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## ANALOGY AS HIGHER-ORDER METAPHOR IN AQUINAS

Robert Masson

At a Thomas Instituut conference in 2000, Otto-Hermann Pesch suggested somewhat enigmatically that the sharp distinction in scholastic Thomism between analogy and metaphor can no longer be maintained since on closer examination analogous statements are in effect instances of a kind of 'higher-order metaphor'.<sup>1</sup> Pesch intended this qualification primarily to draw attention to the agnostic or negative aspect of analogous speech.<sup>2</sup> It is evident from Herwi Rikhof's portrait of 'Thomas at Utrecht',<sup>3</sup> that this emphasis on the negative dimension did not introduce anything controversial or novel at the Instituut. Pesch's suggestion that analogy is a kind of higher-order metaphor is nevertheless enigmatic because the essay does not explain in any detail, beyond drawing attention to the negative moment, what he means by this notion or how it avoids a more radical metaphorical theology that would deny the possibility of saying anything properly of God. He readily acknowledges that Aquinas himself thought it possible. Moreover, Pesch's suggestion is controversial, or at least potentially so at the Instituut, because while Rikhof, the current director, portrays Thomas's negative theology as 'a radical one',<sup>4</sup> he also has argued that on Aquinas's 'account of metaphor it is impossible [...] to talk about analogy as a kind of metaphor

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<sup>1</sup> Otto-Hermann Pesch, 'Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology', in *Contemplating Aquinas: On the Varieties of Interpretation*, ed. by Fergus Kerr (London: SCM, 2003), pp. 185-216, an amended translation by Colin Berry that appeared with the same title earlier in *Aquinas As Authority: A Collection of Studies Presented at the Second Conference of the Thomas Instituut te Utrecht, December 14-16, 2000*, ed. by Paul van Geest, et. al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), pp. 123-63. Quotes from the German are from a copy of Dr. Pesch's typed manuscript.

<sup>2</sup> Confirmed to me in a letter (March 22, 2005) that he sent along with the original German version of the text: 'Aus meinen eigenen Untersuchungen sehen Sie bald, daß auch ich die Analogie für eine Metapher höherer Ordnung halte und immer wieder auf das "agnostische Moment" der analogen Rede hinweise — im Unterschied zum Schulthomismus, der vor allem das *secundum quid idem* betont.'

<sup>3</sup> Herwi M. Rikhof, 'Thomas at Utrecht', in Kerr, *Contemplating Aquinas*, pp. 105-136.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

and metaphor as a kind of analogy.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, on Rikhof's own account, that takes into consideration the insights of contemporary theories of metaphor, 'a completely metaphorical theological language, is not a coherent conception.'<sup>6</sup>

While an undifferentiated identification of metaphor and analogy ultimately creates more problems than it solves, a distinction something like the notion of higher-order metaphor is necessary to explain how religious and theological language work, at least for Christians and in Thomas's theology. Following David Burrell, a distinction needs to be made between Aquinas's use and his accounts of metaphor and analogy. Describing analogous predication as a kind of higher-order metaphor promises a way to overcome inherent limitations in Thomas's account as well as in Rikhof's revised theory of metaphor. At the same time, it better explains and validates how Thomas actually uses metaphor and analogy. While Professor Pesch's appeal to the notion of higher-order metaphor is insufficient, Mary Gerhart and Allan Russell's notion of 'metaphoric process' provides a theoretical framework for elaborating this suggestion and its warrants.<sup>7</sup> In fact, a number of central insights and positions in Rikhof's discussion of metaphor anticipate and support aspects of Gerhart and Russell's theory and my application of it to explain the logic of analogy.<sup>8</sup> So my contention in what follows is this: the suggestion that analogy is a kind of higher-order metaphor avoids Aquinas's strictures about the difference between metaphor and analogy, and Rikhof's critique of metaphorical theology. Furthermore, the proposal offers a way of elucidating how Aquinas's use of analogy continues to serve as a resource for recognizing and interpreting God's presence in the world.

## 1. The insufficiency of Pesch's proposal

Pesch's appeal to analogy as higher-order metaphor without further explanation is insufficient because it begs the question. Metaphor in

<sup>5</sup> Herwi Rikhof, *The Concept of Church: A Methodological Inquiry into the Use of Metaphors in Ecclesiology* (Sheed and Ward: London, 1981), p. 170.

<sup>6</sup> Rikhof, *The Concept of Church*, p. 190.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Gerhart and Allan Melvin Russell, *Metaphoric Process: The Creation of Scientific and Religious Understanding* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University, 1984); 'The Cognitive Effect of Metaphor', *Listening* 25 (1990), pp. 114-126; *New Maps for Old: Explorations in Science and Religion* (New York: Continuum, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> See also my article 'The Force of Analogy', *Anglican Theological Review* 87/3 (2005), pp. 471-486.

