REDISCOVERING AND APPLYING GOD'S HOLINESS IN

ISAIAH 6 AND REVELATION 4 THROUGH THE LENS

OF ABRAHAM KURUVILLA'S HERMENEUTICAL

AND HOMILETICAL APPROACH

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A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of

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Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Joo Hwoan Jung

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APPROVAL SHEET

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Joo Hwoan Jung

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Date _____

To my parents,

Hae Pyung Jung and Soon Iee Choi:

The best examples of "bringing holiness to completion

in the fear of God" for me (2 Cor 7:1 ESV)

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
AsTJ	*Asbury Theological Journal*
BDAG	Bauer, Walter, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature.* 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BHGNT	Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament
BSac	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
CTJ	*Calvin Theological Journal*
HALOT	*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2001
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JBC	*Journal of Biblical Counseling*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JBTM	*Journal of Baptist Theology & Ministry*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JEHS	*Journal of the Evangelical Homiletical Society*
JODT	*Journal of Dispensational Theology*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
NAC	New American Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDNTTE	*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis.* Edited by Moisés Silva. 2nd ed. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014

NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
PtW	Preaching the Word Commentary
RefR	*Reformed Review*
SBJT	*Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Kittel, Gerhard, and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976
TJ	*Trinity Journal*
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

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PREFACE

In the autumn of 2008, I found myself seated in the back corner of a classroom filled with eighty students. It was then that Dr. Bruce Ware entered and asked us to open the Bible. After a brief pause, he read from Isaiah 46:9–10: "I am God, and there is none like me. . . . My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose." That moment was exceptionally impactful for me; I was moved and purely overwhelmed by the power of the text and the preacher's short message. From that point, the beauty of God's divine nature became central to my theological education. This dissertation marks the culmination of a fifteen-year personal journey in pursuit of God and his holiness, a path that has been challenging and deeply rewarding.

This achievement would not have been possible without the support and sacrifices of many. First and foremost, I am immensely grateful to God for guiding me to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. My time at this beautiful institute has been a period of joy and edification, contributing enormously to my growth in character, spirituality, and academic discipline. I extend my gratitude to all professors, particularly my committee members, Dr. York, Dr. Betts, and Dr. Pohlman, and to fellow students who have enriched my experience at Southern. I am grateful to Dr. Eung-Yul Ryoo, my external reader, whose valuable comments greatly contributed to refining the writing of this dissertation. My thanks also go to Betsy Fredrick, my editor and proofreader, for her invaluable assistance with this project. I am particularly indebted to the preachers who delivered sermons at the chapel on Tuesdays and Thursdays during my seminary years in Louisville. Their message was sometimes sweet as honey, other times piercing to heart like a spear, but always guiding me toward the true purpose of my education and ministry.

providing emotional, financial, and spiritual support. Additionally, I am thankful to my sister-in-law, Jisun Kim, for her frequent visits bringing my favorite foods and refreshing me with engaging conversations about daily life events. Above all, special recognition goes to my wife, Ji Hyun Kang, for her unwavering encouragement, prayers, and support. She is "far more precious than jewels" (Prov 31:10) to me, and patiently endured this extended period of studying, knowing that she will "laugh at the time to come" (Prov 31:25). Her role as a wise and diligent wife, godly mother, devoted teacher, and vision sharer has been invaluable. I see Christlike character in her words and behavior, which tremendously inspire me every day. To our two sons, Ethan and Evan Jung, my precious treasures, I am grateful to be your father and eagerly anticipate seeing the fruits of my studies reflected in your lives.

Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Hae Pyung Jung and Soon Iee Choi. Their constant prayers and exemplary Christ-centered lives greatly motivated my pursuit of God's holiness, despite my absence due to my commitment to serving the Lord and studying abroad. I also extend heartfelt thanks and love to my sister, Miyoung Jung, who selflessly supported our parents in ways I could not. Her dedication is earnestly appreciated. Their constant devotion and love for the Lord fueled my desire to deepen my love for God, his glory, and his holiness in Christ. I hope that this dissertation will serve as a valuable resource for those seeking to "live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age" (Titus 2:12).

Joo Hwoan Jung

Atlanta, Georgia

May 2024

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

John Calvin begins his *Institutes* with a depiction of helpless humanity, desperately needing God's self-disclosure, which is the only source whereby "God bestows the actual knowledge of himself."[1] And this infallible God's self-revelation regularly proclaims that "God is holy."

God's holiness is a central and all-encompassing truth found in the Scriptures.[2] This truth is demonstrated in numerous specific and tangible situations throughout biblical teachings.[3] In the Old Testament, God commands Moses at the burning bush to remove his shoes because he stands on "holy ground" (Exod 3:5 ESV).[4] Israel's earliest hymn praises God as "majestic in holiness" (Exod 15:11). In addition, the psalmists frequently refer to the Lord as "the Holy One" (Pss 16:10; 78:41; 99), and it extends to the name of God (Lev 20:3), the Sabbath (Gen 2:3), the appointed festivals (Lev 23:2), and the

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[1] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. J. T. McNeill, trans. F. L. Battles, Library of Christian Classics 1 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 1.4.1.

[2] According to Albert Mohler, the significance of God's holiness is of utmost importance, as he describes it as "the single most important and emphatic declaration in holy Scripture." R. Albert Mohler Jr., "Be Holy as I Am Holy: Awakening & Personal Holiness," Ligonier Ministries, March 12, 2018, YouTube video, 49:41, https://youtu.be/B2WICE_mefU.

[3] Specifically, numerous examples of God's holiness can be found in Old Testament narratives. God is regularly identified as "the Holy One" (Job 6:10; Isa 40:25; 43:15; Ezek 39:7; Hos 11:9; Hab 1:12; 3:3), or "the Holy One of Israel" (2 Kgs 19:22; Isa 1:4; 43:3; Jer 50:29; 51:5). Isaiah describes the Lord more completely as "the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy" (Isa 57:15). God's Word and his Spirit are all holy because they belong to him (Ps 105:42; Isa 52:10; 63:10). In addition, God's holiness is particularly associated with his majesty, sovereignty, and awesome power (Exod 15:11–12; 19:10–25; Isa 6:1–4). Israel itself is to be called a holy nation (Exod 19:4; Deut 7:6) because it adheres to God's holiness. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the English Standard Version.

[4] Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations come from the ESV.

place where God appeared to the people (1 Kgs 8:10–11). In the New Testament, Jesus addresses God as the "Holy Father" (John 17:11); the Scriptures repeatedly affirm that Jesus lived a sinless and perfectly holy life on earth, as evidenced by description of him being "without sin" (Heb 4:15); and his title, "Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34; Acts 3:14) signifies that Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, is infinitely and absolutely holy. The apostle Peter admits that growth in holiness should be expected in a context of everyday life and experience (1 Pet 1:16), as well.

These passages make clear that the holiness of God consists of his utter transcendence, his ultimate glory, and his perfect purity.[5] God's holiness reflects who God is: "Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?" (Exod 15:11). Michael Horton captures the truth this way: "Holiness characterizes all of God's attributes in the Bible."[6]

Furthermore, throughout the Scriptures, one can recognize that God is not just holy but is the very source and standard of holiness of his people. For instance, in Isaiah's vision, he viewed God on high, and the seraphim surrounding the throne, crying out, "Holy, holy, holy" (Isa 6:3). It was God's splendor of holiness. Given that experience, encountering the Holy One created in Isaiah's heart a more overwhelming reverence toward the Lord of hosts because wherever the holiness of God is encountered, as Walther Eichrodt observes, "its first impact must always be that of overwhelming power."[7] Isaiah was utterly overwhelmed by God's holiness that he cried out, "I am lost" (Isa 6:5). Similarly, the book of Revelation provides an example of the holiness of God, specifically

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[5] Baruch Levine affirms that the term "holiness" contains multiple meanings, such as "different from the profane or the ordinary," "powerful or numinous," "blessings," "protection," or "otherness." He writes, "The biblical term for holiness is *kodesh*. Though the noun is abstract, it is likely that the perception of holiness was not thoroughly abstract. In fact, *kodesh* had several meanings, including 'sacred place, sanctuary, sacred offering." Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 256–57.

[6] Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 268.

[7] Walther Eichrodt, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 1:275.

in John's vision of the heavenly throne room. In Revelation 4:8, the four living creatures continually worship God day and night, saying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" This repeated declaration emphasizes the absolute and eternal holiness of God, and similar to Isaiah's vision, highlights the awe and reverence that such a revelation inspires.[8] In the end, visions of God's holiness have a deeply humbling effect on his prophets, causing them to recognize their own unworthiness and dependence on God's mercy.

The profound impact of God's holiness is intrinsically reflected in the conduct of God's people. John Owen emphatically underscores the intimate connection between God's holiness and the holy life of his people: "The holiness of God's nature everywhere in the Scripture made the fundamental principle and reason of the necessity of holiness in us."[9] Owen's comment clearly indicates the expectation for Christians to embody the essence of "holy people," a transformation that is anticipated to occur through sanctification (Heb 10:10). The implications of understanding God's holiness and its effects fall on the holiness of modern Christians as a result of worshiping the holy God or on consecrated everyday conduct at home, in the workplace, or in other aspects of daily activity. In other words, as R. C. Sproul observes, the holiness of the Lord affects every aspect of daily life—economics, politics, athletics, romance—everything in which God's people are involved.[10]

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[8] Larry Hurtado argues that the concept of God's holiness is linked with the relationship between God and his people as they worship him. He denotes, "The worship of the elders mentions God as creator, but the eschatological promise is invoked in the chant of the four creatures, which provokes the elders to fall before God in adoration, indicating that the vision is governed, not only by the sense of God as holy creator, but also by a view of him as the one who brings eschatological salvation." Larry Hurtado, "Revelation 4–5 in the Light of Jewish Apocalyptic Analogies," *JSNT* 25, no. 8 (September 1985): 115.

[9] John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, *The Holy Spirit,* ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1966), 3:568.

[10] R. C. Sproul, "The Importance of Holiness," Ligonier Ministries, March 10, 2015, YouTube video, 32:22, https://youtu.be/eIGAjoqBhhU?list=PL30acyfm60fVpGc7Eo--3S6w1kdhXY9Cb.

Stephen Charnock articulates, "The holiness of God is his glory and crown. It is the blessedness of his nature."[11] In light of this, the foremost duty of a preacher is to preach the greatness and beauty of God's holiness during sermons, with the aim of producing a deep satisfaction in God. This responsibility involves crafting messages that not only illuminate the splendor of God's holiness but also evoke a heartfelt sorrow for failing to meet God's holy standards. John Piper asserts that all holiness grows from the root of satisfaction with God. Therefore, preachers and their audiences need to "taste and see" (Ps 34:8) the holiness of the Lord, moving their hearts to find their greatest satisfaction in God alone through preaching.[12] Through this transformative process, the holiness of God is vividly portrayed, warranting him unparallel praise, as the glory of God is the manifest beauty of his holiness.[13]

From this perspective, David Vandrunen correctly states that "one of the great ways God glorifies himself is by calling and enabling us, his people, to glorify him through our holy conduct."[14] The holiness of God liberates his people from "the works of the flesh" (Gal 5:19–21) and ultimately transforms lives in ways man alone cannot. Abraham Kuruvilla aptly encapsulates this notion, stating, "God is glorified as his people

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[11] Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1977), 2:110.

[12] John Piper highlights the profound connection between God's holiness and his glory: "What the preacher discovers is that the same taste of God's glory that causes grief over our failures to be satisfied in him, also produces a life of holiness and love when that taste grows into (or explodes into) a deep satisfaction in God." John Piper, *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 257.

[13] John Piper, "What Is God's Glory?," *Desiring God* (podcast), July 22, 2014, 9:40, https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-gods-glory--2#manifest-holiness.

[14] David Vandrunen, "3 Ways to Glorify God in Your Life," *The Gospel Coalition* (blog), June 24, 2019, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/3-ways-glorify-god-life/.

thus manifest his holiness and represent him to the world."[15] Consequently, a preacher

must grasp the power of preaching God's holiness and its effects.[16]

In short, God's holiness is the sum of his attributes, or as Andrew Murray

denotes, "The comprehensive summary of all his perfections."[17] God is holy, and his

people must seek to be holy. This teaching is central to the Scriptures. The significant

emphasis placed on God's holiness within the Scriptures necessitates fervent preaching.

If holiness is commanded in the Scriptures, every Christian must acknowledge that to live

a holy life is possible.[18] Indeed, without holiness, no one shall see the Lord (Heb 12:14).

Statement of Problem

Despite its necessity and importance, the holiness of God is one of the subjects

most disregarded among evangelicals today. This neglect directly impacts the emphasis

placed on personal holiness among believers. In other words, when the foundational aspect

of God's holiness is not adequately preached from the pulpit, the pursuit of personal

holiness within the church often loses its urgency and focus. J. I. Packer accurately

observes, "Holiness is a neglected priority throughout the modern church generally . . .

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[15] Abraham Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching: The Journey from Text to Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 2.

[16] Emmanuel Durand's comments are noteworthy for emphasizing the profound impact of preaching about God's holiness:

> Just as Isaiah had to be purified, the people will be purified by God, beyond their deafness and closed minds which seem to prevail and block God's work. The adjective "holy" (*qadosh*) comes back significantly at the end of the Lord's response to Isaiah's question, "How long?" Surreptitiously, a transfer and a communication are considered: from God's holiness on his lofty throne to the people's holiness though the latter has been reduced and stripped on several occasions, until it is wholly destitute. An astonishing and demanding correspondence is established between the proclamation of God's holiness, the prophet's mission, and the remote horizon of that mission as the transformation of God's people. (Emmanuel Durand, "God's Holiness. A Reappraisal of Transcendence," *Modern Theology* 34, no. 3 [July 2018]: 428)

[17] Andrew Murray, *Holy in Christ* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1974), 56.

[18] J. C. Ryle affirms both the necessity and possibility of sanctification: "True holiness is a great reality. . . . Whatever we may think fit to say, we must be holy, if we would see the Lord. Where is our Christianity if we are not? We must not merely have a Christian name, and Christian knowledge, we must have a Christian character also." J. C. Ryle, *Holiness* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 49.

and specifically a fading glory in today's evangelical world."[19] Alistair Begg laments, "I fear that personal holiness is not a priority within the church—even among its leaders."[20] Kevin DeYoung similarly notes, "Passionate exhortation to pursue gospel-driven holiness is barely heard in most of our churches."[21]

Modern evangelical preachers acknowledge the challenge of widely addressing the concept of holiness in their preaching. Although they recognize the importance of this topic, many struggle to effectively convey its significance to their congregations. In 2006, the Barna Group published a nationwide survey revealing that a majority of evangelical Christians have an ambiguous understanding of the concept of holiness, a situation attributed to insufficient biblical teaching or preaching on this subject.[22] David Peterson comments, "Many wanted to abandon the terminology altogether, preferring to speak about the justified life, repentance, faith, righteousness, and godliness. . . . Much is lost by refusing to use the language of sanctification and holiness in a biblical way."[23] Packer similarly holds the view that preachers might have been preoccupied with other concerns, preventing them from wholeheartedly embracing the pursuit of holiness from the pulpit:

> But is holiness really important? Does it matter, in the final analysis, whether Christ's professed followers live holy lives or not? From watching today's Christian world (and in particular the great evangelical constituency of North America), you might

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[19] J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness in Our Walk with God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 99.

[20] Alistair Begg, "Recovering the Priority of Personal Holiness," *Ligonier Ministries* (blog), May 14, 2021, https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/recovering-priority-personal-holiness.

[21] Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness: Filling the Gap between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 10.

[22] When asked to describe what it means to be holy, the most common reply was, "I don't know." This research comes to a meaningful conclusion: "The results portray a body of Christians who attend church and read the Bible, but do not understand the concept or significance of holiness, do not personally desire to be holy, and therefore do little, if anything to pursue it. . . . This is partially because barely one-third of Americans (35%) contend that 'God expects you to become holy.'" Barna Group, "The Concept of Holiness Baffles Most Americans," *Barna*, February 20, 2006, https://www.barna.com/research/the-concept-of-holiness-baffles-most-americans/.

[23] David Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness*, NSBT 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 12.

easily conclude that it does not matter. I once had to respond in print to the question, "Is personal holiness passé?" I found it hard not to conclude that most present-day believers deep down think it is passé. Here is some of the evidence for that conclusion. What do we Christians mainly preach and teach and produce TV programs and DVDs about these days? The answer seems to be not holiness, but success and positive feelings—getting health, wealth, freedom from care, good sex, and happy families.[24]

Some radical holiness concepts contributed to this neglect. To clarify, teachings on how to achieve holiness have been influenced by non-biblical ideas. Jerry Bridges delineates that the focus has moved from the idea of God's attribute to moralism:

> In some circles, holiness is equated with a series of specific prohibitions—usually in such areas as smoking, drinking, and dancing. The list of prohibitions varies depending on the group. When we follow this approach to holiness, we are in danger of becoming like the Pharisees with their endless lists of trivial do's and don'ts, and their self-righteous attitude.[25]

Although preaching about God's holiness has received some attention, further exploration is needed on how this concept directly impacts the daily lives of listeners. Many evangelical preachers have not fully addressed the practical implications of holiness in their congregations. A. W. Tozer has written perceptively on this issue: "I suppose the hardest thing about God to comprehend intellectually is his infinitude. But you can talk about the infinitude of God and not feel yourself a worm. But when you talk about the holiness of God, you have not only the problem of an intellectual grasp, but also a sense of personal vileness, which is almost too much to bear."[26] Tozer takes his argument further: "The reason for this is that we are fallen beings—spiritually, morally, mentally, and physically. We are fallen in all the ways that man can fall. Each one of us is born into a tainted world, and we learn impurity from our cradles."[27]

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[24] J. I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness: Know the Fullness of Life with God* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009), 31.

[25] Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1978), 33.

[26] A. W. Tozer, *The Attributes of God*, vol. 1, *A Journey into the Father's Heart* (Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread, 2003), 158.

[27] Tozer, *The Attributes of God*, 1:158.

Unfortunately, modern evangelical Christians may not often hear messages about the holiness of God in their Sunday sermons.[28] This can be problematic, as without such messages it becomes challenging for hearers to fully grasp and appreciate the reality of God's holiness. Preaching about God's holiness is crucial in helping believers develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of this fundamental aspect of God's nature.[29]

This study identifies three main reasons certain preachers disregard the concept of holiness in their sermons. First, the lack of uniformity in the lexical-semantic meaning of holiness can lead to confusion and ambiguity in interpretation. Second, challenges exist in conveying the depth and beauty of God's holiness through traditional hermeneutical approaches. Third, there is a failure to consider valid applications of the concept of holiness in homiletics, resulting in preaching that fails to resonate with the everyday experiences of listeners.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of God's holiness and its implications for preaching, a detailed examination of key biblical texts is essential. Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 stand out, as both prominently feature the trisagion: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" (Isa 6:3) and "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God almighty, who was and is and is to come!" (Rev 4:8). These passages provide clear insight into the broader biblical understanding of God's holiness. As Richard Bauckham states, "the most primary form of awareness of God: the awed perception of his luminous holiness"[30] is found in these texts of Isaiah and Revelation. Given their

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[28] See the full report by Jeff Robinson, "Some Reasons Personal Holiness has been Neglected in American Churches," Founders Ministries, accessed January 4, 2023, https://founders.org/articles/some-reasons-personal-holiness-has-been-neglected-in-american-churches/.

[29] Kuruvilla emphasizes the crucial role of the preacher in proclaiming God's holiness: "It is the role of each preacher of Scripture to spell out the particularities of this business of keeping his commandments and being holy, meeting divine demand; and this is accomplished in the power of the indwelling Spirit." Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody, 2013), 194.

[30] Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993), 32.

vivid portrayals of God's holiness, they serve as a foundational resource for interpreting God's holiness in preaching.[31] Together, Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 offer a deep understanding of both the transcendent and immanent facets of God's holiness, establishing a comprehensive framework for this dissertation.

Furthermore, these texts present practical implications for preaching about holiness. They emphasize the importance of awakening a sense of God's holiness in the hearts of listeners and advocate for a life of holiness that aligns with God's character. By exploring these themes, this study aims to contribute to a more robust and refreshing approach to preaching on the holiness of God, as described in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4.

**A Lack of Uniformity in the Semantic
Meaning of Holiness**

The semantic meaning of holiness, קדש (*kodesh)* in the Old Testament and ἅγιος (*hagios*) in The New Testament, is a tricky concept in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. Scholars have not uniformly affirmed its lexical meaning, nor have preachers consistently proclaimed it in their pulpits. Historically, biblical and linguistic scholars have employed various methodologies to determine a precise definition of holiness.[32] Nevertheless, the

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[31] Stephen Seamands points out the significance of Isaiah's account for the study of the holiness of God: "Indeed, in Isaiah, the Old Testament conception of divine holiness reaches its summit. Thus, Isaiah (and 6:1–8 in particular) is a prime passage in which to examine the biblical conception of the holiness of God." Stephen Seamands, "An Inclusive Vision of the Holy Life," *AsTJ* 42, no. 2 (Fall 1987): 80. Albert Mohler also highlights the utmost importance of Rev 4 as key passages that effectively communicate the holiness of God and its immense significance. According to Mohler, this particular text stands out as the most powerful and emphatic declarations of God's divine essence within the entirety of the Bible. He states, "Nowhere in Scripture is there a thrice-repeated pattern as we find here, 'Holy, Holy, Holy,' until we get to Revelation 4:8–11. . . . Here in this trisagion, this thrice-repeated pattern, 'Holy, Holy, Holy,' we see God's essence, identity, and being characterized by the attribute of holiness." R. Albert Mohler Jr., "The Whole Earth Is Full of His Glory: The Recovery of Authentic Worship Isaiah 6:1–8," *SBJT* 2, no. 4 (December 1998): 9.

[32] The primary Hebrew root denoting holiness is קדש (*kodesh)* "to be holy; sanctify," which appears as a verb, noun, and adjective over 850 times. David Wright, "Holiness," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3, *H-J*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 237. The concept of holiness is most often expressed with the verb קָדַשׁ "to make holy" or related words, including the noun קֹדֶשׁ "holiness" and the adjective קָדוֹשׁ "holy." Likewise, the noun *kodesh* and the adjective *kodos* are used to describe God as holy. Significantly, it is the most frequently used biblical word concerning the description

scholarship on the definition of holiness still varies in its lexical meaning.[33] Peter Gentry explains the challenge of defining the concept of God's holiness: "Unfortunately, the church of Jesus Christ, at least in the Western world, has not understood very well the meaning of the word 'holy,' nor what it means to worship a holy God,"[34] because "this etymology is entirely uncertain."[35]

The issue of defining holiness becomes more complicated in Revelation 4 compared to Isaiah 6, given that the lexical meaning of God's holiness in the New Testament exhibits both continuity and discontinuity with the Old Testament. In terms of continuity, even though numerous New Testament writers employ the image of God's holiness in their own settings, the New Testament concept of God's holiness largely overlaps with that of the Old Testament.[36] For example, the angels sing "Holy, holy, holy" to the Lord of transcendent majesty (Rev 4:8), just as Isaiah sees in his vision (Isa 6:3). D. A. Carson acknowledges that "apart from its appearance in Isaiah 6, this is the only other occurrence of the trisagion in holy writ, and there is no doubt some dependence on

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of God's attributes. Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Holiness," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 1:984–85.

[33] Still, various and different meanings of the word *holiness* are apparent among many lexical and theological dictionaries. The examples include: "The primary OT word for holiness means 'to cut' or 'to separate.' Fundamentally, holiness is a cutting off or separation from what is unclean, and consecration to what is pure." Elwell and Beitzel, "Holiness," 984–85. "Biblical use of the term 'holy' has to do primarily with God's separating from the world that which He chooses to devote to Himself." Ted Cabal, "Holy," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England (Nashville: Holman, 2003), 304. "The basic meaning of the word is 'consecrated' or 'devoted.' In Scripture it operates within the context of covenant relationships and expresses commitment." Peter J. Gentry, "The Meaning of Holy in the Old Testament," *BSac* 170 (October–December 2013): 417. "Holiness is expressed in moral integrity, which is in turn symbolized by physical wholeness." Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 265.

[34] Gentry, "The Meaning of Holy," 413.

[35] Gentry, "The Meaning of Holy," 413.

[36] The New Testament writers employ the Greek word ἅγιος (*hagios*) and its derivatives as the nearest equivalent to קדש (*kodesh*) in the OT. See Gerald Hawthorne, "Holy, Holiness," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 485.

Isaiah 6."[37] In terms of discontinuity, on the other hand, it is crucial to realize how the biblical and theological concepts of God's holiness are adopted and developed by the writers of the New Testament.[38] They transpose these concepts into a new context, further emphasizing theological and ethical holiness through the person and character of Jesus Christ.[39]

In summary, a number of dictionaries associated with Isaiah and Revelation demonstrate diverse possible meanings, particularly when considering whether קדש (*kodesh*) or ἅγιος (*hagios*) refers to separateness, purity, or moral perfection. The precise determination of what this word or concept means has major ramifications for the preachers who deliver the message with it.

Challenges in Conveying the Depth and Beauty of God's Holiness through Traditional Hermeneutical Approaches

The development and implementation of hermeneutics have affected the practice of preaching. According to Scott Blue, biblical preaching is "dependent upon the hermeneutical process to an even greater extent, because of its attention to the message in

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[37] D. A. Carson, "Tris-Hagion: Foundation for Worldwide Mission," *JETS* 66, no. 1 (March 2023): 5.

[38] NT writers' conceptional adoption of God's holiness entails that theological and ethical holiness is highlighted in the person and character of Jesus Christ. Because of God's holy character and the death and resurrection of Christ, the New Testament insists that believers also are to be holy or sanctified. Christians, who are saved and sanctified by the salvific work of Christ, are frequently identified as "the holy" or "saints," especially in the Pauline letters. See Rom 1:1, 7; 8:27; 15:25, 26, 31; 16:2, 15; 1 Cor 1:2; 6:1, 2; 14:33; 16:1, 15; 2 Cor 1:1; 8:4; 9:1, 12; 13:12; Eph 1:1, 4, 15, 18; 2:19; 3:8, 18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18; Phil 1:1; 4:21, 22; Col 1:2, 4, 12, 22, 26; 1 Thess 3:13; 2 Thess 1:10; 1 Tim 5:10; Phlm 5, 7.

[39] Peterson expands Pauline conceptual holiness to the subject of salvation in Christ. In other words, the term holiness of God is primarily used as soteriological rather than ethical in his conceptual definition. Peterson's perspective on holiness aligns it closely with the believer's salvation in Christ. While ethical holiness remains important, he emphasizes that sanctification primarily concerns the believer's position before God and being set apart for his purposes. This process of sanctification is sustained by the presence of the Holy Spirit and trust in the finished work of Christ. He elucidates, "Christians are sustained in holiness by the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit and the trust that he gives in the finished work of Christ." Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 32–33.

a specific passage of the Bible as the word delivered to a contemporary audience."[40] Of the recent contributions among homiletical works, Abraham Kuruvilla's work on hermeneutics for preaching presents a distinct perspective that effectively broadens the scope of current preaching methodologies.[41] It introduces fresh insights into sermon preparation and delivery by enriching a nuanced engagement with the text. He argues that an information-centered and explanation-oriented approach to the text leads to a loss of pragmatic engagement. He asserts, "It is easy to go wildly astray with all kinds of fascinating observations on matters historical, geographical, biographical, and linguistic related to the biblical text that do not have anything at all to do with its theology and what the author is doing."[42] He suggests that preachers should discern what the author is *doing* (pragmatics) with what he is *saying* (semantics), presenting the concept of *the world in front of the text*,[43] which French philosopher Paul Ricoeur primarily brings up.

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[40] Scott A. Blue, "The Hermeneutic of E. D. Hirsch, Jr. and Its Impact on Expository Preaching: Friend or Foe?," *JETS* 44, no. 2 (June 2001): 251.

[41] In this dissertation, I acknowledge the influence of Abraham Kuruvilla's hermeneutical terms and concepts. Kuruvilla posits that the process of discerning the meaning of a passage, or pericope, should extend beyond the traditional grammatical-historical method. He introduces the pragmatical method, which involves considering *the world in front of the text*—that is, understanding what the author is doing with what he is saying. Kuruvilla convincingly argues that the author's intention and purpose play a significant role in interpreting a passage. Unlike the grammatical-historical method that centers on linguistic and historical contexts, the pragmatical method emphasizes the strategic use of language by the author to achieve specific effects or to engage the audience. He writes,

> Because Scripture is intended for future application by God's people, its interpretation cannot cease with the elucidation of its linguistic, grammatical, and syntactical elements—what the author is saying (semantics), but must proceed further to discern *the world in front of the text*—what the author is *doing* (pragmatics). So this projected world forms the intermediary between text and application, and enables one to respond validly to the text. (Abraham Kuruvilla, "'What Is the Author Doing with What He Is Saying?' Pragmatics And Preaching—An Appeal!," *JETS*, 60, no. 3 [September 2017]: 568)

[42] Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 116. Kuruvilla's methodology can be understood as an attempt to find an alternative to the traditional approaches of sermon that either transform the text into something completely different than what the author intended (an alchemical approach), or that reduce the text to the simple propositional principles (a distillation approach). See also Abraham Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching: Understanding the Heart of Pastoral Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 6–9.

[43] Kuruvilla explains the concept *the world in front of the text* as follows:

> For Scripture, this *world in front of the text* is God's ideal world, individual segments of which are portrayed by individual pericopes. So each pericope is God's gracious invitation to humankind to live

Kuruvilla contends that a legitimate application should have a clear and convincing basis in both theology and hermeneutics. In his words, the role of the preacher is not to extract or distill the principle from the text, but rather to project what an author is *doing*, namely, *the world in front of the text* to the hearers. By doing so, hearers may be invited to inhabit the ideal world of God. He remarks, "The task of the preacher consists in moving from pericope to theology, and subsequently from theology to application."[44] Kuruvilla then describes the foundation for life-transforming application as a result of the preacher's theological understanding of the text and its pragmatic thrust and force. His approach, from the text to theology, and subsequently from theology to the application, is noteworthy:

> Once the thrust of the text has been discerned (i.e., the first move: text to pericopal theology), the responsibility of the preacher continues in the specification of application (i.e., the second move: pericopal theology to application) so that God's people are aligned to the precepts, priorities, and practices of God's ideal *world in front of the text*. Application is therefore indispensable to preaching, and such life change is the goal of preaching. This facet of the preacher's task calls for an intimate knowledge of the flock, its spiritual state and its growth, so that the theology of the text may be relevantly tailored to the lives of listeners in application. Thereby the people of God abide by divine demand, becoming holy, even as their God is holy.[45]

Several scholars and preachers have proposed preaching methods and procedures for *explaining* the holiness of God in sermons on Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4.

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in his ideal world by abiding by the thrust/force of that pericope—that is, the requirements of God's ideal world as called for in that pericopal world segment. And as humankind accepts that divine invitation and applies the thrust/force of the pericope, week by week and pericope by pericope God's people are progressively and increasingly inhabiting this ideal world and adopting its values. Because this projected world depicts how God relates to his creation, the characteristics of that world may rightly be called "theology." Thus, the ideal world that each pericope projects becomes the theology of that pericope. To live by pericopal theology, then, is to accept God's gracious invitation to inhabit his ideal world by aligning ourselves with the requirements of that ideal world. This is the vision of the *world in front of the text*, God's ideal world, painted by Scripture—a glimpse of and an invitation to the divine kingdom—a vision unveiled by faithful preaching. Without a discernment of pericopal theology, it is impossible to derive valid application. (Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching,* 29)

See also Abraham Kuruvilla, "Christiconic View," in *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*: *Four Views on Preaching Today*, ed. Scott M. Gibson and Matthew D. Kim (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 53–56.

[44] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 90.

[45] Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 126.

However, their proposals for preaching about the holiness of God in both texts seem to lack the passage's dynamic (or pragmatic) nature.[46] While they might offer a semantic grasp of the holiness of the Lord, their practical application often appears insufficient. Harold Senkbeil remarks that the preacher needs to identify not only the cognitive aspect of the holiness of God, but also its pragmatic dimensions. He asserts,

> [Holiness of God] is used in the Bible as an adjective, as in "holy people" or "holy things." But before it functions descriptively, it works definitively. For example, in Leviticus 19:2, the Lord God instructs Moses that the foundation of all of Israel's worship and life is fundamentally rooted in the person of God himself: "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." This is both command and promise. . . . If we read the Scriptures carefully, we see that the holiness of God is never defined abstractly or by way of metaphor or analogy. Rather God's holiness, wherever it shows up in the Bible, is experienced as a power and a presence—the power and presence of God himself.[47]

When preaching about holiness based on Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, Kuruvilla's approach allows preachers to understand Isaiah and John's visions in terms of both the semantic and pragmatic aspects of God's holiness. The preacher, in turn, can project this ideal world of divine holiness to the listeners, thus motivating them to "taste and see" (Ps 34:8) the Lord's holiness as demonstrated in the texts. This hermeneutical understanding offers a transhistorical direction for holiness.[48] Therefore, the preacher's role is "to apply this theology into the concrete specificities of the lives of the congregants."[49]

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[46] Kuruvilla identifies a potential reason for the lack of dynamism in preaching, attributing it to the differentiation between two distinct approaches—argumentation and demonstration. He contends, "That's why distillation of texts that ignores authorial *doings* is problematic: such operations result in significant loss of textual meaning, emotion, power, and pathos. . . . The experience of a text can be fully and faithfully shared by a preacher with the congregation only by *demonstration*, not by argumentation." Kuruvilla, *Manual for Preaching*, 271.

[47] Harold Senkbeil, "Holiness and the Care of Souls," *Logia* 27, no. 2 (April 2018): 7–8.

[48] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 194.

[49] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 194.

**Deficient Homiletical Considerations
for Valid Applications**

A pivotal matter in preaching is the indispensability of application. Hershael

York describes this as the "secret of powerful preaching."[50] However, when it comes to

preaching about God's holiness, this application proves challenging for many preachers

preparing sermons from the text. In fact, many sermons across various churches seem to

reveal a lack of valid application in discussions related to God's holiness. Particularly,

preaching based on the texts of Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 mainly deal with a theophany,

or a vision of the true and holy God. Yet, it does not focus on the effect of seeing the holy

God. As a result, and often the primary reason for ineffective application, preachers tend

to establish moralizing principles in place of application.[51] It appears that numerous

preachers, when discussing the holiness of God in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, tend to

quickly move toward moralizing applications, such as issuing a series of prohibitions and

urging listeners to respond to the message, "You should be holy."[52] Graeme Goldsworthy

observes and laments a moralizing conclusion in this application of the sermon:

> We must not view these recorded events as if they were a mere succession of events
> from which we draw little moral lessons or examples for life. Much that passes for
> application of the Old Testament to the Christian life is only moralizing. It consists
> almost exclusively in observing the behavior of the godly and godless (admittedly
> against a background of the activity of God) and then exhorting people to learn from
> these observations. That is why the "character" study is a favored approach to Bible
> narrative—the life of Moses, the life of David, the life of Elijah and so on. There is
> nothing wrong with character studies as such—we are to learn by others' examples—

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[50] Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 145.

[51] See Haddon W. Robinson*,* "The Heresy of Application," in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching*, ed. Haddon W. Robinson and Craig B. Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 306–11; Hershael W. York and Scott A. Blue, "Is Application Necessary in the Expository Sermon?" *SBJT* 4 (Summer 1999): 70–84.

[52] John Piper indicates that the focus has shifted from the idea of God's attributes in application to moralism: "The Christian life is not intended to operate on a minimalist ethic—on prohibitions: don't touch that, don't do this, avoid that. Success in the Christian life is not merely a matter of avoiding sin, yet we often make it into a life of exclusions." John Piper, "Holiness Is a Race, Not a Prohibition," *Desiring God* (blog), July 29, 2015, https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/holiness-is-a-race-not-a-prohibition.

but such character studies all too often take the place of more fundamental aspects of biblical teaching.[53]

The problem with moralizing applications in holiness texts is that they are not coherently related to the author's intention. To phrase it more carefully, a preacher's hearers may cognitively understand what holiness is through the depiction of Isaiah's vision or when a term is repeated three times to become significant in John's experience. However, they may fail to apply it if the preacher merely presents scriptural information about God's holiness or fails to make the connection between the truths about God's holiness and its relevance in application. Ironically, preaching about God's holiness without practical application can actually hinder the growth of holiness in the preacher's hearers.[54]

Thesis

This dissertation is motivated by the recognition of a need to explore alternative hermeneutical approach to bring more clarity to the portrayal of God's holiness within Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. The main argument focuses on questioning the various ways the holiness of the Lord in these ancient texts can be understood and communicated effectively. Employing Abraham Kuruvilla's hermeneutical perspective,[55] it aims to present a comprehensive portrayal of God's holiness, encapsulating both his transcendence

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[53] Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom: A Christian's Guide to the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1981), 24.

[54] Randal Pelton, "Preaching for True Holiness," in Robinson and Larson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, 311.

[55] The approach employed in this dissertation closely aligns with Kuruvilla's hermeneutics for preaching, as outlined in his works such as *Privilege the Text!*, as well as his dissertation, "Text to Praxis: Hermeneutics and Homiletics in Dialogue" (PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 2007). Kuruvilla's primary objective in his monograph is to bridge the gap between the historical context of the text and its relevance to contemporary hearers. He achieves this through a fresh way of utilizing Paul Ricoeur's concept of *the world in front of the text*, suggesting that the text naturally possesses transhistorical intentions that find significance in present-day applications. Thus, this dissertation also seeks to provide a hermeneutically sound method of application.

and immanence.[56] The central argument of this dissertation is that effective preaching of these texts requires a nuanced balance between their semantic and pragmatic dimensions. Specifically, it is argued that the semantic dimension of God's holiness reflects his transcendent aspects, while the pragmatic dimension reveals his immanence. This interpretive approach not only facilitates a deeper understanding of the majestic and the beauty of God's holiness, but also serves to motivate believers toward sanctified living, inspired by the dual aspects of God's holy nature.

Another focus within this dissertation lies in the realm of homiletics, particularly emphasizing the pivotal role of sermon application. This dissertation seeks to articulate an application that integrates both the semantic and pragmatic elements of the texts. By engaging with Kuruvilla's homiletical approach, the dissertation culminates by underscoring the significance of hermeneutically driven preaching on the topic of God's holiness, offering clear homiletical directions. It highlights how Isaiah's narrative depicts a journey from the infinite to the intimate, showcasing the profound personal transformation that ensues from encountering God's transcendent holiness. This encounter prompts a deeper awareness of sin and a consequent call to repentance, facilitated by the enabling presence of God's immanent holiness. Correspondingly, Revelation 4 demonstrates how holiness-driven worship shapes the identity of worshippers, aligning them with God's character through a recognition of his transcendent majesty coupled with his immanent closeness. These insights are crucial for preaching that not only conveys the depth of God's holiness but also invites listeners to experience its life-changing power, fostering a community dedicated to the pursuit of Christlikeness (Rom 8:29).

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[56] This dissertation argues that both texts within Isa 6 and Rev 4 carry transhistorical intentions that aim to shape the listener into a holier individual. This idea is based on Kuruvilla's concept of "exemplification." I will argue that the transcendent and immanent holiness can shape the foundation for effective application. In other words, this study will illuminate how a balanced understanding of the text's thrust (both semantic and pragmatic) can encourage believers to align themselves with the transcendent and immanent aspects of God's holiness and thus inhabit God's ideal world.

Significance

Kuruvilla's views on sermon application are deeply tied to his understanding of preaching theology and his method of interpreting the text, namely *the world in front of the text*.[57] He openly acknowledges that his hermeneutical and homiletical approaches to the text for preaching stem from seeing a lack of theoretical clarity in traditional homiletics, particularly when translating specific biblical texts into applicable sermons for contemporary audiences. In other words, Kuruvilla's hermeneutical and homiletical proposals come from his observation of a gap in traditional homiletics, specifically in how a particular text influences the changes in the lives of Christians living in front of the world of the text.[58]

In this regard, Kuruvilla calls preachers to comprehend that each text of Scripture has its *sentence meaning* (semantic), which conveys information that must be considered for interpretation.[59] Simultaneously, every text also has its *utterance meaning* (pragmatics, what the author is *doing* with what he is *saying*), which brings to light the transhistorical and future-directed intention of the text for preaching and its valid application.[60] Specifically, Kuruvilla suggests that preachers avoid viewing the text as "plain glass" that lets them see only the historical elements *behind* the text. Instead, they should see the text as "stained-glass," where the audience is encouraged to align their

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[57] See Kuruvilla's understanding of the concept of application and its validity in his works, specifically in the section entitled "Preaching Is Applicational," in *A Vision for Preaching*, 111–29; and "Deriving Application," in *A Manual for Preaching*, 57–86.

[58] Kuruvilla's preaching methodology is grounded on the harmonization of theory and practice relating to the path from text to application. Kuruvilla emphasizes,

> The preaching process therefore has two aspects: the exposition of the theology of the pericope (the theological move: text to pericopal theology) and the demonstration of how that theology may be applied in real life (the applicational move: pericopal theology to application). This is at the heart of preaching: divine demand from the biblical text is brought to bear upon the concrete circumstances of the community of God, to align it to the will of God for the glory of God. (Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 116)

[59] Kuruvilla, "What Is the Author Doing?," 565.

[60] Abraham Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis: Hermeneutics and Homiletics in Dialogue* (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 159.

lives with the world the biblical author projected through the text.[61] His "stained-glass" metaphor significantly helps in tying together the theological values (or thrust) inherent in the text, the intent of the biblical author, and the pastoral concern of the preacher. Essentially, this metaphor suggests that a preacher's interpretation should go beyond merely studying the text itself semantically. It should also strive to understand the intentions of the biblical author who, through the text, projects a vision of transformation for the audience living in the world the text depicts.[62] When applying this to the holiness of God in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, Kuruvilla's model enables preachers to perceive not only the semantic meaning of God's transcendent holiness, but also to discern the driving force of the immanent holiness of God for valid application.

Therefore, the significance of this dissertation is found in the recognition that a comprehensive understanding of both the semantic and pragmatic dynamics within the texts of Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 is crucial for producing valid applications. By emphasizing this point, the dissertation challenges the tendency to overlook or oversimplify the concept of holiness in preaching. It highlights the importance of delving into the pragmatic aspects of these texts to ensure that the applications drawn from them are meaningful, relevant, and impactful.

To place a particular emphasis on details, when a preacher projects the holiness of God in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 vividly and richly, hearers are called to *see* and *desire* the holiness of the Lord from the text itself—not from a selected explanation or a distilled proposition of the text.[63] In this event, God's holiness, which the preacher demonstrates through the text, shapes and molds the pattern of holy living among them.

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[61] Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 105.

[62] See Kuruvilla, "Preaching Is Theological," in *A Vision for Preaching*, 91–109; "Discerning Theology," in *A Manual for Preaching*, 27–56.

[63] Kuruvilla uses a quote from James K. A. Smith to explain how valid application is connected to the spiritual formation of the listeners. James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 197, quoted in Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 268.

Through the text's theology and thrust, hearers may experience that God's transcendent holiness can be intimidating. However, concurrently, beauty exists in this God's immanent holiness.

For instance, one can identify its twofold perspective in Isaiah 6, when the prophet, in his vision of the Lord in his heavenly temple, feels repulsion *and* an attraction, sensing the transcendent and immanent holiness of God. If a preacher draws this picture of Isaiah 6 from the text as a whole for preaching, the text itself has something *doing* with its *saying*.[64] It motivates hearers to stand in front of the holiness of God just as Isaiah did through confession of sin. Therefore, as Kuruvilla points out, obeying God's will as presented in the text entails fostering a deep appreciation for God's holy world and encouraging people to live in it. This objective is not just about elucidating the holy and perfect world depicted in Isaiah 6; it also involves conveying the value of the sacred vision in a way that inspires a comprehensive response and facilitates spiritual growth.[65]

Transitioning from this specific example to the broader implications of the study, the significance of this dissertation also resides in its contribution to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of God's holiness in Isaiah 4 and Revelation 6. As suggested by the title of his book *Privilege the Text*, Kuruvilla's model proposes that a sermon truly honoring the text extends beyond merely providing a faithful explanation of

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[64] In Kuruvilla's view, a preacher is not the creator of the sermon, but serves as a curator or witness guiding and demonstrating the audience in the world projected by the text. This differs from traditional preaching that prioritizes argumentation through extraction and elaboration of propositions from the text. Instead, Kuruvilla's perspective stresses a demonstration-oriented approach to preaching, inviting the audience to reside and experience the world that the text portrays and encouraging them to live accordingly. Certainly, this methodology seems to avoid the distillation or reduction of the text's message into propositions. Instead, it seeks to incorporate the pragmatical power and pathos which is inherent in the text into the sermon and its valid application. See Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 264–65.

[65] Kuruvilla summarizes the importance of preaching God's holiness in the context of making valid applications: "Preaching plays a crucial role in this process, for God has deigned to accomplish his goals through this activity: the resulting change of lives, commensurate with God's own holiness, is an important means of glorifying God." Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 190.

its content. Instead, it offers a more profound theoretical framework and practical guidance. This understanding, in turn, enables preachers to convey the transformative power and relevance of the text in a way that engages and inspires their congregations. Consequently, Kuruvilla's preaching model encourages preachers to handle both the language and the theology of the text together, with great care. It can be seen as a model that effectively communicates God's holiness to his people, both in the past and the present.

Methodology

This study seeks to address several key questions surrounding the topic of preaching about God's holiness as depicted in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4: (1) Why is there a contemporary neglect of the concept of holiness in evangelical preaching, and what factors contribute to this oversight? (2) In the context of Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, how are holiness or the holiness of God defined in biblical texts, and how do these definitions influence the interpretation and preaching of these texts? (3) How do different hermeneutical approaches affect the understanding and preaching of the concept of God's holiness, particularly in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4? (4) What is the significance of valid application in preaching about God's holiness, and how does it foster the sanctification of individuals and church community? By exploring these questions, this dissertation aims to provide insights and suggestions for preachers striving to effectively communicate the importance of God's holiness to their congregations.

In addition to addressing key questions surrounding preaching about God's holiness as conveyed in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, this dissertation aims to examine the hermeneutical move from text to theology and its practical impact on preaching. Through a careful examination of the theology and practical implications of the holiness texts in Isaiah and Revelation, the study illuminates how God's transcendent and immanent holiness demands the hearer to inhabit the projected holy world via the preacher's sermon.

To illustrate the legitimacy of the process from text to application, this work will show the way God's holiness in the text moves to the idea of exemplification—that is,

Abraham Kuruvilla's concept of application form.[66] Preaching is "not information-driven, nor is it merely an explanation of the text: its structure, language, background, or history."[67] While the concept of God's holiness can be captivating and meaningful, it is vital to recognize that the preacher's approach to a text dealing with this topic can greatly influence how the audience perceives and engages with the message. If the preacher presents the information in a dry, overly technical, or monotonous way, the audience may feel disinterested or uninspired.

By aligning with Kuruvilla's perspective, the dissertation adds weight to the argument that discerning the pragmatic forces within these texts is crucial for preaching holiness effectively. This approach expands the perception of God's holiness beyond a mere theological concept and encourages preachers to present it in a way that resonates with the everyday experiences and challenges faced by their listeners, thereby making the message more relevant and engaging.

Argument

This dissertation begins by identifying the prevailing issue of the lack of emphasis on holiness in preaching. It then analyzes the reason why God's holiness is often neglected as a topic of preaching and presents the thesis of the dissertation. Chapter 1 explores various challenges, including inconsistency in the semantic meaning of the word "holiness," the potential inadequacy of traditional hermeneutical approaches in grasping the depth and beauty of God's holiness, and the deficiency of homiletical considerations for valid applications. The chapter concludes by highlighting the significance of the study, outlining the research methodology, and acknowledging its potential benefits for preachers.

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[66] Kuruvilla uses the term "exemplification" to refer to the "potential future applications arising from the transhistorical intention." Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 45.

[67] Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 128.

Chapter 2 explores the concept of holiness as depicted in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, stressing the need for a theological approach (pericopal theology) to grasp both the semantic and pragmatic meanings of God's holiness. This chapter delves into the semantic meanings of the Hebrew word קֹדֶשׁ (*kodesh)* and the Greek word ἅγιος (*hagios*), as used in Scripture, with a particular focus on narratives in Isaiah and Revelation. It highlights the limitations of a solely semantic approach and underscores the necessity of a theological perspective. This approach is beneficial for recognizing both the transcendent and immanent dimensions of God's holiness. The chapter further explores how a theological approach can deepen the effectiveness of sermons on these texts by facilitating a balanced presentation of God's transcendent and immanent holiness.

Chapter 3 seeks to establish the value of appropriate hermeneutics for effective preaching about God's holiness in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. This chapter incorporates insights from well-informed and contemporary scholarship in the field of hermeneutics, ensuring a solid foundation for the examination of hermeneutical principles in the interpretation of these texts. Subsequently, this chapter narrows its focus to emphasize the importance of adopting a fresh hermeneutical approach when analyzing the concept of the holiness of God in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. It then examines Abraham Kuruvilla's hermeneutical approach known as *the world in front of the text*.[68] By establishing his framework, the chapter reveals the significance of discerning what the author is *doing* with what he is *saying*, demonstrating both the semantic and pragmatic aspects of the texts of Isaiah and Revelation.

Chapter 4 begins the process of demonstrating how the hermeneutic of *the world in front of the text* serves as a solid foundation for homiletical discussion. This chapter addresses various aspects related to application in preaching, ranging from the

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[68] Chap. 3 primarily focuses on Kuruvilla's approach to interpretation through his hermetical concept of *the world in front of the text*. He basically elucidates the principle of this approach, explaining, "Thus a text not only tells the reader about the world behind the text, what actually happened . . . a text also projects an ideal *world in front of the text* that bids the reader inhabit it, a world characterized by certain precepts, priorities, and practices." Kuruvilla, *Vision for Preaching*, 94.

general issues surrounding its validity and practicality, to a detailed examination of the texts of Isaiah and Revelation. This chapter features a framework for the effective transition from text to application, transferring from hermeneutics to homiletics. It then elucidates that the projected holy world of God, which generated or created by preaching, forms the intermediary between the text and the hearer, as well as between the written Word of God and the response to it. The chapter presents the invitation to embrace God's projected holy world through his Word as a legitimate application.

Chapter 5 serves as the conclusion to the discussion of preaching about the holiness of God. The final chapter summarizes the key arguments and discussions presented in the preceding chapters, highlighting the value of adopting Abraham Kuruvilla's hermeneutical and homiletical approach to comprehensively understand the concept of God's holiness in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 for preaching. This chapter aims to enlighten and encourage preachers to effectively convey the essence of God's holiness in their sermons, thereby profoundly influencing their congregations.

