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RETRACTED – Putting the 'extra' back into Calvinism

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Abstract

With a long and venerable history in both Catholic and Protestant traditions the doctrine represented by the term *extra Calvinisticum* has fallen out of favour within contemporary theologies of the cross. Through an examination of the history of the doctrine and its constituent features the present article advocates the reclamation of the doctrine as a necessary component for a contemporary theology of the atonement, with special emphasis on the trinitarian dimensions of the death of God on the cross. The *extra Calvinisticum* is then adopted to refute contemporary theologies of a suffering God.

An ancient phrase for a contemporary problem

Among the oldest divisions within Protestant theology is that between Reformed and Lutheran bodies over the teaching of the Lord's Supper. According to the only book-length treatment of the term by David Willis, 'The so-called extra Calvinisticum teaches that the Eternal Son of God, even after the Incarnation, was united to the human nature to form One Person but was not restricted to the flesh.'[1] He continues:

> The doctrine received its ponderous name when Lutheran theologians, upon hearing the Calvinists insist that the Son's existence also beyond the flesh of Jesus Christ (*etiam extra carnem*) was being threatened by the Lutheran version of the *communicatio idiomatum*, labelled the Reformed contention 'that Calvinistic beyond' (*illud extra Calvinisticum*). The Reformed theologians maintained that the Son's existence also beyond the flesh did not jeopardize the unity of the divine and human nature in the Incarnation, while the Lutherans claimed that it did.[2]

[1] E. D. Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology: The Function of the So-Called Extra Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology* (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, 2; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), p. 1.

[2] Ibid., p. 1. He also adds that both sides agreed that the doctrine was part of Calvin's theology but disagreed over whether or not Calvin derived this teaching from the scriptures and tradition (the Reformed view) or was alien to the faith (the Lutheran view). Willis' thesis is thus to articulate Calvin's use of this doctrine and its historical antecedents, if any. It is universally accepted that the *extra Calvinisticum* is clearly established within Calvin's work. Willis cites the following as evidence, ibid.,

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All sides agreed on the distinction between the *Logos asarkos* and the *Logos ensarkos* prior to the incarnation. The dispute had to do strictly with the state of affairs *after* the hypostatic union.

Willis makes an important distinction, and one which I endorse, between the *extra Calvinisticum* as a term and as a doctrine. Willis describes the difference in the following way: 'The former is a product of sixteenth and seventeenth century Christological debates occasioned by the divergent views of Reformed and Lutheran theologians regarding the nature of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The latter . . . is a teaching common to a broad range of representatives of the tradition long before the sixteenth century.'[3] When Willis surveys the 'orthodox and heretical precursors to Chalcedon' for the *extra Calvinisticum* he notes the general agreement of the doctrine based on the collective agreement of the Fathers: first, the impassible and immutable character of God and its correlate – the reality of Jesus Christ's atoning suffering; and second, the constancy of God's ordering of the universe and the identity of this ordering God with the Saviour. In addition, two solutions, judged by the church as heretical, were offered to meet the problem these realities posed for theological reflection: first, to rest content with a loose relation between the divine and the human in Christ;

n. 1: F. Wendel, *Calvin: Sources et évolution de sa pensée religieuse* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950), p. 168; F. Loofs, 'Kenosis', Realenzyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche (*RE*), vol. 10, p. 258; S. Cave, *The Doctrine of the Person of Christ* (London: Duckworth, 1925), p. 151, n. 2; J. Ternus, 'Chalkedon und die protestantische Theologie', Das Konzil von Chalkedon, Geschichte und Gegenwart (*KCGG*), pp. 3, 536; W. Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, trans, H. Knight (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), p. 119; and K. Barth, *CD*, IV/1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), pp. 180–1.

[3] Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology*, p. 8. To clarify Willis writes (p. 60): 'The label "extra Calvinisticum," applied to the affirmation that in the Incarnation the Eternal Son of God was united to but not restricted to his humanity, is misleading, to say the least. There is nothing uniquely Calvinist about the doctrine, for as a means of interpreting the Biblical witness to Christ it had widespread and ancient usage.' Later we read, 'If one wanted to add to the terminological explosion which threatens and delights the theological world, one might coin "*extra Catholicum*" or "*extra Patristicum*" as being more appropriate than "*extra Calvinisticum*"', p. 60. David Willis-Watkins noted that so widespread is its use historically that it could just as well be called the *etiam extra catholicum*. D. Willis-Watkins, 'Extra Calvinisticum', in *Encyclopaedia of the Reformed Faith*, ed. D. K. McKim (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), p. 132. In like fashion Paul Jacobs argues that, given its universal and ancient adoption, the term could be called the *extra Evangelicum* and the *extra Augustinum*, 'Pneumatische Realpräsencz bei calvin', *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuse* 44 (1964), pp. 391–2.

