

# PORTRAITS *of* GOD

---

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY  
*of* HOLINESS

ALLAN  
COPPEDGE

---

## C O N T E N T S

---

Abbreviations	9
Introduction	11
<b>1</b> Biblical Roles of God: <i>An Overview</i>	21
<b>2</b> The Unity of the Roles	39
<b>3</b> Holy God as Transcendent Creator	54
<b>4</b> Holy God as Sovereign King	99
<b>5</b> Holy God as Personal Revealer	134
<b>6</b> Holy God as Priest	174
<b>7</b> Holy God as Righteous Judge	207
<b>8</b> Holy God as Loving Father	244
<b>9</b> Holy God as Powerful Redeemer	300
<b>10</b> Holy God as Good Shepherd	332
<b>11</b> The Implications of Roles	359
Bibliography	403
Names Index	422
Subject Index by Theme	423
Scripture Index	425

# ONE

## BIBLICAL ROLES OF GOD

---

### *An Overview*

The concept of God is the most determinative factor for all Christian theology and spiritual life. A right understanding of the nature of God sets a proper pattern for systematic theology as well as for personal knowledge of God. Wolfhart Pannenberg can boldly state, "Everything else remains insecure in theology, before one has made up one's mind on the doctrine of God."<sup>1</sup> In other words our view of God is the single most influential part of our theology. But knowing about God is only the beginning. It is this correct knowledge of God that leads to a proper relationship with him. This is why some argue that the gravest question before the church and each individual is what they conceive God to be like. For individuals as well as for the church, the most revealing thing about them is their idea of God. Many would agree with A. W. Tozer: "There is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God."<sup>2</sup> The most crucial question then for any individual or church is, "What is God like?" The answer to this question will determine both their doctrine and experience.

### **The Place of Revelation**

Historic Christian orthodoxy has always believed that a proper understanding

---

<sup>1</sup>Philip Clayton and Carl E. Braaten, *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), pp. 7-8.

of the nature of God must come by revelation. By its very nature Christianity is based not primarily on what we think about God but on what God has made known about himself. Biblical faith is rooted not in our discovery of God but in his disclosure of himself. However, if he is what he declares himself to be, that is, the supernatural, transcendent and personal God who stands outside of the universe of space and time, then human powers of reason and perception, which are limited to this world, cannot comprehend this God without assistance. So if God is who he says he is, and he is like what he says he is like, we can really only understand him through his special revelation to us.<sup>3</sup> The church has always believed this special revelation has come to us in Scripture. This means the Bible becomes the sourcebook for any attempt to comprehend the nature and character of the God whom we desire to know.

If we accept that God reveals himself in Scripture, the next question is, How are we to view the wholeness of this revelation? Given our premise, the obvious answer is that correct theology must be drawn from all the biblical data. A partial use of biblical materials will yield only an incomplete picture of God. Yet different parts of the Christian church at various times in her history have emphasized only select aspects of the nature of God while neglecting some others. Part of the reason for this has been certain historical circumstances that made it easier to see certain portions of the revelation about God more clearly than others. For example, during the Reformation when the battle raged over the question of authority (who decides the way of salvation: the church or God through his word?), it was natural for leaders like Martin Luther to focus on God's role as Sovereign King. It was God the King who exercised the right to offer salvation on his own terms. The result of emphasizing God as the kingly authority in that historical period is that even today many tend to see God through royal language, One who relates to people as a king to his subjects.

While varying historical circumstances make it understandable that people have viewed God in a particular way, yet we must be clear that a truly biblical and therefore fully Christian theology must encompass the whole of biblical

---

<sup>3</sup>"A human knowledge of God can be a true knowledge that corresponds to the divine reality only if it originates in the Deity itself. God can be known only if He gives Himself to be known. The loftiness of the divine reality makes it inaccessible to us unless it makes itself known. Hence the knowledge of God is possible only by revelation" (Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988], 1:1; cf. Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God* [London: Lutterworth, 1949], p. 118).

revelation. Such a holistic theology must not be content with the parts of Scripture accented by a particular tradition, nor must it focus only on those portraits of God that are most naturally attractive. Rather, it must provide as complete a picture as is possible from the whole of Scripture. Such a task grows out of a conviction that the whole Bible is the Word of God and his revelation to people. Furthermore, it presupposes that God's revelation in Scripture is fully reliable, and therefore it is able to serve as a basis for right thinking about him.

