

## Encountering the Divine: A Theological Analysis of Isaiah 6

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**Abstract:** *The main objective of this paper is to underline the theological feature of Isaiah's initial call (Is 6). In the first part the author presents some isagogic directions regarding The Book of Isaiah and its initial vision. In the second part of the paper, the sixth chapter of Isaiah is analyzed in a theological manner, covering topics such as: angelology, eschatology, divine glory and the prophet's ministry. The study concludes by highlighting the perennial character of Isaiah's revealed words. All the four gospels of New Testament are connecting Jesus saying by referring at least once to Is 6, 9 (Mt 13, 14; Mk 4, 12; Lk 8, 10; Jn 12, 40). This particular verse is used also by Paul the Apostle regarding the Jews from Rome (Acts 28, 25-26). Having studied both Romanian and Western literature, the author's interpretation is characterized by historical, literary and symbolic perspective.*

**Key words:** *initial call, God's glory, angels, seraphim, eschatology, remnant.*

### Introduction

The book that bears his name is the only writing we have from the prophet Isaiah<sup>1</sup>. Looking at its contents, most exegetes distinguish two main parts<sup>2</sup>. The first part (chs. 1-39) contains words addressed to contemporaries, and the second part (chs. 40-66) is mainly about the salvation of the righteous. Between both prophetic parts are inserted four chapters (36-39) of historical character, of which the first two (36 and 37) form the conclusion of the first part, while the following (38 and 39) serve as an introduction to the second part<sup>3</sup>.

At the beginning of the book there is a "tripartite introduction"<sup>4</sup> (Is 1:1-6:13) which indicates the contents of both parts. The first discourse, though probably not the one Isaiah began with, is marked by an ominous character. Because the people do not return to God (Is 1:2-10) and to no avail continue to practice a rigid ritual without consistency (Is 1:11-20), they will undergo a harsh judgment (Is 1:21-31). Dating from the reign of Jotham, the second discourse implies some consolation (Is 2:1-5, 30). The Jews are called to share with the Gentiles in the kingdom of the Messiah (Is 2:1-5). But

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<sup>1</sup> According to 2 Chr 26:22, he also seems to have written a work about King Uzziah. Also from 2 Chr 32:32 it can be assumed that there was a larger writing under the title "book of the kings of Judah and Israel" which has been lost and in which there were writings of Isaiah about King Hezekiah. From this passage, however, it can also be understood that reference is made to the prophecies of King Hezekiah's time (Is 14-39) in the very book of the prophet that we still read today in Holy Scripture. Some scholars also attribute to the prophet an apocryphal writing called *Ascension Isaiah*. Ioan Popescu-Mălăiești, „Studies and Comments”, in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, 1926, fasc. 5, p. 273.

<sup>2</sup> Although there is no unanimous consensus in this direction, the text that appears in the Bible as the *Book of Isaiah* is considered to be a collection of three documents written by different authors from different periods: chapters 1-39 are written by Proto-Isaiah (Isaiah proper), chapters 40-55 are attributed to Deutero-Isaiah (a prophet of the "school of Isaiah"), and chapters 56-66 are presented as a collection of poems elaborated on some themes from the first two parts. The latter would belong to a so-called Trito-Isaiah. "The criteria for differentiating the three parts are: different style, completely different historical setting, which also makes the addressees of each part different in situation, mentality, expectations". Cristian Bădiliță, Francisca Băltăceanu, Monica Broșteanu (eds.), „Introducere la Isaia”, in *Septuaginta*, vol. 6/1, Polirom, Iași, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Vladimir Prelipceanu et al., *Studiul Vechiului Testament – manual pentru facultățile de teologie*, Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2003, p. 197-198.

<sup>4</sup> Vasile Tarnavski, *Introducere în sfintele cărți ale Testamentului Vechi*, Glasul Bucovinei, Cernăuți, 1928, p. 385.

because of their sins they will be punished. However, to show that not all the people are to be wiped out before God, Isaiah speaks of the Lord's Branch, the remnant of Zion who will contribute to the rebirth of the people. The parable of the unruly vine (*Is* 5:1-7) is then introduced, reflecting the sinful state of the people. The last part of the introduction contains the vision of Isaiah's call to the prophetic mission (*Is* 6:1-13) which shows that he is invested to exercise this role by God himself<sup>5</sup>.

