

The Concept of Holiness in Isaiah 6:1-13 —Its Implications for the Nigerian Society

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Abstract

Isaiah's call is defined in one single moment when he steps into the unspeakable presence of the Lord. In a vision, Isaiah sees the glory of God and immediately realizes his own sinfulness. Yet in God's infinite grace, Isaiah's sinfulness is taken away, and he responds with great excitement and urgency to set out to do the work of God. The prophet emphasizes three aspects of God's holiness: His sovereign transcendence, His moral purity, and His costly grace. He does so in his conception of God as supreme and sovereign over the whole world, a God who dominates over the forces of nature and human history, and whose essence is holiness. Such holiness finds an echo in the holiness of the Christian community, especially in worship and witness, and in the life of the individual.

Key Words: Holiness, Christian community, Moral Purity, Grace and His Costly Grace.

1.0 Introduction

In nearly every religion, there is a distinction between that which is holy and what is profane. In most cases, the religious man is the one to whom

something is sacred, i.e. holy. *Holiness* requires a distinction be made between the holiness that is God's very being and the holiness which reflects the character of His people.

The holiness of God is the most central theme in the theology and spirituality of Isaiah. He superlatively expresses God's holiness. God is perfectly and completely holy. Since the early days of the Christian church, the book of Isaiah has been known as "The Fifth Gospel" due to its high content of messianic prophecies (Richard L. Schultz, 2005,194).

Within the direct context of Isaiah, chapter six arrives on the heels of Isaiah 1-5, which contain God's "judgment against all the 'proud and lofty' men and women, humbling them so that the Lord alone will be exalted", contrasting the coming doom and destruction with the surpassing future glory of Mt. Zion (Richard L. Schultz, 2005, 199).

AsHustad describes, this "sets forth the dramatic experiences of true worship".In its simplest description, the reader of the sixth chapter of Isaiah sees a depiction of the one true and holy God, whom Isaiah calls the "Holy One of Israel" in many passages in the book named after him, but refers to Him here as (Yahweh Sabaoth, Lord of Hosts) in Isaiah 6:3. This holy God is He who through His simple presence causes instant recognition within Isaiah of his own sinfulness and that of his people, yet who allows the cleansing regeneration of Isaiah by His grace and offers an ensuing call of obedient service to Him to a willing Isaiah (Donald P. Hustad, 1960, 2002).

2.0 The Theme of Holiness in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the term *holiness* is applied to God in two senses. First, God is separate, set above all which is created. Yet, it is God who calls us to an ethical purity. Secondly, things are regarded holy because of their connection with God—Holy ground, Holy Sabbath, Holy place. God's holiness permeates anything touched by Him, especially ma.

Man's encounters with the holiness of God in the Old Testament were often fearful. Following God's destruction of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea, the Israelites rested near Mount Sinai—where God appeared to Moses

in a burning bush. Before God would establish a covenant with His people, He ordered them to separate from impurity, to make themselves sanctified (holy) to God. On the third day of preparation, God descended to Mount Sinai, demonstrating His power and holiness ([Exodus 19:16–20](#)). God warned that anyone touching the mountain would be put to death. Only Moses and Aaron were permitted on the mountain. Mount Sinai was “*set apart as holy*” — a reminder of the immeasurable chasm between the divine and the human.

2.1 Pentateuch

According to the Old Testament, to be holy means to be dedicated to God. Holiness is a part of God's nature and is imparted by Him to human beings in a right relationship with him. God intends for all human beings to be holy all of the time. Sin, however, defiles us and puts us in need of atonement so that we can be holy once more.

In Numbers 16:7 the meaning of *holy* as *set apart* is employed: "... and the one whom Yahweh chooses will be the consecrated [holy] one ..." Exodus 19:6 "And you shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation ..."

