

## THE ANALOGY IN THEOLOGY

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HE dogmatic teaching of the Church is made up partly of mysteries, truths the existence of which would never have been suspected had they not been revealed, and which, even after they have been revealed, cannot be fully understood by the human mind. In what way then, are these truths to be treated in Christian teaching? One way, a method employed by Our Divine Lord Himself, and since that time used by the Pontiffs of the Church, her Councils, and her Doctors, is that of analogy. The Vatican Council<sup>1</sup> says of analogy in this connection that, first, before revelation, it could have discovered nothing about these mysteries; secondly, in revelation, it is necessary, since God cannot reveal the mysteries to man except through concepts intelligible to the human mind, and therefore analogical; thirdly, after revelation analogy is useful to give us some knowledge of the mysteries of faith. In fact, the only practical way of illustrating these mysteries has always been that of the analogy, or comparison, with something familiar to us. We learn, for the most part, by comparison and contrast. Our Divine Lord Himself sanctioned this usage by always speaking to the people in parables, inculcating and driving home some profound and recondite spiritual truth by illustrating it with a parallel in a sphere well known to His hearers.

Analogy between two things implies a peculiar blending of similarity and difference, it means that they are alike under a certain aspect, or in a given relationship. Sometimes the likeness is expressed in relation to a third element in the comparison, as when we say that a certain kind of food is healthy, and also that the appearance of a person who eats that food is healthy, the health of the person being in this case the third term, of which the food is the cause, and the appearance of the man is the sign. Another kind of analogy, and that with which we are more particularly concerned, is that between two objects themselves without reference to a third thing. Now this can be of two kinds: two ideas may be in direct proportion, or similarity, to each other, as, for instance, eight is to four, since eight is

the double of four. Secondly, two ideas may be analogous, not directly, but by the medium of another relation, or, to say it another way, the formal aspect attributed to two subjects of different orders or spheres is predicated of each observing the proper proportions which exist between these two orders or spheres. Thus eight is analogous to six by means of the relation fully expressed in the proportion; eight is to four as six is to three. This is called the analogy of proportionality, and it is this with which we must deal in Theology.

There is one thing which must never be forgotten when dealing in analogies, and it is that we stand at the lower end of the scale: "Analogical concepts are spoken properly of God, in whom the perfection which they designate exists in a 'formal eminent' fashion, in a pure and infinite condition. God is their 'sovereign analogue' and they are found in things only as a broken prismatic glimpse of the face of God."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, be it also noted that, while the knowledge we thus gain of things Divine is necessarily very imperfect, yet it is not entirely false, for all creatures, even such things as mental processes and activities, which are also creatures, are realizations in the concrete of some phase of the Creator, some way in which God has seen that His essence could be imitated in this world, and willed to bring that realization about. Perfections exist in God in a more eminent manner, absolutely; in us, only relatively and, as it were participated.

So much for generalities; it is interesting to consider some particular analogy, and the best one for all purposes is that which St. Thomas uses to illustrate the Blessed Trinity. One of the most beautiful things in the "Opera Omnia" of the Angelic Doctor is this comparison by which he suggests to us the most reasonable and most reasoned way of interpreting the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, what the Church means when she says, "The Father generates the Son," and so on. St. Thomas did not originate this analogy, for do we not find in the Gospel of St. John itself those words familiar to every Catholic, "In the beginning was the Word," etc. Aquinas simply follows the lead of other theologians who preceded him when he draws the ultimate logical inference from the words of St. John. It is a beautiful thing, this analogy, and the creative mind of St. Thomas adds new beauty to it, as will appear from his own words, a few of which will be quoted later.

Our Faith teaches us that the Blessed Trinity is the mystery of the three Divine Persons, really distinct, in one God, in the one individual Divine substance. Of these three Persons, the Second proceeds from the First by a true generation, the Third, however, from the First and Second Persons as from a single principle, by what is called procession or spiration.

The Son, then, is generated. How? Of course, we do not know, that is part of the mystery, but St. Thomas proceeds with his analogy, showing how it is most reasonable. It is clear that this generation in God cannot be accepted in the sense in which it is used with regard to the lower forms of life; it must therefore, refer to generation as applied to intellectual life. Now it is evident that God understands Himself. Everything, however that is understood exists in the one who understands it as a "concept," or, as a concept may be called, a word. Since God then understands Himself, He exists in Himself in this manner of a Word, witness St. John, "And the Word was with God (*apud Deum*)."