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or second, to mix the divine and the human.[4] Both tendencies are common within contemporary theologies of the cross.

The basic contention of the present paper is that the eternal Son was not exhausted in his being (*ousia*) in the incarnation. That is, there is an 'extra' advocated by Calvin and the Calvinists which accords with Nicene theology – *without ceasing to be God he became man*. This doctrine has come to be known as the *extra Calvinisticum* or Calvinist 'extra'. Take this doctrine out of the eucharistic context in which it first appeared and apply it to the passion of Christ and we have a very good argument against contemporary theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann,[5] Alan Lewis,[6] Paul Fiddes[7] et al. who argue for a form of *patripassianism* – that God suffers on the cross or even that God died on the cross. In a more nuanced form, they each argue that there was some form of separation on the cross within the triune being of Eternal God. I will argue that God suffers only *in Christ* the incarnate Word and further, there was no ontological separation during the incarnation: neither on the cross nor in death. I also hope to show why this is more desirable than some contemporary notions of the atonement, especially that offered by Alan Lewis.

Extra Calvinisticum as *etiam extra Catholicum*

The central question to which the *extra Calvinisticum* addresses itself is this: is the Word of God so fully incarnate that he has no existence also beyond the flesh he assumed? This is a crucial question and one which the church has addressed on numerous occasions. It is my contention that, in line with scripture, the Ecumenical Creeds, especially Nicaea and Chalcedon, the Fathers of East and West, orthodoxy in general, the Reformed theologians were right in espousing the doctrine that came to be known as the *extra Calvinisticum* and that it was Lutheranism initially, and contemporary theology today, which is seeking to introduce theological novelties into discussions of the cross of Christ. It may pay to outline a Reformed doctrine on the *extra Calvinisticum*, with special emphasis on Calvin himself, before moving on to consider contemporary theologies of the cross.

It is accepted that Calvin, by way of the *extra*, sought to theologically discern the reality of the Word's ἐγένετο in the incarnation. This in turn

[4] Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology*, pp. 50–1.

[5] See J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

[6] A. E. Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).

[7] P. S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

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meant a distinction between the two natures of Christ (hypostatic union) and the more subtle refinement of this in terms of a *Logos ensarkos* and a *Logos asarkos* (not that there are two Christs of course, any more than the immanent and economic Trinity implies two Trinities!). Like the patristic theologians before them, Reformed theologians were working from an *a posteriori* basis, not some philosophically derived *a priori*. Without ceasing to be what he was (divine) he became (ἐγένετο) what he was not (human). The *extra Calvinisticum* provides for Christ's lordship over the entire world and yet his special presence with and lordship over the church, through the Holy Spirit.

The *loci classici* in the *Institutes* on the *extra Calvinisticum* are commonly accepted as 2.13.4 and 4.17.30 (1559). Calvin affirms the *extra Calvinisticum* as follows:

> They thrust upon us as something absurd the fact that if the Word of God became flesh, then he was confined within the narrow prison of an earthly body. This is mere imprudence! 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.[8]

In the 4.17.30 passage Calvin adopts the scholastic distinction between *Christus totus* and *Christus totum* to further elaborate the meaning of the *extra Calvinisticum*.

> From Scripture we plainly infer that the one person of Christ so consists of two natures that each nevertheless retains unimpaired its own distinctive character . . . although the whole Christ is everywhere, still the whole of that which is in him is not everywhere . . . Surely, when the Lord of glory is said to be crucified [1 Corinthians 2:8], Paul does not mean that he suffered anything in his divinity, but he says this because the same Christ, who was cast down and despised, and suffered in the flesh, was God and Lord of glory. In this way he was also Son of man in heaven [John 3:13], for the very same Christ, who, according to the flesh, dwelt as Son of man on earth, was God in heaven . . . Therefore, since the whole Christ is everywhere [since as *totus* he is ubiquitous], our Mediator is ever present with his own people, and in the Supper reveals himself in a special way,

[8] See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Library of Christian Classics, 20 and 21; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 2.13.4.

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> yet in such a way that the whole Christ is present, but not in his wholeness [yet he is there *totus* not *totum*]. For, as has been said, in his flesh he is contained in heaven until he appears in judgment.

