two schools in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

It has been justifiably argued that the 'axle and motor' of Martin Luther's theology is a commitment to a particular formulation of the *communicatio idiomatum*, the idea that in the incarnation of the Son there is a real exchange (*perichoresis*) of properties between the divine and human natures, such that what can be properly spoken of one nature becomes true of the other as well.⁵ Thus, 'whatever is said of him as man must also be said of him as God, namely, Christ has died, and Christ is God; therefore God has died – not the separated God, but God united with humanity'.⁶ It has long been the standard interpretation of Luther to see his full-throated affirmation of the *communicatio* as simultaneously a departure both from nominalist late medieval metaphysics and from an unquestioning fealty to divine impassibility. This narrative sees Luther as at least tacitly giving license for a real communication of the human attributes to the divine nature: He will speak even of 'God's martyrdom, God's blood, and God's death'.⁷

But these formulations of the *communicatio idiomatum* do not in themselves mark Luther's Christology as distinctive or controversial in the later debates between Lutheran and Reformed Scholasticism. Indeed, it is important to see Luther operating from within a thoroughly patristic, neo-Chalcedonian framework. By this I mean a pattern of speaking and thinking about the relation of divine and human natures that, at core, takes into account the Second Council of Constantinople's (553) proclamation that 'our Lord Jesus Christ, who was crucified in human flesh, is truly God and the Lord of glory and one of the members of the holy Trinity'.⁸ Though nineteenth- and twentieth-century Lutheran theologians would look upon the Chalcedonian definition with suspicion for risking a dissolution of any inherent connection between the divine identity of the eternal Son and his economic suffering and obedience, the Reformer's own attitudes towards the confession of the council evince no such hesitancy.⁹ The burden of Luther's *Disputatio de divinitate et humanitate Christi* (1540) was precisely that the

⁵The exchange gives a christological grounding, as Johann Steigler has compellingly argued, to *loci* ranging from his doctrine of justification to his theological humour. See Johann Anselm Steiger, 'Die communicatio idiomatum als Achse und Motor der Theologie Luthers. Der 'fröhliche Wechsel' als hermeneutischer Schlüssel zu Abendmahlslehre, Anthropologie, Seelsorge, Naturtheologie, Rhetorik und Humor', *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 38 (1996), pp. 1–28.

⁶Martin Luther, *On the Councils and the Church*, in *Church and Ministry III*, vol. 41 of *Luther's Works*, American edn., ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 104.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 103. The degree to which Luther's language entails a reconfiguration of a classical commitment to divine impassibility remains a topic of lively debate. David Luy has convincingly argued, *contra* later Lutheran reception of Luther, that the German theologian affirmed a version of the medieval theory of 'suppositional carrying' and thereby maintains a strong theology of divine impassibility. Luther believed, in other words, that the Son by no means suffers in his own divine nature but only according to the *suppositum*. Luy's work should be seen as a continuing work by historians and historical theologians to understand Martin Luther as a late medieval and early modern thinker. See David Luy, *Dominus Mortis: Martin Luther on the Incorruptibility of God in Christ* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2014).

⁸*Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols., ed. Norman P. Tanner, SJ (Washington, DD: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 1.155.

⁹This is especially true for those twentieth-century Lutherans who understood themselves to be the guarantors of the theological legacy of Karl Barth. See especially Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1983); and Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune God*, vol. 1 of *Systematic Theology* (Oxford: OUP, 1997).

Chalcedonian definition of Christ as two natures in one person conveys a theological mystery that is not expressible within the ordinary boundaries of philosophical predication.¹⁰

The occasion of the 1540 *Disputatio* was Caspar Schwenckfeld's claim that it is absolutely improper to refer to Christ as a 'creature' and Luther's rejection of this claim on the basis that he misunderstands how Christ is predicated in his divinity and humanity. For our purposes, two points on Luther's 1540 *Disputatio* bear worth mentioning: The first regards the Reformer's disputed attitude towards the medieval theory of 'suppositional carrying'. The second regards the effect of this attitude on how Luther sees the *communicatio idiomatum*. With respect to the first, suppositional carrying is an explanatory mechanism for how the hypostatic union occurs. In this model, the divine *suppositum* – the eternal *Logos* – carries or sustains the human nature, which has no independent concrete existence but is only actualised in the person of the Word.¹¹ In the act of assuming a fleshly nature, the person of the Word appropriates to himself a passable human nature without, however, the divine nature being compromised, changed, or affected by his becoming man. The dominant interpretation of Luther's Christology was, until very recently, that the Reformer's understanding of the hypostatic union and the *communicatio idiomatum* signals a divergence from this traditional model of a divine person assuming nature, seeing instead a symmetrical, mutually determinative, and composite relation between divinity and humanity.¹² This explanation has the advantage of making sense of Luther's liberal use of theopaschite language: the divine nature takes on human suffering, mortality, and ignorance *to the same degree* that the human nature takes on divine attributes (most famously, that of omnipresence).

To be sure, Luther famously disparages the nominalists as speaking 'monstrously' (*portentose*) when they claimed the human nature was supposed by the divine nature.¹³ But, as Luy has suggested, this line alone does not tell the full story of the complicated legacy of late medieval theology in Luther's writings.¹⁴ Luther aims this denunciation

¹⁰Martin Luther, *Disputatio de divinitate et humanitate Christi*, in WA 39/II: 92–121.

¹¹Variations on this fundamentally asymmetrical understanding of the union can be seen at least as early as John of Damascus in *The Orthodox Faith*: 'The Word of God is reckoned *the hypostasis with regard to the flesh*, for God the Word was not united to flesh that already existed in itself, but came to dwell in the womb of the holy Virgin without being circumscribed in his own hypostasis, and gave substance to the flesh from the chaste blood of the Virgin, flesh that was ensouled with a rational and intelligent soul, and, assuming what is representative of the human substance, *the Word himself became the hypostasis with regard to the flesh*.' John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, trans. Norman J. Russell (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2022), p. 165 (emphasis added). Likewise, Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas endorse this view. See Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* 3.2.4 (~<https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~ST.III.Q2.A4>): 'The Person or hypostasis of Christ may be viewed in two ways. First as it is in itself, and thus it is altogether simple, even as the Nature of the Word. Second, in the aspect of person or hypostasis to which it belongs to subsist in a nature, and thus the person of Christ subsists in two natures. Hence though there is one subsisting being in Him [*licet sit ibi unum subsistens*], yet there are different aspects of subsistence, and hence He is said to be a composite person, inasmuch as one being subsists in two.' See also *Summa Theologiae* 3.3.4.

