

God's Revelatory Presence: A Synthesis of God's Revelation and Presence

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Abstract: *Scripture frequently depicts God disclosing his presence to humanity through special revelation. How such encounters are described often reflects whether emphasis is placed on divine omnipresence, the doctrine of special revelation, or the motif of relational presence. Given the diverse emphases within biblical, systematic, and philosophical theology, this study contends that a constructive synthesis—integrating insights from each discipline—offers significant advancement in the theological discourse on divine presence, omnipresence, and revelation. Further, this article proposes the category of God's revelatory presence as the most precise designation for instances when the Triune God manifests himself. This category provides a unifying framework that honors the contributions of multiple disciplines and furnishes a more comprehensive account of the objective and subjective dimensions of encountering God. This study defines God's revelatory presence, examines its nature and function, and shows its theological importance, while highlighting the gaps it addresses in current scholarship.*

Key Words: *biblical motif, God, omnipresence, presence, relational presence, revelatory presence, special revelation, synthesis*

How should one best describe an encounter with God? Throughout Scripture, the Lord consistently reveals himself through his presence so that humanity might experience his love, grace, and mercy. One's approach to God's revelation and presence inevitably shapes the framework for understanding their relationship. Although much biblical, systematic, and philosophical scholarship implicitly treats revelation and presence as inseparable, the nature of each discipline warrants closer examination. Such exploration requires attending to the metaphysical attribute of divine omnipresence, the doctrine of special revelation, and the biblical motif of God's relational presence. What remains lacking is a unified framework that synthesizes these realities. This study contends that the concept of God's *revelatory presence* provides a constructive and integrative approach that both synthesizes and advances existing theological discourse on divine presence, omnipresence, and revelation.

In this article, I refine the relationship between revelation and presence through the category of *revelatory presence*, which I define as the means by which one encounters the manifestation of God's presence—expressed audibly, visually, or experientially—that progressively discloses his nature, character, and will to humanity. This category offers a unifying framework that honors the contributions of biblical, theological, and philosophical studies while providing a more robust account of what occurs both objectively and subjectively when God manifests his presence and reveals himself. Accordingly, this article argues that synthesizing revelation and presence addresses deficiencies that arise when they are treated in isolation. The study proceeds by further defining the concept of revelatory presence, examining its nature and function, demonstrating its theological value, and identifying the gaps in current scholarship that such a synthesis resolves.

The Necessity of a Synthesis

The concepts of God's revelation and presence are not new in the fields of theological studies. However, current theological descriptions of God's revelation and presence lack a coherent synthesis that adequately accounts for the nature of encountering the God of Scripture. If one surveys church history in search of information pertaining to either God's person, revelation, or presence, one will find countless works regarding these topics.¹ Christa McKirland interacts with aspects of God's presence and revelation. Although she does not address it as a unified concept,

¹ See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman, Library of Religion and Culture (Harper & Row, 1958); Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. Paul T. Nimmo, 3rd ed., T&T Clark Cornerstones (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016); Karl Barth et al., *Church Dogmatics, Volume 1, The Doctrine of the Word of God (Part 1)*, Church Dogmatics (T&T Clark International, 1975); Karl Barth et al., *Church Dogmatics, Volume 1, The Doctrine of the Word of God (Part 2)*, Church Dogmatics (T&T Clark International, 1975); Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 6 (Crossway, 1999); Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Fortress, 1980); Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl, The Gifford Lectures 1984–1985 (Fortress, 1993); Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James Leitch, 5th ed. (Harper & Row, 1991); Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden, 1st ed. (Harper & Row, 1974); Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution of Messianic Ecclesiology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (SCM Press, 1977); Christa L. McKirland, *God's Provision, Humanity's Need: The Gift of Our Dependence* (Baker Academic, 2022).

McKirland discusses how humanity benefits through a second-person relationship with God.² Similarly, biblical scholars like Samuel Terrien, Terrence Fretheim, G. K. Beale, J. Ryan Lister, J. Scott Duvall, J. Daniel Hays, and David Wenkel focus on YHWH's personal nature when discussing God's presence.³

Biblical studies typically emphasizes God's presence, whereas systematic theology focuses on divine revelation or omnipresence. The Lord's omnipresence in its traditional sense is a metaphysical category that does not engage with God's relational nature or God's revelation. Although many have attempted to answer how one knows the Triune God or what happens when encountering God's manifest presence, there is no extant work that brings both God's revelation and presence together as a category for theological study. Therefore, this article proposes using the language of *God's revelatory presence* to describe the synthesis of God's revelation and presence. As such, I will bridge the gap between revelation and presence as treated respectively in biblical and systematic fields and propose a new pathway for utilizing the concept of God's revelatory presence.

The Benefits of Synthesis

God's revelatory presence addresses three problems that arise when examining research concerning God's revelation and presence: its location (*locus*), its terminology (*language*), and the gaps in the current understanding (*lacuna*). Within recent biblical theology, explicit engagement with the concept of God's revelatory presence appears rare, with only J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays offering substantive treatment of the theme.⁴ Unfortunately, God's revelatory presence remains unexplored in systematic theology. Although many scholars in biblical, systematic, and philosophical theology draw upon God's revelation and presence to de-

² See McKirland, *God's Provision, Humanity's Need*.