Calvin's christology is to be located within a trinitarian theology. Willis informs us that 'From 1536 onwards the so-called extra Calvinisticum was used to thwart menacing Eucharistic speculation. By the 1559 edition the doctrine was also used to forestall menacing Trinitarian and anti-trinitarian speculation.'[9] And so already within Calvin's own use of the doctrine we see him transposing it onto trinitarian concerns rather than merely localised within eucharistic debates. I wish to do the same today. Only when this trinitarianism is appreciated, can the christology of Calvin be evaluated for its function in the sacramental teaching on the Lord's Supper. Any misunderstanding on Calvin's view of either christology or the Lord's Supper may be traceable to an inadequate grasp of Calvin's trinitarianism. Yet, as with all Calvin's theology, the connection to soteriological themes is apparent in his approach to the Trinity.

Rather than examine Calvin's trinitarian doctrine exclusively we shall consider the doctrine of the Trinity as it relates to christology within the context of the *extra Calvinisticum* as defined and developed by the subsequent Reformed tradition.

The fact that God's Son has become human cannot mean that certain parts of the One who has become human prove to belong to the divine nature, while others belong to the human nature. Christ, without ceasing to be God, became human. The two natures remain intact, distinct, but not separate. Reformed theology is thoroughly Chalcedonian on this point.[10]

The completeness of Christ's human nature must be maintained for the sake of the redemption of human nature in its entirety. In a thorough rejection of Apollinarianism, God's son is truly human. He has a human body, a human soul and consequently human reason. On the basis of the incarnation Christ is no longer merely Son of God, but also Son of humanity. Unlike the Marcionites, Christ's flesh did not descend pristine from heaven but rather was derived from the womb of the Virgin Mary, from the branch of David, sprung from the tribe of Judah, descending back to the seed of Abraham. Because Christ is human, like us, he is designated 'Immanuel': 'God with us'.

[9] Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology*, p. 27.

[10] I am roughly following the outline of J. Rohls, 'Christology and the Calvinist "Extra" (Extra Calvinisticum)', in *Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen* (Columbia Series in Reformed Theology), ed. J. Rohls, trans. J. Hoffmeyer (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), pp. 102–17.

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But the incarnation is not understood in such a way that the Son of God ceased to be God. The incarnation is not a *kenosis* in the sense that the *logos* literally *becomes* flesh. The incarnation is not a change of substance in such a way that the Son of humanity takes the place of the Son of God. As Son of God Christ is of the essence of God, he is *homoousios* with the Father. Christ is not adopted as God's Son, but is begotten as God's Son.

So far any attempt to call into question either the true and complete humanity or the true and complete divinity of the Son is rejected. This applies to Arianism and the theology of Servetus alike. This necessitates speaking of two natures or essences to the incarnate Christ. He is not only human, he is also God; he thus has a human and a divine nature. Christ exists, as Chalcedon made clear, 'in two natures without any commingling or change or division or separation'. These two natures are not absorbed, confused, or mixed, but are united or joined together in one person – the properties of the natures being unimpaired and permanent. Both Nestorianism and Monophysitism are here ruled out of question. Christ is God's Son and thus true God. But at the same time he is Mary's son and thus true human being, so that he is both divine and human in one person. If he is to be our reconciler, he must be both God and human being really and completely.

This amounts to the doctrine of the hypostatic union, two natures within one person. The divine person of the *Logos* assumes an *anhypostatic* human nature and unites it to himself to constitute an *enhypostatic* human person. The humanity assumed is not a person in its own right. Nor does it have an independent being apart from the person of God's Son. It is one person with God's Son and remains such in eternity. With this assertion of an *anhypostasis* of the human nature and its *enhypostasis* in the hypostasis of the divine *Logos*, orthodox and Reformed theology prevents the two natures bound together in Christ from falling apart into two different persons or hypostases. While the hypostatic union begins at a specific point in time, namely conception, it never ends, but endures eternally. This applies not only to eternity future but also to the cross – the Godhead did not cease to be in him, any more than it did when he was an infant.

The consequence of this doctrine is that, as the Leipzig Colloquy states, 'at no time and in not a single location whether in the state of humiliation or in the state of exaltation, did any rupture or separation occur between the natures. Nor did either nature ever depart from the other, not even in death itself.'[11] What transpires in Christ's death is a separation of the soul from the body, not a separation of the two natures.

[11] Ibid., p. 107.

