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Neither Subtraction, Nor Addition: The Word's Terminative Assumption of a Human Nature

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Christological Challenge to Classical Theism

Classical Christian theists are unflinching in their insistence that the divine Word suffered no change in his assumption of a human nature. Augustine of Hippo says the only Son is "the Maker of all things, unchangeable with the Father, unchanged by the assuming of human form, man by incarnation, the Son of man, and the Son of God."[1] Cyril of Alexandria states, "The Word was made man as we are, but was not changed."[2] John of Damascus holds that the "Person of the Word of God became Person to the flesh, and in this way 'the Word was made flesh', and that without any change."[3] Thomas Aquinas concurs, stating, "The Word, of course, is entirely immutable."[4] In assuming our nature, "no change was made in the Word of God Himself, but only in the human nature which was assumed by the Word, in accord with which it is proper that the Word was both temporally generated and born, but to the Word Himself this was not fitting."[5] This insistence that the Word was made man without undergoing any change in himself is most agreeable to the core claims of classical theism, including divine pure actuality, simplicity, impassibility, and timelessness.

Several critics of classical theism allege that its core claims about the divine being cannot be squared with the reality of the divine Word's Incarnation. In order to become flesh (Jn 1:14), to take the form of a servant (Phil 2:7), and to become poor (2 Cor 8:9) the Word must undergo some sort of real alteration and movement from his pre-incarnate state. Corresponding to this

[1] St. Augustine, *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus*, tract. 46, no. 3, in *St. Augustine: Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Soliloquies*, NPNF series 1, vol. 7, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986; originally 1888).
[2] St Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, trans. John Anthony McGuckin (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 92.
[3] John of Damascus, *De fide orthodoxa* 3.11, in *Saint John of Damascus: Writings*, trans. Frederic H. Chase, Jr. (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1958).
[4] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* [*SGC*] IV, c. 37.1, in Aquinas, *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*, trans. Anton C. Pegis, James F. Anderson, Vernon J. Bourke, and Charles J. O'Neil, 5 vols. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955).
[5] Aquinas, *SCG* IV, c. 49.3.

change must also be some newness of being in God. Classical theism, with its denial of all such movement, seems to proscribe any possibility of a *real* Incarnation. The Jesuit theologian Jean Galot, for instance, insists that "the mutability of the Incarnation" cannot be a change located solely in the assumed human nature, as classical theologians had almost universally claimed, but that "the newness lies first of all in the realm of the divine, before affecting the human nature of Jesus." God's dynamic activity in the Incarnation "demands an authentic innovation in God himself."[6] Galot calls for a relaxation of the demands of immutability in order to accommodate innovation of being in God.

Other critics are more overt in their challenges to classical theism in light of the Word's assumption of a human nature. R. T. Mullins, for example, insists that divine simplicity is "in direct conflict with any adequate Christology."[7] Presumably this is because divine simplicity is rooted in pure actuality, and pure act will not allow the mutation that is claimed to be requisite for the Word to become flesh. Mullins draws the same conclusion respecting divine timelessness. He correctly points out that undergoing any sort of change would be sufficient to show a thing to be temporal. And, he notes, "The incarnation seems to be a clear example of God the Son undergoing a change, and thus being temporal."[8] Mullins judges that divine atemporality is repugnant to Christian belief since "a timeless God cannot become incarnate."[9]

Given such allegations, one might reasonably wonder how so many classical Christian theists down the ages could have failed to see that their doctrine of God was patently incompatible with such a central Christian mystery as the Incarnation of the Word. But perhaps, as I will argue, classical Christian theists had a different understanding of the Incarnation sufficient to comply with the demands of pure actuality, simplicity, immutability, and the like—an understanding of the doctrine that is overlooked by their recent critics.

The Christological flashpoint between opponents and modifiers of classical theism, on the one hand, and their accused counterparts, on the other, is arguably with respect to the manner of the Word's *assumption* of a human nature. Most Christology debates, past and present, focus

[6] Jean Galot, S.J., *Who Is Christ? A Theology of the Incarnation* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1981), 270.
[7] R. T. Mullins, "Simply Impossible: A Case against Divine Simplicity," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 7 (2013): 201.
[8] R. T. Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 157.
[9] Mullins, *End of the Timeless God*, 189.

on the hypostatic union, with assumption being given comparatively little proper attention.[10] There are undoubtedly valid historical reasons for this uneven treatment. But it does make errors or disagreements regarding assumption more difficult to recognize. It is necessary to specify the exact nature of this disagreement in order to meaningfully engage the recent criticism.

Unfortunately, this specification is made exceedingly difficult by the modern tendency to reduce the options to either a divestitive account of assumption or an augmentative one. That is, the Word assumed a human nature either by subtracting something from himself, or by adding something to himself. The former is the viewpoint of various kenotic Christologies and the latter is said to be that of traditional Christology. Edwin Chr. van Driel's summary of the dispute is characteristic of this modern reductionism:

> The classical theologian thinks about the Incarnation in terms of an *addition*. Before the Incarnation of the Word, the second person of the Trinity, had one nature, divinity. In the Incarnation a second nature is added: humanity. . . . The kenotic theologian, by contrast, understands the Incarnation in terms of a *divestment*. The kenoticist believes that Scripture saying that the Incarnate "came down from heaven" (John 3) and "emptied himself" (Phil. 2) cannot be explicated by the notion of an assumption of a temporal, limited, and suffering human life, but needs to be explained by a theory of real abandonment.[11]

Such alternatives present profound difficulties for the claims of classical theism, even though the augmentative account is said to be the position of classical theologians. In truth, it does not matter which of these two approaches one holds. In either case it will be necessary to ascribe privation of being and passive potency to God and so classical theism appears doomed by both construals of Word's assumption of our nature. It is not hard to see, given these options, why so many contemporary theologians, even those sympathetic to the claims of classical theism,

[10] It should be noted that assumption and hypostatic union are not the same thing. Assumption speaks of the action in the agent assuming and the passion in the patient assumed. Union implies the relationship that follows from this. To be united may be said equally of the divine and human natures in the incarnate Word; but to assume actively is said only of the Word's divine nature, and to be assumed is said only of the human nature. It cannot be said of the Word's divinity that it is assumed, though it can be said that it is united. Thus, assumption and hypostatic union do not have the same meaning. Assumption, considered actively and passively, is what establishes the hypostatic union as a consequence. See the discussion in Thomas Aquinas, *ST* III, q. 2, a. 8; Cf. John Owen, *Christologia: Or, A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ—God and Man*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William Goold, 16 vols. (1850–1853; repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 1:225–226.