CHAPTER 2

TRANSCENDENCE AND IMMANENCE: THEOLOGICAL
APPROACH TO THE MEANING OF HOLINESS

As this chapter unfolds, it will explore the perplexing issue surrounding the

interpretation of God's holiness. The chapter begins with an overview that emphasizes

the confusion surrounding the subject in the Old Testament and the New Testament. It

then uncovers the linguistic nuances of the Hebrew term קדש (*kodesh*) found in Isaiah 6

and its Greek counterpart ἅγιος (*hagios*) from Revelation 4. The exploration underscores

the necessity of a theological approach to comprehend the profound significance of God's

holiness for preaching.[1]

The subsequent sections of this chapter delve into the semantic meaning of

God's holiness, emphasizing its transcendence. An examination of Isaiah 6 illustrates the

majesty of God, while the study of Revelation 4 portrays the absolute transcendence of the

Lord. The chapter then turns its focus toward the pragmatic meaning of the Lord's holiness,

investigating its more immanent facets. The immanent holiness of God, as depicted in

Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, is analyzed through the arrangement and organization of the

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[1] The traditional understanding of a theological approach may encompass systematic theology, historical theology, practical theology, and biblical theology. However, within the scope of this dissertation, the use of the term "theological approach" aligns more closely with Abraham Kuruvilla's concept of pericopal theology. This framework offers a distinctive lens for biblical interpretation and application. It treats each pericope (a manageable segment of biblical text) as a fundamental unit, embodying a divine demand or call to action. Crucially, each pericope projects *the world in front of the text*, beckoning the reader or hearer to step into this realm and conform to God's ideal standards. In preaching, the task involves elucidating the pericopal theology of the text, interpreting its relevance to a modern audience, and guiding the congregation to live in alignment with its divine demand. See Kuruvilla's concept of theological approach (pericopal theology): "Now where exactly is the 'theology' of that utterance—under the text, over it, in it, with it? Wherever it is, the theology is integral to the text and inseparable from it. It is discerned from the text, it comes with the text, it is part of the text. In a sense, it is the text, for the theology of a pericope is what the text (i.e., its author) is doing." Abraham Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching: The Journey from Text to Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 31.

texts, their specific word choices and emphases, and their unique styles and characters. These texts express visions with distinct agendas, providing a comprehensive understanding of God's holiness.[2]

The Confusion about the Meaning of God's Holiness

The word "holy" or "holiness" resonates deeply with the scriptures, capturing the very essence of God's nature. Yet, its multifaceted semantic nuances, especially as seen in passages like Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, present a challenge for both interpreters and preachers. This complexity is accentuated by a prevailing belief among preachers that word study is the foundation of sermon preparation.[3] For many preachers, the practice of word study is the primary step in crafting a sermon. Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix emphasize its importance: "Word studies can help the expositor determine the literal meaning of the text by revealing the simple, plain, obvious, and literal sense of the words, phrases, clauses, and sentences of the passage. Never minimize the use of a particular word."[4] Consequently, many preachers initiate their sermon preparation by concentrating on specific words or word groups, believing that resources such as concordances, lexicons,

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[2] Kuruvilla further explains, "Needless to say, this is true of every text in the biblical canon; each of its authors has a theological agenda, propounded in and through what they say/write. In other words, writers always do something with what they say." Abraham Kuruvilla, *Mark*, Theological Commentary for Preachers (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), xiv.

[3] This dissertation acknowledges the importance of "word study" in sermon preparation. However, chap. 2 posits that relying solely on "word study" is inadequate for effective preaching, particularly when crafting the application. The cautionary words of Derek Thomas underscore this perspective:

> The "I have a seminary education and I am determined to let you know that" sermon: In its extreme form, this kind of sermon becomes a lecture on the original meaning of the Greek or Hebrew. What belongs in the preacher's study is brought into the pulpit. There is enormous emphasis on the word study, syntax, Greek and/or Hebrew, archeology, textual variants, original intent, and cultural background. The vast research has as its aim a proper exegesis of the passage. But it fails to 'bridge the gap between two horizons' stretching from the world of the Bible to the world of the listener. The sermon sounds like a lecture because it is a lecture. It titillates the intellect but fails to minister to the affections. (Derek W. H. Thomas, "Expository Preaching," in *Feed My Sheep: A Passionate Plea for Preaching*, ed. Don Kistler [Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust, 2008], 430)

[4] Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 112.

word study books, and commentaries can swiftly provide valuable insights essential for effective preaching.[5]

However, when it comes to preaching on God's holiness, challenges arise. While there is a broad consensus regarding the overarching meaning of God's holiness, a brief survey of contemporary theological literature and preaching resources reveals a distinct lack of a definitive and universally accepted definition.[6] This gap often results in a spectrum of subjective interpretations, leading to more confusion than clarity when presenting the subject of God's holiness in sermons.

Such ambiguity may result in inconsistent messaging, potentially steering congregations away from a nuanced understanding of this essential attribute of God.[7] This chapter begins to navigate these complexities and propose a more nuanced comprehension of the holiness of God through a theological lens. The goal is to provide preachers with a coherent and consistent framework for their sermons.

Understanding the Word קדש (*kodesh*)
in the Old Testament

Scholars in the fields of biblical studies and linguistics have employed various methodologies throughout history, leading to different conclusions regarding the precise definition of holiness in the Old Testament.[8] As a result, the semantic understanding of holiness has seen significant variations across scholarly works.[9] This range of

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[5] Stephen F. Olford and David L. Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 123.

[6] See especially the brief history of interpretation of God's holiness in Marny Köstenberger, *Sanctification as Set Apart and Growing in Christ*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 2–6.

[7] See Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 84–108.

[8] See John Davies, "The Concept of Holiness." *London Quarterly & Holborn Review* 185 (January 1960): 36–44.

[9] Otto Procksch, "ἅγιος etc.," in *TDNT*, 1:89–97.

interpretations is evident in both lexical dictionaries and theological writings, as the following examples illustrate.

The term "holy" is primarily translated from the Hebrew word קדש (*kodesh*). In the Old Testament, the root קדש is interpreted in various ways.[10] Walter Elwell and Barry Beitzel explain, "The primary OT word for holiness means 'to cut' or 'to separate.'"[11] Essentially, they suggest that "holiness is a cutting off or separation from what is unclean, and consecration to what is pure."[12]

Building upon this understanding, David Wright argues that the Old Testament portrays God as ethically unique; God is described as "too pure to look on evil" (Hab 1:13 NIV) and unable to tolerate wrong (Isa 1:4–20; 35:8). Wright defines the holiness of God with an emphasis on moral purity: "In the OT, holiness is a positive cultic or moral condition of God, people, things, places, and time. It may be an inherent condition or achieved through ritual means."[13]

Expanding on the concept of holiness, John Hartley emphasizes that God's holiness in the Old Testament should be understood as "separateness," as it lies "at the center of God's being, distinguishing him from everything on earth and in heaven."[14] According to Hartley, God's holiness signifies his separateness over the creation and his

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[10] According to H. P. Müller, in the Old Testament, the Hebrew root קדש occurs 842 times. For example, Lev (152), Ezek (105), Exod (102), Num (80), Isa (73), Pss (65), Josh, Judg, 1–2 Sam, 1–2 Kgs (48), Ezra, Neh, 1–2 Chr (110), Job, Prov, Eccl (9), and Jer (19). See H. P. Müller, "קדש holy," in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 3:1106–7.

[11] Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Holiness," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 1:984.

[12] Elwell and Beitzel, "Holiness," 85.

[13] David Wright, "Holiness," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3, *H-J,* ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 237.

[14] John Hartley, "Holy and Holiness, Clean and Unclean," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 430.

uniqueness among creatures.[15] God is not only utterly distinct from his creation and exercises sovereign majesty and power over it, but also is separate from all that is evil and defiled.

William Ury aligns with Hartley's perspective, suggesting that "holiness denotes the separateness, or otherness, of God from all his creation. The Hebrew word for holy, *kodesh*, in its fundamental meaning, contains the note of that which is separate or apart."[16] Ury claims that the Hebrew word for "holy" means "marked off" or "withdrawn from common, ordinary use."[17] Donna Orsuto also understands holiness as God's act of separating from the world, arguing that holiness pertains to those things or individuals distinguished from the ordinary and sanctified for divine purposes.[18]

Furthermore, Peter Gentry introduces additional dimension of holiness, emphasizing the concept of consecration and commitment within the context of covenant relationship. He denotes, "The basic meaning of the word is 'consecrated' or 'devoted.' In Scripture it operates within the context of covenant relationships and expresses commitment."[19] Similarly, Gordon Wenham underlines the expression of holiness through moral integrity, which he associates with the symbolism of physical wholeness. He highlights, "Holiness is expressed in moral integrity, symbolized by physical wholeness."[20]

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[15] Hartley, "Holy and Holiness, Clean and Unclean."

[16] William Ury, "Holy," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 515.

[17] Ury, "Holy," 516.

[18] Donna Orsuto, *Holiness*, New Century Theology (New York: Continuum, 2006), 11. See also Owen Jones, *The Concept of Holiness* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 107.

[19] Peter J. Gentry, "The Meaning of Holy in the Old Testament," *BSac* 170 (October–December 2013): 417.

[20] Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 265.

In this sense, Rudolf Otto argues the effect of encountering the holy God as *mysterium tremendum* (the mysterious and aweful) or "wholly other"[21]

In a contrasting approach, Baruch Schwartz presents a distinctive view on God's holiness, suggesting that there are two perspectives on holiness: one from the non-priestly and the other from the priestly.[22] Schwartz suggests that the non-priestly view highlights Israel's election, while the priestly view sees holiness as an expression of the divine nature that sets Israel apart. He elucidates that the Pentateuch focuses on the ritual aspects of holiness, such as the consecration of priests and purification rituals, while the other books, particularly the Psalms and Prophets, emphasize ethical aspects, including righteousness, truth, justice, mercy, and a humble walk with God.[23]

The term "holy" or "holiness" often presents multiple semantic meanings, even when used by a single author in a single book of the Scriptures. Leviticus, for instance, extensively explores the subject of God's holiness, and the idea of holiness is interwoven throughout the entire Scripture. However, commentators and scholars of Leviticus often demonstrate inconsistency in defining the lexical meaning and concept of the word group קדש (*kodesh*). Baruch Levine acknowledges this challenge: "Holiness is difficult to define or to describe because the meaning of holiness could be various in the book of

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[21] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University, 1950), 6–7. Otto further explains, "Conceptually *mysterium* denotes merely that which is hidden and esoteric, that which beyond conception or understanding, extraordinary and unfamiliar" (13).

[22] Baruch Schwartz, "Israel's Holiness: The Torah Traditions," in *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus*, ed. M. J. H. M. Poorthuis and Joshua Schwartz (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 47–59.

[23] Schwartz, "Israel's Holiness," 58. David Wright also holds the similar view. He argues, "The Priestly Torah and Holiness School—the basic traditions of the priestly writings in Leviticus and the other Pentateuchal books—offer differing perspectives on holiness. The Holiness School reinterprets the prescriptions of the Priestly Torah by developing a system of holiness that emphasizes God's holiness in relation to the people's experience and conduct." David Wright, "Holiness in Leviticus and Beyond: Different Perspectives," *Interpretation* 53, no 4 (October 1999): 351. See also Jacob Milgrom, "The Dynamic of Purity in the Priestly System," in Poorthuis and Schwartz, *Purity and Holiness*, 29–32.

Leviticus."[24] He affirms that the term holiness contains multiple meanings, such as "different from the profane or the ordinary," "powerful or numinous," "blessing," "protection," or "otherness."[25] Levine concludes, "The biblical term for holiness is *kodesh*. Though the noun is abstract, it is likely that the perception of holiness was not thoroughly abstract. In fact, *kodesh* had several meanings, including 'sacred place, sanctuary, sacred offering.'"[26] Consequently, diverse interpretations of קדש (*kodesh*) can be found even within the single book of Leviticus, leading to debate on whether it denotes "purity," "set apart," or "devoted."

As this brief survey has revealed, numerous resources emphasize different viewpoints as the primary lexical definition of the holiness of God in the Old Testament. The concept of holiness in the Old Testament can be approached in different ways depending on the semantic definitions chosen by scholars. However, their research is quite broad, and they hardly offer a common definition of God's holiness for preachers. This diversity does not necessarily complicate the task of preaching but requires preachers to embrace a more nuanced approach when conveying God's holiness from Old Testament texts, such as Isaiah 6. It encourages pastors to consider the broader theological context and the specific nuances of each passage, allowing for a more comprehensive representation of God's holiness in their sermons.

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[24] Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 256. In another one of his scholarly works, Levine offers an insightful perspective on the concept of "holy" as it is experienced in the Old Testament. He posits, "Holiness relates to a complex of elusive phenomena that retain an aura of mystery and resist definition." Baruch A. Levine, "The Language of Holiness: Perceptions of the Sacred in the Hebrew Bible," in *Backgrounds for the Bible*, ed. Michael P. O'Connor and David N. Freedman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 241.

[25] Levine, *Leviticus*, 256.

[26] Levine, *Leviticus*, 257. Alan Mittleman suggests that the concept of holiness should be interpreted "within a framework of relations rather than a substantive or ontological quality of an object, time, or place." Alan L. Mittleman, *Holiness in Jewish Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2018), 4.

Understanding the Word ἅγιος (*hagios*)
in the New Testament

The challenge intensifies when considering the context of the New Testament as compared to the Old Testament. The New Testament's semantic interpretation of God's holiness demonstrates elements of both continuity and discontinuity. For example, the *NIDNTTE* points out that the continuity is evident as the New Testament's portrayal of God's holiness largely mirrors its Old Testament counterpart, even though many New Testament authors incorporate the imagery of God's holiness into their own unique contexts.[27] Allen Myers elucidates this relationship: "The New Testament writers were firmly grounded in the Old Testament concept of holiness. Thus, allusions to and imagery derived from the Jewish cultus are full of references to cultic holiness."[28]

Kent Brower offers additional clarity on the interplay between the two Testaments concerning the holiness of God:

> The Lord's Prayer hallows the name of the Father in a manner reminiscent of Ezekiel. The trisagion of Revelation 4:6b–10 presupposes Isaiah 6:3 while the Song of Moses and the Lamb reflects Psalms 99. God's call of a holy people reflects Exodus 19:2 and Hosea 2:23, while the command and response of holy living in 1 Peter 1:15 mirrors Leviticus 11:44; 19:2.[29]

In parallel with the Old Testament, where God is regularly identified as "holy" or "holy one," the New Testament writers employ the Greek word ἅγιος (*hagios*) and its derivatives as the nearest equivalent to קדש (*kodesh*) from the Old Testament.[30] For

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[27] The *NIDNTTE* reads, "In marked contrast to the OT, the NT refers to God as 'holy' only a few times (John 17:11; 1 Pet 1:15–16; Rev 4:8; 6:10), and Christ is only once called 'holy' in the same sense as God (Rev 3:7; cf. 1 John 2:20). . . . Many NT passages, however, remain entirely within the framework of OT tradition." "ἅγιος," in *NIDNTTE*, 1:128–29.

[28] Allen Myers, "Holiness, Holy," in *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, ed. John W. Simpson Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 494.

[29] Kent Brower, "Holiness," in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. I. Howard Marshall et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 478.

[30] Gerald Hawthorne distinguishes the semantic meaning of holiness with the word group of *hagios*:

> The words for "holy" and "holiness" used in the NT and the apostolic fathers belong to that cluster of words derived from an old Greek root, *hag-: hagiazō* (make holy, sanctify), *hagiasmos* (holiness, sanctification), *hagioprepēs* (holy, proper for one who is holy), *hagios* (holy, sacred), *hagiotēs*

example, "Holy One" (ἅγιος), which shares the same root of *kodesh*, occurs in Mark 1:24;

"to make holy" (ἁγιάζω) occurs in Matthew 6:9; and "holiness" (ἁγιωσύνη) is employed

to convey the nuances of sanctification in 1 Thessalonians 3:13.[31] This unique attribute of

God is validated by Jesus as he teaches his disciples to pray in a manner that the Father's

name might be exalted and glorified in Matthew 6:9: "Hallowed [Holy] be your name,"

which is the same way of the teaching of the Old Testament (Exod 20:7; Pss 97:12; 103:1;

Ezek 36:22; 43:7).

Furthermore, the conceptual continuity of the holiness of God is prominently

observed in both the Old and New Testaments. Drawing a parallel to the sanctification of

Israel in significant periods of the Old Testament, such as during Moses's era, the concept

of holiness in the New Testament forms an integral part of Christ's redemptive work.[32]

Just as God maintained Israel's holiness through his presence and the Mosaic covenant,

Christians preserve their holiness via the help of the Holy Spirit's constant presence and

their faith in Christ's redemptive work.[33] This highlights God's consistent role in

sanctifying his people in both Old and New Testament. Essentially, the Christian way of

life resonates with the implications for those acquainted with the Holy One of Israel,

thereby emphasizing the ethical connection to divine sanctification in both testaments.

(holiness), along with words such as *hagneia* (purity), *hagnizō* (purify), *hagnismos* (purification), *hagnos* (pure, holy) and *hagnotēs* (purity, sincerity). (Gerald Hawthorne, "Holy, Holiness," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997], 485–89)

[31] Many English translations of the New Testament also use the English terms "holy" or "holiness" to translate Greek terms outside of the typical ἁγ (hag)- word group.

[32] See David Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness*, NSBT 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 27–29.

[33] The apostle Paul affirms that "to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:16). See J. V. Fesko, "Preaching as a Means of Grace and the Doctrine of Sanctification: A Reformed Perspective," *American Theological Inquiry* 3, no. 1 (January 2010): 41–42; Kenneth Kinghorn, "Holiness: The Central Plan of God," *Evangelical Journal* 15, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 57–70.

Finally, much like Old Testament sanctification that necessitated separating from other nations' beliefs and practices, New Testament sanctification calls for a profound shift in values and behaviors.[34] This transformation reflects God's enduring holiness to the world, a theme prevalent across both testaments.

The investigation of discontinuity is equally essential when examining how the concepts of God's holiness are adapted and developed by the New Testament writers. The semantics and conceptualization of God's holiness in the New Testament are not only influenced by the Old Testament but also expanded to fit into the new phases of understanding.[35] The New Testament further enhances the focus on theological and ethical holiness, especially visible in the character and identity of Jesus Christ.[36]

Given the full revelation of God's holiness manifested in the transformative power of Christ's death and resurrection, the New Testament significantly highlights the necessity for believers to exemplify holiness or pursue sanctification. Christians, redeemed and sanctified through Christ's salvific work, are regularly referred to as "the holy" or

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[34] Supporting this idea, Köstenberger observes the necessity of actions for those deemed holy in the New Testament, maintaining the core values of the Old Testament. He articulates,

> In our study of sanctification in the early New Testament letters, we have seen the church emphasize the necessity of life in the Spirit. We looked first at the letter of James. In keeping with Old Testament ethics, James paints a portrait of the "perfect and complete" person who displays steadfastness under trials. Those who walk in holiness exhibit self-control, particularly in speech. Just as faith without works is dead, the holy people of God who have "received with meekness the implanted word" (James 1:21) must be "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (1:23). (Köstenberger, *Sanctification as Set Apart*, 64)

[35] G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson affirm that the nuances of various Old Testament concepts, including the holiness of God, intricately intertwine with the multifaceted ideas of the New Testament. These combinations eventually constitute the foundational components of later comprehensive theological understandings, such as in the case of God's holiness. They illustrate, "Sometimes, more simply, it is worth drawing attention to the way a theological theme grounded in the citation of an OT text is aligned with a major theological theme in the NT that is treated on its own without reference to any OT text." G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, introduction to *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), xxiii.

[36] See Kinghorn, "Holiness," 57–70.

"saints," a notation frequently observed in the Pauline letters.[37] Despite differences in their definitions of God's holiness, some New Testament scholars, like Stanley Porter and David Peterson, find common ground in viewing God's holiness through the lens of sanctification.

Stanley Porter presents a nuanced perspective, stating, "In Paul's eyes holiness is both a condition and a process in which the believer is involved through the work of God, of Christ, or of the Holy Spirit,"[38] because "the verb *hagiazo*, (make holy or sanctify) always has a member of the Godhead as its primary agent."[39] In the Old Testament, the holiness of Israel was principally defined by "their covenantal relationship with God and his presence among them."[40] This perspective, when adapted and developed to the New Testament, posits that God's holiness forms the groundwork of sanctification. This divine characteristic is naturally sought by those who are called by God in Jesus, inspired by the salvific work of Jesus, the Holy One of God, and assisted by the Holy Spirit. Moreover, being holy in Christ is an invitation to moral purity in imitation of Christ. Echoing the scriptural mandate of 1 Peter 1:15, "Just as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all you do," Porter concludes by encapsulating the idea that believers both live and grow in holiness and the holiness of God is the foundation from which the holiness of his people is derived.[41]

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[37] See the biblical references: Rom 1:1, 7; 8:27; 15:25, 26, 31; 16:2, 15; 1 Cor 1:2; 6:1, 2; 14:33; 16:1, 15; 2 Cor 1:1; 8:4; 9:1, 12; 13:12; Eph 1:1, 4, 15, 18; 2:19; 3:8, 18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18; Phil 1:1; 4:21, 22; Col 1:2, 4, 12, 22, 26; 1 Thess 3:13; 2 Thess 1:10; 1 Tim 5:10; Phlm 5, 7.

[38] Stanley E. Porter, "Holiness, Sanctification," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 398.

[39] Porter, "Holiness, Sanctification," 398.

[40] Hartley, "Holy and Holiness, Clean and Unclean," 425.

[41] Interestingly, Porter seems to agree with the modern scholarship on the definition of holiness which distinguishes ethical appeal for purity and Christians' condition in Christ. He writes,

> Most recent commentators distinguish between the word used for "holiness" in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 as the "state of being holy" and the word for "sanctification" in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 7 as "the process of making holy." This distinction between *hagiōsynē*, "holiness," and *hagiasmos*, "sanctification," is

David Peterson initiates his discussion on God's holiness by aligning with Porter's perspective.[42] He suggests that Paul, although not explicitly stating or elaborating on God's divine attributes in the context of holiness, implicitly weaves them throughout his epistles (Rom 6:19–22; Eph 4:24; 1 Thess 3:13; 2 Thess 2:13).[43] Peterson underscores that holiness or sanctification among God's people is not achieved through adherence to the Law, but through a definitive relationship established by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He lucidly states,

> God is holy and those who belong to him must share in his holiness. But how does this happen for the followers of Jesus? His prayer in John 17 stresses that God's word has sanctifying power. Even those who know themselves to be God's holy people under the Mosaic Covenant are challenged by Jesus' teaching to know God and share in his holiness in a new way. At the heart of the revelation that Jesus brings is the proclamation of God's redemptive achievement in the death of his Son. In his death, Jesus demonstrates the love which God has for the world and which he desires to see reflected in the life of his people. With the gospel message about Jesus and his work, God imparts his Spirit to us and binds us to himself in love. That same word keeps us in holiness and love, enabling us to share in his mission to the world.[44]

Peterson broadens the Pauline concept of holiness, associating it with salvation through Christ. In essence, Peterson's understanding places the holiness of God as primarily soteriological rather than ethical. Consequently, Peterson suggests that sanctification should not be viewed merely as growth in holiness but principally concerning the believer's standing before God. He asserts, "Christians are sustained in holiness by the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit and the trust that he gives in the finished work of

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well in keeping with the uses of these words in their epistolary contexts, with *hagiōsynē* reflecting the doctrinal assumption by Paul of the Thessalonians' status in Christ and *hagiasmos* reflecting his paraenetic exhortation that the Thessalonians conduct lives pleasing to God. (Porter, "Holiness, Sanctification," 398–99)

[42] Peterson refers to Porter's examination of God's holiness when defining his own interpretation of this divine attribute. He explains, "In sum, sanctification in the New Testament is seen as a one-time event and as a process, the believers being and becoming holy and acting correspondingly." Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 14.

[43] See the full discussion in Jay Jongsung Kim, "The Concept of Holiness in the Pauline Epistles" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004), 64–106.

[44] Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 32–33.

Christ."[45] God's holiness in a believer's life is possible through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, primarily caused by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[46] Peterson concludes, "With regard to God himself, holiness implies transcendence, uniqueness and purity. With regard to God's people, holiness means being set apart for a relationship with the Holy One, to display his character in every sphere of life."[47]

Indeed, the New Testament vividly conveys the idea of God's holiness not only in the context of believers' actions but also emphasizes it as a crucial goal for believers in their relationship with God. Paul compellingly urges believers to cleanse themselves from "every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God" (2 Cor 7:1). The authors of the New Testament do more than simply acknowledge the concept of God's holiness as expressed in the Old Testament, yet their understanding has been illuminated through the event of Christ's life and teachings. The concept of the holiness of God traces a continuous biblical-theological line that begins with the Old Testament narratives, finds fulfillment in Christ, and extends through to the church—particularly impacting the apostles, their representatives, and successors who are tasked with preaching this divine holiness.

In conclusion, discerning the meaning of God's holiness can be an intricate and nuanced task. While scholars have examined its semantic nuances, a consensus remains elusive. Furthermore, its representation in sermons can differ widely, reflecting the multifaceted interpretations held by various preachers. Numerous Old and New Testament dictionaries and commentaries propose a range of interpretations, particularly whether קדשׁ (*kodesh*) and ἅγιος (*hagios*) refer to separateness, purity, moral perfection, or the necessity of sanctification.

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[45] Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 24.

[46] Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 24.

[47] Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 24.

In the case of Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, the precise determination of what this word or concept means has major ramifications for preachers who deliver the message with it. In other words, this ambiguity directly impacts preachers tasked with delivering messages about God's holiness in both texts. For preachers, the central question remains when they preach the vision of Isaiah and John: Is a semantic understanding of קדש (*kodesh*) and ἅγιος (*hagios*) or the concept of God's holiness, sufficient for its effective preaching? This dissertation argues that without a comprehensive understanding of the semantic *and* pragmatic nuances of the text, preachers may find it challenging to efficaciously proclaim God's holiness as a call to sanctification.

The Necessity of a Theological Approach

As observed previously, the lexical approach to biblical interpretation focuses on understanding individual words within the text. Calvin Miller highlights the benefits of this approach for preaching:

> Going through this word study makes it easy to tell that as a teacher of preaching, I stay very close to words and their meanings. I have simply learned across almost fifty years of writing sermons that words hold the greatest possibility for making sure I properly exegete and expose a text. This should not seem unreasonable. Words are our métier: they are to the preacher what the palette is to the artist. Words are what we paint with, and the images that emerge from our paintings provide the congregation with insight and inspiration.[48]

While this method can be beneficial in interpreting the meaning of specific words or phrases, it may fall short in providing a comprehensive understanding of a biblical text's broader theological implications.[49] Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton

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[48] Calvin Miller, *Preaching: The Art of Narrative Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 154.

[49] D. A. Carson's final remarks on this topic deserve significant attention. He concludes,

Perhaps the principal reason why word studies constitute a particularly rich source for exegetical fallacies is that many preachers and Bible teachers know Greek only well enough to use concordances, or perhaps a little more. There is little feel for Greek as a language; and so there is the temptation to display what has been learned in study, which as often as not is a great deal of lexical information without the restraining influence of context. (D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996], 64)

caution against an over-reliance on individual words, emphasizing the importance of

context and the broader discourse. They assert,

> Some textbooks on exegesis start with the analysis of the words. This is not unreasonable, because sentences are composed of words, and the meaning of these words is obviously important to the meaning of the sentences. But although it is reasonable, there is a certain danger in that it is easy to become so enamored of the words that we forget the sentences in which they appear. Words designate only a few possible fields of potential meaning and function in relation to other words; they do not have meaning on their own. The meaning of a word is the result of an interaction of its fields of potential meaning with the context within which it is used. . . . So word studies must be carried out with their sentences in mind. likewise, sentences should be understood within their paragraphs, and paragraphs within the basic complete unit of meaning, the "nuclear discourse," or all the material cohering around a particular subject or topic.[50]

The lexical approach might limit the comprehension of concepts like God's

holiness in passages such as Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4.[51] To put it differently, God's

holiness involves more than just linguistic interpretation in both texts. It includes an

extensive range of semantic *and* pragmatic nuances that a lexical approach alone may not

fully uncover.[52]

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[50] Dan McCarthy and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 181. Similarly, Andreas Köstenberger and Richard Patterson caution against the fallacy of assuming that "a word can only mean one thing when there is in fact a semantic range (i.e., a multiplicity of potential meanings)." Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology*, Invitation to Theological Studies Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 646.

[51] Carson compellingly contends that while understanding the meanings of individual words is crucial, one must exercise caution with so-called "word studies" that attribute meanings to the text that were never intended by the author. He writes,

> I hasten to add three caveats to this discussion. First, I am not saying that any word can mean anything. Normally we observe that any individual word has a certain limited semantic range, and the context may therefore modify or shape the meaning of a word only within certain boundaries. The total semantic range is not permanently fixed, of course; with time and novel usage, it may shift considerably. Even so, I am not suggesting that words are infinitely plastic. I am simply saying that the meaning of a word cannot be reliably determined by etymology, or that a root, once discovered, always projects a certain semantic load onto any word that incorporates that root. Linguistically, meaning is not an intrinsic possession of a word; rather, it is a set of relations for which a verbal symbol is a sign. In one sense, of course, it is legitimate to say, "this word means such and such," where we are either providing the lexical range inductively observed or specifying the meaning of a word in a particular context; but we must not freight such talk with too much etymological baggage. (Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 32)

[52] Drawing insights from William Alston's *Philosophy of Language* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1964), John Frame provides valuable commentary on the notion of "meaning," He compellingly

Traditional theological methodologies, such as biblical, historical, systematic, and practical theology, primarily aim to distill the divine narrative into a cohesive theme.[53] These approaches endeavor to contextualize biblical texts historically, systematize central doctrines, and explore their relevance to daily Christian life. Nevertheless, this broad perspective may occasionally overlook the particularities of individual biblical texts or pericopes, each with its unique theological message and divine demand.[54] Recognizing these challenges, scholars like Abraham Kuruvilla propose alternative approaches for *preaching purposes*. Kuruvilla argues that these traditional theological methods can sometimes overlook the distinct theological thrust of individual pericopes for preaching, causing diverse theological messages to be merged or unified.[55] He identifies two primary

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contends that understanding the semantic and pragmatic aspects of a text is crucial for interpretation, especially when dealing with the doctrine of God. Frame's exploration of meaning underscores the necessity of recognizing these nuances in biblical interpretation. His work serves as a useful resource for highlighting the importance of semantics and pragmatics in engaging with the text. See John M. Frame, "Appendix C: Meaning," in *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God: A Theology of Lordship* (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1987), 93–100. See also William J. Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relative Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 242–63.

[53] See the various relationships between these theological subjects and their functions. Millard J. Erickson, "What Is Theology?," in *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 17–38.

[54] Kuruvilla unpacks his concept of "a theological hermeneutic for preaching" by delineating two distinct approaches: one driven by systematic theology and the other by biblical theology. He warns against the pitfalls of both approaches. On one extreme, there is a risk of overgeneralization, which can lead to neglecting the text's specifics. On the other hand, there is a danger of carelessly utilizing the text, focusing solely on its application. Kuruvilla summarizes, "On the one hand is the error of over-generalizing and thus neglecting the specifics of the text; on the other that of a willy-nilly ransacking of the Bible for usable scraps. Both transactions disregard what the author is doing with what he is saying, and both leave preachers—not to mention audiences—with a sense that something is lacking." Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody, 2013), 23.

[55] Kuruvilla's concept of "a theological approach" diverges from the usual terminology, widely accepted by proponents of *the theological interpretation of Scripture* in contemporary evangelical hermeneutics. He denotes,

As a nascent field (or, at least, as a nascent label) "theological interpretation of Scripture" remains quite undefined with a number of variant approaches to this critical hermeneutical operation. This work, however, adopts a unique approach to theological hermeneutics. The vantage point of this entire offering is the pulpit, so to speak, not the desk of a Bible scholar or the lectern of a systematic theologian. In other words, the "theology" of this theological hermeneutic is not biblical or systematic theology. Rather, sustaining the focus on preaching, the theology employed is that of the pericope. (Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 25)

shortcomings in this approach *in preaching context*: systematization and atomization.[56]

Kuruvilla points out the inherent bias of systematization: "There is an element of a priori reception about all this, since systems of theology already inform us about how and what we must hear; so the task of interpretation becomes merely an exercise in discovering where in that neat system a given passage of Scripture fits."[57] In contrast, atomization, which tries to "make application out of every tidbit of textual material,"[58] is also not ideal for sermon interpretation. Both methods often miss the unique theological thrust of the pericopes.

Introducing the concept of pericopal theology for preaching, Kuruvilla proposes a framework that is anchored to specific biblical passages, effectively reflecting the dynamic relationship between God and his people.[59] This term "pericope" refers to "a portion of the biblical text that is of manageable size for homiletical and liturgical use in an ecclesial setting."[60] More precisely, a pericope is "a portion of text from which one can preach a sermon that is distinct in theological thrust/force and application from

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[56] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 21.

[57] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 21.

[58] With a discerning focus, Kuruvilla warns of both methodologies:

However, neither systematization nor atomization attends to the trajectory of the particular text being considered (what the author is doing with what he is saying). On the one hand is the error of over-generalizing and thus neglecting the specifics of the text; on the other that of a willy-nilly ransacking of the Bible for usable scraps. Both transactions disregard what the author is doing with what he is saying, and both leave preachers—not to mention audiences—with a sense that something is lacking. (Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 23)

[59] Kuruvilla explains the meaning of pericope theology as well as its goals:

Pericopal theology is the ideological vehicle through which divine priorities, principles, and practices are propounded for appropriation by readers. This species of theology presents to the Christian "how matters should go ideally and ethically." A biblical pericope is thus a literary instrument inviting men and women to organize their lives in congruence with the theology revealed in that pericope. The goal of any homiletical transaction, thus, is the gradual alignment of the people of God, week by week, to the theology of the biblical pericopes that are preached. Thus it is pericope by pericope that the various aspects of Christian life, individual as well as corporate, are progressively and gradually brought into accord with God's design for his creation—the goal of preaching. (Kuruvilla, *Mark*, xii)

[60] Abraham Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis: Hermeneutics and Homiletics in Dialogue* (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 143.

sermons preached from adjacent pericopes."[61] In this regard, pericopal theology acts as a bridge in sermon preparation, seamlessly linking the ancient text to contemporary practice while respecting the text's authority and the audience's context.[62] This approach operates as "the ideological vehicle through which divine priorities, principles, and practices are propounded for appropriation by readers."[63]

Expanding on this concept, the method encourages interpreters, particularly preachers, to recognize and value the unique theological thrust of each text. Kuruvilla emphasizes that the theology of a pericope captures the essence and intent the original author aimed to convey, thereby ensuring that each pericope's distinct theological contribution is acknowledged within the broader divine narrative. He further clarifies, "The theology of the pericope is the thrust and force of the text that its author wants us to catch, the experience of the text to which its author wants us to respond."[64] Consequently, this approach acknowledges and respects the individual theological contributions of every pericope within the larger divine narrative.[65]

For preachers, pericopal theology offers a nuanced method for biblical interpretation.[66] This approach accentuates the original textual nuances, harmoniously

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[61] Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 5.

[62] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 111.

[63] Abraham Kuruvilla, *Judges*, Theological Commentary for Preachers (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 1–2.

[64] Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 31.

[65] Gregory K. Hollifield's definition adds further clarity to the understanding of pericopal theology: "Pericopal theology is the particular theological truth ensconced in a text of Scripture that was intended by the original author to impact his audience in a particular way." Gregory K. Holifield, "Pericope-by-Pericope: Transforming Disciples into Christ's Likeness through the Theological Interpretation of Scripture," *JBTM* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 48.

[66] Understanding the essence of pericopal theology necessitates a profound and comprehensive engagement with the text. Kuruvilla asserts that the preacher's primary responsibility is to "demonstrate and point out the crucial elements of the text so that the hearer experiences the text fully and faithfully." Thus, a preacher's foremost duty is to highlight the text's vital elements, ensuring that listeners engage with the text both deeply and authentically. Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 31.

integrating both semantics and pragmatics.[67] It prioritizes the divine demands embedded within pericopes, making the texts more relevant to contemporary audiences.[68] Furthermore, by recognizing transhistorical intentions, it bridges the gap between ancient contexts and modern interpretations, facilitating a deeper engagement with the scriptures.[69]

In conclusion, pericopal theology aids preachers in discerning the theological focal points of the text, facilitating the derivation of valid sermon applications. Its effectiveness is anchored in its holistic approach and reverence for textual integrity, a principle Kuruvilla succinctly encapsulated in his philosophy of *privileging the text*.[70]

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[67] Kuruvilla elucidates the linguistic rationale for differentiating between semantics and pragmatics. Traditional interpretation, he argues, follows the code model of communication: it encodes thoughts into sentences, which are then decoded by the receiver. This model, however, fails to account for the inferential processes essential to effective communication. Thus, Kuruvilla suggests the consideration of two aspects: sentence meaning (semantics) and utterance meaning (pragmatics). Pragmatics, in his view, goes beyond the literal sentence meaning and refers to what the speaker is aiming to achieve with his utterance. See a full discussion. Abraham Kuruvilla, "Christiconic View," in *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*: *Four Views on Preaching Today*, ed. Scott M. Gibson and Matthew D. Kim (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 43–53.

[68] The significance of the application in pericopal theology can be underlined with Kuruvilla's words:

> Application derived from the Theological Focus becomes authoritative because of the integral link of the theology to the text: the theology of the pericope is derived from a close reading of the text and is specific for any given text. Application derived from this focus becomes relevant when the homileticians, keenly aware of the circumstances of listeners in their pastoral capacity, specify application in terms that are pertinent to their situation. (Kuruvilla, *Mark*, xii–xiii)

[69] Kuruvilla's concept of pericopal theology appears to build upon the foundational ideas of exegetical and theological paradigms in preaching proposed by Timothy Warren. Both Warren and Kuruvilla emphasize the process that enables preachers to effectively engage with the ever-changing world, presenting the "authority and relevance" of the unchanging text with their own term. In this sense, Kuruvilla's pericopal theology can be viewed as a developed version of John Stott's paradigm of "bridging the two worlds," further enhancing the preacher's ability to connect the ancient text with hermeneutical emphasis. See Timothy S. Warren, "A Paradigm for Preaching," *BSac* 148 (October–December 1991): 474–81. John Stott also suggests the metaphor of preaching as bridge-building. John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 135–78.

[70] Kuruvilla articulates a compelling argument for adopting the principle of "privilege the text":

> In other words, for preaching purposes, to discover what the author is *doing* with what he is saying, the crucial undertaking is the consideration of the text itself. It is the text which must be privileged, for it alone is inspired. While some events *behind* the text may be revelatory, they are not inspired and thus not expressly "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the person of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16–17). (Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 105)

The Semantic Meaning of God's Holiness:
Transcendence

The transition from traditional theological methodologies to a more comprehensive approach—pericopal theology—is essential for gaining a deeper understanding of God's holiness, as exemplified in passages like Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, and for its application in preaching.[71] Pericopal theology proves to be a valuable tool in studying the concept of God's holiness, particularly when approaching these texts as individual entities, each presenting distinct divine demands and projecting unique aspects of God's ideal values. This approach empowers preachers to explore the nuanced meanings of God's holiness both from a semantic and pragmatic perspective. This, in turn, facilitates more effective integration into their sermons, aligning with the objective to "identify semantic and pragmatic functions of parts of the discourse above the sentence level."[72]

Building upon this foundational approach, it becomes essential to delve into the specifics of semantic analysis—lexical, grammatical, and syntactical elements.[73] Semantics lays the groundwork for the literal interpretation of the text, serving as a window into the representational content or the core message conveyed by the author. In simpler terms, semantics explores the inherent meanings embedded within the language used. Kuruvilla elucidates this concept further: "The semantics (the linguistically encoded meaning, sentence meaning) serves as a template that must be enriched to reach the

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[71] Kuruvilla considers the application as a goal in preaching when employing pericopal theology in the process of interpretation. He asserts, "Pericopal theology is a form of biblical theology and, as the theology of specific pericope under consideration, it forms the station from which the interpreter may move on to the destination of application." Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 161.

[72] David Alan Black and David S. Dockery, *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 257. Todd Scacewater also delineates the distinction between the semantic and pragmatic approaches: "Pragmatics is the study of the relationship between linguistic forms and the users of those forms. Semantics is the study of the relationships between linguistic forms, their referents, and truth conditions." Todd A. Scacewater, "Discourse Analysis: History, Topics, and Applications," in *Discourse Analysis of the New Testament Writings*, ed. Todd A. Scacewater (Dallas: Fontes, 2020), 13.

[73] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 48.

pragmatics (the inferentially discerned meaning, utterance meaning)."[74] Consequently, semantics emerges as a valid field of study, focusing mainly on word meanings and grammatical analysis,[75] aiming to address the question, "What does this sentence mean?"[76]

The Transcendent Holiness in His Greatness in Isaiah 6

Having established the importance of semantic analysis in understanding God's holiness, focus shifts to the book of Isaiah, a text that vividly portrays this concept through its narratives. The book of Isaiah prominently highlights the profound concept of God's holiness throughout its narratives. As Otto Procksh rightly observes, the theme of holiness is "central to the whole theology of Isaiah."[77] This emphasis is evident in the consistent reference to God as "the Holy One of Israel" throughout Isaiah's prophecies—a title mentioned twenty-nine times, in contrast to its sparse usage, only seven times, in the rest of the Old Testament.[78] One notable instance where God's holiness is explicitly announced and magnified can be observed in Isaiah's vision in chapter 6.

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[74] Abraham Kuruvilla, "'What Is the Author Doing with What He Is Saying?' Pragmatics and Preaching—An Appeal!," *JETS* 60, no. 3 (September 2017): 565.

[75] Bruce Corley, "A Student's Primer for Exegesis," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, ed. Bruce Corley, Steve Lemke, and Grant Lovejoy (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 12. Also, see the definition of semantics in biblical interpretation: "Although linguistic signs apply to all levels of language from morphemes and words to paragraphs and total discourses, it has long been assumed that semantics is primarily the study of the meaning of words." Johannes P. Louw, "Semantics," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1078.

[76] Corley, "A Student's Primer for Exegesis,"12.

[77] Procksch, "ἅγιος etc.," 93.

[78] Walter Kaiser Jr., *The Majesty of God in the Old Testament: A Guide for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 146–47. The book of Isaiah uses the term "holiness" significantly more than any other book in the Old Testament, with a total of thirty-three occurrences compared to twenty-six in the rest of the Old Testament. Additionally, when considering the adjectival use of the noun, Isaiah includes thirty-four times out of a total of ninety adjectival nouns that attribute holiness to God. See J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 17–18.

Specifically, this chapter emerges as a central locus of discussion, presenting a nuanced narrative that profoundly elucidates the concept of God's holiness. The semantics within this chapter—what the author was *saying* or *showing*—bring God's holiness to life through Isaiah's visionary experience and the subsequent divine commission.[79] The chapter maintains a distinct structure characterized by a sequence of proclamations, dialogues, and inquiries involving God, Isaiah, and the seraphim.[80] John Watts observes that various theophanic narratives are utilized to create a cohesive literary piece with a consistent internal structure and contextual integrity.[81] The narrative progression can be seen in table 1.[82]

Table 1. Outline of Isaiah 6:1–13

Contents	Verses
A Vision of the Holy One of Israel	6:1–4
The Prophet's Purification	6:5–7
A Hardening Message for a Calloused Audience	6:8–10
Hope in the Midst of Destruction	6:11–13

In a closer examination of the chapter, Isaiah unveils a heavenly vision that vividly portrays God's unparalleled holiness. This imagery is rich, depicting God seated on a lofty and exalted throne, with his robe filling the entire temple (6:1),[83] and seraphim

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[79] The term "semantic approach" in the context of Isa 6 (specifically Isa 6:1–13) refers to the process of interpreting the literal, linguistically encoded meanings present in the text. It involves analyzing the meanings of the words and sentences to grasp the foundational message the author intended to convey. Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text*, 49.

[80] Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, NAC, vol. 15A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 186.

[81] John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, WBC, vol. 24 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 105.

[82] See also Michael Fishbane's structural analysis where he delineates, "This scene has several components—(1) Isaiah's experience of God, (2) his terror and sense of unworthiness, (3) a purification of his mouth, (4) his prophetic mission, and (5) a synopsis of the message." Michael Fishbane, *Haftarot*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2022), 108.

[83] As Andrew Abernethy elucidates, the image of God sitting upon a throne in Isa 6:1 accentuates God's transcendent authority and imminent execution of judgment. It signifies that God is not simply being

positioned above the Lord. The phrase וָאֶרְאֶה אֶת־אֲדֹנָי (and I saw my Lord) in verse 1

signifies Isaiah's personal narration.[84]

These angelic beings, described as having six wings, use two to cover their

faces, two to cover their feet, and the remaining two to fly in the presence of the Lord (6:2).

Their actions—the shielding of their faces and feet—symbolize their deep reverence and

humility before God.[85] This is a profound gesture, denoting both their acknowledgment

of God's holiness and their own sense of unworthiness in his divine presence.[86] As they

proclaim the holiness of God, the imagery accentuates the awe-inspiring and transcendent

nature of his holiness, emphasizing his supreme and unparalleled position (6:3):

קָדוֹשׁ	קָדוֹשׁ	קָדוֹשׁ	וְאָמַר	אֶל־זֶה	זֶה	וְקָרָא
holy	holy	[is] holy	he said	to the other	one	And (he) called

כְּבוֹדוֹ:	כָל־הָאָרֶץ	מְלֹא	צְבָאוֹת	יהוה
his glory	all the earth	the fullness of	Hosts	Yahweh of

In the context of verse 3, the verb קָרָא (call) following the participle עֹמְדִים

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recognized as king in a general sense, but specifically denotes his role as the righteous judge who is about to bring forth judgment. This emphasizes the theme of God's sovereign authority. Abernathy states, "Sitting upon a throne is a common expression of royal authority. . . . Sitting on a throne, then, can connote a context where the sovereign power is about to execute judgment. . . . Isaiah's vision of the Lord sitting upon a throne is not a generic statement that YHWH is king; fundamental to this vision is that the king is about to exact judgment." Andrew T. Abernathy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom: A Thematic-Theological Approach*, NSBT 40 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 15–16.

[84] Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, 106.

[85] Smith interprets the actions of the angelic beings as a demonstration of humble worship and reverence:

> What is most important is the actions of the seraphs: what they did with their wings and what they said. With two sets of wings, they were covering their own faces and feet, not from shame or guilt, nor because of their inability to look at God. Their humble posture was likely motivated by the natural tendency to bow in worship before the holy glory of God. The most important thing about the seraphs was not their looks, their wings, or their flying. They are known for their simple yet profound antiphonal declarations of the holiness of God (6:3). (Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, 189)

[86] George Gray's statement highlights the significance of the actions of the angelic beings in Isa 6:2 within the themes of reverence and humility: "Again, Isaiah only particularizes what closely concerns him at the moment. His allusions to the seraphim serve to emphasize his thought of Yahweh's majesty and kingliness; if these lofty and superhuman beings must screen their faces, how much more mortals." George B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 1–27*, ICC (New York: C. Scribner's, 1912), 104.

(standing, as mentioned in v. 2) signifies a repeated or habitual action, establishing a rhythmic pattern in the narrative.[87] This is further enriched by the repetition of the term קָדוֹשׁ (holy), which embodies the notion of being "set apart from," or being "consecrated for," thereby emphasizing the distinctiveness of the divine entity being described.[88]

Delving deeper into the syntactical nuances, Raymond Ortlund offers an insightful analysis of the threefold repetition of קָדוֹשׁ (holy), highlighting its role in demonstrating God's unique essence. He remarks, "No other threefold adjective appears in all the Old Testament. It takes a unique linguistic contrivance to convey meaning beyond its meaning as the seraphim strain at the leash of language to say that God alone is God. He is not like us."[89] Echoing this sentiment, Gary Smith provides further comments on verse 3, noting, "The repetition of a word is a way of expressing a superlative idea in the Hebrew language (2 Kgs 25:15, 'gold gold'). Thus, the seraphs claim that God is completely, totally, absolutely, the holiest of the holy."[90] Moreover, the term כְּבוֹדוֹ (his glory, v. 3) holds a central position in Isaiah 6, symbolizing the manifestation of divine authority.[91] It essentially functions as a vivid display of God's holiness, portraying a tangible representation of his purity and splendor.[92]

The words and their relationship to the sentences in verses 3–4 underscore the essence of God's holiness: his absolute distinctiveness, his separation from all that is

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[87] Fishbane, *Haftarot*, 110.

[88] *HALOT*, 3:1067. Also, its semantic meaning could be "exalted on theophanic throne." Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 872.

[89] Raymond C. Ortlund, *Isaiah: God Saves Sinners*, PtW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 77.

[90] Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, 190.

[91] Abernethy elucidates the significance of the term כְּבוֹדוֹ (his glory) in the context, noting, "The announcement that YHWH's glory fills the earth in 6:3 highlights the prominence, or weightiness, of the king's splendor, which pervades all of creation." Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom*, 18.

[92] Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, 81.

common or profane, and his unparalleled moral purity.[93] Andrew Abernethy summarizes verse 3–4 in this way: "The cry of the seraph maintains a focus on the nature of the one on the throne: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts' (6:3). The threefold declaration—unique within the OT and thus highlighting how superlative YHWH is—of the Lord's holiness emphasizes the incomparable, inexhaustible and incomprehensible nature of YHWH."[94]

This emphasis on God's holiness is not only reflected in the language and imagery but also in Isaiah's personal reaction to the divine revelation. Isaiah's reaction to this the celestial disclosure, כִּי־נִדְמֵ֔יתִי (I am lost, or I am silent, v. 5),[95] further elucidates the semantic depth of God's holiness. Overwhelmed by the magnitude of divine purity, Isaiah confronts his own moral inadequacies. This realization prompts him to describe himself as אִ֤ישׁ טְמֵא־שְׂפָתַ֙יִם֙ (a man of unclean lips) in verse 5.[96] This stark contrast between God's holiness and human sinfulness not only underscores a central theme of the narrative

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[93] Brevard Childs contends that the holiness of God in Isa 6 is "not an ethical quality, but the essence of God's nature as separate and utterly removed from the profane." Brevard Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 55.

[94] Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom*, 18.

[95] See the subtle differences in interpretation between the two as discussed in Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, 102. Kaiser also posits that Isaiah's silence stems from his confrontation with his own sin highlighted in the purity of God in his holiness, thus preventing him from joining in the heavenly songs. Kaiser, *The Majesty of God*, 151, 249–63. Erhard Gerstenberger also agrees the interpretation of "silence," albeit for a different reason. He contends that "the words following the introductory woe (Isa 6:5) have, with few exceptions, one purpose: they seek to describe a person or a group of persons in regard to what they are doing, their deeds being the cause for the foreboding woe-cry." Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "The Woe-Oracles of the Prophets," *JBL* 81, no. 3 (September 1962): 251. In this context, Isaiah's lamentation is attributed to his silence, which is thematically linked to Uzziah's transgressions.