¹²The paradigmatic articulation of this trend is the influential essay by Reinhard Schwarz, 'Gott ist Mensch: Zur Lehre der Person Christi bei den Ockhamisten und bei Luther', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 63/3 (1966).

¹³Luther, *Disputatio de divinitate et humanitate Christi*, in WA 39/II: 95.

¹⁴Space and scope do not permit us to litigate the debate Luy has entered, which involves not only Luther's attitudes towards medieval Christology and Scholastic philosophy but also, via the work of scholars

more to the ‘unintended resonances of meaning’ of such a vocabulary, that is, taking the language of a divine person merely ‘carrying’ a created nature to mean that same person cannot be called ‘creature’.¹⁵ Such a mistake, Luther reasons, turns on a failure to distinguish between abstract and concrete modes of predication and, furthermore, an abstract philosophical logic and the new ‘grammar of the Holy Spirit’. Theology calls Christ ‘creature’ *in the concrete* (i.e., as he is a divine person who assumed a created human nature), yet the creature *tout court* is not the *suppositum* but rather that which is assumed by the person.¹⁶ God is man *concretely* – and thus the object of reference in such theopaschite statements as ‘God’s death’ is always the one person and *suppositum* of Christ and not the divine nature abstractly.

The upshot of Luther’s accommodation of ‘suppositional carrying’ is found in how he understood the *communicatio idiomatum*. Namely, Luther seems committed to the doctrine in two distinct senses. First, there is the standard patristic use of the *communicatio* wherein the properties of divine and human nature are each communicated to the person of Christ in the concrete. ‘The Lord of glory was crucified’; ‘The Son of Mary created the world’; ‘One of the Holy Trinity was crucified in the flesh’; each of these represents a *concrete* predication of a quality belonging properly to one nature yet predicated of the whole person. This sense of the *communicatio idiomatum* – what Chemnitz and Gerhard would later regard as the *genus idiomaticum* – would remain uncontroversial in the Reformation period.

But then there is a second, distinct sense of the *communication idiomatum* which Luther seems to tacitly affirm, though his Protestant Scholastic successors would be the first to give determinate form to the idea. Because of the determinate *divine* identity of the person assuming, the assumed human nature really shares in the divine predicates of divinity. It is important to see that this communication (what the later Lutheran Scholastics would call the *genus maiestaticum*) flows from the asymmetrical character of predication outlined in the 1540 *Disputatio*. Even while it is correct to say ‘Christ is man’ concretely, it is erroneous to say ‘Christ is humanity’ in the abstract. However – and this is the point on which much of Luther’s Christology turns – it is proper to say ‘Christ is divinity’, because in the divine predicates there is no distinction between the concrete and the abstract.¹⁷ It follows that every part of Christ – every aspect of his person – is suffused with and conditioned by the divine nature, so much so that Luther will even say that he who touches Christ ‘touches the divine nature itself’ and, moreover, that the humanity of Christ is to be worshipped along with his divinity.¹⁸

It is not difficult to see how this formulation of a one-way communication of the divine attributes to Christ’s humanity (*genus maiestaticum*) makes sense of the Lutheran-Reformed controversy surrounding the presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

such as Heiko Oberman and Tuomo Mannermaa, corroborates his retrieval of the mysticisms of Dionysius, Bonaventure, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Tauler. Suffice it to say that the discussion is still ongoing.

¹⁵The argument that the disputation does not signal a radical departure from suppositional carrying has been made most thoroughly and convincingly by David Luy, who sees an ‘underlying asymmetry within Luther’s Christology, which mirrors medieval theological intent’. See Luy, *Dominus Mortis*, pp. 89ff.

¹⁶See Luther, *Disputatio de divinitate et humanitate Christi*, in WA 39/II: 118: ‘Nos autem dicentes Christum creaturam intelligimus divinam personam, quae assumpsit humanam naturam. Non est autem suppositum, neque in philosophia, illa creatura in Christo, sed assumpta. Christus creatus non est separatus a Deo. Ergo non est creatura in veteri significatione.’

¹⁷Luther’s point here strikes me as remarkably similar to the theory of Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae* 1.13.1.2.

¹⁸Luther, *Disputatio de divinitate et humanitate Christi*, in WA 39/II: 93.

The sacramental issue, for Luther, turns on whether the one person of the Christ may be divided into two, that is, whether it was possible to parse out *in concreto* the divine and human natures.¹⁹ Because the two natures are united in the person of the Word, it is impossible to imagine *part* of Christ being anywhere that the *whole* is not. 'Where you place God for me,' Luther writes, 'you must also place the humanity for me. They simply will not let themselves be separated and divided from the other'.²⁰ Luther takes this fundamentally unitive principle as license to seemingly push the patristic teaching on the communication of attributes to its speculative breaking point.

At least, such was the charge of Ulrich Zwingli, who accused Luther's doctrine of the ubiquity of Christ's human body of indulging a speculative theology and thereby limiting the divine freedom by 'enclosing' him in the flesh. In response, Luther pointed out that to imagine the question in terms of 'enclosure' is to fundamentally misunderstand what God effects in the hypostatic union. 'Rather', Luther writes, 'it is one person with God, so that wherever God is, there also is the man; what God does, the man also is said to do; what the man suffers God also is said to suffer'.²¹ Ultimately, Luther turns Zwingli's point on its head, arguing that the Son has inseparably bound himself to human flesh (and thereby communicated the divine property of omnipresence to the flesh) not in spite of his freedom as God, but precisely *because* of it. In the final analysis, it is Zwingli, Luther avers, who indulges in an overly speculative theology.

Thus, the position of Luther (and the touchstone for Lutheran orthodoxy in the centuries following) may be summarised as follows : 1) the hypostatic union entails a real perichoresis and communication of attributes of the divine nature to the human nature, which means that everything that belonged to God by nature belongs also to Christ's human nature by virtue of the union; 2) to speak of 'the Son' after the incarnation, one simply *has* to speak of the human nature being affected by the divine nature (since to speak of one apart from the other is to endorse a two-subject Christology, at least tacitly); and 3) therefore, since Christ is omnipresent as God, after the incarnation he is also omnipresent as man.