The book of Leviticus is grounded in the truth that God is holy. Leviticus 19:12 gives reasons for demanding holiness of the people: **אֲנִי קָדוֹשׁ כִּי תִהְיֶה לְךָ יְהוָה** (For I, the Lord your God, am holy). The word *qadosh* occurs over a hundred times in the Hebrew text of Leviticus. To say that God is holy means that he is completely separate from all evil or defect. Or to put it in another way, God is completely and perfectly good. The Lord is worthy of total allegiance, exclusive worship, and loving obedience.

Israel's identity arises because by God's actions they *are* holy, yet also because the Lord expects Israel to *act* holy in practical ways. Israel is called to be holy because the Lord himself is holy (Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7; 21:8). The seemingly disparate laws of Leviticus that deal with the ritual, ethical, commercial, and penal aspects of life all rest on this core notion of holiness.

Holiness in Leviticus is not separation for separation's sake, but for the sake of a thriving community of the people of God and the reconciliation of each person to God. Holiness is not only about individuals' behavior following regulations, but about how what each person does affects the whole people of God in their life together and their work as agents of God's kingdom.

2.2 Historical Books

For hundred long years, the Ark of the Covenant had been absent from the Tabernacle and other places of worship. God specified that only Levites should transport the ark on their shoulders by means of poles passed through gold rings attached to the ark. Even the Levites were forbidden to even touch the ark or look in it because God's holiness (presence) abided there. Yet, David chose to bring the ark back to Jerusalem on a cart. When the oxen stumbled, threatening to topple the ark from the cart, Uzzah tried to steady the ark with his hand. This irreverent act angered God, who instantly struck Uzzah dead ([2 Samuel 6:1-11](#)). To approach the holiness of God requires reverence and absolute obedience to His commands. Comparing God's holiness to other god's, Samuel submits: "there is no one holy like the Lord... nor is there any rock like our God" (1 Sam. 2:2).

2.3 Wisdom Books

Here the Book of Job is to be considered. The wisdom that is found in the book of Job is not communicated in the form of proverb. Rather, the book of Job deals with questions of wisdom in the context of a narrative dealing with Job's profound anguish and excruciating pain.

In chapter 40, God says to Job finally, "Is Yahweh's opponent going to give way? Has god critic thought up an answer?" Job's response is not one of defiant demand for answers to his misery. He submits "... what can I reply? I had better lay my hand over my mouth. I shall not speak again. I have spoken twice, I have nothing more to say." (vv. 4-5)

Job's answer comes directly from the wisdom of Job that agrees with the other premises of wisdom literature: the fear of the Lord, awe and reverence before God, is the beginning of wisdom.

Often, when the people of Israel are befuddled and confused by things that are incomprehensible in this world, they always look not for specific answers to specific questions, but they look to know God in His holiness, in His righteousness, in His justice, and in His mercy. Therein is the wisdom that is found in the book of Job.

2.4 Theme of Holiness in the Prophetic Corpus

Holiness is a theme woven throughout Scripture, especially in the prophetic corpus. It is a theme reflected in the prophets, albeit with varying degrees. Ezekiel, the prophet will be considered here.

Apart from the inaugural vision, the mystery of God and His majesty is also revealed in the great importance that Ezekiel attaches to the name of God. In all his actions the greatness of God's name is exalted, whether when he punishes Israel (cf. Ezek. 4:13-16; 6:10; 7:8-9; 11:10) or when he saves her (cf. Ezek. 16:62; 17:24; 20:38-44; 34:27; The prophet Ezekiel fell upon his face when he beheld the glory of the Lord (Ezekiel 1:28). Unlike the Seraphim of Isaiah, the Cherubim of Ezekiel do not have the possibility of contemplating God or singing His praises. God is far removed from created things, and He can enter into dialogue with men only through His Spirit and His word (Udoette, 196). It is the Spirit of God who gives life to the dry bones in the valley (Ezek. 37). For Ezekiel, God is wrapped in mystery, surrounded with silence and solitude.

3.0 The Theme of Holiness in Isaiah

3.1 The Unique Context Of Isaiah's Calling

With King Uzziah's death, either in 739 or 740 B.C., an extended period of living in prosperity and expanding the kingdom comes to an end for Judah (Robert B. Hughes, and J. Carl Laney, 1990; 260).

