# *Analogia Entis* and Indigenous Ontology: Interpreting *Faot Kanaf* of *Atoni Pah Meto* in the Light of Thomistic Metaphysics

**Patricius Neonnub[1*]; Octovianus Kosat[2]**
[1]Faculty of Philosophy, Widya Mandira Catholic University, Kupang
[2]Faculty of Philosophy, Widya Mandira Catholic University, Kupang

[*]Correspondence Author: patrisn@yahoo.com

*Abstract: This study explores the metaphysical significance of* faot kanaf — *the sacred clan stone of the Atoni Pah Meto of West Timor — through the lens of Thomistic analogia entis (analogy of being). While anthropological accounts have highlighted the social and ecological functions of* faot kanaf*, its implicit ontology remains underexamined. Rooted in a participatory cosmology,* faot kanaf *mediates relationships among humans, ancestors, and divine powers, embodying permanence and vitality as symbolic perfections. Interpreting this symbolism through Thomistic categories of participation and analogy reveals structural convergences: both systems affirm that finite realities signify transcendent meaning without collapsing into identity. This analogical framework provides a hermeneutical bridge for intercultural theology, advancing a model of inculturation that respects cultural integrity while deepening metaphysical understanding. By retrieving the sacramental logic inherent in Atoni ritual life, the study argues for an expanded theology of culture grounded in the universality of analogical being. The findings suggest that* faot kanaf *functions as a* signum analogicum*, illustrating how indigenous symbols can illuminate and be illuminated by the principles of classical metaphysics.*

*Key words: Analogia Entis; Faot kanaf; Thomistic Metaphysics; Indigenous Ontology; Intercultural Theology*

## Introduction

The question of how indigenous symbolic systems embody metaphysical intuitions remains an underexplored area in intercultural philosophy and theology. Contemporary scholarship on *Atoni Pah Meto* of West Timor has primarily approached its cultural practices through anthropological, ecological, or sociological lenses, often neglecting their metaphysical dimensions.[1] Among these practices, the ritual centrality of *faot kanaf*, literally, the "stone of the clan", stands out as an enduring symbol of communal identity, ancestral continuity, and cosmic harmony. Far from being an inert object, *faot kanaf* operates as a

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[1] Y. D. Manafe, "Cara Pandang Orang Atoni Pah Meto dalam Perspektif Komunikasi Ritual," *Jurnal Scriptura* 6, no. 2 (2016): 48–56; Y. Manafe and A. Neolaka, "Communication Value of Agricultural Rituals of Atoni Pah Meto Customs," *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 7, no. 10 (2020): 1–13; Bernard Konradus, "Faot Kanaf-Oe Kanaf sebagai Representasi Etos Lingkungan: Kajian Etnoekologi Masyarakat Adat Atoni Pah Meto di Timor Barat," PhD Thesis (Surabaya: Universitas Airlangga, 2007).

symbolic locus mediating the relationship between human beings, nature, and transcendent powers such as *Uis Neno* (Sky God), *Uis Pah* (Earth Lord), and the ancestral spirits (*Be'i nai*).[2]

From an anthropological perspective, scholars argue that *faot kanaf* fulfills multiple roles: it serves as the physical center of the clan compound (*sonaf*), functions as the site of sacrificial rites for agricultural fertility, and anchors ritual speech acts that reaffirm the hierarchical order of the cosmos.[3] These functions, however, point beyond mere social utility. As Eliade has shown in his classic phenomenology of religion, sacred objects often function as *hierophanies*,[4] manifestations of the sacred within the profane, revealing a participatory ontology in which material realities mediate divine presence. Within the *Atoni* worldview, the stone signifies permanence, vitality, and relationality, qualities that are interpreted as deriving from, and ordered toward, transcendent sources.[5]

This implicit metaphysics invites dialogue with classical philosophical frameworks that address the relation between the finite and the infinite. In this respect, the Thomistic doctrine of *analogia entis* (analogy of being) offers a particularly illuminating lens. According to Thomas Aquinas, the term "being" (*ens*) is predicated neither univocally nor equivocally of God and creatures, but analogically, signifying a proportionate similarity grounded in participation.[6] All creatures possess existence (*esse*) not essentially but by participation (*per participationem*), such that "whatever is by participation is reduced to that which is by essence as to its cause" (*omne quod est per participationem reducitur ad id quod est per essentiam, sicut ad causam*).[7] Thus, finite realities can signify divine attributes without collapsing into identity, preserving both transcendence and immanence.

Recent scholarship underscores the enduring relevance of analogy as a conceptual bridge for intercultural theology.[8] For McInerny, the doctrine of analogy safeguards theological language against the extremes of univocity, which compromises divine transcendence, and equivocity, which renders such language unintelligible.[9] Similarly, Cajetan's *De Nominum Analogia* provides a nuanced analysis of

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[2] G. Neonbasu, "Ritus dan Identitas Lokal di Timor," *Jurnal Antropologi Indonesia* 39, no. 1 (2018): 88-106; D. Djebarus, "Religious Symbolism and Agricultural Rituals in West Timor," *Antropologi Indonesia* 40, no. 2 (2019): 123–38.

[3] Clark E. Cunningham, "Order in the Atoni House," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 120 (1964): 34-68; Konradus, "Faot Kanaf-Oe Kanaf Sebagai Representasi Etos Lingkungan: Kajian Etnoekologi Masyarakat Adat Atoni Pah Meto Di Timor Barat."

[4] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (Harcourt, 1957).

[5] Manafe and Neolaka, "Communication Value of Agricultural Rituals of Atoni Pah Meto Customs."

[6] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition*, ed. revised by the Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine Dominican Fathers (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2012), n. ST I, q.13, a.5. *All citations from Thomas Aquinas refer to the* Summa Theologiae, *using the standard scholastic format: Part (I, I-II, II-II, III), Question (q.), Article (a.), and where relevant, Reply to Objection (ad).*

[7] Aquinas, n. ST I, q.44, a.1.

[8] David Burrell, "Analogy and Its Role in Interreligious Understanding," *Theological Studies* 73, no. 4 (2012): 865-83; Gilles Emery, "Participation in Thomistic Metaphysics and Its Relevance for Cultural Hermeneutics," *Angelicum* 90, no. 2 (2013): 245–68; Peter Nguyen, "Analogy and Intercultural Theology in Asian Contexts," *Asian Horizons* 15, no. 2 (2021): 291–308.

[9] Ralph McInerny, *Aquinas and Analogy* (Catholic University of America Press, 1996).

analogical predication, distinguishing between analogy of proportionality and attribution. [10] These distinctions become pertinent when considering indigenous symbolic systems like that of the *Atoni*, which communicate ontological order not through conceptual abstraction but through ritual performance and material signs.

