

從阿奎那的類比法到藍聖恩的 「模型」與「揭示」 ——宗教語言可能性的古與今

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摘要

尋覓一套適切的語言，以使用於有關上帝的言說（God-talk），歷久以來都是神學及哲學的一個重要課題。比喻作為一種語言的工具，自古已被應用到不同的知識範疇，但對宗教論述而言，類比的方法卻是經由中世紀的托馬斯·阿奎那推廣後，才開始被廣泛採用。但阿奎那式的類比法也並非普遍被接納。其中的主要爭論，是在於文字究竟是否只可以作單一意義的闡釋，還是可以像比喻那樣具有多重涵義。當代學術界的研究，對宗教語言的討論更是火上加油：邏輯實證論者堅持認為有關上帝的言說都是毫無意義的，因為真理的宣稱永不能在這個範疇得以立定。有些批評者更認為，宗教是屬於「不能言說」的世界，人們只能以沉默來回應。這些批評驅使宗教思想家們急於作出回應。前牛津大學基督宗教哲學教授藍聖恩（Ian Ramsey）對此挑戰作出了當面的回應。他的回答可分為兩方面。首先，他固然是要在這些哲學的批判之前為宗教語言作出辯護。與此同時，他也渴望說明護教學其實能夠從邏輯經驗主義的理論找到支持。藍氏所建構的「模型」（model）與「揭

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示」(disclosure) 進路，恰能證明宗教語言在經驗世界的基礎。他的進路也顯示出，宗教言說所涵概的足以超越經驗主義對真理與意義的狹隘定義。本文的目的，是將阿奎那的類比法與藍氏的模型理論作一個比較，並特別指出兩個方法同樣是從可見的到不可見的進路來言說上帝。與此同時，本文也會指出，兩者因着不同的本體論引申而來的基本區別。

關鍵詞：托馬斯·阿奎那、類比法、藍聖恩、模型、揭示

From Aquinas' Analogy to Ian Ramsey's Models and Disclosures – the Possibility of Religious Language Then and Now

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Abstract

The search for a proper language for God-talk is a perennial task in theology as well as in philosophy. From times of antiquity, the use of analogy was employed in different realms of knowledge. Yet it was not until the medieval era, primarily through the effort of Thomas Aquinas, that analogy was used extensively in religious discourse. However, Thomistic analogy was not accepted by all. The contention between univocal and analogical use of words was never settled. The contemporary scene adds further fuel to the debate. Logical positivism claims that God-talk is totally meaningless, as truth claims can never be established in such a domain. And some critics say that religion belongs to the world of the 'un-sayable' and silence is the only response. The situation demands an urgent response from the side of the religious thinkers, and Ian Ramsey, previous Nolloth professor of Philosophy of Christian Religion at Oxford University, has taken up the task to face this challenge. Ramsey's job is twofold. First, he is of course concerned with defending religious discourse against such philosophical critiques. At the

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same time, he is eager to show how theological apologetics could actually benefit from the tenets of Logical Empiricism. His method of ‘models’ and ‘disclosures’ is used to demonstrate the empirical relevance of religious language. Such approach also reveals that religious discourses do contain something more than the narrowness of meaning and truth set down by the logical empiricists. The purpose of this paper is to place Aquinas’ analogy side by side with Ramsey’s models approach and see how they compare and contrast each other. Specifically, we will see how these approaches have roughly the same dynamics of going from what is seen to what is unseen in talking about God. We will also see how the two projects differ owing to a fundamental difference in their ontology.

Keywords: Thomas Aquinas, analogy, Ian Ramsey, model, disclosure

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Introduction

The search for a proper language for God-talk is a perennial task in theology as well as in philosophy. From times of antiquity, the use of analogy was employed in different realms of knowledge. Yet it was not until the medieval era, primarily through the effort of Thomas Aquinas, that analogy was used extensively in religious discourse. However, Thomistic analogy was not accepted by all. The debate between univocal and analogical use of words was never settled. As modernity dawned, the Kantian critique posed a serious challenge to the talk of God, as knowledge of God seems to be totally outside our human grasps. Yet this did not end the story. The contemporary scene adds further fuel to the debate. On the extreme side, logical positivists claim that God-talk is totally meaningless, as truth claims can never be established in such a domain. On the more neutral side, there are those who say that religion belongs to the world of the 'un-sayable' and silence is the only response. But to stop talking about God would mean the end of religious discussions and most,

if not all, religious activities. This does not seem to be the case academically and realistically. On the theistic side, different approaches are drawn up to defend the meaningfulness of religious language. One thoroughly developed approach is that of models and disclosures of Ian Ramsey. The purpose of this paper is to place the analogical approach side by side with the models approach and see how they compare and contrast each other.

A remark is in order here at the beginning of this study. The term ‘religion’ used in this work is primarily confined to the Christian religion. The topic of religious languages in other faiths is a very interesting project, but there is not enough space to deal with it in this paper.

I. Aquinas and Analogy

In our discussion of Thomistic analogy, we will first go through the arguments given by Thomas on why univocal and equivocal languages are not appropriate to speak of the Divine. Then we will see how he advocates the way of analogy as the middle and proper way to speak of God.

A. Why it is not possible to describe God in univocal language

(A) God is His act of being, creatures are not

In *De Veritate* 2, 11, Thomas, in responding to the objection that knowledge is only predicated of God and things equivocally, says, that creatures can imitate the Creator to a certain degree, beyond which no more imitation is possible. For things which are similar, they are alike in their substance or quiddity but are distinct in their act of being. But for God, He is His own act of being, “His essence is the same as His act of being, so is His

knowledge the same as His act of being a knower.”¹ Creatures can never attain the same act of being as that which God has and so it is not possible to speak of things and God univocally.

(B) The universal cause cannot be univocal

A further rejection of univocal language arises when we consider God as the universal cause. A non-univocal cause “is causal by reference to the entire species”², just as the sun is the non-univocal cause of all men. A univocal cause, in contrast, could only be the same as what is caused by it; hence it could not be the universal cause. The true universal cause must be different from the species; otherwise it would be a member of the species and would become the cause of itself. Therefore, “the universal cause which must be prior to the individual cause, is non-univocal.”³

(C) Considerations from forms of likeness, participation and priority and posteriority

In the *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1, 32, Thomas has listed six reasons for rejecting univocity⁴; they are summarized as follows. First of all, he says that creatures resemble their Creator, since every effect resembles its cause. However, he points out that the likeness of God and creatures are not comparable because they are not in the same order. For example, the heat

¹ Thomas Aquinas. *The Disputed Questions on Truth*, vol. I-III (112). Translated from the definitive Leonine text by Robert W. (1952-1954). Mulligan. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company.

² Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica* (1a, q. 13, a. 5). Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1947/48). Burns & Oates: London.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Book One: God (ch. 32). Translated with an introduction and notes by Anton C. Pegis (1975). Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

given by the sun is not univocally as hot as the sun itself. Thus, the cause and its effects are simply different in their forms. The second reason concerns the ‘modes of being’ of God and other things. Even if the created things were to have the same form as their Creator, the modes of being between the former and the latter are still different. Nothing in God is not the divine being itself; created things, however, do not possess this quality. Thomas then continues his discourse by arguing from the consideration of genera and species. He says that univocity presupposes the categorization of things according to genera, species, differences, accidents or properties. Yet God cannot be predicated in any of these manners. He does not belong to any species, neither is He a definition. The fourth reason, Thomas says, is that when we predicate things univocally, the predicate is conceptually simpler than what is predicated. However, God is the simplest, both in concept and in actuality, there is nothing simpler than Him. So we cannot speak univocally of things and of God.

The fifth rejection of univocal language arises from the idea of participation. In univocal predication, explains Thomas, there is an implication of partial participation of the subject in its predicate. For example, an individual participates in a species and a species participates in a genus. God does not take part in anything, rather, everything participates in Him. If there were a predicate that can be said of God and things univocally, then God participates in this predicate and it would be something more ultimate than God.⁵ Thus nothing can be said of God by participation in this manner. So univocal predication of God and creatures is refuted.

⁵ Norman L. Geisler (1977). *Philosophy of Religion* (273). Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.