[96] Philip Peter Jenson's analysis offers a significant lens through which to perceive the semantic nuances of God's holiness in Isa 6. He argues that the semantic realm of holiness serves to distinguish the clean from the unclean, positing that "holiness is akin to cleanness and strongly opposed to uncleanness." Philip Peter Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 106 (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1992), 44.

but also amplifies the depth of God's holiness, highlighting both divine essence and absolute moral purity.[97]

While interpretations of God's holiness in the Old Testament span a broad spectrum, the portrayal in Isaiah's vision has resonated profoundly within scholarly and theological circles. The semantic essence of God's holiness, as articulated by the author, is intrinsically tied to the overarching theme of transcendence.[98] Gentry elucidates this connection: "The notion of divine transcendence in Isaiah 6 is there to demonstrate that the holiness of Yahweh."[99] Similarly, Emmanuel Durand perceives the holiness of God in this passage as a manifestation of divine transcendence: "God's transcendence is revealed by Godself through words and theophanies which are addressed to real human beings."[100] Albert Mohler, intensifying this statement, accentuates the transcendent dimension of God's holiness in Isaiah 6. In one of his sermons, he expounds,

> He is beyond us and separate from us. His otherness is a holy otherness. It is an otherness that is transformed into worship. It is an otherness that affirms the creator as separate from his creation and Lord over his creation. It is a transcendental separateness that belongs to God and to God alone. . . . God's people must reflect God's own purity, and we must do so in a way that matches the expectation given to us as the church is revealed in Scripture. So all of that, of the thrice holy God, all of that in the vision of Isaiah, in Isaiah in chapter 6, the "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is filled with his glory," the reality of what it means for

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[97] Stephen Seamands insists, "In fact, Isaiah 6 indicates that there are several divine attributes or characteristics associated with the holiness of God. Each of these must be recognized as a facet of divine holiness if it is to be properly conceived." Stephen Seamands, "An Inclusive Vision of the Holy Life," *AsTJ* 42, no. 2 (Fall 1987): 80.

[98] Kaiser highlights the concept of God's holiness in Isa 6 as being synonymous with transcendence: "While the word transcendent is not a biblical word, the nearest equivalent for the concept of transcendence is 'holy.'" Kaiser, *The Majesty of God*, 144. See also R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1998), 56–58; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, AB, vol. 19 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 225; J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 20; John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 125; Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom*, 40.

[99] Gentry, "The Meaning of Holy," 417.

[100] Emmanuel Durand, "God's Holiness: A Reappraisal of Transcendence," *Modern Theology* 34, no. 3 (July 2018): 431.

God to be transcendentally separate and for the holy things to be transcendentally pure.[101]

To encapsulate the insights observed from both the narrative and scholarly discussions, the semantic exploration of God's holiness in Isaiah 6 unveils his unparalleled otherness, perfect moral purity, transformative might, and total otherness, all woven within the overarching theme of transcendent holiness of God.

The Utter Transcendence of the Almighty in Revelation 4

Parallel to the theme illuminated in Isaiah 6, Revelation 4 offers a profound exploration into the concept of God's holiness.[102] This chapter is "generally considered to be the pivotal section of the book of Revelation."[103] It marks a shift in focus from the earthly matters discussed in chapter 1 through 3 to celestial realities explored in chapter 4 and 5, centering on the vision of God. Much like in Isaiah 6, the semantic lens—what the author conveyed—vividly portrays God's holiness in Revelation 4.[104] This portrayal is

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[101] R. Albert Mohler Jr., "Be Holy as I Am Holy: Awakening & Personal Holiness," Ligonier Ministries, March 12, 2018, YouTube video, 49:41, https://youtu.be/B2WICE_mefU.

[102] Paige Patterson recognizes the thematic connection between Isa 6 and Rev 4, stating, "The witness of the angels to the holiness of God in Revelation is clearly borrowed directly from the phraseology of Isaiah 6." Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, NAC, vol. 39 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2012), 156. Similarly, G. K. Beale associates Rev 4 with the imagery found in Isa 6, highlighting their semantic similarity. He maintains, "The influence of Isaiah 6 continues in v 8b, since the trisagion finds its background in Isa. 6:3, where the seraphim chant God's holiness and glory, which fills the entire earth." G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 332.

[103] Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, Library of New Testament Studies 487 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 97.

[104] The division of discourse units (pericope) in biblical texts often depends on the interpretive lens of the scholar. Different scholars may identify different theological focus as central to a passage, leading to different divisions of the text. David Aune, focusing on the theme of heavenly worship of God, divides the text from 4:2b–11. This division emphasizes the elements of worship and adoration that permeate this section of the text. On the other hand, Beale identifies the throne of God as the core theme of this passage. Consequently, he divides the text into 4:2b–3 and the rest. See David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, WBC, vol. 52A (Dallas: Word, 1997), 274–75; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 319–31.

achieved through a rich fabric of lively imagery and symbolic language, which serves to underscore God's unparalleled majesty, omnipotence, and sovereign control.[105]

The author's portrayal in Revelation 4:1–11 unveils the throne of God, surrounded by an emerald rainbow and twenty-four elders, further emphasizing his supreme authority and majesty.[106] Echoing the theme found in Isaiah 6, the ceaseless worship by the four living creatures, each representing different facets of creation, also accentuates the profound reverence and awe that God's holiness evokes.[107]

Table 2. Outline of Revelation 4:1–11

Contents	Verses
Divine Invitation to Heavenly Realm	4:1
God Seated on the Throne	4:2–3
Twenty-Four Elders Around the Throne	4:5–6a
Four Living Beings	4:6b–8a
God's Holiness in Worship	4:8b
Worship of the Created Beings	4:9–11

The text begins with the vision of an open door to heaven, θύρα ἠνεῳγμένη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, (a door standing open in heaven) in 4:1a.[108] This imagery serves as both a visual introduction and a symbolic gateway, inviting readers to explore deeper layers of divine mysteries. The voice from heaven calls John to witness, ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι (what must take

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[105] See Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Joy of Hearing: A Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 72–75.

[106] Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 51.

[107] Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 118.

[108] The term ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ (locative) can be interpreted in various ways; however, in the context of Rev 4, it seems to be a place of a spiritual realm. David Macleod suggests that this realm might be the eternal dwelling of God: "There is the eternal abode of God, a place of perfection, the place to which Jesus ascended after His resurrection (Heb. 1:3; 4:14; 7:26). Then there are the angelic regions (the 'heavenly places' of Ephesians 6:12). . . . It is probably to this place that John referred—a sphere of spiritual reality." David MacLeod, "The Adoration of God the Creator: An Exposition of Revelation 4," *BSac* 164 (April–June 2007): 202.

place) (4:1b), emphasizing not just the certainty of these future events, but their necessity within the divine plan.[109]

The narrative then narrows its focus to the detailed depiction of the throne's vision (4:2), a semantic representation of divine authority.[110] ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος (the one seated on the throne) is compared to jasper and carnelian (4:3a), precious stones that suggest his majesty and authority. The rainbow around the throne could be a reference to God's eternal covenant,[111] further emphasizing his faithfulness and unchanging nature, aspects integral to his holiness (4:3b).[112]

Moreover, the narrative introduces the ceaseless adorations of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders in verse 4, fulfilling a twofold function: they underscore the vastness and diversity of creation while illustrating the deep reverence and awe elicited by the transcendence of God's holiness.[113] These beings, possibly representing different aspects of creation,[114] exhibit an all-encompassing awareness of

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[109] Craig Keener, *Revelation*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 170.

[110] See Brian J. Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone*, NSBT 48 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019), 37–39.

[111] Gallusz highlights the nuanced significance of the rainbow imagery, noting, "Though in John's throne vision it primarily evokes the idea of God's glory, at the same time it introduces the theme of covenant that is developed later in the book." Gallusz, *Throne Motif*, 105.

[112] Beale, drawing from the theophany scenes in the Old Testament, argues that the symbolic depictions in v. 3 are more than mere representations; they are the demonstrations of God's sovereign majesty and splendor, directly echoing his transcendent holiness and manifesting his divine glory. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 320.

[113] Tabb insightfully delineates the dual function depicted in the verse, writing, "Revelation 4 presents God as the supreme sovereign who created all things (Gen. 1:1) and rules over his creation. The four living creatures and twenty-four elders model the intended vocation of all creatures: unceasing worship of the all-powerful, holy God who lives for ever and ever." Tabb, *All Things New*, 43. See also Russell S. Morton, *One upon the Throne and the Lamb: A Tradition Historical/Theological Analysis of Revelation 4–5,* Studies in Biblical Literature 110 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 96–103.

[114] Henry Swete states, "The four forms represent whatever is noblest, strongest, wisest, and swiftest in animate nature," Henry Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: Macmillan, 1906), 70.

God's holiness. Their continuous praise, which magnifies God's eternal essence, power, and holiness, reflects the reverence and worship that God's holiness demands.[115]

The narrative also describes awe-inspiring phenomena that accompany the vision of the throne. Similar to other symbols that encapsulate God's essence, the flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder serve as powerful indicators of God's commanding presence (4:5).[116]

In the following section, specifically Revelation 4:6b–8a, the text delineates the presence of four living beings situated at the location described as ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου (in the midst of the throne and around the throne, 4:6b).[117] Each of these being, adorned with six wings (4:8a), occupies a position in close proximity to the divine throne. They engage in a ceaseless chant, denoted by the term ἀνάπαυσιν (4:8b),[118] articulating a profound declaration as noted in verse 4:8c:

ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος   κύριος   ὁ θεὸς   ὁ παντοκράτωρ,
holy   holy   holy [is] the Lord   God   the Almighty

ὁ ἦν   καὶ   ὁ ὢν   καὶ   ὁ ἐρχόμενος
The one who was and   the one who is   and   the one who is coming.

The Greek term ἅγιος serves as a central theme, emphasizing God's transcendent holiness in Revelation 4. This phrase ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος (holy, holy, holy)

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[115] Mounce, drawing parallels with Isa 6, interprets vv. 3 and 4 with a central focus on the holiness of God. He observes, "Like the seraphim of Isaiah 6 they sing 'Holy, holy, holy,' but their praise is here directed to those attributes of God that are central to the Apocalypse—his holiness, power, and eternity. To acknowledge God as holy is to declare his complete separateness from all created beings. Praise of his holiness leads to an affirmation of his omnipotence: he is the Almighty." Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 125.

[116] Craig R. Koester, *Revelation*, AB, vol. 38A (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2014), 363.

[117] David Mathewson analyzes this phrase, highlighting its complex implications: "The occurrence of this expression following ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου ('in the midst of the throne') creates a conceptual difficulty, since it is hard to see how the four living creatures can be both around the throne and in the midst of the throne. . . . The two expressions together would portray the four living creatures as in close proximity to the throne and all around it." David L. Mathewson, *Revelation*, BHGNT (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2016), 64.

[118] Mathewson suggests, "The entire clause ἀνάπαυσιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς λέγοντες could be translated 'and they did not cease speaking day and night.'" Mathewson, *Revelation*, 65.

stands as a predicate adjective of a verbless clause. David Aune underscores its implication: "The threefold repetition functions to emphasize the transcendence of God."[119] Scholars, drawing from the encoded meaning of the text, interpret this term to signify a "transcendent being,"[120] or an entity that is intrinsically "wholly other."[121] Moreover, the inclusion of ὁ παντοκράτωρ (the Almighty) in this expression not only amplifies the notion of God's transcendence but also harmonizes with the divine title delineated in John's writings. Grant Osborne further clarifies the relationship between God's holiness and this particular title: "This is one of John's favorite titles for God (used nine times in the book), referring to his sovereign power and control over his created universe."[122] The semantic essence conveyed through this depiction centers on the accentuation of God's transcendently holy nature. D. A. Carson, reflecting on verse 8, insightfully observes, "John sees the four living creatures, the highest angelic beings, orchestrating the praise of this thrice-holy God and reflecting his transcendent administration."[123] Also, Mohler, drawing from the semantic content of Revelation 4, underscores the profound nature of God's transcendent holiness. He articulates, "But here in this trisagion, this thrice—repeated pattern, 'Holy, Holy, Holy,' we see God's essence, identity, and being characterized by the attribute of holiness. What

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[119] Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 303.

[120] BDAG, s.v. "ἅγιος."; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 121; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*. BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 226; Buist M. Fanning, *Revelation*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 204; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 333; Schreiner, *Joy of Hearing*, 73; J. Scott Duvall, *Revelation*, Teach the Text Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 85.

[121] Hawthorne, "Holy, Holiness," 486.

[122] Osborne also articulates the connection with Isa 6, writing, "His holiness leads naturally into his omnipotence. Isaiah 6:3 uses the divine title, 'Lord Sabaoth' (Lord of Hosts). With ὁ παντοκράτωρ (the Almighty) John follows the general LXX translation of that title." Osborne, *Revelation*, 237.

[123] D. A. Carson, "Tris-Hagion: Foundation for Worldwide Mission," *JETS* 66, no. 1 (March 2023): 7.

does the holiness of God mean? It means certainly his separateness from his creation. He is what we are not. We are finite; He is infinite. God is transcendent."[124]

The depiction of divine holiness is further accentuated in verse 10, where the elders, beings of significant stature, engage in a series of reverential actions: πεσοῦνται (they fall), προσκυνήσουσιν (they worship), and βαλοῦσιν τοὺς στεφάνους αὐτῶν (they cast their crowns) before the Almighty God.[125] Johannes Louw and Eugene Nida elucidate the term προσκυνέω (to worship) as "to express by attitude and possibly by position one's allegiance to and regard for deity."[126]

In this context, the Greek verb προσκυνήσουσιν, which literally means "to kneel before," seems to convey a different nuance. Considering the elders are already depicted as lying prostrate before the throne, the literal translation "to kneel before" seems to be an unlikely interpretation here. A possible alternative rendering for προσκυνήσουσιν is "and acknowledge his greatness."[127]

Their symbolic gesture of casting their crowns before the throne is not a mere ritual; it is an acknowledgment and submission to God's unparalleled sovereignty and holiness.[128] Essentially, the elders not only recognize God's supreme authority but also underscore his transcendent holiness. Laszlo Gallusz understands that the living creatures,

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[124] R. Albert Mohler Jr., "The Whole Earth Is Full of His Glory: The Recovery of Authentic Worship Isaiah 6:1–8," *SBJT* 2, no. 4 (December 1998): 9.

[125] Aune elucidates the significance of the combination of these verbs: "This is the first occurrence in Revelation of the paired verbs πίπτειν, 'to fall down,' and προσκυνεῖν, 'to worship,' which are used to describe two stages of a single act of adoration and thus are very nearly synonymous." Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 308.

[126] Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 540.

[127] Robert G. Bratcher and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 94.

[128] Richard Bauckham signifies those three verbs in delineating the true object of worship. He states, "False worship, such as John portrays in the worship of the beast, is false precisely because its object is not the transcendent mystery, but only the mystification of something finite." Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993), 45.

including angelic beings and elders, reflect the semantic dimension of God's divine essence. He notes, "Rather than focusing on the occupant of the throne, the detailed attention to the description of the surroundings of the heavenly seat implies the protection of the unknowable transcendence of God."[129] This thematic emphasis extends to the last verse of the text (4:11c), where the subject σὺ (you) is highlighted in the phrase σὺ ἔκτισας τὰ πάντα (you created all things). David Mathewson underscores its significance in verse 11, noting that the inclusion of σὺ is employed emphatically, adding a layer of emphasis on the entity being referred to, which in this case is God, the creator of all things.[130] This usage accentuates God's central role and authority in the narrative, highlighting his active participation in the act of creation.[131] Upon a careful examination of the vivid scene of imagery and symbolism in Revelation 4, it is evident that this chapter provides a vibrant display of God's holiness, illustrating its magnificence and transcendence. This thematic resonance finds clear parallels in the visionary narrative depicted in Isaiah 6.[132]

Having explored the intricate details and semantic depth of Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, both Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 offer a deep semantic exploration into the concept of God's holiness. In Isaiah 6, the portrayal of God on an exalted throne, attended by seraph, lays out a foundational linguistic representation of his holiness. The seraphs' unceasing declaration, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory," encapsulates the core semantic meaning of transcendent holiness of God.

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[129] Gallusz, *Throne Motif*, 105.

[130] σὺ, nominative subject of ἔκτισας. Mathewson indicates that here in v. 11, "the inclusion of σὺ is emphatic." Mathewson, *Revelation*, 68.

[131] Mathewson, *Revelation*, 68.

[132] Schreiner identifies a parallel between Isa 6 and Rev 4, both emphasizing the theme of God's holiness. He denotes, "The evocation of Isaiah 6 and the subsequent narrative in Revelation 5, where we find no one worthy to open the scroll, show that the Lord's holiness consists in his infinite and matchless moral purity." Schreiner, *Joy of Hearing*, 74.

Parallelly, Revelation 4 presents a vivid linguistic picture of God's holiness through its detailed imagery. The throne, encircled by an emerald rainbow and surrounded by twenty-four elders, linguistically reveals God's unparalleled authority and transcendence.[133] The perpetual adoration by the four living creatures, each symbolizing diverse facets of creation, semantically emphasizes the profound reverence provoked by God's holiness. Both Isaiah's and John's visions, though distinct in their narrative, harmonize to illuminate the holiness of God. The holiness depicted in both texts characterizes transcendent holiness.

The Pragmatic Meaning of God's Holiness: Immanence

The role of pragmatics in interpretation for preaching is indeed vital. It extends beyond the simple decoding of linguistic messages, emphasizing the inferential nuances of communication.[134] This approach allows for a deeper exploration of the text, where the underlying meanings, intentions, and implications are brought to the forefront, facilitating more nuanced understanding that can be conveyed in sermons. As Kuruvilla articulates, the essence of pragmatic approach in interpretation for preaching lies in comprehending what authors are *doing* (the thrust of what they wrote)[135] rather than merely "dissecting out the linguistic, grammatical, and syntactical elements of what authors are *saying*."[136]

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[133] Carson, in his analysis of Rev 4, captures the essence of the scene, emphasizing the transcendent holiness of God: "John gains glimpses into the utter transcendence of the Almighty." Carson, "Tris-Hagion," 8.

[134] See Kuruvilla, "Pragmatics: What Authors *Do* with What They *Say*" in his book, *Privilege the Text!*, 48–54; "Looking Forward: Pragmatics and Author's Doings," in *A Vision for Preaching*, 78–80; "Preaching—Argumentation Versus Demonstration," in *A Manual for Preaching*, 269–73; "What Is the Author Doing?," 555–80.

[135] Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 78.

[136] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 49.

Delving into the pragmatics of a text is both a vital and intricate task.[137] While semantics primarily concerns itself the linguistically encoded meaning, or the "sentence meaning," pragmatics focuses on the inferentially discerned meaning, also known as the "utterance meaning."[138] To put it differently, exploring the pragmatics of a text is "to catch the thrust of a text, the agenda of the author."[139] This nuanced approach allows interpreters and preachers to uncover the author's intentions and messages embedded within the text, facilitating a richer and more insightful engagement with it.

When examining Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, it becomes evident that these chapters are not merely about presenting a semantic understanding of God's transcendent holiness. They also encompass pragmatic aspects, revealing how God's holiness interacts with and influences individuals, particularly those who witness and encounter these visions.

**Identifying the Immanent Holiness
of God in Isaiah 6**

In the intricate narrative of Isaiah 6, linguistic nuances and thematic elements are woven together meticulously to communicate the profound message the author intends to convey.[140] Initially, Isaiah's vision serves a dual purpose: it acts as a culmination of the narratives from chapters 1 to 5, while simultaneously showing the prevailing circumstances

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[137] Kuruvilla himself acknowledges the complexity inherent in discerning the pragmatic dimension within the text. He concedes, "Discerning *doing* is probably one of the hardest steps in sermon preparation. . . . In the last decade or so that I have been grappling with this notion, I have come to realize that textual pragmatics—discerning authorial *doing*—is more art than science, less amenable to being codified into steps." Kuruvilla, *Manual for Preaching*, 37.

[138] Kuruvilla, "What Is the Author Doing?," 566.

[139] Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 25.

[140] According to Kuruvilla's perspective, narratives are not inherently natural; their presentation always involves selection and composition. Thus, a narrative represents a discourse rather than a mere succession of events. He affirms, "Any narrator of any text has the freedom to prioritize, schematize, synthesize, and organize his raw material for his express purpose." Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 104. John Sailhamer claims that "a text is . . . an embodiment of an author's intention, that is a strategy designed to carry out that intention." John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 46–47. To unravel the pragmatic aspects of God's holiness in Isa 6 and Rev 4, one must begin the exploration with assertions of Kuruvilla and Sailhamer because it requires meticulous consideration of the language employed and its designed structures within the text.

of God's people as depicted in the subsequent chapters. John Oswalt highlights the strategic placement of chapter 6: "It is impossible to link chapter 6 solely to chapters 1–5 or solely to chapters 7–12. It functions with both sections, both showing the way of hope for the future (in chapters 1–5) and explaining the present situation (in chapters 7–12). In this sense it is a genuinely strategic chapter, shaping and defining the book as a whole."[141]

Building on this notion, Isaiah's vision occurs in the year of King Uzziah's death, a period marked by political uncertainty in Judah. This vision pragmatically anchors the people in the unchanging holiness of God amidst shifting circumstances. The initial segment of the chapter, which references the death of King Uzziah (6:1), sets the eternal King, Lord (יהוה), against the temporal king, urging readers to shift their focus from fleeting earthly concerns to the eternal divine presence. Abernethy observes the deliberate choice of word placement in the text: "Typical Hebrew word order would place either the verb or the subject first ('my eyes have seen') in a clause, but here the object, 'the King, the LORD of hosts', occurs first for emphasis."[142]

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[141] John Oswalt convincingly argues that Isa 6 serves as both a conclusion to chaps. 1–5 and an introduction to chaps. 7–12. This dual function is a characteristic of the book's style, which often has smooth transitions, making it difficult to distinguish the end of one section from the beginning of another. While many argue that chaps. 6–8 are linked due to their autobiographical nature, the theological connections run deeper. Chaps. 7–12 can be seen as an elaboration of Isaiah's call within chap. 6. Thus, chap. 6 is pivotal, connecting both the hope for the future (chaps. 1–5) and the explanation of the present (chaps. 7–12), and plays a crucial role in shaping the entire book. John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapter 1–39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 175–76.

[142] Abernethy's pragmatical and theological analysis on Isa 6:1–3 holds significance. It illustrates how the author's intention becomes evident through the choice of words used to convey the message. Abernethy elaborates,

> For the first time in Isaiah 6 and the book of Isaiah, YHWH receives the title 'King'. This is a fitting title in the light of Isaiah 6:1–4. By using the appellation "the King [hammelek] the LORD of hosts [yhwh ṣĕbā'ôt]," a contrast occurs with the opening of chapter 6, which places the vision during the year when "the King [hammelek], Uzziah" died. This contrast highlights YHWH's eternal, unchanging nature, over against Uzziah's transience. Though the death of hammelek Uzziah (6:1) threatens the nation's stability, the reign of hammelek, the Lord of hosts (6:5), is unthreatened and immovable. Not only do 6:1 and 6:5 share the term hammelek; they both use the verb rā'â (to see): "I saw the Lord . . . my eyes have seen the King" (6:1, 5). These statements frame verses 1–5 to conceptualize the vision: *seeing God as king* ('ădōnây; hammelek). Isaiah's short statement explains why he is undone, interprets what he saw in 6:1–4, and hence the impression a reader should take away—that YHWH is king. (Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom*, 21)

Furthermore, chapter 6 carefully delineates a thematic progression through the strategic employment of two pivotal Hebrew verbs, ראה (to see) and קרא (to call/hear), which serve as linguistic markers illustrating the theological focal point of the scene. The narrative initiates with the prophet experiencing a visual revelation, denoted by the verb root ראה, *seeing*, as he beholds the Lord in verse 1.[143] This visual encounter transitions into an auditory experience where the text shifts from *seeing* to *hearing*. The prophet becomes an observer of the conversation between angelic beings, as indicated by the verb root קרא in verse 3a. Importantly, marked by angelic beings' adoration, "holy, holy, holy," signifies a pivotal transition in the theme. The depiction of the holy God continues, with the prophet once again *hearing* the voice of the Lord, which causes וַיָּנֻעוּ אַמּוֹת הַסִּפִּים, (the foundation of the thresholds shook, Isa 6:4). The narrative reaches its peak with a vivid portrayal of Isaiah's perception or *seeing* in verse 5, אֶת־הַמֶּלֶךְ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת רָאוּ עֵינָי, (my eyes have *seen* the King, the Lord of hosts). This narrative structure, unified by the Hebrew verb roots, ראה *seeing* and קרא *hearing*, unfolds as follows:

A[1] "Seeing": I saw the Lord (6:1)
  B[1] "Hearing": One called to another (6:3a)
    C *"Holy, holy, holy": The holiness of God* (6:3b)
  B[2] "Hearing": At the voice of him who called (6:4)
A[2] "Seeing": My eyes have seen the King (6:5)

This deliberate progression, seamlessly transitioning between *seeing* to *hearing* and *hearing* to *seeing*, crafts a cohesive and rounded structure. It accentuates the fluidity of the narrative and underscores the profound significance of Isaiah's transformative encounter. This experience, marked by both visual and auditory interactions, centralizes the

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[143] Notably, while Isaiah "saw the Lord" (רָאִיתִי אֶת־אֲדֹנָי) (6:1), the text artfully avoids a direct portrayal of God. Instead, it emphasizes the surroundings—the seraphim (שְׂרָפִים) (6:2), the throne, and the temple filled with smoke—underscoring the majesty of God's holiness, suggesting it is more experiential than descriptive. See Gray, *Isaiah 1–27*, 102–5; Fishbane, *Haftarot*, 107–8.

holiness of God, forging an intimate connection with the prophet's experience.[144] As Steven Mathewson elucidates, this narrative utilizes focalization through verbs of perceptions—encompassing the senses of *seeing* and *hearing*— to shift Isaiah's experience into the center of the narrative, serving a specific, deliberate agenda.[145] This narrative technique is not merely a stylistic choice but a deliberate strategy to immerse the reader in the unfolding revelation of God's immanent holiness, an experience tangible through the senses of *seeing* and *hearing*.

Moving forward to a broader perspective, Raymond Ortlund's symmetrical and thematical layout of Isaiah 6:1–13, which is presented below, exemplifies the author's structural design, a pragmatic device utilized to emphasize the central theme or idea of a passage.[146]

A^1 A great king dies, ending an era (6:1a)
 B^1 The King reigns in holiness (6:1b–4)
  C^1 The prophet despairs (6:5)
   D^1 *The prophet is cleansed* (6:6, 7)
   D^2 *The prophet is sent* (6:8–10)
  C^2 The prophet is dismayed (6:11a)
 B^2 The King reigns in judgment (6:11b–13a)
A^2 A humble remnant lives on, leading to Messiah (6:13b)

Identifying the central point of the chiasm is key to helping readers pinpoint the narrative's most crucial moment or its main theme.[147] This structure accentuates the juxtaposition of divine holiness with human sinfulness and spotlights Isaiah's transformation upon encountering the eternal king. At the heart of the chiasmus are the central points (D1 and D2), which demonstrate Isaiah's personal transformation and

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[144] Motyer explores this structural design in depth. He correlates the outer faculties, such as *seeing* and *hearing*, with the inner faculties of "understanding" and "perceiving" within this narrative. See Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 78–80.

[145] See Steven D. Mathewson's explanation of the narrative focalization in *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 73–74.

[146] Ortlund, *Isaiah*, 76.

[147] Walter Kaiser Jr., *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 77.

commissioning.[148] Through this structural analysis, the passage beckons readers to a transformative experience of God's immanent holiness, challenging them to recognize their own sinfulness, seek cleansing, and respond to God's call, echoing Isaiah's actions.

Focusing on a key detail, verse 3, where the vision of the Lord seated on the throne is accompanied by seraphim singing "Holy, holy, holy," transcends a mere portrayal of God's transcendent holiness; it actively serves as a call to action. In other words, the holiness of God in this text is active, not merely static.[149] Essentially, God's holiness, as portrayed between verses 3–11, is not a static quality but a dynamic force, encouraging proactive participation and response. It suggests that the depiction of God's holiness in the text is meant to inspire action, illustrating a vibrant and active aspect of divine holiness. Gentry insightfully underscores this perspective, demonstrating the significance of the author's word choices in verse 3–4, particularly concerning the location of the throne: "In Isaiah 6 the Lord is not in the דְּבִיר, or holy of holies, He is in the הֵיכָל, the front room, the great hall of his palace. Note that the standard term for the temple as a whole, בַּיִת, is used in verse 4 and clearly contrasts with הֵיכָל in verse 1."[150] Gentry then emphasizes the pragmatic dimension of this word choice, which accentuates the immanence of God's holiness. He contends,

> This makes it absolutely clear that the Lord is in the front room, because Isaiah is at the doorway and would not have been able to see into the back room from the doorway. So while God is awesome in His majesty. His holiness does not mean that He is the "Totally Other," nor does it speak of His separation. Just the opposite in fact-here God is coming to meet man (as in Exodus 3), which fits the central theme of this new section of Isaiah: Immanuel, that is, "God with us."[151]

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[148] See the value of identifying a chiastic structure in the Old Testament narratives in Mathewson, *Art of Preaching*, 253–56.

[149] Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom*, 18.

[150] Gentry, "The Meaning of Holy," 410.

[151] Gentry, "The Meaning of Holy," 417; Peter J. Gentry, "No One Holy, Like the Lord" (sermon delivered at Faculty Addresses, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, September 29, 2010).

In reaction to the manifestation of God's holiness, Isaiah's immediate exclamation, "Woe is me!" (6:5), not only amplifies the personal implications of encountering divine holiness but also extends this crisis to a communal dimension, acknowledging the unclean lips of his people.[152] This narrative trajectory, from revelation to personal crisis to communal implication, encapsulates the progression from the transformative power of God's transcendent holiness to his closeness to his people, culminating in the theme of immanent holiness.[153] The narrative then transitions to Isaiah's purification and commission (6:6–7). In a demonstration of divine sovereignty and compassion, the Lord cleanses Isaiah's lips with a coal from the altar, a symbolic act representing the purification of his sin (6:7b):

עֲוֹנֶ֑ךָ וְסָ֣ר עַל־שְׂפָתֶ֑יךָ זֶ֖ה נָגַ֥ע
your guilt   and he has removed   (on) your lips   this   (he) touched

תְּכֻפָּֽר׃ וְחַטָּאתְךָ֖
it is annulled   and your sin

This action brings the author's theological emphasis to the forefront, revealing a dual purpose: it unveils human inadequacies while also offering hope for transformation and redemption, as seen in the seraphim's act of touching Isaiah's lips with a burning coal (6:7).[154] Through an intricate interplay of linguistic devices and thematic contrasts, Isaiah 6 challenges readers to move beyond mere acknowledgment, inviting them to a profound,

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[152] Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, 192.

[153] Peter J. Gentry, "Sizemore Lecture II: No One Holy Like the Lord," *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 33–34.

[154] The seraphim, often associated with judgment due to their burning nature, further emphasize the theme of purification and redemption. Oswalt comments, "All of the evidence makes it appear that he considers his case hopeless. Yet out of the smoke comes a seraph with a purifying coal. God does not reveal himself to destroy us, but rather to redeem us." Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 184.

transformative experience of God's immanent holiness.[155] Geoffrey Grogan adeptly

captures this pragmatic dimension, noting the balance between divine transcendence and

immanence in Isaiah 6, as manifested in Isaiah's experience:

> The language of fullness, employing the same Hebrew verb (mālēʾ), occurs three times in these verses (vv.1, 3, 4), twice in application to the temple and once to the whole earth. So this passage, insisting as it does on the awesome transcendence of the sovereign God, also emphatically teaches his immanence. His transcendence is not remoteness, or aloofness but is known through his presence in his created world and temple. Divine transcendence and immanence are always held in balance in biblical theism. Isaiah himself says later (12:6), "Great is the Holy One of Israel among you."[156]

In conclusion, these textual signposts guide readers in navigating the narrative's

flow, discerning the author's intentions—what he is *doing* with what he is *saying*—and

grasping the theological thrust of the text. Isaiah 6 is not merely a recounting of a prophet's

vision of God's transcendent holiness; it stands as a profound theological and thematic

invitation for readers to immerse themselves in the immanence of God's holiness.

Discerning the Immanent Holiness
of God in Revelation 4

In his insightful analysis, David deSilva observes, "Revelation exhibits

deliberative goals also in the visions. . . . In several instances the calls to action will be

clarified by means of the display throughout the visions."[157] This nuanced viewpoint finds

a compelling illustration in the scriptural passage of Revelation 4:1–11, a passage that

emphatically highlights the immanent holiness of God as the foundation of authentic

worship.

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[155] Fishbane emphasizes the importance of a pragmatic and theological approach to reading this verse: "Hence, the divine promise of the text is not limited to one historical time but addresses the hope of anyone who would read this prophecy in faith." Fishbane, *Haftarot*, 108.

[156] Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Isaiah*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, *Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 55–56.

[157] David DeSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 83.

Revelation 4 unveils a vivid depiction of John's vision of the heavenly realm, also known as "throne-room vision."[158] This pericope stands as a demonstration to the pragmatic approach adopted in the narrative structure of Revelation 4, markedly distinguishing from the subsequent chapter Revelation 5.[159] This differentiation is primarily rooted in the linguistic nuances employed, characterized by the presence of verbless clauses or participles that punctuate the text.[160]

Upon closer examination, John's linguistic strategy in Revelation 4:1–11, it becomes evident that the author employs specific linguistic nuances to direct the reader's attention to a detailed portrayal.[161] This section is distinctively marked by the utilization of Greek nominal clauses, which are pivotal in shaping the narrative. Mathewson notes, "Revelation 4 contains numerous nominal clauses containing a subject and sometimes a predicate nominative or adjective, or participle with no indicative verb, rather than sentences with an indicative verb filling the predicate slot in the sentence."[162] Instead of

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[158] See the diverse interpretations of the space John occupied. Erin Palmer, "Imaging Space in Revelation: The Heavenly Throne Room and New Jerusalem," *Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 35–47.

[159] See Larry Hurtado, "Revelation 4–5 in the Light of Jewish Apocalyptic Analogies," *JSNT* 25, no. 8 (September 1985): 105–24.

[160] Mathewson highlights a marked linguistic contrast between chaps. 4 and 5 of Revelation. He observes, "Rev 4 is of a different character than Rev 5 because indicative verbs, which carry the story forward, are less frequent in Rev 4; instead, verbless clauses or participles predominate." Mathewson, *Revelation*, 58. This linguistic variation between the chapters can be attributed to their distinct thematic emphases. Daryl Charles elucidates, "Chapter 4 concerns itself with the One sitting on the throne; however, the audience is confronted with two new images in chapter 5: the scroll and the Lamb." Daryl Charles, "An Apocalyptic Tribute to the Lamb (Rev 5:1–14)," *JETS* 34, no. 4 (December 1991): 462.

[161] John's primary objective in describing the heavenly throne is not merely to draw a detailed picture of God who seated on the throne. Rather, as Schreiner rightly posits, John presents a more indirect vision of God: "John probably didn't expect us to be so precise in untangling the portrait given, intending readers to be affected by the general impact of the vision." Schreiner, *Joy of Hearing*, 72.

[162] Mathewson, *Revelation*, 58.

merely delineating a sequence of actions, the author's linguistic choices emphasize a *state of being*, aiming to amplify the grandeur and majesty of the throne.[163]

Similar to Isaiah 6, as Stephen Smalley observes, "verbs of seeing and hearing are important in John's writing."[164] This is evident in verse 1, where the verbs εἶδον (*seeing*) and ἤκουσα (*hearing*) set the fundamental framework. John then skillfully modifies his linguistic strategy, incorporating an intentional use of the present and future tense, remarkably in the form of participles, in contrast to the preceding section of the text.[165] This shift in linguistic strategy pragmatically and meticulously sets the stage for a narrative that is composed to unfold with a specific, deliberate agenda.[166] This technique seamlessly transitions the narrative from a tranquil and static depiction, representing a *state of being*, to a vibrant and dynamic imagery, capturing the essence of its central theme: heavenly worship, a manifestation inspired by God's holiness.[167] This theme resonates

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[163] Steven Thompson, *The Apocalypse and Semitic Syntax* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1985), 83, quoted in Mathewson, *Revelation*, 59.

[164] Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (London: SPCK, 2005), 113.

[165] In Rev 4:1–7, verbless clauses are predominantly used (descriptive or static). However, after 4:8, trisagion*,* the narrative shifts away from verbless clauses, employing present and future tenses along with participle forms to describe the scene. See further details in Mathewson, *Revelation*, 58–68. See also the discussion of future tense in Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 276. Similarly, Smalley explains John's verb choice, writing, "There are three accusatives in the Greek of this verse, with apparently no verb to govern them: θρόνους (*thronous*, 'thrones'), πρεσβυτέρους (*presbyterous*, 'elders') and στεφάνους (*stephanous*, 'crowns'). It is possible that they are governed by the verb εἶδον (*eidon*, 'I looked', or 'I saw') in verse 1. . . . Perhaps this is a further example of John's immediate and dramatic, if strictly ungrammatical, style." Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 118.

[166] In his analysis, Mathewson identifies the role of the usage of the Greek present tense in past-time contexts in narrative, naming it the "historical" or "narrative" present. From a pragmatic standpoint, this stylistic choice operates as a pivotal tool to realign the reader's attention toward the central theme. Mathewson, *Revelation*, 63.

[167] Craig Keener characterizes John's unique linguistic approach as "impressionistic" rather than "photographic." This analogy aptly describes John's technique of linguistic dramatization, which gradually transitions from a static depiction to one with escalating active details. Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 1:50.

profoundly in the latter part of the chapter, particularly within the passage of Revelation 4:6b–11b.[168]

In terms of the thematic chiasm, the structure of chapter 4 is shown as follows:

A[1] (4:1) Introduction: Invitation to the Heavenly Vision
    B[1] (4:2–3) Initial Observation: Description of the Throne and the One Seated on it
        C[1] (4:4) Fundamental Paradigm: Twenty-Four Elders in Static Status
            D[1] (4:5a) Cosmic Disturbances: Lightning, Rumblings, and Peals of Thunder
                E[1] (4:5b) Before the Throne: Description of Seven Spirits of God
                    F[1] (4:6a) Before the Throne: Description of Sea of Glass
                      G[1] (4:6b–8a) Central Focus: *Worshipping God by Four Living Creatures*
                      G[2] (4:8b)   Central Focus: *Worshipping God Evoked by God's Holiness*
                    F[2](4:9a) On the Throne: Description of Contents of Worship
                E[2](4:9b) On the Throne: Description of God's Attributes
            D[2] (4:10a) Cosmic Worship: Ceaseless Worship by Twenty-Four Elders
        C[2] (4:10b) Fundamental Paradigm: Twenty-Four Elders in Dynamic Status
    B[2] (4:11a) Culmination: Acknowledgement of the Worthiness of the One Seated on
                the Throne
A[2] (4:11b) Conclusion: Invitation to Authentic Worship

This structure validates the narrative's linguist and symmetrical progression, with particular emphasis on the central sections (G1 and G2), where the focus is intensely on the worship evoked by God's holiness. In other words, the narrative artfully transitions from an initial static portrayal of the twenty-four elders to a more vibrant and lively depiction. At its core, the structure of the narrative shifts from a state of stillness to one of vibrant activity, culminating in authentic worship that is deeply inspired by the holiness of God. This transition reveals the author's deliberate narrative progression—what the author is *doing* with what he is *saying* or *showing*—which seamlessly integrates the conveyed messages with the events as they unfold.

Delving deeper into the narrative and its details, the opening phrase Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον (4:1a),[169] which translates as "after this I looked," actively engages the reader

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[168] James Hamilton Jr., *Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches*, PtW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 141.

[169] Michael Kuykendall argues, "Μετὰ ταῦτα should be understood as a discourse marker, not a temporal marker. This is enhanced through its association with prominent narrative participants. Heavenly

in a visionary journey, transcending a mere sequential narrative. DeSilva rightly interprets the role of this introductory phrase, stating, "John invites the audiences to see God seated upon God's throne, projecting an aura resembling nothing on earth except its most precious gems and frightening natural phenomena."[170] The subsequent description of θύρα ἠνεῳγμένη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ (an open door in heaven, 4:1b) serves as a gateway to the divine, emphasizing God's accessibility and nearness.[171]

The voice that John perceives (ἤκουσα), characterized as the primary voice in this narrative, is not merely an auditory detail; it operates as a dynamic entity, signaling a shift in the narrative. This voice, possibly attributed to Christ as indicated by the masculine participle λέγων, extends beyond mere semantic level of communication. It beckons John to immerse himself in the unfolding divine display described as δείξω σοι ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι, (what must take place) in verse 1. Stephen Pattemore underscores its significance as a narrative transition marker, asserting, "Both εἶδον and ἤκουσα draw attention to a new feature, shifting the focus, or the breadth or depth of vision, from the previous segment but still within the same perspective."[172] Furthermore, the directive ἀνάβα ὧδε (come up here) in verse 1 not only delineates the trajectory of the pericope but also functions as a pragmatic invitation to deeper intimacy, accentuating God's yearning for a closer

voices are mentioned in 4:1 and 19:1 and angels are mentioned in 7:2 and 18:1. Moreover, ἐν πνεύματι and δείξω σοι are connected closely with μετὰ ταῦτα, adding further support that John is commencing a new section." Michael Kuykendall, "The Twelve Visions of John: Another Attempt at Structuring the Book of Revelation," *JETS* 60, no. 3 (September 2017): 541.

[170] DeSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 196.

[171] Metzger's exploration of John's utilization of the term ἠνεῳγμένη (open) bears considerable significance. He articulates, "In the Greek language in which the book was written the word translated 'open' signifies not only that the door to heaven stood open but that it remains open. Thus, the way is clear for others as well as the seer to appreciate the splendor and majesty of the heavenly scene." Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 47.

[172] Stephen Pattemore, "Revelation," in Scacewater, *Discourse Analysis*, 737.

relationship with his people. Aune further elucidates the intimate connotation of ὧδε, interpreting it as indicating "a position relatively near the speaker."[173]

The passage from Revelation 4:2 provides profound insight into the nature and purpose of the throne depicted in the vision. Central to this narrative is the θρόνος (the throne), and more importantly, the one seated upon it.[174] This throne emerges as a pivotal element in the initial segment of the vision, with Gallusz asserting that its portrayal, along with its occupant, forms the "theological fountainhead" of John's vision.[175] As the narrative unveils, it presents a scene that, while static, radiates grandeur, depicting the throne in the process of being positioned or established, all through John's observant eyes.

This majestic atmosphere is further amplified by the presence of twenty-four surrounding thrones in 4:4. The surrounding twenty-four thrones (4:4), with the elders seated upon them, clothed in white robes, and having golden crowns on their heads, intensify the atmosphere of divine authority. The elders, adorned in their majestic garb, are not merely passive entities; their strategic positioning near the throne vividly illustrates their intimate connection to the essence of God's throne.

As the narrative progresses, John's dynamic vision is intensified by the "flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder" emanating from the throne (4:5). The introduction of the verb ἐκπορεύονται (came out) in verse 5 acts as the author's signpost, transitioning the narrative toward the theological climax of the passage. This verb choice also underscores the author's linguistic shift—from a static to a dynamic portrayal. Mathewson observes that the present tense usage of ἐκπορεύομαι in verse 5 is

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[173] Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 282.

[174] MacLeod elucidates,

The Greek in verse 2 reads, ἰδοὺ θρόνος ἔκειτο ("behold, a throne being set"), that is, it was being set up as John watched for a particular purpose, namely, to oversee the judgments recorded in chapters 6–19. Whatever throne of God is mentioned in the Scriptures—eternal, millennial, great white throne, the throne of chapters 4–5—it partakes of all the authority of the triune God because of the One who is seated on it. (MacLeod, "Adoration of God the Creator," 204)

[175] Gallusz, *Throne Motif*, 97.

instrumental in highlighting that the narrative's focus is fluidly shifting "in order to focus attention on an upcoming element."[176] In this context, the choice of verb not only conveys the semantic but also guides the reader's attention toward the heart of the narrative in the second part of the narrative: the worship originating from the profound, immanent holiness of the one seated on the throne.

The description of the four living creatures in 4:6b–8a is pivotal, underscoring the author's deliberate narrative development. Each creature, distinct in its appearance, is situated both ἐν μέσῳ (in the midst of), and κύκλῳ (around) the throne as described in verse 6. This specific positioning emphasizes their intimate proximity to God.[177] Robert Mounce insightfully notes that "the living creatures are a personification of divine immanence in nature."[178] Additionally, Dan Lioy points out a key aspect of their role: "the four living creatures are leading others in worship."[179] The repeated declaration of God's holiness by the creatures, ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος (holy, holy, holy) in 4:8, serves the climax of the narrative. G. K. Beale aptly observes that this praise "makes explicit the main point of the vision and of the whole chapter: God is to be glorified because of his holiness and sovereignty."[180]

This description of heavenly worship, in its entirety, is more than a mere visual representation; it is a dynamic act, designed to amplify the profound reality of God's sovereign dominion over all creation. Allen Ross accentuates that the immediate and

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[176] Mathewson, *Revelation*, 63.

[177] Fanning insightfully articulates the significance of the creatures' positioning in relation to the throne: "Their location is what John mentions first, again orienting them to God's throne: they form the innermost circle around God himself. They are 'on each side of the throne and around the throne' (v. 6b), offering worship and service to God and guarding his purity and holiness." Fanning, *Revelation,* 202. In the similar line of thought, Patterson acknowledges that "these living beings are symbolic of creation and the divine immanence." Patterson, *Revelation*, 155.

[178] Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 124–25.

[179] Dan Lioy, *The Book of Revelation in Christological Focus*, Studies in Biblical Literature 58 (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 79.

[180] Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 332.

spontaneous response to this vision is "the great anthem of praise."[181] Their worship

unfolds in this manner (4:11):

ἄξιος   εἶ,   ὁ κύριος   καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν, λαβεῖν τὴν δόξαν
Worthy you are, (our) Lord   and   our God,   to receive glory

καὶ τὴν τιμὴν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν ὅτι   σὺ   ἔκτισας τὰ πάντα
and honor   and power   because you created all (things)

καὶ   διὰ   τὸ θέλημά σου   ἦσαν   καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν
and because of your will they existed and were created

This natural and profound reaction serves as a performative element, anchoring

the reader in the central theological tenet of the narrative: the immanent holiness of God.[182]

While John does not explicitly detail his reaction to this vision, it can be inferred to mirror

Isaiah's exclamation, "Woe is me!" (Isa 6:5) or even John's own earlier encounter with

the resurrected Jesus where he "fell at his feet as though dead" (Rev 1:17). John's narrative

technique—he is *doing* something with what he is *saying* or *showing*—guides readers to

perceive the intrinsic connection between God's holiness and worship, a response

inherently evoked by God's immanent holiness. Bob Kauflin's analysis on the role of

God's holiness in worship is particularly illuminating, especially regarding the

significance of the trisagion in Revelation. He comments,

> Can God get any nearer? Yes. God's immanence takes on radical new meaning for
> Christians: God is not only with us—he actually dwells *in* us. The transcendent God
> has taken up residence in his people for his glory. And that knowledge is a constant
> source of wonder, gratefulness, and comfort. God is immanent. He's our brother,
> shepherd, and Savior. His mercies are "new every morning," and he is able to
> sympathize with us in all our weaknesses (Lamentations 3:23; Hebrews 4:15). He is

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[181] Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 480.

[182] Gallusz astutely posits that the descriptions of the trisagion communicate both the transcendent holiness and the immanent nature of God: "While in the first the emphasis [description] lies on the divine transcendence, the second seems to highlight the notion of immanence . . . in chs. 4–5 God's immanence is conveyed." Gallusz, *Throne Motif*, 327.

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Immanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23, quoting Isaiah 7:14). . . . God is both transcendent and immanent. Our corporate worship should reflect this distinction.[183]

At its core, Revelation 4, with its linguistic nuances and thematic depth, offers a profound insight into God's immanent holiness. The chapter underscores the significance of proximity, evident both in the spatial positioning of celestial beings and the deliberate use of Greek tenses to convey immediacy. This emphasis challenges believers to discern the theological focus of the text: the essence of authentic worship rooted in God's holiness. It is a beckoning, a pragmatic invitation to a transformative experience of God's intimate presence, which finds its expression in worship, urging them to immerse themselves in the immanence of God's holiness.

Conclusion

In this chapter a deep exploration of the semantic and pragmatic dimensions of God's holiness as revealed in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 is illuminated. While certain studies highlight the complexities and ambiguities related to the concept of holiness, these biblical passages present a harmonious blend of God's transcendent majesty and his immanent closeness to his people. This harmonious interplay provides a profound foundation for interpreters, preachers, and believers alike, beckoning them toward a transformative encounter with God's holiness.

Transitioning into chapter 3, the emphasis will be on the realm of hermeneutics. Proper interpretation acts as the bridge that connects the ancient Scriptures to contemporary understanding and application. With the foundational insights from chapter 2 as a guide, chapter 3 is set to delve into the critical art and science of biblical interpretation, which ensures that the exploration into the essence of God's holiness is both theologically sound and spiritually enriching. The forthcoming chapter is designed to equip readers with the

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[183] Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 161–62.

necessary hermeneutical skills to navigate the complexities of interpreting and proclaiming

God's unparalleled holiness.

CHAPTER 3

GOD'S HOLINESS IN FRONT OF THE TEXT:
HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH FOR
PREACHING GOD'S HOLINESS

The preceding chapter shed light on the multifaceted nature of God's holiness in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, focusing on both its semantic and pragmatic dimensions. To comprehensively understand these elements, particularly the dynamic interplay between the transcendent and immanent aspects of God's holiness, the establishment of a solid hermeneutical foundation is essential.[1] This chapter underscores the necessity of a refined hermeneutical approach in the nuanced task of interpreting and articulating God's holiness in preaching.[2]

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[1] See the recent works on the necessity of hermeneutics and its importance for biblical interpretation and preaching in Stanly Porter, *Interpretation for Preaching and Teaching: An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2023), 1–23; Scott M. Gibson and Matthew D. Kim, introduction to *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*: *Four Views on Preaching Today*, ed. Scott M. Gibson and Matthew D. Kim (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), xi–xiii; William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2017), 99–115. Stanley E. Porter and Beth M. Stovell, "Introduction: Trajectories in Biblical Hermeneutics," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Beth M. Stovell (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 9–23; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 15–32; Robert L. Thomas, "Current Hermeneutical Trends: Toward Explanation or Obfuscation?," *JETS* 39, no. 2 (June 1996): 241–56; Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 1–25; David S. Dockery, "Preaching and Hermeneutics," in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 141–50.

[2] Grant Osborne rightly observes the indispensable role of sound hermeneutics in preaching, stating:

The final goal of hermeneutics is not systematic theology but the sermon. The actual purpose of Scripture is not explanation but exposition, not description but proclamation. God's Word speaks to every generation, and the relationship between meaning and significance summarizes the hermeneutical task. It is not enough to recreate the original intended meaning of a passage. We must elucidate its significance for our day. (Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006], 29)

This chapter is meticulously designed, integrating both theoretical perspectives and practical accessibility, to facilitate a comprehensive interpretation of God's holiness depicted in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. Each section is organized to incorporate critical hermeneutical discussions and valuable insights, enriching the interpretation of texts centered on God's holiness.

The necessity of adopting a robust interpretative framework, characterized by academic rigor and practical applicability, is emphasized in this chapter, which lays the foundation for an in-depth study of God's holiness, encompassing both its transcendent and immanent aspects. The chapter then shifts focus to the necessity of an author-oriented hermeneutic, investigating the detailed relationship that exists between the author, the text, and the reader. The focus is on the authenticity and integrity of the text's meaning, anchored in the authors' original intentions.[3] The potential pitfalls associated with a reader-responsive hermeneutic are also examined, in relation to the New Homiletic's influence on homiletical principles.[4] This segment is dedicated to a critical assessment of the methodology of the New Homiletic, suggesting a balanced view that illuminates both the strengths and weaknesses of this approach.

