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Speaking of the Triune God: Augustine, Aquinas, and the Language of Analogy

John F. Johnson

Introduction

The decision to focus this initial LCMS Professors of Theology Convocation on the doctrine of the Trinity evidences the fundamental fact that confessional Lutheran theology is, at its very heart, trinitarian theology. The Trinity is most intimately related to the Gospel of salvation as a work of God rather than a work of human beings. Apart from Christ, we can know nothing of the grace of God the Father (Matt. 11:27), and apart from the Holy Spirit we cannot come to know Christ (John 16:13).

In order to claim this truth and prevent a lapse into a deficient "Jesus only" theological orientation, one must confess the full scriptural revelation of God's being in character as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For, after all, "this is the true Christian faith, that we worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God without confusing the persons or dividing the divine substance" (Athanasian Creed 3-4). This one God is the God of the Gospel.

However, it is the case that the confession of the Triune God is the confession of an ineffable mystery which goes to the issue of theological language. Harvard theologian Gordon Kaufmann has argued that the fundamental problem in articulating a meaningful doctrine of the trinitarian God in today's world is semantical or linguistic. Is there any reality at all to which the word "God" refers? Is all talk about Him not, in the strict sense, cognitively meaningless?¹ Concurring in Kaufmann's judgment is Langdon Gilkey of the University of Chicago who warns that the

radical questioning of the Foundation's religious affirmation and so of the theological language reflective of it, is now taking place within and not outside of the church. Heretofore in this century, the radical questioning of religious beliefs was a characteristic of the secular world outside the church. . . . In the present crisis, however, one finds not only concerned laymen wondering about the usage and meaning of religious language; even more one encounters theologians questioning whether it is any longer to speak intelligently of God.²

¹Gordon Kaufmann, *God the Problem* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ Press, 1972), 7.

²Langdon Gilkey, *Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-language* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 16.

The Rev. Dr. John F. Johnson is President of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, and Professor of Systematic Theology.

In the orthodox Christian tradition, the nature, work, and words of God were understood as expressible in doctrinal formulations as references or to a reality as objective as that to which ordinary descriptions referred. The metaphysical structure of orthodox theology had justified valid, common sense assertions about God, even assertions so paradoxical as that of the Athanasian Creed, "that we worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance." But Immanuel Kant's banishment of metaphysics to the sphere of the unknowable eventuated in an antimetaphysical theology, which, to be sure, affirmed God's existence but no longer felt confident to describe His specific nature in universally valid statements. The result is that contemporary situation described by Kaufmann and Gilkey that the task of the theologian now days is not to show that the statements, "God is triune," or, "God is gracious" are true, but to show that they are even intelligible.

The purpose of my remarks is to suggest a helpful theological resource for dealing with the contemporary problem of speaking of God at the most fundamental level. It is the employment of the language of analogy advanced by two of the most influential thinkers in the Catholic tradition—St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. I shall contend that their employment of analogy in speaking of the Triune God remains immensely relevant for the Christian confession.

I.

The trinitarian teaching of Augustine is presented in a number of his works, including the *Enchiridion*, *De doctrina Christina*, and in his anti-Arian writings. But in the treatise, *De Trinitate*, Augustine is not so much a controversialist as a systematic theologian. The work has two parts: the first (books 1-7) establishes the doctrine of the Trinity according to the Scriptures and the humans and nature, which illuminate the mystery. No where does he argue the teaching of the Trinity since catholic faith proposes it. He accepts catholic teaching on the coessentiality of the divine three, their distinctness, their fullness of divinity. His effort goes into its intelligibility and he uses analogies as his chief tool in this regard.

Augustine resonates to his theological predecessors who used the light of the sun or the course of a spring through a river to illustrate the mystery of the Trinity. All of nature bears the stamp of its creator according to Augustine. However, since God is Trinity, the impress of the divine nature will be discovered everywhere. The best reflection of the inner life of God is, of course, human creatures. In the introduction to his translation of *De Trinitate*, Edmund Hill writes:

I myself find it helpful to envisage the whole of the *De Trinitate* as an Alex Through the Looking Glass exercise. We are looking-glass creatures living in a looking-glass world, which reflects the real realities of the divine world in a fragmentary manner, and back to front. In the first seven books Augustine has been discussing the language we use to talk about God *out there*, God in His own divine world, and has also investigated God's incursion into our looking-glass world by the divine missions and by revelation. But now he withdraws wholly into the looking-glass world in order to find God in His image, His reflection.³

Since Scripture tells us that we are made in the image and likeness of God, we can know and articulate the Trinity based on our own mind or soul.