We will not insist on a synthetic outline of the two parts, but rather try to outline some important theological themes found in the book of Isaiah. This prophet is marked by the mystery, the transcendence of God. Therefore, predominantly, the divine name he uses is "the Holy One of Israel" - the holy, the unseen, the incomprehensible but also "of Israel" as One who enters into relationship with his people. The knowledge of God is facilitated by a series of metaphors referring to him: in some places the prophet speaks of God as a Father (*Is* 1:2; 30:9; 63:16; 64:8), in others as a Teacher (*Is* 2:3) and in others he compares him to a Vine-Grower (*Is* 5:1-7)<sup>6</sup>.

All the prophets speak of the fact that the sins of men attract God's punishment<sup>7</sup>. In Isaiah this discourse also implies a social dimension. The relationship between people is very important. This is the starting point for many of Isaiah's accusations against his fellow countrymen. He often accuses them of plundering, of oppressing the defenceless, of bribery (*Is* 1:23; 5:23; 10:1-2; 33:15), of accumulating unjust wealth (*Is* 5:8), of pride or of sexual immorality. Kings are reproached for putting their trust in great powers instead of trusting God completely. Faith is therefore the only way out in the eyes of the prophet. Without showing it, the people bring their own punishment. This will gradually manifest itself from famine, poverty, incapable kings and idolaters, lack of offspring, and finally the conquest of enemies (*Is* 7:18-25; 8:1-10; 9:7-20; 5:25-29; 17:1-6)<sup>8</sup>.

Messages of salvation and messianic prophecies abound in the book of Isaiah. He prophesies that a remnant of Israel will be saved, that God will establish a universal kingdom of holiness and peace (*Is* 6-12). He "is not content with merely announcing this order, but also points to its promoter, the Messiah, Immanuel, the Son of the Virgin, from the stem of Jesse, the father of David"<sup>9</sup>. In Isaiah, the royal son through whom God will act appears for the first time. When he goes out to meet Ahaz (*Is* 7) to assure him that God will rule over the Kingdom of Judah, he tells him to ask for a sign. God is the one who wants to give him a sign, only he doesn't ask for it. But the sign is given by the prophet: the birth of the child with the symbolic name Immanuel ("God is with us") is the sign of God's saving work. At first this name was linked to King Hezekiah, the descendant of Ahaz, but it was concluded

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 389-389.

<sup>6</sup> Cristian Bădiliță, Francisca Băltăceanu, Monica Broșteanu (eds.), „Introducere la Isaia”, p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> Simion Todoran, „Idei doctrinare în proorocia lui Isaia”, in *Glasul Bisericii*, 2009, fasc. 4-6, p. 406.

that "he is too small for such a great prophecy". Therefore, the expectation began to be for that king whose presence would truly signify "God is with us"<sup>10</sup>. In the second part of the writing, Isaiah outlines the Messiah's role as teacher and intercessor for all mankind. Chapter 53 is very suggestive in this regard<sup>11</sup> but in addition to this, Isaiah mentions the Messiah and the Messianic period in 17 other places.

Suggestively, other themes that can be developed from the book of the prophet Isaiah can be related to worship, the unity of Yahweh, substitution (Ebed Yahweh - the one who sacrifices himself for all), messianic peace, God's love, justice and holiness, the superiority of the moral law over sacrificial rituals, the transcendence of God or the universality of salvation<sup>12</sup>.

The prophet's life experience, the tumultuous period in which he lived, and his assumption of the mission gave birth to the most beloved, appreciated, and frequently quoted Old Testament book, both in the New Testament and in the writings of the Holy Fathers<sup>13</sup>. From its contents we can see that this great prophet lived a pure life and conveyed divine truths from a very intimate experience he had with God. At the same time, he did not stay away from the problems of society. He got involved in social life to keep his fellow countrymen from both moral and political mistakes. His prophecies have spanned hundreds of years and have been fulfilled in such a way that he seems to have been an eyewitness to the events described. The most outstanding of these relate to the Messianic period. It is impressive how this great prophet described in great detail some moments in the life of the Saviour. These led Jerome to say that Isaiah is an Evangelist and apostle rather than a prophet<sup>14</sup>.