### Understanding the Transcendent, Supranatural God

Because God is a supranatural being and human perceptive powers are limited to the natural world, how are people to understand the supranatural world beyond? How can God be known if he is outside the world of space and time? Human descriptive language is necessarily confined to the world of creation. Recognizing our dilemma (particularly the finiteness of our perception), God has condescended to use language from the created world to describe his own transcendent being. Working with terms from creation and personal relations, God tells us what he is like in language familiar to us.<sup>4</sup>

In using the language of this world to talk about a transcendent God, the best way to describe God in relation to reality is by the use of *analogical language* (i.e., using terms that are alike in some ways, but not in all ways).<sup>5</sup> So, for example, from the natural world we understand what "power" is, and that assists us (by comparison) to understand the work of God as all-powerful (Almighty) or omnipotent. So by *analogy* the use of "power" in relation to God is similar to our use of "power" in this world. Analogy is particularly helpful in comparing the way God works in relationships. Philip Rolnick declares that because analogy is inherently expressive of relationships, "Our view of the world, ourselves and our God is wrapped in the way we use analogy."<sup>6</sup>

There are many kinds of analogies. For our purposes the one that has particular

<sup>4</sup>For discussion of how terms about God are related to both special revelation (Scripture) and general revelation (creation, reason and experience) see the section on general and special revelation in chapter eleven.

<sup>5</sup>On analogy see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, ed. Thomas Gilby (Garden City, N.Y.: Image, 1969), 1.Q.13; *Summa Contra Gentiles* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, n.d.), 1:32-34; Eric L. Mascall, *Existence and Analogy* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1967); P. Sherry, "Analogy Reviewed," *Philosophy* 51 (1976): 337-45; P. Sherry, "Analogy Today," *Philosophy* 51 (1976): 431-46.

<sup>6</sup>Philip A. Rolnick, *Analogical Possibilities: How Words Refer to God* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993). Rolnick also provides an introductory history on the use of analogy to the time of Aquinas.

relevance for this study is *metaphor*. A metaphor is a more specialized form of analogical language in which one thing (a subject) is compared to another (a symbol). When God is described using metaphors, there is an analogy between God (subject) and something in the created world (symbol) that is based on some similarity of being, action or relationship.<sup>7</sup> An example of God described with a metaphor is when he is called a “rock” (Ps 18:2; 18:31). While the comparison is limited, this metaphor helps us understand that God is unchanging and provides a firm foundation for whatever he wants to do in our lives or in the world. Because of the multiple use of these metaphors in the Bible, it may well be that metaphorical analogy is used more frequently than any other mode of description of God.<sup>8</sup>

A narrower kind of analogical language, then, is the use of metaphor.<sup>9</sup> There is also an even narrower use of metaphor to describe God. The metaphors that imply the greatest degree of correspondence between God (subject) and the symbols from this world are those in which the symbol is taken from personal relations. These personal metaphors describe God’s being, God’s actions and God’s relationships as being similar in many respects to a human’s being, a human’s actions and a human’s relationships. This kind of “human” metaphor for God may be called a *portrait* or *role*. These portraits (a metaphor borrowed from painting) or roles (a metaphor borrowed from the theater) indicate some things about God from the way people are, the way people act and the way people relate to others. Each of these indicates that this is the way God *is*, the way God *acts* and the way God *relates to others*. It is the use of these portrait or role metaphors that allows the Bible to talk about God so graphically when it is describing him as King, Father, Judge and so forth. These portraits or roles of God then are basically a specialized form of metaphor that are in turn one dimension of analogical language.<sup>10</sup>

The choice of either the term *portrait* or the term *role* has both advantages and limitations. The idea of a *portrait* is initially more vivid and catches the

<sup>7</sup>See Peter W. Macky, *The Centrality of Metaphors to Biblical Thought* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1990), pp. 26, 49. Mackey lists ten different types of metaphor used in Scripture.

<sup>8</sup>Battista Mondin, *Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology* (The Hague: Martinus Nyjhoff, 1963), p. 94. For significant discussion of metaphors and God see Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), pp. 93-99.

<sup>9</sup>On limits on using analogy and metaphor, see Humphrey Palmer, *Analogy: A Study of Qualification and Argument in Theology* (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 85-96.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Richard Baukham’s use of “the identity of God” as an alternative label in *God Crucified* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 7-8.

imagination. Its limitation is that a picture is more static in nature and has more difficulty showing interaction between the subject and other persons. The strength of the concept of *role* is that it is more full orbbed in showing how a person acts and relates to others in a variety of situations. There is a dynamic nature to the use of roles that is very attractive. The limitation of the use of role is that actors can play different roles that may have contrary character traits and sometimes people view a role as arbitrary and perhaps disconnected from the person actually playing the role. This disadvantage may be overcome if the concept of role is not limited to the language of the theater but is expanded to include the way persons have a variety of responsibilities (like roles) within of their lives. So a father may also be understood as carrying out a variety of roles. He leads, he teaches, he may be a friend, an intermediary and so on. If we understand that a father is playing certain more limited roles within the context of his overarching fatherly role, we have a better understanding of the way the term *role* may be used without the limitations of it as a theater metaphor only.