He ultimately uses a psychological analysis of the mind's own knowledge and love of itself as an analogue of the Trinity.

Just as you have two somethings, mind and its love, when it loves itself, so you have two somethings, mind and its knowledge, when it knows itself. The mind therefore and its love and knowledge are three somethings, and these three are one thing, and when they are complete they are equal.

But they are in each other too, because the mind loving is in love, and love is in the knowledge of the lover, and knowledge is in the mind knowing. They are each in the other two, because the mind which knows and loves itself is in its love and knowledge, and the love of the mind loving and knowing itself is in the mind and its knowledge, and the knowledge of the mind knowing and loving itself is in the mind and its love, because it loves itself knowing and knows itself loving.

But with these three when mind knows and loves itself the Trinity remains of mind, love, knowledge. Nor are they jumbled up together in any kind of mixture, though they are each one in itself and each whole in their total, whether each in the other two or the other two in each, in any case all in all.⁴

Thus Augustine views mind, knowledge, and love and their interrelationships as an analogy of the coequal consubstantial Trinity.

There is also an external trinity in our sensitive life: the object seen, our outer vision and the attention of our mind. It is evil if, according to this outer trinity, which is concerned with sensible things, we use our imagination to

³John E. Rotelle, ed., *The Trinity*, trans. and intro. by Edmund Hill, 4th edition (Brooklyn: New City, 1991), 5:52.

⁴Rotelle, *The Trinity*, 9.4.

engender another trinity: memory, interior vision and will. For the outer triad is not an image of God, "since it is produced in the soul through the senses of the body." However, it is not totally dissimilar because all created things are good and so reflect the goodness of God. "An image is only an expression of God in the full sense, when no other nature lies between it and God . . . the vision which takes place in the sense is mingled with something spiritual."⁵ According to Augustinian scholar James Mohler, "Augustine prefers the interior threesome: memory, inner vision and will, when these are drawn together and are called thought."⁶

The analogy runs this way. When we look at an object, it is easy to distinguish these three terms: the thing seen, a stone or a flame for instance; the sight of that thing, i.e., the form impressed by the object on the organ of sight; and finally the mind's attention, which keeps the sight fastened on the object as long as the perception lasts. These three things are obviously distinct: the visible, material body taken in itself is one thing; the form it impresses on the sense organ is another; and finally, the mind's attention differs both from the unseeing body we see and the sense organ that sees it because this attention belongs to the mind alone. At the same time there is a kind of generation of vision by the object, for if there were no action exercised on the sense by the object, there would be no vision. Here then we have an example of three terms at once distinct and yet closely linked, so closely in fact that at least two of them are scarcely distinguishable.

Of course, even after the sense object is removed, its image is still present to the memory and the will can turn to it again whenever it likes to enter and contemplate it. Here we have a second trinity, another trace of God in the outer man: the recollection, the inner vision of that recollection, and the will which links them. In the first trinity, two of the three terms belonged to different substances: sensible body is a material substance utterly foreign to the order of mind, vision already belongs to the order of the soul because it presupposes an organ animated by an inner power, and the will belongs entirely to the purely spiritual order, i.e., to mind in the proper sense of the word. In the second trinity, however, the operation is like a cycle completed entirely within the soul itself. The recollection originates outside because it is the recollection of a sensation or of images made up of recollections of sensations, but once the image is acquired, the will has but to focus the attention of the soul upon it to cause knowledge and to have it last as long as it wants it to last.

⁵Rotelle, *The Trinity*, 11.2.

⁶James A. Mohler, *A Speechless Child is the Word of God* (Brooklyn: New City, 1992), 18.

To be sure, Augustine was not deluded concerning the limitations of his various analogies. No image of God that human creatures may carry is identical with Him in the way the Son who is God's image is identical in substance with the Father. The image of the Trinity in us is not such that one could deduce the doctrine of the Trinity from it. Augustine clearly affirms the necessity of faith.

When the final day of life reveals a man, in the midst of this progress and growth, holding steadfast to the faith of the Mediator the holy angels will await him to bring him home to the God whom he has served and by whom he must be perfected; and at the end of the world he will receive an incorruptible body, not for punishment but for glory. For the likeness of God will be perfect in this image only in the perfect vision of God: of which vision the Apostle Paul says: "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face-to-face" (1 Cor 13:12). And again: "But we with unveiled fact beholding the glory of the Lord are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the spirit of the Lord."⁷

II.