Despite the potential for such comparative metaphysical engagement, existing studies of *Atoni* culture rarely move beyond descriptive accounts. For instance, Konradus and Manafe & Neolaka emphasize the ecological and social dimensions of ritual practices without situating them within a broader ontological discourse. [11] Conversely, theological studies on analogy and participation, while abundant in the Thomistic tradition [12] seldom address non-Western cosmologies. This lacuna calls for an integrated approach that draws on the resources of Thomistic metaphysics to interpret the metaphysical intuitions embodied in indigenous symbols, thereby advancing both philosophical and theological inquiries.

The present literature review seeks to address this gap by bringing *Atoni* symbolic ontology into dialogue with the Thomistic concept of *analogia entis*. It proceeds in five steps. First, it surveys anthropological and ethnographic studies on *Atoni* worldview and ritual systems, focusing on the ontological significance of *faot kanaf*. Second, it examines the Thomistic doctrine of analogy and its relation to participation and causality, with reference to primary texts and key commentators. Third, it engages in a comparative hermeneutics to identify structural convergences and divergences between these frameworks. Fourth, it explores the theological implications for inculturation and intercultural dialogue, particularly concerning the sacramentality of culture as articulated in *Gaudium et Spes* and subsequent magisterial teaching. Finally, it identifies gaps in existing research and proposes directions for future inquiry, especially in the context of eco-theology and the philosophy of culture.

By adopting this approach, the study aims to demonstrate that *faot kanaf* can be interpreted as an analogical sign, *signum analogicum,* within a participatory ontology, thus enriching the discourse on the universality of metaphysical structures and their cultural mediations. Such an interpretation not only deepens our understanding of indigenous cosmologies but also reinforces the catholicity of Thomistic metaphysics, affirming its capacity to engage pluralistic contexts without forfeiting conceptual rigor.

## Methodology

This study employs an interdisciplinary methodology integrating ethnographic research, textual analysis, and Thomistic metaphysical reflection to examine the ontological significance of *faot kanaf* in *Atoni* Pah Meto cosmology. The research proceeds in three phases: First, Ethnographic Engagement. Fieldwork was conducted in West Timor, involving semi-structured interviews with *Atoni* ritual specialists (*mone ana*) and community elders to document indigenous interpretations of *faot kanaf*. Participant

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[10] Tommaso de Vio (Cajetan), *De Nominum Analogia* (Rome: Typis Vaticanis, 1934).

[11] Konradus, "Faot Kanaf-Oe Kanaf sebagai Representasi Etos Lingkungan: Kajian Etnoekologi Masyarakat Adat Atoni Pah Meto di Timor Barat."; Manafe and Neolaka, "Communication Value of Agricultural Rituals of Atoni Pah Meto Customs."

[12] Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Random House, 1940); Cornelio Fabro, "Participation and Causality in Thomistic Metaphysics," *Review of Metaphysics* 15, no. 2 (1961): 170–200; John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Catholic University of America Press, 2000).

observation of ritual practices provided phenomenological insight into its sacramental function as a mediator between humans, ancestors, and divine powers.

Second, Comparative Symbolic Analysis. Drawing on anthropological literature, the study analyzes *faot kanaf* as a polysemic symbol encoding permanence, vitality, and relational participation. Its implicit ontology is then juxtaposed with Thomistic *analogia entis*, particularly Aquinas's account of created beings as participatory analogates of divine perfection. This comparative approach identifies structural resonances, such as the non-identical but real relation between finite symbols and transcendent meaning, while respecting cultural particularity.

Third, Intercultural Hermeneutics. The final phase constructs a theological hermeneutics grounded in analogy. By interpreting *faot kanaf* as a *signum analogicum*, the study applies Thomistic categories (e.g., participation, symbolic causality) to articulate how indigenous ritual logic coheres with classical metaphysics. This framework avoids reductionism, instead fostering a bidirectional dialogue where *Atoni* cosmology deepens, and is deepened by, scholastic metaphysics.

The synthesis of these methods advances an inculturated theology of culture, demonstrating how analogical reasoning can bridge indigenous and Christian metaphysical imaginations without assimilation.

## Results and Discussions
## Indigenous Ontology and Symbolic Systems

The worldview (*world-picture*) of the *Atoni* Pah Meto people is deeply relational, integrating human, natural, and spiritual dimensions within a hierarchical cosmology. At the apex stands *Uis Neno* (Sky God), regarded as the supreme source of life and order. Below this transcendent deity is *Uis Pah* (Lord of the Earth), who governs fertility and sustains agricultural abundance, followed by the ancestral spirits (*Be'i nai*) who mediate between the divine and human spheres.[13] This tripartite structure is not merely a mythological construct but functions as a normative framework guiding ritual practice, moral obligations, and ecological ethics.[14]

Within this cosmology, reality is conceived not as a closed material order but as a participatory system in which beings are interdependent and oriented toward maintaining harmony (*lulik*). The concept of *lulik*, the sacred, pervades *Atoni* ritual discourse, signifying a realm of power that sustains life and whose violation results in cosmic imbalance.[15] This participatory ontology is expressed in spatial and symbolic configurations, most notably in the *sonaf* (clan house), which operates as a microcosm of the universe.[16] The *sonaf* is oriented toward the east, symbolizing life and origin, and its architectural elements are invested

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[13] Manafe, "Cara Pandang Orang Atoni Pah Meto dalam Perspektif Komunikasi Ritual," 50; Neonbasu, *Ritus dan Identitas Lokal di Timor*.

[14] Manafe and Neolaka, "Communication Value of Agricultural Rituals of Atoni Pah Meto Customs."

[15] Konradus, "Faot Kanaf-Oe Kanaf sebagai Representasi Etos Lingkungan: Kajian Etnoekologi Masyarakat Adat Atoni Pah Meto di Timor Barat," 82-83.

[16] Cunningham, "Order in the Atoni House."

with cosmological significance. Such spatial hierarchies reflect an implicit metaphysical principle: that the visible order participates in and manifests an invisible, transcendent order.