In making the choice between the term *portrait* or the term *role*, we observe that traditionally different portraits are painted of people as they are known in certain roles, for example, the king, my father, a shepherd. An artist paints a portrait to remind his viewers of the fuller role in life that the subject plays. In other words, portraits lead to understanding people in their life roles. This seems to suggest that perhaps the better choice of these terms is the concept of *role*. It certainly seems to fit the description of the living God in Scripture, whom we see acting and relating to people in a variety of ways. It is this active doing, speaking and relating that seems best captured with the word *role*. Accordingly, we are going to use *roles* as the primary term to describe these personal pictures of God, while *portraits*, *metaphors* and *analogies* will be used as secondary terms.<sup>11</sup>

G. B. Caird in his significant study *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* calls attention to the fact that God uses human categories to begin to help people understand himself. He points out that these metaphors/roles derived from human relationships are of special significance because they lend themselves to a two-way traffic in ideas.

---

<sup>11</sup>Three kinds of metaphors are used for God: inanimate objects (God is a rock), animals (the Lion of the tribe of Judah) and persons (King, Father, Shepherd). On a scale of increasing comparison, the inanimate objects are clearly where the comparison is least like God, and the personal metaphors are the ones that are most like him.

When the Bible calls God Judge, King, Father or Husband it is, in the first instance using the human known to throw light on the divine unknown, and particularly on God's attitude to his worshipers. But no sooner has the metaphor traveled from earth to heaven than it begins the return journey to earth, bearing with it an ideal standard by which the conduct of human judges, kings, fathers and husbands is to be assessed.<sup>12</sup>

God uses multiple metaphors/roles because no single category is fully adequate to explain himself. In addition, people's perception of the ideal in each role is also often distorted, so that from a human point of view there is no ideal judge, king or father. Yet enough is known about each of these human categories to give us a better understanding of some aspect of the nature of God.<sup>13</sup> God is like them in some ways but (in accord with the way analogy works) not in every way.

Once we begin to reflect on the nature and character of God as revealed in his roles, a much more perfect model is given to us of what an earthly judge, king or father ought to be. While we begin to understand God with the use of these extended metaphors, our more comprehensive understanding of him is not conditioned on our knowledge of any of these human portraits, which might be faulty. In fact, a proper understanding of the human roles must be corrected in the light of a larger understanding of what God is like.<sup>14</sup>

## The Major Roles

It is now time to turn our attention to the primary roles of God that are

<sup>12</sup>G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), pp. 19.

<sup>13</sup>There is a growing list of literature on metaphor in general. Some of the more significant works include: I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936); Edwin Robert Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief* (London: Collins, 1938); Max Black, *Models and Metaphors* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962); Ian Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977); George Lakoff and Mar Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Earl R. MacCormac, *A Cognitive Theory of Metaphor* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985). Several works specifically relate metaphor to religious language. In addition to the sources cited in the text see C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (New York: Macmillan, 1947); "Bluspels and Flalanfferes," in *Rehabilitations and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 135-58; Earl R. MacCormac, *Metaphor and Myth in Science and Religion* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1976); Janet M. Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985).

<sup>14</sup>For discussion of the biblical figures of speech, including metaphor, see Benjamin Keach, *Preaching from the Types and Metaphors of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 1972); E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible: Explained and Illustrated* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1968); C. F. Pfeiffer, "Figures of Speech in Human Language," *BETS* Vol. 2, no. 4 (fall 1959), pp. 17-21.

emphasized in Scripture. Eight major roles that describe God seem to dominate the biblical data. This is not to say there are not other roles/portraits that are used to describe God and our relationship with him, but in terms of quantity of material and theological significance, eight of them seem to stand out. The eight roles are *Creator*, *King*, *Personal Revealer*, *Priest*, *Judge*, *Father*, *Redeemer* and *Shepherd*. Each of these roles has a language category that describes not only God but people and the divine-human relationship. The language category connected with each term forms an extended metaphor system that helps illuminate the relationship depicted in each role. For example, when speaking of God as *Creator* we use the language of creation with a focus on giving life. In describing God as *King* we use the language of the royal court that describes his majesty. Here the focus is on authority. It is the *King* who rules. The full picture of the roles and their language categories may be seen in table 1.1.