While King Uzziah's reign had been a rather long one beginning at age 16 and spanning fifty-two years, towards the end of his leading Judah, trouble was brewing on the international scene with the coming to power of Tiglath-Pileser III as king in the Assyrian kingdom in 745 B.C. Building his empire, he fought truthless battles, eventually threatening the sovereignty of both Israel and Judah (J. A. Motyer, 1993, under "Is 6:1."). With Tiglath-Pileser driving his first campaign towards the west, a significant military danger had arisen. Based on his victories in kingdoms to the east and north of the Israelite states, the kings of Israel and Judah faced a great threat, one which would ultimately result in the collapse of the northern kingdom under the onslaught of the Assyrian troops. In addition, Tiglath-Pileser's troops conquered the capital of Samaria. As a war strategy, large portions of the residents of these areas were deported (Victor Harold M. et al., 2000, under "Is 6:1").

It is during this phase that Isaiah received the call to his prophetic ministry. Unlike other prophets, who began their letters with their call (e.g. Jeremiah 1), Isaiah did not place this calling until chapter 6. In addition, he is the only prophet to date his calling by a king's death. But in Isaiah's thinking, this was a critical event in history, and God was using it to speak to his people. Isaiah had observed the years during which King Uzziah was living in a separated and alienated state from God, during which God's displeasure was becoming visible.

- **Isaiah's Vision of the Lord (6:1-3)**

Isaiah saw the Lord; indeed he himself stated this in the very first verse of chapter six. In other words, Isaiah experienced a theophany. Buksbazen defines a theophany as "God's manifestation of Himself to man, ... a voluntary limitation on the part of God of His divine nature in order that men might be able to experience His awesome presence without perishing." In this case, according to Buksbazen, God chose to reveal Himself to Isaiah in such a way that he could recognize Him (Victor Buksbazen, *The Prophet Isaiah: A Commentary* (Bellmawr, 2008, 135).

Isaiah saw the Lord, and ultimately the Lord commissioned him as His prophet and as a voice to pronounce impending doom.

- **God's Majesty**

Notice the details of Isaiah's vision: God was on the throne. Uzziah may have died, but God was still on the throne. The throne was "high and exalted," which means that it is greater and exceeded all other thrones. God's throne is not on a level with earthly thrones — whether it be Uzziah's, or the rising Assyrian throne of Tiglath Pileser III. It is higher than theirs. Its location speaks of His supremacy over the earth and all human rulers who rise and fall at His command.

God's surpassing greatness was the bedrock of Israel's faith. The Psalmists did not intend for their repeated cries for the Lord to "be exalted" to imply God's elevated position needed shoring up. They knew that "God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne. ... the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted" (Psalm 47:8,9). Rather, this was a way of recognizing the status He already possessed.

God's throne was inviolable whatever circumstances His people were undergoing. Even when the nation had apparently come to an end and its people were in exile, Daniel still spoke of God as "the Most High God" who was "sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes" (Daniel 4:2,25).

Trappings of majesty surrounded the throne Isaiah saw. The royal robe reached from heaven into the temple. Its length captures the grandeur of God's sovereign rule, but also, in making a connection with earth, suggests that God is not remote from or indifferent to the struggles of His subjects below. The robe "filled the temple" — not the palace, the seat of power; or, the courts, the seat of law; but, the temple, the seat of atonement. This further suggests God's desire to overcome His people's lack of holiness by providing them with a means of cleansing and reconciliation.

As Jamieson points out, Isaiah saw something different than the *Shekinah* on the mercy seat in the tabernacle or the temple: there was a lack of a cloud or fire, rather Isaiah perceived a different form. In addition, instead of the cherubim above the mercy seat,

Isaiah saw seraphim. The form in the tabernacle or temple had no clothing described in Scripture, yet here Isaiah described a robe and train (Robert J., 1997 under "Is 6:1.>").