The last reason comes from the consideration of priority and posteriority. Thomas points out that things predicated of God and of creatures are not in the same order, but according to priority and posteriority. All things are said of God ‘essentially’, but this is not so for creatures. God is ‘good’ because He is ‘goodness’ itself. But all other predications are made by participation, just as Socrates is a man not because he is humanity himself but because he participates in humanity. Therefore, Thomas says: “what is predicated of some things according to priority and posteriority is certainly not predicated univocally.”⁶

B. Why it is not possible to describe God in equivocal language

Having refuted univocal language as the way to predicate the Divine and creatures, Thomas then goes on to discuss the possibility of using equivocal language for this purpose. He again deems this inappropriate. His arguments are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs. A remark must be made here concerning the word ‘equivocal’. It should be noted that when Thomas says that equivocal language is inappropriate for God-talk, he is referring to the ‘pure equivocal’ language or ‘equivocals by chance’.⁷ The word ‘pen’ can mean either an instrument for writing or an enclosure for animals, but these meanings are in no way related, it is just accidental that the word can take on two totally unrelated meanings. Thomistic analogy is actually a kind of equivocity, or equivocity by design, for there are indeed reasons why the same name is given to things

⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles. Book One: God*: ch. 32.

⁷ *Ibid.*, ch. 33.

of different definitions. This should become clearer in the development of the paper.⁸

(A) Not total difference but indeterminate similarity

Thomas first elaborates his refusal of equivocal language in the talk of the Divine in *De Veritate* 2, 11. There he is answering to objections which say that we can only predicate of God and creatures equivocally. The skeptics insist that there could not be any likeness between God and creatures. The infinite distance between God and creatures simply renders likeness impossible. Furthermore, the skeptics point out that words for different species are only equivocal, say a dog-fish and a barking dog have no relation at all. But the differences between substance and accident are greater than that between two species of substances. Take for example the word ‘knowledge’; our knowledge is only an accident, while God’s knowledge is a substance. So knowledge can only be predicated of God and man equivocally.

Thomas responds to the above objections by saying that it is not God who is similar to creatures but creatures are similar to Him. An image is both like and unlike what it imitates. But there are two types of likeness, one which signifies a proportionality, which is found between things in different genera; the other signifies a determinate relation to the other, which is found within the same genus. In the first type of likeness, the infinite distance between creatures and God is not taken away (2 to 1 is as 6 to 3 is as 100 to 50 and so on). The equivocal argument is valid when there is absolutely no

⁸ Wim de Pater (1999), “Analogy and disclosures: On religious languages (33).” In Lieven Boeve and Kurt Feysaerts (ed.), *Metaphor and God-talk*. Bern: European Academic Publishers.

likeness between the two things predicated. But in this first type of likeness, there is similarity between the entities involved, even though such similarity is indeterminate. As a result, equivocal language is refuted.

In answering to the objection that substance and accident can only be predicated of equivocally, Thomas says that analogous words can be used in place of equivocal words to signify what they have in common. In addition, Thomas admits that while the word ‘animal’ is predicated equivocally of the real animal and the one in a picture, the word ‘knowledge’ behaves differently. “Knowledge”, says Thomas, “is suitable to both creature and Creator in the respect in which the creature imitates the Creator,”⁹ and so consequently, “knowledge is not predicated of the two altogether equivocally.”¹⁰

(B) Every effect resembles its cause

The fact that effects resemble their cause is used once again to refute equivocal language. Thomas states that creatures are like God because every effect resembles its cause. This is said in chapter 29 of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. There Thomas points out that even though effects do fall short of their cause both in agreement with name and nature, some likeness must exist between them, this is so because “an agent produces its like.”¹¹ Our perfections are given by God, though they do not fully resemble His perfections. Creatures are both like and unlike God, just as the heat produced by the sun bears some likeness to the power of the sun. And because of such likeness, equivocal predications of God and creatures are rejected.

⁹ Aquinas, *The Disputed Questions on Truth*, 2: 11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles. Book One: God*: ch. 29.

As with the case of univocal language, Aquinas has still other arguments for rejecting equivocal language in speaking of the divine. They are made from considerations of order of reference, knowledge of God and negative language. For the brevity of this paper, these reasons will not be discussed here. The interested reader can go to *Summa Contra Gentiles* book 1 chapter 33 for further reading.

C. The analogical way in speaking of God

By eliminating both univocal language and equivocal language, Thomas says the only possible alternative to the knowledge of God is by analogy. The analogical way is described as a way between the previous two ways. In his own words, Thomas says, “this way of using words [i.e. analogy] lies somewhere between pure equivocation and simple univocity, for the word is neither used in the same sense, as with univocal usage, nor in totally different senses, as with equivocation.”¹² Thomas has written quite substantially on the topic of analogy. It is not possible to include every argument of his in our study here. In the discussions below, we will only focus on the key points which are relevant to the purpose of this paper.

(A) The different ways of analogy

1. According to intention (*secundum intentionem*) and according to being (*secundum esse*)

We see the first ‘division’ of analogy by Thomas in his earliest work of *I Sentences*. The context of the passage in d19, q5, a1, ad 1m is the problem

¹² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*: 1a, q. 13, a. 5.

of truth. It is asked whether ‘true’ can be attributed to a subject in a similar manner like ‘healthy’. For health can be attributed to many things, but only the animal possesses health intrinsically. Similarly, it could be reasoned that there is only one truth, possessed by a being intrinsically, and from this truth all other truths are derived.¹³ Thomas responds to this question by putting down the three ways in which things are said analogically.¹⁴

(1) According to intention and not according to being

This first category is defined, in Thomas’ own words, as “when one intention is referred to many in an orderly way which however has being in only one of them.” Thomas gives the example that, when urine, diet and animal are being called ‘healthy’, health only truly exists in the animal. There is priority and posteriority in the things predicated, but they do not differ diversely with reference to being, since health is found in the animal alone.¹⁵ The foundation for extending the use of the word ‘healthy’ in this case is based on the various references or proportions to the entity where health exists.¹⁶

(2) According to being and not according to intention

The second category occurs in the case when “many things are made equal in some common intention that does not exist as one notion in them

¹³ Henry Chavannes (1992). *The Analogy between God and the World in Saint Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth* (21). William Lumley (trans.). New York: Vantage Press.

¹⁴ Thomas is quite brief here in making the three distinctions. In this text he just states the definition of each case and gives the corresponding examples without further elaboration. It is also worth noticing that in his reply here there is no mentioning of any of the traditional terms in his analogy, e.g. attribution, proportion, proportionality, the relation of many to one, the relation of one to another etc. See Battista Mondin (1963). *The Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology* (9). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

¹⁵ Chavannes, *The Analogy between God and the World*, 22; Mondin, *The Principle of Analogy*: 9.

¹⁶ Ralph McNerny (1961). *The Logic of Analogy* (122). The Hauge: Martinus Nijhoff.

all.” The concept of corporeity falls into this category. Both celestial and terrestrial bodies are named bodies analogically, even though they have different natures (the medieval mind holds the view that the former are incorruptible while the latter are corruptible). We know the celestial bodies only by the knowledge of the terrestrial bodies, and the former is denominated from the latter.¹⁷ There is a ‘prior’ and ‘posterior’ in this order of naming (*per prius et posterius*).¹⁸

(3) According to both intention and being

In this third category, things are not the same with respect to either intention or being. An example would be when being is said of substance and accident. In such case “the common nature has some being in each of the things of which it is said, though differing according to greater and lesser perfection.” The common nature exists in all the things being predicated, but each thing possesses such nature to various degrees of perfection¹⁹, or in other words, there is an “unequal participation in a common perfection.”²⁰ Thomas says that it is only in this third division where attributes like truth, goodness and the like can be said analogically of God and creatures.²¹

¹⁷ Ibid., 122.

¹⁸ Ibid., 116. There is disagreement here between the logicians and the metaphysicians on whether the term “body” can be said analogically of celestial and terrestrial bodies. The logicians (at the time of Aquinas) argued that the term “body” can only be applied univocally to both of these entities, while the metaphysicians (again at the time of Aquinas) insisted that it is appropriate to call them “bodies” in an analogical way. The logicians are concerned primarily with the form of body, while the metaphysicians are interested in the matter which forms the different bodies. For further details, please see Chavannes, *The Analogy between God and the World*: 21-22 and McNerny, *The Logic of Analogy*: 122-124.