[11] Edwin Chr. van Driel, "The Logic of Assumption," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, ed. C. Stephen Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 265–266.

believe that traditional theism needs either to be abandoned or significantly retooled in order to make room for the Word's assumption of our nature.

But are subtraction and addition the only options? I contend they are not. Thomists and other traditional Christian theists have advocated for understanding the Word's assumption of our nature after the manner of a *termination*, over against both subtraction and addition. Terminative assumption is almost universally disregarded in the current literature; so much so that it is not even afforded the dignity of a refutation.[12] Nevertheless, it seems to be the account of the Word's assumption of a human nature best suited to cohere with classical theism.

The principal claim is that the person of the Word *terminates*—in the sense of *completing* or *perfecting*—the assumed human nature by bringing it to his own subsistence and thereby supplying to it the personhood it requires for its existence. As Dominic Legge observes, "This is the greatest possible mode by which a creature (namely, Christ's human nature) can be related to a single divine person, as a terminus according to the Son's 'personal *esse*.'"[13] While God supplies concrete subsistence to the individual natures of all other humans by way of a created hypostasis (or person), he supplies it to the human nature of Christ by drawing it into immediate relation to the divine person of the Word. The Word subsists as man not by receiving some determination or perfection of being from the assumed nature, but by perfecting this nature in being through his own divine personal being. Thomas writes, "The eternal being (*esse aeternum*) of the Son of God, which is the Divine Nature, becomes the being of man (*esse hominis*), inasmuch as the human nature is assumed by the Son of God to unity of Person."[14] Elsewhere he states, "The Word of God . . . has no subsistence from the human nature, rather, He draws the human nature to His subsistence or personality. It is not through, but in, human nature that He subsists."[15] Since *drawing* to oneself, and thereby supplying subsistence to that which is drawn, necessitates neither divestment nor augmentation, the Word does not subtract or add anything to

[12] Notable exceptions are found among several Roman Catholic Thomists, including: Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Bernard Lonergan, Thomas G. Weinandy, Gilles Emery, Thomas Joseph White, and Dominic Legge.
[13] Dominic Legge, O.P., *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 106. Legge is drawing on *ST* III, q. 17, a. 2.
[14] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III, q. 17, a. 2, ad 2, in *Summa Theologiae*, eds. John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón, trans. Fr. Lawrence Shapcote, O.P. (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012).
[15] Aquinas, *SCG* IV, c. 49.4. The Protestant theologian John Owen agrees with St. Thomas when he says the Word actively assumed a human nature "by giving it a subsistence in his own person." *Christologia*, in *Works*, 1:225.

himself in his assumption of a human nature and so requires no privation of being or passive potency in order to become flesh. Such are the fundamental claims of terminative assumption.

The aim of this article is chiefly to set forth the claims of terminative assumption in contrast to those of divestitive and augmentative assumption. Though this is not sufficient to resolve every question one might have about how to reconcile classical theism and Christology, it should go some distance in demonstrating that the Word's assumption of a human nature does not necessarily render null and void the claims of traditional theism. I will first consider the two dominant alterative accounts of assumption—the divestitive and augmentative—together with some remarks on their incongruity with pure act and its entailments.

Divestitive Assumption

The doctrine of assumption most obviously inimical to the teaching of pure actuality, simplicity, and immutability is that in which it is claimed the divine Word necessarily underwent some real loss in becoming man. This divestitive account of assumption is maintained by all variations of kenotic Christology. Stephen Davis notes that "a kenotic christological theory is one that explains the incarnation in terms of the Logos temporarily 'giving up' or 'laying aside' or 'divesting itself of' or 'emptying itself of' certain properties that normally belong to divinity."[16] A brief consideration of this popular viewpoint will help us appreciate just how radical the alternative view of terminative assumption really is.[17]

Divestitive accounts of the Word's assumption of a human nature are generally grounded in two basic arguments: (1) that Scripture clearly teaches, in passages such a Philippians 2:7 (from which the term *kenosis* is derived), 2 Corinthians 8:9, and John 17:5, that the divine person experienced genuine dispossession when he assumed a human nature; and (2) that he had to remove (or at least suspend the operation of) certain divine attributes that seem wholly incompatible with the limitations of his human nature, usually including knowledge, power, and

[16] Stephen T. Davis, "The Metaphysics of Kenosis," in *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, ed. Anna Marmodoro and Jonathan Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 118.

[17] For helpful historical and doctrinal overviews of kenoticism, see the following: Thomas R. Thompson, "Nineteenth-Century Kenotic Christology: The Waxing, Waning, and Weighing of a Quest for a Coherent Orthodoxy," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, ed. C. Stephen Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 76–111; Bruce McCormack, "Kenoticism in Modern Christology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Christology*, ed. Francesca Aran Murphy and Troy A. Stefano (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 444–457; John Stewart Lawton, *Conflict in Christology: A Study of British and American Christology, from 1889–1914* (London: SPCK, 1947), 111–164; and Thomas G. Weinandy, OFM Cap., *Does God Change? The Word's Becoming in the Incarnation* (Still River, MA: St. Bede's, 1985), 101–123.

presence. Wolfhart Pannenberg observes that for most kenoticists, "The *vere homo* is achieved only proportionately to subtractions from the *vere deus*."[18] In order to take on and make room for a human nature, ontological or operational space occupied by the Word's divine nature must be cleared away by divestment of attributes or operations. A. M. Fairbairn speaks clearly on the need for divestment of uncreated realities in the person of the Son in order for assumption and Incarnation to occur:

> [A] supreme renunciation was necessary; He had to stoop from the form of God to the form of a servant. This act is described as a *kenosis*, an emptying of Himself. Now, this is precisely the kind of term we should expect to be used if the Incarnation was a reality. It must have involved surrender, humiliation; there could be no real assumption of the nature, the form, and the status of the created Son, if those of the uncreated were in all their integrity retained. These two things, the surrender and the assumption, are equal and coincident; but it is through the former that the latter must be understood.[19]

In other words: no divestment, no assumption. John Macpherson also makes this claim:

> When the Son of God, the Divine Logos, became flesh, He submitted Himself to the limitations of time and space, and surrendered the eternal mode of existence in assuming the temporal mode of existence. This of necessity meant that the limitations of His mode of manifestation gave no room for the exercise of those attributes of God which do not recognise the restrictions of time and space. It is quite distinctly implied in the gospel story, and throughout all the New Testament, that Jesus Christ in His incarnate life was absolutely without the divine attributes of Omnipotence, Omniscience, and Omnipresence.[20]

It is clear from both of these statements that kenoticists do not hold God to be absolutely simple or immutable. For them, he is a being susceptible to loss of actuality. Insomuch as they believe it is the selfsame subject who perdures through this loss, they are positively committed to the belief that God is composed of parts. Classical theism is necessarily incompatible with such a viewpoint.