It is to these christological assertions that John Calvin directly responds in his denial of the ubiquity of Christ's presence qua human. Whether or not Calvin himself believed in the only doctrine named after him is, as we will soon see, dubious; but both *loci classici* for the *extra Calvinisticum* come from Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Like Zwingli, Calvin accuses the Lutheran position of an improper understanding of the incarnation of the Son of God as a 'confinement within the narrow prison of an earthly body'. Calvin writes,

For even if the Word in his immeasurable essence united with the nature of man into one person, we do not imagine that he was confined therein. Here is something marvelous: the Son of God *descended from heaven in such a way that, without leaving heaven, he willed to be borne in the virgin's womb*, to go about the earth, and to hang upon the cross; yet he continuously filled the world even as he had done from the beginning!²²

¹⁹Martin Luther, *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, in *Word and Sacrament III*, vol. 37 of *Luther's Works*, American, edn., ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 218.

²⁰*Ibid.* p. 219.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 222.

²²John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), II.xiii.4.

Calvin's impulse, it should be noted, is plainly not to blindly assert a Chalcedonian metaphysics of nature and hypostasis, much less (as Lutherans would charge) to facilitate a Nestorian separation of the natures. Rather, Calvin's broader point is soteriological. For, if the descent of the Son entails his assuming an external (in this case, spatial) limitation or necessity (that is, if his assumption of flesh upon earth means that he truly evacuates heaven), then in what sense can he still be truly God? And if he is no longer God, then how can he save us? For Calvin, this must necessarily mean that the divine Son maintains a dual existence, beginning with his incarnation and confirmed in the ascension, simultaneously ruling from heaven *etiam extra carnem*, even as he empties himself in the flesh on the cross.

Although the significance of positing such a twofold (yet decidedly non-Nestorian) existence of the Word is open to debate, it is entirely possible to see Calvin's insistence on a simultaneous divine existence *extra carnem* as an attempt to be faithful to the pre-Reformation legacy he sought to inherit and carry forward. In his book-length study of the *extra Calvinisticum*, E. David Willis argues that Calvin's version of the *extra* is not a Reformation innovation at all but rather Calvin's attempt to explicate and synthesise the ancient church's teaching about the incarnation from Origen, Athanasius, and Augustine to Thomas Aquinas.²³ The patristic adage that after the incarnation, the divine Son 'remained what he was' leads Willis to conclude that the *extra Calvinisticum* is better termed the '*extra Patristicum*', or even the '*extra catholicum*'.²⁴ After all, even Cyril of Alexandria, whose friendship with Reformed orthodoxy has been at best tenuous, seems to affirm something approaching Calvin's position.²⁵

At this point, we may assert some common ground between Calvin and Luther. Both believe that there is a valid distinction between the *Logos asarkos* and *Logos ensarkos* before the descent of the divine Son into time; moreover, even while the Lutherans reject a *Logos asarkos* after the incarnation, Luther still believes that the Son remains God even as he is human. The disagreement emerges when we consider the implications that the *communicatio idiomatum* bears on this claim. Calvin affirms the traditional patristic sense of the *communicatio*, while rejecting Luther's one-way transmission of the divine attributes to the human nature (the *genus maiestaticum* of later Lutheran orthodoxy). That is, Calvin affirms the properties of each nature to the single *person* of Christ without, however, cross-predicating the attributes that belong properly of one nature to the other.²⁶

The passage that stands as the second *locus classicus* for considering the *extra* is *Institutes* IV.xvii.30, and we should note here that Calvin's divergence from Luther rests not on his insistence that the Son remains God, but on the particular *way* he remains God, namely by not communicating divine properties to Christ's humanity. Calvin writes that in the incarnation, the Son's divinity descends not as if it left heaven and 'hid itself in the prison house of the body', but even as Christ filled all things (Colossians 2), he dwelt in a circumscribed human body, both *within* and *apart from* a human body. To explain this difficult mystery, Calvin invokes a Scholastic distinction from Peter Lombard: 'Although the whole Christ (*totus Christus*) is everywhere (*ubique*), still the whole of that which is in

²³See Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology: The Function of the So-Called Extra Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), pp. 26–60.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 60.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁶Oliver Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity: The Incarnation Reconsidered* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), pp. 7–8.

him (*totum quod in eo est*) is not everywhere'.²⁷ Thus, Calvin definitively rejects Luther's insistence that because of the affinity (perichoresis) between the two natures after the union, whatever we predicate of Christ, we must predicate of *both* of his natures.

We must keep in mind that by positing a divine existence of the Son apart from the flesh – simultaneously the circumscribed and *fleshly* character of Jesus' humanity – Calvin affirms a fundamentally soteriological principle that Christ must be 'like us in every way, yet without sin' (Heb. 4:15). Consequently, we find in Calvin's own writings that the overall significance of the *extra* occupies at most a marginal place in his theology.²⁸ Yet, in the subsequent generations of the Lutheran-Reformed debates, the centrality of the *extra* steadily gave both sides more license to speculate metaphysically over the relation of the two natures. This particular trajectory is less the story of Calvin, as we have seen, than it is of Calvinism.²⁹ Questions 47–48 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which taught that the divinity of the Son 'is indeed beyond the bounds of the manhood which it has assumed' enshrined the *extra* as a tenet of Reformed Orthodoxy and thereby solidified the christological fault lines between the Reformed and Lutheran positions. The age of Protestant scholasticism further generated conceptually complex attempts of expressing a metaphysics of the *extra* or its non-existence.³⁰ Indeed, the term '*extra Calvinisticum*' originates precisely in this scholastic context as a polemical jab by Theodor Thumm during a 1623 intra-Lutheran debate between the Universities of Giessen and Tübingen where Thumm pejoratively accused his counterparts of positing '*illud ipsum extra Calvinisticum*'.³¹

On the Reformed side of scholasticism, we find a development of the *extra* motivated less by the soteriological interests of Calvin and more by a need for comprehensiveness in the metaphysics of the union. '*Finitum non capax infiniti*' became an axiomatic catchphrase of the school of thought. We need to cite only one image to see the complex

²⁷Calvin, *Institutes* IV.xvii.30. See also Peter Lombard, *Sententiae* III.xxii.3.

²⁸Willis puts the question with particular force: 'Is the 'extra Calvinisticum' inevitably bound to such slogans as 'Antwerp and the ocean,' 'novitas,' 'finitum non capax infiniti,' . . . ? As it appears in Calvin's theology – *no*. Its main liability there is to reinforce Calvin's occasional minimisation of the importance of Christ's bodily presence during his earthly ministry; the invisible behind the visible flesh receives disproportionate attention.' Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology*, p. 153. Arguing along similar lines, Andrew M. McGinnis is, to my mind, correct in his judgement that 'the doctrine of the Son's transcendence of the human nature' did not play as major of a role in the actual debates of the sixteenth century as commentators have sometimes suggested. See Andrew M. McGinnis, *The Son of God Beyond the Flesh: A Historical and Theological Study of the extra Calvinisticum* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 73ff.