### **The Call of Isaiah**

The sixth chapter of Isaiah contains a sublime vision in which God, like a King sitting on a throne, reveals himself to the prophet and sends him among the people to proclaim his will and plan for the Kingdom of Judah. Many exegetes assume that it was in this solemn setting that the call<sup>15</sup> or his inauguration into prophetic activity took place. On this point there is a question that has greatly troubled the exegetes: what is the reason why the prophet does not begin his writing with the moment of his call? To answer this question it is necessary to consider the unified structure of the first six chapters.

Chapters 1, 2 and 6 begin with a delineation in time of when they were written. These three

<sup>10</sup> Cristian Bădiliță, Francisca Băltăceanu, Monica Broșteanu (eds.), „Introducere la Isaia”, p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> "Chapter 53 is devoted in exculpation to the description of the role of the Hierarch as a hierarch for the whole human race. The words of Isaiah 53 entered into divine worship at the holy consecration. In this way Isaiah shows that all mankind will be saved through the bloody sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Simion Todoran, "Idei doctrinare în proorocia lui Isaia", p. 406.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 398-406.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Ingrid Bauer, „Comentariu la Isaia sau perenitatea profeției”, in Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Comentariu la Isaia*, coll. *Traduceri Patristice* 6, Doxologia, Iași, 2013, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Petre Semen, „Chemarea profetică în viziunea lui Isaia”, in *Teologie și Viață*, 1991, fasc. 9-12, p. 121-122.

chapters thus represent three introductory moments in the book of Isaiah. Fr. Ioan Popescu-Mălăiești compares these three moments to the gates of an imposing building. A majestic building has several gates through which one can enter its premises. This is also the case with the prophecy of Isaiah, which stands out as the most beautiful and imposing prophetic writing. It has three different entrances. The first is that of chapter 1 in which the prophet's attention is turned to the past of the people, their present state and their future. Because of their sins, Isaiah foretells punishments from God and very little instills in them feelings of hope in God's mercy. The second introductory part begins in chapter 2 and extends up to and including chapter 5. Throughout, the main tone is the promise of the future. The prophet shows that there will be a small part of the people, a "remnant", who will live in God's light. Through the parable in chapter 5, however, he reminds his people of their sinful state and that the time of judgment is inherent in this state. In chapter 6, after these preparatory entries, Isaiah takes the reader before the divine throne to hear from God that the state in which the people find themselves is not pleasing in his sight and that they will suffer for their sins<sup>16</sup>.

It is believed that Isaiah did not begin his writing with this inaugural vision because, at first, he did not want to share it with the people. Such a vision marks the whole being, it is etched deeply in both mind and soul and no words can be found to describe what happened. Perhaps Isaiah wanted to keep this vision in his heart. And he may even have thought that sharing it with the people would lessen the impression it left on his whole being. Therefore, he began his moralistic speech without relating this vision, without telling the people that God had invested him with the prophetic office. But when he began to speak, many of his listeners remained indifferent and cold to his message. They probably wondered who he was and what he was entitled to speak on behalf of God? Isaiah felt that his speech lacked authority and consistency. He alone took on the task of a prophet, asked to be sent among the people (*Is* 6:8) and here he fails to awaken their conscience. He felt the need to remove any trace of doubt and provide an answer to the questions relating his call to the mission of prophet<sup>17</sup>. By this Isaiah shows them that he is not speaking from himself, and people receive his exhortations as they would receive them from the mouth of God.

Unlike Moses, Jeremiah or Jezekeil, who resisted the call to this mission, Isaiah volunteered to tell God: "Here am I, send me!" (*Is* 6:8). And he had reasons for volunteering for this job: he loved his nation, he wanted to awaken consciences and save people from God's punishment<sup>18</sup>. All this led Isaiah not to keep this vision to himself, but to share it with others. Although only 13 verses long, chapter 6 is very rich in content. Therefore, in order to understand what the prophet Isaiah wanted

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<sup>16</sup> Ioan Popescu-Mălăiești, „Studii și comentarii. Proorocia lui Isaia cu scurte explicații”, in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, 1926, fasc. 12, p. 727.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 728.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 728.

to convey, it is necessary to outline a theological perspective that resonates with the patristic literature<sup>19</sup>.