This vision of reality aligns with what Eliade terms the dialectic of the sacred and the profane: sacred spaces such as the clan courtyard and sacred objects like *faot kanaf* function as *hierophanies*, mediating divine presence through material forms.[17] In *Atoni* ritual consciousness, therefore, matter is not profane *per se* but sacramental, capable of revealing and transmitting spiritual power under specific conditions of consecration and ritual usage. This insight anticipates the Thomistic notion of *sacramentality of creation*, according to which "created things can signify divine realities because they participate in being and goodness."[18]

Among the most significant material symbols in *Atoni* culture is the *faot kanaf*, literally, the "stone of the clan." Typically located in the courtyard of the *sonaf*, the *faot kanaf* serves as the ritual and ontological center of communal life.[19] Ethnographic descriptions emphasize that the stone is neither ornamental nor inert; rather, it embodies the clan's origin and continuity, functioning as a tangible reference point for identity, authority, and sacred power.[20] Its permanence contrasts with the transience of human existence, symbolizing stability amidst temporal flux, a quality that, in Thomistic terms, analogically reflects the divine attribute of immutability (*immutabilitas*).[21]

Rituals surrounding *faot kanaf* include sacrificial offerings, oath-taking, and agricultural ceremonies aimed at securing fertility and social harmony.[22] These practices reinforce the belief that the well-being of the clan depends on maintaining proper relations with the divine and ancestral realms. In moments of crisis, such as drought or conflict, the *faot kanaf* becomes the focal point for rites of reconciliation, underscoring its mediating function. As such, the stone operates as a symbolic mediator within a network of relationships that constitute the *Atoni* universe: the human community, the natural environment, and the spiritual hierarchy.

From a philosophical standpoint, the symbolic efficacy of *faot kanaf* rests on its capacity to signify realities beyond itself without collapsing into identity. It is not divine in itself but participates in a sacred order, mediating vitality and authority to the clan. This mode of signification, material, relational, and proportionate, anticipates the structure of analogical reference (*analogicum nomen*) as articulated in Thomistic metaphysics, where finite beings signify divine attributes proportionately to their mode of being (*secundum propriam proportionem*).[23]

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[17] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*.

[18] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition. "Participatio divinae bonitatis"* (participation in divine goodness) (ST I, q.6, a.4).

[19] Manafe, "Cara Pandang Orang Atoni Pah Meto dalam Perspektif Komunikasi Ritual."

[20] Konradus, "Faot Kanaf-Oe Kanaf sebagai Representasi Etos Lingkungan: Kajian Etnoekologi Masyarakat Adat Atoni Pah Meto di Timor Barat," 74-76.

[21] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition*, n. Cf. "Deus est immutabilis" (God is immutable) (ST I, q.9, a.1).

[22] Manafe and Neolaka, "Communication Value of Agricultural Rituals of Atoni Pah Meto Customs."

[23] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition*, n. 1. "Nomina analogica dicuntur de Deo et creaturis secundum propriam proportionem" (Analogical names are said of God and creatures according to their proper proportion) (ST I, q.13, a.5).

The cognitive structure underlying *Atoni* ritual life contrasts sharply with the abstract conceptualism of Western metaphysics. Knowledge of the divine is not attained through discursive reasoning but through embodied practices, mythic narratives, and material symbols.[24] As Eliade argues, in archaic ontologies "symbol gives rise to thought," not the reverse; that is, symbolic forms do not merely illustrate pre-existing concepts but generate ontological insights by mediating experience.[25] The *faot kanaf* exemplifies this dynamic: through ritual interaction, participants experience a sense of ontological depth that affirms their embeddedness in a cosmic order.

This relational epistemology underscores the sacramental logic operative within *Atoni* culture: the material mediates the spiritual, and the visible signifies the invisible. Such logic is not alien to Thomistic thought, which affirms that "effects resemble their cause and can lead us to knowledge of it" (*causa cognoscitur per effectum*).[26] In other words, the world is not a closed immanent system but a theophanic medium through which the divine can be analogically known. The resonance between these epistemic structures suggests that intercultural dialogue between *Atoni* ontology and Thomistic metaphysics is not only possible, but also philosophically fruitful.

The significance of *faot kanaf* reaches beyond cosmological sign to a lived moral order. As Konradus shows, the stone functions as a juridical locus: oaths are sworn, disputes adjudicated, and truth bound under sacred sanction.[27] This act of publicly taking an oath before elders, kin, and the land itself creates a community of witnesses and a memory of justice. Falsehood is not merely a private vice; it fractures the social fabric and offends the cosmos that shelters the oath.[28] In this sense, *faot kanaf* parallels Catholic sacramentals: both call down divine authority into human affairs without conferring sacramental grace, yet they shape conscience, restrain injustice, and stabilize promises.

The stone also orders reciprocity. Reparations, fines, and reconciliations are performed at *faot kanaf* to re-knit relations not by abstract contract but through concrete rites: the exchange of goods, shared meals, and mutual pledges that re-align persons within kinship and village.[29] Here justice is restorative rather than merely retributive; it seeks repaired communion, not victory. The stone thus anchors a pedagogy of virtue, teaching truthfulness, fidelity, temperance, and courage, through repeated, embodied acts.

Ecologically, *faot kanaf* mediates a covenant with place. Rituals there mark planting and harvest, open and close hunting seasons, name taboo zones, and regulate the commons. Overuse is framed as sacrilege; restraint is reverence. By synchronizing labor with seasonal rhythms and by sanctioning breaches (e.g., illicit burning, premature harvesting), the rites translate cosmology into governance. This is practical

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[24] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, 1973).

[25] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*.

[26] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition*, n. "Ex effectibus causae notitiam habemus" (From effects we have knowledge of the cause) (ST I, q.2, a.2).

[27] Konradus, "Faot Kanaf-Oe Kanaf sebagai Representasi Etos Lingkungan: Kajian Etnoekologi Masyarakat Adat Atoni Pah Meto di Timor Barat."

[28] Pontifical Council for Culture, "Theology and Inculturation," Vatican Publishing, 2017.

[29] Manafe and Neolaka, "Communication Value of Agricultural Rituals of Atoni Pah Meto Customs."

ecology: communal rules with moral teeth, enforced by elders and mythic memory, not by bureaucracy alone.

Read teleologically, these practices disclose an implicit doctrine of ends. The aim is restored harmony, the *bonum commune,* where truth-telling secures trust, reconciliation heals fractures, and the land's fertility is guarded for future generations. Aquinas would call this alignment with *lex naturalis*: reason discerning goods intrinsic to human and creaturely flourishing, then binding custom and ordinance to those goods.[30] *Faot kanaf* is thus not folklore on a pedestal; it is a local constitution, a school of virtue, and a liturgy of stewardship, ordered to *ordo et pax* in both society and soil.

The foregoing analysis permits several preliminary observations. First, *Atoni* ontology resists the dualistic partition between matter and spirit characteristic of certain strands of Western thought. Instead, it articulates a symbolic economy in which material entities, stones, water, plants, serve as conduits of spiritual power, provided they are integrated within a ritually constituted order. Second, the participatory logic governing this ontology anticipates key principles of Thomistic metaphysics, notably the notions of causality, participation, and finality. Third, the analogical structure of *Atoni* symbolism offers a promising point of entry for intercultural hermeneutics: just as Aquinas maintains that language about God is neither univocal nor equivocal but analogical, so too Atoni symbols signify the divine not by identity but by proportionate similarity.