²⁹McGinnis, in my view rightly, argues for a re-narrating of the *extra*'s history in which the Reformed doctors displace Calvin as the central figure in the history of the doctrine. See McGinnis, *The Son of God Beyond the Flesh*, pp. 93–148.

³⁰For example, in the Lutheran Johann Gerhard, who ensconces the *communicatio* as the centerpiece of a new Protestant scholasticism, we find a systematic expression of different genera of the *communicatio*, that work at different metaphysical 'levels,' as it were within the union: 'Thus one ought to teach that after the Incarnation took place the person of the Word was neither beyond the flesh nor was the flesh beyond the person of the Word; nor were the two natures joined by a certain bare side-by-side existence but by a profound interpenetration which the Fathers teach with the example of the glowing iron and the animated body.' See Johann Gerhard, *On the Person and Office of Christ*, ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes, trans. Richard J. Dinda (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2009), p. 30.

³¹Whereas the Tübingen school attributed the fact to a 'hiding' of the power of Christ's humanity to be everywhere, the Giessen school said that 'Christ's body was evidently not everywhere because there was an abstinence (κένωσις) of the use, and not just of the *visible* use, of the humanity's power to be ubiquitous.' See Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology*, pp. 20–22.

(and oftentimes Nestorianizing) tendencies seemingly licensed by this version of *extra*. At the Colloquy of Maulbronn the famous image of ‘Antwerp and the Ocean’ was introduced by Kaspar Olevianus against his Lutheran detractor Jakob Andreas. The image attempted to illustrate the superiority of Calvin’s *totus/totum* distinction over and against Luther’s enclosure of the divinity in the humanity. Olevianus saw a fault in Andreas’ reasoning that, because the human Christ was at the right hand of God, the humanity enjoyed all the same qualities as the right hand of God (which is omnipresent). Andreas’ reasoning, Olevianus argued, resembled the claim because the island Antwerp is wholly *in* the ocean and the ocean encircles the whole world, Antwerp itself encircles the globe.³² Just because Antwerp (the humanity) is surrounded and sustained by the ocean (the divinity) does not thereby grant the island the same magnitude or absolute relation as the ocean. As Willis notes, ‘Antwerp is merely tangential to the ocean’, and likewise the real humanity of Jesus by necessity entailed humanity’s irreducible *finitude*.³³ To communicate the properties from the divinity to the humanity – to insist that Antwerp becomes the ocean – is to risk the absolute contingency of created human nature on the divine.

The problem with the trajectory illustrated by the image of Antwerp on the ocean is twofold. First, though it was originally intended to distinguish between the human presence of Christ in heaven (Antwerp) with the divine omnipresence of Christ (the ocean), it seems to posit the human Jesus as a kind of second economic agent at least conceptually distinct from the divinity of the Logos that encircles him. Calvin himself clearly did not intend to posit ‘two Sons’, one on earth and the other in heaven. Yet, we can see in this example why in their polemics the Lutherans labelled the *extra Calvinisticum* as what Isaak Dorner called a ‘double Logos theory’, where one *Logos* is circumscribed by human limitation, and another, more metaphysically obscure *Logos* reigns from above.³⁴

But second and more crucially, the development of the *extra* after Calvin construed the *kenosis* in terms of divine *concealment*. Whether the Reformed scholastics intended to or not, the *extra* ended up protecting the *Logos asarkos* from any full disclosure in the event of his revelation in time. Therefore, Turretin can write that the Son in himself is not ‘lessened in the humiliation, nor increased in the exaltation. But emptying is ascribed to it as *concealment* and *restraining of glory and majesty* under the form of a servant’.³⁵ The self-emptying, in other words, is an epiphanic ‘concealment’ of the Son in time. The doctrine protected, as we will soon see the early Barth thought, a reserve of revelation from coming to be seen.

II

I have attempted thus far to trace the development of the concept of the *extra Calvinisticum* in the period after the Reformation, showing the basic christological

³²Ibid., pp. 15–16.

³³As Willis notes: ‘The crucial anthropological assertion made by this Reformed Christology was that humanity by definition is finite. Christ was human in all respects like us: sin and not finitude was excepted.’ Ibid., p. 18.

³⁴See D. O. Sumner, ‘The Twofold Life of the Word: Karl Barth’s Critical Reception of the *Extra Calvinisticum*’, *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 15/1 (2013), p. 48.

³⁵Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols., ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1992), 2.334.

commitments and metaphysical prejudgments, as well as the fruits that the doctrine produces. The foregoing narrative is significant because without it, it is very difficult to appreciate the extent to which Barth's doctrine of revelation puts conceptual pressure on his own retrieval of Reformed dogmatics. By the time Barth emerged on the German theological scene, mainstream Protestant liberalism had largely cast the *extra Calvinisticum* to the ash-heap of extraneous metaphysical dogmas disposed of with the rise of historical-critical inquiry into the life of Jesus. A new grammar for Christology, distinct from the classical concerns of both Reformed and Lutheran orthodoxy, became dominant. For Schleiermacher, the problem of Christology lay in the question of how the Redeemer could bring together in himself the ideal universal and the concrete particular. The mode of such a unity – and therefore the distinction between Jesus and the rest of humanity – lies in the constant potency of the God-consciousness of the Redeemer, something which, by virtue of a 'direct existential relationship' between Jesus and the church, could effectuate the believer's own sense of inner vitality and sense of dependence on God.³⁶ The kenoticism of Gottfried Thomasius and the anti-metaphysical approach of Albrecht Ritschl had likewise shown little sympathy for the Reformation-era debates.³⁷ It was into this theological context that Barth intervened. *Der Römerbrief* (1918) subjected the normative religiosity of Protestant liberalism – its accommodation to secular ideologies and political movements, its naïve commitment to an anthropology predicated on human progress, its implicit identification of God with creaturely reality, and above all the minor role it assigned to eschatology – to the most intense theological scrutiny.

After the second edition of *Römerbrief* (1922), Barth turned his attention to Christian past, publishing lecture notes from a 1923 Göttingen course on the Reformed confessions.³⁸ The lectures read as if Barth is uncovering an ancient, foreign, and long-forgotten confessional way of thinking theologically – as if he has discovered his own tradition for the first time and is offering an *apologia* for the confessions to his students.³⁹ As such, Barth comes off as a loyalist of the newly discovered Reformed tradition, though he is not by any measure blind to its potential shortcomings.