Aquinas, as in ordinary parlance, signifies figurative or improper predication, for example when the believer says: 'God is my rock'. But Aquinas holds that when believers say 'God is love', 'wise', 'simple', or 'life', or that 'God's essence is "to be"' they are not speaking just figuratively but are saying something proper of God. Pesch clearly affirms that this is the case when such names are predicated of God: 'And I know for sure that in doing so, I am not making just a negative or a relative statement, let alone merely a metaphorical one, but am meeting and denoting God *positively in himself (substantialiter)*'.<sup>9</sup> At the same time Pesch appropriately emphasizes that this does not mean for Aquinas that creaturely concepts grasp God. He acknowledges the truth of Karl Barth's criticism:

[...] the 'similarity' between God and created beings, anchored in the analogous name [...], is not established by a sort of comparison between the patterns of behaviour of God and created beings resulting in a proportionate correspondence [...]. This is for the simple reason that the two poles on which the comparison should rest do not fall within our empirical knowledge, but in this case only one does so, namely the created life of experience.<sup>10</sup>

So it is faith — not some correspondence that our minds can observe or grasp between worldly reality and God — that entitles us to affirm some sort of similarity, however restricted, between the created and God. Pesch adds the qualification that this *analogia fidei* in Aquinas's thought is based on belief in creation, not founded on Christology in the way it is for Barth. But Pesch nevertheless insists that while faith leads Aquinas to affirm an analogy between the created and Creator that justifies proper predicates for God, such analogous terms on Thomas's account are not able to directly 'represent' or 'grasp' God. Quite the contrary, names predicated of God such as 'life' are

so different in God from what life in created beings is able to 'represent' that I have basically grasped nothing of God's life other than that it is actually life. The dissimilarity is greater than the similarity because the intellect

<sup>9</sup> Pesch, 'Thomas Aquinas', p. 211. 'Und ich weiß gewiß, daß ich damit weder nur eine negative, noch nur eine relative, und schon gar nicht nur eine metaphorische Aussage mache, sondern Gott *positiv in sich selbst (substantialiter)* treffe und bezeichne.' The English versions misleadingly translate 'bezeichnen' here and in a number of other places as 'describe' which is an inappropriate way to talk about an analogous predication because of the distinction that Thomas makes and to which Pesch appeals in the previous paragraph, between the 'that which is signified by the name' (*id quod significant nomen*) and the human mode of its signification (*modus significandi*). If Pesch intended 'describe' he would more likely have said 'beschreibe'.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

of a created being cannot, at the critical point, overcome the ever greater dissimilarity of our names of God from the reality of God.<sup>11</sup>

Pesch concludes that 'St Thomas's thinking by analogy thus entails a clear "agnostic element"', and this leads to Pesch's assertion that a sharp distinction between analogy and metaphor can no longer be maintained.<sup>12</sup>

But then we are left with the questions: How does the notion of a higher-order metaphor preserve and explain whatever of the 'distinction' remains? What kind of distinction does it envision? What is the difference between metaphors and higher-order metaphor? Pesch does not explain how it is possible to justify speaking of analogy as a kind of higher-order metaphor, when Thomas himself so clearly distinguished between metaphor and analogy. Moreover, while Pesch's account appears congruent by and large with the positions of contemporary scholars who hold that meaning in analogous predication is a function of judgment rather than of the concepts as such, his conclusion could be taken as indicating the contrary.<sup>13</sup> Does this suggestion that analogy is a kind of higher-order metaphor implicitly take concepts themselves rather than their use and the act of judgment as key to understanding and interpreting such predication? Is the suggestion captive to the assumption that the issue of analogy is a question about how certain concepts can signify God? Does it presuppose, or imply, that analogous predication after all entails concepts that purport to grasp or describe God? I do not believe that this is Pesch's intent although the English translation sometimes gives that impression.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. Metaphoric process

To quickly bring into focus the key feature of 'metaphoric process' most relevant to these questions and to indicate its potential for exploring Pesch's suggestion, some crucial terminological clarifications are necessary. Gerhart is a theologian and Russell a physicist. Their primary

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, the classic articulation of this argument in Henri Bouillard, *The Knowledge of God* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968) and more recently Gregory P. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God. Thomas Aquinas on the Interplay of Positive and Negative Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> This is particularly the case with the mistranslation of 'bezeichnen', cited above in note 7.

focus is the relation between religion and science. When they talk of analogy, they are not referring to the highly differentiated conception of Thomistic metaphysics. What they have in mind is the affirmation of an identity between some feature common to two different realities that extends or expands our knowledge of one or the other, or both of them. This is the broad sense of analogy as people ordinarily use the term to indicate some sort of similarity. For example, one can affirm an analogy between the operations of the human mind and computers. This could lead either to a better grasp of how the mind works, to the development of more sophisticated software, or to an enriched understanding of both the mind and computers.

Sometimes, only one of the analogues in question will be known. In that case, a known feature of one reality tells us something about another which is unknown. This is what Gerhart and Russell understand to be the defining characteristic of simile. They refer to an example cited by Max Black: 'The chairman plowed through the discussion.' This text instructs the reader who did 'not know how the discussion proceeded, and who now, on the comparative basis of the simile, does know.'<sup>15</sup> The example is significant because it indicates a further distinction: the importance of reception. Whether Black's proposition functions as an analogy or simile depends on the knowledge state of the persons involved. A person who was present at the chairman's discussion would be in a position to agree with Black's analogy or, as we say, would 'get it'. In that case, the predication would be one that enables the acquisition of a deeper insight into the event. It would not be a case of simile that communicates new information about something unknown. So the determination of whether the predication is a simile or analogy is a function of use and performance. Moreover the performance can be meaningful and yet not have the same meaning or truth for different speakers and hearers.