In Augustine's *Treatise on the Trinity*, which had an immense influence on the Middle Ages, scholasticism is said to have been born. Employing the language of analogy to speak of God was a significant aspect of the thought of Thomas Aquinas. As Augustine, Thomas understood that God alone is being. Everything else has being; but God's essence is identical to His existence and it is of His essence to exist. This being the case, the Triune God can only be known through analogy.

Although he makes references to talking of God throughout his works, a crucial juncture is reached in the *Summa Theologiae*, Part I, Question XIII, "On Naming God." How is it possible to know or to say of a reality that infinitely surpasses us that it is good, wise, incorporeal, just, etc.? In fact, how is it possible to say anything at all about it? The answer – at least for a long line of Christian theologians – lies in the *via negativa* and the *via affirmativa*, the "way of negation" and the "way of affirmation."

The way of negation endeavors to demonstrate that finally God is beyond comparison of all finite things and that by knowing the finite we can know and speak of what God is not. Approaching God (as Aquinas says we must) indirectly, we can never know the divine substance as it is in itself, but we can at least know what it is not and therefore approximate more and more to a positive, albeit incomplete, knowledge of what it is:

⁷Rotelle, *The Trinity*, 16.17.

Now, in considering the divine substance, we should especially make use of the method of remotion. For, by its immensity, the divine substance surpasses every form that our intellect reaches. Thus we are unable to apprehend it by knowing what it is. Yet we are able to have some knowledge of it by knowing what it is not. Furthermore, we approach nearer to a knowledge of God according as through our intellect we are able to remove more and more things from him.⁸

We can establish, for instance, that God must be infinite (not finite), immutable (not changeable), incorporeal (not material, and simple non-composite). While the way of negation in this fashion advances our knowledge of the divine nature forward by denying to it certain traits found in sensible reality, the way of affirmation allows us to predicate of God other features, such as wisdom and goodness, positively and affirmatively.

This introduces a crucial concept in Thomistic thought—the *analogia entis*, the “analogy of being.” According to Thomas, this is the key for rendering human language about God meaningful. Incidentally, I intentionally refrain from referring to the doctrine of analogy as Thomists commonly do. David Burrell and Norris Clarke, two contemporary Thomistic commentators, have noted that Thomas himself never developed a structural analysis of the logical form of analogy. Others organized his comments into a full-dress theory, although Thomas has become famous for it. As is frequently the case, the philosophical activity of the master became doctrine in the hands of his disciples.

What Thomas actually did was to make us aware of Aristotle’s initial and rough division of expressions and their senses into univocal and equivocal. But there is a set of expressions, Aquinas said, that can be used in a fashion neither univocal nor equivocal, but somewhere in between. These expressions are those we use in positively talking of God, in calling Him by His other names revealed in Scripture—Goodness, Truth, Justice, Wisdom. These expressions he calls “analogous”: “For in analogies the idea is not, as it is in univocals, one and the same; yet is not totally diverse as in equivocals; but the name which is thus used in a multiple sense signifies various proportions to some one thing. . . .”⁹

Now, to ask the appropriate Lutheran question, “What does this mean?” We speak univocally (literally, naming in one way) when we apply a word with the same meaning to different things. For example, when we say, “Thomas is a man, and Bill and Ted are also,” we predicate exactly the same

⁸Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, Q.13.

⁹Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, Q.32.

thing of Bill and Ted as we do of Thomas. The term "man" is used univocally. But when we say, "God is good," or "Jesus loves you," are we intending to predicate "good" and "love" univocally of both God and created beings? Of course not. God cannot be good and loving in exactly the same way that Thomas, Bill, and Ted may be said to be good or loving. The goodness and love we can see in creatures is imperfect. But to talk of the goodness and love of God is to talk of perfect goodness and love. Attributing goodness and love to God is not the same as attributing goodness and love to a human person (that would be univocal or synonymous attribution and it would ultimately amount to idolatry, the blurring of the distinction between the creator and His creation).