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[3] This dissertation aligns with the principle of "singular meaning" in biblical interpretation, a stance reinforced by article 7 of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics. The article firmly states, "We affirm that the meaning expressed in each biblical text is single, definite, and fixed." See International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics," *JETS* 25, no. 4 (December 1982): 398. Walter Kaiser Jr. also supports this perspective, emphasizing that "exegesis will seek to identify the *single* truth-intention of individual phrases, clauses, and sentences as they make up the thought of paragraphs, sections, and, ultimately, entire books." Walter Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 47. Kaiser's perspective is further elaborated in another of his works, "The Single Intent of Scripture," in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 55–69.

[4] Richard Eslinger is credited with popularizing the term "New Homiletic," although he was not the first to introduce this hermeneutical methodology for preaching. Key figures like Fred Craddock, recognized for his inductive preaching style, Eugene Lowry, known for the homiletical plot, and David Buttrick, associated with the phenomenological movement, have been instrumental in advancing this methodology. Richard Eslinger proposed the term "New Homiletic" to describe a shift in homiletical approaches that marked a departure from the traditional author-centered interpretation. See Richard L. Eslinger, *A New Hearing: Living Options in Homiletical Method* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 13–14.

The chapter then transitions to a comprehensive review of three interpretive views—theocentric interpretation,[5] Christ-centered interpretation,[6] and Christiconic interpretation.[7] Each view is explored in detail, offering insights into their methodologies and implications for preaching God's holiness. The Christiconic view, as articulated by Abraham Kuruvilla, receives special emphasis. His approach places a significant emphasis on *the world in front of the text*,[8] highlighting the balance between the text's semantic and pragmatic aspects. This perspective illuminates that the text does more than just convey

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[5] Kenneth Langley defines "theocentric preaching" as a sermon that "makes God the subject of the sermon's sentences." Kenneth Langley, "Theocentric View," in Gibson and Kim, *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, 83. Sidney Greidanus identifies this methodology as a continuation of evangelical tradition, tracking its roots back to the era of the Reformers, especially in Calvin's sermon method. He writes, "In the light of this comment as well as others we have heard from Calvin so far, it is surprising that his sermons on the Old Testament can, in general, best be described as God-centered rather than Christ-centered." Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 145. See also Greidanus's evaluation of the theocentric approach to preaching in his seminal work, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 114–18. See also Kenneth Langley's arguments regarding theocentric hermeneutics and its benefits compared to the Christ-centered approach in "When Christ Replaces God at the Center of Preaching," *JEHS* 9, no. 1 (March 2009): 53–79.

[6] Graeme Goldsworthy emphasizes that this methodological approach was predominantly championed by the Reformers. He states, "Christ-centered interpretation was a feature of the Reformation, which marked a radical departure from medieval Catholicism. . . . To understand the Bible correctly requires faith in Christ along with the Spirit's enlightenment. Christ is revealed as the meaning of the Scriptures so that no part can be rightly understood without reference to him." Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 85. In the modern era, the concept of "Christ-centered interpretation" has developed, notably from the contribution of Edmund Clowney, especially with his publication of *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961). For further insights in a similar vein, see also Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 11–44; Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundation and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 56–74; and Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 247–83; Dennis Johnson, *Heralds of the King*, ed. Dennis E. Johnson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 165–68; Dennis Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 54–61.

[7] Abraham Kuruvilla introduces his own term "Christiconic interpretation," articulating it as a form of interpretation for preaching that "facilitates the conformation of the children of God into the image of the Son of God by the power of God." Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody, 2013), 60.

[8] See Kuruvilla's definition on this concept in *Text to Praxis: Hermeneutics and Homiletics in Dialogue*, Library of New Testament Studies 393 (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 19–35; *Privilege the Text!*, 39–43; and *A Vision for Preaching: Understanding the Heart of Pastoral Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 92–96.

information; it actively engages and shapes the contemporary reader.[9] He views the text as a dynamic entity that initiates a transformative interaction, extending beyond a simple exchange of information. Echoing this sentiment, Kuruvilla asserts, "A biblical pericope thus is more than informing; it is also transforming."[10] His methodology is rooted in the conviction that the biblical text, with its a transhistorical essence, has the intrinsic power to shape the reader's character and conduct in alignment with God's will.[11] This part of the chapter is particularly enriching, offering a deep dive into the theological foundations present in the texts of Isaiah and Revelation. It provides practical insights on how to project God's transcendent and immanent holiness as demanded by the text.

A Valid Hermeneutic for Legitimate Interpretation

The discipline of hermeneutics, firmly rooted in the nuanced methods of interpreting texts, serves as a cornerstone for theologians and preachers seeking the legitimate meaning of ancient and sacred texts.[12] The essence of a valid interpretation is

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[9] Gibson and Kim succinctly encapsulate Kuruvilla's approach to hermeneutics. They note, "Kuruvilla's hermeneutic distinguishes what the author was doing from what he's saying (semantics and pragmatic*s*). His focus on what the scriptural author was doing provides a natural connection to life application." Scott M. Gibson and Matthew D. Kim, "Conclusion," in *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*: *Four Views on Preaching Today*, ed. Scott M. Gibson and Matthew D. Kim (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 159.

[10] Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 115.

[11] Kuruvilla contends, "All literary texts function in this manner and project worlds in front of themselves; thus, a text serves as an instrument of that action. In this way, such discourses have validity for the future, capable as they are of being applied, despite the effects of distanciation." Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 42.

[12] Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard explain that "hermeneutics" is a term used to "describe the task of explaining the meaning of the Scriptures." Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 39. Further illuminating the concept, James Sanders characterizes hermeneutics as the art of understanding: "It refers to the method and techniques used to make a text understandable in a world different from the one in which the text originated." James Sanders, "Hermeneutics," in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, ed. William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 175. In the context of its application to preaching, Eugene Nida and William Reyburn define hermeneutics as "pointing out parallels between the biblical message and present-day events and determining the extent of relevance and the appropriate response for the believer." Eugene A. Nida and William D. Reyburn, *Meaning across Cultures: A Study on Bible Translating* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1981), 30.

inexorably linked to several critical factors: discerning the author's original intention,[13] identifying the text's key facets including its historical background, linguistic nuances, literary genre, and cultural relevance, and distinguishing between the foundational meaning of a text and its broader significance for modern contexts.[14] Henry Virkler and Karelynne Ayayo astutely observes that "hermeneutics is needed, then, because of the historical, cultural, philosophical, and linguistic gaps that blocks a spontaneous, accurate understanding of God's Word."[15]

In the absence of a methodologically rigorous and systematic hermeneutical approach there exists a tangible risk of either distorting or oversimplifying the intricate layers of meaning within a text.[16] Such distortions can compromise the authenticity of the original message and might result in interpretations that fail to resonate with contemporary readers. Thus, it becomes imperative to adopt a hermeneutic approach that balances academic rigor with practical relevance, particularly in the context of preaching since "hermeneutics drives preaching."[17] This approach guarantees that interpretations remain faithful to the original intent while also offering relevance and insight for today's readers.

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[13] In light of the shift in hermeneutics toward reader-oriented interpretations, E. D. Hirsch's influential approach seeks to anchor meaning in authorial intent. Hirsch astutely observes that once the author was decisively removed as the determiner of a text's meaning, it slowly became evident that there was no sufficient principle for assessing the validity of an interpretation. He writes, "Once the author had been ruthlessly banished as the determiner of his text's meaning, it very gradually appeared that no adequate principle existed for judging the validity of an interpretation." E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1967), 3.

[14] See also Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 39–53; Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 24–33; Scott A. Blue, "The Hermeneutic of E. D. Hirsch, Jr. and Its Impact on Expository Preaching: Friend or Foe?," *JETS* 44, no. 2 (June 2001): 254–61.

[15] Henry A. Virkler and Karelynne Ayayo, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 20.

[16] Rick Byargeon emphasizes the necessity of sound hermeneutics in interpretation, cautioning that without it "we open ourselves to allegorical and spiritualizing applications of the text." Rick Byargeon, "Thus Saith the Lord Interpreting the Prophetic Word," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, ed. Bruce Corley, Steve Lemke, and Grant Lovejoy (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 312.

[17] Gibson and Kim, "Conclusion," 158.

Delving into profound topics like God's holiness, interpreters and preachers are tasked with navigating the complex dimensions of divine nature. As highlighted in chapter 2, two primary facets emerge. The first pertains to the transcendence of God, which alludes to his unparalleled majesty and distinctiveness. Conversely, the second emphasizes the immanence of God, spotlighting his accessibility, closeness, and relational attributes. As Bruce Ware insightfully observes, "To think God correctly, then, we must establish our framework for understanding God as containing both of these key elements—both the transcendent otherness of God in himself, apart from creation, and also the immanent nearness of God with every aspect of the created order."[18] Addressing these dual aspects presents a complex interpretative challenge, necessitating a robust hermeneutical approach.

From the discussions outlined previously, it becomes evident that interpretations, especially those probing deep theological concepts, hold considerable weight for both faith communities and individual believers.[19] Lacking a solid hermeneutical foundation can precipitate academic oversights and theological ambiguities, deeply impacting faith and daily practice of God's people. As David Schrock succinctly puts it, "Bad hermeneutics undermines good theology."[20] Moreover, the act of preaching and sermon preparation are not solitary endeavors. Preachers, deeply entrenched within their communities, craft sermons that serve and resonate with them, underscoring their role as integral members of

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[18] Bruce A. Ware, *God's Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 35. Jens Zimmermann's insight is relevant in this context. He emphasizes a theological hermeneutic that connects self-knowledge with understanding God. In other words, the goal of interpretation is to both know God and oneself, and to understand the relationship between the two. He articulates, "Hermeneutics is all about self-knowledge, and self-knowledge is impossible without knowledge of God." Jens Zimmermann, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics: An Incarnational-Trinitarian Theory of Interpretatio*n (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 7.

[19] Kuruvilla offers insight into the interrelationship of interpretation and community: "Thus, for its reading and application, the arena of action is the congregation of God's people of all time. This normative, fixed corpus of religious literature is to be interpreted within the community of faith that acknowledges it as Scripture and affirms its applicability to its life." Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 82.

[20] David Schrock, "Reading the Psalms with the Church: A Critical Evaluation of Prosopological Exegesis in Light of Church History," *SBJT* 25, no. 3 (Fall 2021): 90.

these interpretative communities.[21] In this light, hermeneutics emerges not merely as an academic discipline but as an essential instrument ensuring the accuracy, relevance, and integrity of interpretive efforts.

The Necessity of an Author-Oriented Hermeneutic

Author-centered hermeneutics, at its core, is a methodological approach to textual interpretation that underscores the primacy of the author's intended meaning in a given text.[22] John Stott plainly notes, "A text means what its author meant."[23] Kevin Vanhoozer also posits that "traditional interpreters read for the author's voice,"[24] believing that "the text is a shell that contains a spark of the author's soul."[25] This approach operates on the foundational belief that the true essence of a text is intrinsically linked to the author's original intention at the time of composition. While the perspectives of readers and contemporary contexts play crucial roles in interpretation, they should not overshadow or distort the original authorial intention[26] since, Margaret Köstenberger elucidates,

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[21] Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 66.

[22] This hermeneutical approach offers invaluable benefits, especially in today's era where subjective readings is dominant in interpretations. Grounding interpretation in the author's original intent acts as a foundational pillar. It guarantees adherence to the initial message, minimizing the risk of misunderstanding or potential distortion of the text. By focusing on the author's perspective, interpreters are better positioned to uncover the timeless insights within the text, leading to a proper application, too. See the benefits of author-centered hermeneutics in Robert H. Stein, "The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics," *JETS* 44, no. 3 (September 2001): 451–66; Robert L. Plummer, "Righteousness and Peace Kiss: The Reconciliation of Authorial Intention and Biblical Typology," *SBJT* 14, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 54–61.

[23] John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 221.

[24] Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text?*, 45.

[25] Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text?*, 45.

[26] Vanhoozer's insights are particularly significant. He underscores the importance of an author-centric hermeneutic approach, asserting, "Authentic Christianity thus depends on one's ability to recover the author's intention—say, the minds of Malachi, Matthew, or Mark—and perhaps through them, the mind of God." Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text?*, 46.

"every text has an author and is willed by that author to express a particular message."[27] Robert Stein captures this sentiment: "The goal of interpretation is to arrive at what the author of a text meant."[28]

Building on this foundation, in interpretative endeavors, the author is not just the originator of the text but also its primary determiner of meaning. Stein insightfully points out, "The biblical author is the determiner of the text's meaning."[29] Every chosen word, subtle nuance, and literary technique unveils the author's thought process, shedding light on their motivations, cultural context, and primary message. To bypass the author's intent is to risk missing the depth and richness of the text, and potentially misconstrue its essence. Mark Bowald offers a compelling analogy: "The fear of the author is the beginning of literary knowledge."[30]

E. D. Hirsch, a prominent figure in this field, strongly emphasizes the importance of author-centered hermeneutics.[31] He asserts that authorial intention is both "determinate and reproducible."[32] He uses the term flexible "significances" to emphasize the notion that while texts can have multiple applications, their core meaning, as intended

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[27] Margaret Köstenberger, "What's at Stake: 'It's Hermeneutics!,'" *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 38.

[28] Stein, "The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach," 455. In another work, Stein contends that "the meaning of a text depends on the specific conscious will of the author." Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 38.

[29] Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*.

[30] Mark Alan Bowald, *Rendering the Word in Theological Hermeneutics: Mapping Divine and Human Agency*, Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015), 88.

[31] For a more comprehensive discussion on Hirsch's hermeneutic approach and its implications, see Blue, "The Hermeneutic of E. D. Hirsch, Jr.," 253–69; Scott A. Blue, "Meaning, Intention, and Application: Speech Act Theory in the Hermeneutics of Francis Watson and Kevin J. Vanhoozer," *TJ* 23, no.1 (Spring 2002): 160–83; G. K. Beale, "The Cognitive Peripheral Vision of Biblical Authors," *WTJ* 76, no 2 (Fall 2014): 266–70; W. Edward Glenny, "The Divine Meaning of Scripture: Explanations and Limitations," *JETS* 38, no. 4 (December 1995): 486–88.

[32] Hirsch articulates, "The author's verbal meaning is determinate, that it is reproducible." Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 126.

by the author, remains singular and unchanged.[33] Hirsch's strong support for the

reproducibility of authorial intent bolsters the belief that, when approached with this

perspective, texts can provide consistent and objective interpretations.[34] While holding to

Hirsch's viewpoint, Kuruvilla also underscores the importance of author-centeredness in

interpretation. He states,

> Letters and wills are prime examples of texts always regarded as bearing the intentional presence of their authors or testators. Therefore, the fallacy of baptizing the text as an authorless, absolute entity, detached and completely bereft of any authorial vestige, must be avoided. In other words, despite distanciation, authorial fingerprints can be detected in the inscription; such residues of intent are essential for interpretation and are sufficiently present in texts to establish the writer's purpose.[35]

An author-centered hermeneutic is fundamental, particularly when interpreting

profound texts like Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 that explore the multifaceted nature of God's

holiness. By prioritizing the original intentions of the biblical authors, this method ensures

the authenticity and integrity of the message, allowing for a more accurate representation

of God's holiness.[36] Furthermore, this approach provides a holistic understanding of God's

divine nature, unveiling the balance between his transcendence, characterized by

unparalleled majesty and separateness, and his immanence, marked by accessibility,

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[33] Hirsch addresses the conflict between the original intent of the author and its shifting relevance to modern readers by drawing a clear distinction between "meaning" and "significance." He explains:

> No doubt the significance of the work to the author had changed a great deal, but its meaning had not changed at all. . . . *Meaning* is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. *Significance*, on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable. (Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 8)

[34] Vern Poythress summarizes Hirsch's concept on objective interpretation: "Evangelicals desiring to protect the objectivity of propositional revelation in Scripture have usually gravitated toward E. D. Hirsch's view, since it promises an objectively fixed, textually expressed authorial intention." See Vern Poythress, "God's Lordship in Interpretation," *WTJ* 50, no 1 (Spring 1988): 40.

[35] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 36.

[36] Kenneth Jones assuredly insists, "Our human understanding of the nature of holiness comes from God. Our very understanding that holiness exists has been revealed by God and would not be known otherwise. We know about holiness only because God declares that he is holy. This revelation of God's holiness comes to us in our day through the Bible." Kenneth Jones, *The Commitment to Holiness* (Anderson, IN: Warner, 1985), 9.

closeness, and relational attributes. Grasping this balance is crucial for interpreting these biblical passages, ensuring the essence of God's holiness is fully captured.

Without an author-centered perspective, interpretations could be at tangible risk of distortion. Overemphasizing the reader's viewpoint or being overly influenced by the current context can lead to misunderstandings, especially concerning the nature of God and his holiness.[37] Osborne rightly points out that "preachers or teachers must proclaim the Word of God rather than their own subjective religious opinions. Only a carefully defined hermeneutic can keep one wedded to the text."[38]

In the context of preaching, an author-centered hermeneutic extends beyond mere information transmission; it contemplates how the text dynamically engages and influences the contemporary reader.[39] Stein elucidates this, stating, "Implications flow out of the paradigm of the author's meaning. As a result, we as readers do not create them but discover them."[40] Preaching seeks to bridge the divine with the human, and this dynamic interaction, initiated by the text, is particularly pertinent when it addresses themes as profound as God's holiness. Therefore, an author-centered approach is indispensable for genuinely comprehending and communicating the depth of such biblical texts for preaching.

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[37] David Wells observes that the diminished emphasis on God's holiness in the pulpit primarily stems from the misinterpretation of Scripture or subjectively understanding the text. He succinctly summarizes his argument with the question, "Would it be the holiness of which Scripture speaks?" See David F. Wells, *God in the Whirlwind: How the Holy-Love of God Reorients Our World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 174–76.

[38] Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 23.

[39] Kuruvilla aptly underscores the preacher's pivotal role in interpreting the text with author-centered perspective for homiletic purposes. He eloquently states, "We preachers, as handmaids to the sacred writ, as midwives to Scripture, as curators and witnesses of the text, want the audience to experience it as the A/author intended." Abraham Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching: The Journey from Text to Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 272.

[40] Stein, "The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach," 460.

The Peril of a Reader-Responsive Hermeneutic

Reader-responsive hermeneutic, often referred to as reader-response interpretation, is an approach that emphasizes the reader's role in shaping the meaning.[41] Instead of seeing the text as a fixed entity with a singular, determinable meaning, this approach posits that each reader co-creates the meaning, interacting with a text based on their unique experiences, emotions, and cultural context. Consequently, the meaning of a text becomes multifaceted, ever shifting based on the individual reader's engagement with it. Thus, every reader, with their unique background, experiences, and perspectives, interacts with the text, leading to a multitude of interpretations, each as valid as the other. Dane Ortlund succinctly outlines the three main characteristics of the reader-responsive hermeneutic. He denotes, "(1) textual meaning is determined by the reader; (2) textual meaning is determined by its usefulness to the reader; and (3) textual meaning is determined by its usefulness to the reader in the context of communal consensus."[42]

In comparison to the author-centered approach, the reader-response hermeneutic values the fluidity of interpretation. This method warrants careful scrutiny. While the reader-response hermeneutic highlights a variety of interpretations based on individual reader experiences and personalizing engagement with the text, it simultaneously brings about a significant level of an uncontrolled subjectivity in interpretation. Vanhoozer labels this inclination toward subjectivity as "the interpretive sin of pride."[43] Elaborating on this, Ortlund clarifies the notion of pride in the reader-responsive hermeneutic:

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[41] Osborne provides a foundational perspective on this method: "Most proponents of this school accept some form of the autonomy theory, that a text becomes autonomous from its author as soon as it is written down. Therefore, delineation of a text's meaning stems from the *present* reader rather than from the *past* author or text." Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 214. See more details and its evaluation in Dan McCarthy and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 296–99.

[42] Dane C. Ortlund, "Truthfulness in Usefulness: Stanley Fish and American Literary Pragmatism," *Themelios* 33, no. 1 (May 2008): 30.

[43] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 462.

> Reader-determined interpretation is, by definition, prideful; author- or text-determined interpretation is, by definition, humble. . . . The former proceeds on the conviction that *self* is best suited to exercise power as evaluative agent; the latter proceeds on the conviction that one must stand under something outside oneself in order for responsible understanding to occur.[44]

Therefore, as Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton conclude, "Reader-response hermeneutics is not very convincing."[45]

The adoption of the reader-responsive hermeneutic in preaching brings forth significant challenges that might jeopardize the authority of the Scriptures and the reliability of application from the pulpit. A major issue associated with this approach is the diminishing of authority.[46] Traditionally, the authority of a sermon is anchored in the belief that God communicates through his words, mediated by the preacher's interpretation and proclamation, ensuring the text's inherent message is conveyed to the congregation.[47] However, when employing the reader-responsive hermeneutic, such established authority may risk being eclipsed or entirely supplanted by the individual interpretations of the listener. David Ryoo shrewdly points out that the reader-response hermeneutic "lies a rejection of biblical authority and authorial intention."[48] As each hearer is prompted to extract personal meaning from the text, the cohesive message that both the Scripture and

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[44] Ortlund, "Truthfulness in Usefulness," 36.

[45] McCarthy and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*, 298.

[46] David L. Allen, "A Tale of Two Roads: Homiletics and Biblical Authority," *JETS* 43, no. 3 (September 2000): 496.

[47] Albert Mohler confidently addresses the issue of authority within the realm of preaching. He emphasizes that the source of authority is the text—the Word of God as conveyed through the preacher's message. He then asserts,

> The authority of the preacher is rooted in this divine call to preach, and the church must respect the preaching office. But in the final analysis, the ultimate authority for preaching is the authority of the Bible as the Word of God. Without this authority, the preacher stands naked and silent before the congregation and the watching world. If the Bible is not the Word of God, the preacher is involved in an act of self-delusion or professional pretension. Standing on the authority of Scripture, the preacher declares a truth received, not a message invented. (R. Albert Mohler Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* [Chicago: Moody, 2008], 42)

[48] David Eung-Yul Ryoo, "Paul's Preaching in the Epistle to the Ephesians and Its Homiletical Implication" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003), 7.

preacher aim to convey may risk dispersion. This shift away from central authority might unintentionally shift focus from the core message of the Scriptures, making room for personal interpretations that might overshadow the original biblical messages.[49] Gordon Fee concisely highlights this potential peril, stating, "If 'meaning' lies only with the reader, not in the text or with the (unknowable) author of the text, then from this view the possibility of the Christian community's hearing from God through its sacred texts is rather thoroughly negated."[50]

Another significant peril is the reliability of application. Preaching aims beyond mere information transfer; its primary task is to guide the congregation in applying the teachings of the Scripture to their daily lives. Hershael York emphatically states that "the goal of our preaching is always a change in the behavior and character of those who hear the Word. We do not just want them to *know* the truth; we want them to *do* the truth."[51] Adopting the reader-responsive approach, however, poses challenges. The multiplicity of meanings derived from the text can make it difficult for the preacher to provide a clear and direct application from the text. Anthony Thiselton provides an illuminating critique, highlighting a potential pitfall: "If textual meaning is the product of a community of readers, texts cannot reform these readers 'from outside.' In this case *The Reformation* then becomes a dispute over alternative community lifestyles."[52] Given such a backdrop, a pertinent question arises: if every listener draws a personalized meaning from the Scripture, how can the preacher lead to a relevant application that remains true to the

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[49] Mohler's caution is worth heeding. He categorizes preaching without authority as mere "pretense preaching." He elaborates, "Once biblical authority is undermined and eroded, preaching becomes a pretense. The preacher stands to offer religious advice on the basis of the latest secular learning and the 'spirituality' of the day. The dust of death covers thousands of pulpits across the land." Mohler, *He Is Not Silent*, 72.

[50] Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 184.

[51] Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 188.

[52] Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 549.

text? The danger is that the congregation could be overwhelmed with multiple interpretations and lack clear guidance on how to apply the Scripture's teachings in their daily lives.

In light of the challenges presented by the reader-responsive hermeneutic preachers ought to be discerning when integrating this perspective into their preaching. Although personal engagement with the text enriches the experience, the heart of the preaching must always be Scripture's foundational message and authority,[53] which is why the New Homiletics should be evaluated with a specific caution.

**The Reader-Responsive Hermeneutic
and the New Homiletics**

The New Homiletics emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century as a response to the traditional homiletical approach.[54] Rooted in a desire to make biblical teachings more accessible and relevant to modern listeners, this approach emphasized the significant role of the audience's personal context and life experiences in the interpretative process.[55] Instead of merely being a passive recipient, the listener was empowered to

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[53] David L. Allen emphasizes the importance of maintaining the author-centered message of the Scripture and its authority in preaching, even while recognizing the value of personal engagement with the text. He expresses this emphasis as follows:

> The preacher submits to the authority of the text. Therefore, he shuns the reader-response approach of the postmodern hermeneutic which manages the text in such a way that the biblical author's view is replaced by the reader's own perspective. The preacher, as interpreter, to the degree possible in humankind, seeks to empty his presuppositions, biases, and previous conclusions as he approaches the text. His goal is to come to the text, as if for the first time, in order to be instructed by the text rather than to instruct the text. (David L. Allen, introduction to *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Mathews [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010], 6)

[54] For a detailed history of the New Homiletics, see O. C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 798–827. See also O. Wesley Allen Jr., "The Pillar of the New Homiletic," in *The Renewed Homiletics*, ed. O. Wesley Allen Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 1–18. For further historical insight and evaluation, see David L. Allen, "Preaching and Postmodernism: An Evangelical Comes to the Dance," *SBJT* 5, no.2 (Summer 2001): 62–78.

[55] In the New Homiletics paradigm, when references are made to the "text" or the "word of God," they often do not directly allude to the biblical text itself. Instead, within their hermeneutical framework, the emphasis is placed on the church's interpretation of the biblical text and the experiences of the listeners. Fred Craddock encapsulates this perspective, asserting, "The Word of God, if it is to be located,

actively partake in shaping the meaning of the text through the sermon. In this paradigm, preaching is viewed not merely as the delivery of a message derived from the text but as an interactive event. Scott Gibson aptly notes that, from a New Homiletics perspective, "The sermon is seen as an event or experience."[56] In such a setting, the congregation actively immerse themselves with the sermon, creating their own sermonic experience.

Fred Craddock, Eugene Lowry, and David Buttrick are often recognized as leading figures in the New Homiletics movement, and their approaches have influenced contemporary preaching methodologies. Craddock, in his seminal work *As One without Authority*, established himself as an innovative figure, introducing the inductive preaching approach to both the academic and homiletical community.[57] Breaking away from traditional sermon structures, Craddock's method centers on the narrative, allowing the sermon to unfold much like a story.[58] Rather than starting with a clear, declarative thesis, his sermons often commence with questions or a sense of exploration, inviting listeners on a journey of discovery through the preaching event or experiencing the sermon. Craddock contends that the primary duty of a preacher is to provide the listener with "the inductive experience of coming to an understanding of the message of the text."[59] He

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it to be located in movement, in conversation, in communication between scripture and church." Fred Craddock, *As One without Authority* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 106.

[56] Scott M. Gibson, "Critique of the New Homiletic: Examining the Link between the New Homiletic and the New Hermeneutic," in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching*, ed. Haddon W. Robinson and Craig B. Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 477. Eugene Lowry, a leading proponent of the New Homiletics, states, "Perhaps the issue finding the central place in all the various models or understandings of narrative preaching is the goal of sermonic event." Eugene L. Lowry, "The Revolution of Sermonic Shape," in *Listening to the Word: Studies in Honor of Fred B. Craddock*, ed. Gail R. O'Day and Thomas G. Long (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 110.

[57] Craddock believes that the inductive method stands as the most effective approach to preaching. Contrasting this with the deductive reasoning prevalent in old homiletics, which he contends is no longer viable, Craddock insists that "everyone lives inductively, not deductively." Preachers must align the form of the sermon inductively. Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 60.

[58] Allen succinctly identifies the essence of Craddock's methodology. He encapsulates it by stating, "Metanarratives are out while 'story' and 'narrative' in. . . . Objectivity is out while perspectivism is in." Allen, "Preaching and Postmodernism," 58.

[59] Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 125.

believes that this method of preaching is more attuned to the contemporary listener who often approaches the text with questions and a desire for personal relevance. This approach makes the sermon more of an experiential engagement, emphasizing the *co-creation of meaning* between the preacher and the congregation.[60] Thus, meaning is not confined to the text itself; rather, it emerges from the interplay between the preacher and the listeners. Craddock asserts,

> Thus far the attempt has been made to say that inductive movement in preaching corresponds to the way people ordinarily experience reality and to the way life's problem-solving activity goes on naturally and casually. It has been urged that this method respects rather than insults the hearers and that it leaves them the freedom and hence the obligation to respond. In addition, unfolding or unrolling the sermon in this fashion sustains interest by means of that anticipation built into all good narration.[61]

Lowry expanded upon Craddock's homiletical principles. Lowry's perspectives, which highlighted the active role of the listener in preaching, took a unique structural approach. He advocated for the homiletical "loop" method—a sermon structure anchored in presenting and resolving a clear tension or dilemma.[62] As the sermon progresses, this tension is explored, deepened, and then resolved, pulling the listener into an "eventive evocation."[63] Lowry's perspective on preaching is clear: "Storytelling. A sermon is a

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[60] Gibson critically observes, "For Craddock, the preacher and the listeners are co-creators of the sermonic experience. More important than imparting knowledge, the sermon seeks to affect an experience by cultivating the surprise of the gospel through the preacher's ability to embed the experience in the familiar world of the congregation." Gibson, "Critique of the New Homiletic," 478.

[61] Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 55.

[62] Lowry's *The Homiletical Plot* outlines a design with five distinct stages: (1) upsetting the equilibrium ("oops"); (2) analyzing the discrepancy ("ugh"); (3) disclosing the clue to resolution ("aha"); (4) experiencing the gospel ("whee"); and (5) anticipating the consequence ("yeah"). Similar to a narrative's climax that arises from an unforeseen change in viewpoint, this sermon framework culminates in what Lowry describes as an "aha!" moment for the listener. Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Louisville: John Knox, 1980), 26.

[63] Lowry asserts that the primary objective of preaching is "eventive evocation," using plotting as the means to achieve this end. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, 122.

narrative art form."[64] Within this framework, his narrative preaching transcends mere information; it crafts a personal experience, bridging the gap from a state of equilibrium to a resolution. Furthermore, he insists that this homiletical plot not only reflects the experiences of the congregation but also connects deeply with the listener's own life struggles.[65] Central to his argument is the idea that preaching "should be an event-in-time that intends a divine-human meeting in the context of corporate worship."[66] Drawing parallels to Cradock, Lowry's alignment with the reader-responsive hermeneutic is evident when he agrees with the statement that "meaning arises from the experience of personal involvement in the dramatic action."[67]

Similarly, Buttrick's homiletical approach, grounded in the concept of "moves," underscores the significance of sermonic structures in preaching.[68] His methodology draws

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[64] Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, 12. Goldsworthy offers insight into the influence of Craddock on Lowry's homiletical concepts. He articulates,

> According to Eugene Lowry it was Fred Craddock's 1971 publication, *As One Without Authority*, which brought us to a new era in (North American) homiletics. This was partly motivated by new literary hermeneutics that focused on the shape and nature of the text and how it was used to communicate, and partly by a serious questioning of the viability of the practice of sermonizing as a communication medium in modern society. Lowry's discussion centers on Craddock's idea of inductive preaching, which is sometimes referred to as narrative preaching. (Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible*, 231)

[65] Lowry writes,

> There was an excitement you felt, a tension which took hold. And you knew even before the sermon was formed, that you had it! At that time the tension perhaps was only latent to the actual sermon, but the tension was evidence of a discrepancy perhaps known only implicitly. In whatever way the sermon worked itself out, it was a matter of a plot moving toward resolution. A sermonic idea is a homiletical bind; a sermon is a narrative plot! (Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, 14)

[66] Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, 122.

[67] Robert P. Roth, *Story and Reality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 42, quoted in Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, 12.

[68] In his work *Homiletics*, David Buttrick delineates the concept of "moves" in preaching, asserting, "Sermons are a movement of language from one idea to another, each idea being shaped in a bundle of words. Thus, when we preach, we speak in formed modules of language arranged in some patterned sequence. These modules of language we will call 'moves.'" David Buttrick, *Homiletics: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 23. Elaborating on this in a more accessible manner, he articulates,

> In presenting the sermons, I designate the introduction and conclusion and then number the paragraphs in the body of the discourse. Paragraphing matches sections of each sermon that focus on

parallels to scenes in a theatrical play or chapters in a literary narrative, where each "move" is intricately designed to guide the listener deeper into the core message of preacher's sermon.[69] These "moves" are not mere thematic shifts but are meticulously crafted logical and thematic progressions tailored to captivate the listener's "consciousness."[70] Thomas Long provides an apt encapsulation of Buttrick's homiletical principles and system:

> If the sermon is well formed, though, they will have something like a filmstrip, a series of pictures that possess a lively sense of movement from one to the next and that work together to produce coherent understanding. Sermons, then, are a movement of language from one idea to another, and because of this Buttrick likes to call the individual ideas, or units, of the sermon "moves." Because of his understanding of how human consciousness works, Buttrick insists that these moves must be built according to a single blueprint.[71]

In an era characterized by rapid consumption of information, Buttrick suggests that using a dynamic and interconnected thematic approach is more effective in engaging modern listeners.[72] Essentially, he posits that his method facilitates a more intuitive formation of meaning, rendering biblical messages both more comprehensible and resonant. Within Buttrick's homiletical system, the preacher endeavors to bridge the gap between the sermon's "moves" and the listener's "consciousness." Through this interactive process, meaning is formed and made tangible for the audience.[73] Echoing this

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particular ideas. These sections call them "moves" are not separate "topics," nor are they didactic "points," but are designed like the back-and-forth shifts in a conversation; thus they are moves in a mutual movement of thought. (David Buttrick, *Speaking Parables: A Homiletic Guide* [Louisville: John Knox, 2000], xviii)

[69] Buttrick, *Homiletics*, 322–23.

[70] Buttrick places a significant emphasis on the role of "consciousness" in preaching. For him, "consciousness" stands as the central ground that defines the very essence and primary function of preaching. In line with this, he asserts, "Preaching mediates some structured understanding in consciousness to a congregation." Buttrick, *Homiletics*, 320.

[71] Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 153.

[72] Buttrick, *Homiletics*, 18–19.

[73] Buttrick, *Homiletics*, 24. James Thompson explains it in this way: "Buttrick describes the sermon as a series of moves that are logically connected and shaped by the preacher's awareness of how meaning forms in the consciousness of the listeners." James W. Thompson, *Preaching Like Paul: Homiletical Wisdom for Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 6.

notion, Buttrick states, "Sermon structures ought to travel through congregational consciousness as a series of immediate thoughts, sequentially designed and imaged with technical skill so as to assemble in forming faith."[74] Conclusively, Buttrick's emphasis on the listener's experience suggests an underlying philosophy rooted in a reader-responsive hermeneutic.[75] This perspective positions the sermon as a personal interaction between the text and the listener's "consciousness."

Collectively, these three homileticians, Craddock, Lowry, and Buttrick, have not only reshaped the structure and approach of modern preaching but have also underscored the vital importance of the relevance of the message. Their collective works stress that sermons should transcend mere information dissemination, aiming instead to foster deep, personal connections that resonate with the lived experiences of congregants. In the broader conversation on preaching, scholars like James Thompson offer insights into the formative power of sermon structure.[76] Thompson emphasizes, "Form actually shapes the listener's faith, and the Bible is a source not only for what we preach, but also for how we preach."[77] This perspective highlights the dual influence of biblical text on both the substance and style of preaching.

However, this strength of the New Homiletics approach—its resonance with the listener—might also be its vulnerability. While the New Homiletics has influenced

[74] David Buttrick, "Interpretation and Preaching," *Interpretation* 25, no. 1 (January 1981): 55–56.

[75] In his support of Buttrick's conversational model of preaching, Ronald Allen offers a short evaluation of Buttrick's approach. He states, "The text makes an important contribution to the sermon, but it is not the imperial ruler of the homiletical realm." Ronald Allen, "Why Preach from Passages in the Bible?," in *Preaching as a Theological Task: World, Gospel, Scripture: In Honor of David Buttrick*, ed. Thomas G. Long and Edward Farley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 181.

[76] James Thompson, while critiquing their approach for its tendency to neglect the authorial intention, acknowledges several key contributions from the New Homileticians: (1) They emphasize the role of narrative as a mode of revelation. (2) They recognize the significance of movement and anticipation as effective communication tools. (3) They contend that the Scripture informs not only the content of the sermon but also the manner in which it is delivered. (4) They ensure that preaching is anchored in Scripture. See Thompson, *Preaching Like Paul*, 5–8.

[77] Thompson, *Preaching Like Paul*, 8.

contemporary homileticians, it has also been critically examined for its pronounced tilt toward reader-responsive hermeneutics, known for tailoring sermons to align with the audience's perspectives and experiences. Overemphasizing the listener's interpretation and role in preaching risks diluting the Scripture's original message, which can result in numerous subjective interpretations that might deviate from the intended message of the Scriptures as conveyed by preachers. In essence, while it values the effectiveness of the delivery, it compromises the authority of the text.[78] Gibson calls attention to a critical vulnerability in the New Homiletics—the concept of "the authority of experience"[79]— which may lead to a subjective reading of Scripture. This approach emphasizes the interaction between the preacher, the biblical text, and the hearers, seeing the sermon as a live event that unfolds and evolves with the participation of the audience.[80] This shift marks a significant departure from the author-centered method of interpretation and brings the audience's role to the forefront.

Furthermore, the New Homiletics redefines the preacher's role. Instead of primarily delivering God's message with fidelity, the preacher now focuses on enhancing the listener's experience through the sermon. As Gibson puts it, "The responsibility of the preacher has moved from teacher of truth to director of happenings."[81] In his assessment of Craddock, Lowry, and Buttrick, Hershael York identifies and explains the fundamental flaw in their methodology. He elucidates,

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[78] For an in-depth analysis of the New Homiletics and its relationship to authority in preaching, See Charles Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,1997), 125–35; Mark Howell, "Hermeneutical Bridges and Homiletical Methods: A Comparative Analysis of the New Homiletic and Expository Preaching Theory 1970–1995" (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1999), 81–102.

[79] Gibson, "Critique of the New Homiletic," 479.

[80] The New Homiletics suggests homiletical paradigm shift as "the creation of an experience in which both speaker and audience are co-participants in an event of understanding." Robert Reid, Jeffrey Bullock, and David Fleer, "Preaching as the Creation of an Experience: The Not-So-Rational Revolution of the New Homiletic," *Journal of Communication and Religion* 18, no. 1 (March 1995): 1. See also John McClure, "Conversation and Proclamation: Resources and Issues," *Homiletic* 22, no. 1 (Summer 1997): 7–11.

[81] Gibson, "Critique of the New Homiletic," 480.

If the biblical text cannot be taken literally, historically, or authoritatively, then the preacher is left to search among the gospel story for bones that he attempts to make live by breathing into them the breath of creativity and poignancy. If the preacher cannot find the biblical author's meaning, then he only has two choices: bestow on it his own significance or help the audience experience their own subjective meaning.[82]

In contrast to the New Homiletics, the author-centered hermeneutic prioritizes the original intent of the biblical author. This method, rooted in discerning the Scripture through the lens of the author's intended meaning, provides a more anchored and objective interpretation of the text. Its strength lies in its unwavering commitment to upholding Scripture's authority, offering a steadfast interpretative foundation untouched by contemporary trends or cultural shifts. Albert Mohler confirms, "The purpose of preaching is not that we ourselves might be heard, but that the text of the Word of God might be heard."[83] While the New Homiletics offers valuable insights into engaging modern listeners, it is beneficial to harmonize the New Homiletics' strategies for effectiveness in preaching with the timeless principles of author-centered hermeneutics.

By intertwining the strengths of both approaches, preachers can deliver sermons that are both relevant to the contemporary audience and firmly rooted in the truth of Scripture. Walter Kaiser's insights offer valuable direction for understanding and preaching about God's holiness. He provides a critical assessment of the New Homiletics, proposing two clear criteria for effective preaching: "(1) Does the lesson or sermon accurately reflect what is being taught by the author of the text? and (2) has that text been applied to our modern and contemporary contexts of living and acting so that I am called to change for the glory of God?"[84] These principles stand as guiding beacons, illuminating the path to effectively convey the splendor and intimacy of God's holiness.

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[82] Hershael W. York, "Communication Theory and Text-Driven Preaching," in Akin, Allen, and Mathews, *Text-Driven Preaching*, 235.

[83] R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Preaching: The Centrality of Scripture* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 11.

[84] Walter Kaiser Jr., *The Majesty of God in the Old Testament: A Guide for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 19–20.

Three Interpretive Views Regarding
God's Holiness in the Text

Building on the foundation of author-centered hermeneutics, three prominent interpretations emerge: Theocentric, Christ-centered, and Christiconic. Each of these interpretations, while distinct in their approach, is deeply anchored in the principle of author-centeredness. By adhering to this principle, they ensure that the original intent of the biblical author remains at the forefront of the interpretative process. A deeper exploration of these interpretations offers insights into their unique perspectives and their invaluable contributions to the domain of biblical hermeneutics for preaching, particularly when addressing God's holiness as portrayed in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4.

Theocentric Interpretation

Theocentric interpretation, as the name suggests, places God at the center of the interpretative process.[85] This approach is firmly anchored in the conviction that Scripture predominantly narrates God's grand narrative.[86] Articulating this perspective, Kenneth Langley asserts, "God is at the center of the Bible. God is at the heart of redemptive history. He is its main character."[87] Similarly, Sidney Greidanus underscores the importance of this interpretive lens, stating, "Theocentric interpretation seeks to expose in every passage this God-centered focus of the entire Bible."[88]

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[85] Langley encapsulates the essence of the theocentric interpretation for preaching, writing, "Preachers may take up a variety of texts and topics, but they should take them up (and their hearers with them) all the way into the presence of God, so that listeners are instructed by the Word of God, convinced of the value of God, captivated by the holiness, grace, kingship, wisdom, and beauty of God. Preaching is all about and all for God." Langley, "Theocentric View," 81–82.

[86] Sidney Greidanus, "Preaching in the Gospels," in Duduit, *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, 331.

[87] Langley, "Theocentric View," 89.

[88] Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 116.

At its core, the theocentric interpretation diligently endeavors to illuminate the God-centered essence in every biblical passage.[89] As Langley expresses, "Every passage is from, for, and about God."[90] Through the theocentric lens the world is interpreted as a manifestation of God's creative prowess, humanity is perceived as bearers of his image, and salvation is exclusively attributed to his gracious act. Consequently, each biblical narrative, command, or doctrinal teaching is seen within the overarching framework of God's sovereign design and divine intent.[91]

Theocentric interpretation stands out for its steadfast emphasis on God's active role in human history. Whether God is working openly as in miraculous events, or subtly behind the scenes as in the book of Esther, the sovereign hand of God is always at play.[92] Rather than viewing Scripture as a mere collection of disparate events or figures, this perspective sees it as a harmonious narrative, meticulously crafted to reflect God's grand purpose. Every biblical event, character, or teaching, no matter how seemingly mundane or peripheral, is a testament to God's overarching providence and master plan. Langley succinctly encapsulates the essence of the theocentric interpretation: "It is still God who creates, calls, redeems, sanctifies, guides, gives, commands, empowers, and promises. It

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[89] Robert L. Reymond, *The God-Centered Preacher: Developing a Pulpit Ministry Approved by God* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2003), 55.

[90] Langley, "Theocentric View," 98.

[91] Frederick Schmidt encapsulates this God-centric perspective in a compact way:

The creation is God's free choice born of God's character, that creation is good and sustained by God, that humankind is made in God's image and is meant to serve as God's vice-regent in the world, and that humanity's desire to be its own god has undermined its ability to serve as God's vice-regent, imperiled the well-being of God's creation, and compromised God's claim to be God. The purpose of God's saving acts, then, is to restore the image of God in humankind, invite our participation in the work of healing and restoration begun and completed in the person of Jesus Christ, and establish God's intended reign over all creation. (Frederic W. Schmidt, "Preaching Advent: A Theocentric Approach in an Anxious World," *Journal for Preachers* 41, no. 1 [Advent 2017], 4)

[92] In expanding on this concept, Greidanus observes the God-centeredness in interpretation: "The only apparent exception that confirms the rule of the theocentric focus of all canonical books is the book of Esther, for it never mentions God directly and consequently was included in the canon only after much debate. Yet even the book of Esther is theocentric—albeit in a unique way." Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 116.

is God who sent Christ and God who will send Christ again at the end of history."[93] In this light, theocentric interpretation becomes an invaluable lens, offering a holistic understanding of the whole Scripture as a continuous testimony of God's enduring presence and purpose.

In the realm of preaching, the theocentric interpretation serves as a pivotal compass, directing both the preacher and the listener toward a God-centered understanding of the text. Since the theocentric approach anchors the message in the immutable nature and purposes of God, it redirects attention from mere human endeavors or ethical nominalism to the majesty of God's sovereign plan and his relentless pursuit of a relationship with humanity.[94] As Greidanus precisely puts it, "The theocentric nature of biblical literature needs to be upheld especially over against an all too facile slide into anthropocentric interpretation and preaching."[95] By consistently pointing listeners back to God as the epicenter of all biblical narratives, preachers ensure that their congregations are not merely informed but transformed by God-focused application.[96] The theocentric approach to sermonic application shifts the focus from direct behavioral directives to a deeper exploration of how God interacts with his people and the values he instills in their daily lives.[97] David Dorsey suggests that crafting such an application involves probing questions like, "What does it reveal about God's mind, personality, qualities, attitudes,

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[93] Langley, "When Christ Replaces God," 59.

[94] Reymond, *The God-Centered Preacher*, 177.

[95] Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 116.

[96] Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 41. For more on theocentric application in preaching, see chap. 2 of Doriani's work.

[97] Langley advocates for preachers to position God as the central subject in many of their sermon's statements. He suggests a shift in perspective: "Instead of 'We need to witness more,' say, 'God wills and empowers our witness." Langley, "Theocentric View," 99.

priorities, assumptions, values, concerns, teaching methodologies, and the kinds of attitudes and moral and ethical standards he wants so see in those who serve him?"[98]

When preachers adopt a theocentric lens, they inherently challenge their congregations to view their personal stories as subplots within the greater narrative of God's eternal story. The result is a sermon that not only enriches the listeners' understanding of Scripture but also deepens their awe and reverence for the God who is central to every passage. In the words of J. I. Packer, "the real subject of Holy Scripture is not man and his religion, but God and his glory; from which it follows that God is the real subject of every text."[99] Therefore, every text, and by extension every sermon derived from it, should primarily serve to magnify God.

However, the strength of the theocentric interpretation could also be its limitation. Focusing predominantly on the divine narrative might overlook the intricate weave of human emotions, thoughts, and actions that permeate the Scriptures with relatable depth and resonance for many readers.[100] While a God-centered interpretation provides profound insights, an overly intense emphasis on it might overshadow the importance of human decisions and their practical implications in preaching. Paul Scott Wilson astutely observes that even if the sermon's content is theocentric, its real-world

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[98] David A. Dorsey, "The Use of the OT Law in Christian Life: A Theocentric Approach," *Evangelical Journal* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 14.

[99] J. I. Packer, "Expository Preaching: Charles Simeon and Ourselves," in *Preach the Word: Essays on Expository Preaching in Honor of R. Kent Hughes*, ed. Leland Ryken and Todd Wilson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 150.

[100] Paul Scott Wilson offers a nuanced critique of the theocentric approach, drawing attention to its broader theological implications. He underscores the dynamic relationship between God's saving actions and human responsibilities, emphasizing key redemptive events that signify God's grace and guidance. He articulates,

> The gospel is rather God who comes to us, often in a signature movement found in many events: sin to redemption, sickness to healing, hunger to feeding, oppression to liberation, despair to hope, exodus to promised land, cross to resurrection, and fall to new Jerusalem—basic movements of faith. They represent God's saving action. They are two sides of the same coin, two aspects of one indivisible Word that simultaneously imply what humans are to do and what God does, both by instruction and by gracious empowerment. (Paul Scott Wilson, "Response to Kenneth Langley," in Gibson and Kim, *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, 114)

application "still depends on human answering the call."[101] Kuruvilla also denotes, "Preaching, while based upon, and fully cognizant of, the sovereign work of God in sanctification, should not neglect human responsibility and the believer's filial duty of faithful obedience unto God."[102] Such lessons are crucial as they act as guides for contemporary believers navigating the complexities of modern life.[103] Doriani highlights a concern in this interpretive method: "Zeal to avoid moralistic readings of narrative leads some to refuse all moral uses of narratives."[104] Hence, an approach that balances both divine and human perspectives ensures a more comprehensive understanding of the Scriptures, especially when it comes to preaching.

When exploring the themes of God's holiness in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, a theocentric interpretation brings into sharp focus the overwhelming majesty and grandeur of God into prominence. In Isaiah 6, the prophet's vision of the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, with seraphim proclaiming his holiness, vividly signifies God's transcendence and unparalleled authority. In a similar vein, Revelation 4 paints a vibrant depiction of the heavenly throne room, where the four living creatures constantly exclaim, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty" (Rev 6:8). Through a theocentric lens, these passages emphasize not just the awe-inspiring holiness of God but also his sovereign rule over all creation, beckoning listeners to approach him with reverence and awe.[105]

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[101] Wilson, "Response to Kenneth Langley," 116.

[102] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 258.

[103] Ramesh Richard highlights that while preachers provide the guidance, it is imperative for contemporary believers to proactively seek and apply these lessons in navigating the complexities of modern life. Richard states, "The application must be concrete. If your application is abstract, your audience will tend to think about the words you said rather than how those words should affect their lives. Be specific about God's expectations of your people. It is not enough to tell them that God wants them to be holy. You must give specific examples of holiness that will be relevant to their situation today." Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 113.

[104] Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 296.

[105] See chap. 2, sec. "The Semantic Meaning of God's Holiness: Transcendence."

On the other hand, while the theocentric interpretation excels in highlighting the transcendent holiness of God, it can underemphasize his immanent holiness. Texts such as Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 do more than depict a transcendent and exalted deity; they also reveal God's profound closeness to his people. In Isaiah, the depiction of God's immanent holiness catalyzes authentic repentance, demonstrating the transformative impact of divine proximity (6:6–7). Similarly, Revelation portrays God's nearness as a catalyst for genuine worship, recognizing his omnipresence (4:10–11). This aspect of holiness testifies to God's relational essence, underscoring his longing for intimacy and involvement with his creation.[106]

Consider, for instance, Langley's scholarly exposition on Isaiah 40. Although it does not explicitly engage with the nuances of Isaiah 6, it nevertheless highlights a theocentric focus that is applicable to the broader narrative spectrum of Isaiah. Langley advocates for a pronounced proclamation of God's centrality—a focus that might not entirely encompass instances where the text foregrounds God's relational and approachable attributes.[107] He asserts,

> Isaiah charges his fellow preachers: "You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, 'Here is your God!'" (40:9). What does Zion need to hear? "Behold your God!" What message do gospel heralds still shout from the mountaintops? "Look at God!" What is the burden of preachers today, centuries after Isaiah? "Take your eyes off idols and empire and self, and gaze at God!" Everything the prophets said, everything God himself said through them, was meant to render God central in the minds and hearts of listeners.[108]

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[106] Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 51.

