

THE HOLINESS OF GOD

The Attributes of God

Banska Bystrica, 24th January 2016

בשנת־מות המֶלֶךְ עֲזִיָּהוּ וְאַרְאָה אֶת־אֲדֹנָי יֹשֵׁב עַל־כִּסֵּא רָם וְנִשְׂא וְשׁוֹלֵיו מְלֵאִים אֶת־הַיְכָל
 שְׂרָפִים עֹמְדִים מִמַּעַל לוֹ שֵׁשׁ כַּנְּפִיִם שֵׁשׁ כַּנְּפִיִם לְאַחַד בְּשָׁתַיִם יְכַסֶּה פָּנָיו וּבְשָׁתַיִם יְכַסֶּה
 רַגְלָיו וּבְשָׁתַיִם יַעֲוֹף³ וְקָרָא זֶה אֶל־זֶה וְאָמַר קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ יְהוָה זְבָאוֹת מְלֵא
 כָּל־הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ⁴ וַיִּנְעֻזוּ אֲמוֹת הַסָּפִים מִקּוֹל הַקּוֹרֵא וְהַבַּיִת יִמְלֵא עָשָׁן⁵ וְאָמַר אוֹיְלִי
 כִּי־נִדְמִיתִי כִּי אִישׁ טָמֵא־שִׁפְתַיִם אָנֹכִי וּבְתוֹךְ עַם־טָמֵא שִׁפְתַיִם אָנֹכִי יוֹשֵׁב כִּי אֶת־הַמֶּלֶךְ
 יְהוָה זְבָאוֹת רָאוּ עֵינָי

Isaiah 6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" ⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵ And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" ⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar.

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0. INTRODUCTION:

[TOZER] "Neither the writer nor the reader of these words is qualified to appreciate the holiness of God. Quite literally a new channel must be cut through the desert of our minds to allow the sweet waters of truth that will heal our great sickness to flow in. We cannot grasp the true meaning of the divine holiness by thinking of someone or something very pure and then raising the concept to the highest degree we are capable of. Holy is the way God is. To be holy He does not conform to a standard. He is that standard."¹

- *mysterium tremendum* ↔ *mysterium fascinans* (Rudolf OTTO)
- קִדְּוּת apartness, holiness, sacredness, separateness...
- ἄγχιος – from ἄζομαι – "to stand in awe, or dread of the gods or one's parents" (Passow)
- "holy" → the opposite is not "bad", or "evil" – but *common*; *generally available*; *unclean*...

¹ TOZER, A. W. *The Knowledge of the Holy*, chpt. 21.

- **Lev 10:10** You are to distinguish between the **holy** and the **common**, (בין הקדש ובין החל) and between the **unclean** and the **clean**, (הטמא ובין הטהור)

0.1. POPULAR IDEAS ABOUT HOLINESS

- **Resistance:** fear; mockery; hatred; suspicion (judgment); accusing (pride); bondage (“Do not touch!”); weakness; imbecile; impractical; impossible; unhappy; depressing...
- **Mistaken:** [CASTANIZA?] ² austere life ... recital of many prayers ...silence and solitude → they help, but they are not “it” → these outward exercises, do oftentimes endanger their own salvation...
- **Mal 3:13** Your words have been hard against me (הזקו עלי דבריכם), says the LORD.
- **Jude 1:15** ...all the **harsh things** that ungodly sinners have spoken against him (περὶ πάντων τῶν σκληρῶν ὧν ἐλάλησαν).

0.2. BEGINNING WITH THE HOLINESS OF GOD

- Is it psychologically/didactically right to *begin* with the HOLINESS of God, knowing it is so misunderstood and hated?

[LLOYD-JONES 1John 1:5] ...We must not even start with God as love (1John 1:4 “that your joy may be complete”) – Now we can see at once how by putting it like this we just give an utter contradiction to what has been so popular especially, again, since 1860; the great message that has been preached for a hundred years is ‘God is love’. That is the thing that has been emphasised, ...that is what we wanted and there He was to meet us; yet what an utter travesty of the gospel that is! This is the message: ‘God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.’ – I say it with reverence that **before I begin to think and consider the love of God** and the mercy and compassion of God, I must start with the holiness of God. ...We have had the flabby, sentimental notions of God as a God of love, always **smiling** upon us, and then when wars and calamities come we are baffled and we turn our backs upon religion ...God is utter, **absolute righteousness and justice**: ‘holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord’ (Heb 12:14); ‘God is a consuming fire’ (Heb 12:29); sharing in the light that is unapproachable, everlasting and eternal in the brightness and the perfection of His absolute qualities. Light! And light must not be interpreted as knowledge; light is knowledge, but **light essentially stands here for holiness**. ... Why must I start with the holiness of God rather than with His love? ...if you do not start with the holiness of God you will never understand God’s plan of salvation, which is that salvation is only possible to us through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross on Calvary’s hill. ...It is not surprising that the cross has been discounted by modern theologians; it is because they have started with the love of God without His holiness. It is because they have forgotten the life of God, His holy life, that everything in Him is holy; with God love and forgiveness are not things of weakness or compromise. He can only forgive sin as He has dealt with it in His own holy manner, and that is what He did upon the cross. – **Therefore it is essential to start with the holiness of God; otherwise the plan of redemption, the scheme of salvation, becomes meaningless and we can see no point or purpose in some of the central doctrines of the Christian faith.** But if I start with the holiness of God I see that the incarnation must take place; the cross is absolutely essential, and the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit and every other part of the great plan as well.³