Does this therefore mean that all talk about God is equivocal? We speak equivocally (literally, naming in like ways) when we employ a single word but intend totally different meanings. In his discussion of the *via analogiae*, Edward Miller uses the word "pen" as an example. We may employ that word at one time to mean a writing instrument and at another time a place for confining pigs. It is the same word. But do we wish to use equivocation in talking of God? While it may be true that when we say, "God is good," we do not intend that He is good in exactly the same way that we are good, we certainly do not intend either that His goodness is completely unlike and completely unrelated in any possible way to our own. That linguistic path ends in meaninglessness. Think of our people on an evangelism call: "Mr. Smith, the Bible says that God loved you so much that He sent His Son into the world to die for you. But, of course, God's love is so totally unrelated to our human love that we can have no possible idea of what it means." Our erstwhile evangelist may as well have said, "Mr. Smith, the Bible says that God 'bliked' you." If God so transcends our linguistic concepts that they have application to Him at all, then all knowledge of God and human discourse about Him would be impossible. So, although attributing goodness to God is not the same as attributing goodness to a person, neither is the goodness of God totally unrelated to the goodness of a person (that would be an equivocation).

In sum, then, in speaking of God, Thomas Aquinas is

concerned to maintain that we can use words to mean more than they mean to us – that we can use words to "try to mean" what God is like, that we can reach out to God with our words even though they do not circumscribe what He is. The obvious objection to this is that in e.g., God is good, "good" must either mean the same as it means when applied to creatures or something different. If it means that same, then God is reduced to the level of creatures; if it does not mean the same then we cannot know what it means by knowing about creatures, we

should have to understand God Himself; but we do not, hence we do not understand it at all – we only have an illusion of understanding because the word happens to be graphically the same as the “good” we do understand. St. Thomas wishes to break down this either-or.¹⁰

He does so by suggesting that we talk of God neither univocally nor entirely equivocally, but analogically. It is not true, he says, that a word must mean either exactly the same in two different uses or else mean something altogether different. There is the possibility of a word being used proportionately, with related meanings.

At the heart of the Thomistic concept of analogy is the conviction that the world stands in a real relation to God; that the creature is the effect of the Creator and in some way bears His imprint. For Thomas in particular, this conviction is rooted in his famous casual argument for the existence of God as elaborated in the first three of his five ways of proving God’s existence (e.g., some things change; if anything changes there is a least one efficient cause of that change; if there is one efficient cause of change, then there is a first cause of change; the first cause is God). Causality serves as the bond of similarity between God and the world. However, one need not, it seems to me, embrace the classical Thomistic proofs. The point is that the world bears something of the perfection of its cause. Every casual bond sets up at the same time a bond of intrinsic similarity in being.

The most proper name for God is “He Who Is” (Exod. 3:14) because, posits Thomas, it best symbolizes God. “For it does not signify some form,” he writes, “but being itself (*ipsum esse*). Hence, since the being of God is His very essence, it is clear that among other names this one most properly names God; for everything is named according to its essence.”¹¹ The natural world – and we ourselves – may not be wholly like God, but neither is it wholly unlike Him. Creatures, by the very fact that they are, resemble God who is Being Itself. Analogical predication is based on just this resemblance. Thomas believed that we can acquire, through experience of God’s creation, ideas of perfections such as being, goodness, and wisdom. Moreover, we can by analogy affirm these perfections of God:

whatever is said of God and creatures is said according as there is some relation of the creature to God as to its principle and cause, wherein all the perfections of things pre-exist excellently. Now this mode of community is a mean between pure equivocation and simple

¹⁰David Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1979), 115.

¹¹Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, Q.2.

univocation. For in analogies the idea is not, as it is in univocals, one and the same; yet it is not totally diverse as in equivocals; but the name which is thus used in a multiple sense signifies various proportions to some one thing. . . .¹²

For Thomas, then, all our talk of God is at best analogical. We infer His perfections from the “incomplete, fractured” perfections we see in His creation. We can speak of Him analogically only because He has made us and all beings.

If the general scheme of not univocal, not equivocal, but another category of language in talking of God strikes a familiar pose in your minds, you recall more of Francis Pieper than you might have imagined. At the outset of his treatment of the essence and attributes of God in *Christian Dogmatics*, volume one, Pieper states that in God, essence and attributes are not separate. In creatures, existence, essence, and attributes are separate and distinct entities but in God they are all identical. When we speak of the essence of a thing, we commonly mean not its physical but its metaphysical entity – what it is in terms of its being. Then we might proceed to contrast the properties or the attributes of a thing that emanate from its essence. But with God, His essence – what He is – and His attributes or qualities are one and cannot be separated.