Motyer also points out that while Isaiah described majestic elements, such as a throne, a king's robe and attendants, God Himself is not described, yet his presence, power and authority are clearly visible through the attributes ascribed, high and exalted ("Is. 6").

Isaiah came to recognize the temple as the place where God's presence was not merely symbolic, but had now become tangible reality for him. The ensuing encounter allowed Isaiah to see "the point where heaven touches earth", as Motyer describes it ("Is. 6"). According to Motyer, the symbolism of the foot acting as an indication of life's direction should be what is observed in this scene, and therefore the seraphim's behavior indicated submission to God's commands (Is 6:2). However, as Jamieson et al. point out, the practice of covering feet was one common in the presence of Eastern kings, in order to show reverence, a practice which seems the likelier association in this scene (Jamieson et al. Is 6:2).

- **The Unique Trisagion of Isaiah 6:3 (קדוש קדוש קדוש)**

קדוש קדוש קדוש, יהוה יהוה צבאות; מלא כל-הארץ, כבודו. 3 And one called unto another, and said: Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.

Isaiah apparently had this vision in the Temple, possibly on a cultic occasion when the house was filled with the smoke of incense. Such an experience may not have been unique to prophets. The psalmist speaks of gazing towards God in the temple "to see your power and glory" (Ps. 63:3). It may be that worshippers hoped for such a vision when they attended worship in the temple. In any case, the claim to have seen God lends considerable authority to the prophet's message (J.J. Collins *Collegetown Bible Commentary: Old Testament 13— Isaiah*). The question remains: why three times holy?

The seraphim's threefold קָדוֹשׁ (*qadosh*, holy) leaves no doubt about the holiness of God. While some scholars have seen a picture of the trinity in the thrice repeated "holy", according to the translation notes of the NET Bible, "this proposal has no linguistic or contextual basis and should be dismissed as allegorical" (*The NET Bible, New English Translation*, 2006), 1273). According to Chisholm, Hebrew repeats words for emphasis. Motyer agrees that "Hebrew uses repetition to express superlatives or to indicate totality" (Motyer, Is. 3). While a threefold repetition is unusual in Old Testament writing, it serves as a very strong emphasis (Robert B. Chisholm, 2002, 24-28). Another example of this is Ezekiel 21:27, which repeats the word עוֹהָה (*avah*, ruin) thrice, meaning nothing will be left of the city but rubble. Jeremiah 7:4, which repeats הֵיכָל (*hêkāl*, temple) three times, may be another such example of emphasis.

Similarly to the *bold*, *italic*, and *underline* used to show emphasis, a Hebrew emphasis was repetition. Paul writes twice in Galatians 1:8-9 that those preaching a contrary gospel should be accursed. And Jesus never uses desultory language, so it is meaningful that he prefaces his words with *amen*, *amen*—or truly, truly. He is saying, in effect, "Pay attention. This is of grave importance!" So the angels are not content with, "Holy!" And they are not even content with the emphasis of "Holy! Holy!" They must say it three times—"Holy! Holy! Holy!" They take it to the third degree—the superlative degree. No other attribute of God is praised like this. Not love or mercy or justice or sovereignty. Just Holy.

Here the seraphs (Isaiah 6:2,6) attend the King of kings. These fiery creatures, mentioned by name only in these two verses in the Bible, cannot look directly on God. Hence, "With two wings they covered their faces [and] with two they covered their feet." Probably they covered their feet because they "disavowed their intention to choose their own path." (Motyer Alec, 76.) The other pair of wings they used to fly, since they were constantly ready to do the bidding of their Lord. Their ears remained uncovered; their duty was to listen to God's command and obey.