With these definitions a great many of the comparisons people ordinarily think of as metaphors are in Gerhart and Russell's theory either analogies or similes. So their definitions of analogy and metaphor do not correspond directly to Aquinas's differentiation between proper and improper predication. Moreover, when they speak of 'metaphoric process' they have a further distinction in mind that involves what they speak of as a third kind of analogy. To explain this third kind of analogy it is

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<sup>15</sup> Gerhart and Russell, 'The Cognitive Effect of Metaphor', p. 116. Quoting Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1962), p. 13.

crucial that we situate it in the epistemological context they envision. They conceive inquiries about the world and ourselves taking place in 'cognitive spaces' or 'worlds of meanings.' These worlds of meanings are made up of networks of interrelated concepts, or 'fields of meanings'. The sciences, religion, and the common sense of an epoch or culture are examples. Notions within our worlds of meanings are not static 'quiddities' but are dynamically related to one another so that changes in one meaning can effect other meanings.

Metaphoric process is an analogy that forces an identity between two meanings that given normal understandings is unwarranted with the consequence that the broader field of meanings is changed in some significant way. The key feature here is the change in the field of meanings. This is what distinguishes the merely 'metaphorical' use of language from the 'metaphoric' use. Gerhart and Russell cite, for example in science, Copernicus's insistence that the sun is the center of the universe, and Newton's insistence that the mechanical laws of the heavens are identical with the earth's. Copernicus's affirmation that the sun is the center conflicted with the standard account at the time that the earth is the center. Likewise, Newton's affirmation that the laws of heaven and the laws of the earth are the same forced an analogy that contradicted the meanings taken for granted in the science of the day. But the effect of both of these forced, or metaphoric, affirmations, despite their apparent unreasonableness, was to open up possibilities for understanding that had not been available before. These were conceptual moves that changed fundamental notions within physics - and indeed changed how we understand the world.

What most distinguishes such uncalled-for analogies is the disruptive effect on the fields of meanings associated with them. The force of these metaphoric analogies does not simply add new information to the world of physics and astronomy, expanding knowledge the way the discovery of a new planet or a new mechanical law might. Nor does it clarify the given world of meanings, the way affirming an apt analogy between something known and something unknown might. In Newton's day, for example, Galileo's understanding of the heavens and Kepler's understanding of mechanics were already known. The uncalled-for analogies had a more tectonic effect because they forced a reframing in the until-then accepted fields of meanings. The result was reconfigured fields of meanings that constituted a better understanding of reality. In that sense, the result was a new world of meanings. Moreover, the shifts in the fields of meanings made available a new logic and understanding of what is



reasonable. Conceptual moves are possible in Einstein's world that were inconceivable in Newton's, and moves in Newton's world would not have made sense in Galileo's. Each metaphoric act has the potential to lay the groundwork for otherwise unthinkable later moves.

Since on this understanding only metaphors or analogies that force a change in our fields of meanings involve this metaphoric process, it is necessary to make a distinction between the use of language normally recognized as metaphorical and the particular uses that can be described as metaphoric. As noted already, not every metaphor is metaphoric. And not every metaphoric predication is a metaphor. Analogies can be metaphoric too. Moreover, a metaphoric conceptual move need not have the form of a predication 'x is y', and it may not be an explicit or conscious move. So Gerhart and Russell are not proposing a comprehensive theory to account for either metaphor or analogy. Their more restricted focus is to explain the generation of new knowledge (as distinct from additive knowledge) particularly in the sciences and religion. This also provides a crucial key for explaining what is most important in the religious and theological use of metaphor and analogy. It bears emphasizing that instances of significant metaphoric process are not common everyday events. They are not a trope or products of some kind of twelve step epistemological technique.

### 3. Illustrations from Aquinas

A reframing of the fields of meanings is the key characteristic of metaphoric process. We can draw on David Burrell's work to briefly illustrate three instances of this sort of conceptual move in Aquinas: his affirmation that God is simple, his assertion that God's essence is *esse*, and his attribution of perfection terms to God.<sup>16</sup> In the first case Aquinas employs the kind of proportions we find in all beings (form/matter, substance/act/genus/species, and so on) to identify God, but to identify God as transcending such composition. Even though the term 'simplicity' is a substantive and thus sounds like a quality or description of God, Aquinas uses the term as shorthand for denying that any substantives — at least as we know them — can apply properly. Affirming that God is simple does not require that our concept of created simplicity can

<sup>16</sup> David Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1979).



somehow be stretched to grasp God. Rather the affirmation that God is simple effects and presupposes a change in the underlying logic or grammar of ordinary discourse. To affirm God as simple is to use the grammatical form of a substantive predication to affirm that God transcends such predication. Because this twist of language and thought reconfigures the grammar of our assertion, it can properly be affirmed of God. So this is not a figurative assertion. It is not metaphor. Rather it is a 'speech act', in the sense of ordinary language philosophy, that reconfigures the available field of meanings thus creating new conceptual and logical space that enables otherwise unavailable possibilities for understanding and describing reality.<sup>17</sup>