Now if that is the case, suggests Pieper, the next question would be how can we talk about God at all. And to that point Pieper addresses himself:

Since finite human reason cannot comprehend the infinite and absolute simplicity, God condescends to our weakness and in His Word divides Himself, as it were, into a number of attributes which our faith can grasp and to which it can cling. Scripture itself teaches us to distinguish between God’s essence and His attributes when it speaks of God’s love (Rom. 5:8), God’s wrath (Rom. 1:18), God’s long-suffering (Rom. 2:4). . . . Because God employs our human language, He has also adopted our way of thinking and accommodate Himself to the laws of human thought processes. . . .¹³

In our imperfect human way of thinking, then, we are led to conceive the divine properties or attributes as forms enveloping the already constituted essence after the manner of qualities. Further, as Pieper notes, we find that in Holy Scripture the same attributes are predicated of both God and human creatures. This, he acknowledges, seems to involve us in somewhat of a

¹²Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, Q.13.

¹³Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951-1953), 1:428.

difficulty, since God and His attributes are infinite, while human attributes are finite. In what manner can the same properties be ascribed both to God and to His creatures, he asks. His response sounds familiar:

Not univocally, in the identical sense, as though the term and the matter apply to God and the creature in the same manner and degree; not equivocally, as though the terms when applied to God and to the creatures had no more in common than the sound, but in such case have an entirely different meaning; but analogically, similarly, because both being and attributes belong to God and the creatures, though not in the same manner or degree.¹⁴

Interestingly, Pieper never refers to Thomas Aquinas in all of this treatment of "God-talk." He does, however, explicitly cite Augustine as representing the classical concept of analogy. One can only surmise the reason for such selective "foot-noting" – it must be that Pieper too shared that insidious disease which has always afflicted our tradition of trying to make a Lutheran out of Augustine and a pagan of Aquinas.

In point of fact, Pieper's approach is in line with the classical Thomistic perspective. We speak of the divine nature in a plurality of ways because we necessarily approach God through the world of nature in which the being of God is, as it were, refracted and seen under different and varying lights; something of the divine being is reflected in the goodness that human creatures know and of which we speak, in the wisdom that we know and of which we speak, etc. If we were able to know God as He is in Himself, then we would, of course, see that the divine attributes converge into one, identical with the simple and divine nature that is the essence of God.

Finally, in terms of the Thomistic view of analogical language, it must be emphasized that he does not mean likeness, pure and simple. For Thomas, our language about God is not metaphorical. And precisely here, I think, the Thomistic elaboration is much stronger than Pieper's. I am quite sure that Pieper really understood the difference between analogy and metaphor. As an example of analogy He uses Isa. 49:15 ("Can a woman forget her suckling child . . . yet will I not forget thee"). For Thomas, analogy is more than a conception of language; it is a metaphysical doctrine.

He does not want to say simply that our language about God is metaphorical because he wants to distinguish between two different kinds of things that we say about God; between statements like "The Lord is my rock and my refuge" and statements like "God is good." The former is quite

¹⁴Pieper, *Dogmatics*, I:431.

compatible with its denial – “of course the Lord is not a rock,” whereas the latter is not. We would not say “God is not good,” though we are quite likely to say “God is good, but not in the way that we are.” It is a significant point about metaphor that while we can easily say “God is not really a rock” we cannot so safely say “The Lord is not a rock in the way that Gibraltar is.” There is, after all, only one way of being a rock, but more importantly, being a rock in the way that Gibraltar is what the poet has in mind. Unless we think of God as being just like Gibraltar – although of course not really being a rock – we betray the poet’s meaning. However, in the case of “good,” since there are in any case many ways of being good among creatures, there is nothing incongruous in saying “He is good, though not in our creaturely way.” For Thomas, what makes it possible to be confident that the word “good” is in some meaning applicable to Him is that He is the cause of the goodness of creatures. In this way, creatures exhibit relatively and proportionately the perfections that exist infinitely in God. It should be noted, however, that what is epistemologically prior is metaphysically posterior. The term “good” as we know it applies first to creatures and second to God, whereas in fact goodness exists primarily in God and only derivatively or secondarily in creatures. No metaphor is the best possible metaphor. One can always say, “I don’t really mean that.” But some things we may say of God even though they are imperfect cannot be improved on by denying them; their imperfection lies in our human understanding of what we are trying to mean.