### **The theological dimension of Isaiah's vision**

God reveals himself to the prophet Isaiah in a wonderful and mysterious way. In essence, His holiness and glory are incomprehensible and no man can see Him and live. But in order to be perceived, He appears before the prophet in a veiled, anthropomorphic form. This form does not entirely cover His holiness. He is holy and all who enter in His presence must be holy, that is, cleansed from sin. From the Isaianic vision it is prominently evident that He is the Lord of the whole universe, the One who rules the heavenly hosts and governs human beings; therefore He must be served. Those who are aware of their sinfulness and confess their faults can receive forgiveness (*Is* 6:5), but those who repeatedly reject His commandments will have their hearts hardened (remain steadfast in their sinful will) so that God's judgment may be fulfilled (*Is* 6:10)<sup>20</sup>.

The prophet Isaiah's inaugural vision contains a host of theological implications. Among them we recall: man is called to praise God with the angelic hosts; to enter into the proximity of God's holiness requires repentance and awareness of creaturehood; God is to be served like a king; the message of God is to be conveyed regardless of its content or severity; the need to harden people's hearts because of their sins; the offering of a ray of hope in a speech announcing the destruction of cities and the desolation of the land. Isaiah's responsibility was not pleasant or easy, but fear and personal preference are lost when a man has the privilege of witnessing God's glory<sup>21</sup>.

### ***Anghelology***

Various studies on angelology have sought to assert either that angels are superior to man or that humans are, from some perspective, superior to angels. If God is often likened to a King, he must inevitably have some servants on his throne to carry out his commands. These servants are the angels. To be able to sit at the throne of God's glory they must be "creatures superior to men"<sup>22</sup>. Their close relationship with God, their ability to praise the Lord, their eagerness to fulfil certain tasks they are given, and the fact that they are not prone to fall into sin are just some of the characteristics that make angels hierarchically superior to humans. Because of these, they remain a hard-to-reach model for

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<sup>19</sup> The Holy Fathers and ecclesiastical writers who have dealt with the book of the prophet Isaiah by composing commentaries on it are: Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Theodoret of Cyrene, St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil the Great, St. Ambrose of Milan, Blessed Jerome. Others, such as Saint Gregory of Nazians, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Saint Ephrem Sir, Saint Athanasius the Great, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Blessed Augustine, Saint Gregory the Great and Saint Simeon the New Theologian have contributed to the explanation of some passages in the Book of the Prophet. See Ingrid Bauer, "Comentariu la Isaia sau perenitatea profeției", p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> Gary Smith, *Isaiah* 1-39, in *New American Commentary* 15A, Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, 2007, p. 183.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 183.

<sup>22</sup> Abraham Cohen, *Talmudul*, transl. Carol Litman, Hasefer, București, 2014, p. 107.

humans<sup>23</sup>.

At the same time, there are some opinions according to which one can speak of a "super-angelicity of man"<sup>24</sup>. "The angel is only a servant, a servant of God and of man, whereas man is also a master"<sup>25</sup> since he was placed in this rung after he was created. Man is the "crown of creation", the one who sums up in himself both the unseen and the seen world. Through his soul, he has access to "the incorporeal angelic, whereas to the angel the experience of the body remains foreign, even if, if need be, he can temporarily put on a body"<sup>26</sup>.

From a theological point of view, although it is not wrong to make such comparisons, it is much more important to emphasise the solidarity between the seen and unseen world. Often angels are sent by God with certain tasks to support people. Man is also called to follow the way of life of the angels and, by practicing the virtues, to reach their level: "once the Spirit has abode in him, [man is] worthy to be a prophet, an apostle, an angel, though he be earth and ashes"<sup>27</sup>.

More than solidarity and mutual support, we need to talk about unity between the two worlds; and this in liturgical worship. In the Holy Liturgy, people join the angels in the act of worshipping God, and the angels are invisibly present with them.

The Isaianic vision puts before us both how man should relate to the holy angels and the contribution of the holy angels in bringing men closer to God. "Hearing the angels exclaim: 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord of host', the prophet felt an urgent need to participate with them in the glorification of God [...]. Isaiah realised that the exclamation of the angels must in fact be the exclamation of the glorification of the divinity by the whole creature"<sup>28</sup>. The prophet saw, however, that he could not offer praise to God like the seraphim because his lips are unclean. The fact that one of the seraphim takes that coal with the tongs from the altar and touches it to the prophet's lips to forgive his sins highlights the role of the angels in supporting people on the path of salvation.