What here Thomists call analogy in a technical sense, I am arguing is an instance of a metaphoric or forced analogy. What this theory adds to the Thomistic account is a description of how this conceptual move - this particular kind of predication in Aquinas — operates at a second order level to reconfigure our fields of meanings. In this sense, but only in this sense, it is appropriate to describe analogy as a kind of higher-order metaphor. This does not confuse analogical assertions that properly are predicated of God with figurative (or metaphorical) assertions that are improperly predicated, such as 'God is my rock'. 'God is simple' is metaphoric or a kind of higher-order metaphor because it effects a fundamental shift in the logic of predication and in use of the concept simplicity. It is an extended use of language but not a figurative or empty use. This affirms the limits of created concepts (namely the agnostic aspect that God's simplicity as such cannot be grasped in any human idea) without denying the possibility of saying something positively of God. It does not deny the warrant for using 'simple' of God as proper in this particular and restricted way. Indeed it offers a fuller explanation of the grammatical and epistemological mechanisms involved in such theological usage.

This also explains why and how reception can play such an important role in the religious and theological use of language. A person who does not recognize the shifts in the fields of meanings that Aquinas effects with such usage, or a person who does not accept the theological and philosophical warrants that are entailed in Thomas's use, will not 'get' his conceptual move. It is appropriate to speak here of 'getting'

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<sup>17</sup> Terrence Tilley provides a very accessible overview of speech act theory and illustrations of its usefulness for theological analysis in *Evils of Theodicy* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1991).

Aquinas's conceptual move because it is not simply a case of whether the person understands or misunderstands the predication 'God is simple'. A person with other grammatical and theological presuppositions could legitimately understand the sentence differently than St. Thomas. If that is the case, then whether the person accepts Thomas's use or rejects it, the person would be accepting or rejecting something other than what St. Thomas means. Arguments for or against Thomas's theological warrants and philosophical presuppositions would be beside the point if the shifts in his fields of meanings and logic are not grasped.

The affirmation that the nature of God is *esse* offers a second illustration. The logical act of assertion is different from predication. When we say that something is, that it exists, we are not describing any particular feature of the reality. In affirming that God's essence is 'to be', Aquinas is not giving us a description of God in the ordinary sense of things, because 'to be' is not a thing or predicate in the ordinary sense. Saying that God's nature is 'to be' does not give us a definition or grasp of God's nature. Although what 'to be' signifies cannot be grasped directly in a concept, the grammatical analogy between asserting things 'to be' and affirming predicates of things, enables Aquinas to stretch predication and to use substantives to talk of a thing's 'being' or of God's 'to be'. In employing this structural analogy, however, Aquinas does not reduce an existential assertion to a predicative one. Rather, he extends language — he forces an identity between the logic of asserting and the logic of predicating — to display and speak of what is beyond language's grasp. So, this affirmation is properly predicated of God because of the way it effects a change in our fields of meanings, which again could fittingly be described as a kind of higher-order metaphor without implying that it is a merely a figurative predication. Note that this forced grammatical analogy is not explicit. Moreover, one could get Aquinas's point without being conscious of the grammatical move that it effects and presupposes.

The third illustration is the one to which Pesch primarily appeals in his essay: Aquinas's attribution of perfections such as 'living' to God. Here Aquinas exploits the logical peculiarity that perfection terms have a range of meanings that point beyond any particular instances that we can know. For example, we can use 'living', 'good', or 'wise' to express many ways of being alive, good, or wise without thereby exhausting the range of these terms to encompass still other ways of living, goodness, or wisdom not yet even known or envisioned. We can thus distinguish the thing signified (*res significata*), wisdom for example, from the manner in which it

was signified as a particular instantiation (*modus significandi*). Terms such as these 'have a capacity to function quite literally in diverse contexts.'<sup>18</sup> The range of meaning is not circumscribed by some underlying univocal sense. They are open to a range of meanings beyond those specified in the dictionary. Burrell maintains that

the single recurring fact is that we can always find a more comprehensive use of the term. A recursive formula displays the analogous structure of these expressions, namely, the wise man is one who realizes he is not wise. The formula has an inbuilt ratchet-effect. The more accomplished the wise man is, the wiser he becomes in realizing that his accomplishments do not constitute wisdom.<sup>19</sup>

Reflection on this ratcheting-effect of such words intimates 'a literal sense which transcends our actual employment.'<sup>20</sup> And if God is the source of all perfection, then it follows that such terms apply primarily to God and only secondarily and analogously to us. We know such perfections only in the limited mode of signification available to our creaturely experience. We know instantiations of wisdom, not wisdom as such. We have an analogous rather than univocal grasp of what wisdom is. 'The obvious implication,' Burrell argues, 'is that we are never in a position to employ these terms literally (as McCabe aptly translates *proprie*).'<sup>21</sup> What wisdom is literally, on Burrell's understanding of Aquinas, is in this sense beyond our grasp. However paradoxical this sounds, it is not equivocating or speaking only figuratively. Our experience of the range of meaning for such terms and what Burrell describes as the ratcheting-effect of their grammar, gives us an intimation of their literal or primary sense even though this falls short of an intuition, direct grasp, or underlying univocal description. So although we affirm such perfections of God, we do so without knowing how they signify God. This twist of grammar in perfection terms and counterfactual assertion that they properly apply to God and only secondarily to creaturely existence fits Gerhart and Russell's description of a metaphoric move and so again illustrates why one might speak of analogy in Aquinas as involving a kind of higher-order metaphor.