In sum, the *faot kanaf* may be interpreted as a *signum analogicum*, a finite sign that mediates transcendent meaning through its participation in a sacred order. This interpretation not only deepens our understanding of *Atoni* symbolic thought but also illustrates the universal reach of analogical reasoning as a mode of mediating between the finite and the infinite. In the next section, we will examine the Thomistic doctrine of analogy in greater detail, highlighting its conceptual resources for articulating this intercultural dialogue.

## The Concept of Analogy in Thomistic Metaphysics

The Thomistic doctrine of *analogia entis,* the analogy of being, emerges as a response to the fundamental problem of theological language: how can finite human concepts meaningfully signify the infinite God without compromising divine transcendence or rendering such discourse unintelligible? For Thomas Aquinas, the key lies in rejecting two extremes: univocity, which asserts that terms applied to God and creatures have the same meaning, thereby collapsing divine transcendence, and equivocity, which implies that such terms have entirely different meanings, precluding any genuine predication.[31]

Instead, Aquinas posits analogy, whereby a term is predicated of different subjects according to an order of proportion, such that the signification is neither identical nor wholly disparate but proportionally similar (*secundum propriam proportionem*).[32] Thus, when we say "God is good" and "this creature is good," the term *good* signifies perfections present in both, but in radically different modes: in God as pure

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[30] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition*, n. "Lex naturalis ordinatur ad bonum commune" (Natural law is ordered to the common good) (ST I-II, q.94, a.2).

[31] Aquinas, n. ST I, q.13, a.5.

[32] Aquinas, n. "Nomina analogica dicuntur de Deo et creaturis secundum propriam proportionem" (Analogical names are said of God and creatures according to their proper proportion) (ST I, q.13, a.5).

actuality (*actus purus*), in creatures as participated perfection (*bonum per participationem*). This analogical predication preserves both the transcendence of the Creator and the intelligibility of creaturely reference.

Cajetan's classic treatise, *De Nominum Analogia*, further refines this doctrine by distinguishing two principal modes: analogy of attribution (*analogia attributionis*), wherein a term applies primarily to one subject and secondarily to others due to some causal relation (e.g., "healthy" of an organism and of food), and analogy of proportionality (*analogia proportionalitatis*), wherein a term applies proportionally to subjects according to their respective natures.[33] In the case of God and creatures, Aquinas employs both: creatures are good by causal attribution, receiving goodness from God; and the proportionate relation between God's goodness and creaturely goodness reflects an analogical proportionality, not a univocal identity.

The metaphysical ground of analogy lies in the doctrine of participation (*participatio entis*). Every finite being possesses existence (*esse*) not essentially but by participation in the pure act of being (*actus essendi*) that is God. As Aquinas asserts, *"Everything that exists by participation is reduced to what exists essentially as to its cause"* (*omne quod est per participationem reducitur ad id quod est per essentiam, sicut ad causam*).[34] Thus, analogy is not merely a linguistic convention but an ontological necessity: the analogical structure of language reflects the analogical structure of reality itself.

Aquinas' metaphysics rests on the real distinction between essence (*quidditas*) and existence (*esse*) in all finite beings. While essence determines what a thing is, existence actualizes it in reality.[35] God alone is *ipsum esse subsistens*, subsistent being itself, whose essence is identical with existence.[36] Creatures, by contrast, do not possess existence essentially but receive it as an act, rendering them radically dependent on the First Cause.[37] This dependency constitutes a metaphysical relation of participation: finite beings are "shadows" or "traces" (*vestigia*) of the divine, reflecting perfections that exist eminently in God.

Participation grounds the possibility of analogical predication. Since creatures truly possess perfections such as goodness, truth, and unity, albeit in a finite mode, terms signifying these perfections can be applied to God analogically. As Aquinas explains: *"Goodness is predicated of God and creatures not univocally nor equivocally, but analogically."*[38] The mode of predication corresponds to the mode of being: creatures have goodness by participation (*per participationem*), whereas God is goodness by essence (*per essentiam*). Hence, analogy reflects the ontological hierarchy of being, mediating between radical difference and real similarity.

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[33] Vio (Cajetan), *De Nominum Analogia*; McInerny, *Aquinas and Analogy*.
[34] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition*, n. "Omne quod est per participationem reducitur ad id quod est per essentiam, sicut ad causam" (Everything that exists by participation is reduced to what exists by essence as to its cause) (ST I, q.44, a.1).
[35] Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*.
[36] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition*, n. ST I, q.3, a.4.
[37] Fabro, "Participation and Causality in Thomistic Metaphysics."
[38] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition*, n. "Bonum dicitur de Deo et creatura non univoce neque aequivoce, sed analogice" (Good is said of God and creature not univocally nor equivocally, but analogically) (ST I, q.13, a.5).

The analogical structure of predication is indispensable for theological discourse. Without analogy, as Aquinas notes, either divine transcendence would be compromised (under univocity) or all knowledge of God rendered impossible (under equivocity). Analogy allows us to affirm both affirmation and negation in speaking of God: every positive attribution (*e.g., Deus est bonus*) must be immediately qualified by the recognition that God's mode of goodness infinitely exceeds the creaturely mode.[39] This dialectical movement is often summarized in the formula of the *via triplex*: *via affirmationis* (affirmation), *via negationis* (negation), and *via eminentiae* (eminent attribution).

Contemporary Thomists emphasize that analogy is not a mere semantic device but expresses a metaphysical realism: terms signify realities, and analogical predication mirrors the ontological order.[40] This point is crucial for intercultural philosophy: if reality is intrinsically analogical, structured by degrees of participation in being, then cultural symbols that mediate the divine may themselves be interpreted analogically. In other words, analogy provides not only a grammar for theological language but also a hermeneutic for engaging symbolic systems beyond the horizon of Western thought.[41]

Analogy in Aquinas is inseparable from his teleological worldview. Every being, by virtue of its form, is ordered to an end (*ordinatur ad finem*), and the ultimate end of all things is the divine goodness.[42] This orientation undergirds the analogical relation between creatures and God: finite goods participate in and signify the infinite Good as their ultimate cause and finality. Thus, analogy is not static but dynamic, directing thought and being toward transcendence.

This teleological dimension resonates with indigenous cosmologies, including that of the *Atoni Pah Meto*, wherein ritual practices aim at restoring and maintaining cosmic harmony. Just as Aquinas sees natural law (*lex naturalis*) as participation in the eternal law (*participatio legis aeternae*),[43] so too *Atoni* ethical norms express a participatory order oriented toward the *bonum commune*. Such convergences suggest that analogy may serve as a conceptual bridge for interpreting the teleological structures embedded in cultural rituals.