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From the doctrine of the hypostatic union Reformed theology also adopts a nuanced version of the *communicatio idiomatum*. The personal or hypostatic union, as we have stated, does not cancel out the properties of each nature but rather, each nature retains forever its essential properties or character. Their loss would be tantamount to a cancellation of the natures themselves. One would no longer be able to say that Christ is God and human being. Instead Christ would become a *tertium quid*.

Jan Rohls reminds us that 'it is out of soteriological interest in Christ's humanity that Reformed Christology refuses to speak of a communication of the properties of divine majesty to the human nature'.[12] According to Reformed theology, there is only a *communicatio idiomatum* applied to the offices of Christ in his mediatorial role, but there is not a *communicatio idiomatum* between the two natures of Christ. Wyatt expresses the concern that Calvin had to safeguard the majesty of God. 'The theological stance adopted in the extra-calvinisticum derives', claims Wyatt, 'in part, at least, from Calvin's conviction that the doctrine of the Incarnation should not imply change or diminution in the deity'.[13] Wyatt adds a quotation from Calvin's *Commentary on the Gospel of John* to sustain this insight:

> Again, since he distinctly attributes the name of Word to the man Christ, it follows that when he became man Christ did not cease to be what he was before and that nothing was changed in that eternal essence of God which assumed flesh. In short, the Son of God began to be man in such a way that he is still that eternal Word who had no temporal beginning.[14]

It is on this issue of the *communicatio idiomatum* that Calvin differed quite considerably from Luther. Wendel's assessment is insightful:

> Yet while he emphatically affirms the unity of Christ's divinity with his humanity, Calvin cannot go further into the question of communication of idioms without much hesitation, and whenever he thinks he can concede something on this point, he automatically attaches the reservation that, in the person of Christ, divinity and humanity keep their own characteristics without reacting upon one another any more than is required for the existence of this union *sui generis*, and for the mediation of which it is the bearer.[15]

[12] Ibid., p. 108.

[13] P. Wyatt, *Jesus Christ and Creation in the Theology of John Calvin* (Princeton Theological Monograph Series, 42; Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1996), p. 35.

[14] Calvin, *Commentary on John* 1:14, cited in Wyatt, *Jesus Christ*, p. 35.

[15] F. Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of his Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), pp. 222–3.

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Wendel explains the difference between Calvin and Luther by stating:

> While Luther had taken the unity of the person of Christ as his starting point of departure and, by extending the traditional notions of communication of the idioms and of the ubiquity, finished by admitting the ubiquity not only of the divine, but also of the human nature of Christ, Calvin took his stand upon the immutability and incommunicability of the divinity, and thence arrived logically – or at least apparently so – at very different conclusions.[16]

Tylenda analyses Calvin's doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* and conveniently identifies and classifies four categories with examples.[17] His work can be summarised in the following list form:

1. Scriptures attribute to Christ properties which belong solely to his *humanity*. Example: Christ 'increased in age and wisdom' (Luke 2:52).
2. Scriptures attribute to Christ properties which belong uniquely to his *divinity*. Example: Christ said, 'Before Abraham was, I am' (John 8:58).
3. Scriptures attribute to Christ characteristics which belong to *both* but not to one or other alone. Examples: Christ's power of remitting sins (John 1:29). Christ raising to life whom he wills. Christ bestowing righteousness and holiness.[18]
4. Scriptures attribute to the *divinity* that which is characteristic of the *humanity*, and they attribute to the *humanity* that which is characteristic of the *divinity*. Examples: 'God purchased the church with his blood' (Acts 20:28). 'The Lord of Glory was crucified' (1 Corinthians 2:8). 'The Word of life was handled' (1 John 1:1). 'No one has ascended into heaven but the Son of

[16] Ibid. Calvin claims in *Institutes*, 2.14.1: 'Thus . . . the Scriptures speak of Christ: they sometimes attribute to him what must be referred solely to his humanity, sometimes what belongs uniquely to his divinity; and sometimes what embraces both natures but fits neither alone. And they so earnestly express this union of the two natures that is in Christ as sometimes to interchange them. This figure of speech is called by the ancient writers "the communication of properties".'

[17] J. N. Tylenda, 'Calvin's Understanding of the Communication of Properties', in *An Elaboration of the Theology of Calvin*, vol. 8 in R. C. Gamble (ed.), *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism: A Fourteen-Volume Anthology of Scholarly Articles* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1992), pp. 148–59.

[18] Tylenda notes of this third category, 'Christ had been endowed with these prerogatives when he was manifested in the flesh. It is true that along with the Father he held them before the creation of the world, but it had not been in the same manner or respect, and they could not have been given to a man who was nothing but a man', 'Calvin's Understanding', p. 150.