³ Samuel L. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology*, 1st ed., Religious Perspectives 26 (Harper & Row, 1978); Terrence Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Abingdon, 2005); G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 17 (Apollos, 2004); J. Ryan Lister, *The Presence of God: Its Place in the Storyline of Scripture and the Story of Our Lives* (Crossway, 2015); J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *God's Relational Presence: The Cohesive Center of Biblical Theology* (Baker Academic, 2019); David Wenkel, *Shining Like the Sun: A Biblical Theology of Meeting God Face to Face* (Lexham Press, 2016).

⁴ Duvall and Hays, *God's Relational Presence*, 221.

velop their theological systems, none explicitly emphasize God's revelatory presence or provide its definition, nature, or function.⁵ Further, God's revelatory presence does not fit easily into either biblical or systematic categories because of its synthesis of both revelation and presence. Additionally, the revelatory presence of God cannot be reduced to the traditional attribute of God's omnipresence, the doctrine of revelation, or the biblical motif of presence.

First, although both biblical and systematic interact with the Lord's revelation and presence, neither presents the definition, nature, or function of the revelatory presence of God (i.e., God walking in the garden of Eden, Moses encountering God at the burning bush, Elijah approaching God at Mt. Horeb, Christ's incarnation). Rarely is revelation defined or explicitly stated as associated with God's presence. God's revelation often assumes his presence. Yet if Scripture highlights God's presence as central to redemption, why is revelation usually treated in systematic theology while presence is left to biblical theology? Further, the metaphysical category of God's omnipresence is rarely noted for being personal in nature.⁶

⁵ Scholars have utilized various motifs to build their theological systems. Examples of integrative motifs include the temple, Christ as the Word of God, God's speech-acts, divine presence, hope, the gospel, the magnificence of God, God's sovereignty, salvation through judgment, and the kingdom of God expressed through the covenant. See Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*; Barth, *Church Dogmatics*; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Westminster John Knox, 2005); Lister, *The Presence of God*; Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*; Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Zondervan Academic, 2020); Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Baker Academic, 2013); John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, rev. ed. (Hendrickson, 2008); Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Zondervan, 1996); Duvall and Hays, *God's Relational Presence*; Wenkel, *Shining Like the Sun*; James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Crossway, 2010); Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Zondervan, 2011); Peter John Gentry and Stephen Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of The Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Crossway, 2018); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (IVP Academic, 2012); R. Zachary Manis, *Thinking Through the Problem of Hell: The Divine Presence Model* (Cascade Books, 2024).

⁶ Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 1st ed. (Doubleday, 1983), 27–28; R. W. Yarbrough, "Revelation," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy (InterVarsity

Many scholars discuss God's revelation or his presence, but only recently do Duvall and Hays note the revelatory presence of God. Unfortunately, neither the definition nor the nature or function were provided.⁷ Therefore, the *locus* of God's revelatory presence must be clarified concerning God's omnipresence, relational presence, and revelation.

Second, the *language* of God's revelatory presence cannot be reduced to either omnipresence, presence, or revelation. The term *omnipresence* does not do justice to the personal nature of God's revelation in Scripture.⁸ Additionally, the doctrine of revelation cannot be separated from God's presence as seen in Scripture.⁹ As mentioned above, the language of revelation and presence are common elements of theology. What is lacking is a synthesis of the previously mentioned fields that capitalizes on how God's revelation and presence are personal, relational, and revelatory. Therefore, the revelatory presence of God does not fit neatly under either category.¹⁰ Therefore, the *language* of God's revelatory presence must be clear, but distinct from either omnipresence, revelation, or presence.

Third, although there is extensive research on God's presence and revelation, no study presents God's revelatory presence as a unifying theme or integrates both concepts using biblical and systematic theology. Neither has there been a taxonomy of theology regarding the revelatory presence of God. Many systematic works will detail God's revelation and presence, but they are separated by God's attribute of omnipresence, how one interacts with God epistemologically, and God's character. Although many could argue that the doctrine of God proper covers both revelation and presence, rarely does the systematic presentation capitalize on the work of biblical theologians when they describe encountering God's presence. Biblical studies will describe the importance of unifying these

Press, 2000), 732–34; John S. Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place: The Doctrine of Scripture* (Crossway, 2018), 33–35; Barth, *CD 1/1*, 339–99, 426; Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason: The Christian Doctrine of Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Olive Wyon (Westminster, 1999), 59–66; Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 225; Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 144; Robert Letham, *Systematic Theology* (Crossway, 2019), 56–62.

⁷ Duvall and Hays, *God's Relational Presence*, 221.

⁸ Duvall and Hays, *God's Relational Presence*, 7. Duvall and Hays argue that God's presence should not be confined to just omnipresence or relational presence, as Scripture shows God actively revealing himself to humanity in various ways.