[107] Langley's assertion provides a robust foundation for applying a theocentric interpretive principle to various biblical texts, including Isa 6. He posits that a theocentric view is universally applicable across Scripture because the Scripture is fundamentally "the Book of God." This principle of God's centrality is not confined to any single pericope but is a consistent thread throughout the biblical narrative. Therefore, when a preacher approaches Isa 6 with Langley's theocentric lens, the principle of placing God at the core of interpretation becomes evident. Langley says, "God as central, on the other hand, is comprehensively adequate because he is prominent everywhere. We can be faithfully theocentric in every pericope because the Bible is 'The Book of God.'" Langley, "Theocentric View," 90.

[108] Langley, "Theocentric View," 82.

Langley's interpretation undeniably places God at the epicenter of both understanding and application, leaving little space for the listener's active involvement with the text, aiming to place God at the forefront of the listener's mind and heart. This principle is equally pertinent to Isaiah 6. While Isaiah 6 powerfully communicates the nearness of God's holiness, which leads to Isaiah's repentance, an interpretive approach that solely stresses the theocentric aspect may result in a vague application in preaching. Indeed, Isaiah's profound encounter with the divine in the temple is a deeply personal and transformative moment that culminates in his repentance and subsequent commissioning (Isa 6:5–8). A strictly theocentric focus might overlook the significance of this human response, instead offering generalized exhortations to "behold God's holiness" or "recognize divine majesty," which, while true, do not fully engage with the text's portrayal of personal transformation. Such an approach might reduce the application to abstract imperatives, such as merely "to accept or believe or rejoice or hope or imagine *something*,"[109] without offering tangible, concrete guidance for living out one's faith.

The narrative of Isaiah, who confesses his unworthiness with "woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa 6:5), and then undergoes a transformation that culminates in his commitment "here I am! Send me" (Isa 6:8), is pivotal for a full understanding of the immanent nature of God's holiness. Isaiah 6 portrays both the supreme holiness of God and his call for a sanctified and engaged community, presenting a balance that interpreters must convey. This captures the full spectrum of divine holiness, encompassing both its transcendent and immanent dimensions. Hence, an over-reliance on a theocentric perspective might miss out on this nuanced balance between God's exalted status and his personal connection with humanity. It is crucial for preachers to

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[109] Langley, "Theocentric View," 102, emphasis added. Kuruvilla's critique is valid when he points out that, in sermon after sermon, preachers frequently revisit and reiterate a limited set of theological themes and concepts from Scripture, taking a theocentric approach. Abraham Kuruvilla, "Response to Kenneth Langley," in Gibson and Kim, *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, 111.

maintain a balance, ensuring that the immediacy of God's presence is neither lost nor diminished in their interpretations and proclamations.

Christ-Centered Interpretation

In scholarly discourse on biblical interpretation, the Christ-centered approach underscores the person and work of Jesus Christ as its foundational pillar. This method is firmly anchored in the belief that the entirety of Scripture is intricately connected to, and emphasizes, the pivotal role of Christ in God's overarching redemptive narrative. Such a perspective illuminates the profound ramifications of Christ's life and ministry.[110] Through this lens one discerns a harmonious integration of the Old and New Testaments, thereby bringing to the forefront the Christocentric essence of the Scriptures. Expanding on this, Greidanus elaborates that within this interpretive framework, Christ is perceived not merely as a subject, but rather as the essential purpose and climax of the Scriptures.[111]

The essence of Christ-centered interpretation is the diligent pursuit of showcasing Christ's presence, reflecting in "both the unity of Scripture and the fullness of Jesus Christ."[112] Timothy Keller articulates that Christ-centered interpretation is designed to "find how the particular text fits into the full canonical context and participates as a chapter in the great narrative arc of the Bible, which is how God saves us and renews the world through the salvation by free grace in his Son, Jesus Christ."[113] From this perspective, biblical events, prophecies, and symbols are seen as foreshadowing Christ's advent, sacrifice, resurrection, and second coming. In other words, the covenantal promises, sacrificial system, prophetic utterances, and even moral imperatives are all

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[110] Bryan Chapell, "Redemptive-Historical View," in Gibson and Kim, *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, 4.

[111] Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 10.

[112] Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*, 11.

[113] Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015), 70.

understood in the framework of Christ's redemptive work.[114] Andrew Hebert encapsulates this method by stating, "Each major section of Scripture finds its fulfillment in Christ and the interpreter must demonstrate how the major epochs of the Scriptural story find correspondence to Christ as the antitype."[115]

Additionally, the Christ-centered interpretation is distinguished by its progressive nature, which encapsulates the continuous and organic revelation of God throughout Scripture. This interpretation method incorporates the unfolding, gradual revelation of God, with earlier Scriptures laying the groundwork for subsequent, clearer manifestations of Christ. Chapell stresses the idea that initial revelations act as foundational layers, priming readers for the deeper and clearer unveilings of Christ that follow.[116] This progression is not a simple sequence; rather, it is a structured framework where each component, whether an Old Testament prophecy or a New Testament teaching, supports and enhances the overall understanding of Christ and what he has done.[117] This progression, while organic, is deliberate, ensuring that believers see the consistent thread of God's redemptive grace from Genesis to Revelation.[118]

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[114] Julius Kim underscores the centrality of Christ in biblical interpretation: "Only Jesus, his eternal presence, prophetic promise, virgin birth, sinless life, atoning death, vindicating resurrection, and glorious ascension, resolves all the redemptive themes of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation." Julius Kim, *Preaching the Whole Counsel of God: Design and Delivery Gospel-Centered Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 59.

[115] Andrew C. Hebert, "Christological Preaching in Ruth: A Christiconic Interpretation of Ruth 1:1–22," *Criswell Theological Review* 19, no. 2 (Spring 2022): 94.

[116] Chapell helpfully summarizes, "The organic nature of the progressive process must also be understood to interpret God's revelation of himself. The earlier aspects of revelation are laying foundations and filters for our understanding of the later aspects, and the later revelation provides explanation and rationale for the earlier aspects." Bryan Chapell, "Response to Kenneth Langley," in Gibson and Kim, *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, 108.

[117] Greidanus outlines seven methods to establish a robust connection with Jesus Christ: (1) Redemptive historical progression, (2) Promise-fulfillment, (3) Typology, (4) Analogy, (5) Longitudinal themes, (6) New Testament references, and (7) Contrast. See Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 308–14.

[118] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 6.

Within the context of preaching, Christ-centered interpretation acts as a compass, directing both the preacher and the congregation toward the tenet of "Preaching Christ as the text manifests him."[119] Contrary to some misconceptions that it involves pinpointing Christ's reference in every scripture, the essence of this method lies in identifying how each text correlates with Christ. To clarify, Christ-centered preaching seeks to reveal how each text stands in relation to Christ.[120] This approach not only elucidates the profound theological truths about redemption but also encourages listeners to find their identity in Christ.[121] By consistently spotlighting Christ as the central figure in every biblical narrative, a preacher helps the congregation contextualize their individual spiritual journeys within the overarching narrative of the gospel.

Bryan Chapell, a notable advocate for Christ-centered preaching, has extensively elaborated on this method. His influential approach in contemporary homiletics revolves around the "Fallen Condition Focus" (FCF). He describes the FCF of a biblical text as "the mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to or about whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage for God's people to glorify and enjoy him."[122] Chapell asserts that every text in Scripture reflects some aspect

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[119] Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*, 11.

[120] Chapell provides clarity on Christ-centered preaching:

Christ-centered preaching rightly understood does not seek to discover where Christ is mentioned in every biblical text but to disclose where every text stands in relation to Christ. The grace of God culminating in the person and work of Jesus unfolds in many dimensions throughout the pages of Scripture. The goal of the preacher is not to find novel ways of making Christ appear in every text (we should not need a magic wand or a decoder ring to interpret Scripture) but to show how each text manifests God's grace in order to prepare and enable his people to embrace the life provided by Christ. (Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 260)

[121] Chapell delves into the profound implication of Christ-centered preaching concerning the true Christian identity. He eloquently writes, "Our life is now 'hidden with Christ' (Col. 3:3b). His identity has become our own, and our past identity—characterized by sin that would separate us from God—is dead. So the apostle says not only that 'you have died' but also that 'your life is hidden with Christ in God'" Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Sermons: Models of Redemptive Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 167.

[122] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 30.

of humanity's fallen condition, which finds its ultimate resolution only in Christ.[123] Recognizing the FCF in every biblical segment allows preachers to highlight the transformative essence of divine grace consistently.[124] He believes that the heart of effective preaching lies in illuminating this connection, leading listeners to a profound recognition and gratitude for God's encompassing grace as embodied in Christ and his cross.[125] Consequently, the preacher's role becomes pivotal in reassuring the congregation, emphasizing that God's grace, as epitomized in Christ, offers liberation from guilt and the strength for holy living.[126]

While the Christ-centered interpretative methodology offers significant insights into the realm of hermeneutics and homiletics, it is not devoid of inherent challenges. An excessive emphasis on discerning Christ in every text may inadvertently result in eisegesis, where personal beliefs unduly influence textual interpretation.[127] It is undeniable that the broader scriptural narrative is Christocentric; however, not every individual verse or story explicitly conveys this theme. Langley aptly indicates that Christ-centered interpretation "may inadvertently train people to look past what is plainly there in the text and to look instead for a reference to Christ that may or may not be there."[128] By adhering strictly to

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[123] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 251.

[124] Chapell identifies a preaching approach that systematically incorporates the "Fallen Condition Focus" (FCF) as "Grace-Directed Preaching." Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 297. In this sense, Chapell's methodology emphasizes the importance of application in preaching. By centering on grace as the core application, it allows the message to be deeply personal, resonating with the everyday experiences of the listeners.

[125] Bryan Chapell, *The Hardest Sermons You'll Ever Have to Preach: Help from Trusted Preachers for Tragic Times* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 14–15.

[126] Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 245.

[127] Kaiser raises a pressing concern about the potential pitfalls of eisegesis in the Christ-centered approach: "To also take the New Testament's fullness and progression of revelation on topics treated in the Old Testament as 'new understandings' of the Old Testament again sounds like, looks like, and probably is eisegesis." Walter Kaiser, *Recovering the Unity of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 218.

[128] Langley, "When Christ Replaces God," 9.

this approach, there is a risk of overshadowing the immediate context or original intent of specific passages, particularly within the Old Testament. Echoing this sentiment, Lucas O'Neill contends that the Christ-centered interpretation can "fail to do justice to the theology of the Old Testament text itself."[129]

Kuruvilla provides a detailed critique of the redemptive-historical interpretation or Christ-centered interpretation, especially when applied in the context of preaching.[130] He warns that such an approach can often overshadow or dilute the intricate messages embedded within individual scriptural segments, known as pericopes. Kuruvilla emphasizes the importance of privileging the unique voice and intent of each biblical passage, regardless of whether it is from the Old or New Testament.[131] Overreliance on Christ-centered themes can detract from the distinct theological and moral lessons inherent in the texts.[132] Kuruvilla poignantly points out, "Christocentric preaching tends to undermine the ethical emphasis of individual texts."[133] He explains the reason for this neglect, stating that "the specifics of the pericope being preached—the miniatures— tend to get swallowed up in the capacious canvas of RH (redemptive-historical)

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[129] Lucas O'Neill, *Preaching to Be Heard: Delivering Sermons That Command Attention* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 125.

[130] Abraham Kuruvilla, "Response to Chapell," in Gibson and Kim, *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, 30. In *Privilege the Text*, Kuruvilla begins by critiquing current issues among contemporary preachers: the pitfalls of improper hermeneutics characterized by excessive systematization, atomization, and misguided applications. He cites the redemptive-historical interpretation as a prime illustration of these concerns. Kuruvilla observes that this approach can inadvertently reduce the biblical text to a mere springboard for elucidating overarching themes like covenant-fulfillment, Christology, justification, and sanctification. He argues that this approach flattens the text's original message by consistently foregrounding a "Christ only" message week after week, thereby backgrounding the unique voices of individual pericope. Put differently, in such interpretations the nuanced details of a given pericope often become overshadowed by the broader scope of redemptive-historical interpretation. Kuruvilla's conclusion is sharp: Redemptive-historical preachers do not preach texts; they repetitively preach a Christ-only message. See Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 211–69.

[131] Kuruvilla argues, "I recommend you preach the New Testament text of interest when you get to it. But when you are preaching an Old Testament text, privilege that Old Testament text and discern its thrust and theology for listeners," Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 125.

[132] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 242.

[133] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 244.

interpretation,"[134] leading to a tedious repetition of sermonic themes detrimental to the faith and practice of God's people.[135] Kuruvilla then concludes, "For preaching purposes, the specific voice of each one must be heard and respected, without being drowned out by the sounds of other texts in the canon."[136]

When interpreting the depiction of God's holiness in Isaiah and Revelation, the Christ-centered hermeneutic, particularly through the lens of the FCF, offers profound insights into human frailty juxtaposed with divine redemption. However, this interpretive stance may inadvertently neglect the full spectrum of God's holiness, especially its transcendent dimensions.[137] For instance, while this approach adeptly acknowledges the divine sanctity and resultant reverence in Isaiah, it often fails to progress beyond Messianic anticipation. It commends the passage as a precursor to the incarnate Christ, focusing on motifs of purification and mission fulfilled in Jesus. Nonetheless, such an interpretation may not wholly engage with the text's broader transformative call for believers to embody a holiness that mirrors Christ's, one that integrates both transcendent and immanent divine attributes. This limitation is evident in Andrew Davis's commentary on Isaiah 6, which tends to focus primarily on the FCF, possibly neglecting the broader call to a holistic expression of holiness that the text encourages. Davis articulates,

> The great God of glory, seated on a throne high and exalted, the one whom the seraphim cannot see fully, and they veil their faces because of his glory—that one is Jesus! . . . This is the one whose blood provides the only sure purifying remedy for sin. Isaiah cried out, 'Woe is me! I am ruined by my sin!' The live coal taken from

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[134] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 240.

[135] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 241.

[136] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 240. Greidanus, a respected advocate for Christ-centered interpretation for preaching, wisely cautions against overreach in this interpretive method. He maintains that while the Scriptures undeniably point to Christ, it is crucial to avoid forcing a Christological presence in passages where such a connection is not evident. See Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 118–19.

[137] Kuruvilla highlights a critical limitation of the FCF in biblical interpretation by pointing out that not all divine commands are a response to human fallenness. He argues, "Thus not every divine demand is a reflection of the 'Fallen Condition.' Divine demand in Scripture will need to be met even in the sinless, unfallen environment of heaven, for divine demand is the call of God for his people to align themselves with the precepts, priorities, and practices of his ideal world." Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 259.

the altar represents Christ, his purifying ministry. Isaiah saw the glory of the preincarnate Christ and wrote about him. The glory of Jesus is infinite and will radiate throughout the new heaven and new earth forever. And Isaiah wrote about him so that we could see that glory by faith and turn and be healed.[138]

In the interpretation of Isaiah 6, Davis places a pronounced emphasis on the immanent nature of God's holiness as embodied in Jesus, viewed through the lens of the FCF. This perspective intentionally highlights the nearness and accessibility of the divine, as manifested in the person of Christ, aligning closely with the human experience of redemption and sanctification. Indeed, while an interpretation steeped in the FCF adeptly captures the intimate journey of grace and repentance, it may inadvertently narrow the narrative, neglecting the expansive, awe-inspiring aspects of God's transcendent holiness that are also vividly depicted in the text. Put differently, focusing narrowly on personal piety and individual moral reform, as seen through the lens of the FCF, risks diminishing the text's broader imperative to acknowledge and revere the transcendent majesty of God. This could lead to a homiletic approach where the grandeur of God's holiness is acknowledged but not allowed to challenge and expand the believer's repentance. Gary Gilley highlights this concern: "[The FCF] draws all attention to Christ and in the process reduces the personhood of the rest of the Trinity; minimizes every other topic and theme found in Scripture."[139] The result is a portrayal of God's holiness that is immanent and accessible yet not sufficiently balanced by the recognition of his supreme otherness and sovereignty. Consequently, an excessive reliance on the FCF paradigm has the potential to yield a reductive exegesis that may possibly neglect the broader scriptural affirmation of God's majestic holiness, which is depicted in Isaiah 6 as the primary catalyst for Isaiah's repentance, rather than the presence of Christ. Kuruvilla's critique aligns with this

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[138] Andrew Davis, *Exalting Jesus in Isaiah*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2017), 43–44.

[139] Gary E. Gilley, review of *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, by Bryan Chapell, *JODT* 23, no. 66 (Spring 2019): 115.

observation: "This move away from the specifics of a text to a level of canonical abstraction, as biblical theology envisages, is counterproductive for preachers."[140]

In summation, the Christ-centered interpretation, with its emphasis on the FCF, adeptly brings to light the immanent facets of God's holiness and his redemptive endeavors as exemplified in texts like Isaiah 6. Nevertheless, achieving a balance with an acknowledgment of God's transcendent holiness in both texts remains essential. A balanced hermeneutic that appreciates the multifaceted nature of divine holiness ensures a more holistic portrayal of God as both imminently present and transcendently awe-inspiring. An exclusive reliance on a Christocentric lens, despite its enriching effects on the interpretative experience, may overshadow salient themes within the Scriptures. Consequently, for a richer and more comprehensive exposition of these pivotal biblical passages, a nuanced approach to preaching that seamlessly interweaves immediate textual insights with Christological themes is advocated. Further exploration of the Christiconic perspective offers additional dimensions to the understanding of God's nature as presented in Isaiah and Revelation.

Christiconic Interpretation

The Christiconic approach represents a hermeneutical strategy for biblical interpretation that seeks to direct individual believers toward alignment with the divine will, as disclosed within the Scriptures.[141] This method involves a thorough analysis of biblical pericopes, ensuring that sermons faithfully reflect the characters of Christ as

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[140] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 241.

[141] Kuruvilla's definition of Christiconic interpretation is clear:

The Spirit's words (text) depict Christ's image (pericopal theology), and as God's people are aligned with that image, they are inhabiting the Father's kingdom (application)—it is coming to be! A biblical pericope thus is more than informing; it is also transforming. By aligning ourselves with the pericopal theology of each text, we are becoming increasingly Christlike, because Christ is the only one who fulfilled all the theologies of all the pericopes in all the books of Scripture. And this is God's goal for his people, that they may be "conformed to the image [eikōn] of his Son" (Rom 8:29). . . . I call this a Christiconic interpretation of Scripture for homiletics. (Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 57–58)

presented in each text.[142] Grounded in the fundamental principle that "each biblical pericope portrays a facet of the canonical *image* (εἰχών; Rom 8:29) of Christ,"[143] this approach upholds the conviction that "all interpretation of the Bible for preaching purposes must be consistent with this bedrock—the *image* of Christ portrayed by the canon."[144]

Within this hermeneutical context, it is crucial for preachers to distinguish between Christ-centered and Christiconic interpretations, as both prioritize the centrality of Jesus in Scripture but engage with the text through distinct lenses.[145] The Christ-centered interpretation aims to discern how the entirety of Scripture points to Jesus, identifying types, foreshadowing, and direct references that reveal the role of Christ in God's redemptive plan.[146] As discussed previously, this perspective underscores the fulfillment of messianic promises through Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, thus perceiving Scripture as a cohesive story culminating in him. Chapell reinforces this concept, stating, "Thus, Jesus is the apex and culmination of Scripture's testimony."[147]

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[142] Kuruvilla, *A Privilege the Text!*, 27; *A Vision for Preaching*, 45; *A Manual for Preaching*, 30; "Christiconic View," in *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*: *Four Views on Preaching Today*, ed. Scott M. Gibson and Matthew D. Kim (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 63.

[143] Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 136.

[144] Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 136.

[145] The foundational distinction between the hermeneutical approaches of Greidanus (Christ-Centered) and Kuruvilla (Christiconic) lies in the specific biblical passages they each focus on. Greidanus anchors his Christ-centered interpretation in the idea that "Christ is both the eternal Logos, who is present from the beginning (John 1:1), and Christ incarnate, who is present only after Old Testament times (John 1:14)." Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 3. Chapell grounds his argument on the same biblical passage. Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 5. Conversely, Kuruvilla bases his argument for Christiconic interpretation on the concept that the comprehensive portrayal of Christ, as the image of God, represents the ultimate goal (*telos*) of the entire biblical canon. He contends that it is God's will to shape his people into this image of his Son, as stated in Rom 8:29. This difference in foundational passages forms the basis of the distinct interpretive lenses through which each homiletician views Scripture.

[146] See Chapell, "Redemptive-Historical View," 10–23. Kim, *Preaching the Whole Counsel of God*, 78–79; Keller, *Preaching*, 80–82; Edmund Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 100–112.

[147] Chapell, "Redemptive-Historical View," 9.

In contrast, Christiconic interpretation advances beyond the mere acknowledgment of Christ as the focal point of Scripture; it also considers him as the exemplary model. Kuruvilla lays the groundwork for this perspective by emphasizing that "the New Testament consistently points to Jesus as an example."[148] This method involves a thorough analysis of biblical passage to ascertain how it reflects facets of Christ's character or mission, thereby establishing a standard for believers to emulate these attributes. Each pericope distinctively positions Jesus as the model of obedience, the embodiment of divine precepts.[149] In this light, Jesus stands as the singular exemplar who has actualized the ideal life that Scripture delineates. This profound connection with Jesus is critical for the Christiconic method of biblical hermeneutics. Kuruvilla underscore this concept by asserting,

> Since only one man, the Lord Jesus Christ, perfectly met all of God's demands, being without sin (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26), one can say that this person, and this person alone, has perfectly inhabited *the world in front of the text*, living by all of its requirements. Jesus Christ alone has comprehensively abided by the theology of every pericope of Scripture. In other words, each pericope of the Bible is actually portraying a characteristic of Christ, showing us what it means to perfectly fulfill, as he did, the particular call of that pericope. The Bible as a whole, the collection of all its pericopes, then, portrays what a perfect human looks like, exemplified by Jesus Christ, God incarnate, the perfect man.[150]

The Christiconic approach is not merely an academic exercise but serves a transformative purpose in the act of preaching, aiming that "God's people are being molded into Christlikeness,"[151] and thus engaging with the text as a living guide for

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[148] Kuruvilla, "Christiconic View," 61.

[149] Kuruvilla's Christiconic interpretation starts with this conviction: "Each pericope of the Bible is actually portraying a characteristic of Christ. Each world segment is a facet of the image of Christ, showing us what it means to perfectly fulfill, as he did, the particular divine demand in that pericope. Thus, to be fully Christlike means to fulfill God's will in every pericope of Scripture." Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 133.

[150] Abraham Kuruvilla, "Christiconic Interpretation," *BSac* 173 (April–June 2016): 144.

[151] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 269. See the theological foundation of the concept "Christlikeness" in Gary L. Nebeker, "The Holy Spirit, Hermeneutics, and Transformation: From Present to Future Glory," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 27, no. 1 (January 2003): 47–54.

personal and communal holiness.[152] While Chapell emphasizes Jesus as the pinnacle and ultimate fulfillment of Scripture's narrative, Kuruvilla extends this foundation by accentuating the imperative of emulating Christ. He encapsulates this principle in his hermeneutic with a distinct focus: "Christ must be imitated as an example."[153]

In contrast to Chapell's hermeneutical framework, which places the FCF at the forefront, addressing the human condition through Christ-centered solutions,[154] Kuruvilla advocates for a more profound engagement with the text's own narrative and its invitation to divine imitation. He consistently underscores the primacy of the biblical text, or pericope in his terminology, in the context of preaching. This emphasis is encapsulated in his frequent call to *privilege the text*.[155] He argues that the preacher's focus should be primarily on the text itself and its unique theology, as it is the text that is divinely inspired, not necessarily the historical events or other elements it may describe. Kuruvilla elaborates,

> But by focusing on the event behind the text rather than on the text itself, the theology of the pericope was completely negated! Instead, for preaching purposes, the interpreter must *privilege the text*; only in so doing can one discover what is projected

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[152] The objective of the Christiconic interpretation, as outlined by Kuruvilla, is to foster Christlike behavior among believers. Kuruvilla explains, "A christiconic mode of biblical interpretation has as its goal the inculcation of Christlike conduct, by the power of the Spirit, and through the instrumentality of Scripture, pericope by pericope, week by week." Kuruvilla, *A Privilege the Text!*, 30.

[153] Kuruvilla, "Christiconic View," 61.

[154] Chapell insists that every unit of the Scripture discloses a FCF: "The FCF present in every text demonstrates God's refusal to leave his frail and sinful children without guide or defense in a world antagonistic to their spiritual well-being. An FCF not only provides the human context needed for a passage's explanation but also indicates that biblical solutions must be divine and not merely human." Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 30.

[155] Josiah Boyd elucidates Kuruvilla's concept of *privilege the text* as a commitment to a text-centered hermeneutic:

> Instead, Kuruvilla suggests, only a theological hermeneutic committed to the privileging of the inspired text of Scripture can help preachers arrive at the desired destination. Not only does this provide a method of text-centered and testable interpretation, but from that interpretation is provided a method of developing application that is clearly supported by the passage of Scripture out of which it is claimed to have arisen. (Josiah D. Boyd, *From Ancient Text to Valid Application: A Practical Exploration of Pericopal Theology in Preaching* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021], 38)

in front of the text, pericopal theology. In sum, it is the text that must be privileged, for it alone is inspired. Events behind the text are not inspired.[156]

Chapell's Christ-centered interpretation, deeply rooted in redemptive-historical perspective, focuses on interpreting texts through their soteriological implications, as exemplified by the FCF. However, this method inadvertently subordinates the text's immediate and unique expression to the overarching redemptive narrative. This hermeneutical tension is particularly noticeable in the interpretation of Genesis 22, *the Aqedah* (עקד, "bind" in Gen 22:9).[157] In this narrative, where Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac is recounted, Kuruvilla challenges the Christ-centered approach for its tendency to view the passage primarily as a prefiguration of the sacrifice-redemption.[158] Transitioning from observation to critique, he cautions that a simplistic identification of Christ within the actions of Abraham and Isaac represents a "strong danger of ultimate superficiality."[159] Kuruvilla interprets Genesis 22 with an emphasis of the text's own inherent theology, arguing that "The *Aqedah* was, in reality, a demonstration of love for God over against anything that advanced a rival claim to that love."[160] Timothy Warren offers a discerning distinction between Christ-centered and Christiconic interpretations, observing that

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[156] Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 105.

[157] In his analysis, Eric Price contrasts the interpretative approaches of Greidanus and Kuruvilla regarding preaching Christ from Gen 22:1–19. Greidanus emphasizes a Christ-centered approach, particularly highlighting the theme of substitutionary context as seen in the Lord's provision of a ram for Isaac, thereby underscoring the typological significance of Christ. Kuruvilla, however, directs his focus more toward the text's distinctive theological point, illustrating how the blessings were partially contingent on Abraham's obedience. See Eric Price, "Comparing Sidney Greidanus and Abraham Kuruvilla on Preaching Christ from the Old Testament," *TJ* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 69–93.

[158] Kuruvilla offers a pointed critique of the Christ-centered interpretation as exemplified in Greidanus's interpretation of Gen 22, where the narrative is predominantly seen through the lens of salvation via the cross. Kuruvilla challenges this perspective, suggesting it lacks robust exegetical support and characterizes it as "a tangled skein of anachronistic references." See *Privilege the Text!*, 219. For a comprehensive assessment of Kuruvilla's interpretation of Gen 22, see Abraham Kuruvilla, "The *Aqedah* (Genesis 22): What Is the Author is Doing with What He Is Saying?" *JETS* 55, no. 3 (September 2012): 489–508.

[159] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 219.

[160] Abraham Kuruvilla, "Theological Exegesis," *BSac* 173 (July–September 2016): 270.

"Kuruvilla's proposal allows any text to stand on its own without forcing upon it some reference to Christ."[161]

Expanding on the theme of textual primacy, Kuruvilla intensifies the critical role of pericopal theology within the Christiconic interpretative framework. He considers pericopal theology essential for grasping the unique theological essence of each text.[162] He describes it as a representation of a segment of the plenary world in front of the canonical text that portrays God and his relationship to his people.[163] In his discourse on the objectives of preaching from a Christiconic standpoint, Kuruvilla establishes the foundational idea: embracing pericopal theology equates to accepting God's gracious invitation. This invitation extends beyond mere comprehension of God's world; it involves active participation within it, a process that necessitates living in accordance with the divine demands each pericope presents. Kuruvilla articulates this concept by stating, "To live by pericopal theology is to accept God's gracious invitation to be aligned to the will of God as depicted in each pericope."[164]

Delving deeper into the core function of pericopal theology, Kuruvilla introduces the concept of *the world in front of the text*[165] as a hermeneutical intermediary where the divine ideal is vividly portrayed, inviting the reader to inhabit it.[166] He leverages Paul Ricoeur's insights to assert that texts do more than recount historical events or undergo structural analysis; they project an "ideal world" that beckons readers to align

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[161] Timothy S. Warren, "Exploring Precursors to and Benefits of Abe Kuruvilla's 'Pericopal Theology,'" *JEHS* 15, no. 1 (March 2015): 56.

[162] See the concept of pericopal theology in chap. 2, "The Necessity of a Theological Approach."

[163] Abraham Kuruvilla, "Pericopal Theology," *Homiletix* (blog), October 4, 2012, https://homiletix.com/pericopal-theology/.

[164] Abraham Kuruvilla, foreword to Boyd, *From Ancient Text to Valid Application*, x.

[165] See the discussion of *the world in front of the text* in chap. 1, "Challenges in Conveying the Depth and Beauty of God's Holiness through Traditional Hermeneutical Approaches."

[166] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 28.

with its vision.[167] Kuruvilla expounds, "Thus a text not only tells the reader about the world behind the text, what actually happened. . . . a text also projects an ideal world in front of the text that bids the reader inhabit it, a world characterized by certain precepts, priorities, and practices."[168] This envisioned world, rich with the author's intended teachings and values, becomes the focal point of the text's message. In Kuruvilla's terms, it becomes the text's referent, encapsulating the essence of what the text fundamentally communicates.[169] Kuruvilla further clarifies, "Pericopal theology is the ideological vehicle through which divine priorities, principles, and practices are propounded for appropriation by readers."[170]

A comparison of Kuruvilla's interpretive framework with Chapell's reveals a similar foundational structure. Just as Chapell's "biblical theology" aligns the FCF with a

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[167] Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory posits that the essence of a text's meaning unfolds in front of it rather than being confined to its historical origins. He suggests that to truly comprehend a text readers must engage with the world envisioned by the text, following the text's own trajectory. Thus, the text serves as an invitation for reader or congregation to inhabit this projected world, living in a manner that embodies the text's underlying concepts, values, and directives. Ricoeur explains, "What is indeed to be understood—and consequently appropriated—in the text?. . . What has to be appropriated is the meaning of the text itself, conceived in a dynamic way as the direction of thought opened up by the text. In other words, what has to be appropriated is nothing other than the power of disclosing a world that constitutes the reference of the text." Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and The Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University, 1976), 92.

[168] Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 94. Klyne Snodgrass also remarks, "With preaching we should be concerned most with the world the text projects and the way it rearranges the sets of relations out of which people live. Most important in those sets of relations is God, the God who speaks and desires willing and capable hearers." Klyne Snodgrass, "Reading to Hear: A Hermeneutics of Hearing," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 24, no. 1 (June 2002): 32.

[169] Recognizing Ricoeur's scholarly impact, Kuruvilla examines the notion of the referent in biblical hermeneutics. Kuruvilla identifies twofold thrust:

Given that a pericope is both an object and instrument of action, it has a twofold thrust: it is best considered a concrete universal—"plurisign" whereby it signifies a first-order referent that is "close, immediate, and relatively obvious," as well as a second-order referent that possesses "a universal and archetypal character.". . . The projected textual world (the universal) is the second-order pragmatic referent, unique to the text and derived from the particulars of its first-order referent. Such secondary referents of Scripture display to readers a world of divine values and demands and offer to them the possibility of appropriating that world by subscription to those values and obedience to those demands. (Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 157–58)

[170] Abraham Kuruvilla, *Mark*, Theological Commentary for Preachers (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), xii.

Christ-centered interpretive principle, so does Kuruvilla's "pericopal theology" grounds the reader's engagement in *the world in front of the text*. This distinction arises because, whereas Chapell's FCF predominantly interprets Scripture through the lens of Christ-centered solutions, Kuruvilla's pericopal theology encourages a more nuanced engagement, anchoring the reader more directly in the text itself.[171] This nuanced approach not only deepens the practical comprehension of each pericope but also actively guides the congregation to inhabit the reality of God's ideal world, as vividly shaped by the transformative power of the text and its theology.[172] In this way, Kuruvilla's interpretive strategy offers a more immediate and tangible application of biblical principles, providing a more contextually sensitive understanding of the pericope, the text.

In the practice of Christiconic interpretation, particularly through the lens of *the world in front of the text* of each pericope, one must recognize that the author's communicative action extends beyond mere words to the projection of a transcendent vision. Kuruvilla elucidates the practical methodology of his interpretive approach by emphasizing the importance of discerning what the author is *doing* with what he is *saying*.[173] This process involves a deep analysis of the text to understand not just what is being said, but the purpose and action with these words. Kuruvilla suggests, "The interpreter privilege the text and its immediate context to figure out what A/author was

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[171] Kuruvilla distinguishes his "text-centered" perspective from Chapell's approach, which is driven by "biblical theology." This distinction underscores the unique focus of each methodology on interpreting Scripture. Kuruvilla asserts, "Indeed, I am convinced that no two biblical pericopes can ever have the same thrust or force. The uniqueness of wording and structure and context of any given passage renders it impossible for one pericope to have the same thrust/force as another." Abraham Kuruvilla, "Time to Kill the Big Idea? A Fresh Look at Preaching," *JETS* 61, no. 4 (December 2018): 834.

[172] Kuruvilla articulately addresses the transformative power inherent in texts, emphasizing the importance of focusing intently on the text itself: "The interpreter must, therefore, pay close attention to the text, privileging it, not just to discover some kernel hidden in it, but to experience the thrust and force of the text qua text, in toto and as a whole." Kuruvilla, "Time to Kill the Big Idea?," 831.

[173] Kuruvilla succinctly states, "What authors are *doing* is projecting a *world in front of the text* bearing an intention that is transhistorical, transcending the specific circumstances of the author and the writing." Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 27.

doing with what he was *saying* (pericope theology)."[174] This vision, or *the world in front of the text*, is not a mere backdrop but a vivid, divine invitation to live according to the ethos of God's kingdom.[175]

Each pericope, as a distinct and preachable segment of Scripture, presents a unique perspective, embodying a specific call to action and resonating with God's will.[176] In Kuruvilla's hermeneutical system, the author in the text is *doing* more than exegesis; he shapes a theological thrust that calls for transformation with his words.[177] He is not just conveying information; he is *performing* with the text to project an ideal world, urging readers to step into this world with each act of obedience and alignment with the pericope's theology. This author's *doing* is a pragmatic aspect of the text, a beckoning to live out the text in a way that progressively shapes the listener into the likeness of Christ, the perfect inhabitant of God's ideal world.[178]

Moving beyond this foundational understanding, Kuruvilla meticulously outlines his interpretive methodology, elucidating that interpreting *the world in front of the text* involves a two-fold process: understanding the semantic content—what the author is *saying* through the text; and discerning the pragmatic actions of the author—what the

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[174] Abraham Kuruvilla, "David v. Goliath (1 Samuel 17): What Is the Author *Doing* with What He Is *Saying*?," *JETS* 58, no. 3 (September 2015): 490.

[175] Kuruvilla signifies the transformative power of biblical texts, noting, "Thus, in texts, a view of life is portrayed, projecting for the reader a world beyond the confines of the text. A world is portrayed, an invitation to that world is extended, and lives are changed as listeners respond to inhabit the world and live by its precepts, priorities, and practices." Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 94.

[176] Kuruvilla, "Christiconic View," 57.

[177] Thomas Long stresses the need for discerning what the text does with it says. He writes, "Texts do all these things through words, of course, which means that they do things by saying things in certain ways. And it is here—in the interplay between saying and doing—that we find the key to building the bridge between text and sermon." Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 124.

[178] Kuruvilla, "Christiconic Interpretation," 145–46.

author is *doing* with the text.[179] This dualistic approach necessitates an initial focus on semantics, involving "the linguistic, grammatical, and syntactical aspects of an utterance."[180] This step is a prerequisite for establishing a foundational understanding of the text. In other words, a grasp of the semantic elements is "a necessary foundation of interpretation"[181] for appreciating the pragmatic implications of the text. However, a comprehensive interpretation of an author's communicative act transcends mere semantic analysis, extending to the discernment of the non-literal, pragmatic elements at play. This aspect of interpretation seeks to uncover the underlying intentions and actions of the author, as conveyed through the text. Kuruvilla accentuates the intricate relationship between semantics and pragmatics in his hermeneutic. He posits that the task of interpretation of *the world in front of the text* or what the author is *doing* extends beyond the mere analysis of linguistic, grammatical, and syntactical elements—the "what" of the author's message, (semantics). He then stresses the importance of progressing to the "how" of the message, which involves discerning *the world in front of the text*—the author's goals and intentions (pragmatics).[182] He states, "Semantics, though a necessary foundation of interpretation, does not by itself yield the thrust of the text, which is the function of pragmatics."[183] The pragmatic analysis seeks to uncover *the world in front of the text*, characterized by the

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[179] Kuruvilla clarifies the relationship between semantics and pragmatics in textual interpretation: "While the semantic and pragmatic transactions of a text may not be separable, they are discriminable: what the author is *saying* and what the author is *doing* with what s/he is saying can be distinguished (sentence meaning vs. utterance meaning)." Abraham Kuruvilla, "'What Is the Author Doing with What He Is Saying?' Pragmatics and Preaching—An Appeal!," *JETS* 60, no. 3 (September 2017): 566.

[180] Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 78.

[181] Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 78.

[182] Kuruvilla, "What Is the Author Doing?," 568.

[183] Kuruvilla's perspective on interpreting *the world in front of the text* is a blend of science and art. He posits,

> It is founded on a hermeneutic that sees authors doing things (the pragmatics) with what they say (the semantics), projecting *the world in front of the text*, the ideal world of God, and inviting God's people to dwell in that world, abiding by the call of that text (pericopal theology). Semantic (scientific) analysis of a text generates only the author's saying. One must go beyond that to pragmatic (artistic) analysis, which alone can yield the author's doing. (Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 270–71)

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ethical and theological values the author projects through the text.[184] This pragmatic realm, rich with implied meaning and ethical values, represents the true objective hermeneutical engagement. Josiah Boyd captures the essence of this hermeneutical strategy: "God's people will not only be able to better understand what God is *saying* semantically, but they will be able to discern what God is *doing* pragmatically with what he is saying."[185]

In conclusion, the foundational principle that "Jesus Christ alone has comprehensively abided by the theology of every pericope of Scripture,"[186] elevates the projected world in front of the pericope as a vital intermediary where the attributes of Christ are not only admired but actively pursued.[187] This intermediary facilitates the embodiment of virtues such as compassion, humility, obedience, and sacrificial love, transforming them from abstract qualities to tangible realities for emulation. This embodiment of virtues represents a valid application of the text's theology or main thrusts, a topic that will be thoroughly examined in the subsequent chapter.[188]

Preaching, in this context, aims to bridge the gap between the ancient text and contemporary life, rendering the Christiconic model a lived experience for believers. This engagement enables the text transcend time and culture, allowing the timeless figure of Christ to emerge as the living word, actively shaping the ethos and actions of the faith community. The concept of *the world in front of the text*, as understood within the Christiconic framework, sets forth a transformative goal for preaching. It aims to shape character and behavior in accordance with the ideals exemplified by Christ, thereby

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[184] In pragmatic analysis, the concept of "transhistorical intention" of the text emerges as the interpreter moves beyond the texts to purposeful application across ages. This method discerns enduring truths and divine imperatives within the Scriptures, aiming to translate ancient wisdom into contemporary relevance. The concept of "transhistorical intention" will be discussed in chap. 4.

[185] Boyd, *From Ancient Text to Valid Application*, 73.

[186] Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 30.

[187] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 28.

[188] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 194.

fostering a people of God deeply rooted in Christian principles. Kuruvilla summarizes

this dynamic process:

> Thus, preaching is not merely for the information of minds, but for the transformation of lives—that they may be conformed to the image of Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, through the instrumentality of Scripture, by the agency of the preacher. Sermon by sermon, habits are changed, dispositions are created, character is built, the image of Christ is formed, and humans are becoming what they were meant by God to be.[189]

Projecting God's Holiness: What Is the Author Doing with What He Is Saying in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4?

The scriptural narrative, particularly in its depiction of divine holiness, presents

a nuanced and intricate theological tapestry. This complexity is astutely navigated through

the application of Kuruvilla's hermeneutical system, a methodology that accentuates *the

world in front of the text*. This interpretative approach is especially effective in elucidating

the dual nature of God's holiness as portrayed in the texts of Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4.

These chapters extend beyond their historical and prophetic contexts, emerging as

theological treatises that articulate the dual dimensions of God's holiness—its transcendent

majesty and its immanent presence. In other words, a mere semantic analysis does not

fully capture the text's depth. As Kuruvilla notes, "While no doubt a faithful depiction of

what actually happened . . . the narrative of characters and events are to be primarily

interpreted as furthering the theological purpose of the writer."[190] This insight highlights

the necessity of exploring the pragmatic dimension of the text.[191] To effectively grasp the

pragmatic aspect of the text, Kuruvilla endorses a "demonstration" approach in

preaching—a method that goes beyond mere explanation and instead focuses on revealing

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[189] Kuruvilla, foreword to Boyd, *From Ancient Text to Valid Application*, x.

[190] Kuruvilla, *Mark*, xiii.

[191] Kuruvilla emphasizes the importance of pragmatic analysis in interpreting texts, highlighting that "semantics is necessary for comprehension, but it is not sufficient, for there is a non-semantic part (i.e., the pragmatic element) to the interpretation of utterances and texts. This is to emphasize that there is more to understanding what authors are *doing* than just dissecting out the linguistic, grammatical, and syntactical elements of what authors are *saying*." Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 49.

the theology of the text.[192] By demonstrating the theology inherent in the text—*the world in front of the text*—preachers can more effectively facilitate an experiential understanding of the pericope among their hearers.[193] This "demonstration" method allows the congregation to vividly engage with the text's projected ideal world, leading to a transformative experience that is rooted in the author's intention.[194] Kuruvilla elucidates this concept further, stating that the sermon is not an argument or explanation,[195] but "a demonstration of the experience (of the text's doing)."[196] His hermeneutic approach is designed to immerse listeners in both the text and its underlying theology, aligning themselves with the divine demands.[197] In the context of Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, the application of this hermeneutical approach discussed above becomes particularly salient.

[192] Kuruvilla underscores the effectiveness of "demonstration" compared to "argument" in preaching, particularly in capturing the pragmatic nature of the text—what the author is *doing*. He elaborates,

> A fresh look at preaching then describes this central mode of Christian communication as a novel form of text-based address unknown to classical rhetoricians, calls for attending to authorial doings with texts (discerning the theology of pericopes), and considers textual interpretation as not only a science but also an art, texts being both discursive (in their sayings) and non-discursive (in their doings). Such a conception of texts entails that preaching be conceived more as demonstration than as argumentation. (Kuruvilla, "Time to Kill the Big Idea?," 823)

[193] Kuruvilla uses the term "theological agenda" and "the world in front of the text" interchangeably. He notes, "The theological agenda of the authors must be respected: *the world in front of the text*." See *Privilege the Text!*, 105; 107; 117; 126; 130; 135; 142; 148; 187; 194.

[194] Kuruvilla, "Time to Kill the Big Idea?," 842–46; "Preaching—Argumentation versus Demonstration," in *A Manual for Preaching*, 269–73.

[195] Tim MacBride offers valuable clarity on the concept of "demonstration" in preaching. He observes, "Explanation can help our understanding of a text, but it is not always capable of communicating the *experience* using ideas and images that speak directly to contemporary hearers." Tim MacBride, "The Preacher as Tour Guide: Becoming Better Curators of the Biblical Text," *St Mark's Review* 258, no.1 (December 2021): 44.

[196] Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 89.

[197] See Kuruvilla's explanation on the concept preaching as demonstration in "Creating Maps" in *A Manual for Preaching*, 89–110.

Projecting God's Holiness as Demanded
by the Text in Isaiah 6

Abraham Kuruvilla's hermeneutical approach provides a valuable perspective for interpreting God's holiness in Isaiah 6 within a preaching context. This framework enhances comprehension by insisting on a dual focus: understanding both the explicit content of the text and its intended effect on listeners. Restating this for emphasis, Kuruvilla's assertion that "text analysis for preaching should involve semantics *and* pragmatics"[198] is particularly pertinent in unraveling the complex narrative of Isaiah 6. This method allows for a deeper appreciation of the text's theology, revealing not just what the author is *saying* but also the intended theological implications (what the author is *doing*). By engaging with both the words and their pragmatic elements, readers can more effectively connect with the profound spiritual truths about God's holiness embedded within Isaiah 6.

Semantically, Isaiah 6 offers a richly descriptive account of God's holiness, characterized by awe and reverence.[199] This is exemplified in the depiction of a divine vision where God is seated on a lofty throne, his robe filling the temple (Isa 6:1), and seraphim positioned above him (Isa 6:2). The seraphim, with their six wings, symbolize profound reverence and humility, covering their faces and feet in God's presence.[200] The repeated declaration of God's holiness by the seraphim, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts" (Isa 6:3), underscores his supreme and unparalleled status.[201] This repetition, a unique linguistic device in the Old Testament,[202] effectively communicates the transcendent nature of God's holiness.

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[198] Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 271.

[199] See "The Transcendent Holiness in His Greatness in Isaiah 6," in chap. 2.

[200] Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, NAC, vol. 15A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 189.

[201] Raymond C. Ortlund, *Isaiah: God Saves Sinners*, PtW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 77.

[202] R. C. Sproul denotes, "It represents a peculiar literary device that is found in Hebrew forms of literature, especially in poetry. The repetition is a form of emphasis." R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1998), 23.

However, a simplistic explanation of the concept of transcendent holiness does not suffice to encapsulate the pragmatic depth and narrative intricacy of the text. Kuruvilla's hermeneutical principles facilitate a deeper understanding of the text's theology, guiding readers to perceive God's holiness not merely as a conceptual abstraction but as a tangible, experiential reality.[203] Isaiah 6 moves from a divine revelation to a personal crisis and then to broader communal implications, demonstrating the journey from encountering God's transcendent holiness to recognizing his immanent presence. In other words, this progression is instrumental in illustrating the transition from an encounter with God's transcendent holiness to an acknowledgment of his immanent presence. The text, therefore, serves not solely as a historical account or explanation, but as an intermediary through which the reader is invited to experience the reality of God's transcendent and immanent holiness, bridging the gap between the ancient text and its modern application.[204]

Explicitly, the narrative structure, using visual and auditory elements, highlights the transformative encounter with God's holiness, moving from a portrayal of divine majesty to a personal and communal engagement with the divine.[205] The author's deliberate use of Hebrew verbs ראה (to see) and קרא (to call/hear) exemplifies this, serving as thematic markers that illustrate the theological focus.[206] It clearly demonstrates

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[203] Kuruvilla's hermeneutical system skillfully integrates the understanding of both semantics and pragmatics by focusing on the key concept of *the world in front of the text*. He clearly articulates this foundational approach: "Therefore, the interpretation of Scripture cannot cease with the elucidation of its linguistic, grammatical, and syntactical elements: what the author is saying (semantics). It must proceed further to discern the world in front of the text: what the author is doing (pragmatics)." Kuruvilla, "Christiconic View," 54.

[204] In Kuruvilla's hermeneutical framework, the preacher's role is distinctly defined: "The primary task of preachers is to help their listeners experience the text + theology—the agenda of the A/author—in all its fullness. That is to say, preachers let their listeners encounter and experience the text as they themselves did." Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 272.

[205] J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 78–80.

[206] For a detailed explanation of the narrative structure, specifically the thematic chiasm, refer to the section "Identifying the Immanent Holiness of God in Isaiah 6" in chap. 2.
    A[1] "Seeing": I saw the Lord (6:1)

what the author is *doing* (understanding and perceiving) with what he is *saying* (God is holy). The narrative skillfully transitions from a visual revelation of the Lord to an auditory experience of angelic beings, culminating in Isaiah's profound realization of his own sinfulness in the presence of divine holiness. The narrative's progression from *seeing* to *hearing* and the returning to *hearing* and *seeing* establishes a cohesive structure. This structure emphasizes the transformative nature of Isaiah's encounter with God, thereby showcasing the author's deliberate theological focal point (what author is *doing*). This method is appropriately termed "an artful depiction of theological truth,"[207] highlighting the author's intention in weaving together sensory experiences to convey profound theological insights. Viewed from another perspective, the elements of *seeing* and *hearing* do more than advance the plot; they enrich the text with layers of "meaning, emotion, power, and pathos."[208]

Similarly, the interpretation of verse 5 in Isaiah 6 offers another insightful example. Isaiah's immediate response to the divine revelation, as he exclaims, "Woe is me! For I am lost" (Isa 6:5), poignantly reflects his self-awareness of moral inadequacies in comparison to God's transcendent holiness. This moment highlights a stark contrast between the transcendent holiness of God and Isaiah's own sense of moral shortfall. Following this, the narrative reaches a pivotal moment with the phrase, "And he touched my mouth" (Isa 6:7). This action does more than deepen the understanding of the semantic essence of God's transcendent holiness as a catalyst for repentance; it also pragmatically underscores God's desire to purify his people. This moment intensely projects not just Isaiah's recognition of his inadequacies but also marks the transformative process initiated

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B[1] "Hearing": One called to another (6:3a)
   C *"Holy, holy, holy": The holiness of God* (6:3b)
B[2] "Hearing": At the voice of him who called (6:4)
A[2] "Seeing": My eyes have seen the King (6:5)

[207] Kuruvilla, "Christiconic Interpretation," 143.

[208] Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 271.

by divine intervention. John Oswalt provides insightful commentary on this scene: "[Isaiah] has been made aware of the awesome holiness of God with all that means of his transcendence and yet his immanence, and now he is suddenly and brutally aware of himself."[209] This observation sheds light on the dual nature of God's holiness—both awe-inspiring and intimately close—and its transformative impact on Isaiah. Gary Smith well captures the theology of the interplay between God's transcendent and immanent holiness in Isaiah's experience:

> Sin no longer separated God and Isaiah (cf. 59:1–2). Isaiah's experience illustrates how any believer can identify sin (have a clear vision of the holiness of God), how everyone should respond when sin is recognized (admit it), and how God deals with confessed sin (he removes it). People who presume upon God's mercy because of their supposed goodness will fail to receive his forgiveness, but those who perceive the holiness of God will quickly acknowledge their great guilt and experience his atoning love.[210]

In this sequence, the author skillfully utilizes linguistic techniques and thematic contrasts to draw readers into a profound engagement with the dual aspects of God's holiness—both transcendent and immanent. This method fosters a transformative experience that goes beyond mere intellectual acknowledgment. As a result, the portrayal of God's holiness in Isaiah 6 transforms into a pragmatic call to action, prompting a response that integrates both reverence and personal transformation. Kuruvilla encapsulates this idea, stating, "God is not merely the subject under discussion in a sermon; he is a live voice, the One who introduces the discussion, graciously addressing his people as to how they should live in covenant fellowship with him."[211] Clearly, this perspective shifts the focus from a theoretical discussion to an active, relational engagement with the divine.