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Man who was in heaven' (John 3:13). 'God laid down his life for us' (1 John 3:16).

According to the analysis of Tylenda, it is only in the fourth point that we encounter the communication of idioms. 'In all of Calvin's five examples [from category 4]', notes Tylenda, 'the divine or human property is said of a subject, a person (Jesus Christ), and that subject is designated either in function of his divine nature as "God", or "Lord of Glory", or in function of his human nature as "Son of Man"'. And the crucial insight follows as Tylenda further explains, 'In none of the examples is the property of one nature applied to the other *nature as such*; it is always applied to a *subject possessing that nature*.'[19] Calvin's application of a *communicatio idiomatum* thus differs from Luther's in important ways. 'For Calvin an attribute of one nature is assigned to the person of Christ, though designated by his other nature; for Luther, the attribute of one nature is granted to the other nature.'[20] Given this insight and analysis we can see why Calvin strongly resisted the doctrine of the ubiquity of the body of Christ. For Calvin, the whole of Christ is present in the eucharist but not in his wholeness.

When the cross is considered, this Calvinistic understanding of the *communicatio idiomatum* is crucial. The fact that the two natures work together in carrying out the office of mediator does not cancel the differences between them. On the contrary, the natures are retained together with their particular properties. When Reformed confessions say, 'Lord of glory was crucified for us, according to Paul's words' (*Second Helvetic Confession*, C244), this cannot be interpreted in such a way that the subject is taken abstractly. If that were the case, Christ's suffering and death, which is proper to Christ's human nature, would be predicated of the divine nature. A communication of properties

[19] Tylenda, 'Calvin's Understanding', p. 153. A helpful clarification is added by Tylenda (p. 154): 'Calvin does not mean that a human concrete attribute as "blood" or "dying" can be applied to divinity as such, or to the divine nature in the abstract, for example, "divinity is mortal", because he has already rejected such predication in his commentary on Acts 20:28. But he does mean, and so do the Scriptures, that "blood" and "dying" can be predicated of divinity *in the concrete*, of a *divine being*, if the divine being, is also human, and therefore has blood and is mortal. Hence, Christ is a single subject having two real natures (he is true God and true man) we can truthfully say by the communication of idioms that "God purchased the church with his blood".' Such statements are thus true when understood *in concreto*, that is, when one sees the subject of the statements in the person of Christ, but not in one of the two natures. When it comes to Mediation or Reconciliation, then both natures are ascribed to the offices of Christ, in this case we can consider the *communicatio idiomatum in abstracto*. See Rohls, 'Christology', p. 110.

[20] Tylenda, 'Calvin's Understanding', pp. 158–9.

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would take place not only concretely but abstractly. For that reason the confession continues to read 'therefore, we do not in any way teach that the divine nature in Christ suffered'.

What is central to the distinction between a Lutheran and a Reformed doctrine of a *communicatio idiomatum* is not the first case, 'the genus of humility', that is, the question of the communication of human properties to the divinity. What is at issue is exclusively the second case, the 'genus of majesty', that is, the question of the communication of the properties of divine majesty to the human nature of Christ. The latter communication is decisively denied by Reformed christology.

Why the strong denial? For strictly soteriological grounds: the hypostatic union must not be understood in such a way that Christ's true human nature would become the subject of properties of the divine nature. This means that Christ is ubiquitous, omnipotent and all-knowing, not according to his humanity but according to his divinity. One cannot therefore use 'abstract locutions' to say that 'Christ is ubiquitous'. If that route were followed, then the two different natures and their properties would be mixed, or even made equivalent to each other.

Because of the personal union of the two natures Christ has a divine nature which retains all the divine properties and a human nature which retains all the human properties. This means that the person of the Son is at the same time infinite and ubiquitous according to his divinity, and yet finite and localised according to his humanity. This is affirmed in the *Heidelberg Catechism* when it states, 'Since the Godhead is incomprehensible and every where present, it must follow that it is indeed beyond the bounds of Manhood which it has assumed, but is yet none the less in the same also.'