**Table 1.1. Roles of God with Language and Focus Emphases**

Role	Creator	King	Personal Revealer	Priest	Judge	Father	Redeemer	Shepherd
Language	Creation	Majesty	Personal Communication	Sanctuary	Legal	Family	Slavery/Freedom	Pastoral Scene
Focus	Life	Authority	Fellowship/Communication/Truth	Grace/Purity	Law	Love	Deliverance/Service	Care

From the chart one can see that the chief focus of God as Personal Revealer is that of fellowship and personal communication of truth in interpersonal relationships. This role is the least specific of the eight we are using but the most pervasive in Scripture. Part of the reason is that God is “revealing” himself as a person through each of the other seven roles. But this category refers primarily to that person-to-person communication in verbal form when God is not speaking in some other role. Often he does not communicate as a King or Father, but he just speaks to people in a personal, linguistic way. The subcategories under this role (table 1.2) give it a bit more definition. They are the roles of God as Teacher, Prophet and Friend. Each

focuses on a personal God communicating with and entering into relationships with other persons.

When God functions as *Priest*, the language is borrowed from the temple or the sanctuary, and the focus is on grace and purity. When he is described as *Judge*, the language is from the courtroom and is legal in nature. Here law is the focus. When God appears as *Father*, it is language from the family which describes him. This is the portrait of intimacy and of the home, and naturally has its focus on love. The language of slavery and freedom describes God as *Redeemer*, and it focuses first on deliverance and then on service. Finally, it is the extended metaphor from the pastoral scene that assists us in understanding God as a *Shepherd* with its focus on his care.

### The Subroles

These eight major roles of God do not exhaust the personal biblical metaphors that describe him. But these eight are among the most extensively used in Scripture, and certain other metaphors are really subcategories of these eight. For example, God's role as *Physician* or *Healer* is a picture of one who restores health and life, and thus may be reasonably understood as a subcategory of God's role as the Creator and giver of life.

Likewise, the concept of God as the *Lord of Hosts*, or *God of the Armies*, is really a subcategory of God's ruling function as King of the universe. The picture of the husband-and-wife relationship is a significant analogy that describes the relationship of God to his people. Yet, the *Husband* role is really another part of the family analogy that describes God's relation to his people in the language of the home. Table 1.2 includes the key subroles along with their language categories and the major focus of each.

### Why So Many Roles?

Each of the roles/portraits conveys significant information as to what God is like, but no single one is complete by itself. This is the reason Scripture uses many different metaphors to describe God and our relationship to him.<sup>15</sup> Because no one portrait of God is fully adequate to describe him, multiple images are necessary for a holistic picture of God. It may well be that one of the

<sup>15</sup>See Vern S. Poythress, *Symphonic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991), pp. 16-17.

major problems in the history of the Christian church has been the tendency of different segments of the church to emphasize different analogies or roles. By emphasizing one or two roles at the expense of the others, an unbalanced picture of God has resulted. In an extreme form this approach leads to heresy. In milder forms it leads to various groups within the Christian church focusing on only part of the truth.

**Table 1.2. Roles with Their Subroles**

Role	Creator	King	Personal Revealer	Priest	Judge	Father	Redeemer	Shepherd
Language	Creation	Majesty	Personal Communication	Sanctuary	Legal	Family	Slavery/Freedom	Pastoral Scene
Focus	Life	Authority	Fellowship/Communication	Grace/Purity	Law	Love	Deliverance/Service	Care
<b>Subrole</b> Language Focus	<b>Physician</b> Medicine Healing	<b>Lord of Hosts</b> Military Warfare	<b>Teacher</b> Learning Truth		<b>Lawmaker</b> Legislation Giving law	<b>Husband</b> Home Love		
<b>Subrole</b> Language Focus	<b>Farmer</b> Agriculture Growing		<b>Prophet</b> Proclamation Revelation			<b>Bridegroom</b> Marriage Intimacy		
<b>Subrole</b> Language Focus	<b>Builder</b> Construction Building		<b>Friend</b> Friendship Faithfulness					
<b>Subrole</b> Language Focus	<b>Potter</b> Pottery Shaping							

It is our desire that in articulating the major categories in which the Bible analogically describes God, a fuller picture of what he is like will lead to a more balanced Christian theology. Further, since incomplete, as well as distorted, views of God ultimately lead to a stunted or imbalanced Christian experience, it is hoped that a more complete understanding of God will lead each member of the Christian church to a deeper personal knowledge of God in his own life. Caird is right when he expresses his conviction that this type of theological knowledge of God should ultimately lead to our being conformed into God’s image.