Isaiah 6 serves as a dynamic demonstration of specific values and priorities, vividly depicting God's holiness in both its transcendent and immanent aspects. Julian

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[209] John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapter 1–39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 182.

[210] Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, 193.

[211] Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 61.

Love captures this dynamic in Isaiah's theology, noting that "this Holy One is both withdrawn from the world of sin and yet moving redemptively toward that world."[212] This vision of God's holiness—*the world in front of the text*—invites the congregation to immerse themselves in a reality permeated with divine holiness, guiding them to align their lives with sanctified principles. This rich depiction not only offers a timeless direction toward holiness but also facilitates a deep, transformative interaction with the scripture. By engaging with this scriptural segment, the hearer is progressively shaped by God's holiness—transcendence and immanence—reflecting the image of Christ, the holy one of God (Mark 1:24), and journeying toward partaking in his holiness (Heb 12:10).

In brief, while the semantic components of Isaiah 6 are crucial for understanding the text, they represent only a part of its full meaning. The pragmatic meaning—what the author is *doing*—emerges as one discerns the text's theology, inviting the reader into a profound engagement with God's holiness. This interpretive approach resonates with Kuruvilla's hermeneutic, which transcends mere semantic analysis to embrace the pragmatic implications, particularly emphasizing the theme of immanent holiness. Such an interpretive attempt ultimately aims to transform the hearers, molding them more into the likeness of Christ.

Grasping the Theological Thrust of the Text in Revelation 4

In the analysis of Revelation 4, employing a hermeneutical approach akin to Kuruvilla's, which accentuates the interplay between semantics and pragmatics, is essential for an in-depth understanding of the depiction of God's holiness. Focusing on the theological focal point of the text, Kuruvilla's method is particularly pertinent in unraveling the multifaceted narrative of Revelation 4. This passage semantically provides a vivid and

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[212] Julian Price Love, "The Call of Isaiah: An Exposition of Isaiah 6," *Interpretation* 11, no. 3 (July 1957): 294.

detailed depiction of the heavenly realm, filled with a variety of imagery and symbolism.[213] The chapter opens with John's vision of God, seated on his magnificent throne, an image that is both awe-inspiring and majestic (Rev 4:1–2). In this vision, God is portrayed as the ultimate ruler of all creation (Rev 4:3), and encircled by various heavenly beings, including the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures (Rev 4:4–6). Particularly, the repeated cries of "Holy, holy, holy" (Rev 4:8) by the four living creatures underscore the perfect and transcendent nature of the Almighty. D. A. Carson reflects, "John sees the four living creatures, the highest angelic beings, orchestrating the praise of this thrice-holy God and reflecting his transcendent administration."[214] This theme of sovereign holiness is central to the worship and adoration that unfolds in the heavenly realm (Rev 4:9–11). The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures are depicted in a state of constant worship, deeply recognizing God's eternal nature and affirming his power and glory. Their unceasing adoration (Rev 4:8–10) serves to underscore the grandeur and majesty of God's holiness.[215] This semantic richness serves to elevate the reader's understanding of the scene, highlighting the transcendent holiness of God as the foundation for authentic worship.[216]

Transitioning from a detailed semantic analysis to a pragmatic exploration, as advocated by Kuruvilla, is crucial for grasping the full impact of the text.[217] This shift in focus allows for a deeper understanding of how the narrative's structure, language, and

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[213] Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 116–27.

[214] D. A. Carson, "Tris-Hagion: Foundation for Worldwide Mission," *JETS* 66, no. 1 (March 2023): 8.

[215] Brian J. Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone*, NSBT 48 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019), 37–39; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*. NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 330; David E. Aune, *Revelation* 1–5, WBC, vol. 52A (Dallas: Word, 1997), 303.

[216] R. Albert Mohler Jr., "The Whole Earth Is Full of His Glory: The Recovery of Authentic Worship Isaiah 6:1–8," *SBJT* 2, no. 4 (December 1998): 9.

[217] Kuruvilla succinctly captures the essence of biblical interpretation by stating, "exegesis is begun with determining the *saying*, but it is completed only with discerning the *doing*." Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 36.

imagery in Revelation 4 to collectively project an author-centered theological message, transcending mere argumentation or explanation. Within the context of Revelation 4, the chapter's portrayal of God's holiness invites readers into a narrative journey that moves from a majestic depiction of the divine to a dynamic and vibrant portrayal of heavenly worship. The author's deliberate use of specific linguistic techniques acts as thematic markers that guide the reader through the theological depth of the text. This section is distinguished by its use of Greek nominal clauses, as noted by David Mathewson.[218] Revelation 4 predominantly features these clauses, comprising a subject and occasionally a predicate nominative, adjective, or participle, but without an indicative verb.[219] This linguistic approach subtly shifts the focus from a *state of being* to dynamic sequences of action, effectively bridging the narrative from the solemn majesty of God's holiness to the vibrant realm of active worship.[220]

Mirroring this linguistic nuance, the chiastic structure of Revelation 4 further exemplifies this narrative technique, outlining a symmetrical progression that centers on the worship evoked by God's holiness. This structure, moving from an introduction of the heavenly vision to a culmination in the acknowledgment of God's worthiness, showcases the author's purposeful narrative strategy.[221] Essentially, the thematic development in this

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[218] David L. Mathewson, *Revelation*, BHGNT (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2016), 58.

[219] Mathewson, *Revelation*, 59.

[220] Mathewson, *Revelation*, 60.

[221] The thematic chiasm (the structure of chap. 4) is shown as follows:

A^1 (4:1) Introduction: Invitation to the Heavenly Vision
  B^1 (4:2–3) Initial Observation: Description of the Throne and the One Seated on it
    C^1 (4:4) Fundamental Paradigm: Twenty-Four Elders in Static Status
      D^1 (4:5a) Cosmic Disturbances: Lightning, Rumblings, and Peals of Thunder
        E^1 (4:5b) Before the Throne: Description of Seven Spirits of God
          F^1 (4:6a) Before the Throne: Description of Sea of Glass
            G^1 (4:6b–8a) Central Focus: *Worshipping God by Four Living Creatures*
            G^2 (4:8b) Central Focus: *Worshipping God Evoked by God's Holiness*
          F^2(4:9a) On the Throne: Description of Contents of Worship
        E^2(4:9b) On the Throne: Description of God's Attributes
      D^2 (4:10a) Cosmic Worship: Ceaseless Worship by Twenty-Four Elders
    C^2 (4:10b) Fundamental Paradigm: Twenty-Four Elders in Dynamic Status

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narrative is both intentional and strategic. It reflects what the author is *doing* through his choice of words (what the author is *saying*), thereby projecting the ideal world of a holy God. The narrative's shift from a static to a dynamic representation of the divine realm skillfully conveys deep theological insights.

This thematic strategy of the narrative is further emphasized as it transitions to the pivotal moment in Revelation 4:8. At this juncture, the narrative reaches its climax, vividly illustrating the culmination of the author's meticulously crafted development: authentic worship that emerges from God's transcendent holiness and is made accessible through his immanent holiness. Laszlo Gallusz captures the essence of this dynamic: "While the throne motif conveys primarily the idea of God's royal authority and unrivalled power in Revelation, it balances, at the same time, the emphasis on divine transcendence with an immanent aspect."[222]

This interpretation aligns with Kuruvilla's perspective, which views the sermon as a compelling demonstration of the text's underlying theology or thrust, encouraging the congregation to both experience and react to the divine truths presented in the pericope. Revelation 4, at its core, serves as a pragmatic call to action, challenging the reader to not only recognize the transcendent holiness of God but also respond to God's immanent holiness through authentic worship. As worshippers respond to God's transcendent and immanent holiness, they are progressively conformed to the image of Christ, a transformation that reshapes identity and purpose.[223]

In summary, Revelation 4, through its intricate narrative and theological depth, offers profound insight into the nature of God's holiness. It presents a vision of holiness

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B[2] (4:11a) Culmination: Acknowledgement of the Worthiness of the One Seated on the Throne

A[2] (4:11b) Conclusion: Invitation to Authentic Worship

[222] Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, Library of New Testament Studies 487 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 305.

[223] Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 129.

that is both transcendent in its majesty and immanent in its presence for worship. Bob Kauflin emphasizes the significance of these dual aspects of God's nature in enriching worship experiences. He points out,

> The transcendence and immanence of God are a doorway to deeper and more grateful worship. Our church gatherings and our personal devotions can suffer from a failure to treasure both God's transcendence and immanence. If God isn't great, he won't compel our reverence, fear, and obedience. If we don't think of him as near, he won't evoke our gratitude, joy, and amazement.[224]

In this light, the narrative of Revelation 4 masterfully projects a vision of an ideal world, drawing the reader into profound engagement with its central theme: genuine worship that originates from the exalted holiness of God and is rendered accessible through his intimate holiness. The theological exposition presented in the text empowers believers to "abide in *the world in front of the text*, aligned to its precepts, priorities, and practices,"[225] thereby reflecting this holiness in their own lives. The author of Revelation effectively demonstrates that through a commitment to holiness-driven, authentic worship, "God is glorified as his people thus manifest his holiness."[226] Furthermore, this narrative's pragmatic strategy not only accentuates the centrality of God's holiness within Christian worship but also sheds light on the transformative influence of holiness in guiding believers toward Christlikeness, profoundly impacting their lives and actions.

Conclusion

Chapter 3 initiates a discussion on the importance of adopting a robust hermeneutical framework for preaching, underscoring the necessity for both academic rigor and practical applicability in interpreting Scripture. Central to this discussion is the concept of an author-oriented hermeneutic, which posits that the author's intent drives the meaning of the text. This foundational belief emphasizes the authenticity and integrity of

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[224] Bob Kauflin, "Worshipping the Infinite and Intimate God," *Desiring God* (blog), February 12, 2021, https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/worshiping-the-infinite-and-intimate-god.

[225] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text*, 63.

[226] Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 2.

the text's meaning, which is solidly rooted in the original intentions of the authors. The chapter also critically assesses the New Homiletic methodology, which is based on a reader-responsive hermeneutic, highlighting its strengths and limitations in balancing engaging sermons with fidelity to the biblical text.

Furthermore, the chapter delves into the interpretive challenges in conveying the depth and beauty of God's holiness, examining three hermeneutical approaches: theocentric, Christ-centered, and Christiconic interpretation. These methods are scrutinized for their effectiveness in capturing and communicating the complex nature of divine holiness as depicted in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. The discussion features the continuous need for a Christiconic hermeneutical method that is deeply anchored in the text and simultaneously meets the spiritual and practical needs of contemporary audiences.

As a practical application of Christiconic interpretation, the narratives of Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 are examined. Through their theological richness and narrative depth, these texts offer profound insights into the multifaceted nature of God's holiness. The dual portrayal of God's holiness as both transcendent and immanent powerfully serves as a catalyst for personal purification and authentic worship, embodying *the world in front of the text*. Thus, Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 emerge as timeless guides, leading believers to a deeper understanding of God's holiness and challenging them to align with their transformative power. The next chapter will delve into the effective methodologies that connect God's holiness as presented in ancient texts with its practical applications in the context of modern preaching.

CHAPTER 4

BE HOLY FOR I AM HOLY: HOMILETICAL
APPROACH FOR VALID APPLICATIONS

This chapter takes a deep dive into the essential yet challenging task of applying

the concept of God's holiness in preaching. The chapter explores the intricate relationship

between the theological understanding of holiness and its practical application in

homiletics, underscoring the critical need for valid application in sermons.[1] Hershael York

compellingly asserts that application is not merely an aspect, but "its ultimate goal."[2] This

understanding highlights the vital role of application in bridging the gap between the

interpretation and congregational edification. Therefore, the objective of this chapter,

drawing on Abraham Kuruvilla's approach, is to seek to "establish a means to validate

the move from Scripture to sermon."[3] This involves engaging in both interpretation and

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[1] The importance of application in preaching is a key emphasis among homileticians. John Broadus, in his seminal work on preaching, asserts, "The application in a sermon is not merely an appendage to the discussion, or a subordinate part of it, but is the main thing to be done." John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, ed. Edwin Charles Dargan, 23rd ed. (New York: Hodder & Stougton, 1898), 245. Similarly, Albert Mohler emphasizes the centrality of application in preaching, stating, "Expository preaching is that mode of Christian preaching that takes as its central purpose the presentation and application of the text of the Bible. All other issues and concerns are subordinated to the central task of presenting the biblical text." R. Albert Mohler Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 65. For a more detailed discussion on the necessity of application in preaching, see Hershael W. York and Scott A. Blue, "Is Application Necessary in the Expository Sermon?" *SBJT* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 70–84; Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 12–40.

[2] Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 11.

[3] Abraham Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis: Hermeneutics and Homiletics in Dialogue* (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 142.

application—connecting hermeneutics with homiletics[4]—specifically for the texts of Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4.

This chapter begins by addressing the general issues of application in preaching. It critically examines various challenges in contemporary preaching, including the issue of application-less preaching.[5] This approach often arises from the assumption that the hearers are capable of independently forming relevant connections or practical implications from the sermon. Paige Patterson comments, "If the preacher assumes that the lesson is complete without concrete application, he assumes too much."[6] Furthermore, the chapter scrutinizes the approach of simple direct transference, which posits a straightforward equation between the scriptural text and modern hearers.[7] The discussion then shifts to the pitfalls of moralizing application, which reduces the rich benefits of biblical teaching to a simplistic list of moral lessons.[8] It highlights how such methods can distort the authorial intention, leading to a misinterpretation of biblical narratives in contemporary preaching contexts.

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[4] Abraham Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching: The Journey from Text to Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 34. Kuruvilla explains the relationship between hermeneutics and homiletics, writing, "Homiletics must draw from the insights of early and modern hermeneutics, and hermeneutics must attend to the ecclesial context and unique demands of the homiletical endeavor." Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 3.

[5] Application-less preaching can be defined as a style of preaching where the application is either ambiguous or entirely missing. Doriani critiques this method: "Far too many books assume that application takes care of itself if we just listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and speak honestly to the troubles, we see in ourselves and others. Unfortunately, it is not that simple." Daniel M. Doriani, *Getting the Message: A Plan for Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1996), 11.

[6] Paige Patterson, "Ancient Rhetoric: A Model for Text-Driven Preachers," in *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Mathews (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010), 33.

[7] Ramesh Richard's definition of direct transference is insightful. He comments, "Principilization short-circuits the interpretation process by overlooking the discontinuity between the people then and the people today. A simple equation mark is placed between the past and the present so that then equals now. Best call this 'direct transference.'" Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 163.

[8] Sidney Greidanus's perspective on moralizing application in preaching serves as a starting point for discussing this issue. He expresses his concerns in this way: "Moralizing means drawing moral inferences, usually things to do or become. . . . Unfortunately, in overemphasizing virtues and vices, dos and don'ts, and in not properly grounding these ethical demands in the Scriptures, they trivialize them and turn them into caricatures." Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 163–64.

Recognizing these challenges, the chapter transitions into a detailed exploration of the necessity of valid application in preaching, particularly in applying the concept of God's holiness to modern audiences. In conjunction with the hermeneutical framework utilized in chapter 3, which draws significantly from Abraham Kuruvilla's hermeneutical concept of *the world in front of the text*, this chapter specifically employs his hermeneutics to bridge the text of Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 with the application of God's holiness. This approach aligns with the understanding that the portrayal of God's holiness in these texts was intended not just for their original audiences but also carries universal implications, emphasizing God's holiness as a catalyst for personal transformation and authentic worship.

By adopting this perspective, Kuruvilla's "Rules of Reading" are introduced as a foundational work for further discussion.[9] These rules are dedicated to establishing a solid basis for applications that remain true to the authorial intention while also being relevant to modern-day lives. The segment on homiletical moves, titled "From the Text to Theology, Theology to Application," encapsulates Kuruvilla's method for transforming theological insights into applicable life lessons in preaching. This world in front of the text (discerning pragmatic of the text) effectively addresses the hermeneutical challenge of distanciation, acknowledging that these texts are intended to be transhistorical for exemplification.[10]

At the heart of the chapter lies a thorough analysis of how God's projected holy world is applied in the texts of Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. These texts are seen as projecting

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[9] For Kuruvilla, these rules are foundational in guiding the valid move from interpretation to application. Rather than focusing on specific interpretations or applications, they provide the fundamental framework for moving from text to praxis. Kuruvilla explains,

> The rules are essentially statements of the reading habits that govern the interpretation of this special text—they reflect the employment of a *special* hermeneutic. In terms of the function of these rules, their broad scope necessarily limits them to the role of guardians: the interpreter must not cross the boundaries laid down by these rules; rather he or she must operate within them. . . . The rules merely delimit the process and determine what would, in broad and general terms, be valid or invalid; they do not specify what particular texts mean or how exactly they might be applied. (Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* [Chicago: Moody, 2013], 66–67)

[10] Kuruvilla uses the terms "exemplification" and "valid application" interchangeably in his discussion. See Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 44, 54, 58, 60, 90, 143, 147.

an ideal world for the sermon's listeners to inhabit, inviting them to experience and understand God's holiness, akin to the invitation in Psalm 34:8 to "taste and see." This section illuminates how the theology presented in these biblical texts—*the world in front of the text*—offers a transformative vision of living in alignment with God's transcendent and immanent holiness. It discusses the dynamics of the applicatory concept of "infinite to intimate,"[11] which leads to genuine repentance as depicted in Isaiah 6, emphasizing the affective rather than cognitive aspects of application. The chapter also examines the applicability of authentic worship enabled by God's holiness in Revelation 4, highlighting the transformative power of worship in shaping believers' identities.

The General Issues of Application in
Preaching God's Holiness

In exploring the aspect of application within the realm of preaching, particularly when it pertains to the articulation of God's holiness, it is imperative to acknowledge its pivotal role.[12] This section draws upon the insights provided by Clyde Fant and William Pinson, who highlight the importance of relevance in preaching. They articulate,

> Great preaching is relevant preaching. That is not a presupposition with which this work was begun, but a conclusion to which it came. After studying the lives of hundreds of preachers and reading countless sermons, we concluded that the preachers who made the greatest impact upon the world were men who spoke the issues and needs of their days.[13]

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[11] Nahum Sarna's interpretation of the concept "infinite to intimate" is insightful for applying the theology of Isa 6. He reads the phrase "The Lord will come down" (יֵרֵד יְהוָה) in Exod 19:11 as signifying this concept, suggesting that the depiction of God's action in terms of human motion "expresses at one and the same God's infinite transcendence and His personal and intimate involvement with humanity." This analogy is also applicable to Isaiah's encounter with God in Isa 6. Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 105.

[12] Michael Fabarez, *Preaching That Changes Lives* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 43.

[13] Clyde Fant Jr. and William Pinson Jr., *A Treasury of Great Preaching: An Encyclopedia of Preaching* (Dallas: Word, 1995), 1:1. Hughes Oliphant Old also recognizes that application has always been one of the fundamental elements in the history of preaching. See Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Biblical Period*, vol. 1 of *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 61–62.

This perspective illuminates the fundamental nature of application in crafting the sermon and its delivery. To state it candidly, application elevates a sermon from a mere informative discourse to a transformative and engaging experience for the hearers.

However, there exists a prevalent inclination to prioritize exegesis and doctrinal accuracy, often at the expense of practical application.[14] Haddon Robinson offers a stark warning in this regard: "The greater danger lies in the opposite direction—in spending too much time on explanation and not going far enough into application."[15] This cautionary note serves as a decisive reminder that, although the exegetical parts are undeniably crucial, an exclusive emphasis on explanation or exegesis can result in sermons that are theologically robust but fail to resonate with the practical realities of the congregation's life. The true vitality of a sermon lies in its capacity to bridge scriptural understanding and real-life application, thereby rendering it both informative and transformative.[16]

In this assessment, York articulately delineates the critical need for a balanced integration of exegesis and application (theology and praxis) in the art of preaching: "When our sermons arise from the text, based on sound hermeneutical and exegetical methods, we can call men and women everywhere to obey the admonitions of the text, to believe its

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[14] Doriani observes that the neglect of application in preaching often stem from an overly emphasis on exegesis or the scholarly aspects of sermon preparation. He states,

> While popular volumes take more interest in application and serious scholars have begun to consider it, publications on the subject remain rare. Why this neglect? In an era of specialization, application falls through a crack separating exegesis, ethics, and homiletics. . . . Scholars pause before publishing outside their field, leaving the integration of exegesis, application, and ethics to others. Critical exegetes hesitate to apply texts whose historicity or veracity they doubt. Perhaps unwittingly, evangelical scholars mimic the critics' model of detached scholarship, possibly hoping an air of objectivity will win them acceptance. (Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, viii–ix)

[15] Haddon W. Robinson, "Blending Bible Content and Life Application," in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching*, ed. Haddon W. Robinson and Craig B. Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 297.

[16] Reinforcing the significance of connecting scriptural messages with practical application, John Stott gives emphasis on the integration of exegesis and application. He articulates, "We have to plunge fearlessly into both worlds, ancient and modern, biblical and contemporary, and to listen attentively to both. For only then shall we understand what each is saying, and so discern the Spirit's message to the present generation." John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 145.

prophetic word, to accept its directions for the home, and to trust its word of salvation."[17]

Aligning with York's perspective, D. A. Carson similarly highlights risks of overemphasizing either doctrinal exposition or practical relevance in sermons. He notes that an imbalance can result in sermons becoming either dry doctrinal monologues or discourses overly focused on practicality, lacking in theological depth.[18] This challenge manifests in three prevalent tendencies in homiletics. Application-less preaching typically concentrates only on explanation, neglecting the practical implications of the text. In contrast, approaches that lean toward direct transference often improperly overemphasize the contemporary context at the expense of theological foundation.[19] Concurrently, the emergence of moralizing application can be attributed to the misapplication of hermeneutical principles. Kuruvilla succinctly addresses this issue: "A fundamental issue for homileticians has always been the determination of application that is faithful to the textual intention (i.e., authoritative) and fitting for the listening audience (i.e., relevant)."[20]

Application-less Preaching

Application-less preaching, as the term suggests, is characterized by a lack of clear or explicit application of biblical truths to the lives of the listeners. More broadly, it encompasses instances where application is either ambiguous or ineffective, thereby blurring the distinction between preacher's own good advice and God's clear direction.[21]

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[17] York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 22.

[18] D. A. Carson, "The Primacy of Expository Preaching Part 1," *Desiring God*, podcast, 1:09:37, January 30, 1995, www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-primacy-of-expository-preaching-part-1.

[19] Haddon Robinson offers a pertinent warning regarding this tendency. He insightfully observes the danger associated with application without exegesis, emphasizing that it can be equally harmful as careless interpretation. See Haddon W. Robinson, "The Heresy of Application," in Robinson and Larson, *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching*, 308–9.

[20] Abraham Kuruvilla, "Preaching as Translation via Theology," *JEHS* 9, no. 1 (March 2009): 85.

[21] Gary Millar and Phil Campbell, *Saving Eutychus: How to Preach God's Word and Keep People Awake*, 2nd ed. (Youngstown, OH: Matthias, 2022), 68.

This style of preaching often misses the opportunity to connect scriptural truths to the tangible realities of the listeners' daily experiences.[22] Daniel Akin lucidly points out the significant drawbacks inherent in this approach, while simultaneously advocating for application that is both textually grounded and calls for a response. He outlines three key essential features of expective, text-driven application: (1) relevance to contemporary life, (2) inclusion of practical examples, and (3) motivation for obedient faith.[23]

Upon examining Akin's outlined characteristics, it becomes possible to identify the salient attributes of application-less preaching with greater clarity. First, a notable deficiency in application-less preaching is its inability to relate biblical truths to the contemporary lives of its audience. Diverging from a more integrative approach that combines explanation with application, it fails to demonstrate the relevance of biblical teachings to the current issues faced by the congregation. Consequently, while the sermons may be doctrinally sound, they are often presented in a way that feels irrelevant or detached from the everyday challenges and experiences. John Piper eloquently highlights the risks associated with such an approach, noting that it "minimizes the seriousness of the command, diverts attention from the real necessity of the imperative, leads to a kind of preaching that oversimplifies the urgency and complexity of Christian obedience. . . . It silences the specific riches of the text by preempting them with unwarranted applications of right doctrine."[24]

Second, application-less preaching is often deficient in providing practical examples and guidance for effectively translating biblical truths into action. This shortfall is not necessarily due to a complete lack of application, but rather in its ambiguity, making

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[22] See David L. Larsen's evaluation on this topic in his chapter "Why Is Application So Difficult? The Issue of Relevancy," in *The Anatomy of Preaching: Identifying the Issues in Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 95–106.

[23] See more detailed discussion in Daniel Akin, "Applying a Text-Driven Sermon," in Akin, Allen, and Mathews, *Text-Driven Preaching*, 270–74.

[24] John Piper, *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 197.

it ineffective. Douglas Stuart underscores the importance of clarity in application: "You are required to explain the application that is clearly and intentionally the concern of the passage. Unless you are convinced that it is the intention of the Scripture that a passage be applied in a certain way, no suggestion as to application can be confidently advanced."[25] This often leaves the congregation without clear guidance on how to live out the teachings of Scripture in their daily lives.

To avoid the pitfalls of ambiguous application in preaching, adopting a detailed and explicit method in the application process is essential.[26] This approach ensures that the application is not only comprehensible but also intimately relevant, tailored to the unique circumstances and needs of the audience. Kuruvilla emphasizes this point: "Unless you know who your audience is, you are not going to be able to provide specific application. This is one reason why preaching cannot be separated from pastoring."[27] His insight stresses the importance of knowing the congregation in crafting applications that truly resonate and inspire.

Building on these insights, York fervently emphasizes the criticality of specific application in preaching. He asserts, "One of the secrets of powerful preaching is specific application. And even though we are crafting the main points in an applicational fashion, we want to be specific. We want to get in their lives, in their shoes, in their jobs."[28] In agreement with York's viewpoint, Timothy George also intensifies the need of specific application. He comments, "In order to do this effectively, the preacher must be as good an exegete of the congregation as he is of the text. He will know how to reprove the wayward, comfort the disconsolate, rebuke the obstinate, encourage the disheartened, and

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[25] Douglas Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 5th ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 77.

[26] Donald R. Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching: Proclaiming Truth with Clarity and Relevance* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 120–28.

[27] Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 64.

[28] York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 145–46.

extend the invitation of grace to the unsaved."[29] This approach reinforces that the preacher's responsibility to extend beyond mere exposition, transitioning into a role of a spiritual guide who aids the congregation in integrating biblical truths to their day-to-day living. Hence, this degree of specificity in application is key to converting abstract imperatives into actionable steps. Through implementing specificity in application, preachers play a central role in steering the congregation toward a path of Christlikeness.[30]

Third, a marked aspect of application-less preaching is its absence of persuasive exhortation, which results in a failure to inspire listeners to respond in obedient faith to the truths of Scripture. This particular characteristic highlights the glaring insufficiency and ineffectiveness in motivating congregational response, an element critically essential yet frequently neglected in such preaching methods. John Broadus stresses the critical nature of persuasive aspect in application: "The chief part of what we commonly call application is *persuasion*. It is not enough to convince men of the truth, nor enough to make them see how it applies to themselves, and how it might be practicable for them to act out—but we must 'persuade men.'"[31] Broadus's understanding highlights the vital importance of persuasive dynamics in fostering a congregation that is both responsive and committed to faithful teachings of Scripture.

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[29] Timothy George, "Doctrinal Preaching," in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 97.

[30] Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 64. Michael Quicke also comments on the importance of specificity in application: "As preachers move on from exegesis, they need to be alert to the responses that God is calling for today. The Holy Spirit is the great applier of God's Word, but he needs consecrated, bold preachers who know and love their hearers in order to sharpen his specific challenges." Michael J. Quicke, *360-Degree Preaching: Hearing, Speaking, and Living the Word* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 154.

[31] John Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (1870; repr., Louisville: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 249. In alignment with Broadus's insights, James Massey also recognizes the critical role of persuasion in sermon application. He states, "Application in the sermon, both throughout and as a concluding act, must be focused upon persuading the hearer—stirring the hearer of the sermon to act upon the truth that was shared. Persuasion is a key concern in the preaching task because pulpit utterance must have both its art and its aim." James Massey, "Application in the Sermon," in Duduit, *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, 212.

The predictable consequence of neglecting the persuasive element in sermon application is a subsequent dullness among listeners.[32] This issue is keenly observed by Robinson: "Dull expository sermons usually lack effective applications."[33] To counter this tendency, introducing passion into sermon application stands out as a potent solution. Infusing passion into application can transform a mundane preaching into a compelling and impactful message, captivating the hearts of the hearers.[34] David Murray, in his discussion on sermon dynamics, accentuates the significant role of passion in sermon application. He notes the necessity of engaging not just the intellect but also the emotions to elicit a response: "The preacher's own feelings must reflect the nature of the application. He needs to be solemn when warning; be warm when comforting; be confident when encouraging."[35] By embodying the message with an application imbued with passion, the preacher can effectively persuade and move the congregation, turning potential boredom into a memorable experience. Matthew Kim aptly observes, "Passionate and heartfelt messages go further than we may think."[36]

In a nutshell, while doctrinal accuracy and scriptural exegesis are foundational to preaching, their true efficacy is realized when they are seamlessly integrated with practical, specific, and passionate application. This harmonious blend ensures that preaching not only enlightens but also profoundly resonates with and inspires God's people.[37] This form of application is indispensable for the spiritual development and

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[32] Millar and Campbell, *Saving Eutychus*, 41.

[33] Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 10.

[34] Joel R. Beeke, *Reformed Preaching: Proclaiming God's Word from the Heart of the Preacher to the Heart of His People* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 78.

[35] David P. Murray, *How Sermons Work* (Carlisle, PA: Evangelical, 2011), 116.

[36] Matthew Kim, "Three Homiletical Challenges for the 21st Century," *JEHS* 9, no. 2 (September 2009): 14.

[37] See Bryan Chapell, "The Future of Expository Preaching," *Presbyterion* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 71–72.

vitality of the church. Kuruvilla succinctly expresses its significance, remarking, "Without application, the field of homiletics lies fallow, preaching unproductive, and the sermon stillborn."[38]

Direct Transference

In the field of homiletics, direct transference is identified by the practice of applying biblical texts directly to contemporary audiences without adequately considering the historical-cultural context and thorough textual exegesis.[39] This approach presupposes a straightforward correlation between the biblical text and its applicability to the modern context, violating the distinct identities of the two worlds and conceptual core intention of the text.[40] Ramesh Richard critically examines this approach, noting its inadequacy with the observation that "situations are never the same between the early world and ours."[41] In a similar vein, Robert Van Voorst criticizes this methodology as a product of "fundamentalistic exegesis,"[42] which tends to deny or minimize any distinctions between past and present context. These critiques demonstrate the imperative of responsibly bridging ancient texts to contemporary life, thereby challenging the efficacy and validity of direct transference as a method of application in preaching. Whereas application-less preaching often overlooks the crucial aspect of applying biblical principles to practical life, direct transference tends to neglect the vital exegetical process, ignoring to bridge the historical and cultural gap between the text and contemporary audiences.

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[38] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 135.

[39] Sydney Greidanus, "Application in Preaching Old Testament Texts," in *Reading and Hearing the Word: Essays in Honor of John H. Stek*, ed. Arie C. Leder (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1998), 235.

[40] Kuruvilla, "Preaching as Translation via Theology," 88.

[41] Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons*, 89.

[42] Robert Van Voorst, "The Dynamic Word: A Survey and Critique of Recent Literature on Preaching and the Bible," *RefR* 37, no. 1 (August 1983): 6.

Daniel Doriani cites a striking example that illustrates the flaws of direct transference: "Certain Christians opposed radio in its early days. They believed it was Satanic, and they found a text to prove their case: 'Satan is the prince of the power of the air.' This kind of abuse of the Bible evokes an easy laugh today."[43] This misuse of Scripture exemplifies the high risks of misapplying biblical texts. Similarly, the narrative of Daniel (Dan 1:8–21) offers further insights into the limitations of direct transference. Sidney Greidanus shares an anecdote:

> About twenty years ago I heard a sermon in which the preacher focused on Daniel's refusing the royal rations of food and wine. He encouraged the young people: "Like Daniel, you should avoid rich food; like Daniel you should avoid alcohol; and like Daniel you should avoid sex." On the bright side, I remember this sermon—even after twenty years! On the downside, the enthusiastic preacher missed the good news God had for us in this passage. Such direct transference applications usually miss the author's intended meaning; they clutter up the sermon; and, in the context of the New Testament, they may be unbiblical.[44]

Undoubtedly, direct transference struggles with its inability to acknowledge the author's original purpose within the biblical text. Richard criticizes this approach, stating that direct transference "makes the Scripture a passive objective containing information of times gone by."[45] Indeed, by applying biblical texts directly without considering the discontinuities and differences between then and now, this method fails to appreciate the dynamic nature of Scripture and its enduring relevance to contemporary life.[46] Furthermore, direct transference application often neglects the current context of the congregation, disregarding the nuanced differences between the original audience and today's listeners.[47] Edmund Clowney underlines the distortion caused by this approach, cautioning against the simplistic replication of biblical actions in modern contexts:

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[43] Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 29.

[44] Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Daniel: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 30.

[45] Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons*, 163.

[46] Fabarez, *Preaching That Changes Lives*, 44.

[47] Greidanus, "Application in Preaching Old Testament Texts," 235.

"Surely we cannot pattern our daily conduct on that of Samuel as he hews Agag to pieces, or Samson as he commits suicide, or Jeremiah as he preaches treason."[48] This approach, therefore, fails to recognize the unique historical-cultural context addressed by the biblical author, leading to an absurdly distorted interpretation of the original meaning of the text and its subsequent misapplications in contemporary settings.

Moralizing Application

Moralizing application in preaching refers to the practice of distilling biblical narratives or teachings into simplistic moral lessons or lists of "dos and don'ts." Greidanus defines this approach: "Moralizing is to draw one or more morals from the preaching text when the author of the text did not intend such application(s) for his original audience."[49] This method typically extracts direct moral inferences from the text, focusing on what individuals should do or should not do based on the actions or attributes of characters in biblical narrative. It leads to a form of preaching that uses the lives of biblical figures as exemplars for moral behavior.[50] William Willimon elucidates the rationale behind moralizing in application: "[Moralizing] occurs when preachers attempt to draw simple moral inferences from the text, usually ideals that the listeners should practice or live."[51]

Advancing the discussion on moralizing application, a significant danger inherent in this approach is its tendency toward reductionist interpretation, which often disregards the theological context and authorial intent of Scripture. Piper raises a valid concern about this approach: "Moral behavior replaces the gospel of Christ crucified and risen for sinners. And it leaves untapped the only power that would make moral behavior

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[48] Edmund Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 80.

[49] Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Daniel*, 24.

[50] Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 163.

[51] William H. Willimon, *A Guide to Preaching and Leading Worship* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 71.

acceptable to God."[52] This critique highlights how superficial moralizing application can inadvertently reflect the preacher's personal views rather than the original intent of the text, leading to a shallow understanding of Scripture.[53] Moreover, from a theological standpoint, preachers who rely on moralizing principle in application face a contradiction. Christopher Wright warns against a preaching style that persistently encourages the congregation to strive harder without recognizing their inherent sinful nature. He contends, "It is just telling people all the time to try harder, do better, do more, love more, care more, give more, especially. No, when our preaching holds out the response that God wants but also shows how far short we all fall from that (including preacher)."[54] Wright's perspective brings to light the potential risk that moralizing application can lead to legalism and a works-based understanding of faith.

The analysis of the biblical story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17, as presented by Kuruvilla, serves as a prime example of the shortcomings inherent in moralizing application.[55] This approach becomes evident when the application is not firmly rooted in the text's theological context. For instance, reducing the narrative to simplistic moral lessons like, "We must be like the stones, patiently being smoothened by God's

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[52] Piper, *Expository Exultation*, 198.

[53] David L. Allen, "Fundamentals of Genre," in Robinson and Larson, *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching*, 265.

[54] Christopher J. H. Wright, *How to Preach and Teach the Old Testament for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 82.

[55] Comparing the applications of the David and Goliath narrative is helpful for discerning the strengths and weaknesses of a moralizing application. A moralizing approach to the story of David and Goliath often leads to the oversight of key theological themes, such as God's providence and faithfulness in application. This method stands in contrast to Kuruvilla's more balanced application of the same passage in 1 Sam 17. Kuruvilla suggests that "God's people are to develop the stature of a heart for God, exercise faith to engage enemies in the name of God (the ultimate resource) and gain the experience of the deliverance of God." Abraham Kuruvilla, "Christiconic Interpretation," *BSac* 173 (April–June 2016): 143. This approach is specific and concrete, providing practical guidance for listeners. In comparison, Kenneth Langley advocates for a theocentric interpretation and application. His application, "God is seen to be at work in this text, replacing faithless Saul with a man after his own heart who will show the watching world that there is a God in Israel," is theologically sound, but it arguably lacks practical guidance for how listeners can respond to the text. Kenneth Langley, "Theocentric View," in *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*: *Four Views on Preaching Today*, ed. Scott M. Gibson and Matthew D. Kim (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 104.

waters of time, until he uses us"[56] or "Be brave like David and face your giants," focuses too narrowly on David's victory or personal bravery, missing the deeper theological focus and the author's original intention. This example demonstrates the necessity of maintaining a balance between theology of the text and relevant application in preaching, ensuring that the sermon remains true to the biblical text while effectively engaging the hearers.

Transitioning from this example, it is important to recognize that not all instances of ethical exhortation are inherently detrimental. Some Christ-centered interpreters (Redemptive-historical homileticians) avoid moral lessons entirely in their sermon applications, a practice that can lead to a different set of challenges.[57] Kuruvilla advocates for the legitimacy of ethical guidance that naturally emerges from the biblical text and aligns with its gospel foundations: "*All* of God's demands are moral in essence and theological in function, thus necessarily valid for all of God's people."[58] Elsewhere Kuruvilla further clarifies the basis for this:

> This is to say that implicitly or explicitly, every pericope provides guidelines for ethical behavior before God, dealing with one facet or another of the relationship between God and man. Such imperatives are not salvific in intent or meritorious in performance. They are simply divine demands that God expects his children to

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[56] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 22.

[57] John Carrick's critique of Redemptive-Historical interpretation (or Christ-centered interpretation) provides a valuable perspective. He highlights the potential danger associated with the complete absence of ethical exhortation in sermon application. He writes,

> There is, interestingly, a very significant connection between the concept of *example* and the concept of *imperative*. Certainly the vast majority of biblical examples are expressed in the indicative mood. . . . In other words, the concept of example in the Scriptures is intrinsically parenetic and hortatory; biblical examples contain a latent or implied imperative, whether positive or negative. It is, therefore, not at all surprising that those within the redemptive-historical school who eschew the concept of example in preaching should also eschew the concept of imperative in preaching. It is indeed very striking that the published sermons of one of the great fathers of redemptive-historical preaching—Klaas Schilder— are characterized by an almost complete absence of the imperative mood. His sermons are characterized by the *indicative*, but at the expense of the *imperative*. . . . Indeed, it appears to follow as by an iron law of necessity that those preachers who eschew the *exemplary* almost invariably avoid the *imperatival*, with the result that exhortation and application are suppressed or even entirely eliminated. (John Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching: A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1982], 130–31)

[58] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 193.

obey, that his people may be like him: "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (Lev 19:2; 1 Pet 1:16).[59]

For him, the issue is not the presence of moral demands in application; rather, it is the lack of a gospel-driven theological foundation for these demands that is problematic.[60] He advocates for an approach in which ethical standards are not just moral imperatives but are deeply rooted in theological understanding.[61] Kuruvilla's approach emphasizes the harmonious integration of moral imperatives with the theological essence of the text. This integration ensures that applications not only serve as a valid call for obedience but also promote ethical action. Kuruvilla asserts that moral demands "are to be applied today by employing a *theological* hermeneutic,"[62] which he defines as "the transhistorical intention implicit in the theology of the pericope."[63]

In brief, while moralizing application might seem appealing due to its simplicity and directness, it falls short in adequately addressing the richness and relevance of biblical narratives. Preachers must go beyond the surface-level moral lessons and delve into the rich theological thrusts embedded within the text. Expressed differently, preachers must strive to avoid the pitfalls of moralizing by engaging deeply with the theological themes of the text, understanding the authorial intent, and making applications that are both engaging and theologically sound. This balanced method not only enriches the congregation's understanding of Scripture but also fosters a deeper relationship with God, grounded in a comprehensive understanding of his Word.

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[59] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 194.

[60] Abraham Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching: Understanding the Heart of Pastoral Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 124–26.

[61] See Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 193–95.

[62] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 153.

[63] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 153.

Although these three examples do not encompass all the challenges of application in preaching, they provide a clear indication of what pastors need to address.[64] When examining application-less application, direct transference, and moralizing application, it becomes evident that these approaches share a fundamental deficiency: their failure to adeptly bridge the gap between the biblical text and contemporary application. Specifically, application-less preaching, by omitting practical relevance, loses its connection with the audience, failing to engage them in the context of their daily lives. Moralizing application typically extracts surface-level moral lessons from biblical narratives, primarily concentrating on human behaviors and ethical conducts, frequently highlighting these elements in a repetitive manner. This approach tends to produce applications more reflective of the preacher's personal biases than the original author's intent, stemming from flawed or absent hermeneutics that diverge from the text to distorted applications.[65]

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[64] Kuruvilla critically addresses the issue of oversimplification in preaching, which he links to incorrect homiletical practice. He elucidates this through his concept of "atomization" which refers to crafting application without a connection of the text. Similarly, he discusses "systemization," a concept originating from erroneous hermeneutical assumptions just as moralizing application does. He acknowledges the somewhat artificial nature of this categorization, noting that "this broad-brush categorization is necessarily artificial, created for its illustrative power; the two poles are, undoubtedly, extreme. In actuality, it is doubtful if any preacher belongs in one or the other; there are, however, tendencies in either direction." Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 21. J. I. Packer also comments, "Over-simplification is a damaging form of mental self-indulgence, leading to shallow, distorted, and inhibited ways of thinking." J. I. Packer, "Hermeneutics and Biblical Authority," *Themelios* 1, no. 1 (April 1975): 3.

[65] In their discussion of hermeneutical issues in preaching, Randal Pelton and Jeff Carrol offer a compelling illustration of how moralizing application can stem from flawed hermeneutics. They use the example of Jesus to elucidate,

> Whereas the words of Jesus provide some controls over the narrative portions of the Gospels, the works of Jesus do not contribute in the same way. When Jesus teaches either in true didactic fashion, through parables, or in dialogue with a minor character, His recorded speech contains a theological idea that is preachable. Forms of SAM [Spiritualizing-Allegorizing-Moralizing] are rarely, if ever, committed in didactic material (we know the parables have been allegorized to death), but it is very tempting for a pastor to moralize the methodology of Jesus. While pastors will urge their parishioners to emulate the lifestyle of Jesus and follow His teaching, their focus should not be on His methodology. One prevalent form of SAM is moralizing the methodology of Jesus. Since the Gospels are filled with so many of the things that Jesus did, it is tempting for a pastor to preach a sermon which encourages the people to do exactly what Jesus did. How can it be wrong to ask people to do what Jesus did, especially when Christian bookstores are selling WWJD bracelets? (Randal Pelton and Jeff Carrol, "If You Can't Spiritualize, Allegorize, or Moralize, What's a Preacher to Do? Preaching Christ from Gospel Narratives," *JEHS* 5, no. 1 [March 2005]: 45)

Conversely, direct transference typically starts with the application, retroactively seeking biblical support, a process indicative of flawed homiletics. This method, often adopted by preachers responding to their congregation's immediate context, selects texts that appear literally coherent but ignores its broader theological implications. Greidanus warns of the danger in seeking applications before full understanding the author's message: "Unfortunately, busy pastors may look for applications before they have taken the time to understand the author's message."[66] As observed, this method assumes a direct, unfiltered application of biblical messages to contemporary audiences without adequately considering the historical-cultural gap. It highly risks treating Scripture as a static source for sermonic purposes, applicable in a straightforward manner to any and all contemporary situations. Richard reiterates this concern: "The preacher chooses the particulars in which the passage relates to his audience. And many details of the passage become of little or no use in the sermon. . . . [Direct transference] emphasizes the preacher (and the hearer) over the text."[67]

These shortcomings collectively underscore the necessity of a balanced approach in preaching, akin to John Stott's concept of "bridging two worlds"—effectively connecting the ancient text to contemporary listeners.[68] Such a balanced approach necessitates a commitment to theologically sound homiletics where preachers integrate the biblical and contemporary worlds into a cohesive whole rather than merely attempting to construct a bridge between them.[69] This approach requires a thorough engagement with the text to grasp its original context and author's intention, coupled with discerning

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[66] Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Daniel*, 31.

[67] Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons*, 163.

[68] Stott's definition and functionality of preaching should be noted here. He expresses, "A true sermon bridges the gulf between the biblical and the modern worlds and must be equally earthed in both." Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 10.

[69] See the section "Getting from There to Here: The Problem of Contemporization of the Biblical Message," in Millard J. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation: Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 55–76.

application that addresses modern life's complexities in a relevant, clear, and passionate manner. Undertaking this challege, therefore, involves a delicate balance of exegesis and application, interpretation and relevance, and hermeneutics and homiletics.

The task of preaching about God's holiness demands a careful avoidance of three critical pitfalls. First, the absence of practical application in conveying the message of holiness can render a sermon uninspiring and one-dimensional. This approach misses the opportunity to connect the holiness of God, as presented in the text, with the listener's understanding of sin, diminishing the sermon's impact. Effective sermon application in this context should be tangible, clearly conveying that "God's holiness is acknowledged by faithfulness to his demands in every sphere of life."[70] Second, without a solid hermeneutical foundation, preaching God's holiness can risk degenerating into moralism. This approach tends to oversimplify the profound theological significance of divine holiness into mere moral directives. Randal Pelton addresses this issue, highlighting the core problem of such a fallacy: "The problem comes when the link between the theological and practical isn't spelled out. When the text says nothing about how we are to live, it's easy to neglect holiness."[71] Lastly, the danger of direct transference in application should not be overlooked. This issue occurs where audiences are urged to emulate specific biblical figures, such as Isaiah in his divine encounter or the apostle John during his mystical experience in the heavenly throne room. Undoubtedly, such interpretations and their resulting applications obscure the congregation's proper understanding and application of God's holiness as presented in the text. In this context, Kuruvilla's guideline is particularly noteworthy: "Everything worth emulating about a biblical character (as it is projected in the

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[70] David Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness*, NSBT 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 23.

[71] Randal Pelton, "Preaching for True Holiness," in Robinson and Larson, *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching*, 311.

theology of the pericope) is a facet of Christlikeness; everything that must be abandoned is the negative image of Christlikeness."[72]

Navigating these pitfalls with scholarly rigor and hermeneutical sensitivity is crucial to ensuring that the preaching of God's holiness fosters meaningful engagement and appropriate application of scriptural messages. Kuruvilla's approach to preaching presents a compelling alternative to the three methods previously discussed in homiletics. He puts the emphasis on what he terms "the homiletical move," a two-step process that first delves into the text to discern its theological foundations and then skillfully transitions to valid application. This method not only guides preachers to meticulously engage with the biblical text (pericope) to uncover its theological thrust but also assures the text's relevance that is both valid and transformative.[73] Kuruvilla's homiletical model brings several key benefits. It achieves a balanced integration of interpretation and praxis, encapsulating both the semantic (what the author is *saying*) and pragmatic dimensions (what the author is *doing*).[74] This stands in contrast to application-less preaching, which often neglects practical implications, and moralizing application, which may overlook deeper theological insights in favor of surface-level moral lessons. Additionally, Kuruvilla's approach skillfully avoids the pitfalls of oversimplification and inadequate exegesis characteristic of direct transference, which frequently applies texts without fully considering their lexical, grammatical, and historical elements with theological focus. His method seamlessly validates that applications are rooted in a comprehensive *theological* understanding of the text rather than being based on superficial or literal interpretation.

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[72] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 266.

[73] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 23.

[74] For Kuruvilla, interpretation and application are inseparable and integral parts of a single process. He stresses the importance of this unified approach in developing a valid application. Kuruvilla explains, "We first need to determine the saying of the author in the text. Let me emphasize the importance of determining authorial saying, without which there is no moving toward discerning the doing of the author. And without discerning authorial doing, there can be no valid application." Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 32.

This highlights the dual responsibility of preachers to be true to the voice of the text while also making it heard and accessible to their listeners. As Kuruvilla himself articulates, "The focus of a sermon must be on discerning the theology of the pericope and deriving application."[75]

The Necessity of Valid Application: Bridging the Gap between the Text and the Hearer

Wayne Shaw calls attention to two pivotal concepts for effective and transformative preaching: hermeneutical-homiletical balance and boundaries. Shaw writes, "Balance and boundaries are important in relation to each other because, without boundaries, balance can mean riding the fence on pivotal issues, but boundaries without balance can be arbitrary, overly narrow, and myopic."[76] This perspective is crucial for comprehending Kuruvilla's approach to preaching, particularly its emphasis on a legitimate hermeneutical-homiletical move. This procedure underscores the importance of maintaining both balance and boundaries in the interpretation and application of biblical texts.[77] From this perspective, Kuruvilla's framework emerges as a vital link, where the enduring theology of the pericopes meet the dynamic challenges of today's world. To ensure accuracy, Kuruvilla establishes a set of reading rules that serve as foundational guidelines for understanding and applying Scripture in a way that is faithful to its text while simultaneously being relevant to contemporary audiences. These rules form the boundaries within which preachers and interpreters operate to ensure that their applications

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[75] Abraham Kuruvilla, "Response to Paul Scott Wilson," in Gibson and Kim, *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, 152.

[76] Wayne Shaw, "Reflections on Homiletical Balance and Boundaries for Evangelicals," *JEHS* 2, no. 1 (June 2002): 32.

[77] Kuruvilla describes this process as a blend of "Art and Science." This characterization enables a preacher to see the dual nature of his approach. It involves a thorough analysis of textual semantics and pragmatics, while also focusing on generating a valid application that are both valid and appropriately balanced for the church context. Abraham Kuruvilla, foreword to *From Ancient Text to Valid Application: A Practical Exploration of Pericopal Theology in Preaching*, by Josiah D. Boyd (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021), x.

are valid and transformative.[78] Kuruvilla affirms, "The task of the theologian-homiletician consists in moving from pericope to theology, and subsequently from theology to application . . . under the governance of these rules, valid application is enabled that retains the authority of Scripture and remains relevant to the audience."[79]

**Rules of Reading as Balance and
Boundaries for Application**

In Kuruvilla's hermeneutical framework for homiletics, these six rules collectively establish a comprehensive approach to biblical interpretation and application: (1) Rule of Exclusivity, (2) Rule of Singularity, (3) Rule of Finality, (4) Rule of Applicability, (5) Rule of Ecclesiality, and (6) Rule of Centrality.[80]

The Rule of Exclusivity sets the foundational principle by recognizing the unique authority of the scriptural texts. Kuruvilla elucidates this concept: "The Rule of Exclusivity demarcates those canonical books that alone may be utilized for applicational purposes."[81] Such emphasis on the significance of canonical texts positions them as the exclusive and authoritative source for both preaching and application. Kuruvilla makes clear the implication of this boundary, asserting, "Applicational practices of a community will be dependent upon the boundaries of the canon that it submits to."[82] This approach

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[78] Kuruvilla expounds the core functions of the rules of reading in this way:

What are these rules of reading (playing?) the language game of the biblical corpus and how do they help preaching? The rules are essentially statements of the reading habits that govern the interpretation of this special text—they reflect the employment of a special hermeneutic. In terms of the function of these rules, their broad scope necessarily limits them to the role of guardians: the interpreter must not cross the boundaries laid down by these rules; rather he or she must operate within them. In other words, these rules oversee and superintend the hermeneutical operation without defining how precisely a specific text may be interpreted. The particularities of a text are not elucidated by the application of these rules. (Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 66)

[79] Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 143.