Through the song Isaiah hears, the seraphim not only glorify the Creator of all, but also reveal the Trinity. Because they use the title Lord in the singular and repeat "Holy" three times, it can be inferred that they are referring to the one Being of God. "Holy, Holy, Holy" indicates the mystery of

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<sup>23</sup> Andrei Pleșu, *Despre îngeri*, Humanitas, București, 2015, p. 32.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 36.

<sup>25</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 1, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2010, p. 447.

<sup>26</sup> According to St. John Cassian, it is precisely because they have a material body that people are kept from falling into sin to the same degree as the devils. If angels had bodies they would not have fallen so low as to become devils. The body is like a brake: "you cannot fall lower than the precarious constitution of the flesh allows". See Andrei Pleșu, *Despre îngeri*, p. 32.

<sup>27</sup> Calist și Ignatie Xanthopol, *Metodă și regulă foarte amănunțită pentru cei ce-și aleg să viețuiască în liniște și singurătate*, in: *Filocalia* 8, trans. Dumitru Stăniloae, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 1979, pp. 220-221.

<sup>28</sup> Petre Semen, „Chemarea profetică în viziunea lui Isaia”, p. 124.

the Holy Trinity, and the appellation "Lord of Hosts" indicates the unity of the divine being<sup>29</sup>. Like them, at every Holy Liturgy, people also offer praise to God. The faithful sing this hymn received from the seraphim<sup>30</sup>.

In one of his homilies to the seraphim, St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the unity between seraphim and humans in the Church by saying:

*"Upstairs doxologize the armies of angels, downstairs, in the churches, people, in chorus, imitate the doxology of angels. Upstairs the Seraphim sing the trisagion loudly, downstairs the crowds of people send the same song upwards; a common feast of heavenly and earthly is drawn up: one prayer of thanksgiving, one joy, one joyful chorus. The Lord's unholy sacrament prepared this, the Holy Spirit united the two choirs, and with the Father's good will this harmony of sounds was born"<sup>31</sup>.*

Thus, Isaiah's vision a clear proof that angels come to man's aid in the way of salvation. Angels help humans in their struggle with sin. They guide people towards God and want them to be near the throne of glory. The seen world and the unseen world do not repel each other; they are complementary.

### ***Eschatology and hope***

Eschatology refers to "the last things". For the Israelites, eschatology was primarily about the end of the Jewish nation and the world in general, and only then about the end of each individual person. The prophets were keen to emphasise that Israel was the chosen people and that God's justice and truth were to be manifested on earth. Thus, the eschatological perspective is first concerned with some expectations of great things to unfold in the future. It is about a time when the divine will will be established on earth.

The time when God will judge the world is referred to in the prophetic writings as the "Day of the Lord". It can be understood in two senses: on the one hand, as the time when God will manifest his power over creation in a punitive form, and on the other, as the time of salvation of the righteous. According to the Israelites, the "Day of the Lord" meant disaster and punishment only for the enemies. The prophet Amos, however, contradicts this conception for the first time by showing that this day may also dawn upon the chosen people (*Amos* 3:2)<sup>32</sup>.

For the prophet Isaiah, the "Day of the Lord" means terror and calamity both for the kingdoms of Judah and Israel (*Is* 2:12) and for the other nations (*Is* 14:25). But in addition to this, several distinctive features can be found in his eschatological discourse. For the most part, his

<sup>29</sup> Theodoret of Cyr, „Commentary on Isaiah”, in *Sources Chrétiennes* 276, *apud*. Steven a MCKINION, *Isaiah 1-39*, in: *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Old Testament*, Intervarsity Press, Illinois, 2004, p. 49.

<sup>30</sup> Sf. Chiril al Ierusalimului, *Cateheze*, trad. de Dumitru Fecioru, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2003, p. 361.

<sup>31</sup> Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omiliile la Ana; Omiliile la David și Saul; Omiliile la Serafimi*, trans. Dumitru Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2007, p. 132.