0.3. THE ESSENCE OF HOLINESS

- 1John 1:5 → light (unapproachable, but giving life...)
- **Ps 89:35** ...I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David (אחת נשבעתי בקדשי אם לרוד אכזב)

² Castagniza (or Castaniza), Juan De – a Spanish biographer and theologian, of the order of Benedictines, who died at Salamanca in 1598, was general preacher of his order, chaplain of Philip II, and censor of theology of the apostolic judges of faith. His principal works are, La Vita de Santo Benito (Salamanca, 1583, 8vo): — Historia de Santo Romualdos Padre y Fundador del Ordene Camaldulense (1597, 4to). Some biographers attribute to him a well-known book, Batalla Spiritual, but it is known now that the monk Laurent Scupoli wrote it. (<http://www.biblicalcyclopedia.com/C/castagniza-%28or-castaniza%29-juan-de.html>)

³ LLOYD-JONES, D. M. *Life in Christ*, Wheaton : Crossway Books, 2002, p. 100-102

- [BAVINCK] "...the adjective is שֶׁקֵט, the substantive שֶׁקֵט, and its antonym is חֵל (κοινος), from חֵלל, to make common ...it was rather **God's utter transcendence and power over all creatures** that was expressed in God's holiness..."⁴

0.3.1. HOLINESS IN HUMANS

- **Heb 12:14** ...holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord'

[CHAMBERS] **Holiness** is the **balance** between our disposition and the law of God as expressed in **Jesus Christ**, and it is such a stern thing that the majority of us have either not begun it, or we have begun it and left it alone. ...If I am going to follow the dictates of the Spirit of God and take up the attitude of Jesus Christ to things, it will produce an earthquake in my outlook.⁵

- "For him [TERTULLIAN] the moral imperative was strictly defined in terms of **God's character** and was dominated by the problem of individual purity. Tertullian's aim was not morality but holiness."⁶

- → the basic idea of holiness is **belonging** – exclusive right of access and ownership

0.3.2. THE HOLINESS OF GOD

- **ontological** (difference of being) & **ethical** (moral perfection)
- [BAVINCK] "YHWH is not called holy because of an immediately conspicuous attribute. He is rather called holy in a comprehensive sense in connection with every revelation that impresses humans with his deity. Holiness alternates with himself (Amos 4:2; 6:2)."⁷
- **1John 1:5** **God is light**, and in him is no darkness at all.
- the biblical viewpoint would refer the holiness of God not only to the mystery of his power, but also to his character as totally good and entirely without evil⁸ (**Isa 5:16** ...the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness בְּצִדְקָה בְּצִדְקָה שֶׁקֵט נִקְרָא הַקָּדוֹשׁ הַיְהוָה)
- [(Pseudo-)DIONYSIUS] "Holiness is that which we conceive as a freedom from all defilement and a complete and utterly untainted purity."⁹
- [OTTO – translator's preface] "But though, in our final experience of God's Holiness, perfect goodness has an absolutely essential and central place, yet there remains a something beyond. **Holiness or sanctity has an element in it independent of the category of the good**."¹⁰
- [OTTO] ...ἀρρητον – *ineffabile* in the sense that it completely eludes apprehension in terms of concepts.¹¹

1. GOD IS DIFFERENT

→ mystery

[TOZER] This is an It, an awful Thing, and can never be intellectually conceived, only sensed and felt in the depths of the human spirit. It remains as a permanent religious instinct, a feeling for that **unnamed**, undiscoverable **Presence** that "runs quicksilverlike through creation's veins" and sometimes stuns the mind by confronting it with a **supernatural, suprarational** manifestation of itself. The man thus confronted is brought down and overwhelmed and can only tremble and be silent.¹²

- **1Tim 6:16** ...who alone has **immortality**, who dwells in **unapproachable light**, whom **no one has ever seen or can see**

⁴ BAVINCK, H. *Reformed Dogmatics II*, p. 220.

⁵ CHAMBERS, O. *The Shadow of an Agony*, Complete Works, p. 1183.

⁶ BRAY, G. L. *Holiness and the Will of God*, London : Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979, p. 66.

⁷ BAVINCK, H. *Reformed Dogmatics II*, Grand Rapids : Baker, 2004, p. 220.

⁸ HARRIS – ARCHER – WALTKE, *Theological Wordbook II*, Chicago : Moody Press, 1980, p. 787.

⁹ DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE *On the Divine Names and Mystical Theology*, London : SPCK, 1920, p. 181.

¹⁰ OTTO, R. *The Idea of the Holy*, Oxford : OUP, 1936, p. xvi.