It is here that Barth engages with the question of the *extra Calvinisticum* for the first time, initially rehearsing a number of typically anti-Lutheran polemical points. The *genus maiestaticum* 'results in the unending confusion of all the articles of our Christian faith, makes the true humanity of Christ into a phantom . . . puts the body of Christ on the cross and simultaneously invisibly in Rome and Jerusalem, inside and outside the maternal body of Mary, in every apple and pear, even in every beer and wine cask!'⁴⁰ Moreover, the enclosure of the *Logos* within the flesh of Jesus and the doctrine of ubiquity together render the ascension unintelligible, since it would seem to make Christ *equally* present in heaven as he was on earth and indeed even in hell.⁴¹

³⁶See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928), §94.

³⁷McGinnis traces this trajectory very helpfully in *The Son of God Beyond the Flesh*, pp. 125–48.

³⁸Karl Barth, *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions*, trans. Darrell L. Guder and Judith J. Guder (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p. 183.

³⁹Barth later credits his Reformed *ressourcement* to his reading of Heinrich Heppe's *Reformed Dogmatics*, an anthology of selections from the Reformed fathers. See 'Karl Barth's Foreword', in Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, rev. and ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G.T. Thompson, (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1950), pp. v–vii.

⁴⁰Barth, *Theology of the Reformed Confessions*, p. 183.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 184.

The novelty of Barth's critique does not rest in any one of these polemical contentions, all of which were ensconced in the history of Reformed orthodoxy. What makes the early Barth's full-throated affirmation of the *extra* uniquely his own is how deeply it is tied to a particular (yet still developing) construal of the doctrine of revelation and a correlative suspicion of natural theology. One can see in Barth's treatment of Reformed-Lutheran debates here, as John Webster has pointed out, that 'the doctrines are handled instrumentally rather than descriptively', that is, Christology is indexed into a more general set of concerns around what we might label theological epistemology.⁴² The *extra* is yet another way to safeguard the otherness between the Revealer and the recipients of revelation, between Creator and creation. For God to continue to be God and the creature the creature, there must be an irreducibly *non-given* reserve to revelation, 'a concealment of revelation'.⁴³ The Lutheran *unio naturarum*, which Barth seems to believe belongs more to the 'speculative idealist' system of Hegel and Schelling than to the reformer himself, endangers this non-given and indirect aspect of revelation. 'By accepting the *direct givenness* and presence of contingent revelation', it ultimately merges revelation with creation, compromises the Creator/creature distinction, turns Christ into an omnipresent phantom (i.e., Docetism), and materialises God such that he ceases to be God.⁴⁴ From this perspective, the existence of the Son of God beyond the flesh functions as the epistemological guardrail against a view of 'contingency as revelation'.⁴⁵

This same epistemological concern reverberates in Barth's first attempt at a comprehensive work of dogmatic theology, the 1924–1925 *Göttingen Dogmatics*. Here, Barth offers three reasons for a strong affirmation of the *extra*. First, to the Lutheran concern that the *extra* prohibits the *whole* Christ from being revealed in the incarnation, Barth responds with Calvin's *totus/totum* distinction, namely, that the *Logos ensarkos* and the *Logos asarkos* are 'naturally not two different entities', one part hidden and the other revealed, but rather 'they are the same totality'.⁴⁶ They are *one God*, and God's existence outside the flesh simply assures us that it is *the transcendent God* we are dealing with in the incarnation. Second, Barth invokes the same soteriological principle as Calvin, insisting that the doctrine of ubiquity destroys Christ's likeness with us. And third, Barth once again points to the dialectical tension inherent in the *extra* as safeguarding the mysterious and gratuitous character of revelation. That the Son is both *ensarkos* and *asarkos* means he is 'wholly in his revelation and without subtraction a perceptible object', yet at the same time 'also wholly not an object . . . but the immutable divine subject'.⁴⁷

Clearly, Barth does not appropriate the reformers neutrally. Instead, he does so as someone who brings to them the questions of his own day, with the expectation that their texts will continue to speak. *That* he does this is not a problem. All good readers do. Yet it is worth noting two things about *how* Barth poses his own questions to the doctrine of the reformers: First, the doctrine of revelation exercises a *regulative* function over the other mysteries of the Christian faith. It has been well-documented that Barth's

⁴²John Webster, *Barth's Earlier Theology: Four Studies*, (London: T&T Clark, 2005), p. 54.

⁴³Barth, *Theology of the Reformed Confessions*, p. 202.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁶Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, trans. G.W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 6.IV, 209.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 6.IV, 210.

early theology is predicated on a dialectic of veiling and unveiling, a dialectic that, Barth believed, protects theology from becoming beholden to anything other than its subject matter, the God disclosed in Jesus Christ.⁴⁸ The *extra Calvinisticum* functions to sustain that key insight: God is both in and beyond his revelation, given to us in the revelation of Jesus Christ while remaining non-given in his transcendence. It is worth asking whether, despite Barth's insistence that the *method* of theology should not determine its *content*, the dynamics of the non-given reserve of revelation here functions as something pre-given, something that conditions what can and cannot be true of the fullness of God given in Christ Jesus.

A second point follows from the first. As Barth will come to see, an appeal to revelation in a purely formal sense proves to be a shaky starting place for theology. Put positively, the *what* of revelation is inextricable from its *how*; its content is part and parcel with its mode of disclosure, its phenomenality. Few commentators have proven to be more generative here than Jean-Luc Marion, who points out that *revelatio* emerged as a distinctive concept only in the thirteenth century, where, in Marion's reading, it took on a basically epistemological valence. Even if *revelatio* occupies the highest tier in a hierarchy of human knowing, the formulation of *sacra doctrina* as a quasi-science alongside the natural light of reason opened the door for revelation to be submitted to the conditions of human knowing, as it did later in the Enlightenment.⁴⁹ The point being that, for much of the theological history of the West, revelation was a concept the function of which was to make God known through propositions and predicative statements.