Man begins with the familiar situations of home and community and derives from them metaphors to illuminate the activity of God; but the application of these

terms to God establishes ideas and absolute standards which can be used as instruments for the remaking of man in God's likeness. Man is created to become like God, and the ultimate justification of anthropomorphic imagery lies in the contribution it makes to the attainment of that goal.<sup>16</sup>

One of the purposes of this book is to provide a fuller understanding of who God is from his roles so that we will be drawn into a deeper relationship with him that results in being more perfectly conformed to God's likeness.

### **The Roles and Themes from Christian Theology**

An examination of each role and its accompanying language category reveals that a significant amount of Christian theology is described under each one. This is because the metaphors at the heart of each role have an extended language system. Caird spells out how this works.

Some metaphors readily lend themselves to a high development because they belong to a metaphor system, i.e., a group of metaphors linked together by their common origin in a single area of human observation, experience or activity which has generated its own particular sublanguage or jargon. Farming, commerce, law, welfare, family, weather, love, health, nature, sport—each of these has a recognizable language of its own and any metaphor drawn from any one of these areas invites embellishment by the addition of others.<sup>17</sup>

Because of these metaphor systems, each of the roles we are going to examine provides biblical terms or theological language that explicates a number of themes in Christian theology.<sup>18</sup> The biblical materials reveal that in each role category there is language that describes the *trine God* (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), but there is also language that describes *men and women, sin, salvation, atonement, growth in Christian experience, the church, full sanctification and glorification.*

It works like this: In the role of God as Creator, not only is God the *Father* described as Creator but so is the *Son* and the *Holy Spirit*. *Men and women* are

---

<sup>16</sup>Caird, *Language and Imagery of the Bible*, pp. 177-78.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>18</sup>For a different use of metaphor to build Christian theology from a contemporary feminist perspective see Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982). For a critique of McFague's restricted use of "Metaphorical Theory" see Colin Gunton, "Proteus and Procrustes: A Study in the Dialectic of Language in Disagreement with Sallie McFague," in *Speaking the Christian God*, ed. Alvin Kimel Jr. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 65-80.

described as creatures who are persons created in the image of God. *Sin* is described in terms of marring the image of God in people, and *salvation* is that which begins to remake the image of God in them. The *atonement* has to do with Christ as the new head (recapitulation) of the human race. *Growth* in Christian experience is a progressive rebuilding of the image of God. The *church* is seen as the body of Christ, while *full sanctification* is a more complete remaking of the moral image of God in individuals. *Glorification* is described in terms of a final restoration of persons as well as the creation of a new heaven and new earth. The complete set of terms relating to creation language may be outlined as in table 1.3.

**Table 1.3. Example of Theological Themes Described in One Role**

Father	Son	Spirit	Persons	Sin	Salvation	Atonement	Growth	Church	Full Sanctification	Glorification
Creator	Creator	Agent of creation	Made in image of God	Marred image/idolatry	Remaking image/Regeneration	Recapitulation	Growth in image of God	Body of Christ	Full remaking of image	New heaven/earth

In addition to the major themes in Christian theology under each role we are including an introduction to the *attributes* of God that relate to each one. These include the *absolute attributes* (e.g., spirituality and infinity), the *relative attributes* (e.g., omnipotence and wisdom) and the *moral attributes* (e.g., righteousness and love). Some attributes are related to more than one role in the biblical material, but most have at least a close association with one major role (e.g., loving Father). We will use these close connections as a means of introducing all the major attributes of God. There has always been some uneasiness in Christian theology that the attributes of God were more abstract categories that did not convey the more personal dimensions of the way God describes himself in Scripture. By identifying certain attributes with certain roles of God we are hoping to bridge the gap between the more narrative descriptions of God that are pictorial in nature (the roles of God) and the more systematic delineations of his nature normally connected with a discussion of his attributes. The two should provide complementary forms of describing God so that we might relate to him more adequately.

When all the roles are put together with all the themes of Christian theology under each role, a very full conception emerges of God and how we relate to

him. *Who God is* obviously dominates the whole of Christian theology and is the connecting link between its various themes.<sup>19</sup> We are going to examine this