Putting the extra back into Easter

The late Alan Lewis (1944–94) was professor of constructive and modern theology at Auburn Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Austin, Texas. A self-confessed disciple of Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann and Eberhard Jüngel, Lewis viewed his own work as building on the foundation laid by these men. For this reason I will not survey the theologies of the cross given by Barth, Moltmann or Jüngel, but limit my discussion to the final offering by Alan Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday.*

Over the course of his career Lewis sought to investigate what happened at Easter, more specifically, to view Easter from the perspective of Holy Saturday and to look stereophonically back to Friday and only then forward to Easter Sunday. His thesis is that only by rehearsing and remembering the Easter event in this way do we realise afresh what the Cross meant, not only for

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humanity, nor only for Christ, but also for God. In a 1986 address Lewis said in reference to Holy Saturday:

> With no remarkable tomorrow on the horizon to give that Sabbath special identity . . . the interment of Jesus is shapeless and anticlimactic. It is simply the day after terminal rupture. This the end of a man, a mission and a message; the end of the God of whom the message spoke, from whom the mission came, and to whom the man was Son; and the end of the world for all whose future hung with the coming of the Father's kingdom.[21]

As his subsequent full-length treatment of this work, *Between Cross and Resurrection*,[22] makes clear, when Lewis speaks of a 'terminal rupture' he intends an intra-trinitarian rupture that is terminal, albeit temporarily so, for God. As Lewis continues, 'the continuity of Easter with Good Friday shockingly insists that the powerful, resurrecting God has himself succumbed to godforsakenness and termination, and that only as the victim of death and godlessness will God secure a victory over them'.[23] The significance of these horrific events, according to Lewis, is not merely that the Son of God experienced them as a human, but more so that such shocking experiences reside within the Trinity itself and are formative of its own divine life.

Lewis makes it clear, by a rejection of certain passages in Irenaeus and Calvin, that any theological shifting of the goal posts, to say that it was only as a human being that Christ died and not in fact his divinity, is to be ruled out.[24] 'Yet, if the resurrection has confirmed that this is *God's* humanity, and has been all along, is he less so hanging on the cross or decaying in the tomb than when praying in the garden or growing in the womb?'[25] asks Lewis rhetorically. Lewis is explicit that he intends to say that God was present in the tomb as absent, that is, dead.

In a summation of Lewis' theology of Holy Saturday, Fr Thomas Weinandy writes:

> Because Barth newly conceived God in the true light of revelation and not in the false light of pagan philosophy, he was able 'radically to reconceive

[21] A. E. Lewis, 'The Burial of God: Rupture and Resumption as the Story of Salvation', paper delivered to the Joint Annual Conference of the Society for the Study of Theology and the Irish Theological Association, in Belfast, N. Ireland (April 1986), p. 11.

[22] A. E. Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).

[23] Lewis, 'Burial of God', p. 14.

[24] Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection*, pp. 91–2.

[25] Lewis, 'Burial of God', p. 15. See also Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection*, pp. 86–7.

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immutability and divine ontology' (p. 182). For Barth, and following him Jungel, Christ revealed that 'history is a predicate of revelation,' since 'God's being is constituted through historicality' (p. 189). Lewis sanctions Jungel's summation of Barth's divine ontology: 'God's being is in becoming' (p. 189). Thus, because God is now part of the historical temporal process, especially within the incarnation, God as God suffers. Quoting Jungel, Lewis states: 'The consequence of this self-surrender of God is God's *suffering* . . . a suffering even to *death* on the cross' (p. 191). While Barth refused (to Lewis' chagrin) to say that God actually died on the cross, yet he was willing to clearly state that God '*chooses and elects* that cross and grace as the very loci of sovereign, living Godness.' (p. 193).[26]

Lewis moves beyond Barth and onto Moltmann, who was able to bring this whole retooling or renovated concept of the Trinity to some form of maturity. For Moltmann, the cross becomes an event of trinitarian becoming. On the cross the Father and Son were torn asunder in mutual abandonment. Lewis argues that 'there is a dying of the Son which, by the principle of *perichoresis*, mutual indwelling, intrudes death into the whole Godhead'.[27] He next moves beyond Moltmann and onto Jüngel. In a considerable development from his earlier work in which he merely stated that the God of traditional philosophy, the metaphysical God of immutability and impassibility, is dead, Lewis is now able to state, along with Jüngel, that God is dead. Lewis argues with Jüngel that God's identity is now established as that of one who died. The being of this dead man defines God's own being.[28]

While many objections could be made to these new proposals I will limit myself to the issues surrounding the *extra Calvinisticum*, or issues of the omnipresence of Christ, the hypostatic union and the activity of the Trinity on the cross.