⁹ Lister, *The Presence of God*, 23; Richard Bauckham, *Who Is God? Key Moments of Biblical Revelation* (Baker Academic, 2020), 12. Bauckham notes that Scripture portrays God's presence as immanent, transcendent, personal, active, and present to his creatures. Lister argues that the presence of God is a significant theme progressively revealed throughout the canon.

¹⁰ Lister, *The Presence of God*, 48.

themes, but due to the nature of the field, God's presence and character are commonly traced as themes or motifs throughout Scripture. By approaching God's revelation and presence in these ways, we are left with an incomplete picture of the relational nature of God who proactively and progressively reveals himself to humanity for the sake of redemption. Because of this gap, the *lacuna* of God's revelatory presence belongs in the *prolegomena* of systematic theology, helping bridge this new category with other doctrines and disciplines.

Defining the Synthesis:

Definition, Nature, and Function of God's Revelatory Presence

As mentioned above, although much of past scholarship approaches both God's presence and God's revelation seriously, a synthesis of God's presence associated with his revelation is rare, if not absent. During the last decade or so, only John Frame and Piero Coda have engaged with the concept of revelation and presence in the field of systematic theology in a way similar to what this article proposes.¹¹ Even then, their goals lead to differing conclusions and outcomes. Frame develops God's revelation in line with his lordship, while Coda develops how God reveals himself as Trinity. Although transformation by the Lord's presence is often tied to soteriological doctrines, it rarely emphasizes God's relational presence or its effect when he reveals himself. This essay seeks to address that gap. Therefore, proposing a definition, nature, and function of God's revelatory presence should clarify what God's revelatory presence is and how it resolves the gap between biblical and systematic explanations of God's presence and revelation.

The Definition of God's Revelatory Presence

The *revelatory presence of God* can be defined as the manifestation of God's presence—either expressed through audible, visible, or experiential means—that progressively unveils God's nature, character, and will to human beings. YHWH's revelation is purposeful in illuminating human persons to understand who God is, what God is like, how God operates, and why God's revelation is significant for humanity. YHWH purposefully and unconditionally reveals his presence so that a dynamic, covenantal

¹¹ See John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (P&R, 2013), 29–42; Piero Coda, *From the Trinity: The Coming of God in Revelation and Theology*, ed. William Neu (The Catholic University of America Press, 2020), 22–31, 96–99. Frame links revelation to God's lordship and equates immanence with omnipresence, whereas Coda explores God's self-revelation through the Trinity in creation but with different goals and conclusions.

relationship might exist between God and humanity. This relationship is characterized as redemptive in purpose, eschatological in scope, and eternal in duration. Additionally, humanity can either accept or reject God's revelatory presence, leading to blessing for those who receive it and curse for those who resist his self-disclosure through his word or will.

The Nature of God's Revelatory Presence

A survey of Scripture reveals ten elements of the nature of the revelatory presence of God. The nature of God's revelatory presence should be characterized by the following features: personal; relational; immanent; transcendent; objective; subjective; necessary; unconditional; redemptive; and eschatological.¹²

Personal

First, the revelatory presence of God is personal. When the revelatory presence of the Lord engages humanity, YHWH does so in personal terms. The Trinity's self-disclosure is not impersonal as YHWH desires to form a relationship with humanity that leads to eternal joy (Gen 3:8, 10; Exod 25:8; 1 Kgs 8:1–13; Isa 66:22–23; Matt 1:23; John 1:14; 2:21; Rev 21–22).¹³ Further, Barth observes that God's activity to make himself known reveals the personal work of the Trinity.¹⁴ Because the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit reveal themselves through God's presence, the Lord enables human beings to know God as well as God's will regarding salvation.¹⁵

¹² Frame addresses God's revelation, noting both general and special revelation. He adds, however, an additional category he terms as "existential revelation" which is "God's revelation in our person, by which we appropriate the other forms of revelation" (*Systematic Theology*, 690). Frame does talk about God's revelation in personal, immanent, and transcendent terms. Coda would agree with God's revelation associated with his presence; but because of his trinitarian emphasis, Coda focuses more on how God's revelation is experienced through the second member of the Trinity. Coda does address God's revelation through the covenant, but specifically for the purpose of Israel's salvation (*From the Trinity*, 22–31, 96–99).

¹³ Lister, *The Presence of God*, 48–49.

¹⁴ Barth, *CD 1/2*, 203–37.

¹⁵ Gerald Lewis Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (InterVarsity Press, 1993), 50–52; Robert Letham, *Systematic Theology* (Crossway, 2019), 64; Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Broadman & Holman, 1994), 11; Adam Harwood, *Christian Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Systematic* (Lexham Academic, 2022), 90–91, 161–62.