The Thomistic account of analogy has profound implications for the interpretation of material symbols like *faot kanaf*. If analogy reflects an ontological relation grounded in participation, then symbols function as mediating realities precisely because they participate in, and therefore signify, higher perfections. This sacramental logic, whereby material elements signify and transmit spiritual realities, is central to Catholic theology and finds analogical echoes in indigenous ritual systems.

When Aquinas asserts that "sensible things are signs of intelligible realities" (*res sensibiles sunt signa rerum intelligibilium*),[44] he articulates a principle that illuminates the structure of *Atoni* symbolism.

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[39] Aquinas, n. "Quicquid de Deo dicitur, non eodem modo dicitur de ipso et creatura" (Whatever is said of God is not said in the same way of Him and the creature) (ST I, q.12, a.12).

[40] Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*; Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*; Thomas Joseph White, "Analogia Entis and the Problem of Univocity," *Nova et Vetera* 9, no. 3 (2011): 573–600.

[41] Burrell, "Analogy and Its Role in Interreligious Understanding."; Emery, "Participation in Thomistic Metaphysics and Its Relevance for Cultural Hermeneutics."

[42] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition*, n. ST I-II, q.1, a.4.

[43] Aquinas, n. ST I-II, q.91, a.2.

[44] Aquinas, n. ST I-II, q.101, a.4.

The *faot kanaf* is not divine in itself, but by ritual consecration and cultural interpretation, it becomes a locus of mediation, an analogical sign (*signum analogicum*) which points beyond itself to the transcendent source of life. In this sense, the Thomistic framework not only explains the intelligibility of such symbols but also legitimates their role within an economy of grace that encompasses creation and culture.

The concept of analogy in Thomistic metaphysics can thus be summarized as follows. First, regarding analogy as metaphysical necessity, it can be said that analogical predication arises from the ontological dependence of creatures on God, reflecting the structure of participation. Second, insofar as modes of analogy are concerned, attribution and proportionality distinguish degrees of reference, preserving transcendence and similarity. Third, concerning teleological orientation, it can be said that analogy is dynamic, ordering creatures to the ultimate good (*bonum commune*). Fourth, in terms of hermeneutical potential, analogy offers a conceptual tool for interpreting symbolic systems that mediate the divine, grounding intercultural dialogue.

The next section will build on this conceptual foundation to engage in a comparative hermeneutics, examining how the analogical principles articulated by Aquinas illuminate the symbolic economy of *Atoni Pah Meto* culture, particularly the role of *faot kanaf* as a participatory and analogical sign.

## Participation and Comparative Hermeneutics

The task of interpreting *faot kanaf* through the Thomistic lens of *analogia entis* is not an exercise in imposing external categories upon an alien system, but a hermeneutical endeavor aimed at uncovering structural affinities that can sustain meaningful dialogue between indigenous and classical metaphysical frameworks. As Paul Ricoeur famously asserted, "the symbol gives rise to thought,"[45] and in this sense, the symbolic logic embedded in *Atoni* ritual practices functions as a generator of metaphysical insights, even in the absence of formal philosophical articulation.

To undertake such an interpretation, two principles must be observed: first, hermeneutical humility, recognizing the integrity of the indigenous system in its own terms; and second, ontological realism, acknowledging that both systems, despite cultural distance, seek to articulate truths about the same metaphysical horizon, namely the relationship between finite and infinite being.[46] Thomistic analogy provides a framework that respects these principles, for analogy as Aquinas conceives it is grounded not in arbitrary linguistic convention but in the very structure of reality (*ordo entium*), which is intrinsically participatory.[47]

To avoid the common pitfall of Eurocentric interpretation, where Western philosophical categories dominate indigenous epistemologies, this study employed three operational strategies. First, *privileging*

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[45] Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).
[46] Burrell, "Analogy and Its Role in Interreligious Understanding"; Emery, "Participation in Thomistic Metaphysics and Its Relevance for Cultural Hermeneutics."
[47] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition*, n. "Nomina analogica dicuntur de Deo et creaturis secundum propriam proportionem" (Analogical names are said of God and creatures according to their proper proportion) (ST I, q.13, a.5).

*Atoni self-understanding through ethnography*. Primary reliance was placed on ethnographic sources produced either by indigenous scholars or through long-term participant observation, such as Manafe, Konradus, and Neonbasu.[48] These works articulate the internal logic of *Atoni* ritual life, emphasizing emic categories such as *lulik* (sacred), *faot kanaf* (stone of the clan), and their cosmological significance, rather than filtering them through Western conceptual grids. Second, *methodological "double listening."* Following Bevans' model of contextual theology,[49] interpretation proceeded via a dialogical process of "double listening": first, listening to the indigenous worldview on its own terms; second, listening to the Thomistic tradition without presuming a unilateral normativity. This approach resists the temptation to reduce cultural symbols to mere prefiguration of Christian sacraments or to treat them as ontologically void sociological constructs. Third, *analogical translation rather than subsumption*. Rather than subsuming *Atoni* symbols under Christian categories through univocal identification (e.g., equating *faot kanaf* with the Eucharist), the study employs analogical translation: identifying structural convergences (participation, mediation, finality) while maintaining irreducible differences. This honors what Burrell calls the "asymptotic movement"[50] of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, where proximity grows without obliterating otherness.

By operationalizing these steps, the study aligns with contemporary calls for decolonizing theology[51] and developing an intercultural metaphysics that neither absolutizes Western categories nor romanticizes indigenous systems. Instead, it seeks a relational approach where analogy functions as a shared horizon for interpreting the participatory structure of reality across traditions.

A comparison of *Atoni* ontology and Thomistic metaphysics reveals striking parallels in their respective accounts of participation. For Aquinas, every creature exists by participation (*per participationem*) in the act of being (*actus essendi*) that is God, who alone is *ipsum esse subsistens,* subsistent being itself.[52] This dependence grounds both the metaphysical hierarchy of beings and the analogical mode of predication. Similarly, the *Atoni* worldview conceives the cosmos as a hierarchically ordered whole, in which human flourishing depends on maintaining right relations with higher powers, *Uis Neno* (Sky God), *Uis Pah* (Earth Lord), and the ancestral spirits, through ritual mediation centered on sacred loci such as *faot kanaf*.[53]

The *faot kanaf*, as the ritual and symbolic center of clan life, functions as a mediating reality. It is neither divine in itself nor a mere artifact, but a material sign that participates in a sacred order, signifying permanence, vitality, and relationality, perfections that, according to *Atoni* belief, flow from transcendent

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[48] Manafe, "Cara Pandang Orang Atoni Pah Meto dalam Perspektif Komunikasi Ritual."; Konradus, "Faot Kanaf-Oe Kanaf sebagai Representasi Etos Lingkungan: Kajian Etnoekologi Masyarakat Adat Atoni Pah Meto di Timor Barat."; Neonbasu, *Ritus dan Identitas Lokal di Timor*.