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5849-eschatology>, accessed 4 June 2024.

predictions announce a harsh judgment, a sentence marked by destruction and distress. In such a context, the prophet also finds a way to insert a ray of hope into his speech. One of the most eloquent examples of this is found in *Is* 1:21-26. In this text, God punishes Jerusalem in order to cleanse it of sin<sup>33</sup>. Another example is *Is* 6:9-13. God is determined to bring punishment, to destroy the cities and to drive out of the land of Canaan all those whom he had once brought out of danger and guided. Because of sins, "my people" (*Is* 3:7) have become "this people" (*Is* 6:9). Isaiah announces that God's punishment will be very harsh, but he does not forget to add a small ray of hope at the end. Like a cut tree that at some point gives birth to a shoot from its trunk, the chosen people will not be annihilated. That 'holy seed' will remain, a small 'remnant' through which the chosen people will endure. Other examples can be found to show that in Isaiah's predictions there is a sense of hope and optimism about the restoration of the people after their punishment<sup>34</sup>.

Many exegetes believe that verses 12 and 13 of *Is* 6 were added later. In addition, it is considered that the last sentence of verse 13 was also added later, since it is only because of it that the chapter ends on a positive note. However, if we place these verses in the context of the content of Isaiah's writing, it can be seen that they belong, from the beginning, to the place where they are now written.

Paradoxically, instead of asking the prophet to call the people to repentance, God asks him to harden their hearts so that they will not turn to Him (*Is* 6:9-10). From the content of his writing, however, we see that Isaiah also conveyed messages of repentance. For example, *Is* 30:15 offers the opportunity for repentance and forgiveness: "For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength". This is also evident from *Is* 31:6: "Turn ye unto him from whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted!"<sup>40</sup>.

Thus, Isaiah's writing can be seen on the one hand as an announcement of punishment and on the other as an exhortation to repentance. When Isaiah was called to his prophetic mission (*Is* 6), he heard that God had decided to punish the people. It is not wrong to note that from that message he also learned that a "remnant" of the people would remain, made up of righteous people who remained faithful to God's law. He glimpsed that God would judge the people very harshly but also that he would not annihilate them. One day, he will be able to be restored because of that "remnant"

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<sup>33</sup> Craig A. Evans, „*Is* 6:9-13 in the context of Isaiah's Theology”, in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 1986, fasc. 2, p. 139-140.

<sup>34</sup> Other passages similar in the hope the prophet offers are *Is* 14:24-26; 17:14; 28:28. The first predicts that Judah will be delivered from Assyrian bondage; the second promises that God will remove the Gentiles who plundered the chosen people. The latter shows that the grain of wheat is not broken even though the horse-ridden tormentor passes over it - thus showing that the people will endure even if they are stolen by other nations. *Ibidem*, p. 140.



that remained<sup>35</sup>. Placed in connection with other similar texts, the text of *Is* 6:12-13 finds its place in this context with great ease. Isaiah did not resist the divine command. He warned his countrymen that God would punish them, but he also offered a glimmer of hope. Indeed, the "Day of the Lord" will come and all sinners will be punished. A small "remnant" of Israel will remain, but wickedness and sin will be removed. Through punishment, God wants evil to be extirpated and people to come to realize how important it is to remain in communion with Heavenly Father.

### ***Other theological themes***

**Glory of God.** The glory of God is a visible manifestation of God's presence<sup>36</sup>. Throughout the history of Israel, the glory of God has been associated with theophanies and God's judgment<sup>37</sup>. In the Pentateuch, God's glory is represented by that cloud-shrouded consuming fire on Mount Sinai (*Jas* 24:16-17). In the image of the cloud and the fire, God's glory led the Israelites through the wilderness (*Jas* 13:21), was manifested at the sanctification of the tabernacle (*Jas* 40:34-38) and at the sanctification of Solomon's Temple (*1 Kgs* 8:10-11; *2 Chr* 7:1-3). God also showed his glory by his mercy towards Israel in the episode of their exit from Egypt (*Jas* 14:4) and by offering them manna in the wilderness (*Jas* 16:7). When the people rebel against God, his glory is shown to punish them (*Num* 16:42-50)<sup>38</sup>.

It is important to remember how the divine glory was manifested in the Pentateuch because in the book of the prophet Isaiah we also find many similarities with the first five books of Holy Scripture in this regard. In Isaiah's prophecy the divine glory is found in the theophany (*Is* 6:3) and manifests itself as judgment on sinners among the chosen people (*Is* 2:10), but also on the Gentiles (*Is* 10:16-17). In *Is* 6:3 it is shown for the first time in the prophetic writings that the glory of God is closely linked to the Temple in Jerusalem<sup>39</sup>. God appears to the prophet in that holy place, seated on the throne of glory surrounded by seraphim singing "Holy, holy, holy Lord Sabaoth, all the earth is full of his glory". The whole of creation is full of God's glory so that it can manifest itself in both a prone and a judgmental or punitive manner.