Isaiah's attention shifts from what he sees to what he hears. "And they were calling to one another: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (6:3). This song is something of a surprise. Since the focus has been on God's sovereignty, one would expect the seraphs to celebrate His rule: its legitimacy, power, and authority. Instead the seraphs celebrate His holiness. They are not content to mention His holiness and pass on, or even mention it twice — the usual Hebrew way of providing emphasis. They repeat their cry three times with increasing intensity. He is utterly, thoroughly utterly, perfectly utterly, holy. This is, "an emphatic formulation (that) is tantamount to a definition of the nature of YHWH." (A. Motyer, 1993), under "Is 6:1."). God's holiness is such that only a "super superlative" does it justice. (Alec Motyer, 1993, 77.) R.C. Sproul (1985) adds: "The Bible never says that God is love, love, love, or mercy, mercy, mercy, or wrath, wrath, wrath, wrath, or justice, justice, justice. It does say that He is holy, holy, holy, the whole earth is full of His glory."

The second line of the seraphs' song speaks of the sphere in which this holy God operates. God wants people to see His glory — the manifestation of His divine attributes — throughout the world. Isaiah encounters Him in the temple, but God is not limited to that shrine. Isaiah represents the children of Israel, but God has not limited His sovereignty to His covenant people. Just as we find God's signature throughout His creation, so we, too, know His law is throughout the earth and the nations observe His works (Psalm 19). The God in this vision is no petty tribal deity, limited in authority to a small group in Judah. He displays His holiness in the theater of the whole world.

It would have been surprising if this breaking in of this "highly active, energetic, dynamic even threatening" divine power had not had an immediate impact on the place where it occurred (B.W. Anderson, *Contours of Old Testament Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999, 43f.). And it did. Isaiah records the classic signs of a visitation from God in saying, "the doorposts and thresholds shook," as if an earthquake

was occurring, and “the temple was filled with smoke” (v.4). This was reminiscent of Moses’ encounter with God on Sinai (Ex. 19:16–20). In Isaiah, the holy God of the Exodus and Sinai revealed himself once more at a crucial point in Israel’s history.

The image of the seraphim’s voices in concert and yet with a back and forth of praise, thus bouncing off each other as they cry out to each other to declare the holiness of God, is what Keil and Delitzsch (2002) describe as “a continuous and unbroken antiphonal song” and call it the “blessed employment” of the seraphim to deliver such “uninterrupted worship of God.”

3.2 God's Holiness As Moral Purity

- **God's Holiness and Man's Unworthiness**

The holiness of Yahweh is in sharp contrast to the sinful condition of man. While God, on one hand, is superlatively holy, Israel on the other hand is superlatively sinful (Udoette D., 115).

Isaiah was a man of integrity, yet one glimpse of God's holiness makes him come apart at the seams. As long as our gaze is fixed on the horizontal plane of this earth, we have no problem with ourselves. But if we lift our gaze to heaven and contemplate what God is, we will be broken. Security and smugness is annihilated. Holy men are reduced to trembling with one glimpse of God.

Such an out-of-the-ordinary experience was naturally profoundly disturbing. It is not surprising to read that Isaiah’s response was to cry out, “Woe to me! I am ruined!” (v. 5). The cause of his fear lies not in his emotional terror in the face of the power that has confronted him, but in his personal unworthiness in the face of the holiness he encountered. His response says his fate is sealed because “I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”

The holiness of God simultaneously reveals the uncleanness of Isaiah who fears for his life. Having encountered holiness, Isaiah realizes that his own life is far from clean. His confession focuses on his lips for a number of reasons. The seraphs' lips had proclaimed God's holiness and, by contrast, he realized that his own lips had failed to witness to God's perfection (Leclerc Thomas, 2007, 167).

The chief instrument Isaiah used as a prophet were his lips. It was natural, therefore, to concentrate on them. He was not confessing to swearing or filthy conversation but to preaching unworthy messages, which perhaps came from his own imagination, frustrations, temper, or desire for comfort and compromise.

When Isaiah discovers who God is he pronounces an oracle of doom on himself—a curse. The first time he saw what God is was the first time he saw who he was. He saw that he had a dirty mouth and that his dirtiness was epidemic, pandemic.