It is precisely this formal concept of revelation that had become sedimented in western theology, and which Barth calls into question in the opening paragraphs of the *Church Dogmatics*. The central insight can be put thus: God is not only the subject and object of revelation, but he is also the *mode* of his revelation, its phenomenality. Revelation is always *self-revelation*, the self-manifestation of God: 'God reveals Himself. He reveals Himself through Himself. He reveals Himself. If we wish really to regard the revelation from the side of its subject, God, then above all we must understand that this subject, God, the Revealer, is *identical with His act in revelation, identical also with its effect*'.⁵⁰ Whereas previously Barth had subordinated his Christology to a formal concept of revelation, we can now see that the *vere deus* and *vere homo* is beginning to condition how he imagines revelation at work in theology: revelation shows itself as the Word, a speaking of God *that is identical with God*. Moreover, the *being* of the Word is accomplished as an *act* in the world of creatures, such that the self-disclosure of Jesus Christ discloses nothing other than the Word as he is in himself: God is his self-manifestation since Jesus is the manifestation of God.

If it is injudicious to say that the whole of the *Church Dogmatics* turns on the insight that revelation is self-revelation, a more modest claim may be staked here: the seismic shift in Barth's doctrine of revelation began to build pressure that would be felt in the whole system of the *Dogmatics*. Indeed, whether or not we affirm the *extra Calvinisticum*

⁴⁸See Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936*, (Oxford: OUP, 1997).

⁴⁹See Jean-Luc Marion, *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere*, ed. Stephen E. Lewis and Stephanie Rumpza (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2024), pp. 45ff. Marion traces development of *revelatio* along these lines through Aquinas, Suárez, Kant, Hume, and Schleiermacher.

⁵⁰Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* [hereafter CD], 13 vols., ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956–1974), I/1, p. 340.

depends, in part, on whether we agree with Barth that revelation is self-revelation. By 1938, with the publication of the section 'The Mystery of Revelation' (§15), in *Church Dogmatics* I/2, the fault lines begin to visibly crack. There, Barth comes to terms with a Christology taken in light of the claim that revelation is self-revelation. The larger question at issue in §15 is in what sense God 'became' (ἐγένετο) flesh while still remaining God: Is the becoming in question *transitive*? Does the event of becoming entail a real ontic change? And, moreover, is the becoming something that 'befalls' the Word, an event of 'action and reaction', activity and passivity alike?⁵¹

On the one hand, Barth gives voice to many of the same concerns he had already expressed: Does the Lutheran 'real spatial limiting' of the Word properly take into account the 'freedom, majesty, and glory of the Word of God' so that they are not 'submerged in His becoming flesh'?⁵² Moreover, Barth has reoriented Protestant Christology in *Church Dogmatics* I/2 towards a recovery (by way of the Scholastic compendia of the Reformed Heppes and the Lutheran Schmid) of the ancient doctrine of *enhypostasis*/*anhypostasis*, that is, that the human nature of Jesus has, in itself, no concrete subsistence but is only ever individuated and active in the divine mode of being of the Word.⁵³ The question would then be whether the assertion that the Word is 'solely' in the flesh not simply the 'reversal' of the doctrine of *enhypostasis*. That is, is it not a limiting of the Word to its subsistence in the person of the man, and not vice versa?

It is important to take note here of *how* Barth appropriates the doctrine of *enhypostasis* and how its use builds upon the scaffolding of revelation as self-manifestation. On the one hand, to say that the humanity is only ever actualised in the person of the Word permits the Swiss theologian to refer every action of the human Jesus in the Gospel narratives as a *self-manifestation of the divine Son*. But – and this is where Barth's appropriation is simultaneously a development of the doctrine – the inverse is also true: any action predicated of the divine Son *must also refer to the human Jesus*, for it is the God-man who gives himself to us in the event of revelation. Indeed, Barth here comes close to affirming the Lutheran point that any statement after the union cannot parse out the divinity and humanity: 'Every question concerning the Word which is directed away from Jesus of Nazareth, the human being of Christ, is necessarily and wholly directed away from Himself, the Word, and therefore from God Himself, because the Word, and therefore God Himself, *does not exist for us apart from the human being of Christ*'.⁵⁴ Likewise, the miracle of the incarnation discloses that 'there is no other manifestation in heaven or on earth save the one child in the stable, the one Man on the cross'.⁵⁵

The above rule lends itself to a further question: Is this not simultaneously a prohibition against any speculation about the existence of the Son of God *extra carnem*? Does the *extra* not fall within the crosshairs of Barth's critique? Apparently not – or at the very least Barth is willing to qualify and truncate the Reformed view to accommodate his new doctrine of revelation as self-revelation in two conceptual moves. First, the Lutheran-Reformed debates are recast as two poles in a dialectical scheme – the thesis and antithesis through which Barth attempts to produce, if not a synthesis, at least a *rapprochement*. Christology contains 'dynamic' and 'static' elements, 'ontic' (Lutheran)

⁵¹Barth, CD, I/2, p. 160.

⁵²Barth, CD, I/2, p. 166–7.

⁵³Barth, CD, I/2, p. 163.

⁵⁴Barth, CD, I/2, p. 166.

⁵⁵Barth, CD, I/2, p. 165.

and 'noetic' (Reformed) principles, each constantly chastening the other, even if the Reformed formulation of the question is 'more comprehensive and to that extent superior'. Not so much a call for mutual conciliation, this is simply the mode of theology conforming to its subject matter, which lies beyond the grasp of any 'unitary theology'.⁵⁶ The irenic tone should be read against the earlier claim that the *extra* functions as an epistemological protective: whereas before the *extra* proved feasible as a mean of safeguarding the reserve of God's majesty in revelation, now 'the Reformed *totus ad intra et extra* offers at least as many as difficulties of characteristic the Lutheran *totus intra*'.⁵⁷

Yet Barth maintains hope of rehabilitating the Son's existence *etiam extra carnem* as a grammar for the continued lordship of the God-human even in his earthly humiliation. The Reformed doctors, in Barth's view, use the *extra* not as a 'separative' concept but rather as a 'distinctive' concept, by which he means the intent in maintaining the *extra* is chastened to signify the continuity of a single subject and agency across the Son's pre- and post-incarnate existence.⁵⁸ The *Logos asarkos* is not the epistemological reserve of revelation, that which remains obscured and veiled, it is now the '*terminus a quo*' of the incarnation, whereas the *Logos ensarkos* is the '*terminus ad quem*'.⁵⁹ By *Church Dogmatics* I/2, the force of the *extra Calvinisticum* in Barth's theology has therefore become destabilised from its initial epistemological footing. Rather than serving as a definitive safeguard for the otherness of God in a doctrine of revelation, the *extra* has here been chastened to signify the continuity of existence between pre- and post-incarnate life of the Son. Even on this point, though, Barth expresses hesitation, arguing that the Reformed position is 'afflicted by its own doubtfulness', for it presupposes 'a static element in the ἐγένετο'.⁶⁰ That is, it presents a vision of divine revelation and ontology that fails to obtain to the unity of being and act that Barth sees as a fundamental theological principle of the triune God's self-disclosure. Now, the doctrine of God's definitive revelation in Jesus Christ is beginning to condition Barth's use of the *extra*, rather than the other way around.