Relational

Second, the revelatory presence of God is relational. Lister emphasizes that God's desire to relate to creatures is prominent throughout Scripture, as the Lord engages both individuals and corporate communities so that they might enjoy a covenant relationship with God (Gen 1–3; 9; 12; 15; 18; 22; Exod 19–24; Jer 31:34; Ezek 36:27).¹⁶ Fretheim observes that Israel's relationship with YHWH is personal and intimate as God is covenantally bound to his people.¹⁷ Further, Frame argues that because of God's relational nature, the Lord enters into covenant agreements with humanity for their benefit.¹⁸ Michael Bird notes that through the covenants, Israel and the nations can enjoy the relational blessing of YHWH as their suzerain.¹⁹

Immanent

Third, the revelatory presence of God is immanent. Fretheim affirms that YHWH's desire to be near his creation magnifies his personal and relational nature.²⁰ Lister agrees that the Lord freely and intentionally reveals his presence so that humanity might draw near to God (Josh 2:11).²¹ Wenkel emphasizes that YHWH's presence is transitory in nature, as immanence leads many to experience God in ways that seem contrary to the metaphysical and impersonal attribute of the Lord's omnipresence.²² Frame contends that there is no conflict between the two, as God's sovereignty over creation is a reality whereby the Lord is not limited by time or space; yet that does not negate God's relational presence among his creatures.²³

Transcendent

Fourth, the revelatory presence of God is transcendent. Lister proposes that while YHWH is personal, relational, and immanent in his revelation, the revelation and presence of God highlights the Lord's transcendence, set apart from creation.²⁴ However, Frame cautions against

¹⁶ Lister, *The Presence of God*, 120.

¹⁷ Fretheim, *God and World*, 160.

¹⁸ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 29.

¹⁹ Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 225.

²⁰ Fretheim, *God and World*, 19–20.

²¹ Lister, *The Presence of God*, 36–40.

²² Wenkel, *Shining Like the Sun*, 111–12.

²³ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 41.

²⁴ Lister, *The Presence of God*, 44–45.

separating God's transcendence from his personal and relational nature.²⁵ Additionally, the Lord's transcendence is not lost when making his revelatory presence available to creatures.²⁶ Erickson claims that transcendence illustrates how the Lord is "separate from and independent of nature and humanity ... [although] also superior to it in several significant ways."²⁷ Therefore, the revelatory presence of God balances both the immanent and transcendent nature of the sovereign Lord who freely engages with creation.

Objective

Fifth, the revelatory presence of God is objective. Barth contends that humanity can experience the Trinity, but only in the way that the Lord so chooses to express his revelation and presence.²⁸ However, when the Lord chooses to manifest himself, his revelation is always in line with his character and nature.²⁹ Barth stresses that the Lord's revelation will never contradict who God is, why God acts, how God operates, what God demands, or the extent to which God expects a person to understand his revelation to accomplish his will.³⁰ Further, YHWH reveals himself as triune, as the Father reveals himself through the Son objectively and through the Spirit subjectively.³¹ Therefore, YHWH's revelation and presence enable objective knowledge of God and in turn, enable subjective realities.³²

Subjective

Sixth, the revelatory presence of God is subjective. Schleiermacher emphasizes experiencing YHWH is personal and subjective, felt individually and corporately when encountering God's revelation and his presence.³³ However, Henry contends that the subjective nature of the Lord's revelation cannot be separated from the objective truth of encountering God.³⁴ Erickson proposes that if subjective experiences are taken to the extreme, then the truth about YHWH depends on human experience and

not on the revelation of God.³⁵ Henry cautions that this would contradict Scripture as experience alone distorts truth; instead, subjective experiences must be grounded in objective truths.³⁶ Therefore, the subjective nature of God's revelatory presence is experienced through the Spirit, but balanced objectively through the Father's existence and sending of the Son to establish absolute truths about God's character, nature, and will.³⁷

Necessary

Seventh, the revelatory presence of God is necessary for humanity to know God. Even before the fall of Adam and Eve, revelation was required for humanity to know God. Feinberg affirms that the Lord became present so that sinless human beings would know God relationally.³⁸ Duvall and Hays agree that without God revealing himself, humanity would not have the ability to know God in personal and intimate terms.³⁹ Further, without God's revelatory presence active in his creation, sinful humanity would be unable to reach God's eschatological goals.⁴⁰ Even more, Bird comments that "[what] should be clear now is that divine revelation is necessary if human beings are to have knowledge of God, that God reveals himself at his own initiative, and that God's revelation is chiefly redemptive in character."⁴¹

Unconditional

Eighth, the revelatory presence of God is unconditional. Humanity is subject to the authority of YHWH in his revelation of himself.⁴² Feinberg argues that God's revelation is not a response to the fall but is a natural part of God's plan for finite creatures to encounter and experience an infinite being.⁴³ The Lord's desire for humanity to know God then requires the Lord to reveal himself. Henry Blackaby and Claude King emphasize that God's revelation and presence are unconditional, as God freely chooses how, why, when, where, and to whom he wishes to reveal

²⁵ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 41–42.

²⁶ Lister, *The Presence of God*, 45.

²⁷ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 282.

²⁸ Barth, *CD 1/1*, 227.

²⁹ Henry, *GRA 1/6*, 70–82.

³⁰ Barth, *CD 1/1*, 353.