[49] Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Orbis Books, 2002).

[50] Burrell, "Analogy and Its Role in Interreligious Understanding."

[51] Nguyen, "Analogy and Intercultural Theology in Asian Contexts."

[52] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition*, n. "Deus est ipsum esse subsistens" (God is subsistent being itself) (ST I, q.3, a.4).

[53] Manafe, *Cara Pandang Orang Atoni Pah Meto dalam Perspektif Komunikasi Ritual*; Konradus, "Faot Kanaf-Oe Kanaf sebagai Representasi Etos Lingkungan: Kajian Etnoekologi Masyarakat Adat Atoni Pah Meto di Timor Barat."

sources.[54] This mode of signification mirrors what Aquinas describes as **analogical attribution**, wherein a term is applied to different subjects according to their causal relation to a primary referent.[55] Just as creatures are called "good" because they receive goodness from God, so too the *faot kanaf* is considered sacred not by intrinsic necessity but by its ordered relation to the divine and ancestral powers that ground its significance.

The mediatory role of *faot kanaf* resonates with Aquinas' principle that "sensible things are signs of intelligible realities" (*res sensibiles sunt signa rerum intelligibilium*).[56] For Aquinas, the sacramental economy presupposes the analogical capacity of material elements to signify and, in the case of sacraments, to confer grace by divine institution. While indigenous symbols do not possess sacramental efficacy in the strict sense, their symbolic function illustrates the same metaphysical logic: matter, by virtue of its participation in being and goodness, can mediate spiritual realities proportionate to its mode. This observation supports the claim advanced by contemporary theologians that the *sacramentality of creation* constitutes a point of convergence between Catholic thought and indigenous cosmologies.[57]

The cognitive pathways by which *Atoni* culture apprehends the divine differ methodologically from Thomistic abstraction yet share an underlying analogical logic. Whereas Aquinas proceeds discursively from effects to cause, *ex effectibus causae notitiam habemus* (from effects we have knowledge of the cause),[58] the *Atoni* arrive at similar intuitions through ritual performance and mythic narrative, which concretize metaphysical principles in symbolic form.[59] Both approaches presuppose that the created order is not epistemically opaque but transparent to transcendence, mediating knowledge of the ultimate through analogical relations.

This convergence challenges the epistemological skepticism of modernity, which often severs symbol from ontology, reducing ritual to a mere sociological construct. By contrast, both Thomistic and *Atoni* frameworks affirm the intelligibility of being through analogical mediation, grounding knowledge in participation rather than representation. Such an epistemic model offers fertile ground for developing an intercultural metaphysics that honors the integrity of indigenous symbols while situating them within a universal horizon of meaning.

Another axis of convergence lies in the teleological orientation of both systems. For Aquinas, every being is ordered to an end (*ordinatur ad finem*), and the ultimate end of all creatures is the divine goodness

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[54] Neonbasu, *Ritus dan Identitas Lokal di Timor*; Djebarus, "Religious Symbolism and Agricultural Rituals in West Timor."

[55] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition*, n. ST I, q.13, a.6; Cf. Vio (Cajetan), *De Nominum Analogia*, n. on attribution and proportionality.

[56] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition*, n. "Res sensibiles sunt signa rerum intelligibilium" (Sensible things are signs of intelligible realities) (ST I-II, q.101, a.4).

[57] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*; Culture, "Theology and Inculturation."

[58] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition*, n. ST I, q.2, a.2.

[59] Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*; Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*.

(*bonum divinum*).[60] The natural law itself is defined as "a participation of the eternal law" (*participatio legis aeternae*),[61] directing human acts toward the *bonum commune*.[62]

Analogously, *Atoni* rituals aim at restoring and maintaining cosmic harmony, ensuring fertility, and securing communal well-being.[63] These teleological practices presuppose an ontological order in which individual goods are subordinated to the common good, conceived not merely in social terms but in cosmological and spiritual dimensions. Such a conception parallels Aquinas' assertion that the ultimate ratio of law and morality lies in the orientation of all things to their proper end in the divine. This shared teleological horizon further reinforces the analogical structure uniting these two worldviews.

The preceding analysis has revealed that the symbolic logic of *faot kanaf* embodies a participatory ontology that resonates with Thomistic metaphysics, particularly the principle of analogy. This convergence suggests that analogy can serve not only as an interpretive tool but also as a theological bridge: mediating between descriptive ethnography and constructive theology.

Such a hermeneutical move does not entail a collapse of cultural symbols into Christian sacramental forms. Rather, it affirms their analogical capacity to signify realities beyond themselves while maintaining the asymmetry between natural and supernatural orders. In this sense, *faot kanaf* functions as a "cultural preamble" (*praeparatio evangelica*), inviting a theology that acknowledges sacramentality as a universal structure of mediation while situating its fullness in the economy of grace.

The next section explores this trajectory by integrating the metaphysical insight of analogy into a theology of inculturation, focusing on sacramentality as both a metaphysical principle and a pastoral strategy.

## Inculturation and Intercultural Theology

Inculturation, understood as the dynamic process through which "the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration into Christianity and the insertion of Christianity into different human cultures" occurs,[64] is grounded in the Thomistic axiom: *gratia non tollit naturam, sed perficit*, grace does not destroy nature but perfects it.[65] This principle underscores the Church's mandate to engage cultures not as neutral frameworks but as providentially disposed loci for the reception and expression of divine revelation.

Vatican II articulates this perspective with clarity: "Culture flows immediately from the rational and social nature of man" and "the Gospel of Christ renews the life and culture of fallen man."[66] Theological

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[60] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition*, n. ST I-II, q.1, a.4.

[61] Aquinas, n. ST I-II, q.91, a.2.

[62] Aquinas, n. "Omne quod est perfectionis in creatura, praeexistit in Deo eminentius" (Every perfection found in the creature pre-exists in God in a more eminent way) (ST I, q.4, a.2).

[63] Manafe and Neolaka, "Communication Value of Agricultural Rituals of Atoni Pah Meto Customs"; Konradus, "Faot Kanaf-Oe Kanaf sebagai Representasi Etos Lingkungan: Kajian Etnoekologi Masyarakat Adat Atoni Pah Meto di Timor Barat."