Even critics of kenoticism, such as John Lawton, find it difficult not to concede some sort of divestment on the Word's part in assuming a human nature. According to Lawton, the Word's

[18] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A Priebe, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 311.
[19] A. M. Fairbairn, *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), 476.
[20] John Macpherson, *Christian Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1898), 300–301.

becoming man was not something that occurred "in addition to an otherwise untrammeled existence, but something which entailed a sacrifice or a temporary giving-up on his part, something which involved a renunciation of things which it was his right to possess."[21] From the perspective of the classical theist, if the Word's divine existence is restrained or impeded in any fashion, even by the assumption of a finite human nature, then God is certainly not pure act, no boundless ocean of being, as John of Damascus would have it.

Hans Urs von Balthasar and Bruce McCormack are more recent advocates for kenotic Christology who undertake to ensure that the *vere deus* is not compromised by the Word's emptying of himself. Balthasar is willing to relinquish strong immutability, but still retains a place for the language of divine impassibility: "On the one hand, God's changelessness must not be defended in such a manner that in the pre-mundane Logos nothing real took place. On the other hand, this real event could not be allowed to degenerate into theopaschism."[22] What is this real event that took place in the pre-mundane Logos when he assumed a human nature? Balthasar answers, the loss of his glorious condition. The "form of God" and "form of a servant" (from Phil 2:6-7) are said to be incompatible conditions. If they were compatible, then "nothing would really have happened in God himself"[23] when the Word became flesh. This *happening* within God is in fact a change the divine person undergoes. As Balthasar notes, "The Subject, doubtless, remains the same . . . but a change in the condition of the Subject is unavoidable."[24] The influence of the assumed nature upon the person of the Word extends to the Father and Spirit as well: "the event of the Incarnation of the second divine Person does not leave the inter-relationship of those Persons unaffected. . . . [They] must also be affected by the Son's humanity."[25] Whatever novelty is involved in the Incarnation is thus not restricted to the created order of being proper to the assumed human nature, but touches God intrinsically.

In words cited from Paul Althaus, Balthasar declares that Christology must be thought out from the vantage point of the cross and that Christ's powerlessness and death anguish "cannot keep unscathed the 'divine nature'." Indeed, Christ's passion is simply the "undiminished divinity of God . . . at work." It is "a law of the divine life itself." The

[21] Lawton, *Conflict in Christology*, 133.
[22] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Pachale: The Mystery of Easter*, trans. Aidan Nichols, O.P. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 25.
[23] Balthasar, *Mysterium Pachale*, 27.
[24] Balthasar, *Mysterium Pachale*, 27.
[25] Balthasar, *Mysterium Pachale*, 30.

consequence of this is that "the old conception of God's immutability breaks into pieces." The new conception, by contrast, imagines kenosis as characteristic of the intra-divine life of God itself. In this way the Word's experience of loss in the assumption of a human nature, while a distinct instance and type of kenosis, is in important respects just a novel extension of the kenotic character of the divine intra-trinitarian relations: "God himself really entered into suffering, and in that very entrance is and remains entirely God."[26]

McCormack proposes a kenotic theory with distinct parallels to Balthasar's, but that is said not to require mutability in God. McCormack achieves this, like Balthasar, by "making kenosis *original* to the being of God so that its concretization in time involves no change in God."[27] If God is by nature self-emptying, or self-divesting, then the self-emptying of the Son by the assumption of flesh entails no essential change in him. McCormack can say that in the kenosis that characterizes the Word's assumption of the form of a servant, "no divestment of anything proper to God is entailed."[28] But this is only because McCormack has made divestment itself proper to God. It is hard not to see this view as deeply ironic, and perhaps nonsensical: God is by nature a self-divesting being and further divestment by the assumption of flesh does not produce any change in the divine person from that which he already is *qua* divine. McCormack calls this divine immutability, but it is, as he says, "no longer controlled by the idea of impassibility."[29]

The kenotic theories, old and new, are deserving of a more extended examination and evaluation than can be provided here.[30] It is enough for our present purposes to observe that they require a real distinction in God between act and passive potency just insomuch as they conceive the Word suffering a loss of some sort of divine actuality, even if only an accidental condition or experience of glory. In order for something new to "happen" in God himself, God must be

[26] Balthasar, *Mysterium Pachale*, 33. For an illuminating discussion of Balthasar's teaching on this score, see Gerard F. O'Hanlon's chapter, "Christ and God's Immutability," in *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 9–49.
[27] McCormack, "Kenoticism in Modern Christology," 454–455.
[28] McCormack, "Kenoticism in Modern Christology," 455.
[29] McCormack, "Kenoticism in Modern Christology," 456. It is beyond the scope of my present concern to offer a thorough critique of the coherence of such a claim, though I do not believe it is intellectually defensible to hold both that divine persons undergo experiences of passion and that these experiences do not amount to mutation. Any reduction of passive potency to act, which is requisite in every instance of passion, is necessarily a change.
[30] For a critical analysis of the roots and rationale of recent kenoticism, with its insistence that divestment and change are intrinsic to the intra-trinitarian life of God, see Bruce D. Marshall, "The Absolute and the Trinity," *Pro Ecclesia*, vol. XXIII, no. 2 (2014): 147–164. See also, Thomas Joseph White, "The Two Natures of Christ in the Crucifixion: The Cross as a Revelation of Divine Love," *Angelicum*, forthcoming.

characterized by privation of being and passive potency. All varieties of kenoticism necessarily proscribe ontologically robust understandings of divine impassibility and immutability.

Augmentative Assumption

Anti-kenoticists have a counterargument almost perfectly matched to the claims of divestment. Rather than *subtract* something from himself in the assumption of our nature, the Word *added* something to himself. It is easy to see the polemical appeal of this riposte. It is neat and to the point—addition, not subtraction. So pervasive has this augmentative alterative to kenoticism become, that it is now widely assumed simply to be the traditional orthodox position. The whole debate between kenoticists and their more traditionally-minded critics is said to come down to whether "in his incarnation the Logos emptied himself of certain properties normally characteristic of divinity or else simply added a new human nature to his already existing divine nature."[31]

Addition appears to have the obvious advantage over subtraction of leaving intact the Son's divine nature. Aloys Grillmeier, in his monumental study of patristic Christology, writes,

> By becoming man, the pre-existent Christ, who exists in a divine mode of being, chooses a mode of existence which is a concealment of his proper being. Historical existence as man can never express what the pre-existent Christ is in himself. Because this kenosis is a "taking", or better an "adding", the first kind of being is not done away with. He who is on an equality with God adds something to his divinity, the form of a servant.[32]