³¹ Barth, *CD 1/2*, 1–10.

³² Stephen J. Wellum, *Systematic Theology: From Canon to Concept* (B&H Academic, 2024), 91–103.

³³ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 132, 432–33.

³⁴ Henry, *GRA 1/6*, 73–81.

³⁵ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 163.

³⁶ Henry, *GRA 1/6*, 73–82; Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 76.

³⁷ Barth, *CD 1/2*, 209, 240–44.

³⁸ Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place*, 32.

³⁹ Duvall and Hays, *God's Relational Presence*, 57.

⁴⁰ Duvall and Hays, *God's Relational Presence*, 325–27; Lister, *The Presence of God*, 106.

⁴¹ Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 223.

⁴² Barth, *CD 1/1*, 352.

⁴³ Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place*, 32.

himself to bring about change.⁴⁴ Therefore, God's presence and revelation work together to engage humanity. The Lord does so to assist fallen humanity to encounter a holy and just God. Further, God does this so that humanity might encounter the Lord but also enjoy a relationship post-conversion.

Redemptive

Ninth, the revelatory presence of God is redemptive. The revelatory presence of God is both the agent and means for sinful humanity to enjoy the redemptive and eschatological benefit of God's presence. Through the Word of God, God's revelatory presence is compelled by the Lord's desire to redeem fallen humanity so that they might enjoy God eternally.⁴⁵ Lister suggests that without God's mediation, humanity would be lost.⁴⁶ Daniel Liroy observes that the Trinity ensures humanity begins their lives in the revelation and presence of God at Eden so that humanity might dwell with God and benefit from his presence; however, humanity chooses to disobey God and loses access to the presence of God.⁴⁷ Because of the Lord's desire for redemption, Lister contends that God's revelation and presence pursue humanity beyond the garden walls and is manifest throughout Scripture to ensure humanity will reach God's redemptive goals seen in Rev 21–22.⁴⁸ Therefore, God's revelatory presence is at the center of the redemptive story, as it unites all of the canon of Scripture, leading toward its redemptive end.⁴⁹

Eschatological

Finally, the revelatory presence of God is eschatological. Lister writes that when considering the beginning of creation "Eden was always to become the new creation before there was ever a need for a 'new' creation."⁵⁰ The New Covenant brings about the eschatological objective by removing the transgression of sins (Jer 31:34; Ezek 36:29, 33), internal transformation of the heart (Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:26), and a personal rela-

⁴⁴ Blackaby and King, *Experiencing God*, 9.

⁴⁵ Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as The Living and Active Word of God* (InterVarsity Press, 2014), 66–67.

⁴⁶ Lister, *The Presence of God*, 246.

⁴⁷ Daniel T. Liroy, "The Garden of Eden as a Primordial Temple or Sacred Space for Humankind," *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* 10.1 (2010): 25.

⁴⁸ Lister, *The Presence of God*, 170.

⁴⁹ Lister, *The Presence of God*, 148.

⁵⁰ Lister, *The Presence of God*, 81.

tionship, both corporately and independently, between God and his people (Jer 31:34; Ezek 36:27).⁵¹ The New Heaven and Earth will be a fulfillment of the Edenic goal achieved in the eschaton, experienced through the revelatory presence of God so that the Lord might dwell among his people.⁵² Lister argues that Christ fulfills the garden sanctuary, the tabernacle, and the temple. The Messiah does this by being the physical, personal tabernacle who embodies the Spirit of God in the flesh. This points to God's presence as the ultimate desire of all creation (Rev 21–22).⁵³

The Function of God's Revelatory Presence

Throughout Scripture, the revelatory presence of God actively engages with creation in the following six ways: (1) by his presence; (2) by his transforming of persons; (3) by the unveiling of his nature, character, and will; (4) by his continual engagement of persons; (5) by his demand of a response; and (6) by his judgment that results in blessing or curse.

God's Presence

Revelation occurs through God's presence so that all of creation might know the Lord (Isa 42:13–17; Jer 25:12–14; Amos 1:3–2:3; Nah 1–3; Zeph 2:8–15; Jonah 3:4–8; 4:11; Matt 1; John 1:1–18; Acts 2, 10; Rev 21–22).⁵⁴ Henry suggests that the Lord created male and female with the ability to receive divine revelation.⁵⁵ Because of this, Moltmann argues that it should be stated that God reveals his presence so that through his presence, revelation might lead human persons to enjoy God's grace.⁵⁶ The revelatory presence of God reaches its climax in the Incarnation whereby God's very presence reveals YHWH's nature, character, and will. Yet, the mystery of this event requires human persons to depend upon God's revelatory presence in the present until Christ returns.⁵⁷ Therefore, the Lord's revelatory presence appears to meet humanity's greatest need, for without God actively pursuing humanity, humanity would not know God through his revelatory presence.⁵⁸

God's Transforming of Persons

People are transformed upon encountering the revelatory presence of

⁵¹ Lister, *The Presence of God*, 121–22.

⁵² Lister, *The Presence of God*, 123.