- **The Statistical Evidence of Isaiah's Usage of "Holy"**

Isaiah's favorite designation for Yahweh is "**The Lord of Hosts**", used sixty-two times in the book. "The name designates the Lord as omnipotent, and...is used by all the writing prophets except Ezekiel, Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah. The term 'hosts' designated the armies of Israel. It could also refer to the angels, the heavenly messengers of the Lord, and to the stars as God's hosts. When, as here, it appears without further qualification, it designates the Lord as the God of all hosts, and is thus an equivalent expression for the 'all-powerful God'."

Another dominant designation for the Lord used by Isaiah is "**The Holy One of Israel**". In his book it is used at least twenty-five times, while found only six times in all the rest of the Bible.

4.1 THE RELEVANCE OF ISAIAH

In the whole biblical tradition, Isaiah has always stood tall as a great prophet who delivered powerful messages to his contemporaries.

Two major themes run throughout the book. There is the exhortation to "**Trust in the Holy One of Israel.**" Faith in the Lord would assure forgiveness for their transgressions and deliverance from their enemies. Eight times the people are urged to "wait upon the Lord" (Cf. Is. 40:28-31). "**The Messiah to come and the glory of His age**" is another dominate message. Isaiah spoke frequently of the events to come, foretelling the fall of heathen nations and the establishment of the kingdom of the Messiah who would rule in justice and righteousness (cf. [Isa 2:1-5](#)).

4.2 Significance to Pastoral Ministry

All Christians have been ordained into the ministry of Christ by virtue of their calling. Thousands forsake the ministry when they see there is no glamour in it. The call to proclaim the gospel to all nations is implicitly a summons to holiness. This is undeniable since no one gives what he does not have (*Nemo dat quod non habet*). The acknowledgement of God as Holiness *in se* convinces the pastor to savour the sweetness and majesty of the God who continually cleanses their lips.

- **Vision of Self(6:5-7)**

Isaiah's recognition of his sinfulness is an immediate one. As Motyer, writes, "Isaiah let his audience know that before he pronounced his woes on others, he had first pronounced a woe upon himself ("Is. 6"). Certainly in the presence of such holiness and the praise emanating from holy lips, Isaiah instantly knew that he was doomed due to his own sinfulness and gave voice to his realization: "I am destroyed, for my lips are contaminated with sin" and instantly also recognized God's covenant people as such a sin-contaminated people. Isaiah realized that he was associated with this "sinful society, which had rejected the 'Holy One of Israel'" (Chisholm, 25). Motyer

describes Isaiah's experience very succinctly by citing from H.H. Rowley that "when people fear before God ... it 'is not the consciousness of ... humanity in the presence of divine power, but the consciousness of ... sin in the presence of moral purity' (Motyer, Is. 3).

4.3 Relevance to Theology

Isaiah's theology of the holiness of God is outstanding. The superlative, or in Moyter's thoughts: "super superlative" holiness of God encompasses all the attributes of God. For Isaiah God is not just holy, holiness is not a predicate of God; it is an indicative of who God is. God is not merely holy, but is holiness *par excellence*. Holiness constitutes the essence of God.

Because God is absolutely holy, he transcends all creations, all peoples. Even the celestial spirits, who are at His service, including the Seraphim and the Cherubim, tremble before Him in recognition of transcendent power of His majesty and sanctity.

Yet Yahweh's supernatural sanctity does not make him a God "out there," unconcerned with the affairs of his people. Rather, the holy and transcendent God of Israel is very much at home with His people and very much concerned with their affairs. God is "most intimately associated with the earth, for the world and all that dwell therein are the testimony to his creative power. Most importantly of all, he is the God of Israel... he is hailed Yahweh Sabaoth, the ancient name with which the Jerusalem liturgy saluted its God" (Bruce Vawter, 1973,196-197).

4.4 EVALUATION

The Old Testament describes God's name as "Holy" more than all other ways combined. Isaiah, "the prophet of holiness," repeatedly calls God "the Holy One of Israel." (Alec Motyer, 1993, 17).

What does it mean to say that God is holy? Holiness refers to God's altogether different nature, His transcendent separateness, His exalted majesty, His awesome power, His absolute purity, His immeasurable

brightness, His unfathomable glory, and His redeeming salvation. It is shorthand for the excellence of His perfection.