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<sup>18</sup> Burrell, *Aquinas*, p. 64.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

#### 4. Rikhof's theory of metaphor

Rikhof's theory of metaphor in *The Concept of Church* provides a clarifying contrast with the suggestion that the most significant instances of analogical use in Aquinas are metaphoric. In that study a somewhat different problem with religious and theological language is at issue: how to resolve the conflicting appeals to metaphor in the ecclesiology of *Lumen Gentium* and in its interpretations among theologians. Rikhof sets out an extensive review and critique of the leading theories of metaphor and metaphorical theology in an effort to find a comprehensive account capable of sorting out the theological and methodological problems with such appeals. He concludes that while 'metaphors should play a central role in theology' a non-metaphorical or properly conceptual theological language is required to provide the 'interpretation key' and 'coherence criterion' necessary for a reasoned interpretation of metaphorical language.<sup>22</sup> Consequently he urges the need to distinguish between the level of religious language in which metaphorical use plays the central role, and the distinctively conceptual discourse of theology in which analogical use has the key role.<sup>23</sup> He proposes that theology be conceived, therefore, as a form of second order 'metaphor paraphrase' on first order religious language. Metaphors are a particular kind of speech act: a predication in which 'the rules governing sets of concepts or conceptual realms involved are relaxed for this occasion in function of a proposed redescription of reality.'<sup>24</sup> His review of the conflicting appeals to metaphors for the church in *Lumen Gentium* and among theologians makes a compelling case for the need of such further appeal to non-figurative conceptions to interpret when and how far the metaphorical relaxation of rules applies and for adjudicating among the conflicts that result from discordant metaphorical claims.

His argument, which was published three years before Gerhart and Russell's *Metaphoric Process*, anticipates and supports some of their key insights and my application of these to the understanding of analogy's role in theology. Noteworthy in particular are: his argument that metaphor is a function of particular kinds of predication rather than the property of certain kinds of terms or meanings, his suggestion that metaphor is a form of speech act entailing a proposed redescription of reality,

<sup>22</sup> Rikhof, *The Concept of the Church*, pp. 190 and 250.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 190-191.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

and his conception of metaphor in relation to the description of language 'as a system or web of interrelated concepts and sets of concepts.'<sup>25</sup>

Rikhof's explanation of Aquinas's notion of metaphor and its distinction from analogy is clear and persuasive as far as it goes.<sup>26</sup> A brief overview will be helpful even though it may cover familiar territory. The crucial presupposition is that words do not signify things directly. They signify them through intellectual concepts, which Aquinas refers to as the *ratio nominis*. A further distinction can be made between the signification of a word (*ratio nominis*) and its supposition. The *significatio* is the meaning or sense of the word. The *suppositio* is the reference of the word, what it stands for. Different meanings can refer to the same reference. 'Morning star' and 'evening star' can both designate the planet Venus. So it is possible to distinguish between the thing signified (*res significata*) and its mode of signification (*modus significandi*). This provides a framework for distinguishing between univocal, equivocal, and analogical language. In a univocal predication a word has one meaning (*ratio*). Rikhof cites Thomas's example: 'man and horse are animals'. 'Animal' has the same meaning in both instances. In an equivocal predication there is a word in common but different meanings (*rationes*), for example 'dog' referring to an animal and to a star. In analogical predications, the same word is used and same *res significata*, but not signified in the same way. Aquinas's favorite example is 'healthy' affirmed of a person, medicine, and urine. In each case the same *res*, health, is intended. But the meaning varies in the applications. The person has health. Medicine restores it. Urine shows it. Because of these differences in the mode of signification it can be said that there is at once both a unity and difference in meanings. The unity in meanings, or *ratio communis*, is rooted in a proportion, relation, or reference 'to one and the same thing', in this case, health. But in each case a different proportion, relation, or reference to that one and the same thing is designated. So the use of health is neither univocal in these three instances nor equivocal. Consequently it can be said that health is used properly in each of the three cases, although one case, the healthy person, is central and regulative for the others.

This provides the basis for Aquinas's explanation of the difference between metaphor and analogy. In metaphor 'there is one ratio, one meaning. For example, in "God is my rock and my shield", "rock" and "shield"

<sup>25</sup> Rikhof, *The Concept of Church*, see respectively pp. 120, 84 and 202. Gerhart and Russell do not cite Rikhof in either of their books.

<sup>26</sup> Rikhof, *The Concept of Church*, pp. 167-191; and 'Thomas at Utrecht', pp. 126-129.

have both one meaning, are both univocal.<sup>27</sup> So metaphor is neither equivocal (having completely different meanings, *rationes*) nor analogous (having a plurality of related meanings, *ratio communis*). Metaphor is an improper predication because the reference (*suppositio*) is not proper to that which it is predicated. The reference of 'rock' and 'shield' is not properly God. The predication is used of God because there is some similarity of effect or property. God is a steady support or my protector.