**Table 1.4. Roles of God with Theological Themes**

Role	Creator	King	Personal Revealer	Priest	Judge	Father	Redeemer	Shepherd
<b>Language</b>	Creation	Majesty	Personal communication	Sanctuary	Legal	Family	Slavery/ Freedom	Pastoral scene
<b>Focus</b>	Life	Authority	Fellowship/ Communication/ Truth	Grace/ Purity	Law	Love	Deliverance/ Service	<b>Care</b>
<b>Son</b>	Creator	King	Emmanuel/ Word/ Teacher	High priest/ Mediator	Judge/ Advocate/ Witness	Son/ Bridegroom	Savior	Good Shepherd
<b>Spirit</b>	Agent of creation	Executive of Godhead	Spirit of truth	Intercessor	Advocate	Agent of new birth	Spirit of power	Good Spirit
<b>Man/ Woman</b>	Creature in God's image	Subject/ Citizen	Person	Worshiper	Made for law/ Order	Child	Freedman/ Servant	Sheep
<b>Sin</b>	Marred image/ Idolatry	Rebelliousness/ Rebellion	Alienation/ Rejection	Defilement/ Unclean- ness	Lawlessness/ Transgres- sion	Self-love/ Disobedi- ence	Bondage/ Yielding	Lostness/ Straying
<b>Salvation</b>	Regeneration/ Life	Pardon/ Entering kingdom	Reconcilia- tion/ Accepting Christ	Forgiveness/ Cleansing	Justification	New birth/ Life	Redemption/ Ransom/ Delivery	Being found
<b>Atonement</b>	Recapitulation	Governmental/ Anselmic satisfaction	Reconcilia- tion	Propitiation	Penal satisfaction	Moral influence	Ransom	Example
<b>Growth</b>	Growth in image	Kingly rule	Developing relationship	Continuous cleansing	Obeying law	Maturity	Serving God	Following
<b>Church</b>	Body/Building	Assembly/ Kingdom	Communion of saints	Kingdom of priests	Community under law	Family/ Household	Community of Redeemed	Flock
<b>Sanctifica- tion</b>	Full remake of image	Full submission/ Lordship	Fullness of God/Infilling of Spirit	Cleansing from sin/ Purification	Full obedience/ Blamelessness	Perfect love/ Perfection	Full redemption	Total following/ Rest of faith
<b>Glorifica- tion</b>	New heaven/ New earth	King of kings	Eternal fellowship	Eternal worship	Final judgment	Final inheritance	Final redemption	Eternal rest

as a whole, using the data under each role in some detail in the following chapters, but an abbreviated outline of the total picture appears in table 1.4.

This data leads us to the conviction that there are many theological truths that are described biblically and theologically in multiple ways. The pattern is clearly set

<sup>19</sup>William B. Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology* (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Book Room, 1880), 1:233. "God is all in all throughout the whole compass of theology: everywhere both its subject and its object and the unity of these."

for this in Scripture. Part of the reason for this is to give us the full picture, not only of God himself, but also of other crucial truths we need to understand. The use of the roles of God gives us language categories which in turn introduce us to a means of understanding Christian theology in a very holistic way. After seeing the multiple roles we cannot be content, for example, with describing sin or salvation in only one or two ways. In order to have a full biblical theology each subject needs to be described in all of these language categories as well as by using any additional terms that may be used in Scripture for that particular theological truth. We will return in chapter eleven to more discussion of this use of the roles to develop Christian doctrine after we have examined each role.<sup>20</sup>

### How Roles Are Used in Scripture

Throughout the biblical text these extended metaphors or roles are often mixed together in the same passages. Rarely do you get only one portrait used in any single passage, although certain authors tend to use one or two of the roles more frequently than the others. Our purpose will be to separate these roles for the sake of analysis, which we hope will lead to a clearer picture of God and our relationship to him. God's nature, of course, is not separable or neatly divisible, and so the biblical passages that mix these roles come as a healthy corrective to our analytic treatment of them. God is one God, and so he is, in some measure, like all of these portraits. Each role has certain elements that cause it to modify the others. A holistic view of God must include all of the roles of God and also must consider their mutual impact on one another.

No analogy or role from this world will be perfectly adequate to explain a transcendent God. That is one of the reasons why so many different analogies are used to describe him. The various roles condition one another and help us see God more perfectly.<sup>21</sup> We will try to press these roles of God as far as Scripture

---

<sup>20</sup>For a discussion of how roles are a unique combination of metaphorical and conceptual language that provide grids for interpreting a relationship between God and people see McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, pp. 117-29. McFague also helpfully notes, "Many models, both dormant and subsidiary, as well as many kinds of models (some more metaphorical and others more conceptual) will constitute a Christian theology" (p. 129). The difference between this study and McFague's is that she sees a greater validity in the use of "many kinds of models" that may come from Scripture or any other kind of relationship in creation. Our study is based on a more traditional view of revelation as the authoritative standard for theology which carries with it the conviction that the multiple kinds of roles (models) need to all be biblically based.

<sup>21</sup>On how metaphor and analogy qualify one another see J. F. Bethune-Baker, *Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine* (London: Methuen, 1942), p. 160.

does, and there may be certain circumstances when the theological implications of certain roles may be pressed even further. But in this second part of the task we need to proceed very cautiously, lest we fall into misunderstanding by pressing an analogy too far. After all, an analogy is by definition like something in some respects, but not in all respects.