Eleonore Stump explains Thomas Aquinas's teaching in similar terms: "At a certain moment in time, the second person of the Trinity assumed a human nature. That is to say, the second person added to himself another nature, in addition to the divine nature already his own. . . . In Christ's case, the human nature is added to Christ from conception."[33]

This claim is almost ubiquitous in contemporary Reformed and evangelical literature on the topic. A few representative citations must suffice to demonstrate this trend. John Murray denies the Incarnation involves the divine Son in "divestiture and transmutation." Instead, he

[31] Davis, "The Metaphysics of Kenosis," 125.
[32] Aloys Grillmeier, S.J., *Christ in Christian Tradition:* Vol. 1, *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, trans. John Bowden, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 21. Given the extensive primary source documentation found throughout Grillmeier's volume, it is noteworthy that he supplies no reference to an early Church father or council to substantiate this claim about the manner of Christ's kenosis.
[33] Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 408, 423. Stump references *ST* III, q. 2, a. 8 in support of her claim. But Thomas's text makes no mention of addition made to the person of the Word.

states, "the incarnation means addition and conjunction, not subtraction."[34] Millard Erickson claims that Christ "retained the μορφὴ of God, but added to it the form a servant."[35] Robert Letham says the same:

> He remained the Word. What is there, and who is there, after the ἐγένετο [Jn. 1:14], the becoming, is the same as what was there and who was there before. The difference is that there is now an addition. The Word now has a full human nature. In the words of Paul, he who was—and eternally is—"in the form of God" has now added "the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:6-8). He has not ceased to be in the form of God. There is no subtraction, only addition. It is the Word who is the subject of the whole event. . . . He emptied himself not by ceasing to be what he always was but by becoming what he previously was not, not by subtraction but addition.[36]

Rob Lister says that "the person of Christ is the divine Logos, to which a human nature was added."[37] And Stephen Wellum advances this same view. Remarking on Paul's words in Philippians 2:7, he writes, "The text says nothing about Christ emptying his divine attributes. Rather, he empties himself by adding to himself a complete human nature and a willingness to undergo the agony of death for our sake and for our salvation."[38] The Incarnation "was the real addition of a human nature, but it was not the reduction or renunciation of his deity."[39] Moreover, "Scripture teaches, and the church confesses, that Christ's humanity is an *addition* to his deity and not a replacement of it."[40] Wellum insists this is the traditional view of Christian orthodoxy: "Historically, orthodoxy . . . affirmed that the incarnation was an act of *addition*, not subtraction. . . . [T]he classical view insists that the divine Son, in assuming a concrete human nature, became human by adding to himself a human body *and* soul."[41] The Word "added to himself a human nature."[42] Such statements are primarily intended to counter the inherent divine mutablism of the kenotic Christologies. But, as will be discussed below, they seem to trade substantive mutation for accidental mutation, at least implicitly.

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[34] John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray; Volume 2: Select Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 136.
[35] Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh: A Contemporary Incarnational Christology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 555. Erickson calls this "kenosis by addition."
[36] Robert Letham, *Systematic Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 477–478, 538.
[37] Rob Lister, *God is Impassible and Impassioned: Toward a Theology of Divine Emotion* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 265n11.
[38] Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 177.
[39] Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 370
[40] Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 363. (emphasis his)
[41] Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 376, 400. (emphasis his)
[42] Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 411.

Adherents to augmentative assumption assert both biblical and historical support for their claim that the Word added a human nature to himself. But these claims are conspicuously lacking in textual corroboration. The few biblical passages that describe the act of assumption proper do not use the language of addition. The most explicit statement about assumption in the New Testament, Philippians 2:7, speaks of *taking* to, not *adding* to: "taking the form of a bond-servant." The term for "taking" is λαβών (from λαμβάνω). It means "to take hold of" and can have the sense of "to make one's own." It does not properly mean "to add to oneself," though taking to oneself by addition is not, in itself, metaphysically impossible. At all events, *taking to*, or assumption, without any further qualification, is not synonymous with *adding to*.[43] Yet this seems to be the supposition of those who say the Son added to himself a human nature.[44] From the viewpoint of classical theism, this conflation of assumption with addition is a mistake (not merely linguistic, but also conceptual) which carries with it deleterious theological implications.

What then of the alleged support from traditional theology? Given the current consensus, one would think patristic and medieval texts claiming an addition made to the Word would be easy to come by. In reality, such evidence is scarce. And, if perchance one discovers such a text, it may well turn out not to provide the hoped-for support. Taking just one example, consider the few places in St. Augustine's tractates and homilies on John's Gospel where he says the Son added something to himself in the Incarnation. "Man was added to (*accessit*) Him, God not lost to Him."[45] "The man therefore was added to (*accessit*) the God, that He might be man who was God."[46] "Something was added to (*accessit*) Him from time, not anything went from (*decessit*) His eternity."[47] Rendering *accessit* (from *accedo*) as "added to," which is a valid translation of the term, may not exactly correspond to Augustine's intended meaning. The term can also be translated "to join" or "to draw near," in which case Augustine may be saying nothing more than that the divine Son drew a human nature near to himself, or that the Son came near to a human nature, in such a manner that he was both true man while remaining true God; this is just to claim

[43] If the New Testament writers had wanted to explain the Son's assumption of a human nature as an addition, we might have expected them to use a term such as προστίθημι or some close cognate.
[44] Consider, for example, the following explanation of Phil 2:7 from Thomas R. Schreiner: "The emptying consisted not in the removal of Christ's deity but rather in the addition of his humanity. Paul utilizes paradoxical language by describing Christ's emptying in terms of adding." *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 325.
[45] Augustine, *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus*, tract. 8, no. 2.
[46] Augustine, *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus*, tract. 21, no. 7.
[47] Augustine, *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus*, hom. 2, no. 10.

assumption or hypostatic union. The word *accessit* does not in itself require the assumption to be augmentative or additive in character. One would have to know something more about the manner of the assumption, and the nature of that which terminates the assumption, in order to determine whether or not it was assumption by addition. At any rate, if Augustine had unambiguously intended to claim an addition made to the Word, he might simply have deployed the term *addo*; but he does not.

The claims of augmentative assumption are seldom accompanied by metaphysical elaboration. Just what is the manner of this purported addition of a human nature to the Word? Is it substantive or accidental? If substantive, it is difficult to see how one avoids either Nestorianism (the conjunction of two complete substances, which is really an accidental conjunction), on the one hand, or monophysitism (two essential parts coming together to constitute a single nature), on the other. If humanity is added to divinity in order to bring about a compound substance—the two natures functioning as two conjoined essential parts, perhaps similar to the way matter and form are joined to make a composite material substance—then monophysitism appears inevitable. In any case, it does not seem that most adherents to augmentative assumption intend any sort of substantive addition, whatever that might entail. Rather, if anything, they tend to speak of the addition in terms more befitting the acquisition of an accident by a substance.