¹⁹ Chavannes, *The Analogy between God and the World*: 22.

²⁰ McNerny, *The Logic of Analogy*: 123.

²¹ Ibid.; Mondin, *The Principle of Analogy*: 10.

Summarizing briefly, we say that when an analogy is made according to intention, the analogous terms differ according to intention, or the meaning in mind; when an analogy is made according to being, the analogates differ according to the thing itself. Analogy can be made from either side, or both, which results in the above three classes.²² The objector in this passage of *I Sentences* argues that since both ‘true’ and ‘healthy’ are analogous names, then ‘truth’ like ‘health’, resides in only one of the analogates which in turn implies that there could be no ‘truth’ in creatures. Thomas replies to the objection by pointing out that the mode of signifying is different from the remote foundation of this mode; things said analogically can have totally different modes of signification. In cases like ‘being’, creatures and God do possess ‘being’, though to a different scale. God is ‘being’ essentially, while creatures have ‘being’ through participation. In the case of ‘healthy’, although there is no real essence of ‘health’ in the words ‘medicine’, ‘urine’, ‘diet’ etc., this does in no way forbid us calling them ‘healthy’ analogically, since the basis of analogy lies in the references to the animal which has health intrinsically. Naming things analogically in the broad sense is something ‘logical’ which does not always concern the essence of the things in themselves. It is because of this ‘logical’ similarity, and not because of the essence in the things themselves which permits Thomas to speak of things called ‘healthy’, and between God and creatures, as cases in which things are said to be analogical.²³

²² Chavannes, *The Analogy between God and the World*: 22.

²³ McInerny, *The Logic of Analogy*: 124-125.

2. Order of analogy — the relation of many to one and the relation of one to another

Another important clarification to be made in analogical language is the distinction between a ‘a relation of many to one’ and a ‘relation of one to another’. Thomas speaks of this topic in both the *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1, 34 and the *Summa Theologiae* 1a, 13 articles 2 and 5.

(1) When many things have reference to one thing (*multorum ad unum*)

Thomas uses the example of health again to illustrate this point. Medicine is said to be ‘healthy’ because it is the cause of health, food is called ‘healthy’ because it preserves health, urine is described as ‘healthy’ because it is a sign of health. All these attributes have references to the concept of health of the animal, the animal being the subject of health.

(2) When one thing has reference to another (*unius ad alterum*)

In this second way, the two things are spoken of analogically when one has a reference to the other. When ‘healthy’ is said of a diet and the man, it signifies the relation of the diet to the man’s health, the diet being the cause of his health. Whatever we say of God and creatures, we are speaking with respect to an order which creatures have to God. God is the cause and source of things and all perfections in things pre-exist in God transcendentally.²⁴ Thomas raises the example of being and substance as illustration: “*being* is said of substance and accident according as an accident has reference to a substance, and not according as substance and accident are referred to a third

²⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*: 1a, 13, 5.

thing.”²⁵ For the things we attribute to God, they can only be said according to the former sense (one thing with reference to another) and not the latter sense (many things with reference to one), otherwise we would have to posit something before God and that is not possible.²⁶

However, in this second way of analogy, there is the issue of priority and posteriority, which means that the order of our knowing the thing and the order in reality are sometimes the same and sometimes different. For example, substance is said to be prior to accident both in nature and knowledge, since substance is both the cause and definition of accident. But for the case of medicine and health of an animal, what is prior (the healing power) in reality is only known after we have seen the health of the animal, as the cause is named from its effect. This latter case is also true for our knowledge of God: “therefore”, says Thomas, “because we come to a knowledge of God from other things, the reality in the names said of God and other things belongs by priority in God according to His mode of being, but the meaning of the name belongs to God by posteriority. And so He is said to be named from His effects.”²⁷

3. What is signified (*res significata*) versus the mode of signification (*modus significandi*)

Another important aspect about analogical language is the distinction between ‘what is signified’ and ‘the mode of signification’. Thomas touches on this topic in both of his *Summae*. Let us first look at the *Summa Contra*

²⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles. Book One: God*: ch. 34.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

Gentiles. In chapter 30 of book 1, Thomas is explaining what names can be predicated of God. He says that names which “unqualifiedly designate a perfection without defect are predicated of God and other things.”²⁸ Examples in this category are words like ‘goodness’, ‘wisdom’ and ‘being’. Further, names which express with ‘the mode of supereminence’ are predicated of God alone.²⁹ To these belong names like ‘the highest good’, ‘the first being’ etc. But there are also names which only express perfections according to the mode of a creature. For example, ‘stone’ is sometimes said of a man to show the hardness of his intellect. Such names “designate the properties of things, which are caused by the proper principles of their species.”³⁰ Names like these, says Thomas, belong to the category of metaphors in which the meaning of one thing is transferred to another, and such names are defective in describing God because their mode of signification pertains only to creatures.

In the *Summa Theologica* 1a question 13 article 3, Thomas states a similar teaching. He says that words that signify the perfections of God can be used literally, and they are even more appropriately used in speaking of God than of creatures. But such words are inappropriate in the modes of their signification, because such ways of signification are appropriate only for created things. Thus words like being, good, living etc. are applied to God literally, in so far as they point to perfections without saying how the perfections are achieved. But they are denied of God if they are confined to

²⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles. Book One: God*: ch. 30.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

the mode of signification, because then they contain a bodily context in such way of signification.

Summarizing briefly from the two *Summae*, we can see that when a word is used in its mode of signification, what is expressed is concrete and has a creaturely connotation. Such a word is therefore imperfect and is not fit to speak of God. But when a word is used to signify with reference or intention, then what is expressed is simple, perfect and can be affirmed of God.³¹ The being of God is necessary and essential, so whatever is predicated of Him must express His essence and He must have it essentially. Thus ‘goodness’, ‘power’, ‘truth’ etc. are used to describe Him in an analogical way.³²

(B) Analogy and the ‘three ways’ of Thomas

The famous ‘three ways’ (via affirmation, via negation and via eminence) of Thomas Aquinas should also be mentioned briefly here. Strictly speaking, the ‘three ways’ which Thomas borrows from Pseudo-Dionysius belong to ‘theo-logy’ (speech or study of God) rather than to analogy. Yet there is such a closeness between the dynamics of the ‘three ways’ and the dynamics of analogy, it is both relevant and interesting to make a comparison between them in the course of our discussion.³³

For Thomas, the principle of ‘causality’ is an important way to knowledge. According to him, there are three kinds of causality:³⁴ (1)

³¹ Ibid.

³² Geisler, *Philosophy of Religion*: 280.

³³ Charles M. Zola (1995). “Ian Thomas Ramsey: Cosmic Disclosures and Referring to God (114).” Ph. D. diss. Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.

³⁴ Ibid.

univocal: that in which effects agree with their cause both in name and in definition, for example, a human person engenders another human person; (2) equivocal: that in which effects differ from their cause both in name and in definition, for example, the sun generates fire; (3) analogical: that in which effects are not completely different nor completely the same as their cause, for example, the case of God and creatures. Concerning this last cause, Thomas says:

God acts in neither of these ways (equivocal nor univocal). Not univocal, because nothing agrees with Him univocally. Nor equivocally, because effect and cause somehow agree here in name and intelligibility...God, for instance, by His wisdom makes us wise, but only in such a way that our wisdom is always deficient in terms of His wisdom.³⁵

Man only knows the highest wisdom through negating his own limited knowledge, but this negation is possible only if we have at first some positive knowledge of God. Positive knowledge of God is possible in the first place because creatures resemble their Creator, this is what we have seen earlier. Yet such knowledge is only limited and imperfect because we only participate in God in a limited and imperfect manner. He has wisdom eminently and man/woman only has it defectively and negatively.³⁶ Thomas says:

³⁵ Translation of Aquinas' *1 Sentences* d. 8, q. 1, a. 2, c taken from Zola. "Ian Thomas Ramsey: Cosmic Disclosures and Referring to God (114)."

³⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, vol. 3 (VII, 5). Translated by the English Dominican Fathers (1952). Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press; Zola, "Ian Thomas Ramsey: Cosmic

But seeing that from his one power many and various effects proceed, it is evident that every effect of his falls short of the power of his cause. Consequently no form of a divine effect is in the effect in the same degree as in God: and yet they must need be in him in a more eminent way.³⁷

In 1 Sentences, Thomas states the three ways even more explicitly:

Dionysius says we go to God from creatures in three manners: as is obvious through causality, through negation, through eminence. And the reason in this, the being of a creature is from another. Therefore, according to this we are led to the cause from which it comes. This however can happen in two ways. In respect to that which is received, and this is through the mode of causality; and in respect to the manner in which it is received, since it receives imperfectly; and so we have two modes, namely, through the negation of imperfection from God and according to that which is that thing which is received in the creature which is more perfect and more noble in the Creator and this is the way of eminence.³⁸

Put briefly, the correspondence between the three ways and analogy can be stated as follows. The *via positiva* is demonstrated by the simple perfections, i.e. ‘what is signified of God’ (*res significata*), e.g. that God is ‘good’, ‘just’, ‘wise’ etc. The *via negativa* is shown by the fact that such

Disclosures and Referring to God”: 115.

³⁷ Aquinas, *On the Power of God*: 5.

³⁸ Translation of Aquinas’ *1 Sentences* d. 3 taken from Zola, “Ian Thomas Ramsey: Cosmic Disclosures and Referring to God”: 115.

perfections are not spoken of Him and creatures in the same manner, they do not have in the same ‘mode of signification’ (*modus significandi*) in God and in creatures. The *via eminentiae* is expressed by the showing that God has these perfections primarily (*per prius*), which, carries the connotation of exemplarity. God is not only the cause of all by being their efficient and final cause but also by being their exemplary cause.³⁹

(C) A brief summary of Thomistic analogy

We have covered quite a number of points in our discussion of Thomistic analogy. Let us now briefly summarize what we have gone through. In the first place, we have seen why Thomas refutes both univocal and equivocal language as ways of predicating God and creation. Then we have discussed how he advocates the analogical way of speaking of the Divine. However, there are several divisions to analogical language. The most important thing to be emphasized, despite the different ways of expressing analogy, is that it is primarily because of the likeness between creatures and the Creator that God-talk is possible. Such likeness is grounded on the principle of similarity between cause and effect. Because of this principle, there is intrinsic attribution in analogy. Analogy of intrinsic attribution, according to Thomas, is then the essence of theological language. It says that there is likeness between the primary and secondary analogate, the latter being an imperfect imitation of the former, and that perfection is

³⁹ Zola, “Ian Thomas Ramsey: Cosmic Disclosures and Referring to God”: 116; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*: 1a, q. 44, a. 3. There are still other important aspects to the discussion of analogy in Aquinas, such as proportion and proportionality and the difference between analogy and metaphor. It will be too lengthy to deal with all of them here in the present paper.

predicated essentially of the former and secondarily of the latter, through participation.⁴⁰ It is because of intrinsic attribution, that creation becomes a pointer to the Divine, which in turn authorizes us to speak of Him through human language.⁴¹

We are finite beings. To speak of something infinite and transcendent from finitude is ultimately a difficult task. It is only because of the belief that creation resembles its Creator which gives rise to the possibility of speaking of the absolute origin at all. However, God is ultimately other to us, we do not have direct and exact language for Him. Resemblance and difference of creation to the Creator must be maintained with equal strictness. Too much difference would render the Divine totally alien, there would be no point and no meaning in speaking further. Yet too strong a unity makes God and the world indistinguishable. We would then have direct knowledge of God, the Creator and His work would be the same and God becomes pantheistic. God reveals and conceals and we only understand partially and imperfectly, our language of transcendence can only reside in the between. The analogical way is an attempt to strike the balance in the middle, an approach to speak of the Divine by avoiding univocity no less than pure equivocity. It is Saint Thomas' constant preoccupation "to maintain an analogy that is just sufficient to account for the relation of God and the world apart from which the divine transcendence is compromised."⁴²

⁴⁰ Mondin, *The Principle of Analogy*: 101.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴² Chavannes, *The Analogy between God and the World*: 93-94.

II. Disclosure through Models and Qualifiers in Ian Ramsey

A. The challenge of Logical Empiricism to religious language

Before going into the details of Ramsey's theory of models and disclosures, it is useful to briefly go over the background against which Ramsey's work was produced. Ian Ramsey (1915 - 1972) was the Nolloth professor of the Philosophy of Christian Religion at Oxford University from 1951 to 1972. He also served as the Bishop of Durham from 1966 till 1972 (the year he died). Ramsey did most of his writings at a time when Logical Empiricism was dominating the world of analytical philosophy. The earliest representatives of the analytical movement were G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell. For Russell, the task of philosophy is to analyze and clarify language so as to lay bare the truth of reality. Moore sought to refute the loftiness in metaphysics, which to him is mere abuse of language⁴³. Put together, both Russell and Moore were saying: "what can be said, can be said plainly."⁴⁴

The next phase of modern analytical thought was the stage of Logical Positivism. The Vienna circle was the driving force of this movement. The thinkers in this circle were philosophers and scientists whose ambition was to make philosophy on par with the success found in the natural sciences. They had then proposed the Verification Principle, which basically says that all meaningful propositions must be limited to statements verifiable by our

⁴³ Jerry H. Gill (1976). *Ian Ramsey: To Speak Respectably of God* (18). London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

⁴⁴ Ian Ramsey (1969). *Religious Language* (11). London: SCM.

senses.⁴⁵ Philosophy, following the lead of this movement, had then been reduced to philosophy of science.⁴⁶ In England, A.J. Ayer was the chief representative of Logical Positivism. Ayer said that there are only two types of language which could establish knowledge and truth: logical assertions or empirical assertions.⁴⁷ From this perspective, religious language can neither be true nor false, since it is neither definitional nor sensical, it becomes meaningless, or literally ‘non-sense’.⁴⁸

Then came the third stage of the analytical movement – the stage of Logical Empiricism.⁴⁹ The emphasis now turned to use ‘Falsification’ as the criterion to test the meaningfulness of propositions.⁵⁰ Metaphysics, under the scrutiny of this new measure, becomes impossible. Logical empiricists were saying that the ‘ultimate problems’ in philosophy are only confusions in the use of words.⁵¹ And religious discourses meet the same fate, for it is the kind of language which could not be falsified. There were further developments and modifications to Logical Empiricism in later years resulting from severe criticisms placed on them, but it is beyond the purpose of this paper to put down all the details.

This was then the background of Ramsey’s time. The situation demanded an urgent response from the side of the religious thinkers, and Ramsey had taken up the task to face this challenge. Ramsey’s job was twofold. First, he was of course concerned with defending religious discourse

⁴⁵ Ramsey, *Religious Language*: 12.

⁴⁶ Gill, Ian Ramsey: *To Speak Responsibly of God*: 18.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁹ Ramsey, *Religious Language*: 13.

⁵⁰ Gill, Ian Ramsey: *To Speak Responsibly of God*: 17.

⁵¹ Ramsey, *Religious Language*: 13.

against the philosophical critiques of the time. Yet at the same time, he was eager to show how theological apologetics could actually benefit from the tenets of Logical Empiricism.⁵² His approach of ‘models’ and ‘disclosures’ was used to demonstrate the empirical relevance of religious language. His approach also revealed that religious discourses contain something more than the narrowness of meaning and truth set down by the logical empiricists, as we will see very shortly.

B. Disclosures

Ramsey’s explanation of religious disclosures is contained in his famous book *Religious language*.⁵³ There in the book, he relates several stories from everyday life. One goes as follows. Suppose on a fine sunny day we are going on a train trip to the countryside. Along the way there are hills, churches, buildings, houses, and they look quite the same as anywhere. Then suddenly someone carrying a guidebook yells: “There’s Winter Hill!”, “That’s the Manor House!”, “Here is St. Lawrence’s church — going back to the Saxon times!” Supposing we are familiar with the history and culture of the region, the information offered by the guidebook is more than another piece of fact or another bit of detail. What is given now makes the originally unknown object familiar and friendly, the whole landscape suddenly ‘comes alive’ and we feel being nostalgic for the past. The function of maps or guide books in witness to landmarks strikes a parallel in religious disclosures.⁵⁴

⁵² Ibid., 14.