As was pointed out in Fr Weinandy's critique, a fundamental error Lewis makes is to confuse the truth that God does act within the finite world and

[26] T. G. Weinandy, 'Easter Saturday and the Suffering of God: The Theology of Alan E. Lewis', International Journal of Systematic Theology (*IJST*) 5/1 (2003), p. 66. Earlier (p. 62) Fr Weinandy offered an introductory critique which I fully endorse: 'I very much support Lewis' desire to address candidly, from within a Christian context, the critical issues of evil, sin, suffering and death as they ultimately express and so fully realize themselves in the horror of Holy Saturday. Nonetheless, while Lewis can be quite insightful and is by no means a rampant innovator or indifferent relativist, yet at the heart of his endeavour, within the substantive questions that he raises and within the substantive answers he offers, there resides an almost complete, though unintended, misunderstanding of the Christian gospel.'

[27] Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection*, pp. 224–5.

[28] Ibid., pp. 244–5.

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within temporal history with the error that in order to do so he must become a member of the finite world and thus a member of the historical process. Lewis misunderstands the doctrines of God's immanence and transcendence by interpreting God's transcendence as a real threat to his immanence, rather than, as with the Christian tradition, seeing that it is God's transcendence that enables him to be immanently present to and active within the finite temporal realm.[29] Lewis betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of Christian notions of time and space as relationally conceived by adopting a container notion of space in which God cannot be both transcendent and immanent at the same time, especially not within the incarnate Christ.[30] Lewis thus unwittingly falls foul of his own critique – it is he who is importing a false metaphysical or philosophical a priori into his theology. In so doing, he is repeating the Lutheran mistake in their rejection of the theology that stood behind the doctrine of the *extra Calvinisticum*.

Another major error Lewis makes concerns his doctrine of the Trinity and incarnation. Lewis rightly holds that the Son of God suffered and died and endured the depths of rupture and abandonment by God. However, Lewis contends that this was not simply endured or felt or suffered as a man but as God. In contradistinction to the Fathers and the tradition that the Son suffered only in his humanity, Lewis argues that due to the *communicatio idiomatum* the Son of God so immanently entered into the human predicament as man that he, within the very depths of his own divinity, suffered and died. As with Moltmann, Jüngel and others, Lewis demands that the suffering of Christ on the cross was the suffering of the *Logos* – and thus it is imperative to stress that the suffering and death of Christ was the suffering and death of divinity. More specifically, on the cross the Son and the Father were ontologically separated from one another and in this experience the Father experienced (suffers) a form of death along with the Son. It is this theology which allows Lewis to speak of the real death of God. It is only the bond of the Spirit that holds the two together.

How does a reappropriation of the *extra Calvinisticum* reply to such an understanding of the cross? By keeping in mind the unity of the incarnate Son whilst respecting the properties of the two natures. In a review of another work on the cross McCartney states:

> Patristic writers, in their zeal for the deity of Christ, sometimes referred to Jesus as the 'crucified God' and to Mary as the 'mother of God,' but

[29] Weinandy, 'Easter Saturday', pp. 70–1.

[30] On notions of space-time in relation to theological questions, especially the *extra Calvinisticum*, see T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), and *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998).

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> such language is notably absent from the NT itself. Why should the NT writers, since they believed Jesus was God, be so reluctant to speak of God crucified, or of the sufferings of God, or the humiliation of God, or the shame of God, or even the resurrection of God, since there was absolutely no reluctance at all to speak of Jesus as crucified, suffering, humiliated, shamed, or raised? Precisely because they did distinguish Jesus' deity from his humanity, and it is in his capacity as representative *human* that Christ suffered once-for-all and was raised.[31]

This is important. Contemporary theologies of the cross have almost completely adopted the notion that it is important for God to suffer and die *as God* for salvation to be meaningful. This, however, undermines the whole point of the incarnation – that the Son of God became man so that as man, and not as God, he could freely offer his human life to the Father as a loving sacrifice for our sin. It is what the Son of God does as man that is salvific. Otherwise, the humanity of Jesus would merely be an instrumental shell in which God chose to suffer as God. Any other view of the cross not only diminishes the salvation procured in Christ's passion but also demeans the entire human nature of the Son and makes his life of active obedience meaningless. If the eternal Word has not lived, dwelt among us, suffered, died and conquered sin as a real human being then salvation has not been won at all. The tradition knows this and has defended this view through the various councils and creeds, most notably Nicaea and Chalcedon, and it is doctrines such as the *extra Calvinisticum* which uphold this. What good does it do for God to die? Surely the logic is that only God can save us from our sin. And yet for substitution to be a reality a real human has to die. Hence the necessity, traditionally conceived, of the need for the God-man to live and die for us, to take away our sin and to defeat sin and death as a human. For God to die would make no sense at all. It defies not only scripture and tradition, but logic itself. The same argument, although we will not pursue it here, applies to the suffering of God. It is not God that needs to suffer and die but one who is *homoousios* with the Father and with us humans, who, as a sinless human being, must suffer and die in our place. Any other conception makes a mockery not only of the scriptural testimony but also of tradition and logic.