R. T. Mullins is clear about the human nature being related to the Word after the manner of an accident: "the Son's human nature is accidental to Him."[48] Similarly, Bruce Ware, after affirming the standard augmentative view—"adding human nature to his divine nature"[49]—proceeds to explain this addition by two analogies, both of which suggest the addition of an accident. The first is a brilliantly painted car covered in mud, which, even though its glory is obscured, is still the selfsame brilliant car underneath. The second is a king who puts on the clothes of a beggar, moves into the street, and adopts a beggar's behavior in order to discover what life is like for his unfortunate subjects, all the while possessing all his kingly qualities,

[48] R. T. Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God*, 184. This way of speaking, though, may stem from Mullins's tendency to confuse contingency and accidentality. Not all contingencies are accidents. For example, a dog's act-of-existence (*esse*) may be contingent; but existence is not one of its accidents. And it does not belong to the animal by way of inherence, as all accidents do to those substances that have them.
[49] Bruce A. Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 20.

though hidden and unused for a time.[50] These analogies imply that the addition of a human nature is after the manner of adding a habit, an action, or a place. But to add to oneself a habit, action, or location is to take on an accident, these being three of Aristotle's well-known nine categories of accidents. If augmentative assumption turns out to mean the Word takes on a human nature after the fashion of an accident—and it is difficult to see how it does not mean this—then the fundamental claims of classical theism are rendered incompatible with it. Accidental addition entails the reduction of some passive potency in the substance to actuality. It also means that the substance gains a new determination of being above and beyond the actuality of its substance.[51]

Terminative Assumption

If doctrines like pure actuality and divine simplicity cannot be reconciled to either a divestitive or augmentative view of the Word's assumption of a human nature, then it seems the classical Christian theist is caught on the horns of a dilemma. He must choose between holding to the Incarnation of the Son, on the one hand, or the core claims of traditional theism, on the other. But, as indicated above, this is a false alternative. A third way of understanding assumption is available that coheres with classical theism's core doctrines; namely, terminative assumption. The fundamental claims of this doctrine have already been introduced. In this section the motivation, meaning, and rationale of terminative assumption will be examined in greater detail.

No Addition Made to the Word

In order to appreciate what motivates the doctrine of terminative assumption, the reasons for rejecting augmentative assumption must be grasped. Several classical theologians deny that the Word's assumption of a human nature involves an addition he makes to himself. Thomas Aquinas considers a possible objection to a divine person assuming a created nature in which the problem of addition is raised explicitly:

> It would seem that it is not befitting to a Divine Person to assume a created nature. For a Divine Person signifies something most perfect. Now no addition can be made to what is

[50] See Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus*, 20–23.

[51] Aquinas perceives yet another problem with saying the Word possesses his human nature as an accident: "And in saying that the union of the Word to the soul and human flesh was accidental, one must be saying that the Word after the union was not subsistent in two natures. And this Eutyches said. For nothing subsists in that to which it is accidentally united." *SCG* IV, c. 37.10.

> perfect. Therefore, since to assume is to take to oneself, and consequently what is assumed is added to the one who assumes, it does not seem to be befitting to a Divine Person to assume a created nature.[52]

This concern about divine perfection is one Thomas takes seriously, and he grants the objector's major premise: no addition can be made to that which is already perfect in being. But he does not grant that assumption entails addition. He offers the following reply: "Since the Divine Person is infinite, no addition can be made to it (*non potest ei fieri additio*): Hence Cyril says: 'We do not conceive the mode of conjunction to be according to addition'; just as in the union of man with God, nothing is added to God by the grace of adoption, but what is Divine is united to man; hence, not God but man is perfected."[53] As Thomas says elsewhere, "the person of the Son of God . . . was not in any way augmented or perfected by the assumed human nature."[54] Indeed, "the Word of God from all eternity had complete being (*esse completum*) in hypostasis or person."[55] Any real addition would bring a new perfection of being to the subject and so an infinite being, which as such is unboundedly perfect in being, cannot assume a human nature to itself by way of addition. Infinity and absolute perfection simply cannot be augmented. All augmentation, like all mutation, requires a privation of being in the subject; and there is no privation of being in God.

Similar denials are found in the works of various Lutheran and Reformed scholastics. The Lutheran *Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord* states, "nothing was added to or taken away from his divine nature in its essence or characteristics through the incarnation."[56] The Reformed theologian William Ames claims the hypostatic union of divinity and humanity in the divine person is not by a real addition made unto him: "The union adds nothing to the divine person and nature except a relationship."[57] The New England Congregationalist John Norton agrees with Ames: "To the divine nature is not added anything, only a relation; but to the human

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[52] Aquinas, *ST* III, q. 3, a. 1, obj. 1.
[53] Aquinas, *ST* III, q. 3, a. 1, ad. 1. See also *ST* III, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1 in which Thomas says the Word's divine nature does not receive "any addition or change" from the assumed human nature.
[54] Thomas Aquinas, *De unione Verbi incarnati*, a. 4, in *Thomas Aquinas:* De unione Verbi incarnati, trans. Roger W. Nutt (Leuven: Peeters, 2015). There is no real distinction between person and nature in God, but only a conceptual one. Thus, both person and nature are infinite, as Thomas states in *De unione*, a. 1, ad 15: "It should be said that the person of the Word is infinite, just as the nature of the Word is infinite."
[55] Aquinas, *ST* III, q. 2, a. 6, ad 2.
[56] *The Solid Declaration*, art. 8, no. 49, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).
[57] William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John Dykstra Eusden (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1968), 1.18.17.

nature, there is added a real change."[58] John Owen is also abundantly clear on this point. Though Christ took our nature to be his own, "it was no addition unto him."[59] This is due to God's aseity and plentitude of being: "God alone wants nothing, stands in need of nothing; nothing can be added unto him, seeing he 'giveth unto all life, and breath, and all things,' Acts xvii.25."[60] So absolutely perfect, infinite, and self-sufficient is the divine nature and person of the Son of God, "that nothing can be taken from him, nothing added unto him."[61] The Particular Baptist theologian John Gill is equally emphatic in repudiating any addition made to the divine nature and person in the act of assumption:

> By the incarnation nothing is added to, nor altered in the divine nature and personality of Christ. The human nature adds nothing to either of them; they remain the same they ever were. . . . [T]he human nature has its subsistence in his Person, and has a glory and excellency given it; but that gives nothing at all to the nature and Person of the divine Word and Son of God.[62]

An addition would change the divine person by giving to him a form of being (i.e., new act of some sort) lacking in himself. As no perfection of being is lacking in God, all addition to the divine nature or person is ruled out.