⁵³ Lister, *The Presence of God*, 133; Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 368.

⁵⁴ Henry, *GRA* 2/6, 250–51.

⁵⁵ Henry, *GRA* 2/6, 227.

⁵⁶ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 35.

⁵⁷ Barth, *CD* 1/1, 199.

⁵⁸ McKirland, *God's Provision, Humanity's Need*, 154.

God.⁵⁹ Robert Letham states that not only does the Lord draw people into a relationship with him, but he does so to develop and sanctify believers through his indwelling presence.⁶⁰ Adam Harwood suggests that the goal of the transformation of persons is to imitate Christ. This allows people to grow in the knowledge, likeness, and love of the Lord, leading to true fellowship with the Godhead.⁶¹ However, YHWH allows humans the freedom to either accept or reject God's revelatory presence. When someone responds negatively to the Lord's presence, they miss out on the opportunity of salvation or to reflect God's glory.⁶² Therefore, their stubbornness of heart and rejection of God's presence in the divine encounter leads some to run from positive transformation and choose negative transformation.⁶³

God's Unveiling of His Nature, Character, and Will

The revelatory presence of God progressively unveils the Lord's nature, character, and will throughout Scripture, making known that which is hidden from human persons. Erickson states that God's revelation of himself builds upon each revelatory encounter, culminating in unveiling God fully in the New Heaven and Earth.⁶⁴ Feinberg argues that this does not mean that any revelation—past, present, or future—is lacking in what is revealed; rather, each encounter with God's does not reveal the fullness of God all at once.⁶⁵ Instead, revelation progressively “amplifies and explains in more detail and clarity what he has previously said.”⁶⁶ Vern Poythress urges caution when describing God's revelation of his presence as “progressive” due to the problem of arguing that latter revelations are superior to previous revelations.⁶⁷ Therefore, Scripture testifies to God's revelation as progressive because it builds over time, accumulating past and present until the final disclosure at Christ's coming.⁶⁸

God's Continual Engagement of Persons

The revelatory presence of God continually engages human persons.

⁵⁹ Wenkel, *Shining Like the Sun*, 53.

⁶⁰ Letham, *Systematic Theology*, 648.

⁶¹ Harwood, *Christian Theology*, 90–91.

⁶² Wenkel, *Shining Like the Sun*, 53–55.

⁶³ Wenkel, *Shining Like the Sun*, 38.

⁶⁴ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 164.

⁶⁵ Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place*, 45.

⁶⁶ Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place*, 45.

⁶⁷ Vern S. Poythress, *Reading the Word of God in the Presence of God: A Handbook for Biblical Interpretation* (Crossway, 2016), 226.

⁶⁸ Letham, *Systematic Theology*, 63.

God continually reveals himself to humanity “whereby God progressively unveils the truth about himself and his purposes to a community of believers.”⁶⁹ The relationship between YHWH and people develops over time, expanding human understanding of who God is and requiring humanity to purposefully engage with the Lord in response to God's revelatory presence and prompting.⁷⁰ In turn, Feinberg argues that the relationship that God grants through his revelation and presence develops before and after conversion.⁷¹ Despite sinful humanity's inability to save itself, YHWH graciously acts to enable and maintain covenantal relationships. Letham agrees that those who respond positively to God's presence experience a relationship with God through the Spirit that enables further understanding of who God is, what God wills, and how God expects believers to live.⁷²

God's Demand of a Response

When the revelatory presence of God appears, humanity must respond to God's revelation of himself.⁷³ Barth contends that if an individual responds positively to YHWH's presence, it is because of the Spirit at work in the person.⁷⁴ This implies humanity's sinful nature naturally leads to negative consequences, which objectively places the individual under God's wrath. Therefore, people cannot respond to God without the Lord first working in the person.⁷⁵ When the revelatory presence of God appears, God not only requires a response from humanity but also enables humanity to respond rightly to the Lord.⁷⁶ McKirland argues that through faith, and the working of the Spirit, humans can understand through God's enablement.⁷⁷ If humanity will respond rightly to God's revelation of himself (faith), then persons receive the greatest gift of salvation; but

⁶⁹ B. Mitchell, “Revelation Revised,” in *The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine: Essays in Honour of Maurice Wiles*, ed. Sarah Coakley and David A. Pailin (Oxford University Press, 1993), 178.

⁷⁰ Mitchell, “Revelation Revised,” 177.

⁷¹ Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place*, 45, 108.

⁷² Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (P&R, 2019), 273–74. Additionally, see Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 40–57.

⁷³ Barth, *CD 1/1*, 204.

⁷⁴ Barth, *CD 1/1*, 208.

⁷⁵ Barth, *CD 1/1*, 208.

⁷⁶ Barth, *CD 1/1*, 379; Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Hendrickson, 1996), 76.