But God is Pure Act, eternal, etc., and so it follows that He always understood Himself in this way, and hence we have, "In the beginning was the Word"; and again, because He is Pure Act, He not only is his understanding, but also the act of His understanding itself is the Divine substance; and, since the essence of the Word conceived is God's understanding of Himself, consequently the essence of God is the same as the essence of the Word conceived. and so St. John says, "And the Word was God." Of course, it is plain that this cannot be so in our own earthly mode of understanding, for our intellect is not the same as our essence, nor is our concept the same as our act of understanding that concept. We must bear in mind that we are dealing in analogies which embrace two different orders of being.

The Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Holy Ghost, is not generated, but proceeds from the Father and the Son. In illustrating this we must consider that in every intellectual being there is not only intellect, or understanding, but also will. And so, in God we say there is also will,—not that there are any distinct faculties of intellect and will in God, as there are in us, for in Him they are the same as His substance, nevertheless we make these distinctions of intellect and will, according to our human way of understanding. The proper act of the will is love, and the proper object of God's will is the highest good,

that is, Himself. Now the object of love, or the thing loved is, in a sense, in the one who loves, and, therefore, God is in His will as the thing loved in the one loving. Now in us of course this action is simply a phenomenon, something transient and unsubstantial, but since God IS His operation, and is Pure Act, this existence in the one loving is existence in a substantial manner, so it is really and substantially God, one in essence with the other two Persons of the Blessed Trinity. Furthermore, we know that in the intellectual nature nothing is loved unless it be known, and so bespeaks a relation to the concept of the mind, the "word," and so we must say that this love, by which God loves Himself, proceeds from the Word and from the Father whose Word He is, both acting together as one principle. Nevertheless, since that which is loved does not exist in the one who loves as a specific likeness; this Divine Love, or the Holy Ghost, is not said to be generated, as the Word is, for the Word is conceived by a true generation. Thus there are two processions in God, likened to the two processes found in the human mind, that of understanding and that of loving, the cognitive and conative functions of mind.

What did St. Thomas himself think of this analogy? We cannot do better than give his own words, as he used them in the 26th chapter of the 4th book of the "Contra Gentiles":

"Thus we can consider the similitude of the Divine Trinity in the human mind. For the mind, from the fact that it actually understands itself, conceives its own "word" in itself. Furthermore, since the mind loves itself, it produces itself in the will as a thing loved. It does not, however, go any further within itself, but the circle is complete, since it returns to its own substance by love. . . . Therefore in the mind we find three things: The mind itself, which is the principle of the processes existing in it; the mind conceived in the intellect; and the mind loved in the will. These three, however, are not one nature, because the understanding of the mind is not its essence, nor is its volition either its essence or its understanding, because of this also, in us the mind understood and the mind loved are not persons, because they are not subsisting, even the mind itself, existing in its own nature, is not a person, because it is not the whole, but only a part of the subsisting being, which is man. In our mind, therefore, we find a similitude of the Divine Trinity in regard to the procession which makes the plurality in the

Trinity. . . . In this, however, the mind fails in representing the Trinity, that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are one nature, and each one of them is a perfect Person, because the understanding and the willing of God are the Divine Substance itself. And because of this the similitude of the Divinity in man is like unto a likeness of Hercules in stone,—like as far as the representation of the form, but it is not of the same nature. And hence, in the mind of man, is said to be an image of God, according to the text, “Let us make man to our image and likeness.” Gen. 1, 26.

That, then, in a few words, is the famous analogy between the functions of the human mind, and the processions of the Divine Persons, as presented by the Angel of the Schools; “like unto a similitude of Hercules in stone,—like as far as the representation of the form, but not of the same nature.” It is the analogy between two different orders, the analogy of proportionality; the two orders or spheres are the divine and the human, and any notion we can form in this life must be more unlike the reality than like it, as St. Thomas constantly reminds us. Nevertheless, there is some likeness, even though it be, “in stone,” for real knowledge of any of the mysteries we shall have to wait that time when we “shall see even as we are seen.”

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<sup>1</sup> Const. “*Dei Filius*,” Cap. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Maritain, “*Philosophy of Art*,” p. 44.