The *dénouement* on the *extra* in the *Church Dogmatics* is found in IV/1 (§59). In his doctrine of reconciliation, Barth returns yet again to Christology, this time with reference to the question 'How can God be the kind of God who is definitively known through the atonement, that is, an act of perfect obedience?' It is worth quoting him in full:

We must concede that there is something unsatisfactory about the theory [of the *extra Calvinisticum*], in that right up to our own day it has led to fatal speculation

⁵⁶Barth, *CD* I/2, p. 171.

⁵⁷Barth, *CD* I/2, p. 170.

⁵⁸Barth, *CD* I/2, p. 169.

⁵⁹Barth, *CD* I/2, p. 169. The Reformed perspective, as Barth affirms it here, is simply another way of affirming the '*extra Patristicum*', i.e., that the Son 'remained what he was' even in his self-emptying into the form of a slave. It is worth noting that Barth's analysis of the *extra* in *CD* I/2, pp. 167–171 is very much ahead of its time. Whereas Willis' book-length treatment of the *extra* was seen as a watershed moment for connecting the doctrine to a forgotten patristic and medieval (as well as eastern and western) history, Barth had traced the concept in Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, John of Damascus, and Thomas Aquinas.

⁶⁰Barth, *CD* I/2, p. 170. It is well known that Barth interpreted Chalcedonian metaphysics in dynamic and actualist terms. See, for instance, Bruce L. McCormack, 'We Have "Actualized" the Doctrine of the Incarnation: Musings on Karl Barth's Actualistic Theological Ontology', *Zeitschrift für Dialektische Theologie* 32 (2016), pp. 179–98.

about the being and work of the *logos asarkos*, or a God whom we think we can know elsewhere, and whose divine being we can define from elsewhere than in and from the contemplation of His presence and activity as the Word made flesh. And it cannot be denied that Calvin himself (and with particularly serious consequences in his doctrine of predestination) does go a good way towards trying to reckon with this 'other' god.⁶¹

Though the term 'something unsatisfactory' might at first blush seem irenic, it ought to be weighed against Barth's accusation that the *Logos asarkos* amounts to an "'other" God'. This is serious language, as it insinuates that the *extra Calvinisticum* leaves open the possibility for the worship of another God behind or before the God revealed in Christ, which is to say, an idol. Barth's rationale for this conclusion was charted by himself when he established the 'basic rule' that 'statements about the divine mode of being antecedently in themselves cannot be different in content from those that are to be made about their reality in revelation'.⁶² The ultimate question of the matter falls upon the doctrine of revelation: If His revelation in the incarnate Christ 'is distinguished from his proper being as worldly, does it bring us into touch with God Himself or not?'⁶³ In other words, when we ask, 'Is Jesus the Son?', is there room for an economic qualification, relegating Jesus as the Son *in the economy alone*?

The question pressures Barth throughout his whole career, leading him ultimately to judge that there cannot, in fact, be such an economic qualification, for reasons that are ultimately soteriological. 'If God is not truly and completely in Christ', Barth writes, 'what sense can there be in talking about the reconciliation of the world with God in him?'⁶⁴ Jesus *is*, without evasion or metaphysical qualification, the divine Son of the Father, for this is who he gives himself to be in revelation. If he were not identified as such, if God were not *always already* God with us, we could not be saved. Therefore, as Barth would say as he returned to the Reformed confessions at the end of his career, the Calvinist *extra* as expressed in Questions 47–48 of the Heidelberg Catechism was nothing short of a 'theological disaster' and 'a statement of unbelief'.⁶⁵

Even after this seismic shift in Barth's thought, he remains conscious that the previous affirmation generates a number of conceptual difficulties. If, given the singular existence of Jesus the Son, how can 'ὁ Λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο' not designate an immanent change in the eternal life of the Godhead? And moreover, if we say that Jesus empties himself *as the divine Son of God*, then how do we get around also affirming that there is a real diminution that happens to the deity of the Godhead, that God ceases to be God? These, of course, are not new questions; they are the same questions that animate the earliest Christian debates around the identity of Jesus as the Christ. What *is* new is just

⁶¹Barth, CD IV/1, p. 181.

⁶²Barth, CD I/1, p. 479.

⁶³Barth, CD, IV/1, p. 196.

⁶⁴Barth, CD, IV/1, p. 183.

⁶⁵Karl Barth, *Learning Jesus Christ through the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. Shirley C. Guthrie, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1982) p. 77. Barth goes on to point out that to the question ('Is Christ with us even to the end of the age, even as he is in heaven?') that the catechism offers only evasive and qualifying language. Surely, the human Jesus cannot be with us, the catechism reasons, since he is no longer on earth. In response, Barth replies firmly: 'In light of Matthew 28:20 ("Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.") only an unqualified yes would be the appropriate answer to the question.' Indeed, the catechism's response 'lacks the simplicity of biblical thought and speech.'

how deeply Barth reframes the terms of the debate, thereby subsuming the Lutheran-Reformed oppositions.

Darren O. Sumner has very convincingly argued that Barth's reversal on the *extra* is supported by a coincident revision of the Protestant doctrine of the *status duplex*, Christ's dual states of humiliation and exaltation, the *forma dei* and the *forma servi*.⁶⁶ The Lutherans, because they believed that the Word did not exist as *asarkos* during the incarnate life of the Son, consigned the *status duplex* to a chronological series of events. The *Logos* enters into 'a temporary state' of humiliation and then takes his exalted humanity with himself into glory. The Reformed, for their part, tended to index the *ensarkos* and *asarkos* distinction to the patristic distinction between theology and economy, rather than to the two states. Therefore, the Reformed radically truncate the sense in which the *Logos* empties himself in the *kenosis*, consigning the humiliation not to the *Logos in se*, but to the *Logos* become man.⁶⁷

Barth's intervention into this question radically disrupts and thus surpasses the logic of classical Christology. Sumner points out that Barth's insistence that the *Logos ensarkos* and *Logos asarkos* are one coterminous subject must mean that the one *Logos* is always simultaneously *both* humble and exalted. Whereas the Protestant traditions had parsed the *status exinanitionis* and *status exaltationis* – assigning each to a temporal moment in the Son's life, or to the eternal/economic modes of God's being – Barth sees them dialectically, as 'a single event and being'.⁶⁸ Thus, Barth can say that

It is not, therefore, a matter of two different and successive actions, but of a single action in which each of the two elements is related to the other and can be known and understood only in this relationship: the going out of God only as it aims at the coming in of man; the coming in of man only as the reach and outworking of the going out of God; and the whole in its original and proper form only as the being and history of the one Jesus Christ.⁶⁹

By dialectically uniting the humility and exaltation of the one Son, Jesus Christ, Barth has definitively raised the stakes of the *extra Calvinisticum*. No longer a matter of abstract *theologoumena* or an indulgent speculative exercise, how we receive the *extra* has far-reaching reverberations for the identity of the God we worship in Jesus Christ. I will therefore close by identifying two decisive implications of Barth's inextricable union of exaltation and humiliation in the single subject of Jesus Christ.