Also underlying this denial of addition to the Word is the commitment of Thomas and his followers to the truth that every effect preexists in its efficient cause. Since God is the efficient cause of all things, the perfection of being of all his creatures already exists in him, albeit in a more eminent way. For this reason no creature can add anything to him. Thomas sets forth the

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[58] John Norton, *The Orthodox Evangelist* (London: John Macok, 1657), 44–45. By "relationship" and "relation" Ames and Norton almost certainly mean a relation of reason or a logical relation. Thomas Aquinas explains why God can only be related to his creatures by a relation of reason, and not by a real relation: "For it must be universally held that no relation of God to creature really exists in God, but such is only a mental relation because God is above every order of creature and is the measure of every creature from which every creature derives, and not conversely. . . . Now in Christ we assign only one supposit and one hypostasis, just as we also assign one person which is an eternal supposit in which there can be no real relation to a creature." *Quod.* 1, q. 2, a. 1, in *Quodlibetal Questions 1 and 2*, trans. Sandra Edwards (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1983). Bernard Lonergan states that, "truths contingently and properly predicated of a divine person add nothing to that divine subsistent relation except a relation of reason." *The Ontological and Psychological Constitution of Christ*, trans. Michael G. Shields (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 111. See also, Aquinas, *ST* I, q. 13, a. 7; III, q. 2, a. 7; Weinandy, *Does God Change?*, 88–98; Herbert McCabe, *God Matters* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987), 45; and Michael J. Dodds, OP, *The One Creator God in Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2020), 93–100.

[59] John Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William Goold, 16 vols. (1850–1853; repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 1:323.

[60] Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, in *Works*, 1:325.

[61] Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, in *Works*, 1:325.

[62] John Gill, *A Body of Divinity* (1769; repr., Grand Rapids: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1971), 382–383.

claim, "All created perfections are in God," and offers two arguments in support.[63] First, any perfection that exists in an effect must also be found in its efficient cause. After all, a thing cannot give what it does not have. In univocal agents these perfections exist "in the same formality," as, for instance, a human who begets another human. In equivocal agents these perfections exist in a more eminent degree, that is, in a more perfect way than they do in the effect. Thomas writes,

> Now it is plain that the effect pre-exists virtually in the efficient cause: and although to pre-exist in the potentiality of a material cause is to pre-exist in a more imperfect way, since matter as such is imperfect, and an agent as such is perfect; still to pre-exist virtually in the efficient cause is to pre-exist not in a more imperfect, but in a more perfect way. Since therefore God is the first effective cause of things, the perfections of all things must pre-exist in God in a more eminent way.[64]

Thomas's second argument is more straightforward: "Since therefore God is subsisting being itself (*ipsum esse subsistens*), nothing of the perfection of being can be wanting to Him. Now all created perfections are included in the perfection of being; for things are perfect, precisely so far as they have being after some fashion. It follows therefore that the perfection of no one thing is wanting to God."[65]

Several Protestant scholastics apply Aquinas's reasoning to the question of the Word's assumption of a human nature and to the hypostatic union, insisting no change or acquisition can be ascribed to the divine person. Stephen Charnock writes,

> Again, there could be no change in this union; for, in a real change, something is acquired which was not possessed before, neither formally nor eminently: but the divinity had from eternity, before the incarnation, all the perfections of the human nature eminently in

[63] Aquinas, *ST* I, q. 4, a. 2.
[64] Aquinas, *ST* I, q. 4, a. 2. Effects only preexist as potentialities in their material causes, as the form of a house might be said to preexist in a pile of lumber. And potentiality is less in being than is actuality. In intelligent agents, which are efficient causes, effects preexist as actual forms, and ideal ones at that. For instance, the form of a house in an architect's mind is more perfect than the same form as it comes to exist concretely in wood or some other material. Thomas says that agents as such are perfect because an agent, *qua* agent, is in act, not potency. And act is what perfects a thing in being, not potency. On the claim that agents are unchanged by their acts of agency, see J. A. McWilliams, S.J., "Action Does Not Change the Agent," in *Philosophical Studies in Honor of the Very Reverend Ignatius Smith, O.P.*, ed. John K. Ryan (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1952), 208–221.
[65] Aquinas, *ST* I, q. 4, a. 2. See also, Joseph Pohle and Arthur Preuss, *Christology: A Dogmatic Treatise on the Incarnation*, 5th ed. (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1925), 123: "For every creatural perfection, no matter how exalted, is virtually and eminently contained in the perfection of God, and consequently cannot add one jot or tittle to it."

> a nobler manner than they are in themselves, and therefore could not be changed by a real union.[66]

John Owen concurs, stating, "All being is essentially in him, and in comparison thereunto all other things are as nothing."[67] The comparative nothing of the human nature—which surely accounts, at least in part, for the *kenotic* character of the Word's Incarnation—cannot make a real addition to the infinite being and agent from whom it derives all that it is; but this does not mean it cannot be taken into a special sort of union with that agent.[68] We turn now to consider the peculiar manner of this assumption of the human nature unto the divine person.

The Word Terminates the Assumed Human Nature

The impossibility of attributing subtraction or addition to an infinite God, together with the firm conviction that the divine Word became flesh, and so is true God and true man, compels theologians to find a way to coherently articulate the Word's assumption of a human nature that satisfies all the data, even if not rendering these mysteries comprehensible to us.[69] Terminative assumption satisfies the requirements of these theological data.

We must first consider what is meant by termination and why it is important for our understanding of the Incarnation. Human nature requires a hypostasis, or person, in order to subsist. It does not subsist of itself.[70] At the risk of oversimplifying this point, we might observe that there never was or will be an actual human nature that is not the human nature *of someone*, or *of whom*. There cannot be a concrete subsisting human nature that is not the nature of anyone

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[66] Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 2 vols. (1853; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 1:340.

[67] Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, in *Works*, 1:324.

[68] In his commentary on Phil 2:7, Aquinas writes, "How beautiful to say that *he emptied himself*, for the empty is opposed to the full! For the divine nature is sufficiently full, because every perfection of goodness is there. . . . But human nature and the soul are not full, but capable of fullness, because it was made as a slate not written upon. Therefore, human nature is empty. Hence he says, *he emptied himself*, because he assumed a human nature." *Super Epistolam ad Philippenes lectura*, c. 2, lect. 2 (no. 57), in *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P., ed. John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012). For a fine study of St. Thomas's understanding of kenosis see Gilles Emery, O.P., "Kenosis, Christ, and the Trinity in Thomas Aquinas," *Nova et Vetera* (English), vol. 17, no. 3 (2019): 839–869.