In our study of the various roles we will notice that there is some overlap from one role to another. This means that some things described as done by God in one role are also done by him in another role. God brings life into being both as Creator and as Father. Both the roles of King and Judge have some responsibility for law and order in society. Thus while we try to categorize the language in each of these roles, it must be remembered that some activities of God and some relationships of people to God may fit in more than one category. The lines between these categories must not be drawn too rigidly, but must be seen as flexible and porous because many times the categories “bleed” into one another. An effort will be made in each chapter to indicate which part of each analogy may also be applicable to other roles in our discussion.

### **A Whole View of God Is Essential**

In the following chapters each of the eight major roles will be discussed in sequence. When this task has been completed, then it will be possible to synthesize the data under each theme in Christian theology (Christ, the Holy Spirit, men and women, sin, salvation, atonement, growth, the church, sanctification and glorification) for application in knowing God and for ministry. There can be no holistic theology of any of these truths without biblical materials from all eight roles and their language categories. This means the church must “package” a holistic portrait from each of these categories for preaching, teaching and other ministry purposes. It simply is not sufficient to speak of “Isaiah’s view of God” or “Paul’s view of sin.” For those in the church who are convinced that the whole Bible is the word of God, a holistic understanding of this data must be at the heart of their theology. This does not mean to imply that there was never a progressive revelation of materials, nor that there ought not to be significant consideration given to how much revelation had been given at any particular period in biblical history. Yet, for teaching, preaching and discipling purposes today, the entire biblical picture must be taken into account if the church is going to call men and women to

properly understand God and adequately respond to him. It is this full, whole, biblical understanding that is one of the first parts of the work of systematic theology.<sup>22</sup>

In relation to the data, our task is not to gather everything the Bible has to say about sin, for example, but we hope to be provisionally comprehensive about how the Bible pictures sin under each of the major roles we are describing. The next step in the process would be to put together a holistic doctrine of sin from these eight major roles (plus any other data that might not be included in these or their subcategories) for a complete and realistic picture of sin. It is hoped that our analysis of these biblical language categories will facilitate the process of pulling together what the Scripture has to say about sin and each of the other subject headings described. This is part of the way we hope to facilitate the movement from biblical materials to systematic theology.

Further, it has been observed that many people find it much easier to obtain a grasp of the categories of Christian theology if there is a way for them to see how they fit together. Helping people understand Christian truth in categories of creation language, legal language, family language, etc., makes it much easier for them to conceptualize truth in their own minds and apply it in their own lives. Since it is the application of biblical truth to life that is a matter of special concern for the church, we hope the following analysis will make a significant contribution to that end.

### **Analogical Language**

Since this whole book is wrapped up with the language of analogy, a further word is in order about how analogy functions. In the history of the Christian church it was Thomas Aquinas who made the most effective case for analogi-

---

<sup>22</sup>This approach to the biblical data fits between the final stages of biblical theology and beginning stages of systematic theology. It is the task of biblical theology to collect the fruits of exegesis, first within books and then within authors. But most biblical theology stops with the collection of certain significant data under authors or time periods. An exception to this is Donald Guthrie's *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1981), in which he attempts to summarize the biblical data under the categories of systematic theology. As valuable as Guthrie's work is, it is limited only to the New Testament data. The next step must be to include the Old Testament materials in order to gain a holistic view of subjects like God, men and women, sin, salvation, the atonement, growth, the church, sanctification and glorification. The task of this book is located between the final responsibilities of biblical theology and the initial task of systematics.

cal language as the best means of speaking about God.<sup>23</sup> He argued that since God is infinite, it follows that none of our finite concepts can be applied to him *univocally* (with one voice), i.e., expressing entirely the same meaning as they do in ordinary usage. Further, he insisted that since God created the world, then he cannot be totally distinct in every way from it, for that would make the descriptive terms of him *equivocal* (in a different voice), i.e., expressing totally different meanings. The creature must bear some similarity to the Creator. It is this similarity, said Aquinas, that makes it possible for the creature to speak analogically of the Creator, using the language of creation in order to describe him.<sup>24</sup>

For example, we may say God is a King, meaning there is an analogy (comparison) between the way God works and the way a king works, i.e., sometimes he acts like a king but not all the time. Since God is a purely spiritual King, there will always be dissimilarities between him and any earthly king. If we said God is a King using univocal language, we would be saying that he is exactly like a king in all respects. If we used theological language equivocally, we would say that the concept of an earthly king will tell us nothing about God's work as a King. God as a King and "King George" would be as unrelated in meaning as the word "ball" when used of Cinderella or a sporting event. So in terms of the options of language when speaking about God (univocal, equivocal or analogical), clearly analogous language seems to be best.