⁵³ Ian Ramsey (1969). *Religious Language*. London: SCM.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 27.

Disclosure situations, Ramsey says, are those scenarios which cannot be accounted for by sensory description alone, there is more than the spatio-temporal qualifications. They are those situations which Ramsey describes as something “‘coming alive’, ‘taking on depth’, where ‘the penny drops’, where we ‘see’ not with the bodily eyes, where something ‘strikes us’, where ‘eye meet eye’, and where ‘hearts miss a beat’.”⁵⁵ Disclosure scenarios are plentiful in human relationships. Very familiar words like ‘husband’, ‘mother’, ‘friend’, on the one hand, embody physical patterns of behavior, and on the other hand contain a transcendent referent.⁵⁶ These are words of disclosure. Our knowledge of love ones and close friends transcends the total of the ‘observables’, it is something much deeper than what can be physically described.⁵⁷

Besides words of personal relationships, there are other metaphysical terms that are grounded in disclosures. The realm of ethics certainly calls for disclosure situations. An ethical situation does not just contain the *descriptive* spatio-temporal elements, rather, it calls for an *evaluation* on our side, and we are to be *responsive* to the call. Thus disclosure situations not only bring in discernment, they often demand our commitments. We are to respond to the transcendent challenges demanded by words like ‘duty’ and ‘conscience’.⁵⁸ Ramsey is convinced that moral, personal and inter-personal

⁵⁵ Ian Ramsey (1974), *Christian Empiricism* (159). London: Sheldon Press.

⁵⁶ Ian Ramsey (1971), “Talking about God.” In Ian Ramsey (ed.), *Words About God: the philosophy of religion* (206). London: SCM Press.

⁵⁷ Jerry Gill (1969), “The Tacit Structure of Religious Knowing(550).” *International Philosophical Quarterly* vol. IX, no. 4.

⁵⁸ Ian Ramsey (1961), “On the Possibility and Purpose of a Metaphysical Theology.” In Ian Ramsey (ed.) *Prospect for Metaphysics* (172). New York: Greenwood Press.

relationships are most important in shedding light on religious disclosures.⁵⁹ Often people would relate ‘duty’ and ‘conscience’ to religion by saying ‘duty’ as ‘God’s will’ and ‘conscience’ as ‘the voice of God’. Ramsey strongly agrees that there is a precise logical kinship between them.⁶⁰ In fact, it is a more comprehensive move from the talk about ‘duty’ to the talk about ‘God’, the latter of which involves disclosures of providence and creativity.⁶¹

Thus we begin to see how Ramsey moves from personal and moral disclosures to religious disclosures. In fact, there is a hierarchy of the disclosure-commitment situations in Ramsey’s religious language; they can be categorized under the following headings: linguistic, perceptual, theoretical, moral, personal and cosmic.⁶² Ramsey’s approach in religious language is to go from finite disclosures to cosmic ones. In his own words he says:

The cosmic pattern chimes in with the human pattern; the human pattern has already led to a finite disclosure — of persons — and their matching then evokes a cosmic disclosure around natural events such as seed-time and harvest. It is as and when a cosmic disclosure is thereby evoked that we are able to speak of God — what the cosmic disclosure discloses — in terms of the models with which the finite situations have supplied us. It is on these occasions that we speak of a ‘sense of kinship’ with the Universe, of a ‘friendly’ valley — so friendly that, as Psalm 65 would express it, ‘the valley

⁵⁹ Gill, *Ian Ramsey: To Speak Respectably of God*: 54.

⁶⁰ Ramsey, *Religious Language*: 44.

⁶¹ Donald Evans (1971). “Ian Ramsey on Talk About God (134).” *Religious Studies* vol. 7.

⁶² Gill, *Ian Ramsey: To Speak Respectably of God*: 52.

laughs and sings with us.⁶³

C. Models and Qualifiers

(A) Models

Ramsey's term 'qualified model' is the key concept in his approach to religious discourse. This phrase contains both the term 'qualifier' and the term 'model'. For instance, expressions like 'im-mutable', 'im-passable', 'al-mighty' and 'infinitely-wise' consist of qualifier terms 'im', 'al' and 'infinitely' and model terms 'mutable', 'passable', 'mighty', 'wise'. Religious expressions without model terms would be misleading and even confusing, for they fail to find their anchorage in empirical experience. On the other hand, if the qualifier terms are missing, models by themselves would become straightforward and flat, they would just look like any other empirical assertions.⁶⁴ So for Ramsey, both qualifiers and models must be used together to make religious expression function in the proper way.

A qualified model serves to point out both the factual dimension and the 'unseen' dimension of religious expressions, in the way that the term 'model' shows us the observable part and the term 'qualifier' represents what is beyond.⁶⁵ Put differently, a qualified model allows us to get from one familiar scenario to an unfamiliar one.⁶⁶ Via the use of models, a language specific to a context becomes a lens through which another context is seen.⁶⁷

⁶³ Ramsey, "Talking about God": 206-207.

⁶⁴ Gill, *Ian Ramsey: To Speak Responsibly of God*: 92.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁶⁶ Wim de Pater (1988). *Analogy, Disclosures and Narrative Theology* (41). David K. Wilken (trans.). Leuven: Acco.

⁶⁷ Wim de Pater(1968). "Sense and Nonsense in Talking about God (10)." *Saint Louis Quarterly* 6.

A qualifier model is ‘a similarity-with-a-difference’ which helps evoke disclosures and generate insight.⁶⁸

Let us talk about models first. Models are constructions made to adapt reality.⁶⁹ The insights brought about by the models serve to integrate our experiences and make them fit into one another. Models are employed in every realm of knowledge, in religious discourses as well as in disciplines like chemistry, sociology and psychology. Models and disclosures have a very tight relationship that one cannot go without the other: “models without disclosures would be empty talk, and disclosures without models might be blind enthusiasms,”⁷⁰ says Wim De Pater (who once studied under Ramsey). Ramsey tells us about two kinds of models: the picture models and the analogous models.⁷¹

1. Picture models

A picture model is also called a ‘scale model’, its purpose “is to reproduce, in a relatively manipulable or accessible embodiment, selected features of the ‘original’... to bring the remote and the unknown to our own level of middle-sized existence,” says Ramsey in quoting Max Black. A picture model is a replica of the original entity, but with a different scale. A model airplane or a warship is a good example of picture models, so is a model-skyscraper prepared by an architect. Models, when constructed precisely, reproduce the relevant and essential properties common to both the

⁶⁸ De Pater, “Analogy and disclosures: On religious languages”: 105.

⁶⁹ Wim de Pater (1984-1985). “Philosophy of Religion (74).” Course notes, Institute of Philosophy, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.

⁷⁰ De Pater, “Sense and Nonsense in Talking about God”: 18.

⁷¹ Ramsey’s discussion here does depend heavily on Max Black’s theory of models.

models themselves the real objects. Lord Kelvin built scale models to help himself understand the real scientific phenomena: “I never satisfy myself until I can make a mechanical model of a thing.”⁷² Scientists of his day employed the same technique. Bohr thought that his model of the atom was an exact representation of the real atom. Maxwell and Faraday showed that the propagation of electricity in a medium via a picture model of push or pull.⁷³ Of course science has progressed much further since these people, yet the employment of scale models are still common in many scientific researches nowadays. Examples like wind tunnels, skid surfaces, simulations of polar weather conditions, slow motion simulation of biological processes etc. are still very helpful scale models.⁷⁴

2. Disclosure models

Besides picture or scale models, there is a second type of models, Max Black calls them ‘analogue models’ and Ramsey names them ‘disclosure models’. Such kind of model is situated between a replica and a formula. It offers hints and not identities.⁷⁵ Between the analogue model and the phenomenon, there is a ‘structural similarity’ and ‘similarity-with-a-difference’. It is because of such characteristics that insights and disclosures are possible, in which something eventually ‘strikes us’ or ‘breaks in’ upon us. A disclosure model functions to simplify the actual phenomenon. It shows us those ‘fundamental notions’ in the phenomenon which make the description of the phenomenon easier.⁷⁶

⁷² Quoted by Ian Ramsey (1964). *Models and Mystery* (2). London : OUP.