[69] St. Thomas says, "Indeed, among divine works, this most especially exceeds the reason (*rationem excedit*): for nothing can be thought of which is more marvelous than this divine accomplishment: that the true God, the Son of God, should become true man." *SCG* IV, c. 27.1.

[70] Aquinas makes this observation in *Questiones disputatae de potentia Dei*, q. 9, a. 5, ad 13: "In created things . . . the common nature does not subsist by itself except in the individual." In *On the Power of God*, trans. English Dominican Fathers (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1952). Person is the principle of subsistence in created rational natures.

in particular. Moreover, this *someone-ness* or *who-ness*, to express it rather clumsily, is really different and distinct among all humans. One man's human nature is generically and specifically identical with that of all other humans; but *who* he is as *this man*, and no other, is unique to him as a supposit. Since human nature as such never exists except as the human nature *of someone*, of a hypostasis, and among humans to be a particular someone is not strictly identical with the human nature as such, every human nature requires a distinct hypostasis to establish it and perfect it in being. It is brought to complete realization in being when it is made the nature of a person. Thus, personhood *terminates*, or completes, the being of a rational nature.

Ordinarily, human nature terminates in a created hypostasis, a human person. But it is arguably not a fixed law of human nature that it terminate in a finite, created person; only that it terminate in a rational hypostasis.[71] In every instance of a human nature other than that of Jesus of Nazareth, the nature is terminated in a created person. Aquinas notes this Christological exception, writing, "But the human generation of Christ had as ultimate term union with the divine Person, and not the establishment of a human person or hypostasis."[72] What ensures that *who* Jesus of Nazareth is is none other than the divine Word himself, is that his human nature finds its hypostatic terminus, and thus receives its concrete subsistence in being, in that divine person of the Word. No doubt, this is John of Damascus's meaning when he says the person of the Word "became Person to the flesh." Inversely, this is also what ensures that it is truly the *divine Word* who is the man Christ Jesus.[73]

In assuming a human nature, the Word takes a created nature to himself in such a manner that his own divine person supplies the hypostasis to that nature. Thus, it is the divine Word, and no created person, *who* is the child begotten of the Virgin Mary. *What* is generated in Mary's

[71] Michael Gorman offers a scintillating examination of the question of whether or not human natures as such are person-grounding, devoting special attention to why Christ's humanity does not ground its own supposit. See *Aquinas on the Metaphysics of the Hypostatic Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 73–100.
[72] Aquinas, *SCG* IV, c. 45.3.
[73] For guidance in expressing such Christological mysteries, one could hardly do better than to consult Aquinas's discussion in *ST* III, q. 16. Herbert McCabe argues that since God and creatures are not correlative items within a single universal order of being, it is not necessarily impossible or absurd to say a man is God as it would be, for instance, to say a man is a sheep. There is no natural conflict or incompatibility of species between God and man, as there is between humans and all other creatures, because God simply exists beyond the confines of genus and species. He is not a *kind* or *sort* of anything (see *ST* I, q. 3, a. 5). Note, though, that to say a man is God is not to say humanity is divinity. McCabe writes, "It may be part of the meaning of man that he is not any other creature; it cannot be part of the *meaning* of man that he is not God. God is not one of the items in some universe which have to be excluded if it is just man that you are talking about. God could not be an item in any universe." *God Matters*, pp. 57–58. See also, Lonergan, *The Ontological and Psychological Constitution of Christ*, 103; and Thomas Joseph White, OP, *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 117–118.

womb is created; *who* is generated is uncreated. The human nature of Christ does not pre-exist its assumption by, or union to, the divine Word, but rather is assumed and united to him in its very inception in the Virgin's womb. Dominic Legge writes, "From the first instant of Christ's human life, Christ's humanity has a 'relation' to the divine Word himself, according to the Word's 'pre-existing personal *esse*,' a relation so profound and exalted that there is no merely human personhood in Christ, nor a human hypostasis or supposit. But only the personhood of the Word."[74]

"To assume is to take to oneself."[75] St. Thomas explains that the word "assumption" signifies two things, namely, the principle of the action and the term of it. The principle of assumption is the divine nature, it being the power by which assumption takes place, and thus assumption is principally an act common to all three divine persons. But, as Thomas notes, "the term of the assumption (*terminum assumptionis*) does not belong to the Divine Nature in itself, but by reason of the Person in Whom It is considered to be."[76] The assumption "is terminated in the Person of the Word."[77] And again, "This assumption is terminated in a Person."[78] The Lutheran scholastic Johann Gerhard writes, "The act of assumption proceeds from the divine power common to the three persons; the terminus of the assumption is the hypostasis that belongs to the Son."[79] And the Reformed scholastic Francis Turretin agrees with Aquinas and Gerhard:

> This union can be viewed either in respect of its principle or in respect of its terminus. In the former sense it is attributed to the whole Trinity, by the power of which such union is made. . . . In the latter, it belongs to the Logos alone because it is terminated on him. Although the person of the Logos may well be said to have been incarnate, yet the Trinity itself may not because the incarnation is not terminated on the divine nature absolutely, but on the person of the Logos relatively.[80]

The union of a rational soul and body, which is necessary to constitute any human nature, is of greater dignity in Christ than it is in other humans, "for the very reason," explains St.

[74] Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas*, 108–109.
[75] Aquinas, *Questiones disputatae de potentia Dei*, q. 6, a. 7, ad 5.
[76] Aquinas, *ST* III, q. 3, a. 3.
[77] Aquinas, *ST* III, q. 3, a. 3, ad 2: *terminari ad personam verbi*.
[78] Aquinas, *ST* III, q. 4, a. 4: *quia assumptio ista terminatur ad personam*.
[79] Johann Gerhard, *On Person and Office of Christ*, ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes, trans. Richard J. Dinda (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), c. 7, § 103.
[80] Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, vol. 2 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishers, 1994), top. 13, q. 6, a. 4.

Thomas, "that it does not have its end-point (*terminatur*) in a created *suppositum*, but in the eternal *suppositum* of the Word of God."[81] It receives its completion in being from the divine person to whom it is united. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange states this succinctly: "Assumption is properly an action by which the human nature is drawn into the subsistence of the Son, so that it may subsist by his subsistence. Hence this action not only produces in the human nature of Christ a relation of dependence on the Word, but communicates to it the personality of the Word."[82] This, in short, is what it means to say that the Word became flesh and that he took to himself the form of a servant. He just is the hypostatic terminus of the created human nature he assumes. This is what enables us to say it was none other than God himself, in the person of the Word, who was born of Mary; that a *man* is Creator and is God. As Aquinas remarks, "A man is called Creator and is God because of the union, inasmuch as it is terminated in the Divine hypostasis."[83] While all of this is of inestimable benefit and gain to the assumed nature, it is neither loss nor gain to the assuming agent and term, that is, the Word himself.