The word *holy* is like a brilliant firework that explodes into a myriad of colors. It is impossible to take it all in at once. Often, focus is placed on one aspect or another of God's radiance. Isaiah, in chapter 6, however, gets as near to describing the fullness of God's holiness as anyone.

4.5 Conclusion

Having examined the content and import of God's holiness in the Isaianic corpus, it is important to note well that holiness defines the very character of God who is transcendent over the earth, awesome in majesty, sovereign in power, perfect in goodness, pure in His moral nature, and gracious to the core of His being.

The sixth chapter of Isaiah paints a picture of God's holiness like few other passages in Scripture. Here is an image of the perfect sense of justice and at the same time the absolute love displayed by the King of the universe. Man's sinfulness is immediately apparent in all its ugliness. Jonathan Edwards writes in "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God(2000):

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times so abominable in his eyes as the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours.

This single vision in which Isaiah encounters God in the temple emphasizes three aspects of God's holiness: His sovereign transcendence, His moral purity, and His costly grace.

4.6 Practical Appreciation: The Nigerian Society

The 21st century thinking has been shaped by modern worship music and styles, where theology appears to have been stripped of God. Isaiah's emphasis on the power, oneness, and holiness of God and his exhortation to acknowledge as such is of utmost importance to men and women of this age. Isaiah has quite a lot to offer to men and women of contemporary period, and in particular, the Nigerian society.

Oswalt writes,

How we need a vision of the blazing holiness of God. How we need to be crushed under the awareness of a Being who is greater than the entire known universe (which is one meaning of 'the whole earth is full of his glory,' 6:3). How we need to come face to face with a white-hot moral perfection in the presence of which sin cannot exist

(The NIV Application Commentary: Isaiah, 131.)

As the bride of Christ, Isaiah's writing is a reminder of the calling to be a holy people. In Leviticus 19:2 God tells the Israelites: "Speak to the whole community of Israelites and say: Be holy, for I Yahweh your God, am holy" (NJB). This is repeated in 1 Peter 1:16 in the New Testament. God demands a holy people. All are well advised to view Him not just as friend, but also as sovereign Lord. Romans 12:9-21, gives tangible advice on what holy living looks like to a New Testament believer. By disciplining believers and teaching them about the indescribable value of being in the Word every day, this holiness aspect will undoubtedly grow as worldly views are transformed into a biblical worldview through the exposure to the expressed will of God through the pages of the Scriptures.

In the article "Skin-Deep Christianity: the Outcome of Evangelization, Cultural Neglect and Upsurge of Pentecostalism" Ezenweke E. and J.E Madu report that contemporary writers and interpreters of the practice of religion in Africa concur in their view that the problem of Christianity in Africa is that of superficiality (G. Nnamani (ed.), *The New Religious Movements: Pentecostalism in Perspective*, 2007, 265-281). Syncretism has remained a recurrent decimal to

native African Christians. Those who have attempted to compliment their faith in God with other diabolical powers and those who have voluntarily submitted themselves to demonic and cultic practices need to hearken to the prophecies of Isaiah on the power, oneness, and holiness of God. Cultists, witches and wizards, necromancers, all those who have covenanted with Satan in one way or the other, have some points to take home. It is important to remember how Isaiah indicts the pagan gods as nonentities compared to the powerful, one, and holy God of Israel (Is. 2:8; 18:20-21; 37: 19)

Even a superficial study of Church history makes it clear that it is all too easy to develop ideas about God and then to worship these ideas instead of God Himself. As the skeptic Voltaire quipped: "God made man in His image, and man has returned the compliment." One may not realize that he has an incomplete, or even false, understanding of God. Thus, it is profitable to hearken to the summons to holiness of life and sound teachings on the faith.

Isaiah's acknowledgement of God's holiness is practically a summons to all peoples of the earth—Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, African Traditional Religionists, Atheists, Skeptics, Gnostics, and indeed all classes of people

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