[64] John Paul II, "Redemptoris Missio," 1990, sec. 52.

[65] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition*, n. "Gratia non tollit naturam, sed perficit" (Grace does not destroy nature but perfects it) (ST I, q.1, a.8 ad 2).

[66] Second Vatican Council, "Gaudium et Spes," 1965, sec. 53.

models of inculturation, as Bevans and Shorter argue, should therefore move beyond superficial accommodation toward an authentic hermeneutical process in which the Gospel and culture mutually illuminate each other.[67]

The engagement between Thomistic metaphysics and *Atoni* ontology exemplifies this imperative. By interpreting indigenous symbols such as *faot kanaf* through the principle of analogy, theology affirms their ontological depth and sacramental potential, thus fulfilling the dual movement of inculturation: the elevation of culture through grace and the concretization of grace through culture.

### *Sacramentality of Culture*

The sacramental economy presupposes a broader principle: that material reality can signify and mediate divine realities because all creatures exist by participation (*per participationem*) in the divine act of being (*esse*). As Aquinas states, "Everything that exists by participation is reduced to what exists by essence as to its cause" (*omne quod est per participationem reducitur ad id quod est per essentiam, sicut ad causam*).[68] From this follows the analogical capacity of the finite to bear meaning beyond itself, a capacity that grounds both the Christian sacraments and the symbolic systems of traditional cultures.

Indigenous symbols like the *faot kanaf* exemplify this sacramental logic. Although not sacraments in the strict sense, their ritual function reveals an analogical structure: material forms mediating transcendent realities through culturally constituted signs.[69] This mediatory function aligns with Aquinas' affirmation that "in the sacraments, sensible things are employed to signify divine things" (*in sacramentis adhibentur res sensibiles ad significanda divina*).[70] In this sense, the *faot kanaf* can be interpreted as a *signum analogicum*, a natural sign whose intelligibility rests on participation in a higher order of being.

The recognition of such sacramentality within culture does not imply ontological parity between natural symbols and sacramental signs. Rather, it frames indigenous symbols as *praeparatio evangelica*, a preparation for the Gospel, consistent with the principle that "every perfection found in creatures pre-exists in God more eminently" (*omne quod est perfectionis in creatura praeexistit in Deo eminentius*).[71]

### *Analogical Hermeneutics for Intercultural Dialogue*

The Thomistic doctrine of analogy provides a conceptual key for reading cultural symbols without collapsing difference or resorting to equivocity. By affirming proportional similarity (*secundum propriam*

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[67] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*; Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Orbis Books, 1998).

[68] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition*, n. "Omne quod est per participationem reducitur ad id quod est per essentiam" (Everything that exists by participation is reduced to what exists by essence as to its cause) (ST I, q.44, a.1).

[69] Manafe, "Cara Pandang Orang Atoni Pah Meto dalam Perspektif Komunikasi Ritual."; Konradus, "Faot Kanaf-Oe Kanaf sebagai Representasi Etos Lingkungan: Kajian Etnoekologi Masyarakat Adat Atoni Pah Meto di Timor Barat."

[70] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition*, n. "In sacramentis adhibentur res sensibiles ad significanda divina" (In the sacraments, sensible things are employed to signify divine things) (ST III, q.60, a.4).

[71] Aquinas, n. "Omne quod est perfectionis in creatura praeexistit in Deo eminentius" (Every perfection in the creature pre-exists in God more eminently) (ST I, q.4, a.2).

*proportionem*) between finite and infinite being,[72] analogy allows for genuine predication while preserving divine transcendence. This principle extends to hermeneutical practice: cultural forms can be affirmed as authentic mediations of metaphysical intuitions while remaining distinct from the sacraments instituted by Christ.

Nguyen describes analogy as a "bridge concept" for Asian intercultural theology,[73] and Burrell argues that it prevents the twin errors of syncretism, the uncritical fusion of symbols, and reductionism, the nominalist denial of symbolic efficacy.[74] Applying this to the *Atoni* context, the *faot kanaf* is neither identified with Christian sacraments nor dismissed as a mere cultural artifact; it is interpreted as an analogical sign that anticipates, without replicating, the sacramental economy.

This hermeneutics fosters what Bevans terms a "mutual transformation" [75] between faith and culture. The Christian message assumes and elevates indigenous symbolic logic, while the encounter with this logic deepens theology's appreciation of the universality of analogy as a metaphysical and semiotic principle.

### Toward an Inculturated Theology of the Sign

Building on these insights, an inculturated theology of the sign would integrate three elements. The first is *metaphysical grounding*, i.e., the affirmation of the analogical structure of being as the basis for symbolic mediation. The second is *hermeneutical method*, i.e., the use of analogy to interpret indigenous symbols as anticipatory signs of the sacramental economy. The third is *pastoral praxis*, i.e., catechetical strategies that draw on cultural symbols to elucidate Christian mysteries.

In the *Atoni* case, the *faot kanaf* can serve as a catechetical analogy for Christ as the cornerstone (Eph 2:20) and for the Eucharist as the *fons et culmen* of ecclesial life[76]. Liturgical adaptation, governed by the norms of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (§37–40), might incorporate symbolic gestures acknowledging the clan stone, not as a sacramental substitute, but as a cultural locus of continuity and gratitude to the Creator.[77] Such practices embody what John Paul II calls the "mutual enrichment" of Gospel and culture.[78]

While analogical interpretation opens promising paths for inculturation, it also necessitates theological vigilance. Syncretism occurs when cultural symbols are absorbed into Christian worship in a way that compromises doctrinal integrity, blurring the ontological distinction between sacramental and non-sacramental signs. Reductionism, conversely, trivializes indigenous symbols as mere "stepping stones," erasing their ontological significance within their native context.

The Thomistic principle of analogy mitigates both risks. By maintaining the *analogical interval* between Creator and creature, it secures the transcendence of divine action while recognizing the creaturely capacity to signify it. In this way, analogy provides a normative criterion for discernment: cultural elements

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[72] Aquinas, n. ST I, q.13, a.5.
[73] Nguyen, "Analogy and Intercultural Theology in Asian Contexts."
[74] Burrell, "Analogy and Its Role in Interreligious Understanding."
[75] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*.
[76] Second Vatican Council, "Sacrosanctum Concilium," 1963, sec. 10.
[77] Pontifical Council for Culture, "Theology and Inculturation."
[78] John Paul II, "Ecclesia in Asia," 1999, sec. 21.

can be assumed and elevated, but never equated with the sacramental signs instituted by Christ. Thus, inculturation remains a process of purification and elevation (*assumptio et perfectio*), not mere adaptation or syncretic amalgamation.