A qualification is in order at this point. We must be careful not to think that the Word actualizes and completes the being of the assumed nature the way an informing form brings actuality to some greater whole of which it is a part. The Word is not a "part" of the incarnate Christ.[84] Garrigou-Lagrange unpacks the rationale of this claim:

> The informing form is related to the whole to which it is ordered as the less perfect part, just as the soul is less perfect than the complete man. On the contrary, the terminating perfection is not ordered to the more complete whole, but rather draws the other to Himself. Hence, instead of involving any imperfection, God imparts His perfection to what is assumed.[85]

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[81] Aquinas, *De unione*, a. 2, ad 12.
[82] Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *Christ the Savior: A Commentary on the Third Part of St. Thomas' Theological Summa*, trans. Dom Bede Rose (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1950), 201.
[83] Aquinas, *ST* III, q. 2, a. 7, ad 3: *terminatur ad hypostasim divinam*.
[84] Though Thomas believes there is a way to speak of the Word as a *composite person*, "insomuch as one being subsists in two [natures]," he is clear that this "composition of person … is not on account of parts, but by reason of number." See *ST* III, q. 2, a.4; q. 2, a. 4, ad 2.
[85] Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christ the Savior*, 41. See also, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *The One God: A Commentary on the First Part of St. Thomas' Theological Summa*, trans. Dom Bede Rose (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1946), 194: "In the hypostatic union, the Word is united, indeed, in the entitative order with the humanity of Christ, but not as the informing form, but as the Person terminating the humanity and communicating to it His existence. And thus the Word does not enter into composition with Christ, because the Word is not related to Christ as a part, for the part is always less perfect than the whole." Garrigou-Lagrange insists that this claim is vital in order to avoid conceiving the hypostatic union along pantheistic lines. The Word's relation to his assumed humanity as terminating act avoids confusion of the divine and human in Christ.

The Word is neither a receiving subject of the assumed nature, nor is himself, since he is *actus purus*, received by the assumed nature after the manner of an informing act: "Expressed more briefly, we may say that the Pure Act is unreceived and unreceivable. If He were received in any potency, He would be subjected to participation and limitation; if, however, He were to receive, then He would be in potency for a further act."[86] Terminative assumption enables us to say that the divine person of the Word is a man without thereby demoting him to the inferior status of a part, or to the status of a finite entity by suggesting that he receives a new determination of being.

Finally, it will be helpful if we can illustrate what we mean when we speak of termination as requiring neither subtraction nor addition in the terminus. Garrigou-Lagrange, in denying the Word *receives* anything by assuming a human nature, uses the analogies of a point terminating a line and a seen object terminating one's visual faculty:

> That the Word possesses the human nature in a receptive sense, this I deny; in a terminative sense, this I concede. To possess a form in a receptive sense is to be the subject of this form, just as matter receives its form, or a substance receives accidental forms; but such is not the case when a subject has some form in a personal or terminative sense. The Word, however, possesses the human nature not in a receptive sense, because He is not in passive potency to receive it; but He possesses it personally and terminatively, in so far as He is its intrinsic terminus, intrinsically completing it and terminating it, just as the point terminates the line, or the object seen terminates the visual faculty.[87]

A line-segment is perfected or completed by the points that terminate it. But a point is not in any way altered, neither diminished nor enlarged, by its terminative role since points have no length, thickness, or depth; and they are complete in themselves whether or not any line-segment terminates in them. A point receives nothing but a relation of reason in becoming the terminus of some line-segment, even though it becomes intrinsic to the line-segment itself. Point *A*, for instance, undergoes no change in itself by becoming a terminus for Line-Segment *AB*. The relation to the point is *real* in the line-segment; it is only rational in the point. The point *really* perfects the line-segment in being, but without undergoing any change in itself. The same can be said for visible objects terminating a viewer's vision. The seen object actualizes sight in the

[86] Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christ the Savior*, 42.
[87] Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christ the Savior*, 40–41. See also, Pohle and Preuss, *Christology*, 123.

viewer's visual faculty, moving it from passive potency to completion in act. In the viewer there is a real relation to the visible object seen; but the seen object receives nothing from the visual faculty it actualizes and terminates. In both of these analogies it should be noted that the terminus perfects the being of that which it brings to completion, and even becomes intrinsic to it, but is not further perfected in itself. And so it is also with the divine Word, who terminates his assumed human nature by perfecting it in being and subsistence, even becoming intrinsic to it and subsisting in it, but is himself utterly undiminished and unimproved by the hypostatic union that results.

Conclusion

Based on these observations about the unique character of terminative assumption, it should be clear that to say the Word "became" flesh, as in John 1:14, need not automatically mean the Word himself underwent change in the Incarnation. It is a mistake to conflate becoming and change. This is borne out plainly by Scripture in two non-incarnational "becoming" texts. In Isaiah 63:8 we read of Yahweh, "So He became their Savior." Arguably, God did not become Savior to his people by undergoing a change in himself, but by effecting a change in his people and bringing them to himself. Their new relation to him is the reason for saying he "became." Also, in John 1:3 we read of the Word's creative operation that, "All things came into being through Him." The word translated "came into being," ἐγένετο, is the same word used is in John 1:14 to speak of the Incarnation. But in 1:3 this word cannot mean "change" since creation *ex nihilo* is not a change. That is, it involves no movement from a *terminus a quo* to a *terminus ad quem*—this movement being necessary in any genuine change. This should suffice to show that "become" does not necessarily mean "change."

To become the terminus of a thing only requires newness of being or perfection in that which is terminated, not in that which terminates. It *could* coincide with newness of being in the terminus, but it would not be on account of terminating *as such* that the terminus was further actualized. And in the case of the divine Word, given that he is eternal pure act and *esse completum*, his termination of a human nature cannot coincide with a corresponding change in him. So long as the person of the Word terminates the human nature by assuming it to himself, we are able to meet the requirements of an orthodox doctrine of the Incarnation: the Word became flesh; he who was in the form of God took to himself the form of a servant; Jesus of Nazareth is true God; and God the Son is true man. Because the manner of the Word's

assumption of a human nature is terminative, there is no alteration—neither subtraction, nor addition—required in his divine nature or person in order for him to subsist in our nature. Unless critics can show that terminative assumption is necessarily false, or somehow fails to constitute a *real* Incarnation, the Word's assumption of our nature offers no compelling reason to forsake the strong claims of traditional theism.