Contemporary theologies of the cross which advocate the suffering of God, or death in God or the death of God reject traditional understandings

[31] A criticism made by D. G. McCartney in a book review of Richard Bauckham: '*God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament*', *Westminster Theological Journal* 61/2 (1999), pp. 283–6.

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of the incarnation, the communication of idioms, the Calvinist 'extra' and ecumenical orthodoxy espoused in the creeds.

Trinity, cross and salvation

What Lewis and others contend is that the cross of Christ is inherently a trinitarian event and it is only from that trinitarian perspective that we can comprehend the cross. Quoting Paul Fiddes' work, *The Creative Suffering of God*, Lewis notes: 'Only as triune can God be identified with humanness and suffering, while remaining Lord and God; thus when Barth re-established the primacy of God's triunity he inaugurated "the welcome theme of recent theology that the doctrine of the Trinity is at root a conceptualizing of the event of the cross".'[32] I agree with Lewis, Fiddes, Moltmann and Jüngel here – it is only a trinitarian view which will illuminate the cross. I agree that it is at the cross that we get our clearest vision of the mystery of the triune God, as paradoxical as that sounds. However, I fundamentally disagree with what these theologians 'see' at this point. I do not see the death of God. I see the death of Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, God as man.

In the death of Jesus Christ on the cross a human being died. During the hours on the cross we are told that Christ became sin for us, died in our place, took the punishment we deserved, represented fallen humanity in its fallenness before a Holy God. As such a representative of fallen humanity we can only conclude, from the cry of dereliction, that Jesus felt the absence of his Father for the first time in his human life. For him the dark night was total. Consciously, the Father was absent. As a human being this man felt and experienced the rupture, the absence and the wrath of God.[33] And this, according to scripture, is death. And then it was finished. This is the suffering which constitutes the pain of Hell for Hell is the experience of the absolute loss of God's loving presence.

However, this was the God-man, the theandric person who was not only human but also divine. As the *extra Calvinisticum* makes clear, the person of the Son was not confined to the flesh but also, as God, remained omnipresent. Within the intra-trinitarian communion the Father, Son and Holy Spirit remained in perfect communion and fellowship. Their plan for redemption was being fulfilled; the salvation of humanity was being effected. Despite the ravages of sin the triune God was making all things right and inaugurating the exaltation of the Son of God to receive and sum up all things to himself – even death and sin shall be conquered and mastered.

[32] Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection*, p. 197.
[33] Wrath simply being God's approval of what sin itself rightfully demands.

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While it is right to speak metaphorically of the suffering or grief of the Father over the death of the incarnate Son, it is equally, if not more so, biblical to stress the Father's attitude of rejoicing and pleasure with his Son. Fr Weinandy has even suggested that 'despite what may be its theological validity, there is little or no New Testament warrant for asserting that the Father grieved over the death of his Son'.[34] By contrast, there is scriptural evidence that the Father was well pleased with his Son for, out of love for him and for his people, he willingly suffered and died.[35]

Conclusion

A proper understanding of the incarnation requires and affirms what the *extra Calvinisticum* so remarkably and clearly, even scandalously safeguards, advocates and confesses. The eternal, almighty, all-perfect, unchangeable and impassible divine Son, he who is equal to the Father in all ways, actually experienced, as a weak human being, the full reality of human suffering and death. What was an infamy to Docetists, Arians and to Nestorius was, for Athanasius, Calvin and the Christian tradition the glory and grandeur of the gospel. Among contemporaries who advocate a 'death of God' theology of the cross the incarnation is still a scandal, but a scandal for all the wrong reasons: for while with the best of intentions, having locked death and suffering within God's divine nature, they have, in so doing, locked God out of human suffering.

Against much contemporary theologising about the cross of Christ, a return to scripture and the tradition will enable us to see more clearly how it is that Christ has died for us, to save us, and that he did so as a true human being filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit for his obedient sonship, even unto death. And that, as a result, he was raised on the third day and exalted to the right hand of God from where he sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to the church and forever lives to intercede before the Father on our behalf, one day to return to judge the living and the dead and consummate the kingdom of God on earth.

[34] T. G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000), p. 228.
[35] See Matt. 20:28; John 15:13; Eph. 5:2; 1 John 3:16.

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