But this effect or property is not mentioned: what is mentioned is the thing that has this effect or property. When a man is called 'lion' or God is called 'fire', this is done on the basis of the similarity in strength between man and lion, or the similarity in power to purify between God and fire. But since this effect or property is not named, but rather what has this effect or property, no new way of signifying the *res* is involved. Metaphor is a case of improper supposition. If all suppositions of lion and fire were collected, man and God would not be among them.<sup>28</sup>

This is why Rikhof contrary to Pesch insists that St. Thomas's position entails a sharp distinction between metaphor and analogy.

Rikhof recognizes the limitations of this account. Although Aquinas explains metaphor as a case of improper supposition and so implies that it is a function of some sort of predication, he starts from the contrary assumption that the metaphor is a word. 'But this means that there exists a discrepancy, which, if noticed, calls into question either the starting-point (the metaphor is a word) or the explanation (a metaphor is a case of improper supposition).'<sup>29</sup> More relevant to Pesch's concern about metaphors and analogy, is a second difficulty. On Rikhof's reading of Aquinas 'the contrast with analogy makes clear that no change of meaning or extension of meaning occurs in a metaphor.'<sup>30</sup> He thinks Aquinas is correct on this, but he sees problems with the consequences that mirror for metaphor the questions Pesch has about analogous predications of God. 'For what is left of the meaning of the word if it does not constitute the basis of the transfer? Why is this particular word chosen if not for its meaning?'<sup>31</sup>

Rikhof's theory of metaphor is meant to overcome these limitations. The work of metaphors is done in the sentence. It is not a property of certain concepts or meanings. Metaphors are predications in which the

<sup>27</sup> Rikhof, 'Thomas at Utrecht', p. 129.

<sup>28</sup> Rikhof, *The Concept of Church*, p. 170.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*



and his conception of metaphor in relation to the description of language 'as a system or web of interrelated concepts and sets of concepts.'<sup>25</sup>

Rikhof's explanation of Aquinas's notion of metaphor and its distinction from analogy is clear and persuasive as far as it goes.<sup>26</sup> A brief overview will be helpful even though it may cover familiar territory. The crucial presupposition is that words do not signify things directly. They signify them through intellectual concepts, which Aquinas refers to as the *ratio nominis*. A further distinction can be made between the signification of a word (*ratio nominis*) and its supposition. The *significatio* is the meaning or sense of the word. The *suppositio* is the reference of the word, what it stands for. Different meanings can refer to the same reference. 'Morning star' and 'evening star' can both designate the planet Venus. So it is possible to distinguish between the thing signified (*res significata*) and its mode of signification (*modus significandi*). This provides a framework for distinguishing between univocal, equivocal, and analogical language. In a univocal predication a word has one meaning (*ratio*). Rikhof cites Thomas's example: 'man and horse are animals'. 'Animal' has the same meaning in both instances. In an equivocal predication there is a word in common but different meanings (*rationes*), for example 'dog' referring to an animal and to a star. In analogical predications, the same word is used and same *res significata*, but not signified in the same way. Aquinas's favorite example is 'healthy' affirmed of a person, medicine, and urine. In each case the same *res*, health, is intended. But the meaning varies in the applications. The person has health. Medicine restores it. Urine shows it. Because of these differences in the mode of signification it can be said that there is at once both a unity and difference in meanings. The unity in meanings, or *ratio communis*, is rooted in a proportion, relation, or reference 'to one and the same thing', in this case, health. But in each case a different proportion, relation, or reference to that one and the same thing is designated. So the use of health is neither univocal in these three instances nor equivocal. Consequently it can be said that health is used properly in each of the three cases, although one case, the healthy person, is central and regulative for the others.

This provides the basis for Aquinas's explanation of the difference between metaphor and analogy. In metaphor 'there is one ratio, one meaning. For example, in "God is my rock and my shield", "rock" and "shield"

<sup>25</sup> Rikhof, *The Concept of Church*, see respectively pp. 120, 84 and 202. Gerhart and Russell do not cite Rikhof in either of their books.

<sup>26</sup> Rikhof, *The Concept of Church*, pp. 167-191; and 'Thomas at Utrecht', pp. 126-129.



have both one meaning, are both univocal.<sup>27</sup> So metaphor is neither equivocal (having completely different meanings, *rationes*) nor analogous (having a plurality of related meanings, *ratio communis*). Metaphor is an improper predication because the reference (*suppositio*) is not proper to that which it is predicated. The reference of 'rock' and 'shield' is not properly God. The predication is used of God because there is some similarity of effect or property. God is a steady support or my protector.

But this effect or property is not mentioned: what is mentioned is the thing that has this effect or property. When a man is called 'lion' or God is called 'fire', this is done on the basis of the similarity in strength between man and lion, or the similarity in power to purify between God and fire. But since this effect or property is not named, but rather what has this effect or property, no new way of signifying the *res* is involved. Metaphor is a case of improper supposition. If all suppositions of lion and fire were collected, man and God would not be among them.<sup>28</sup>

This is why Rikhof contrary to Pesch insists that St. Thomas's position entails a sharp distinction between metaphor and analogy.

