My proposal is firstly to examine the background in ancient and medieval thought to Thomas Aquinas’s language on God and then secondly to study some of the key texts in his writings where he justifies and applies his thought on this matter.

In the first part we will explore what Plato has to say about ‘theological language’ in Book II of his dialogue Republic. There he goes in search of criteria of right speech about the gods, a rational and philosophical language (logos) that will be more fitting for speaking about the divine than is the mythical language used by the poets (muthos). A second text of Plato will also be considered, his late dialogue Parmenides because of the significance it had for later Neoplatonist philosophers who in turn transmitted its concerns to Islamic, Jewish and Christian teachers.

A second inheritance from the ancient world is the threefold way of speaking about the divine, by negation, in terms of causality, and by eminence. This grammar for God-talk emerged in the ancient world, firstly among pagan thinkers, but was found congenial also by Jewish, Islamic and Christian teachers. The sacred scriptures of the great monotheistic faiths required exactly the same combination of ways of speaking about God. The early Christian teachers therefore valued this threefold way because they were theologians and also because they were philosophers. They required a proper reserve in relation to any talk about God (the way of negation recognizing that we know what God is not but not what God is), an acknowledgement of God’s causality in relation to all that is (and so the possibility of naming God from the created world), and the necessity to stress the degree of super-eminence in which perfections attributed to God from the created order will be realized in God (this because of the absolute transcendence of God, the creator ex nihilo of all that is).
A third moment in this account will be to examine the philosophy of Proclus and its importance for the Syrian Christian theologian known as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Proclus represents the final stages of pagan neoplatonist thought. In his major works of philosophical theology – his *Platonic Theology*, his *Elements of Theology*, and his *Commentary on the Parmenides of Plato* – he brings to an extraordinary fulfillment the original insights of Plato about theological language as these insights had been refined and developed particularly in the school of Plotinus. Where the pagan Neoplatonists were able to tolerate the idea of different levels of divinity, resolving some of the tensions in Plato’s *Parmenides* by attributing all negation to one, highest level of divinity and all affirmation to another, lower level of divinity, this option was not available to Christian theologians. There is only one God, Creator and Lord of all things, and even if Christians had come to understand God as a Trinity of Persons this could not be in such a way that God’s absolute unity would be prejudiced. Pseudo-Dionysius then brings together the *via negativa* and the *via positiva*, the apophatic and cataphatic ways of speaking about God. These two ways of speaking are with reference to the same reality, God, who is at one and the same time hidden in mystery, beyond knowing and being, and revealed in creation, in the Bible and in the saving mysteries celebrated in the Church.

With this background in mind we turn then to texts of Saint Thomas Aquinas in which he speaks about the language that is appropriate for God. In the first place we will study *Summa theologiae* I, 13, the question on ‘naming God’. We will see how the ancient threefold way of *via negativa*, *via causalitatis* and *via eminentiae* was used by Aquinas to develop his own account of ‘analogical predication’. Our language about God is neither univocal nor equivocal, rather is it ‘analogical’. This part of his work continues to be extraordinarily fruitful having been re-thought and re-presented in modern times by Christian theologians familiar not only with what Aquinas and the Thomist school after him taught about language on God, but familiar also with the work of Wittgenstein and of other philosophers of language.

A second text in Aquinas worthy of particular study is *Summa theologiae* I, 15, the question ‘on ideas’. This question has given rise to significant controversy
among Thomists with some believing that it is too ‘platonic’ for an Aquinas whom they regard as essentially Aristotelian in his philosophical preferences. It seems to make God dependent on creation for some of His knowledge, a dependence that would threaten the divine simplicity, so comprehensively established by Aquinas in many places. Others see that Aquinas appeals to the notion of ideas in God in many places throughout his work, most notably in his treatment of central theological doctrines such as creation, providence and the Divine Word. An adequate treatment of this question obliges us to consider the importance of Saint Augustine of Hippo, the great Latin Father of the Church, whose thought continued to be of such crucial importance for Aquinas.

In the final part of this series of lectures we will study the opening question of Aquinas *Summa theologiae* where he explains how he understands *sacra doctrina*, or Christian theology. What language about God (*theo-logia*) is appropriate and required by what reason and faith together teach us about God? We must then consider how Aquinas weaves together Aristotelian notions of scientific knowledge and argument with earlier patristic and monastic understandings of spiritual knowledge and wisdom. We will consider the importance of metaphor in all language on God as well as examining the senses of scripture identified by Aquinas: the literal sense that may also bear allegorical, moral and anagogical senses. Finally, and by way of experiment, what Aquinas has to say about intellectual virtues and types of causality will be brought alongside what he has to say about the senses of Scripture to see whether there is a basis for relating, in a fresh way, elements of his natural philosophy, his understanding of language, and his theory of virtue.