⁷⁷ McKirland, *God's Provision, Humanity's Need*, 47.

if a person rejects God's revelation of himself (disbelief), then the individual will receive what he is due: judgment, punishment, and eternal death.⁷⁸

God's Judgment That Results in Blessing or Curse

Scripture testifies to God's revelatory nature tied to his judgment through blessings or curses (Num 25:19; Deut 7:24; 9:3; Esth 9:6, 12; Jer 1:10; 12:17; 18:7; 49:38; 51:55; Ezek 25:7, 16; 28:26; 30:13; Obad 8; Zeph 2:5, 13; Rev 19–22).⁷⁹ The Trinity wants humanity to experience a personal relationship because the Lord wants to bless by redeeming those who respond positively to his revelatory presence and spare them from the judgment to come. However, Lister observes that not all respond to God's grace, and many will experience the wrath of God as an extension of his judgment.⁸⁰ Those who respond positively to the Lord and enjoy fellowship with him experience the benefit and blessings of salvation and eternal life. A negative, disobedient response leads to cursing, resulting in either losing access to the relational presence of God or receiving God's wrath;⁸¹ eventually, for those who reject God's presence and revelation, eternal punishment waits for them in eternity.⁸² The redemptive story shows the Messiah as the Suffering Servant who reveals God's presence. He takes humanity's curse, dies in their place, and gives life to those dead in sin. Through this, Christ accomplishes God's redemptive goal for his people.⁸³

The Location of God's Revelatory Presence in Scripture

When applying the synthesis of God's revelation and presence to reading Scripture, one will find God's revelatory presence as a natural element of the biblical narrative. Throughout Scripture, the theme of God's revelatory presence progressively unfolds throughout both the Old and New Testaments. Further, the reality of God's revelatory presence can be traced throughout the redemptive narrative of Scripture seen through the covenants. A brief overview of the canon and the covenants should prove that this theme is not new but has yet to be explored in detail.

⁷⁸ Henry, *GRA 1/6*, 31–40.

⁷⁹ Lister, *The Presence of God*, 40.

⁸⁰ Lister, *The Presence of God*, 40.

⁸¹ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 401.

⁸² Duvall and Hays, *God's Relational Presence*, 335.

⁸³ Lister, *The Presence of God*, 255.

Overview of the Canon

The revelatory presence of God appears consistently throughout the canon and the covenants. Scripture begins with God's actions revealing his presence forming and fashioning creation to his will, resulting in his rest over creation from his heavenly temple (Gen 1:1–2:3). Genesis 3–4 shows the fallout of disobeying God and losing free access to God's presence, leaving the reader to wonder how the curse will be undone. It will not be until Exodus 40 that God's presence will dwell among humanity again. Without a permanent place to dwell, God's tabernacling presence wanders with Israel throughout the wilderness until the land is conquered and Israel's enemies are put to rest (Deuteronomy–1 Kings). After David's conquest, Solomon is given the right to construct a house for the Lord (2 Sam 7; 1 Chron 17). Like Eden and the tabernacle, God's revelatory presence appears in a mighty way as God's presence fills the temple (1 Kgs 8; 2 Chron 5–7).

In the New Testament, the incarnation proves that God's revelatory presence appears to humanity for redemption, with some responding in faith, while others respond in disbelief. Even when rejected, YHWH continues to pursue his creation for the sake of their salvation. In the Gospels, God's revelatory presence is magnified through the Incarnation. Those who receive Christ find blessing and fellowship with God, while those who reject him are exposed in their sin. Still, Christ offers repentance and redemption to all who accept his mercy and grace.⁸⁴ Further, the Gospels stress Christ's intentionality to draw a people unto himself, continuing the Old Testament pattern of God's revelatory presence pursuing Israel and the nations. The powerful revelation of God's presence at Pentecost continues the progression of God's revelatory presence spreading to the nations (Acts 2, 10).⁸⁵ God purposefully appears to both Jew and Gentile

⁸⁴ McKirland, *God's Provision, Humanity's Need*, 49–57. McKirland states that Christ models the second-personal relationship that humanity needs, revealing the revelatory pattern in the incarnation. Christ responds positively to God's revelatory presence, in which all other humanity is to imitate.

⁸⁵ Yarbrough, "Revelation," 732–38. Yarbrough provides several examples of God's theophanic expression through the Angel of the Lord to: Hagar (Gen 16:7); Abraham (Gen 18; 22:11–12); Jacob (Gen 32:29–30); Moses (Exod 3:2–6); Joshua (Josh 5:14–15); Gideon (Judg 6:11–14); and David (1 Chr 21:16, 18, 27). Although this list focuses on the Old Testament, the greatest manifestation of God's presence, being the incarnation of Jesus Christ the Lord, fills the Gospels. Jesus's Spirit drives the narrative post-ascension and will return at the eschaton where God's presence will no longer require a barrier between God and humanity.

for the sake of transformation and personal relationship through the indwelling of God's presence.⁸⁶

Finally, the revelatory presence of God pursuing humanity culminates at the end of Scripture, as God initiates the New Heaven and Earth. John's Apocalypse foreshadows future hope in which God's people will dwell with the Lord forever in the garden-temple city of New Jerusalem. In the events that develop throughout Revelation, the pattern of God's revelatory presence remains consistent. God initiates these divine revelations so that John might bear witness to the end of days. If any believe and respond to God's revelatory presence, they shall be spared the wrath to come. Through God's final revelation of himself, believers and non-believers are separated, revealing the end of the age. Due to rejecting God's revelatory presence, the condemned will remain in the lake of fire (Rev 20:7–15; 21:8), while the blessed will dwell in the presence of God in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:5–7; 22:1–5).