First, Barth's rejection of the *extra* conditions how he imagines the shape of reconciliation. It is no coincidence that lively debate emerged in the twentieth century regarding the role of medieval mysticism, including the question of divinisation soteriology, in Luther's theology.⁷⁰ The *communicatio idiomatum* introduced the vocabulary of 'divinised humanity', and it was not a stretch of the imagination for disciples of Luther to apply the same logic to humanity. As a Reformed theologian, Barth

⁶⁶See Darren O. Sumner, *Karl Barth and the Incarnation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

⁶⁷Sumner, 'Twofold Life of the Word', p. 48. Thus, it becomes tempting for the Reformed to say, as they frequently did, that after the second advent, the Word will divest himself of the flesh. He will, in Calvin's own terms, 'discharge the office of Mediator'. Calvin, *Institutes*. II.xiv.3.

⁶⁸Sumner, 'Twofold Life of the Word', p. 54.

⁶⁹Barth, *CD*, IV/2, p. 19.

⁷⁰See the essays collected in Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification*, trans. Kirsi Irmeli Stjerna (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005).

is consistently wary of the language of deification. And yet, he is equally wary of the Reformed inclination to keep the divine and human at a distance from one another. His critical reception of the *extra* allows Barth to find a third way. As Sumner has put it brilliantly, 'where Lutheran Christology suggested that the Word *crosses* the gap between Creator and creature, and Reformed Christology that the Word *bridges* the gap (remaining on both sides), Barth's actualist Christology suggests instead in his person Jesus Christ *closes* the gap. God and humanity remain distinct, but are unequivocally reconciled in the event of the Son's incarnate life'.⁷¹

Second, and more importantly, to say that the one Word of God is always simultaneously humble and exalted necessitates a reconfiguration of the ontology of the Godhead. No commentator on Barth has seen this with more acuity than Bruce McCormack, who has pointed out that Barth's rejection of the *extra* led him to reconsider the 'essentialist' metaphysical constitution of God as the western church had received it, locating the inner constitution of the Godhead in the doctrine of divine election.⁷² Indeed, for McCormack the most pressing reason that Barth rejects the *extra* is that Barth, unlike Calvin, believed that God's *action* is constitutive of his *essence*. Thus, after Barth's turn away from the *extra*, the decisive question is no longer, 'Given what we know about the metaphysical structure of the Godhead, how can we possibly make sense of the claim that Jesus of Nazareth died on the cross and was raised on the third day?' After Barth, the question theology must ask is rather, 'Given who this Jesus of Nazareth is and what he has done, namely dying and being raised, what must be true of Israel's God?'⁷³ The upshot of rejecting the *extra* is, in the final analysis, not an imperative against metaphysical speculation, but the first step in a new kind of divine ontology that is, at its heart, christological.

The external action of God is therefore his immanent life: His relation with Israel is not mere 'role-play' for God, but his eternal election to *be* Jesus Christ, to be God-with-us 'is the event in God's life in which he assigns to himself the being he will have for all eternity'.⁷⁴ To say that there is no God behind Jesus of Nazareth – to say that the one subject is always already humble and exalted – allows us to read the cry of divine abandonment, indeed the *human death of Jesus*, as a decisive event in God's immanent life.⁷⁵ To this claim, we might hear the contemporary defenders of the *extra Calvinisticum* assert that such a claim would compromise the always divine character of

⁷¹Sumner, 'Twofold life of the Word,' p. 56. Though we may agree with Sumner on this point, we must also judge his interpretation of the late Barth's attitude towards the *extra* as ultimately incorrect. Sumner believes that Barth's final position does not meet the necessary conditions for a 'rejection', but rather that Barth chastened the *extra* to mean that there is always-already-human Son *incarnandus*, even as he is *incarnatus*. While I believe the latter part of the previous sentence is true, it is a difficult stretch to suggest that this satisfies the conditions of affirming the *extra Calvinisticum*, at least as any of his ancestors in the Reformed tradition meant by it. We might say, rather, that Barth ruptured and transformed the concept of the *extra* from within, but that what emerges (viz., eternal divine-humanity) is no longer recognisable as the old. This tendency for Sumner to downplay Barth's ultimate rejection is evidenced by his failure to make sense of Barth's most severe language toward the doctrine at the end of his life.

⁷²See Bruce McCormack, *The Humility of the Divine Son: Reformed Kenoticism and the Repair of Chalcedon* (Cambridge: CUP, 2021).

⁷³This mantle is taken up, of course, by many of the so-called 'post-Barthians'. Whether it is Jüngel's assertion that the cry of dereliction marks a real moment of negativity in the divine life, or Jenson's claim that Israel's God just is his own history with his people, the identification of revelation as self-revelation lies at the heart of these dogmatic systems.

⁷⁴McCormack, 'Grace and Being', p. 98.

⁷⁵Barth, CD IV/1, p. 185.

the Godhead, to which we might hear Barth respond that such a claim presumes an antecedent idea of what 'divine' actually means, an idea that necessarily excludes lowliness, obedience, and even willing himself to undergo suffering. Barth himself hypostatized this notion into his doctrine of God in the closing volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*. Barth writes that the incarnation

reveals to us that for God it is just as natural to be lowly as to be high, to be near as to be far, to be little as to be great, to be abroad as to be at home . . . He is amongst us in humility, our God, *God for us, as that which he is in himself, in the most inward depth of his Godhead*. He does not become another God. In the condescension in which he gives himself to us in Jesus Christ, he exists and speaks and acts as the One he was from all eternity and will be to all eternity.⁷⁶

⁷⁶Barth, *CD* IV/2, pp. 192–3.