My proffering the Thomistic view of analogy as a viable resource for dealing with the contemporary problem of “God-talk” is not without the realization that there are substantial difficulties with his position. One of the more strident contemporary critics of the Thomistic perspective is Kai Nielsen, a widely published humanist philosopher. At the heart of every analogous concept, he insists, there must be a “common core of meaning,” which in turn necessarily implies that this core of meaning must be univocal. “Common core of meaning and univocal” are co-extensive and interchangeable terms according to Nielsen. This objection, incidentally, is exactly the same as that brought against Thomistic analogy by Duns Scotus and William of Ockham shortly after the time of Thomas himself. Thomists, for the most part, admit that in some sense there must be some common core of meaning in all analogous predications of the same term; otherwise, it could not function as one term and concept. But they would maintain that this common core of meaning is not therefore univocal, it remains analogous, similar-in-difference, or diversely similar. Properly analogous terms are those that are intended to express a proportionate intrinsic similarity. Such intrinsic analogies are found in terms like “love,” “unity,” “being,” “knowledge.” We use analogous concepts in our language life to fit occasions wherein we cannot help but use them. This occurs when we notice some basic similarity-

in-difference or proportional similarity across a range of different kinds of subjects, such that the similarity we notice does not occur in the same qualitative way in each case. The similarity is not some one thing or characteristic that remains exactly the same in all cases, as it would be with univocity. It is rather that the similar property itself is more or less profoundly and intrinsically modified in a qualitatively different way each time. Still, Nielsen's contention that all analogy must be rooted in univocity constitutes a perennial objection to the Thomistic perspective. And, of course, there are others beyond the purposes of my point that Thomistic analogy is not without its problems — problems both philosophical and theological.

Even a Thomist such as David Burrell admits that "analogy" is a rather slippery term. In his excellent work *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, he writes, "Indeed, for Aquinas it seems to refer to any manner of establishing a notion too pervasive to be defined or too fundamental or exalted to be known through experience. More often than not, this is accomplished via examples designed to point up enough relevant aspects of these notions to use them responsibly."¹⁵

Aquinas worked in the context of belief and breathed the very air of faith. In that atmosphere, many of the problems to be raised by Hume and others (who breathed rather different air) simply did not occur. But above all, I think we should remember another dimension of the Thomistic atmosphere Burrell neglected to mention. Thomas worked in the context of the word. In the Holy Scriptures, Thomas said, "the Word of the eternal Father, comprehending everything by His own immensity, has willed to become little through the assumption of our littleness, yet without resigning His majesty, in order that he may recall man who had been laid low through sin, to the height of His divine glory."¹⁶ Theology receives its principles immediately from God through the divine revelation given to the prophets and the apostles. When the act of *intelligere* is directed to the human words of Scripture it penetrates beneath them to read them from their inner aspect and so through the senses it reaches what the author intended the words to signify, the *intellectus literalis*, which does impart true knowledge of God. Because it is our nature to learn intelligible truths through sensible objects, God has provided revelation of Himself according to the capacity of our nature and has put forward in the Scriptures truths about Himself through analogical language. Thomas had no real difficulty concerning either the sense or the reference of talk of God. The

¹⁵David Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ Press, 1973), 89.

¹⁶*Compendium Theologiae*, I.

sense of God-talk is analogical; its reference is to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the creator and redeemer of all there is.

Conclusion

Nothing strains the resources available to human language so completely as our attempts to speak of the Triune God. I have noted how both Augustine and Thomas Aquinas identifies these resources through the employment of analogies. In my estimation, analogical language does illuminate the meaning of religious discourse. Although it may not allow us to say anything more or anything less about God than we did before, it does clarify *what* we are saying – and are not saying. This is no small accomplishment. Since the publication of A. J. Ayer's *Language, Truth, and Logic*, the status of religious language and the very conceptual possibility of religious knowledge have become central issues in philosophical theology. The entire task of philosophy in the twentieth century was to clarify what we are saying and what we are not. For much of the philosophical world statements like the credal confession, "but the whole three persons are coeternal together and coequal, so that in all things, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshiped" are not just irrelevant; they are without meaning, literally nonsensical. They hold no more cognitive significance than "creech creech." The language of analogy, as advanced by Augustine and Thomas, has the potential to give meaning to our language about God. Hopefully, through these and other means, theological language may yet be rescued from the contemporary attempt to discard theology entirely.