Rikhof recognizes the limitations of this account. Although Aquinas explains metaphor as a case of improper supposition and so implies that it is a function of some sort of predication, he starts from the contrary assumption that the metaphor is a word. 'But this means that there exists a discrepancy, which, if noticed, calls into question either the starting-point (the metaphor is a word) or the explanation (a metaphor is a case of improper supposition).'<sup>29</sup> More relevant to Pesch's concern about metaphors and analogy, is a second difficulty. On Rikhof's reading of Aquinas 'the contrast with analogy makes clear that no change of meaning or extension of meaning occurs in a metaphor.'<sup>30</sup> He thinks Aquinas is correct on this, but he sees problems with the consequences that mirror for metaphor the questions Pesch has about analogous predications of God. 'For what is left of the meaning of the word if it does not constitute the basis of the transfer? Why is this particular word chosen if not for its meaning?'<sup>31</sup>

Rikhof's theory of metaphor is meant to overcome these limitations. The work of metaphors is done in the sentence. It is not a property of certain concepts or meanings. Metaphors are predications in which the

<sup>27</sup> Rikhof, 'Thomas at Utrecht', p. 129.

<sup>28</sup> Rikhof, *The Concept of Church*, p. 170.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

rules governing sets of concepts or conceptual realms are relaxed in a particular instance. This allows combinations of meaning that under normal circumstances would not be permitted. But the predications are not proper. There is no extension or change of meaning for 'lion' in the metaphorical predication 'The man is a lion', similar to the extension of meanings (*ratio communis*) in the analogous predications of healthy to a person, medicine, and urine. Nevertheless, a metaphorical predication's relaxing the rules has a cognitive effect. It enables a redescription of reality with evocative power and an amplitude of connotations not reducible to a paraphrase. And on Rikhof's reading, Aquinas unambiguously affirms the need and irreplaceability of such metaphorical discourse, particularly in religious language. Already in the *Scriptum*, he held that 'Revelation has necessarily to be couched in metaphorical language, i.e., in similes taken from sensibilia. Without metaphorical language we would not be able to understand revelation, for our minds take their point of departure in sensibilia.'<sup>32</sup> But in the *Scriptum*, Aquinas also precluded the use of metaphors in argumentation and the refutation of error, from which Rikhof concludes that the appeal to metaphors for deciding matters of truth is illegitimate in theology. The apparent conflict between these affirmations is finally resolved, he contends, in the *Summa Theologiae* by acknowledging the difference between on the one hand the original language of scripture and faith in which God is presented through metaphors drawn from sensible and corporeal things and on the other hand the interpretive and conceptual language of theology. Metaphorical language is necessary because of the character of human knowing which is always rooted in the senses. But metaphorical language presents the divine improperly and obscurely and so requires further elucidation. 'It is these two aspects which make theology possible and necessary: because there is some understanding, further development and clarification is possible, and because this understanding is initial and not complete, a development and clarification is required.'<sup>33</sup> This, then, is the rationale for Rikhof's proposal to construe theology as a kind of metaphor paraphrase, which as he sees it,

is not like a paraphrase of another kind of sentence, for it does not consist in one sentence capturing exactly the cognitive content of the metaphor. A metaphor-paraphrase attempts to reveal the implications of the extraordinary combination, to explain the connections, to interpret the associations,

<sup>32</sup> Rikhof, *The Concept of Church*, p. 173.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

to explore the consequences, and to reach a coherent understanding of the metaphor overall.<sup>34</sup>

The metaphorical language of scripture and faith is necessary, irreducible, and irreplaceable. But it provokes and requires the complement of a distinct theological terminology that is precise, rigorous, discursive, and coherent and that in its own way is irreplaceable and irreducible. As Rikhof demonstrates, this is particularly the case with the problematic and conflicting appeals to metaphor in *Lumen Gentium* and subsequent theological discussions.

## 5. A more complete and generalized explanation

Metaphor as explained by Aquinas and qualified by Rikhof is clearly distinct but not entirely separate from the conceptual move that Gerhart and Russell have described as metaphoric process. The different conceptions of metaphorical and metaphoric can be summarized this way. Both are properly understood as conceptual moves, not properties somehow entailed in words or concepts as such. Both presuppose that language is a web of interrelated concepts or fields of meanings. Both are predications. They do their work at the level of judgment. They are affirmations of some sort of identity or similarity that relax the expected rules for concepts or related sets of concepts. Both can be considered speech acts in that their performance does more than simply assert an identity or similarity. Metaphors on Rikhof's view also propose a redescription of reality. Metaphoric process does something like that but more fundamental. Metaphoric process not only relaxes the expected rules of meaning, it effects a change in the fields of meanings themselves and their logic. Moreover, the result when successful, is more than a new description of reality. Metaphoric process generates previously unavailable ways of thinking and speaking about reality. Metaphoric process provides mechanisms crucial for the extension of meaning in Aquinas's analogous affirmations of God. Metaphors the way Aquinas and Rikhof conceive them are figures of speech. Strictly speaking, they are not extensions of meaning. They work improperly by a relaxing of the rules of meaning for specific instances and purposes. Metaphoric process, in contrast, is an epistemic act not restricted to a particular figure of speech. A great many

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

instances that we normally name metaphorical are not examples of metaphoric process, and metaphoric process is not proposed as a comprehensive theory to explain all instances of metaphor.