In the Isaianic view, God's glory is manifested in accordance with the message of punishment. At the beginning of the vision, Isaiah sees the whole Temple being filled with the shining robe of the Lord of hosts. "The radiance of the light that spreads from the divine garments and from the distinguishing marks of their masterful power can appear either as healing light or as frightening radiance. These phenomena can fill with light both the divine and mundane spheres. In *Is* 6 this aspect

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 140.

<sup>36</sup> Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 1995, p. 169.

<sup>37</sup> David N. Freedman et al., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, W.B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2000, p. 507; see also Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, Heinz-Josef Fabry, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 7, trans. David E. Green, Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, 1999, p. 27-29.

<sup>38</sup> David N. Freedman et al., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 507.

<sup>39</sup> Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 169.

of filling, of healing filling, is related to the overwhelming of glory. This radiance, which springs from the temple, is the symbol of the divine presence on earth"<sup>40</sup>. As long as God's glory is in the Temple, the land is blessed and full of plenty.

God appeared to the prophet in a bright atmosphere, but soon "the temple was filled with smoke" (*Is* 6:4). This smoke represents God's wrath and his determination to punish the people. This will take the form of the desolation of the land and the destruction of the cities. The filling of the Temple with smoke means that the divine glory has withdrawn from the midst of the chosen people. God is no longer accessible to the people, nor does he want to be, which is why he will ask the prophet to harden the hearts of his people (*Is* 6:10). "As long as the heart of the people is hardened, the land and the cities with their inhabitants will be destroyed as a divine punishment. The prosperity, the abundance of the land will be lost. This means that divine glory (*kabod*) will no longer be seen in the land"<sup>41</sup>.

It can thus be seen that the manner of the manifestation of God's glory in Isaiah is not unusual. From the earliest books of Holy Scripture one can find events in which divine glory has appeared either as a reason for blessing or punishment. In the opening vision, Isaiah sees God's glory shining forth and, through it, observes how great the difference is between his creaturely state and the holiness of the Creator. Sensing His presence in the Temple, the prophet sees how important it is for Him to be among the people. But God comes to reveal his will to punish the people, so after Isaiah sees him sitting on the throne and sees the seraphim flying around him, he witnesses a grim process. The temple fills with smoke. This smoke signifies the withdrawal of God's glory not only from the place of worship but also from among the people. Through this process of transition, i.e. the appearance of glory and its withdrawal, God shows the prophet Isaiah that the people will be punished.

**Sending the prophet on mission - hardening hearts.** One of the greatest challenges that *Is* 6 opens up is *Isaiah's* command from God to harden the hearts of those who will listen to him (*Is* 6:10)<sup>42</sup>. Most prophetic speeches involve encouraging and exhorting people to repentance, not hardening hearts against God. Some critics believe that God never told Isaiah to harden the hearts of the people. Instead, this command holds true. King Ahaz rejects Isaiah's message (*Is* 7:11-12). Perhaps remembering the vision in which he was inaugurated into prophetic activity, the prophet realizes that it is God who has commanded this and that this is the reason he failed to persuade King Ahaz, which

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<sup>40</sup> Gabriel Ralph Bultz, „Semnificații teologice ale slavei lui Dumnezeu în Cartea profetului Isaia”, in *Anuarul Facultății de Teologie Ortodoxă din Cluj-Napoca*, 2016, fasc. 1, p. 53.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 54.

<sup>42</sup> See Geoffrey D. Robinson, „The Motif of Deafness and Blindness in Isaiah 6,9-10: A Contextual, Literary, and Theological Analysis”, in *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 1998, fasc. 8, p. 167-186.

is why Judah suffered greatly in the Syro-Ephraimite war<sup>43</sup>.

A view that questions whether God commanded this diminishes the credibility of the prophet. Did Isaiah not hear what God told him? How would a prophet allow himself to invent that God had appeared to him in glory, forgiven his sins, and commanded him to harden the hearts? Because of the difficulty of understanding the text, various explanations have been used. However, a detailed analysis will clarify what the hardening of the hearts of the chosen people meant.