⁷³ Ramsey, *Models and Mystery*: 3.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

In religious utterances, many of the technical terms function as disclosure models. Such terms do not give us a mirror image or picture of what is being discussed; rather, they are there to evoke the relevant features. Terms like ‘unity’, ‘simplicity’, ‘perfection’ etc. claim to talk about ‘God’: “to talk of God in terms of ‘unity’ means, if we translate this into the formal mode, that the word ‘God’ unites all the diversity of language which is used to talk about the world around us,”⁷⁷ Ramsey so puts it. It is owing to the intrinsic nature of mystery and paradox in religion that the models employed in religious discourses are basically analogous. Disclosure models are even more appropriate and necessary in theological discourses than in the theoretical sciences, for the former discipline involves greater and more complex mysteries concerning ultimate reality such that our articulation must harbor a greater flexibility.⁷⁸

(B) Qualifiers

The use of qualifiers plays a very significant role in Ramsey’s approach of religious language. A qualifier is a directive and, when used with models, ‘develops’ the model until a disclosure is evoked.⁷⁹ By itself alone, a qualifier has no meaning; it functions like a mathematical operator or a directive of procedure for discovering what the mathematician is aiming at.⁸⁰ As has been intimated previously, religion, just as psychology and sociology, talks about the observable realm as well as the realm of the unseen.

⁷⁷ Ramsey, *Religious Language*: 59.

⁷⁸ Gill, “The Tacit Structure of Religious Knowing”: 557.

⁷⁹ Ramsey, *Religious Language*: 91.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

Qualifiers in religious discourse help regulate the model terms so that the latter would not be interpreted in a simple, straightforward manner. They act as pointers which direct our attention to a deeper dimension.⁸¹ Such pointers are not destinations themselves; rather, they show us the route or direction from models to mystery.⁸² If the use of qualifiers is neglected and the models are taken as straight descriptions, religious affirmation will become scandalous.⁸³ And because of the logical function of qualifiers as directives and imperatives, something inexpressible by descriptive language is disclosed.⁸⁴ Qualifiers help us to ‘see’ the ‘what is more’, “...the qualifier, precisely as functor of a model, witnesses to the fact that we are talking about a mystery, i.e., about something which cannot be expressed adequately in flashy descriptive terms.”⁸⁵ A number of examples can help illustrate how qualifiers and models work together in Ramsey’s theory of religious language.

(C) Three types of religious models

In his work *Religious Language*, Ramsey tells us 3 types of religious terms which are composed of models and qualifiers.⁸⁶

1. Complex single word terms employed in negative theology: such as ‘immutable’, ‘impassible’
2. Uni-concept simple terms said of the Deity: such as ‘unity’, ‘simplicity’, ‘perfection’

⁸¹ Gill, *Ian Ramsey: To Speak Responsibly of God*: 88.

⁸² Ramsey, *Models and Mystery*: 61.

⁸³ Ramsey, *Christian Empiricism*: 74.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁸⁵ De Pater, “Sense and Nonsense in Talking about God”: 17-18.

⁸⁶ Ramsey, *Religious Language*: 50

3. Two word terms used in Christian doctrines: such as ‘first cause’, ‘infinitely wise’, ‘infinitely good’, ‘creator *ex nihilo*’, ‘eternal purpose’

In the first two groups, the model and qualifier feature is used implicitly while in the third group it is shown explicitly.⁸⁷ Let us consider the three groups in order.

1. ‘Immutable’ and ‘Impassible’

Everyone can witness to the fact that all things around us are changing, and most can see that there is much suffering in human history. Yet for the person with a religious mindset, change and suffering are not the final words. The terms ‘immutable’ and ‘impassible’ seem to suggest that, in contrast to what we experience, there is some being which is not subject to any change. They urge us to go further, till ‘the light dawns’, ‘the penny drops’ and ‘the ice breaks’, when again a disclosure is envisaged where we come to see that only God is immutable and impassible. The terms ‘immutability’ and ‘impassibility’ are making a language claim, which asserts that the word ‘God’ is outside the realm of mutable and passible language,⁸⁸ that there is an inherent ‘oddness’ with the very word ‘God’.⁸⁹ In this second group of words, the way in which a qualifier works together with a model is clearly manifested. In the words ‘immutable’ and ‘impassible’, the part ‘im’ serves as an operator, which works to develop the model terms ‘mutability’ and ‘passibility’ and direct out thoughts towards disclosure situations.⁹⁰ But this way of characterizing God is performed at the cost of emphasizing the

⁸⁷ Gill, *Ian Ramsey: To Speak Responsibly of God*: 89.

⁸⁸ Ramsey, *Religious Language*: 52-53.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

distance of God from what we normally experience. In fact, we are little informed about what ‘God’ is like by these terms. In the next two groups, we will see how qualifiers and models work in a more positive way in talking about the Divine.

2. ‘Unity’, ‘Simplicity’, ‘Perfection’

The second group of terms is characterized by the method of contrast.⁹¹ Take the word ‘unity’, a concept that we might not know in the start what it exactly means. Yet we can start our thoughts from a world which is diversified. There are different sorts of entities in our world: things, plants, animals, persons etc. From a diversified situation, we can then eliminate the diversity gradually, hoping to put things together in a simpler and more generalized way.⁹² Say we begin with a room in our discussion. In a room there are chairs, table, shelves etc. There are several rooms in most houses. Moving on, we know there are many houses in a street, and there are many streets in a city. Of course, there are many cities in a country, and then there are many countries in the world...As we progress onwards, we can imagine at some point far enough that we arrive at a characteristically unique scenario, one that is by nature different from what comes before, a point at which ‘the penny drops’, the ‘light dawns’ and a ‘disclosure’ is evoked on what is called ‘unity’.⁹³ The term ‘unity’ can be compared to the terms ‘set’ or ‘class’ in mathematics, or to the experiences one encounters in Gestalt psychology.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Ibid., 53-54.

⁹² Ibid., 54.

⁹³ Ibid., 53.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 90.

3. ‘First cause’, ‘Infinitely wise’, ‘Infinitely good’, ‘*creatio ex nihilo*’ and eternal purpose

The third group of words in our discussion is characterized in the most obvious way by the qualifier-model theory. This group also shows very clearly the way theological expressions are derived from ordinary parlance.⁹⁵ For brevity sake, we will only discuss the examples ‘first cause’, ‘infinitely wise’ and ‘infinitely good’.

In the phrase ‘first cause’, the word ‘cause’ is the model term and ‘first’ is the qualifier term which works upon the model. ‘First’ is a directive that ‘develops’ the model and forces us to go backward and backward until a characteristically different situation is arrived at when we finally get to ‘see’ what is beyond observation, or when a mystery is ‘disclosed’. Such a ‘disclosed’ mystery is something which cannot be exhausted by the causal chain; it cannot be made any clearer by adding another piece of description. What is at stake is something over and beyond the domain of ordinary language. Mysteries in theology are scenarios which are seen and yet contain something ‘more’, they are distinctively non-homogenous situations which are only evoked via disclosure.⁹⁶ This ‘first cause’ puts an end to the chain of causal events. As ‘first cause’, God is ‘logically prior’ to all causes.⁹⁷

For the phrases ‘infinitely wise’ and ‘infinitely good’, we notice once more how qualifiers and models work together. The qualifier ‘infinitely’ acts upon the models ‘wise’ and ‘good’ and calls us to go on and on till a point

⁹⁵ Ibid., 61.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 62.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

when again, in Ramsey's jargon, 'the ice breaks', 'the penny drops', 'the light dawns', where a characteristically different scenario is brought about and a disclosure is being educed.⁹⁸ Phrases like 'infinitely wise', 'infinitely good' and 'all loving' direct us to a situation which is distinctively religious.⁹⁹ Ramsey so says: "'God' stands to the whole of whatever languages express wisdom — all the languages of discursive knowledge — something like a mathematical bound presides over, gathers together, and completes a sequence."¹⁰⁰ The word 'infinitely' rouses our thoughts concerning wise and good stories, showing us in the intended direction yet without ever reaching 'God'. It is hoped, by progressively moving onwards, a disclosure situation is reached where we will grasp a wisdom and goodness of the highest order, where we come to an imagery of the divine, a god which demands our whole person worship and commitment.¹⁰¹ Indeed there is a logical oddness in the phrases 'infinitely good' and 'infinitely wise', such an impropriety serves to remind us what that they point to is something outside our common language, a logical placing where the word 'God' resides.