¹¹ OTTO, R. *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 5.

¹² TOZER, A. W. *Knowledge of the Holy*.

- **Isa 55:9** For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
- **Isa 57:15** For thus says the One who is **high** and **lifted up**, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy (קדוש שמו): "I dwell in the high and holy place (קרום וקדוש אשכנז), and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.

1.1. THE ONE UNCREATED BEING

- with no time, space, causality relations...
- → the understanding of *blood* sacrifices in religions... (We Europeans do not get or grasp it...)
- The noun *hādār* is associated with: (1) the glory of nature as it reflects the goodness of God...¹³ (**Ps 111:3** Full of splendour and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever.)

1.2. THE DANGER OF INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO GOD

- “impertinent inquisitiveness” (CHAMBERS) → independent of God’s revelation
- [RUSSELL] “Before we can understand language, we must strip it of its mystical and awe-inspiring attributes.”¹⁴
- spiritual intuition → communicated in spiritual words (**1Cor 2:9-15** "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"-¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. ...¹³ And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.¹⁴ The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.)

2. GOD IS UNAPPROACHABLE

- **Heb 12:29** ...God is a consuming fire
- **1Tim 6:16** ...who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see
- **Isa 33:14** The sinners in Zion (!) are afraid; trembling has seized the godless: "Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire (אש איכלה)? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings (מוקרי עולם)?"
- **Isa 4:5** Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy (כי על כל כבוד הפה).

2.1. THE ROLE OF THE SERAPHIM

- “the fiery beings” – protecting God from being viewed by creatures & representing God to creation...
- “It is noteworthy that the ‘living creatures’ of Rev. iv. 7, 8, are an original fusion of the Cherubim of Ezekiel with the Seraphim of Isaiah.”¹⁵
- “With two he covers his face, as a sign of *reverence* towards God, and with two he covers his feet, for the same purpose, or to conceal himself from mortal view, and with two he flies, to execute God’s will.”¹⁶

2.2. THE DANGER OF CURIOSITY

- **1Sa 6:19-20** And he struck some of the men of Beth-shemesh, because they looked upon the ark of the LORD. He struck seventy men of them, and the people mourned because the LORD had

¹³ *Theological Wordbook*,

¹⁴ RUSSELL, B. *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*, London : George Allen and Unwin, 1956, p. 23.

¹⁵ CHEYNE, T. K. *The Prophecies of Isaiah I*, New York : Thomas Whittaker, 1886, p. 38.

¹⁶ ALEXANDER, J. A. *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, New York : Scribner, Armstrong, 1874, p. 144.

struck the people with a great blow. ²⁰ Then the men of Beth-shemesh said, "Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God (הַקָּדוֹשׁ הַזֶּה)?"

3. GOD IS JEALOUS

- **Jos 24:19** But Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a **jealous God** (כִּי־אֱלֹהִים קָדְשִׁים הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ הוּא); he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins.
- **Dt 7:6** ...people holy to the LORD your God (עַם קָדוֹשׁ אַתָּה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ). The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession (לְהִיזוֹת לְךָ לְעַם סְגוּלָה)
- **Lev 11:44** ...Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing
- **Mt 6:9** ...hallowed be **your name**.
- **1Pt 3:15** ...sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts (κύριον δὲ τὸν θεὸν ἁγιάσατε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν), always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you,

3.1. THE EXCLUSIVE OWNER

3.1.1. THE OLD TESTAMENT

- **Ex 20:3** You shall have **no other gods** before me.
- **Ex 20:5** ...I the LORD your **God** am a **jealous God**...
- **Dt 4:24** For the LORD your **God** is a consuming fire, a **jealous God** (אֵשׁ אֹכְלָה הוּא אֵל קַנָּא)

3.1.2. THE NEW TESTAMENT

- **1Cor 6:19 – 7:1** ...do **you not** know that **your** body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within **you**, whom **you** have from God? **You are not your own**, ^{20f}for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.
- **Heb 10:14** For by a single **offering** he has perfected for all time those who are being **sanctified**

3.2. THE DANGER OF IDOLATRY

- **1John 5:21** Little children, keep yourselves from idols.
- **Num 20:13** These are the waters of Meribah, where the people of Israel quarreled with the LORD, and through them he showed himself holy (רָבוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־יְהוָה וַיִּקְדַּשׁ בָּם)
- [BAVINCK] "At the same time this holiness of God is the principle of punishment and chastisement. When Israel breaks his covenant, desecrates his name, and violates his laws, it is precisely God's holiness that incites him to mete out punishment."¹⁷

4. TO REMEMBER

- To think of God's holiness we have to realize our inability to think truly of him without his self-revelation and him creating in us sensibility and understanding of holiness.
- The first sign we are in touch with the Holy God is realization of our sinfulness. → Isaiah!
- The Cross of Christ is the only way to know the genuine holiness of God – showing *both* God's unapproachable being *AND* his self-giving character in creating, sustaining and saving the world.

¹⁷ BAVINCK, H. *Reformed Dogmatics II*, p. 220.