This analogical language may be divided into two types: metaphysical and metaphorical. While the former apply literally to God, the latter do not. A metaphysical analogy has to do with the essence of God's being, whereas a metaphorical analogy describes the way God works in relationship to others. Up to this point we have been referring primarily to metaphorical analogy in our discussion of the way God works. Six of the eight roles of God we have described are metaphorical analogies: Creator, King, Priest, Judge, Redeemer and

<sup>23</sup>For a discussion of the significant role of Aquinas in the use of analogical language about God see the excellent study by Mondin, *Principle of Analogy*. Also see Mascall, *Existence and Analogy*; and Ralph M. McInerny, *The Logic of Analogy: An Interpretation of St. Thomas* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1961).

<sup>24</sup>"A word has the same sense (univocal) if it has all the same synonyms, contraries, determinates and so on; similar sense (analogical) if it has many of the same synonyms and so on; unrelated sense (equivocal) if it has none of the same synonyms and so on" (Richard Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1992], pp. 39-40).

Shepherd. However, a word needs to be said about metaphysical analogy and the two roles associated with it.

Metaphysics has to do with the essence or being of something. When we talk about a metaphysical nature of God, we are talking about that which belongs to the essence of his nature. In our discussions we will be talking about the essence of God's nature in relation to his holiness. We will also be talking about the expression of his holiness in attributes like purity, righteousness, love and goodness. When we use any of these expressions in relationship to God (e.g., God is good), we will be talking about a metaphysical analogy that is literally true of God's being.

Metaphysical analogy is also related to two of the roles that we are discussing: God as Personal Revealer and God as Father. While both of these analogies include metaphorical elements (that is, God is like a person who verbally communicates [Personal Revealer] and like a Father), he is not perfectly like either. He does not have a physical body like all other persons in the created world, nor does he have a consort with which to beget children. So like the other metaphorical analogies, God is like a Personal Revealer and like a Father in some ways but unlike them in other ways. The added dimension in these two roles is that there is something within the inner being of the triune God that each of these roles describes, something of his essence. As Personal Revealer the three members of the Trinity are relating to each other as three persons within one Godhead, and particularly, they are communicating with each other. This person-to-person relation and communication within God himself has to do with the very essence or being of God. The same is true with regard to the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Trinity. Classic Christian theology has understood the distinction between the first and second persons of the Trinity as basically that which relates to Fatherhood and Sonhood, One begets and One is eternally begotten. This means that the role of God as Father in Scripture sometimes relates to his Fatherhood within the triune Godhead and sometimes to his role as Father over persons within creation. Since a designation of God as Personal Revealer and as Father have to do with the very essence of God's being, these two roles are designated as metaphysical analogies.

Because these two roles are metaphysical analogies and have to do more with the basic essence of God's nature, there is a sense in which God is more like these

two roles than any of the others. Or to put it another way, these roles describe who he is, as well as the way he works, more accurately and more fully than any of the others. They might be referred to as foundational roles for the Christian faith.

In the light of what we have said in this chapter about definitions, it may be valuable to summarize the way we are going to use significant terms:<sup>25</sup>

1. *Analogy*. A relationship between two realities in which there are significant similarities but also recognizable differences.

2. *Symbol*. A reality that stands for and gives insight into some other reality because of the analogy between the two.

3. *Metaphor*. A figurative way of speaking in which the subject (God) is spoken of in terms of a symbol (e.g., lion), which is related to it by analogy.

4. *Role*. A specialized use of metaphor when referring to God (subject) in terms of human beings (symbol): Creator, King, Priest, Judge, Redeemer, Shepherd; with metaphysical dimensions when referring to God in terms of Personal Revealer and Father. Roles may also be labeled as portraits, models or the identity of God.

Having defined our terms, one more issue remains before we can look in detail at each of the roles of God. Is there a characteristic of God's nature that ties together the various roles we are going to study? It is to this issue that we now turn our attention.

---

<sup>25</sup>I am indebted to Peter W. Macky for his preciseness in defining some terms in his valuable study *The Centrality of Metaphors to Biblical Thought* (pp. 49-56). Mackey does not speak, however, of roles, but models, which he defines as "an established symbol, one that has become conventionally used to illuminate a particular subject" (p. 56). Our use of role is closer to Sallie McFague's description of models as "systematic and relatively permanent metaphors" (*Metaphorical Theology*, pp. 39, 103, 117, 125, 129, 193).