Ramsey illustrates this concept of infinity through some geometric figures. A pentagon is a figure with five sides and an octagon is one with eight sides. Progressing forward, an 'n-tagon' then is a polygon having n sides. We can then ask, what is a polygon which has an infinite number of sides?¹⁰² Interesting, we would see that there is a subtle change; the figure is

⁹⁸ Ibid., 65-66.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 66.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 68.

¹⁰² De Pater, "Sense and Nonsense in Talking about God": 16-17.

no longer an ‘infinite-gon’ but a circle! Represented in equation forms, our mental exercise would look like:

$$\begin{array}{ll} 5 \text{ (regular polygon)} & = \text{‘pentagon’} \\ \text{infinite (regular polygon)} & \rightarrow \downarrow \text{‘circle’} \end{array}$$

The horizontal arrow in the second equation shows the forward direction, but the downward arrow indicates that there is a gap, indicating that it is an infinite logical progression. This gap cautions us that we are not speaking in our common flatly descriptive language. We need to cross the gap to comprehend the disclosure situation, one which is brought forth by the directive ‘infinite’.¹⁰³ It is indeed hard to see mentally an ‘n-tagone’ where n is the infinite. Thus the figure ‘circle’ is an ‘oddity’ in the realm of polygons. This example in geometry serves as a parallel to show the nature of religious language in Ramsey’s thought.¹⁰⁴

III. Analogy and Models, Similarities and Differences

After a rather lengthy discussion on the ways to religious language in Aquinas and in Ramsey, we have finally come to our last part where we will compare and contrast these two theories. The way of analogy and the method of models can be said as the most systematic and developed approaches among the many routes to the discourse of the Divine. It can be seen that in

¹⁰³ De Pater, “Analogy and disclosures: On religious languages”: 104.

¹⁰⁴ Ramsey, *Religious Language*: 69.

several aspects these two methods resemble each other and are therefore comparable. They remain, however, different in regard to their very cores.

A. Similarities of Ramsey's model theory and Thomistic analogy

(A) Ramsey's way as the 'middle' way

As we have seen earlier, there are two dimensions in Ramsey's use of qualified models. On the one hand the model term points to the fact that religious talk does not trade in shadowy realms, there are the factual elements to the discourse. On the other hand, the qualifier term points us to the unseen parts in the disclosure situation, the dimension which is mediated by the perceptual elements yet transcending them. By juxtaposing these two aspects, Ramsey is aiming at a middle way where he can combine empirical experiences on one side and religious experiences on the other. Ramsey's treatment of disclosures stands midway between a view that is strictly informational and one that is purely existential.¹⁰⁵ Speaking in a linguistic framework, Ramsey is steering between a talk about God which is univocal and one that is equivocal.¹⁰⁶ Such inter-mediating characteristics of his approach make the method of models similar to the 'middle way' of Thomas Aquinas.¹⁰⁷

(B) Disclosure models are analogous

The next intimation of Ramsey's models as akin, in a loose sense, to the analogical way of Aquinas is shown in Ramsey's choice of disclosure models (or analogue models) instead of scale models. A scale model is a replica of

¹⁰⁵ Gill, *Ian Ramsey: To Speak Respectably of God*: 62.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

reality, only it is different in scale, thus it is a univocal expression of the target object. A disclosure model portrays the significant characteristics and relations of reality, what is being represented is partly the same and partly different from the real object. Such expression is neither univocal nor strictly equivocal, but as its name implies, analogous. Put in scholastic terms, the relation between a scale model and its object can be expressed as an analogy of inequality, one that exhibits only univocal similarity with the real object, while the relation between a disclosure model and its corresponding object can be viewed as an analogy of proportionality (in contrast to sheer proportion), in which the model does not take away the mystery of its target.¹⁰⁸ Considering things in this sense, there is indeed a common essence between the method of models and the way of analogy.

Looking back at the history of science, it took scientists a long time before they realized that many of the models they had constructed to explain reality were disclosure models after all. These models only express the major features of the target phenomena, what lies in reality is not portrayed in detail by the models. Ramsey has distinctively pointed out that even theologians were employing the language of models all along, the words which they use for the Divine, including those which Aquinas used to explicate his analogy: ‘true’, ‘good’ and ‘wise’ etc. are only models (though Aquinas would not agree).¹⁰⁹

The similarity between models and analogy can further be explicated in the following manner. As said before, there are two sides to the use of model

¹⁰⁸ De Pater, “Sense and Nonsense in Talking about God”: 34.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

language. On the one hand, the model finds its ground(s) in empirical elements. Theological phrases like ‘impassable’, ‘immutable’, ‘infinitely wise’, ‘unity’, ‘perfection’ etc. contain an empirical part that we can perceive and understand perfectly well. We always have to start first from the changeable, the many, the less than perfect and the things we see every day in life. Then we perform the act of elimination, taking out all the deficiencies, so that hopefully we will finally arrive at an insight of the unchangeable, the One and the most perfect. The models have thus given us the empirical anchorage on which we can start our discourse. Similarly in the analogy of Thomas, the qualities we attribute to God start initially with the phenomenal world. We understand first what a ‘good’, ‘true’, ‘wise’ person is before we apprehend how these attributes can be applied to the Divine who is the ultimate goodness, truth and wisdom.

The other side of model language lies in its capacity to preserve the eventual ‘mystery’ of its target object. In the model and disclosure theory of Ramsey, one can only be assured that something has been revealed to him in a cosmic disclosure, but uncertainty begins when he starts to describe it, one is certain of the ‘thatness’ and not the ‘whatness’ in a cosmic disclosure. In the same vein, analogy allows the theologians to speak of the larger part of their topic without falling into anthropomorphism, yet there is still much reservation on the reliability of their articulation of what is disclosed in analogy.¹¹⁰ Even Aquinas says that we do not have a concept of God. We cannot comprehend God’s essence, because God is not a connatural object that can be abstracted from our material world.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 39.

¹¹¹ Wim de Pater (1982). “Divine Agency and the Concept of God: Can God Act?” D. Boilean and F.

(C) Models and the three ways of Aquinas

That models and analogy are interestingly comparable can be shown by matching the schematics of qualifiers and models and the ‘three ways’ of Thomas mentioned earlier. Consider a diagram of qualified models which we have used before:

infinite ! (regular polygon)	→↓ ‘circle’
infinitely ! (wise)	→↓ ‘God’
im ! (mutable)	→↓ ‘God’

In each category of the diagram, the horizontal arrow stands for the affirmative (*via positiva*); the vertical arrow represents the negative (*via negativa*) and the exclamation mark which expresses the function of the qualifier, signifies the excess (*via eminentiae*). In some cases, the qualifier does not have to be shown but is provided by the context, words such as ‘simplicity’, ‘unity’, and ‘perfection’.¹¹² For cases like these, the schematic can be show by adding the qualifier ‘divine’,¹¹³ for example:

divine ! (simplicity)	→↓ ‘God’
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Thus we see that the mechanism of Ramsey’s theory of models and qualifiers finds a parallel to the dynamics of analogy. In the model theory, the first move contains in finding the base of the religious term in our phenomenal

Dick (ed.). *Tradition and Renewal*, vol. 1, 35. Leuven: Leuven University Press. Referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* :1a, q. 88, a. 2.

¹¹² De Pater, *Analogy, Disclosures and Narrative Theology*: 42-43.

¹¹³ Zola, “Ian Thomas Ramsey: Cosmic Disclosures and Referring to God”: 183.

world, words we understand as they apply to us. Then, we are cautioned of the transcendence in what is being signified, this is represented by the gap (indicated by the downward arrow) between the model and its target.¹¹⁴ In the final move, with the help of the qualifier, our understanding is elevated infinitely to the eventual meaning which the qualified term aims at. Ramsey's approach of qualified models can thus be seen as an attempt, in an implicit sense, to carry out what is intended in analogy, though without using the term.¹¹⁵

B. The difference in ontology between models and analogy

From what we have seen above, it can be said that Ramsey is doing in a broad sense what Thomas was doing. However, there lies a crucial difference between the two approaches, that is, Ramsey refuses to accept the Thomistic ontology.¹¹⁶ In his own words Ramsey says:

But make no mistake, I do not claim that here is something altogether new. We might well admit that in principle we are only doing what, for example, St Thomas Aquinas was doing, though we are not thereby committed (for better or worse) to his ontology and system.¹¹⁷

Without committing to any ontology in his approach of models and disclosures, Ramsey is saying that what is revealed in cosmic disclosures ultimately remains a mystery. Take for example when the word 'good' is said of God. In Ramsey's terminology, God would be 'infinitely good'. But if

¹¹⁴ De Pater, *Analogy, Disclosures and Narrative Theology*: 47.