[80] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 68–86. For further reading on this topic, see *Text to Praxis*, 101–41.

[81] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 68.

[82] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 68.

effectively restricts authority to only inspired texts that may be preached from and applied.[83] Furthermore, in this context, the Rule of Exclusivity, a recurring theme in Kuruvilla's writings, is concisely encapsulated in his guiding principle—"Privilege the text!"[84] This not only emphasizes the special and unique status of the biblical texts within the Christian faith but also illuminates the necessity for interpretations and applications to be firmly grounded in the texts recognized by the Christian community as Scripture.

Building upon this foundation, the Rule of Singularity promotes a comprehensive understanding of the Scriptures. It encourages interpreters and preachers to recognize the canonical cohesion and thematic consistency throughout. Kuruvilla explains, "The Rule of Singularity calls the interpreter to consider the canonical text as a single unit for applicational purposes—an integral whole, intrinsically related in all its parts."[85] This rule plays a pivotal role in biblical interpretation and preaching, as it acknowledges the Scripture as "a single metanarrative"[86] despite its composition by various authors over millennia. Historically, this perspective has guided the church in aligning its faith and practice with Scripture.[87] Moreover, in practical terms, Kuruvilla underlines the thematic unity and coherence within the canon. He observes that the overarching purpose of the canonical texts is to proclaim God and his relationship with humanity.[88] Therefore, under the Rule of Singularity, he posits, the primary objective of

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[83] Kuruvilla's focus is not on the overall topic of "Authority of Scripture." Instead, he mainly argues that the restriction is necessary for a smaller portion of the Scriptures specifically for preaching. He explains, "This Rule of Exclusivity does not regulate the specific composition of the canon. No one list of the books of the canon is preferred by this rule over others." Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 68.

[84] Kuruvilla provides a detailed explanation of this rule, emphasizing the primacy of the text in preaching. He contends, "It is the text that must be privileged, for it alone is inspired. Events behind the text are not inspired and therefore not expressly 'profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness' (2 Tim. 3:16)." Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 105.

[85] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 71.

[86] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 74.

[87] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 71–72.

[88] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 72.

these texts is to shape believers into the image of Christ, thereby glorifying God.[89] As such, it becomes imperative for preachers to understand and utilize Scripture as "the *one* book of God,"[90] ensuring consistency in their preaching.

From the standpoint of a homiletician, the Rule of Singularity calls for a conviction of coherence and consistency among the various texts within the canon. This belief is not merely a reflection of the canon's unity but also a core principle of a complementary approach to reading these texts. This method values both the uniformity and diversity in the subject matter in the canonical texts. Kuruvilla elaborates,

> This rule enables the diverse texts of the Bible to project a world in front of the canon in a united and coordinated fashion. The contribution of each pericope complements that of every other to yield a fully orbed depiction of the canonical world. Together, the particular elements or facets of the world that are projected by individual texts compose the singular and plenary world in front of the canonical text.[91]

This clarification highlights that while Scripture maintains a singular focus, it is not confined to a single narrative or theme. Rather, it includes a wide range of topics and genres, all intricately linked to the person and work of Christ.[92] Intriguingly, Kuruvilla applies this rule to formulate his central hermeneutical concept—*the world in front of the text*. This hermeneutical notion concentrates on the distinct and specific message of each pericope while also weaving together a unified and coherent portrayal of the world in front of the canonical text.[93] Week-by-week, sermon-by-sermon, pericope-by-pericope, preachers engage with specific values and priorities of God as revealed in the selected texts, gradually moving toward a unified vision of God' ideal world.

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[89] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 72.

[90] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 72.

[91] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 76.

[92] Kuruvilla's Christiconic interpretation differentiates itself from traditional Christ-centered interpretation in several key hermeneutical and homiletical principles. See "Christiconic Interpretation" in chap. 3.

[93] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 74. See Kuruvilla's detailed explanations of this topic in "Intrapericopal Coherence," and "Interpericopal Coherence," in Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 45–47.

According to Kuruvilla, the Rule of Finality, also known as the Rule of Completion,[94] firmly ascertains the final form of the biblical text as the authoritative source for preaching. He states, "The Rule of Finality affirms that the final form of the canonical text should be considered the object of interpretation for applicational purposes."[95] By focusing on the final form of the text, this rule guides preachers and interpreters to honor the integrity and authority of Scripture as it has been handed down through generations. Kuruvilla emphatically urges preachers to "focus on the text as it stands, rather than seeking to go *behind* it."[96] This principle clearly sets the foundation of the sufficiency of the text's final form in presenting a canonical world, from which authoritative and relevant applications can be derived.

As a result, the Rule of Finality stands as a key guiding principle in homiletics, anchoring interpretations and applications in the text as it is recognized and revered by the faith community. The primary emphasis of this rule is not on the process of canonization of Scripture. Instead, it centers on the "fixity of text-form as bearing the most utility"[97] for valid transition from the text to its application. To be clear, the Rule of Finality acts as a safe boundary for preachers, providing a clear framework within which to operate. It prevents the potential risks of hypothetical interpretation or the incorporation of extrabiblical elements that may shift attention away from scriptural messages. By adhering

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[94] Kuruvilla uses these terms interchangeably. See Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 164.

[95] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 76.

[96] Kuruvilla acknowledges the importance of understanding what is *behind* the text. But, he emphasizes that a preacher's primary focus should be on what is "in front of the text" (pragmatics) for discerning what the author is *doing* with he is *saying*. He states,

> As the object of a creative literary enterprise, the text must be investigated for what is "behind" and "within" the text (i.e., its historical basis, rhetorical situation, and linguistic particulars). Interpretation, however, must not cease with the elucidation of these essential entities, but, considering the text as an instrument of action, must proceed further to the discernment of the projected world "in front of" the text in order to derive valid application of the text and accomplish covenant renewal. (Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 101)

[97] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 78.

to the final form of the text, preachers are better equipped to make certain that their messages remain true to the Scripture's intended meaning and relevance.

Closely linked with the previous discussion is Kuruvilla's Rule of Applicability, which claims that every part of Scripture is applicable and relevant for contemporary audiences: "The Rule of Applicability asserts that every text in the canonical Scriptures may be utilized for applicational purposes by the church universal."[98] This rule specifically challenges preachers to delve into the contemporary relevance of all biblical texts, ensuring that no part of Scripture is regarded as irrelevant for modern listeners. Citing 2 Timothy 3:16–17 and Romans 15:4 as examples, Kuruvilla contends that "the canon mandates application of all Scripture because all Scripture is efficacious, and all Scripture is efficacious because all Scripture is divinely empowered; thus is begotten the Rule of Applicability that announces the potential of all Scripture for application."[99] This rule emphasizes that each pericope, regardless of its historical and cultural gap, contributes to the projection of a canonical world, rich in precepts, priorities, and practices that are universally relevant. Aligned with this concept is the idea of "recontextualization," which involves adapting ancient texts to modern contexts while maintaining their transhistorical intentions.[100]

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[98] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 79.

[99] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 79.

[100] Kuruvilla's understanding of "recontextualization" aligns closely with the views of other scholars like Grant Osborne. Both emphasize the importance of maintaining the core content of the text, as grounded in biblical teaching, while allowing for alterations in its expression for modern contexts. Osborne explicitly explains this notion: "The content of the doctrine (the extent to which it is based on biblical teaching) is inviolate, but its expression or redescription changes as the thought processes of a culture change. . . . The content will not change (except where the interpretation of texts has been logically weak and "unbiblical") but the form will." Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 408–9. In comparison to Osborne, Kuruvilla explains the same concept with different terms: "Fidelity to what has gone on before is essential, for the church remains under the authority of the text of Scripture and seeks to be faithful to it in its application. On the other hand, novelty is also called for in the fresh context of current auditors, as the church contextualizes an ancient text to its own modern setting. Fidelity and novelty are at the heart of application." Abraham Kuruvilla, "Application as Improvisation," *JEHS* 9, no. 2 (September 2009): 39–40.

At the heart of Kuruvilla's perspective is to perceive the importance of treating every part of the canon with equal weight and normativity. He affirms that every pericope, no matter how small it may seem, has the potential to move hearers toward Christlikeness.[101] The Rule of Applicability, therefore, goes beyond the mere necessity of applying Scripture in preaching. It represents a deep conviction that preachers must discern and appreciate the enduring power and relevance of the biblical text. This rule calls for a diligent and respectful engagement with Scripture, recognizing its role in shaping the identity and practices of the faith community across ages. Kuruvilla is correct when he writes, "All the biblical writings are to be utilized in the life of the Christian community for the determination of its faith and the coordination of its practices because the power of God's kingly rule graciously shapes human identity and empowers new forms of life in persons through Scripture."[102] By inhabiting *the world in front of the text*, preachers and their parishioners alike align themselves with God's will, drawing from the theologies and demands of biblical narratives to inform and guide contemporary faith and practice.

The Rule of Ecclesiality significantly emphasizes the church's role in interpreting Scripture, underscoring the importance of the collective wisdom and tradition of the Christian community in shaping an understanding of the scriptural texts.[103] Kuruvilla elucidates that this rule "obligates the reading of Scripture for applicational purposes to be conducted under the auspices of the community that recognizes its canonicity."[104] Essentially, this rule delineates that the church acts not just as a recipient of biblical truth but also as its guardian, responsible for both interpreting and applying it. As depicted in 1 Timothy 3:15, the church is described as "the pillar and support of the truth," thus bearing a

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[101] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 100.

[102] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 79.

[103] For more clarity of this concept, Kuruvilla expounds, "In deference to the Rule of Ecclesiality, the people of God of *all* time have commissioned the reading and exposition of the Scriptures in the corporate setting, presuming upon the universal validity of its content." Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 158.

[104] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 82.

significant historical and spiritual responsibility to preserve the integrity of Scripture. In simple terms, the church is seen as "the primary agent of its interpretation and application."[105]

This ecclesial approach to hermeneutics guarantees that scriptural interpretations are consistent with the orthodox teachings historically upheld by the universal church.[106] Consequently, the Rule of Ecclesiality functions as a safeguard, maintaining interpretative consistency and preventing individual or isolated readings that stray from established Christian doctrine. This rule also acknowledges the continuous presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit throughout the church's history, affirming that the correct reading of Scripture is one that resonates with the collective insight of the Christian community across different eras. In short, this rule reinforces the inseparable bond between the canon and the community, advocating for a hermeneutic that is deeply rooted in the ecclesial tradition and practiced for the spiritual growth of the church. Notably, the Rule of Eccleciality is harmoniously integrated with the Rule of Applicability. This integration is evident in the way "these rules jointly accord Scripture the ability to speak its weighty matters to audiences and situations for removed from the circumstances of its provenance."[107] Kuruvilla views this combination of rules as a key foundational balance and boundary for overcoming the distanciation intrinsic to textuality.[108]

Lastly, the Rule of Centrality positions the central role of Christ within Scripture at the forefront. This rule directs interpreters and preachers to concentrates on teachings and ministry of Jesus Christ, ensuring that Christological themes are at the heart of both preaching and application. Kuruvilla spells out, "The Rule of Centrality focuses the interpretation of canonical texts for applicational purposes upon the pre-eminent person

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[105] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 84.

[106] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 83.

[107] Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 158.

[108] Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 158.

of Christ and his redemptive work that fulfills the will of the Father in the power of the Spirit."[109] He further clarifies that this rule encompasses all discourses within the canon, as the "communicative action of Scripture" is designed to restore the *imago Dei* in humanity,[110] modeled after Christ who is the perfect image of God (Rom 8:29; Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4; Heb 1:3).

Kuruvilla emphasizes that the primary goal of the homiletical endeavor is to present Jesus Christ as the ultimate exemplar which preachers and hearers are called to be aligned and be conformed. Thus, the core objective for every preacher should be to proclaim Jesus as the *imago Dei*, as revealed throughout Scripture's grand narrative. Kuruvilla signifies, "The plenary depiction of the Christ, the image of God, is the *telos* of the entire canon and the world it projects, and it is the will of God to conform his people to this image of his son."[111] For this reason, the Rule of Centrality is crucial in directing the interpretation of Scripture toward practical application. It serves as a key guardian of the hermeneutical process in homiletics, making certain that each pericope is consistently focused on the image of Christ as the goal of the application.[112]

In summation, the Rules of Reading, as explicated in this section, are essential in maintaining a critical balance in the interpretive process, particularly regarding Kuruvilla's understanding of futurity and transhistorical intention of the text, topics that will be explored in the subsequent section. Rooted in the enduring practices of the church, these rules function not merely as interpretive guides but as crucial guardians, ensuring that interpretations stay within the boundaries of orthodoxy and true to the inherent meaning of the text. The forthcoming discussion, focusing on the valid applications of God's holiness in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, will be fundamentally underpinned by these

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[109] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 84.

[110] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 85.

[111] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 85.

[112] See detailed discussion in "Christiconic Interpretation," in chap. 3.

rules. They establish a framework that honors the theology of the text—*the world in front of the text* or pragmatic dimension—while utilizing the text's applicability for its enduring relevance to modern listeners. Hence, the Rules of Reading are indispensable in laying the groundwork for an in-depth discussion on how the portrayal of God's holiness through the text continues to exert a powerful and directive impact across time and space, encouraging hearers to inhabit God's holy world they project.

Text's Futurity and Transhistorical Intention

Abraham Kuruvilla's methodology in the field of homiletics is notable for its balanced and structured methodology, particularly evident in the dynamic interplay between the interpretation and application of texts. His approach underscores the importance of this dialogue between Scripture and its applicability, emphasizing how the timeless relevance of the text becomes realized in modern contexts.[113] His rules of reading, as outlined, function as more than just interpretative tools; they establish essential boundaries that ensure interpretation and application remain faithful to the original text, thus preventing misinterpretation or misuse. Building on these foundational rules, Kuruvilla advances from a hermeneutical methodology, known as *the world in front of the text*, to a homiletical discussion.

Kuruvilla critically examines traditional homiletical processes that often reduce biblical texts to universal propositions for sermon delivery.[114] He challenges the prevalent practice of distilling and dispersing texts into mere universal propositional

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[113] Kuruvilla's book title, *Text to Praxis: Hermeneutics and Homiletics in Dialogue*, exemplifies the essential interplay between hermeneutics and homiletics. This dialogue is central to his methodology, aiming to establish a clear and valid pathway from the biblical text to its practical application in sermon. Kuruvilla articulates this objective: "By engaging hermeneutics and homiletics in dialogue, this work seeks to establish a means to validate the move from Scripture to sermon." Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 142.

[114] See Kuruvilla's assessment on this topic in "Preaching the Distillate," in *A Manual for Preaching*, 265–67; "'Old' Homiletic: Sermon Constructing," in *A Vision for Preaching*, 80–82.

principles, a process, he argues, that focuses on what is *behind* the text.[115] Kuruvilla

points out the limitation of this approach: "Once one has gotten the distillate of the text,

that is, the reduction of the text into one or more propositions, one can abandon the text

itself."[116] Importantly, Kuruvilla clarifies that he is "not against reductions *per se* in

homiletics,"[117] but advocates for an "appropriately created reduction"[118] that maintains a

theological focus. In many cases, the "preaching the distillate" approach tends to create a

gap between the text and its application.[119] Instead of moving linearly from the text to

application, this method should include a step back to *primarily* examine what lies behind

the text, followed by the development of principles that bridge these insights to their

applications.

As seen in figure 1, in contrast, Kuruvilla advocates for a theological

interpretation that respects the unique theology intrinsic in the text, which he refers to as

the world in front of the text. He elaborates, "In the 'principlizing' hermeneutic, the

principle is antecedent to the text and the text is often considered reducible to that principle

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[115] Kuruvilla offers a critical analyzes of the principlizing approach in comparison to his own hermeneutical method: "Invariably, the one seeking to discover principles is searching *behind* the text for whatever it was that prompted the writing of that text. This is particularly a problem with the interpretation of biblical narrative: the biblical writer, so it would seem, began with a principle (behind the text) and then hunted in his illustration database for an appropriate story in which to couch his principle." Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 128. See the examples of principlizing approach in Millard J. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation: Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 55–76.

[116] Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 81.

[117] Abraham Kuruvilla, "Time to Kill the Big Idea? A Fresh Look at Preaching," *JETS* 61, no. 4 (December 2018): 844.

[118] Kuruvilla, "Time to Kill the Big Idea?," 844.

[119] Kuruvilla, "Time to Kill the Big Idea?," 830. In his response to Kuruvilla's article, Steven Mathewson concurs with the effectiveness and validity of the distillate approach, also known as "big idea" approach, emphasizing its utility when properly practiced. Mathewson finds common ground with Kuruvilla on the importance of focusing on authorial intent, which includes understanding both the text's *saying* and *doing*—the essential elements of Kuruvilla's theological focus. Mathewson elaborates, "While Robinson did not use the language of 'semantics/pragmatics' or 'locution/illocution/perlocution' (Speech Act Theory), he certainly recognized the need to discern what the author is doing what he is saying." Steven D. Mathewson, "Let the Big Idea Live! A Response to Abraham Kuruvilla," *JEHS* 19, no. 1 (March 2019): 37.

behind it; by the theological hermeneutic espoused. . . . the text gives rise to the world/theology and the text is irreducible to that world *in front of* it."[120]

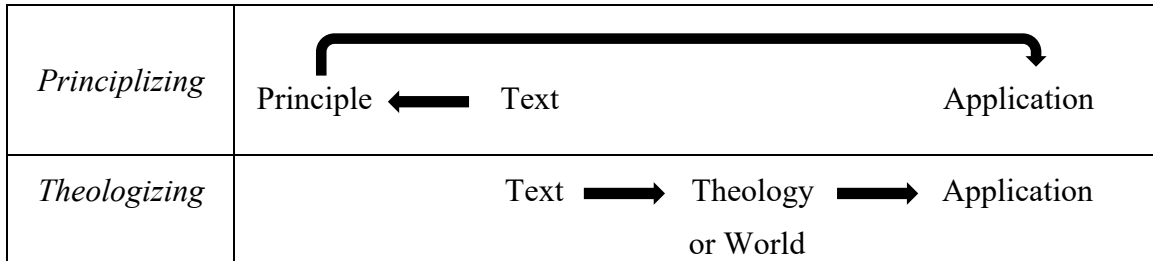| *Principlizing* | Principle ⟵ Text   Application |
| *Theologizing* | Text ⟶ Theology ⟶ Application
or World |

Figure 1. Kuruvilla's model for hermeneutical move

Kuruvilla's approach recognizes the text as more than just a source of principles; it is perceived as a dynamic entity that unfolds into a rich theological world.[121] This method acknowledges the unique character and role of each text, viewing it as an integral part of bridging the *then* of the ancient world and *now* of the contemporary context. Kuruvilla continues, "Instead, the preacher seeks to discover (and rediscover for listeners) the thrust of the irreducible text-as-a-whole, *in toto*, with the power and potency and pathos that is contributed indispensably by every part of the text."[122] Such a nuanced pathway for sermon application enables a preacher to trace a legitimate progression from the text, through the theology or world projected by the text, to text-driven application.

At the core of Kuruvilla's strategy for the homiletical move is the discernment of a text's transhistorical intention.[123] He emphasizes the importance of this approach when noting, "The text is given a future orientation, enabling valid application by readers

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[120] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 37, emphasis added. The statement by Heinrich Ott, "Theology stands midway between the Bible and actual church preaching," aligns well with the concept of pericopal theology as an intermediary in homiletics. Heinrich Ott, *Theology and Preaching* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 17.

[121] Figure 1 adapted from Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!,* 129.

[122] Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 84.

[123] Kuruvilla spells out this focus: "After all, the goal of the interpreter is to discern the transhistorical intention." Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 183.

at locations and times far removed from those of the event of inscription."[124] Kuruvilla defines transhistorical intention as "a conceptual entity with a defined boundary that can comprise one or more future exemplification (application)."[125] This definition leads to a deeper understanding: every text inherently possesses an original textual sense, which includes both its semantics (the explicit, literal meaning) and pragmatics (the author's purpose or doing within the passage).[126] The relevance of a text, by its own textuality, extends beyond its initial composition, owing to its characteristic of futurity.[127] As a result, the meaning of the text also embodies a transhistorical intention, extending its significance beyond its original context.[128] Kuruvilla affirms, "The vector of such an interpretive transaction leads the theologian-homiletician from the text, via the posited world bearing a transhistorical intention, to arrive ultimately at application."[129] Therefore, a valid application, referred to as future exemplification, arises within the boundary of the text's transhistorical intention, maintaining a balance between hermeneutics and homiletic.[130]

To enhance his arguments, Kuruvilla provides two illuminating examples. For the initial example, in his discussion of general hermeneutics, particularly concerning "classic literature," he delves into the concept of text's transhistorical intention, emphasizing that a text's relevance is not confined to its original context. He articulates this idea by stating,

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[124] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 27.

[125] Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 46.

[126] Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 271.

[127] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 54.

[128] Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 157–61.

[129] Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 162.

[130] In his work, Kuruvilla draws from E. D. Hirsch's concept of meaning and its transhistorical intention, particularly emphasizing Hirsch's terms "transhistorical intention" and "future exemplification" to elucidate his hermeneutical-homiletical movement. Kuruvilla interprets "transhistorical intention" as representing "what the author is doing" or *the world projected in front of the text*, and he views "future exemplification" as a form of "valid application" or "improvisation" in his writings. See Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 41–51.

For any text, the content is consumed at an event of reading subsequent to the event of writing. Therefore, information conveyed by a text is not necessarily relevant to a readership far away in time and space; this is akin to reading a local newspaper from another city, a decade after its publication. In other words, the "literature of knowledge," that merely conveys information, usually becomes outdated as the distanciation of the text creates a breach between the event of communication and the content of communication. The relevance of the content for the reader is likely to diminish in proportion to the time-space distance of the content from the event. Pure information rarely transcends time and space to provide direction for future application; it merely tells us how things were in the past, not how things could/should be in the future. On the other hand, it is the "literature of power," projecting a world in front of itself, that never grows outdated. By its world projection, it retains the capacity to say something universally relevant across the passage of time. Thus, its referentiality persists into an indefinite future, and the world projected gives readers direction for application.[131]

Kuruvilla then introduces a distinction between what he labels the "literature of knowledge" and the "literature of power." He elucidates that the former, being bound by its specific temporal and spatial context, often loses its relevance over time, similar to an outdated newspaper that no longer holds current news. On the other hand, the "literature of power" transcends its original context, projecting a universally relevant and meaningful world across different times and spaces. This distinction leads Kuruvilla to explore the concept of the text's transhistorical intention, which he applies to biblical interpretation for a valid application.[132]

For the subsequent example, he explains the concept of transhistorical intention and its future exemplification using the *Metropolitan Police Act of 1839*.[133] In a hypothetical scenario under the law, an individual stranded on a London road with a broken-down vehicle, originally referred to as a carriage, is required to promptly remove the vehicles from the street, regardless of the vehicle type. Kuruvilla explains that the

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[131] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 43.

[132] Kuruvilla applies this concept into the realms of interpretation and application for preaching: "The value of such a concept for biblical interpretation is obvious: the validity of future applications is contingent upon whether such applications fall within the perimeter of the transhistorical intention/*world in front of the text*. What is fixed for the future in the past event of writing, then, is the transhistorical concept of deriving any number of future exemplifications for any number of future situations." Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 46.

[133] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 61.

1839 law, initially prohibiting carriage repair, was later interpreted to also prohibit the repair of trucks and cars, in line with its transhistorical intention of keeping roads clear of broken vehicles: "Thus the law of 1839 prohibiting carriage repair was validly read in the future as prohibiting truck or car repair, as well, by virtue of its transhistorical intention (no broken vehicles on road)."[134] This interpretation demonstrates that the specific action mandated by the law is not historically bounded. Rather, its future exemplification (application) remains consistent with the law's overarching transhistorical intention, which calls for the removal of any broken-down vehicles from the roads.

Reflecting on these analogies and their relevance to preaching, Kuruvilla engages with E. D. Hirsch's idea that a text's meaning goes beyond its original textual sense, allowing for potential future applications while still honoring the author's original intention.[135] He then aligns this idea with Paul Ricoeur's notion of *the world in front of the text*, a pivotal concept for preserving the text's ongoing projection and instrumentality.[136] Kuruvilla states, "Hirsch's transhistorical intention is thus equivalent to Ricoeur's *world in front of the text*."[137] This assertion underscores the importance of Ricoeur's idea, which views the text as a dynamic entity that projects values, precepts, and priority creating *the world in front of the text*. This perspective is harmoniously integrated with Hirsch's framework, which posits that the transhistorical intention of a text is a guiding force for valid applications that remains pertinent over time. Together, these ideas form a cohesive understanding of how texts can maintain their relevance and applicability in various

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[134] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 45.

[135] E. D. Hirsch, "Past Intentions and Present Meanings," *Essays in Criticism* 33, no. 2 (April 1983): 88.

[136] Drawing from Paul Ricoeur's insights, Kuruvilla elucidates, "The *projection* of the world, therefore, generates *projects* for action. In following this projected trajectory of application, the dynamic course of the text is extended beyond itself, and covenant renewal is affected through the instrumentality of the pericope." Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 156. See Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. John Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981), 143.

[137] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 46.

contexts, transcending their original and cultural confines. Kuruvilla understands this functionality under his unique term, pericopal theology.

**Pericopal Theology as Intermediary
between *Then* and *Now***

Kuruvilla redefines the pericope, traditionally seen as a manageable portion of Scripture for preaching, as a self-contained sense unit that bears a sufficient and integral idea, contributing significantly to the overarching message of the biblical text.[138] He articulates, "As the fundamental scriptural entity in ecclesial and homiletical use, and as the relatively irreducible textual element composing a single sense unit, each pericope projects a segment of that broader world projected by the canon."[139] This perspective elevates the pericope beyond a mere textual fragment, recognizing it as a vital component in the broader canonical narrative.

Further, Kuruvilla introduces the concept of pericopal theology as a mechanism for actualizing the transhistorical intention in contemporary settings. In other words, he conceptualizes pericopal theology as an *intermediary* between the text and its modern application:

> One might define pericopal theology as the theology specific to a particular pericope (the representation of a segment of the plenary world projected by the canon) which, bearing a future-directed intention, functions as the crucial intermediary—the

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[138] Timothy Warren's evaluation of the definition of pericope in Kuruvilla's work provides a foundational basis for extended discourse. Highlighting its functional aspect, Warren elucidates the concept of pericope with a clear and directed approach:

> Whether consisting of a paragraph from an epistle or an entire psalm or a single proverb or a distinct narrative, Kuruvilla classifies all coherent units of thought that comprise a preaching text as pericopes. His focus is on that portion of text that the preacher expounds upon during the gathering of a group of believers for worship and edification. He presumes that each preaching text, if it is wisely chosen, contains a theological message that contributes to the more comprehensive canonical theology projected in the entirety of the Bible. It is through the preaching of these texts that portray the fullness of the Bible's theological worldview that God's people are challenged to commit themselves anew to at least a portion of that plenary world in front of the text. (Timothy S. Warren, "Exploring Precursors to and Benefits of Abe Kuruvilla's 'Pericopal Theology,'" *JEHS* 15, no. 1 [March 2015]: 54)

[139] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 109.

element that enables the preacher to say the "same thing"—in the homiletical move from text to praxis.[140]

This understanding maintains the essential role of pericope as a unit that bears transhistorical intention while adeptly linking it to its realization in a new context. His methodological transition in homiletics, from hermeneutics to homiletics, necessarily involves a journey from text to theology, and then from theology to application in an ecclesial context. This process is facilitated by the concept of pericopal theology, which acts as a bridge.[141] In Kuruvilla's system, which emphasizes the dynamic interplay between interpretation and application, pericopal theology empowers the biblical text to fulfill its intended purpose. It "allows the biblical text to do what it was intended to do."[142] The pericope not only says something, but also does something with what it says.

Kuruvilla's hermeneutical term *the world in front of the text* is intricately connected to the concept of pericopal theology. In practical terms, pericopal theology and *the world in front of the text* represent different expressions of a singular goal. Kuruvilla elucidates, "For all practical purposes, pericopal theology, *the world in front of the text*, and what its author is doing (pragmatics) may be considered equivalent."[143] To further clarify the relationship between these two concepts, Kuruvilla explains that "a vision cast by the preacher from the word of God in the form of pericopal theology"[144] is, in essence,

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[140] Kuruvilla, "Preaching as Translation via Theology," 92.

[141] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 145.

[142] Warren, "Exploring Precursors," 10.

[143] Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 29. Thomas Long echoes a similar viewpoint in his discussion on historical inquiry in biblical texts. He explains,

> This style of historical inquiry has sometimes been pictured as an investigation *behind* the text. What is the text's past? Where did it come from? What did it once 'mean' in a particular time and place? These historical questions and concerns need not be abandoned. Instead, they should be augmented by questions that lead to a close analysis of the literary features in the texts and the rhetorical dynamics which are likely to take place *in front of the texts*, that is, between text and reader. (Thomas G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989], 24, emphasis added)

[144] Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 102.

"the vision of a *world in front of the text*."[145] Both terms are employed to emphasize the function of a pericope as a literary instrument through which the author of each pericope projects a transcendent vision or ideal world.

Kuruvilla's interpretation of "Mark's Naked Runaway" episode (Mark 14:51–52)[146] serves as a prime example of his understanding of pericopal theology and the concept of *the world in front of the text*.[147] In this narrative analysis, Kuruvilla delves beyond surface-level events, discerning a profound, theologically charged vision articulated by the author. He contends that this Markan pericope transcends a mere recounting of the young man's naked runaway. Instead, Kuruvilla shows how Mark strategically utilizes linguistic nuances and thematic constructs,[148] particularly the motif of garment exchange—from a linen cloth to a white garment—to accentuate the underlying themes of shame and glory.[149]

As interpreted by Kuruvilla, this pericope functions as a literary device. It not only narrates events but also serves as a vehicle for conveying Mark's theological agenda (pericopal theology) to its readers. It beckons readers into an experiential realm of spiritual

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[145] Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 102.

[146] In his analysis of the brief episode in Mark 14:51–52, where it is written, "And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked," Kuruvilla examines potential figures in this narrative to identify the naked runaway, including Mark, Jesus, Joseph, and Lazarus. However, this observation shows that his focus is not on what lies *behind* the text. See Abraham Kuruvilla, "The Naked Runaway and the Enrobed Reporter of Mark 14 and 16: What is the Author *Doing* with What He is *Saying*?," *JETS* 54, no. 3 (September 2011): 528–33.

[147] Kuruvilla, "The Naked Runaway," 527–45.

[148] Kuruvilla, "The Naked Runaway," 540–43. Kuruvilla's thematical layout and specific word choice in the Markan narrative are as follows:

    A. Young man's (νεανίσκος) linen cloth (σινδών) shed in shame during the abandonment of
       Jesus by disciples (14:51–52)
       B. Jesus's linen cloth (σινδών) worn in death (15:46)
    A–1. Jesus's white garment (λευκός) worn in glory at the transfiguration (9:3)
       B–1. Young man's (νεανίσκος) white clothing (λευκός) at the empty tomb (16:5)
     C. Restoration from shame to glory: "*Clothing Transfer*" (16:1–8)

[149] Kuruvilla, "The Naked Runaway," 544.

restoration and growth, thereby projecting the transformative power of the biblical text, *the world in front of the text*, as envisioned in specific theology of the text. In other words, *the world in front of* Markan account is not just a backdrop for the events but a dynamic space where the theological implications of the narrative are actualized and experienced by the contemporary readers. Thus, Kuruvilla's approach illuminates how each pericope serves as a conduit for communicating profound theological truths and ethical imperatives, shaping the reader's understanding and response to the biblical text.[150] Kuruvilla summarizes his interpretation of the Markan narrative by shifting focus from the traditional quest for the physical identity of the naked runaway to Mark's theological focus:

> Unlike the goal of most commentators through ages, Mark is not so much interested in announcing the precise physical identification of the naked runaway as much as he is in propagating his theological thrust—the restoration of fallen followers. And to do so, he chooses to connect one "young man" with another, one linen cloth with another, one whiteness with another—all for the sake of the rehabilitative "exchange" he wishes to portray. The reader's appreciation of the narrator's art (which is inspired by the Holy Spirit as is every other element of the biblical text) will determine whether that theological thrust is discerned and accepted, and whether believers will change their lives in order to be faithful to what they are called to be and do—to follow without fear, without fleeing. And if it so happens that they do fail, there is hope for restoration. Who, then, is the naked runaway? He is Every Disciple, shamefully feeble and fallible. And the enrobed reporter? That one, too, is Every Disciple, gloriously restored by the grace of God, through Jesus Christ![151]

Kuruvilla's concept of pericopal theology proposes that Mark's biblical passage presents a set of values through its projected worlds, extending an invitation to readers to adopt these values. The main thrust of this pericope—"Faithlessness in discipleship is shameful"[152]—becomes the text's unique theology, and this theology must be discerned for articulating its valid application, that is, the restoration of fallen followers.

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[150] Again, Kuruvilla's definition of pericopal theology is fundamentally anchored in its functional aspect. He articulates, "the biblical canon as a whole projects a world in front of the text—God's ideal world, individual segments of which are portrayed by individual pericopes. Thus, each sermon on a particular pericope is God's gracious invitation to mankind to live in his ideal world by abiding by the thrust of that pericope." Kuruvilla, "Christiconic Interpretation," 131. See also Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, rev. and enl. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 255–72.

[151] Kuruvilla, "The Naked Runaway," 545. See also Abraham Kuruvilla, *Mark*, Theological Commentary for Preachers (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 315–19.

[152] Kuruvilla, *Mark*, 315.

To aid in clarifying the hermeneutical concepts discussed in this section, especially Kuruvilla's use of interchangeable terms, table 3 is provided. This table offers clarity and insight into his methodology.[153]

Table 3. Kuruvilla's hermeneutical concepts within similar categories

Category 1: Literature of Knowledge	Category 2: Literature of Power	Category 3: Discernment
Original Textual Sense	Transhistorical Intention	Valid Application or Exemplification
Author's Saying	Author's Doing	
Semantics of Utterance	Pragmatics of Utterance	
	Pericopal Theology (The World in front of the Text)	

To sum up, Kuruvilla's hermeneutical framework in homiletics lays a foundational ground for deriving valid applications that align with the transhistorical intention of the text. He articulates this principle by noting, "It is by a text's projection of a world that bears a transhistorical intention that it achieves this futurity. The discernment of this projected world is therefore an essential task of the interpreter, for from this intermediary alone may valid application be derived."[154] This perspective posits that while Scripture is deeply rooted in its original historical and cultural context, it also carries forward a set of universal truths and directives that are relevant and applicable across different eras and cultural landscapes, similar to how the *Metropolitan Police Act* transcends its original context. Kuruvilla's model facilitates a seamless connection between the ancient biblical world and the contemporary audience, effectively bridging two distinct realms. Kuruvilla's portrayal of pericopal theology is the invitation to a specific world in front of the text that changes lives as readers and listeners respond by embracing and living according to the values of these worlds in sermon. The contents of this projection

[153] Table 3, adapted from Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!,* 144, has been adjusted for clarity and includes new categories.

[154] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 44.

are the specific theology of each pericope. This projected world acts as an *intermediary* between the text and its application, allowing for a valid response to the text. For application from a particular biblical pericope to be valid, it must be demonstrably built atop the divine demand of the text, that which is determined through right discernment of what the author is *doing* with what he is *saying*.[155] Kevin Vanhoozer captures the essence of this process:

> The Bible is discourse (what is written) on a marvelous matter (what is written about). Faith seeking understanding means attending to the evangelical (canonical) discourse about the evangelical (Christological, ultimately) subject matter. Interpretation is the process of discerning the truth of the matter from the discourse.[156]

Kuruvilla affirms, "Without this operation of projecting worlds, such application potential will remain unrealized."[157] The interpretation of Scripture, therefore, must go beyond the analysis of its linguistic, grammatical, and syntactical elements (semantics) to include discerning what the author is *doing* (pragmatics). Scott Gilbert's summation of this idea is particularly pertinent: "The author's intent, conveyed through the text, exhibits transhistorical intentions in such a way that application is not merely a matter of generalizing principles from the text, but discerning and carrying out the exemplifications of the text's intention that function as *the world in front of the text*."[158]

Kuruvilla's hermeneutical move for homiletical goal is now applied to the interpretations of Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. This application demonstrates the relevance of God's holiness to the circumstances of modern auditors. The fundamental assumption

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[155] Boyd, *From Ancient Text to Valid Application*, 38.

[156] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics," *JETS* 48, no. 1 (March 2005): 104.

[157] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 53.

[158] Scott A. Gilbert, "Go Make Disciples: Sermonic Application of the Imperative of the Great Commission" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 65.

of Kuruvilla, "Pericopal theology thus provides the text's direction for holiness,"[159] will be utilized in this context.

God's Projected Holy World for Applications
in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4

In applying the hermeneutical and homiletical discussions to the theme of God's holiness in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 through the lens of Kuruvilla's method, one deeply engages with the pericopal theology of divine holiness, thereby articulating relevant and valid applications. The theology of Isaiah 6 is captured through the concept of personal repentance, initiated by a transformative encounter with God's holiness. This profound experience begins when Isaiah confronts the Lord's transcendent holiness and acknowledges his own inadequacy, showcasing the transition from the infinite to the intimate—a trajectory characterized by Isaiah's renewal in response to God's immanent holiness. Similarly, Revelation 4 presents a celestial vision of worship, where God's transcendent holiness functions as an initial generator for authentic worship, leading to identity transformation influenced by the immanent holiness of God. In both texts, the envisioned God's world is not merely a distant ideal but a tangible reality to be embraced and applied in the lives of believers, guiding them towards a life of holiness and authentic worship, in alignment with the dual aspects of God's transcendent and immanent holiness.

Invitation Given: Abiding in God's Holy
World through Repentance in Isaiah 6

As elucidated in chapter 2 and 3, the profound narrative of Isaiah 6, when examined through Kuruvilla's hermeneutical lens, unveils a compelling invitation to abide in God's holy world, facilitated by repentance.[160] Semantically, the prophet's experience

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[159] Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 124.

[160] While biblical scholars offer differing perspectives on the concept of repentance, this section will primarily utilize Alec Motyer's definition of repentance. Motyer explains, "Human repentance is not a meritorious work offered to God to excite his pleasure but a response to the fact that his righteous claims

presents a vivid portrayal of God's transcendent holiness, as seen in the vision of the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne (6:1), with seraphim declaring his holiness: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts" (6:3). This depiction establishes a semantic groundwork, representing the original textual sense or the author's *saying*; namely, the distinctiveness and transcendence of the divine. While this semantic foundation is crucial, it is equally important to explore the pragmatic dimensions of the text for a valid application.[161] The text goes beyond mere semantic interpretation, projecting its pragmatic implications (transhistorical intention or *what the author is doing*) to contemporary readers and listeners.[162] In Isaiah 6, this pragmatic unfolding is evident as the narrative transitions from a celestial vision to a personal call for repentance and transformation. The thematic development, marked by the strategic use of the Hebrew verbs ראה (to see) and קרא (to call/hear), aligns seamlessly with Kuruvilla's concepts of the homiletical move—from the text to theology. The narrative's shift from *seeing* to *hearing*, and then back from *hearing* to *seeing*, signifies a dynamic interaction with the divine where the prophet Isaiah not only visually perceives God's holiness but also hears and actively responds to it.[163]

More explicitly, this sensory journey from visual revelation to auditory response in Isaiah 6 encapsulates the interplay between semantic elements and the pragmatic forces

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have been met. . . . Penitent ones/'returning ones' stresses the practical side of repentance: *a change of mind resulting in a new (Godward) direction of life*." J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 51, emphasis added.

[161] As a guideline for the hermeneutical goal of preaching, Kuruvilla emphasizes the importance of understanding the pragmatic aspects of a text in interpretation. He states, "As a function of their pragmatic capability, texts also project worlds with transhistorical intentions, guiding future appropriation and application." Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 53.

[162] If a preacher utilizes a hermeneutic that primarily concentrates on what is *behind* the text regarding God's holiness in Isa 6, he may encounter challenges in identifying the semantic meaning of the word קדש (*kodesh*), which can be vary in its lexical and semantic meanings. See "The Confusion about the Meaning of God's Holiness," in chap. 2.

[163] Michael Fishbane, *Haftarot*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2022), 107–8.

in understanding encounters with God's holiness. The author of the text skillfully constructs this narrative sequence, forming a cohesive and detailed structure that highlights the deep impact of Isaiah's transformational experience.[164] This encounter notably places a strong emphasis on God's holiness as both the initial catalyst and the principal means for Isaiah's repentance. Furthermore, the strategic use of ראה (to see) and קרא (to call/hear) as linguistic markers aligns with the idea of *the world in front of the text*. This approach suggests that biblical text projects a theological world that extends beyond its original historical and cultural confines. The text's inherent futurity within its theology significantly surpasses its original context, effectively connecting the text's theology to valid application. In other words, the narrative of this pericope from Isaiah is not limited to a mere historical observation or listening to the Lord's holiness from a doctrinal standpoint. Instead, it invites an active engagement with God's transcendent holiness through ראה (to see) and קרא (to call/hear), followed by a response, a process enabled and enriched by God's immanent holy nature. Andrew Abernathy perceptively notes, "This dual affirmation that God is transcendent and immanent aims to drive those tottering between rebellion and repentance into the gracious bosom of the cosmic king, while encouraging those who are already faithful with the delightful news that the high king of heaven is with them."[165] Alec Motyer also brings out the significant role of God's transcendent and immanent holiness in redirecting human hearts. He explicates that God's divine nature functions not only as the fundamental cause but also as the means of enabling this transformation in human relationship, thereby "giving primacy to the divine acts which

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[164] The narrative structure of Isa 6:1–5 is characterized by the author's deliberate choice of language, which emphasizes the following aspects:

A[1] "Seeing": I saw the Lord (6:1)
   B[1] "Hearing": One called to another (6:3a)
      C *"Holy, holy, holy": The holiness of God* (6:3b)
   B[2] "Hearing": At the voice of him who called (6:4)
A[2] "Seeing": My eyes have seen the King (6:5)

[165] Andrew T. Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom: A Thematic-Theological Approach*, NSBT 40 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 110.

make the human response possible and meaningful."[166] The text, therefore, becomes a medium for conveying the multifaceted nature of God's holiness, projecting *the world in front of the text* that includes both revelation and response, sight and sound, observation and action.

In addition, this thematic progression is intricately connected to Kuruvilla's concept of pericopal theology. The symmetrical structure of Isaiah 6:1–13 clearly shows and accentuates the theological focus.[167] This structural analysis reveals the author's intentions, that is, what the author is *doing* with what he is *saying*: it illustrates the prophet Isaiah's active engagement with God's holiness, culminating in his purification and restoration. This dynamic interaction within the narrative is not just a literary device but holds profound theological significance. Abernathy astutely addresses the theological ramifications of this encounter: "Isaiah's exposure to such a sight moves him to acknowledge that he and the people are 'unclean' (6:5), a term often contrasted with holiness."[168] In the absence of theological discernment (pragmatics), interpretations of this pericope risk devolving into simplistic moralizing applications, such as "Be aware of what you can do for a holy life," or direct transference, "Repent as Isaiah did, and God

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[166] Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 51.

[167] Raymond Ortlund's symmetrical structure is helpful for understanding the focal points of the author's intention. Raymond C. Ortlund, *Isaiah: God Saves Sinners*, PtW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 76.

A^1 A great king dies, ending an era (6:1a)
  B^1 The King reigns in holiness (6:1b–4)
    C^1 The prophet despairs (6:5)
      D^1 *The prophet is cleansed* (6:6, 7)
      D^2 *The prophet is sent* (6:8–10)
    C^2 The prophet is dismayed (6:11a)
  B^2 The King reigns in judgment (6:11b–13a)
A^2 A humble remnant lives on, leading to Messiah (6:13b)

[168] Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom*, 18.

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will send us on his mission!" Alternatively, sermons might end without practical application, focusing solely on the doctrinal assertion, "God is utterly holy."[169]

In discussing the creation of legitimate and effective applications, Kuruvilla emphasizes the importance of developing the theology of each pericope for applications that are both authoritative and relevant. He notes, "There is, thus, a twofold aspect to the homiletical transaction: the exposition of the theology of the pericope, and the delineation of how the latter may be applied in real life."[170] Therefore, recognizing the theological focus of Isaiah 6 is necessary to understand the author's thematic trajectory: a shift from the infinite to the intimate. The text demonstrates (the author's *doing*) that Isaiah's encounter with God's holiness leads to a profound realization of his own sinfulness, as evidenced by his exclamation, "Woe is me! For I am lost" (Isa 6:5). This moment of self-awareness is pivotal, marking the beginning of a transformative journey. The subsequent purification of Isaiah with a coal from the altar represents more than sin's removal; it signifies an invitation to embrace the values and priorities of holiness in God's ideal world, resonating with the theology of repentance.

The transhistorical intention of the pericope should be exemplified in today's context through the theology of repentance. Paul Raabe is right when he states, "The Book of Isaiah gives an ancient word. And yet, what the Holy One of Israel had to say back then and there continues to speak to us today . . . [this same text] still leads sinners to repentance and faith."[171] The cleansing process in Isaiah 6 serves as a pragmatic demonstration of God's willingness to make the unholy into the holy and to close the gap

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[169] In discussing the transformative power of preaching for life-changing experiences, Calvin Miller aptly contends, "No application, no sermon. Without application, preaching is at best a lecture and at worst entertainment." Calvin Miller, *Preaching: The Art of Narrative Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 96.

[170] Abraham Kuruvilla, *Judges*, Theological Commentary for Preachers (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 2.

[171] Paul R. Raabe, "Look to the Holy One of Israel, All You Nations: The Oracles about the Nations Still Speak Today," *Concordia Journal* 30, no. 4 (October 2004): 343.

between the distant and the near. It is essential to discern the theology of the pericope for valid applications: God's transcendent holiness, infinitely vast, gradually draws closer, ultimately becoming intimately accessible for the sanctification of his people. Indeed, as David Wells succinctly puts it, "Where God is, there is his holiness."[172]

When generalizing this theology for sermon application,[173] the concept of transitioning "from infinite to intimate" aligns profoundly with the notion of "contagious holiness."[174] Craig Blomberg articulates this idea, highlighting that Jesus never shows fear of being morally or ritually contaminated by associating with sinners or the impure. Contrary to social norms, he holds a firm belief that his holiness can positively influence them by proactively drawing near to these individuals. Blomberg notes,

> Jesus thus defies the conventions of his world by his intimate association with a group of people deemed traitorous and corrupt in his society. Still, he does not condone their sinful lifestyles but calls them to repentance, transformation, and discipleship. . . . What is nonetheless striking is that Jesus appears to not require repentance *in advance* of having table fellowship with sinners and tax collectors. Perhaps most strikingly of all, Jesus is not defiled by his contact with impurity but instead vanquishes it through the eschatological power active in him. We might thus speak of holiness for Jesus, rather than sin, being that which he views as "contagious."[175]

Within this theological framework for specific application, God's holiness is not an end goal achieved through human effort; it is a state made accessible by immersing oneself in the holy world that God reveals through the text's projection and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in preaching. This applicational model of the contagious nature of God's holiness, as demonstrated by the theology of Isaiah 6 and a specific example of Jesus

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[172] David F. Wells, *God in the Whirlwind: How the Holy-Love of God Reorients Our World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 114.

[173] Kuruvilla's use of the term "generalizing" requires careful attention. He critiques the type of generalizing that tends to distill the text into basic principles. To guide appropriate theological generalizing, Kuruvilla asserts, "Thus there is a place for generalization, but with a caveat: any generalization must be shown to have been validly drawn from the text and its particulars." Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!,* 32.

[174] The terminology used here is derived from Craig Blomberg. See how Blomberg discusses the concept of holiness through the example of Jesus in Craig L. Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*, NSBT 19 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 65–97.

[175] Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 102–3.

above, fosters a progressive transformation in listeners toward greater Christlikeness. This gradual change, occurring pericope-by-pericope and week-by-week, represents the ultimate objective of preaching.

In summary, the thematic progression in Isaiah 6, highlighted by the verbs ראה (to see) and קרא (to call/hear), exemplifies how a biblical pericope can project theological precepts, priorities, values, and practices of God's ideal world—*the world in front of the text*—and carry a unique theological message.[176] This progression from *seeing* to *hearing* in Isaiah's encounter with God's holiness invites readers and listeners into an experiential understanding and response to the divine.[177] This approach transcends the historical confines of the text, rendering its message both authoritative and applicable in contemporary settings. Therefore, viewed through Kuruvilla's hermeneutical and homiletical framework, the narrative of Isaiah 6 is not just a recounting of a divine vision but a dynamic invitation to all believers across all generations. It prompts a recognition of inadequacies among believers in the light of God's transcendent holiness and encourages an engaged response through repentance, facilitated by God's immanent holiness. Such repentance becomes the pathway to abiding in God's holy world, a transformative process that aligns the hearers with the "contagious holiness" and enables them to live in the reality of his holiness.

Bridging Heaven and Earth: The Role of
Holiness in Worship and Identity
According to Revelation 4

Revelation 4, akin to the profound narrative of Isaiah 6, offers an engaging invitation for genuine worship, a response intricately tied to the dual nature of God's

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[176] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!,* 28; 30; 56; 63; 98; 112; 117; 152; 176; 189; 194; 211; 258; 260; Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 101; 106; 109; 122; 126; 144.

[177] Robert Fyall provides an insightful analysis of the relationship between the notion of repentance and the sensory experiences of "hearing and seeing" within the context of the Hebrew Bible. He posits that repentance is "an acknowledgement that is a further result of listening to and seeing God." Robert S. Fyall, *Now My Eyes Have Seen You: Images of Creation and Evil in the Book of Job*, NSBT 12 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 179.

holiness—its transcendence and immanence. This pericope marks a pivotal thematic transition from earthly concerns to celestial visions, centering predominantly on the depiction of sovereign God and his holiness through the lens of worship.[178]

The semantic portrayal in Revelation 4 visually captivates with its rich layers, offering a multifaceted depiction of God's transcendent holiness. The chapter commences with an evocative image of God seated in splendor upon his throne (4:2), a representation that is both awe-inspiring and majestic. The description of God enthroned, ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος, employs vivid imagery to convey divine authority and majesty.[179] The comparison of God's appearance to jasper and carnelian, along with the surrounding rainbow (4:3), further enriches the portrayal of his sovereignty.[180] This imagery is not merely illustrative but serves a semantic purpose, highlighting the supreme authority and majesty of the divine. The throne itself emerges as a symbol of God's immutable nature, reflecting essential aspects of his holiness.[181]

Moreover, the depiction of celestial beings surrounding the divine throne, notably the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures, substantially augments the portrayal of God's holiness. The elders, adorned in white garments with golden crowns (4:4), signify righteousness and royal authority.[182] Concurrently, the four living creatures (4:5–6), each possibly representing different facets of creation, illustrate the vastness and diversity of God's dominion.[183] Their continuous worship, articulated through the trisagion,

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[178] David MacLeod, "The Adoration of God the Creator: An Exposition of Revelation 4," *BSac* 164 (April–June 2007): 198–200.