Overview of the Covenants

Whereas Scripture bears witness to God's revelatory presence driving and completing the Lord's plan for redemption, the covenants also testify to God's intent to be present among his people and reveal his glory so others might enjoy an eternal relationship with their Creator. Beginning in Gen 3:15, God reveals a future hope in which sin will be defeated, and peace will be restored. The Noahic Covenant develops this hope, as does the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic ratifications, leading to the Messiah who ushers in the Kingdom of God through the New Covenant.⁸⁷ In Christ, God's redemptive plan comes to fruition, seeing the new kingdom realized, directing salvation history towards its eschatological conclusion.⁸⁸ Surveying covenantal progression highlights the pattern of God's revelatory presence initiating the covenants with humanity in order to establish a path of relationship, redemption, and transformation.⁸⁹

Every covenant narrative reveals God initiating, acting, and providing

⁸⁶ Consider how the Acts narratives compare to the following narratives in the Old Testament: God speaking creation into existence (Gen 1–2); God coming down upon Babel to confuse their language (Gen 11); God appearing through the whirlwind to speak with Job (Job 38:1–11); God's presence descending on Sinai in fire and smoke (Exod 19:16–20); God's presence filling the tabernacle and temple (Exod 40:34–35; 1 Kgs 8:11; 2 Chr 7:1–3); God speaking through the storm to Elijah on top of the mountain (1 Kgs 19:4–18).

⁸⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 652–53.

⁸⁸ Lister, *The Presence of God*, 116.

⁸⁹ Daniel I. Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God's Plan of Redemption* (Baker, 2021), 611–13.

the path toward redemption for humanity. Additionally, each covenant reveals that only YHWH can provide salvation for humanity, as sinful humanity regularly fails to uphold its part of the covenant agreement. The covenants bring about stipulations that humanity must keep, but God does not force humanity to obey. Rather, humanity must choose to obey God and follow the Lord's instruction. Disobeying God and forsaking a covenant leads to punishment. Covenant hope proceeds through the line of Adam, then Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David, and climaxes in the revelation of Christ who inaugurates the New Covenant. Salvation and reconciliation with God become a reality only through Christ, as indicated by the Old and New Testament Covenants, developing out of God's promise in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:15).⁹⁰ New Covenant members receive God's forgiveness of sins, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and a new life found only through union with Christ.

Therefore, the New Covenant unveils God's redemptive and eschatological plan culminating in Christ as Christ is the incarnate presence of God who reverses the curse of the first Adam.⁹¹ The Second Adam is the temple of God who tabernacles among his people. He brings about life-giving waters, pouring out the Spirit of God into the hearts of believers who become the temple of the Holy Spirit (Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 36:22–37:38). These new, covenantal people will seek to do the will of God and keep his commandments because Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection from the dead (Isa 65–66; Jer 30–34; Ezek 36–37). Jesus is the Good Shepherd who reigns over the people of God. The Messiah will establish his presence in the consummation of the New Heaven and Earth as the temple will no longer be needed because the Lord and Lamb will reign at the heart of New Jerusalem, inviting all of God's servants to dwell with their God and King (Rev 20–22).

Conclusion: The Benefit of God's Revelatory Presence

Both biblical and systematic theologies engage with elements of God's revelatory presence; however, the language and distinction of God's revelatory presence from God's presence, omnipresence, and revelation is insufficient. If done correctly, synthesizing presence and revelation establishes a framework to understand the value of a unified vision of God's revelatory presence that is evident in the text. While a brief survey of the canon and covenants reveals how prevalent the Lord's revelatory presence is from Genesis to Revelation, God's revelatory presence cannot be

⁹⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 652–53.

⁹¹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 647–766.

reduced to either God's presence, omnipresence, or revelation. By synthesizing the relationship of these three topics, the value of God's revelatory presence becomes clear.

In sum, the *revelatory presence of God* is the manifestation of God's presence—either expressed through audible, visible, or experiential means—that progressively unveils God's nature, character, and will to human beings. The synthesis of God's revelation and presence introduces a new framework that unifies and builds upon the extensive work already developed in three key areas: God's presence, omnipresence, and revelation. Establishing the centrality of God's revelation in theology, combined with the biblical witness of God's intentionality to be present with humanity, provides the basis for why a synthesis of revelation and presence is necessary. Therefore, a synthesis of the revelatory presence of God requires including elements from the metaphysical attribute of God's omnipresence, the biblical motif of God's presence, and the doctrine of the revelation of God to appreciate the biblical witness of God's revelatory presence, inviting sinful humanity into a life of redemption and eternal blessing.