¹¹⁵ De Pater, "Analogy and disclosures: On religious languages": 41.

¹¹⁶ De Pater, *Analogy, Disclosures and Narrative Theology*: 39.

¹¹⁷ Ramsey, *Religious Language*: 185.

asked whether ‘good’ has any ontological status in God, he would say that we only have an intuition of ‘good’ in God, but we would not have the certainty in articulating the ‘good’ in God. Now the problem comes. We cannot help asking: can Ramsey really maintain the dynamics of analogy and yet discard the ontological question? We must ask now by what reasons we can say that certain attributes or models are applicable to God, and that others are not?¹¹⁸ How then can we distinguish between literal and metaphorical descriptions of God?¹¹⁹ Our choice for models for God now becomes difficult. As what has been said before, why can’t we presume God is arbitrary, cruel and composed instead of perfect, good and one?

By refusing to go into the issue of ontology, Ramsey has placed himself in an ambiguous situation. On the one hand, he says that models do not provide descriptions of God, nor do they serve to explain God.¹²⁰ On the other hand, Ramsey stresses that models are not just metaphors, they are not merely some forms of mental constructs or understudies for what we are trying to express in reality. There are many occasions where the referent cannot be spoken of, except through models, and in some situations, the models are ‘self-authenticating’. Ramsey claims further that there is ‘an inalienable objective reference’ in the cosmic disclosures, and such reference is spoken of through a multitude of models which in turn are subjected to both logical criteria and the test of empirical fit.¹²¹ This is the closest

¹¹⁸ De Pater, *Analogy, Disclosures and Narrative Theology*: 39-40

¹¹⁹ De Pater, “Analogy and disclosures: On religious languages”: 41-42.

¹²⁰ Ramsey, *Religious Language*: 168.

¹²¹ Ramsey, “Talking about God,” 216. The criterion of empirical fit is the criterion of coherence. In other words, God-talk must not run into contradiction of other established views about the universe. Models are selected on the basis of whether they can be adapted to a wide range of

Ramsey can get as regard to the problem of ontology. But this still does not solve the problem. J.M. Soskice observes aptly:

His (Ramsey's) difficulty is this — he relies on his empiricism to ground his reference (the object is simply given in disclosure, like Locke's figures in the mist), but he is not justified in terms of the same empiricism in developing the 'disclosure events' with models of God as husband, king, landlord, shepherd of judge. The disclosure is simply a point of reference with no content and, to be consistent with his empiricism and with the spirit of Locke's example, Ramsey should restrict his claims to what is observable, but this he plainly does not want to do.¹²²

Ramsey does not start with ontology at the head of his discussions. Rather, he begins first with religious language. From there he tries to make such language understandable and then tests its rationality, as one would test a hypothesis. But by discarding the doctrines of ontology that are usually associated with analogy, namely, order of being, causality, participation etc.¹²³, he has to supply other criteria in his theory: multi-models, empirical fit, comprehensiveness, consistence etc.¹²⁴, which in turn are founded on some implicit sub-criteria, namely, the Christian tradition, Holy Scripture and the way the believing community speaks.

phenomena in a consistent manner. For further details, see de Pater, "Analogy and disclosures: On religious languages": 117 and Ramsey, *Models and Mystery*: 16.

¹²² J. M. Soskice (1985). *Metaphor and Religious Language* (146). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

¹²³ De Pater, *Analogy, Disclosures and Narrative Theology*: 39.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

By foregoing ontology, Ramsey is foregoing the content in religious knowledge. What he has established is rather a way of speaking about religious experience found in cosmic disclosures. Thus all words of theology according to Ramsey, including those simple perfections of goodness, justice, wisdom etc., are merely models. This is in essence different from the way of analogy in Thomas Aquinas in which positive content is posited to such words. It is on this point of ontology that Ramsey is essentially parting from the true sense of analogy.

Yet looking things from another angle, we can say that despite the fundamental disparity in the roots of the two approaches, they do not really contend with each other nor do they exclude each other. Theoretically, analogy and the method of models are apart due to their ontology, but practically the difference is indistinguishable. Attaching ontological status to our language of God does not open up another box of terms in religious discourse. Words like ‘unity’, ‘simplicity’, ‘almighty’, ‘eminently good’, ‘infinitely wise’ etc. are used both by Aquinas and Ramsey, only that in the former they have ontological status, while in the latter, they are models. Qualities as ‘wisdom’, ‘goodness’ and others, whether literal or not, when pushed to extremes, eventually elude us. The use of qualified models is a method to help us speak of God by starting from empirical entities and moving gradually towards the Transcendent. Analogy is a method in a similar sense. Analogy is “a grammar of theological stammering”¹²⁵, it is “more of a strategy than a doctrine”¹²⁶, says De Pater. That God is spoken of as ‘wise’, ‘good’ etc. is not a mere abstraction of human wisdom and goodness, rather,

¹²⁵ De Pater, “Analogy and disclosures: On religious languages”: 38.

¹²⁶ De Pater, *Analogy, Disclosures and Narrative Theology*: 20.

earthly wisdom and goodness serve as pointers directing our understanding towards God.¹²⁷ If we view matters from this angle, namely that both the model theory of Ramsey and Thomistic analogy are approaches to help us be theologically articulate, we should rather appreciate what they have similarly achieved and not worry so much about their starting differences.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to examine two approaches to religious language, the medieval way of analogy by Thomas Aquinas and the modern attempt of models and disclosures by Ian Ramsey. In the first part, we have seen how Aquinas rejects both univocal and equivocal language in speaking of God. Then we have analyzed the different ways of analogy in Thomistic usage. In the second part, we have studied the concepts of models and disclosures in Ramsey's approach to religious language. We have also discussed several key examples so as to illustrate how models and qualifiers work together to give meaningfulness to God-talk.

The final part is a comparison of the two methods. We have seen that in several aspects the two approaches are similar. First, they can be thought as a middle way between univocal language and equivocal language. In addition, they are particularly comparable in regard to the dynamics of going from what is seen to what is unseen in the use of religious terms. Further, the way qualifiers and models work together does look very much like the mechanism in the three ways of Aquinas. Yet it has been made clear that Thomistic analogy and the method of models are essentially different in their ontology. The way of analogy says that, because of causality and participation, analogous

¹²⁷ Ibid., 21.

predications do contain positive contents of knowledge about God. Such knowledge is not univocal nor equivocal but analogical. However in Ramsey's method, the terms applied to the Divine remain models, the object of inquiry is an ultimate mystery despite that fact that there is positive and definite articulation of what is revealed in the cosmic disclosures.

It has been argued in the foregoing discourse that both Thomas and Ramsey have roughly the same project in mind. The two approaches start from different bases, yet they try to achieve a common goal — to speak of the Divine reasonably and responsibly. The models of Ramsey can be considered as a modern counterpart of the Thomistic way of analogy, intersecting it in many areas yet distinguished from it. Ramsey's theory, through its qualified adoption of Logical Empiricism, has surely infused new dynamics and richness into the medieval project by broadening our conception of empiricism and by bringing insights into the way we understand things in religion and in other realms of knowledge. Both approaches are truly arduous and sincere attempts to establish the meaningfulness of religious discourse. De Pater says conclusively:

I even dare to say that both analogy and Ramsey's theory of qualified models are the most elaborated strategies to fulfil what according to Lyotard (1986, 32-33), being inspired by Kant's third *Kritik*, is the concern of avant-garde art and postmodern philosophy: to make allusions to the Sublime, to evoke the Idea, to point towards the Transcendent, which since it transcends the observable cannot be represented.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ De Pater, "Analogy and disclosures: On religious languages": 42.

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