The synthesis of sacramentality and analogical hermeneutics yields a robust theological framework for inculturation. It affirms the ontological depth of cultural symbols like *faot kanaf*, situates them within a participatory metaphysics, and employs analogy as both a metaphysical principle and hermeneutical key. In so doing, it avoids the twin pitfalls of syncretism and reductionism, while fostering a theology that is at once faithful to the Gospel and responsive to cultural particularity.

### *Gaps in Research and Future Directions*

Despite the growing body of scholarship on *Atoni Pah Meto* cultural practices, most analyses have remained confined within the disciplinary boundaries of anthropology, sociology, or eco-religious studies. Scholars such as Konradus, Manafe, and Manafe & Neolaka have produced rich descriptions of ritual structures, symbolic logic, and ecological ethics within the *Atoni* worldview. Yet these studies often lack an explicit metaphysical framework through which the ontological implications of symbols like *faot kanaf* can be rigorously analyzed.

What remains largely absent is a systematic effort to uncover the implicit metaphysics at work within *Atoni* cosmology, specifically, how concepts such as being, participation, mediation, causality, and finality are instantiated in ritual and narrative forms. This omission is not unique to the *Atoni* case; it reflects a broader disciplinary hesitation to engage indigenous systems on philosophical terms, often under the guise of preserving cultural authenticity. However, as Burrell and Kerr argue, true intercultural dialogue requires more than descriptive tolerance, it demands ontological and epistemological engagement.[79]

A related lacuna is the perceived disconnect between indigenous ontologies and classical metaphysical traditions, particularly Thomism. Often, Western-trained scholars assume that systems like Aquinas' *analogia entis* are too abstract or foreign to resonate with the symbolic cosmologies of traditional cultures. This assumption has led to an artificial bifurcation between "ethnographic theology" and "systematic theology," depriving both of the enrichment that a comparative framework could offer.

Yet as this study demonstrates, the participatory logic of *Atoni* ritual life, its conception of a hierarchical cosmos, the mediating role of sacred objects, the orientation toward cosmic harmony, is structurally congruent with the metaphysical grammar of Thomistic analogy. The challenge, therefore, is not a lack of compatibility but a lack of interpretive infrastructure capable of translating these insights across traditions.

To overcome these barriers, future research must cultivate *interdisciplinary methodologies* that integrate anthropology, philosophy, theology, and liturgical studies. Such a methodology would enable scholars to move beyond superficial analogies and identify deep structural convergences and divergences between cultural-symbolic systems and metaphysical frameworks.

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[79] Burrell, "Analogy and Its Role in Interreligious Understanding"; Fergus Kerr, "Thomism and Postmodernity: A Dialogue of Cultures," *New Blackfriars* 96, no. 1067 (2015): 321–37.

In particular, the use of *analogical hermeneutics*, drawing on Thomistic categories such as *participatio entis*, *causa prima*, and *bonum commune*, can offer a productive lens for interpreting indigenous symbols without reducing them to mere types or prefigurations. Conversely, insights from symbolic anthropology and ritual theory can challenge and refine classical metaphysics, highlighting aspects often overlooked in abstract scholastic formulations (e.g., embodiment, communal memory, spatial symbolism).

Building on the present study, future scholarship could broaden its scope by engaging in a comparative analysis of other Timorese or Austronesian ritual symbols that embody participatory ontologies. Two examples are worthy of mention. First, *Oe kanaf* (ancestral water source): a symbol of continuity, purification, and life, potentially analyzable through the Thomistic notion of *causa efficiens* (efficient causality) and *aqua vitae* (water of life). Second, *Hau teas* (ritual poles): markers of vertical mediation between heaven and earth, possibly interpreted through the vertical hierarchy of being and the *scala naturae* tradition.

These symbols, like *faot kanaf*, are not merely cultural elements but ontological signs, awaiting deeper philosophical engagement. Mapping such analogical structures across multiple traditions would significantly contribute to the emerging field of intercultural metaphysics.

The theological and pastoral implications of this research are significant. First, it offers a robust alternative to reductive models of inculturation that rely on superficial cultural adaptation. Instead, it proposes a metaphysical inculturation, in which cultural forms are interpreted as participatory signs embedded in a sacramental worldview, and thus capable of being assumed, purified, and elevated by the Christian mystery.

Second, it provides a framework for catechesis and theological education in contexts like Timor, where indigenous ontologies continue to shape religious imagination. Catechetical instruction can draw analogies between traditional symbols and Christian sacraments, not to collapse one into the other, but to illustrate how the logic of mediation and participation finds its fulfillment in Christ, the one mediator (*unus mediator*) between God and humanity (1 Tim 2:5). This approach facilitates evangelization through resonance rather than rupture.

Third, it opens the possibility of ritual inculturation in liturgical practice, in line with *Sacrosanctum Concilium*'s call for integrating "elements from the traditions and genius of each people."[80] Ritual objects like *faot kanaf* could be ritually acknowledged in appropriate cultural contexts, not as replacements for Christian sacraments, but as signs of communal memory and continuity with creation.

## Conclusion

The present study has argued that *faot kanaf*, the sacred clan stone of the *Atoni Pah Meto*, can be fruitfully interpreted through the Thomistic concept of *analogia entis*. As an ontological center, symbolic mediator, and ritual locus of cosmic harmony, *faot kanaf* exemplifies a participatory logic that resonates deeply with Aquinas' metaphysical principles of *esse*, *participation*, and analogical predication. It is a

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[80] Second Vatican Council, "Sacrosanctum Concilium," sec. 37.

*signum analogicum*, i.e., a finite symbol that signifies the infinite by proportion, rooted in the shared metaphysical structure of creation.

This analogical reading does not impose foreign categories upon indigenous meaning but reveals their ontological depth, affirming the sacramentality of culture and the universality of the metaphysical order. In doing so, it retrieves the Thomistic tradition from the margins of intercultural theology, demonstrating that classical metaphysics remains a vital resource for contemporary engagement with pluralistic worldviews.

Moreover, it suggests that the path forward for theology lies not in abstract universalisms nor isolated particularisms, but in an analogical realism, one that affirms the intelligibility of being across cultures, and sees in every sign a trace of the transcendent (*vestigium Dei*). As Aquinas reminds us, "All things, inasmuch as they exist, bear the likeness of God" (*omnia entia, inquantum sunt, habent similitudinem Dei*).[81]

Such a vision invites theologians, philosophers, and pastoral agents alike to enter into deeper dialogue with the world's cultural riches, confident that the light of truth, though refracted through many signs, shines from the same source: *ipsum esse subsistens*, the One in whom all things live and move and have their being.

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[81] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin-English Edition*, n. ST I, q.4, a.3.

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