[179] Brian Tabb indicates the significance of the throne image, writing, "The throne indicates how decisive for the theological perspective of Revelation is faith in God's sovereignty over all things. Beginning in 4:2, God Almighty is referred to as the 'one seated on the throne.' The throne is the dominant feature of John's heavenly vision: everything else is introduced in relation to this throne." Brian J. Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone*, NSBT 48 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019), 37.

[180] G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 320.

[181] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2023), 219–20.

[182] David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, WBC, vol. 52A (Dallas: Word, 1997), 314.

[183] Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 125.

"Holy, holy, holy," (6:8), profoundly underscores the reverence and awe elicited by God's utter holiness. This semantically dense portrayal deepens the reader's perception, accentuating God's transcendent nature as the cornerstone of genuine worship. Transitioning from the semantic analysis to the pragmatic considerations, the examination moves to how the narrative structure and linguistic choices of this pericope not only represent holiness but also actively engage the reader in a response of worship.

Therefore, the semantic foundation of Revelation 4 (what the author is *saying*) encompasses not only the original textual sense but also the centrality of transcendence of the Lord in worship, thus establishing it as a crucial element for subsequent narrative and thematic developments. To comprehensively appreciate the significance of Revelation 4, it is imperative to delve into its pragmatic dimensions (what the author is *doing*), which are indispensable for deriving a valid application from the passage. The narrative, through its inherent textuality, projects *the world in front of the text*—its pragmatic objectives bound by a transhistorical intention, resonating with contemporary readers and listeners. This section of Revelation exemplifies the narrative's theological thrust, illustrating a dynamic interaction with God's holiness where the heavenly beings not only recognize God's holiness but also participate actively in worship as a proper response.

The author's proficient employment of structural and linguistic techniques significantly contributes to this pragmatic comprehension of the text.[184] David Mathewson notes that the initial section of the narrative is distinguished by the use of Greek nominal clauses.[185] This linguistic approach serves to emphasizes *a state of being*, enhancing the portrayal of the throne's grandeur and majesty. In a strategic shift following the trisagion

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[184] David deSilva compellingly contends that the key to interpreting Revelation lies in understanding how the author skillfully employs his languages to effectively communicate his message. See David deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 65–92.

[185] David L. Mathewson, *Revelation*, BHGNT (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2016), 58. These clauses typically comprise a subject and occasionally a predicate nominative, adjective, or participle, yet lack an indicative verb.

praise in 4:8, John shifts his writing style from verbless clauses to the utilization of present

and future tense indicative verbs, complemented by participle forms. This contrasts sharply

with the earlier description of the throne.[186] The chiastic structure of the chapter,[187] marked

by its symmetrical progression, demonstrates John's linguistic intentionality, centering on

the worship evoked by God's holiness. This thematic development projects a world in front

of the text, effectively transitioning the focus from *a static state of being* to *a dynamic

sequence of actions*. This shift navigates the narrative from the solemn majesty of God's

holiness to the vibrant realm of active worship.[188] The text's inherent futurity within this

theology significantly surpasses its original context, connecting celestial worship to the

experiences of contemporary believers. As a result, the pericope of Revelation 4 transcends

mere symbolic observation of God's holiness. Instead, it fosters active engagement with

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[186] Mathewson, *Revelation*, 59.

[187] Again, John's strategic structure of chap. 4 is illustrated as follows:

A[1] (4:1) Introduction: Invitation to the Heavenly Vision
  B[1] (4:2–3) Initial Observation: Description of the Throne and the One Seated on it
    C[1] (4:4) Fundamental Paradigm: Twenty-Four Elders in Static Status
      D[1] (4:5a) Cosmic Disturbances: Lightning, Rumblings, and Peals of Thunder
        E[1] (4:5b) Before the Throne: Description of Seven Spirits of God
          F[1] (4:6a) Before the Throne: Description of Sea of Glass
            G[1] (4:6b–8a) Central Focus: *Worshipping God by Four Living Creatures*
            G[2] (4:8b) Central Focus: *Worshipping God Evoked by God's Holiness*
          F[2](4:9a) On the Throne: Description of Contents of Worship
        E[2](4:9b) On the Throne: Description of God's Attributes
      D[2] (4:10a) Cosmic Worship: Ceaseless Worship by Twenty-Four Elders
    C[2] (4:10b) Fundamental Paradigm: Twenty-Four Elders in Dynamic Status
  B[2] (4:11a) Culmination: Acknowledgement of the Worthiness of the One Seated on
    the Throne
A[2] (4:11b) Conclusion: Invitation to Authentic Worship

[188] D. A. Carson insightfully reflects on the worshipful response to God's holiness as depicted
in Rev 4:

> John tells us that "whenever the living creatures give glory, honor, and thanks to him who sits on the
> throne, and who lives forever and ever"—and John has just told us that they never stop doing so—the
> twenty-four elders fall down before him and worship him who lives forever and ever. "They lay their
> crowns before the throne" (4:10), for theirs is but a derivative authority. To the thrice-holy God they
> sing, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all
> things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (4:11). (D. A. Carson, "Tris-Hagion:
> Foundation for Worldwide Mission," *JETS* 66, no. 1 [March 2023]: 8–9)

See also Russell S. Morton, "Glory to God and the Lamb: John's Use of Jewish and Hellenistic/Roman
Themes in Formatting His Theology in Revelation 4–5," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 83,
no. 24 (January 2002): 98–100.

God's transcendent holiness, eliciting a response of worship, a process further enriched by God's immanent holiness.

The pragmatic dimensions of Revelation 4 powerfully highlight the profound impact of God's transcendent holiness as the initiating factor for authentic worship.[189] Simultaneously, Revelation 4 provides deep insights into the immanent holiness of God, characterized by its linguistic nuances and thematic richness. This chapter underscores the significance of closeness, as reflected in the spatial arrangement of heavenly beings and the intentional use of Greek tense forms to express a sense of immediacy.[190] Encompassing both aspects, this skillfully crafted pericope serves a dual purpose: it not only identifies who is worthy of worship[191] but also delineates the manner in which God's holiness shapes contemporary worship practices. This progression from passive observation to active participation in worship exemplifies the interplay between semantic elements and pragmatic forces, offering a comprehensive framework for understanding the influence of God's holiness in worship dynamics. Thus, this nuanced observation, encapsulated within the pericope of Revelation 4, necessitates a discerning approach to its pericopal theology: it accentuates worship as a transformative reaction to God's holiness, characterized by both its transcendent majesty and its immanent accessibility, leading believers toward a deeper

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[189] Grant Osborne rightly observes the initiative function of God's transcendent holiness in worship:

> There have been scores of articles and books on the crisis of worship in the church today. The average service so centers on the horizontal life of the Christian that the experience of awe in the worship of God, the feeling that we are in his presence, is all too often lost. The church as the throne of God, the minister as mediating his presence in the same way as the living creatures and elders in this chapter, is one antidote to this paucity of worship. (Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002], 243)

[190] See more details in "Understanding the Immanent Holiness of God in Revelation 4," in chap. 2.

[191] Mazie Nakhro draws a connection between worship practice and the holiness of God, focusing on the object of worship. He notes, "The phrase ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος (Holy, Holy, Holy) in 4:8 is reminiscent of the words of the seraphim in Isaiah 6:3, thereby suggesting the same God whom Isaiah envisioned as the Holy One (cf. 40:25; 57:15). Similar to Isaiah 6:3, the words ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος in Revelation 4:8 function as substantival adjectives, so that the words may be translated 'Holy One, Holy One, Holy One.'" Mazie Nakhro, "The Meaning of Worship according to the Book of Revelation," *BSac* 158 (January 2001): 76.

and more authentic engagement with the divine. With these theological foundations established, attention is directed toward their practical applications.

Craig Koester's insights bring to light the frequently neglected significance of this scriptural passage. He observes, "Many readers miss the importance of this passage. Seeking to learn 'what must take place after this' (4:1), they quickly move on to the seven seals in chapter 6, where portents of disaster loom large. When John sees 'what must take place after this,' however, the first vision consists not of disaster but of worship."[192] This perspective accentuates the pivotal role of worship within the narrative framework of God's holiness, an essential theme for grasping the text's theological depth and its applicability to contemporary worship practices. The text's transhistorical essence makes it an indispensable resource for guiding contemporary worshippers, steering them toward a paradigm of worship that aligns with divine principles. This approach highlights the harmonious integration of God's transcendent majesty and immanent presence within the worship experience. Worship, when rooted in an awareness of God's holiness, shifts focus to his transcendent magnificence, while cultivating a sacred affection,[193] ignited by the empowering presence of God's immanence.[194] The challenge of distanciation inherent in the pericope of Revelation 4 can be effectively addressed by generalizing the theological principle that the text projects.

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[192] Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 72.

[193] Rev 4 vividly illustrates a paradigm in which the interplay between God's transcendent and immanent holiness is understood as it is presented in Scripture. Charles Lewis effectively summarizes this relationship by stating, "the Bible demonstrates a repeated pattern of conceptualizing and understanding God in his transcendent otherness both prior to his immanence and as the framework within which his immanence can only be rightly understood and experienced." Charles Lewis Jr., "Far and Near: Christian Worship of the Transcendent and Immanent God of Wonders" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 7.

[194] John Piper explicates the connection between authentic worship and holy affection. He posits that genuine holy affection arises when a worshipper beholds the beauty and majesty of God's holiness and embraces it through the aid of the Holy Spirit. This embrace represents the immanent holiness of God, as manifested in Jesus Christ, the savior. See John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 77–83.

This dual nature of God's holiness in Revelation 4 is effectively conceptualized through the paradigm of "gravity and gladness,"[195] paralleling the biblical phrase "rejoice with trembling" found in Psalm 2:11. This framework emerges from the concurrent recognition of God's awe-inspiring transcendence and intimate immanence during worship. Charles Spurgeon, in his eloquent discourse, underscores the essential balance in worship inspired by God's transcendent majesty and his immanent proximity:

> I can admire the solemn and stately language of worship that recognizes the greatness of God, but it will not warm my heart or express my soul until it has also blended therewith the joyful nearness of that perfect love that casts out fear and ventures to speak with our Father in heaven as a child speaks with its father on earth. My brother, no veil remains.[196]

In practical terms, implementing the theology of worship outlined in Revelation 4 requires a clear strategy, as articulated by Kuruvilla. He emphasizes the preacher's role in translating this theology into the real experiences of the congregation, asserting, "The theology of the pericope provides this transhistorical direction for *holiness*; the preacher's task, in the second step of preaching, is to apply this theology into the concrete specificities of the lives of the congregants."[197] This approach necessitates a focus on the transformative power of worship, profoundly influenced by the acknowledgement of God's transcendent and immanent holiness. This perspective underlines the capacity of worship to effect significant personal transformations, particularly in the formation of individual identity. James K. A. Smith empathetically points out that worship possesses the power to transform an individual holistically:

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[195] The concept of "gravity and gladness" is borrowed from John Piper's preaching "Gravity and Gladness." In this sermon, Piper delves into the theological principles and their consequential impact on corporate worship, particularly focusing on the interplay of God's transcendent and immanent presence in worship settings. Piper's theology of worship can be summarized as "God's pursuit of me and my pursuit of him." See John Piper, "Gravity and Gladness," *Desiring God* (blog), November 12, 2011, https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/gravity-and-gladness-session-1. See also John Piper, *Gravity and Gladness: The Pursuit of God in Corporate Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 13–27.

[196] Charles Spurgeon, *The Power of the Cross of Christ*, ed. Lance Wubbels (Lynnwood, WA: Emerald, 1995), 66, quoted in Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 163.

[197] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 195.

The church's worship is a uniquely intense site of the Spirit's transformative presence. We must never lose sight of the charged nature of these practices. These are not just rituals that are unique because they are aimed at a different *telos*; they are also unique because they are practices that bring us face-to-face with the living God. If, in the context of this book, we have tended to focus on the formative power of Christian worship, we do well to remember that, in a sense, even this is a by-product of the fundamental aim of worship, which is praise and adoration of the triune God. The point of worship is not formation; rather, formation is an overflow effect of our encounter with the Redeemer in praise and prayer, adoration and communion.[198]

In the context of transformative worship, the theological concept of "gravity and gladness" is actualized through the practices of "gazing and embracing," fostering a sacred affection. The text actively projects an ideal world of God, calling for an appropriate response to God's transcendent and immanent holiness in worship: gazing upon God's transcendent holiness involves recognizing and revering his majestic nature, while embracing God's immanent presence entails acknowledging and experiencing his closeness and accessibility. The fundamental approach to worship leads to a transformation of identity, laying the foundation for the development of an identity that resonates with divine holiness. The teachings of the apostle Peter further highlight the centrality of God's holiness in the formation of Christian identity. This is evident in his declaration of, "You are a holy nation, a people for his own possession" (1 Pet 2:9), and his echo of the Levitical mandate, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet 1:16).[199] This exhortation stresses the important role of God's holiness in shaping the identity of his people.[200] Expounding on this theme, Mark Liederbach and Evan Lenow articulate that "holiness is

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[198] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Cultural Liturgies 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 150. See the similar perspective in Elna Mouton, "The Transformative Potential of the Bible as Resource for Christian Ethos and Ethics," *Scriptura* 62, no. 3 (April 1997): 245–57.

[199] Karen Jobes highlights the connection between God's holiness and Christian identity: "First Peter depicts the community of believers as a reborn, sanctified, and transformed family of God, that has a distinctive communal identity as the elect and holy people of God which sets it apart from its society." Karen Jobes, *1 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 44–45.

[200] Paul David Tripp succinctly encapsulates this concept: "Worship is not an activity—it is an identity. The issue is not whether we worship; the issue is what or who we worship." Paul David Tripp, "Appearance Is Everything: Reclaiming God's Image in an Image-Obsessed Culture," *JBC* 23, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 40.

rightly understood as a separation *to God*, not just a separation *from sin*."[201] In this framework, the holiness of God is not merely a standard to be achieved but is also the transformative force that molds identity in a way that seeks the splendor of God. Liederbach and Lenow contend that the holiness of God indeed "draws one into worship and not false hope in moral perfectionism."[202]

In short, the essence of actualizing the theological narrative of Revelation 4 resides in an in-depth engagement with both the transcendent and immanent dimensions of God's holiness. This dual engagement—gazing upon God's transcendent holiness with awe and embracing his immanent presence in joy—acts as a catalyst for igniting God-centered holy affection that is instrumental in reshaping one's identity.[203] This holy desire surpasses mere emotional response, functioning as a transformative force that aligns individual identity with the divine character.[204] Through contemplation of God's transcendent holiness, as projected in the text, one can refine one's thoughts, actions, and the very essence of one's being. In response, embracing God's immanent holiness facilitates the reshaping and maintaining of a unique, sacred identity as God's people.[205] Worship, firmly anchored in an acknowledgment of divine holiness, holds the capacity to

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[201] Mark D. Liederbach and Evan Lenow, *Ethics as Worship: The Pursuit of Moral Discipleship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2021), 279.

[202] Liederbach and Lenow, *Ethics as Worship*, 279.

[203] Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 84.

[204] James K. A. Smith posits that the essence of human identity is fundamentally rooted in the nature as desiring rather than merely rational or believing entities. This viewpoint underscores that core identity and actions are profoundly influenced by loves and desires, which are in turn formed and directed by liturgical practices, that is, worship. This model of the human person as a lover, or *homo liturgicus*, emphasizes that the engagement with the world is primarily through affective, non-cognitive intentionality. In other words, the deepest desires and loves shape one's identity, actions, and how that person interacts with the world. Smith explains, "We humans are liturgical animals, whose fundamental orientation to the world is governed not primarily by what we think but by what we love, what we desire." Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 215.

[205] Richard Lints points out the crucial role of God's holiness in defining the identity of his people, especially within the context of worship. See Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion*, NSBT 36 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 57–77.

transform and redefine an individual's self-perception, thus bringing worshippers into closer alignment with the divine values and characters. Progressively, this particularity and potency of God's holiness exert a profound influence on the congregation. Sermon-by-sermon, week-by-week, and pericope-by-pericope, it guides them toward an ever-closer alignment with Christlikeness. Kuruvilla further elucidates this concept: "Such life change is God glorifying, for it aligns God's people with God's will, manifesting God's holiness."[206]

Concluding this section, the application of God's envisioned holy world in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 underscores the necessity of adhering to Kuruvilla's interpretative guidelines.[207] The interpretation and application of God's holiness in both passages are deeply rooted in authoritative Scripture (Rule of Exclusivity), recognized as the exclusive source for theological insights. Notably, this rule lends authority to the application, not due to the status of the preacher but because it is derived from the text itself. The concept of holiness, as explored in this context, is not isolated but a recurring and integral theme throughout the biblical narrative (Rule of Singularity), emphasizing its consistent presence and importance across various scriptural contexts.[208] The interpretations are grounded in the definitive source of each pericope (Rule of Finality), respecting the integrity and authority of the text in its final form for applicational purposes. The interpretation of God's holiness, which includes both its transcendent and immanent aspects, is concretely expressed as a call to repentance and authentic worship. This

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[206] Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 162. Irwin Brown summarizes this structure in different ways: "Holiness of knowledge form a mystic union within the believer's heart, a union which is both the foundation and the superstructure of Christian character. The Architect is God, the Father; the Engineer is Jesus Christ, the Son; the Superintendent is the Holy Spirit; the blueprint is the Word of God. . . . Inscribed on the doorposts is, 'Holiness unto the Lord.'" Irwin Brown, "The Relation of Knowledge to the Experience of Holiness," in *Further Insights into Holiness*, ed. Kenneth Geiger (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1963), 165–66.

[207] Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 68–86.

[208] See the sections, "Understanding the Word קדשׁ (*kodesh*) in the Old Testament," and "Understanding the Word ἅγιος (*hagios*) in the New Testament" in chap. 2.

transformative process is exemplified by the notion of "contagious holiness for repentance" in Isaiah 6 and "gazing and embracing God's holiness for identity change" in Revelation 6 (Rule of Applicability). Furthermore, this interpretation and application of God's holiness are directed toward the sanctification of God's church (Rule of Ecclesiality), acknowledging the role of the Christian community in comprehending and applying scriptural truths. This rule provides a solid boundary for the interpretation and application of both texts. Finally, the process of interpretations of both texts leads to the achievement of Christlikeness (Rule of Centrality), placing Christ at the forefront in applying scriptural truths to cultivate more godly characters, values, and priorities.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on a homiletical discussion of how to apply the concept of God's holiness in sermons, particularly with the texts of Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. The chapter thoroughly examined the necessity of authoritative (text-driven) and effective (relevant) sermon application, while identifying common pitfalls in homiletics, such as application-less preaching, direct transference, and moralizing application. These methods were critically addressed not only for their failure to properly bridge the gap between the original context of biblical texts and their applicability to contemporary listeners' experiences but also for neglecting the authorial intention and text's relevance.

Alternatively, the concept of pericopal theology, as proposed by Abraham Kuruvilla, was introduced. This homiletical approach served as an *intermediary* between the biblical text and its relevant application in the modern ear. Kuruvilla's method encourages interpreters and preachers to focus on discerning a text's transhistorical intention (what the author is *doing*), while maintaining the balance between the semantic and pragmatic aspects of the biblical text. Building on this groundwork, the chapter then demonstrated how Kuruvilla's homiletical approach can be effectively utilized to apply the concept of God's holiness in preaching. Isaiah 6 was presented as an invitation to experience God's transcendent holiness through repentance, enabled by the immanent

nature of the divine, while Revelation 4 was analyzed for its portrayal of authentic worship, highlighting how both aspects of God's holiness function. Both texts are shown to transcend their original contexts, offering transformative insights for modern readers and listeners.

In the next chapter, the entire discussion of this dissertation will be summarized and reviewed, highlighting the potential benefits and contributions of this study. The chapter will include a synthesis of the key findings of this dissertation, with implications for both homiletical scholarship and practical ministry.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, the essence of God's holiness as depicted in the Scriptures was explored, emphasizing its central role in Christian life. More than just an attribute, God's holiness emerges as the core of his very being, a theme consistently echoed across various biblical narratives. This depiction of God's holiness, marked by transcendence, glory, and purity, significantly shapes the identity and behavior of the Lord's people. Theologians such as John Owen and R. C. Sproul highlight the transformative impact of God's holiness on believers, suggesting it should permeate every aspect of a Christian's life.[1] Additionally, this dissertation underscored the responsibility of preachers in conveying this concept, emphasizing the need to inspire awe and a profound, heartfelt engagement with the notion of God's holiness.

Summary of Chapters: The Holiness of God Must Be Preached

This dissertation also confronts a critical issue: the neglect of holiness in evangelical preaching. J. C. Ryle, Bishop of Liverpool, is perhaps the most influential preacher known for lamenting the insufficient teaching of God's holiness among the churches of Christ. In his classic book *Holiness*, he deplores that "practical holiness and entire self-consecration to God are not sufficiently attended to by modern Christians."[2] Because of this, "the subject of personal godliness has fallen sadly into the background.

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[1] John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, *The Holy Spirit*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1966), 3:568; R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1998), 12.

[2] J. C. Ryle, *Holiness* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 10.

The standard of living has become painfully low in many quarters."[3] This neglect stems from various factors, including ambiguities in understanding holiness, difficulties in articulating its profound nature, and the challenge of making it pertinent to daily life. Arie Leder, who bemoans the current absence of the holiness of God in preaching, observes that modern preachers often avoid the language of holiness in their sermons for these reasons:

> The language of holiness may have trouble fitting into the almost completely horizontal life of contemporary worship with its emphases on self-esteem, possibilities, health, and wealth. In the face of the clarity of confessional traditions, multicultural concerns and their accompanying worship modes that characterize so much of contemporary church planting, especially in its anti or nontraditional theological language mode, will have similar problems with holiness. That is simply because the language of holiness is understood to be primitive, confrontational or because it speaks about God in undesirable terms.[4]

Chapter 1 delved further into the practical aspects of preaching on holiness, drawing on pivotal texts such as Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. These texts offered foundational insights into God's holy nature. The study then advocated for a revitalized approach to preaching on God's holiness, aiming to awaken in hearers a sense of his transcendent and immanent holiness and to encourage a life aligned with his holy character. Emphasizing the need for a renewed emphasis on holiness in Christian preaching is vital to ensure that the message of God's holiness not only resonates with but also profoundly transforms the lives of listeners.

Moreover, chapter 1 addressed the complexities surrounding the concept of holiness in biblical texts, particularly focusing on the semantic meanings of קדש (*kodesh*) in the Old Testament and ἅγιος (*hagios*) in the New Testament. Scholars have faced challenges in achieving consensus on a unified definition of holiness, leading to inconsistencies in its interpretation and proclamation. The New Testament's portrayal of God's holiness, while maintaining continuity with the Old Testament, introduces a new dimension through the person of Jesus Christ, emphasizing theological and ethical aspects.

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[3] Ryle, *Holiness*, 10.

[4] Arie C. Leder, "Holy God, Holy People, Holy Worship," *CTJ* 43, no. 2 (November 2008): 230–31.

This semantic ambiguity and diversity present difficulties for preachers in effectively communicating the depth and beauty of God's holiness.

Furthermore, chapter 1 explored the challenges encountered in preaching about holiness, particularly in applying traditional hermeneutical approaches. Many sermons on holiness, especially those based on Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, often lack dynamic application, tending to resort to moralizing principles or sermon without practical application rather than offering a transformative understanding of holiness. The chapter argued for a more coherent and practical approach to preaching on holiness, one that aligns with the author's intention and effectively translates and applies the concept into the lives of the congregation. In this context, Abraham Kuruvilla's methodology, which focuses on the semantic *and* pragmatic engagement with the text, was highlighted at the end. This approach emphasizes the preacher's role in projecting *the world in front of the text* to the congregation, thereby inviting them to inhabit the ideal world of God and fostering a transformative understanding of holiness in preaching.

The Holiness of God: Transcendent and Immanent
Nature in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4

Chapter 2 of the dissertation dealt with the complex interpretation of God's holiness, a central theme in both the Old and New Testaments. Building upon the analysis in chapter 1, this chapter initially addressed the confusion surrounding the concept in these texts, particularly focusing on the linguistic nuances of קדש (*kodesh*) in Isaiah 6 and ἅγιος (*hagios*) in Revelation 4. It methodically explored the semantic meaning of God's holiness, highlighting its transcendence as depicted in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, and subsequently examined its immanent aspects through the analysis of text arrangement, word choices, and stylistic elements in these passages.

The chapter specifically tackled the challenges faced by preachers due to the varied interpretations of holiness. Despite a broad consensus on the overarching meaning of God's holiness, a definitive and universally accepted definition is lacking, leading to

subjective interpretations and inconsistent messaging in sermons. The Old Testament

interpretation of holiness, primarily translated from קדש (*kodesh*), shows significant

scholarly variation, ranging from the concept of separation to moral purity or consecration.

In the New Testament, the concept of holiness, as presented by ἅγιος (*hagios*), exhibits

both continuity and discontinuity with the Old Testament. The New Testament expands

on the concept of God's holiness found in the Old Testament, introducing new dimensions,

especially through the character and identity of Jesus Christ as the "Holy One of God"

(Mark 1:24).[5] This results in a more comprehensive view of holiness that includes both

ethical and soteriological aspects, focusing on sanctification achieved through Christ's

redemptive work. Therefore, the chapter pointed out the complex challenge of

understanding God's holiness, observing that solely depending on the meaning of words

can result in diverse interpretations and potentially misleading applications in preaching.

The dissertation advocated the importance of fully understanding these nuances, enabling

preachers to convey God's holiness as a call to sanctification more effectively. It proposed

that adopting a theological approach is essential to fully grasp and accurately preach the

significance of God's holiness.

Traditional methodologies highlight the benefits of a lexical approach, focusing

on the significance of words and their meanings in sermon preparation. However, this

method may not fully capture the broader theological implications of biblical texts for

preaching. Dan McCarthy and Charles Clayton caution against an overemphasis on

individual words, advocating for a consideration of context and theological significance.[6]

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[5] Steven Lawson articulates the concept of God's holiness as embodied in Jesus Christ, particularly elucidating the significance of the title "Holy One of God." He explains, "The title 'Holy One of God' means that Jesus is infinitely and absolutely holy, fully and perfectly divine. He is transcendent and majestic. He came down from above to save sinners, yet He is set apart from sinners in that He is completely sinless, without any moral blemish, perfect in all of His ways." Steve J. Lawson, "The Holy One of God: The Holiness of Jesus," in *Holy Holy Holy: Proclaiming the Perfections of God*, ed. R. C. Sproul (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2010), 34.

[6] Dan McCarthy and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 181–95.

D. A. Carson further elaborates on this perspective: "But the heart of the issue is that semantics, meaning, is more than the meaning of words. It involves phrases, sentences, discourse, genre, style; it demands a feel for not only syntagmatic word studies (those that relate words to other words) but also paradigmatic word studies (those that ponder why *this* word is used instead of *that* word)."[7]

This comprehensive approach is particularly relevant for comprehending complex theological concepts such as the holiness of God, as illustrated in passages like Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. In these instances, a mere lexical analysis may be insufficient. Kuruvilla introduces the concept of pericopal theology, which concentrates on the unique theological thrust of individual biblical passages. This approach emphasizes the importance of grasping the theological core and purpose of each pericope, defined as a substantial unit suitable for preaching. It ensures that each individual pericope retains its transformative force while also fitting seamlessly into the consistent flow of the overarching biblical narratives within the canon. Pericopal theology proves particularly beneficial in the context of sermon preparation, as it encompasses both the semantic (lexical, grammatical, and syntactical elements) and pragmatic (the analysis of what texts *do* with what they say) aspects of the biblical text.[8] This approach yields interpretations that are deeply connected to the text, thus increasing their relevance and resonance with experiences of today's listeners.[9]

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[7] D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 64. See also Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology*, Invitation to Theological Studies Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 623–62.

[8] Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody, 2013), 48.

[9] Kuruvilla elucidates the fundamental nature of pericopal theology, asserting, "Pericopal theology ground the sermon in the authority of the text and launches it with relevance for the audience. This intermediary ensures the validity of the movement from ancient inscription to modern application." Abraham Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis: Hermeneutics and Homiletics in Dialogue* (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 4.

Within the framework of pericopal theology, chapter 2 explored the semantic significance of God's holiness, focusing particularly on its transcendent nature as illustrated in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. These texts present a profound depiction of God's holiness, employing vivid imagery and symbolic languages to underscore the Lord's ultimate authority and grandeur. In Isaiah 6, the narrative shows God seated in a place of great honor, accompanied by the seraphim's proclaiming his holiness. Similarly, Revelation 4 uses imagery to illuminate God's throne surrounded by elders and four living creatures. Together, these descriptions semantically underscore God's unparalleled transcendent nature. At the same time, the chapter examines the pragmatic meaning of God's holiness in both narratives, focusing on its immanent nature. The pragmatic approach goes beyond merely decoding linguistic messages, focusing on the inferential nuances of communication to uncover what the author is *doing* with what he is *saying* and implications within the text.[10]

Isaiah 6 acts as a strategic pivot in the book of Isaiah, linking narratives and illustrating the circumstances of God's people. The vision in Isaiah 6 employs Hebrew verbs like ראה (to see) and קרא (to call/hear), highlighting the theological essence of the scene through a blend of visual and auditory elements that bring God's holiness to the forefront. This progression from visual to auditory experience weaves a narrative that accentuates the transformative nature of Isaiah's encounter with God. Likewise, Revelation 4 offers a detailed depiction of John's vision of the heavenly realm, emphasizing God's immanent holiness as the center of authentic worship. The narrative employs specific linguistic nuances and the intended thematic flows to navigate the reader through a portrayal of God's holiness and the worship it inspires. Specifically, the structure of the chapter deliberately moves from a static depiction to a dynamic illustration of worship,

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[10] Kuruvilla explicates the necessity of a nuanced hermeneutical approach for interpretation and application: "Pragmatic analysis is essential for the discovery of the future-directedness of the text and thus its application. . . . Therefore, while comprehension of the semantic aspect of the text under consideration is the essential first step of its interpretation, this initial move should advance the reader further, to a discovery of 'the pragmatic penumbra' accompanying semantics." Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 6–7.

emphasizing the perspective that God's holiness evokes as the initiating element and the empowering force that facilitates availability of worship. This pragmatic aspect blends the theological messages with the progression of events, engaging readers and listeners in a transformative experience of God's holiness within the context of worship.

In summary, this chapter demonstrated the effective use of pericopal theology to uncover an integration of God's transcendent grandeur and imminent closeness in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. In essence, chapter 2 established the groundwork for the subsequent focus on hermeneutics, ensuring a theologically sound and practically relevant understanding of God's transcendent and immanent holiness.

**The Holiness of God: Hermeneutical Significance
of Christiconic Interpretation in
Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4**

Chapter 3 discussed the necessity of a robust hermeneutical approach for interpreting and applying the concept of God's holiness in preaching, as seen in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. Expanding on the dual facets of God's holiness explored in chapter 2, it advocated for a comprehensive interpretative framework that combines academic rigor with practical relevance. The prioritization of an author-oriented hermeneutic was positioned as the foundational prerequisite for maintaining the authenticity and integrity of the text's meaning. This key approach was compared to certain modern trends of reader-responsive hermeneutics, a method that often gives rise to interpretations based on personal perspective, leading to inappropriate applications in preaching.

The chapter proceeded to offer a critical evaluation of the New Homiletic methodology, introduced by notable figures such as Fred Craddock, Eugene Lowry, and David Buttrick. This method places excessive emphasis on the reader's role in interpreting the text, which is shaped by their individual experiences and cultural backgrounds. Also, this approach reconceptualizes preaching as an interactive event where the congregation actively engages with the interpretive process. This dissertation highlighted notable risks associated with their approach, particularly in terms of reducing the authority of the

Scriptures and weakening the reliability of sermon applications that should stem from the text. David Ryoo points out that this approach can lead to a rejection of biblical authority and authorial intention.[11] Similarly, Gordon Fee warns that if meaning lies only with the reader, the possibility of the Christian community hearing from God through sacred texts is negated.[12]

Having laid this foundational work, the chapter further reviewed three interpretive views: Theocentric, Christ-centered, and Christiconic interpretations. Each approach, while distinct, is grounded in author-centered hermeneutics, ensuring fidelity to the original intent of the biblical authors. The Theocentric interpretation places God at the center of the interpretive process, viewing Scripture as a narration of God's grand narrative. Vern Poythress highlights the significance of this perspective: "If we reckon with who God is, we can immediately exclude certain kinds of interpretation. . . . We can avoid other misunderstandings on the basis of what the Bible says about God. He is able to speak to people. Hence, the Bible can indeed be God's word."[13] This approach emphasizes God's active role in human history and comprehends every biblical event, character, or teaching within the framework of God's sovereign design and divine intent. Theocentric interpretation is characterized by its focus on God's sovereignty and his relentless pursuit of a relationship with humanity. However, it might overlook the human elements in Scripture, potentially overshadowing the importance of human decisions and their practical implications in preaching.

The Christ-centered interpretation views the entirety of Scripture as connected to and emphasizing the role of Christ in God's redemptive plan. This perspective interprets biblical events, prophecies, and symbols as foreshadowing Christ's advent, redemption,

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[11] David Eung-Yul Ryoo, "Paul's Preaching in the Epistle to the Ephesians and Its Homiletical Implication" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003), 7.

[12] Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 184.

[13] Vern S. Poythress, *God Centered Biblical Interpretation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1999), 15.

resurrection, and eventual return. It posits that the scriptural narratives, spanning from Genesis to Revelation, unfolds progressively, revealing God's continuous and organic revelation. In preaching, Bryan Chapell employs this interpretive approach, focusing on creating applicatory connections as a central objective. His distinctive interpretive framework for preaching, known as the Fallen Condition Focus (FCF), underscores the immanent presence of Christ's grace throughout Scripture. However, this approach carries the risk of eisegesis by overly focusing on discerning Christ or Christological elements in every text, potentially overlooking the text's own theology. Gary Gilley points out its potential limitation: "If the purpose of every text of Scripture is to reveal man's fallenness and need for redemption, the Bible is now reduced to one issue: redemption. . . . God's Word actually has a bigger purpose and message."[14]

The Christiconic interpretation, as proposed by Abraham Kuruvilla, focuses on aligning individual believers with the divine will as disclosed in the Scriptures. It involves analyzing biblical pericopes to reflect the characters of Christ, viewing each pericope as portraying a facet of Christ's canonical image (Rom 8:28). This approach goes beyond acknowledging Christ as the focal point of Scripture; it also considers him the exemplary model for believers to emulate. While similar to Christ-centered interpretation in prioritizing Jesus, Christiconic interpretation emphasizes the transformative purpose of preaching, aiming for listeners to be molded into Christlikeness. Kuruvilla succinctly summarizes its goal in this way: "Interpreting biblical pericopes in this fashion, to discern the divine demand that moves God's people closer to Christlikeness and to the image of God's Son, is the essence of Christiconic interpretation."[15]

Utilizing Kuruvilla's Christiconic hermeneutical system, the last section of chapter 3 was detailed in the hermeneutical discussion of God's holiness as depicted in

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[14] Gary E. Gilley, review of *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, by Bryan Chapell, *JODT* 23, no. 66 (Spring 2019): 114.

[15] Abraham Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching: Understanding the Heart of Pastoral Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 136.

Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. This method allows the congregation to engage with the text's projected ideal world, leading to a transformative experience aligned with the author's intention. In Isaiah 6, the narrative's use of visual and auditory elements effectively transitions from a portrayal of divine majesty to a personal and communal engagement with the divine. Isaiah's experience of God's holiness showcases the theological thrust of the pericope, advancing from mere intellectual acknowledgment of God's holiness to a pragmatic call for action that integrates reverence and personal transformation. Put simply, anchored in its semantic base, the text's pragmatic focus effectively conveys God's holiness—*the world in front of the text*. It invites the audience to dwell in this holy world, ultimately guiding them toward gradual realignment through the act of preaching for Christlike priorities, precepts, and values.

In Revelation 4, mirroring the narrative in Isaiah 6, the text provides a detailed depiction of the heavenly realm. Through vivid imagery and symbols, it underscores God's transcendent holiness as the foundational cornerstone for worship, setting the standard for this sacred practice. The chiastic structure and linguistic choices of Revelation 4 exemplify this narrative technique, offering a symmetrical progression in theological theme that centers on the worship evoked by God's holiness. As Kuruvilla emphasizes the necessity of transitioning from semantic understanding to a pragmatic approach,[16] this shift guides readers through a transformative journey, beginning with the transcendent nature of the divine and culminating in a vibrant representation of immanent holiness in worship. In this context, God's transcendent holiness functions as a pragmatic call to action, challenging listeners to respond to it by the empowering force of his immanent holiness. Thus, this combined semantic and pragmatic understanding of God's holiness leads listeners toward a deeper Christlike embodiment in their worship practices.

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[16] Kuruvilla explains the relationship of both aspects in interpretation: "That does not mean that the semantic elements are unimportant for the pragmatics of the text; on the contrary, they are essential. Semantic analysis may not be sufficient to arrive at the pragmatic meaning, but it is necessary for that move." Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!,* 49.

The Holiness of God: Homiletical Validity for
Transformative Applications in
Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4

Chapter 4 of the dissertation focused on homiletics, specifically addressing the

challenge of effectively applying the concept of God's holiness in preaching. It turned

attention to the critical task of applying the concept of God's holiness in preaching,

emphasizing the importance of valid application in sermons. Hershael York stresses that

application is not just an aspect but the ultimate goal of preaching, highlighting its role in

connecting interpretation with congregational edification.[17] In line with York, Daniel

Block concurs, "Without application, study is esoteric and academic, and proclamation is

hypocritical and hypothetical."[18] The chapter aimed to establish a method for validating

the transition from the text to theology, and then theology to application, particularly

focusing on Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4.

The chapter began by discussing the general issues of application in homiletics,

starting with application-less preaching. This style often fails to connect scriptural truths

with the listeners' daily experiences, leading to sermons that may be doctrinally sound but

feel irrelevant or detached. Daniel Akin emphasizes the need for application that is

relevant, includes practical examples, and motivates obedient faith.[19] Preaching without

application carries significant risks, such as downplaying the importance of scriptural

commands and leading to overly simplistic sermons. The effectiveness of a sermon greatly

depends on its specificity in application. This is particularly true in sermons on God's

holiness where there is a tendency to overlook the practical application of the text. Jason

Meyer offers a pertinent critique of this issue: "Too many sermons close with something

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[17] Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 11.

[18] Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 351.

[19] Daniel Akin, "Applying a Text-Driven Sermon," in *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Mathews (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010), 270.

like, 'May the Spirit of God apply what I am saying to your hearts.' It is a pious way of a preacher saying, 'I did not devote much time to this; I hope you will do better.'"[20]

Direct transference, another issue in homiletical practice, involves applying biblical texts directly to modern audiences without adequately considering historical-cultural and theological contexts. This approach results in significant misinterpretations and inappropriate applications of biblical narratives. In the context of preaching God's holiness, direct transference can significantly distort the author's original intention and the theological focal point of the text. For example, in Isaiah 6 a preacher might oversimplify the message to "be like Isaiah and be touched by him." Or in Revelation 4, direct transference might lead to an application that encourages believers to replicate the exact forms of worship described, such as the actions of the twenty-four elders or the four living creatures, without understanding the symbolic and theological nature of the text.

The issue of moralizing application in homiletics was critically examined for its tendency to oversimplify biblical narratives into basic moral teachings or lists of "dos and don'ts," often disregarding the theological context and authorial intent. This approach risks a superficial understanding of Scripture and a legalistic perspective of faith. For instance, interpreting the story of David and Goliath (1 Sam 17) in as mere moral lessons like bravery or patience misses the deeper theological focus and its significance. In contrast, methods that incorporate ethical guidance, which naturally emerges from the biblical text and aligns with its theological underpinnings, are more effective. Kuruvilla underscores the importance of grounding moral imperatives in preaching within a robust theological framework. This ensures that sermon applications are both authentic and pertinent.[21] From this standpoint, simplistic applications of God's holiness, such as the directive to "be holy simply because God is holy," are deemed inadequate. This inadequacy

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[20] Jason Meyer, *Preaching: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 265.

[21] Kuruvilla asserts that the demands of God, as presented in Scripture, inherently possess a moral essence and serve a theological function. He confirms, "All of God's demands are moral in essence and theological in function, thus necessarily valid for all of God's people." Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 193.

stems from their failure to engage with the theological richness of the text meaningfully and validly.

Building upon the previous discussion, Kuruvilla's methodological approach was introduced, emphasizing a legitimate hermeneutical-homiletical move. This approach is pivotal in maintaining a balance between interpretation and application of biblical texts, while also establishing clear boundaries. Kuruvilla's homiletical move emphasizes the valid connecting the enduring theology of the pericopes with the dynamic challenges of the modern world. He formulates a set of reading rules as foundational guidelines to ensure that applications of Scripture are both faithful to the text and relevant to contemporary audiences.[22] These rules form the boundaries within which preachers operate, enabling valid applications that retain the authority of Scripture and remain relevant to the audience.

Essentially, Kuruvilla's homiletic move—from text to application—is characterized by its balanced and boundary, focusing on the transhistorical relevance of the text for modern contexts. Termed *the world in front of the text*, this method views the pericope as a dynamic entity that unfolds into a rich theological world. The essence of this approach is its focus on the text's ensuring intention, enabling applications that are both faithful to the original text and pertinent to modern settings.[23] Kuruvilla illustrates this idea with tangible examples, such as interpreting *the Metropolitan Police Act of 1839*, showing how certain actions required by the law transcend their historical context and align with the law's transhistorical purpose. This example effectively clarifies how Kuruvilla's model facilitates a connection between the ancient biblical world and modern audiences, effectively bridging the gap between two different time periods and cultural

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[22] Kuruvilla's rules of readings are (1) Rule of Exclusivity, (2) Rule of Singularity, (3) Rule of Finality, (4) Rule of Applicability, (5) Rule of Ecclesiality, and (6) Rule of Centrality. See more details in Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 68–86.

[23] Kuruvilla asserts, "Therefore, a fundamental issue for preachers of the Bible has always been the determination of application that is faithful to the textual intention and fitting for the listening audience." Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 2.

contexts. Kuruvilla encapsulates this process in his definition of pericopal theology. This approach allows readers and listeners to connect with and internalize the values and priorities projected by the biblical pericope. This theological method goes beyond simple linguistic analysis and word studies; it involves discerning the author's intentions—essentially, understanding what the author is *doing* with what he is *saying*. In this way, it brings the pragmatic aspects (*the world in front of the text*) into focus, fostering a more profound engagement with the text and its theological significance. This method not only enhances the understanding of the text (the original textual sense) but also enriches the connection between its timeless intent and its relevance for modern congregation through preaching.

The narrative of Isaiah 6 semantically depicts God's transcendent holiness and pragmatically unfolding into a personal call for transformation. The narrative's hermeneutical significance—from *seeing* to *hearing*—encapsulates the interaction between semantic elements and pragmatic forces, effectively projecting a theological world that includes both revelation and responsive action. This narrative's progression from interpretation (hermeneutics) to valid application (homiletics) exemplifies a shift from the infinite to the intimate aspects of God's holiness, introducing the concept of "contagious holiness" for practical application. This theological contemplation invites listeners to active engagement with the transcendent aspect of God's holiness, which in turn leads to a response enabled by God's immanent presence.

The same homiletical move is observed in Revelation 4, presenting a powerful call to authentic worship. The hermeneutical significance of this pericope is closely linked to God's dual nature of holiness: both transcendent and immanent. Transitioning from semantic to pragmatic analysis, the narrative's structure and linguistic choices actively involves the listeners in inhabiting God's ideal holy world through worship. Hermeneutically driven observation identifies the proper focus of worship and shapes contemporary worship practices. This nuanced insight in Revelation 4 calls for an

exploration of its pericopal theology. It highlights worship as a transformative response to God's holiness, which is marked by both its majestic transcendence and accessible immanence. To elaborate further, the pragmatic dimensions of Revelation 4 demonstrate God's transcendent holiness as the driving force behind authentic worship and explores his immanent holiness as the empowerment of sacred affection within the worshipper's heart.[24]

Transitioning from theological understanding to practical application, the dual nature of God's holiness is conceptualized as "gravity and gladness." This idea is then actualized in the practices of "gazing and embracing," which foster deep devotion as seen in Revelation 4. It entails acknowledging and revering God's majestic transcendent holiness while also recognizing his approachable immanent presence, leading to a fitting response in worship. This interplay of God's transcendent and immanent holiness shapes Christlike attributes as they worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:24), nurturing a renewed Christian identity. Richard Mouw emphasizes this transformation, stating, "When we come together for Christian worship, we are acknowledging our identity as members of 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation' (1 Pet 2:9)."[25]

Proclaiming Divine Holiness: Implications for Cultivating Christlike Character

Albert Mohler insightfully states,

Books, classes, lectures, teachers, schools, colleges, universities, seminaries—even the most godly—are simply means, not ends. Means to what? Means to the preaching of the gospel and the fulfillment of the Great Commission? Yes. Means to the edification of the saints and to growth in godliness? Yes. Means for planting churches and feeding churches? Yes. But even those are penultimate. The end is holiness.[26]

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[24] Kenneth Boa concisely captures the practical essence of God's holiness as an immanent quality in worship, asserting, "All holiness is the holiness of God within us." Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 277.

[25] Richard J. Mouw, "The Danger of Alien Loyalties: Civic Symbols Present a Real Challenge to the Faithfulness of the Church's Worship," *Reformed Worship* 15, no.1 (March 1990): 9.

[26] R. Albert Mohler Jr., "Preparing Your Minds for Action: The Means and Ends of Christian Learning," SBTS Opening Convocation, February 1, 2022, YouTube video, 1:20:45, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmaAfTHZcqA. Similarly, Allen Ross highlights this concept in his

This declaration underscores that all these theological educational and ministerial endeavors ultimately serve a higher purpose: the cultivation of holiness. Reflecting this perspective, Kuruvilla emphasizes that the goal of preaching is to lead believers toward holiness. Kuruvilla notes, "One day, in the plan of God, humankind will 'share his holiness' (Heb 12:10), fully conformed to the image of God in Christ again, partaking of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4; 1 John 3:1–2)."[27]

Through its exploration of God's holiness in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, this dissertation reaffirms that the essence of preaching is not merely the dissemination of biblical knowledge or promotion of moral principles. It highlights a key objective of preaching: to foster a profound, transformative holiness in the lives of believers, aligning them with God's divine nature. This holiness, which encompasses both the transcendent majesty and the immanent presence of God, is the true culmination of all preaching efforts.

This dissertation potentially contributes to theological discourse and practical ministry regarding the holiness of God. First, it may rekindle interest among preachers in highlighting God's holiness in their sermons. By adopting Kuruvilla's hermeneutical approach, this study emphasizes the necessity of comprehensively understanding of God's holiness, both in its transcendent and immanent forms, within the preaching context. This approach not only honors the authority of the biblical text but also fosters sermons that deeply resonate with modern congregations through a nuanced presentation of God's holiness.

Second, the research may aid in enhancing the transformation driven by God's holiness within congregational life. It deepens the theological and practical comprehension

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work. He articulates his viewpoint by stating, "Holiness is its goal. . . . And all who approach him whose name is 'Holy'—whether the priests who minister or the people who worship must themselves be holy. It is as if throughout Israel's holy place was the earthly echo of that seraphic song in the courts above that never ceases to proclaim 'holy, holy, holy.'" Allen P. Ross, *Holiness to the Lord: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 18.

[27] Abraham Kuruvilla, "Christiconic View," in *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*: *Four Views on Preaching Today*, ed. Scott M. Gibson and Matthew D. Kim (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 60–61.

of how God's holiness can transform both individuals and communities. By exploring the themes of repentance in Isaiah 6 and the formation of identity through holy worship in Revelation 4, the dissertation demonstrates how encounters with God's holiness can lead to personal sanctification. This could make the study a valuable resource for church leaders and believers, particularly preachers, in integrating the concept of holiness more effectively into their spiritual practices and communal life.

Lastly, the dissertation advocates for a balanced hermeneutical approach tailored for homiletical purposes. Thus, it potentially contributes to theological discussions, especially in homiletics, by presenting a model that harmonizes hermeneutics and homiletics in understanding and preaching about God's holiness. This model not only aims to prepare future preachers to handle biblical texts with greater precision but also seeks to equip them to address the spiritual needs of their congregations more effectively. By doing so, this approach strives to elevate the standard of preaching and teaching about the holiness of God for the church of Christ.

Bringing it all together, the exhortation to "be holy" (1 Pet 1:16) is an invitation to a life dedicated to sanctification. This journey involves a profound engagement with God's holiness, encompassing both in its absolute, transcendent form and its intimate, immanent aspect, and guiding individuals in their pursuit of Christlikeness. Holiness is not just an ideal but a necessity, for as Hebrews 12:14 states, without holiness, "no one will see the Lord." This understanding of holiness forms the core of a spiritual journey, leading individuals toward a deeper communion with God. May this dissertation, in some small way, assist preachers in encouraging their congregations to recognize and embrace God's holiness, and in inspiring them to "worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness" (Ps 96:9), all for God's own glory.

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ABSTRACT

REDISCOVERING AND APPLYING GOD'S HOLINESS IN
ISAIAH 6 AND REVELATION 4 THROUGH THE LENS
OF ABRAHAM KURUVILLA'S HERMENEUTICAL
AND HOMILETICAL APPROACH

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This dissertation investigates the rich theological concept of God's holiness in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, utilizing Abraham Kuruvilla's hermeneutical and homiletical method for preaching. This study focuses on elucidating a comprehensive understanding of God's holiness, which includes both its transcendent majesty and immanent presence. It also explores how the concept of God's holiness can be effectively communicated through preaching, with the aim of inspiring transformative experiences that align with God's ideal of holiness.

Chapter 1 addresses the contemporary neglect of God's holiness in preaching and identifies three main reasons: the complexities surrounding its semantic meanings of the words "holy" or "holiness," the challenges in finding an appropriate hermeneutical approach, and a lack of homiletical applications. Introducing Abraham Kuruvilla's hermeneutical and homiletical method, this chapter advocates for a renewed approach to preaching God's holiness that is both theologically sound and practically relevant.

Chapter 2 surveys an in-depth analysis of the concept of God's holiness in Scripture initially in a general sense and then specifically in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. This chapter accentuates the need of a theological approach to fully grasp the dual aspects of God's holiness—its transcendence and immanence—and their implications for preaching.

Chapter 3 focuses on refining hermeneutical methods for effective preaching on God's holiness in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. It advocates for Kuruvilla's hermeneutical approach, *the world in front of the text*, as a means to achieve a comprehensive interpretation that not only resonates with the author's original intention but also establishes a pertinent connection to modern listeners, thereby enhancing the sermon's impact.

Chapter 4, building upon the established hermeneutical foundation, seeks to explore the relevance and resonance of homiletical practices for articulating valid applications, particularly for the topic of God's holiness in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. It demonstrates how God's immanent holiness evokes personal repentance and authentic worship, underpinned by the foundation of his transcendent holiness.

Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation by summarizing the key arguments and insights presented. It reiterates the significance of Kuruvilla's hermeneutical and homiletical approach for preaching about God's holiness and encourages preachers to boldly preach God's holiness, aiming for the transformation of the congregation.

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