If the illustrations of metaphoric process in Aquinas provided earlier are accurate, this conception offers a more complete framework for explaining what he names analogous use without confusing that use with what he, and we, normally name metaphorical or figurative use. More is entailed in affirming that God is simple, that God's essence is 'to be', or that perfection terms literally apply to God and only secondarily and analogously to creaturely existence than recognition of a meaning or similarity (*ratio communis*) that signifies God in a different manner than it signifies creatures. The novelty is not just in a meaning (*ratio*) that signifies in different ways, as health signifies a person, medicine, and urine. The novelty is in a forced analogy that presupposes and in its very use effects, if accepted, a fundamental change in our fields of meanings, grammar, and logic. In affirming that God's essence is 'to be', for example, the novelty is in speaking of an assertion as a predication. This stretching of language is what enables 'being' to signify in such fundamentally different ways. Analytical philosophers who seized on this as a category error were correct that the rules of predication are broken in this conceptual move. But what they saw as a violation is its virtue. The metaphoric identification of assertion and predication, which given normal understandings is unwarranted, is the very mechanism that enables Aquinas to create conceptual space to speak of God on a different level. Robert Sokolowski has shown at some length in his exploration of this 'Christian distinction', as he calls it, how this establishes a distinct logic for talking about creatures and Creator.<sup>35</sup> Describing this analogy as metaphoric calls attention to the force of this mechanism that is overlooked in Aquinas's and Rikhof's accounts. It also clarifies that the metaphoric analogy, like metaphor, is a speech act, but as I have argued, a speech act that effects a change in the fields of meanings themselves and their logic and that generates previously unavailable ways of thinking and speaking about reality. Aquinas and likeminded believers are in a very real sense speaking on a different level. Thinking of analogy as metaphoric helps clarify this.

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<sup>35</sup> Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1982).

Attending to the metaphoric force of Thomas's analogous usage also highlights the importance of reception which is overlooked, or at best implicit, in his and Rikhof's accounts. If the metaphoric force of the conceptual move is not grasped or not accepted, then explanations of the difference between proper analogical use and improper figurative use will not have much persuasive power. This is evidenced in objections ranging from Feuerbach's to Barth's. Those skeptical of the Thomistic account legitimately detect a fundamental difference between the analogous extension of meaning involved in predicating health of a person, medicine, and urine and the analogous predication of 'to be', perfection terms and simplicity to God. They complain of begging the question when Aquinas's defenders seek to justify such counterintuitive claims by expounding philosophical and theological arguments which presuppose the notions in question. If one has not grasped that predications for God have a different and additional force than analogous extensions of meaning such as health, then it will not be clear how this conceptual move is inextricably related to its theological roots and warrants and why it cannot be understood apart from those moorings. Revealing those moorings and uncovering their grounding is not question begging but rather explains the conceptual move in terms of the insights and convictions that prompt and underlie it. To genuinely engage Aquinas on this point one at least has to 'get', if not accept, the metaphoric conceptual moves that he is making — and in all their theological and philosophical density. Outside of this specific theological and philosophical context or a comparable one, for example, it is uncalled-for to claim that perfection words apply properly to God and only secondarily to us. All the more so for doctrinal examples of the same logic, for example that 'Father' properly applies to God. These are not moves that can be explained simply by clarifying the distinctions between univocal, equivocal, and analogical predication. Moreover, these conceptual moves are presupposed every bit as much in theological discourse as in the original language of scripture and faith. So a sharp distinction on this count between religious and theological language is misleading and unwarranted. Metaphoric process is often involved at both levels. The difference between the levels on my understanding is that the logic and rationale for such conceptual moves have to be made explicit and justified in theological discourse with precise and coherent terminology. In the language of scripture and faith these conceptual moves are often implicit and unconscious.

The advantage of the notion of metaphoric process and of citing instances of it in other spheres of life and the sciences, is that this provides

a more generalized (non-Thomist) account of such conceptual moves, of their logic, and of their propriety. This does not substitute for the theological analysis necessary to justify the particular moves Aquinas makes but it focuses attention on the more crucial and decisive questions that otherwise get overlooked and misdirected. This is particularly important for progress in ecumenical conversations where different metaphoric moves are frequently operative, and in today's pluralistic theological and philosophical contexts.

There is an obvious terminological question. Why call this process or conceptual move 'metaphoric' which sounds so much like 'metaphorical'? And why add oil to the fire by speaking of this as a kind of higher-order metaphor? The first response is that the important thing is not the name that Gerhart and Russell suggested for the process, but the distinction that they have elucidated. It is the distinction not the name that is essential to my suggestion that this offers a more complete and generalized explanation of Aquinas's appeal to and use of analogous language. 'Metaphoric' is a fitting word to describe 'forced analogies' that given normal understandings are unwarranted. While the similarity to 'metaphorical' could be confusing, the parallel with metaphors as improper predications recommends it. I do not see that this is any more mystifying than following Aquinas and using 'analogy' in very differentiated and technical senses considerably removed from the ordinary dictionary meaning as a similarity in some respects between things that are otherwise dissimilar. One of the difficulties with 'analogy' is that it is such an analogous term. The advantage of 'higher-order metaphor' is aptness for suggesting that the mechanism has to do with what is happening at the second-order or higher level of the fields of meanings and the implication that the matter at hand is neither a metaphor nor an analogy in any ordinary sense. But no matter what term is chosen, the distinction needs to be made explicit and focal in our accounts of analogy.