When Pharaoh brought the chosen people out of Egypt, he hardened his own heart, and later God himself hardened it (cf. *Ex* 7:3; 9:12; 11:10). A few years later, God sends an evil spirit upon the sinners of Shechem (*Jdg* 9:23), but also upon the disobedient King Saul (*1 Sam* 18:10; 19:9). Micah sees God (*1 Kg* 22:19-23) asking a spirit to soften Ahab's heart so that he may go to meet his end at Ramoth-gilead. Looking at these passages, one sees that the mission Isaiah received to harden hearts in the time of Ahaz is not a command unheard of in Holy Scripture<sup>44</sup>.

This command does not restrict Isaiah's message to this fact alone, nor does it undermine his right to call for repentance (*Is* 28:15; 30:15; 31:6), nor does it destroy the prophet's hope (*Is* 8:16-18). God does not forbid him to ask the people to have faith in him (*Is* 7:9; 12:2; 26:3; 30:15; 31:1-3), he only tells Isaiah that his message will harden hearts. From time to time, Isaiah observes how God closes the ears of some of his fellow believers (*Is* 29:9-14) but at the same time allows some to respond positively to his commands (Hezekiah, *Is* 36-37). Unfortunately, too many people have stubbornly refused to listen to God (*Is* 42:18-20; 44:18). All this shows us that both God's determination to harden people's hearts and the idea that people have closed their ears and eyes<sup>45</sup>, are not foreign to Isaiah's theology. The message that Isaiah conveys only confirms the hardening of those who already disobey and do not follow God's commands. Thus, it is appropriate to consider God's command to make the people obey but not understand (*Is* 6:9-10) as a plan of His relating to the different stages of Isaiah's work but particularly valid for people who were no longer willing to keep His commandments<sup>46</sup>.

### **Instead of conclusions: the New Testament reception of the theophanic episode**

In the New Testament the book of the prophet Isaiah is often quoted<sup>47</sup>. Many of his words appear on the lips of the Jesus Christ or the Apostles. His prophecies, in which events that have not yet happened are described in detail, are fulfilled during the work of Jesus Christ. From *Is* 6, verse 9 in particular has been received: "Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see

<sup>43</sup> Gary Smith, *Isaiah* 1-39, p. 184.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 184.

<sup>45</sup> People can hear and see, but they have become too accustomed not to respond to God's word. Looking at the problem in this way, one concludes that it was and is the problem with people. Michael Fishbane, *Haftarat*, in *The JPS Bible commentary*, The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 2002, p. 126.

<sup>46</sup> Gary Smith, *Isaiah* 1-39, p. 185.

<sup>47</sup> "There are over 400 quotations, paraphrases or allusions to Isaiah in the New Testament, proportionately chosen from almost every chapter of prophecy, evenly distributed throughout the New Testament books where the Old Testament is quoted abundantly". Ingrid Bauer, „Comentariu la Isaia sau perenitatea profeției”, p. 9.

ye indeed, but perceive not." These words are found five times in the New Testament. The Synoptic Gospels (*Mt* 13:14; *Mk* 4:12; *Lk* 8:10) place this verse in the context in which the Apostles ask the Saviour to explain the parable of the sower. Jesus Christ speaks these words in reference to his listeners. The words of the prophet Isaiah were fulfilled in that He speaks to the people in parables. If He had not spoken in this way, the people would not have listened to any word, but rather would have turned away. But by this way of preaching they were captivated and understood His teachings. If these teachings have not reached their souls and have not been taken up, it is because they are possessed by the spirit of wickedness and are worthy of punishment<sup>48</sup>.

In the Gospel of John (*Jn* 12:40), Christ recalls the words of the prophet Isaiah in the form of an observation. Although they were witnesses of his miracles and signs, they still refused to believe in him: "for Christ had raised Lazarus and they were trying to kill him, he was casting out demons and they said he had demons, he was leading them to the Father and they called him a deceiver"<sup>49</sup>. The people's hearts were hardened, their eyes were glued shut and their ears closed before all the miracles performed by the Saviour. In the *Acts of the Apostles*, these words are addressed by St. Paul to the Jews in Rome (*Acts* 28, 25-26). After arriving in the capital of the Empire, the Apostle Paul preaches the Saviour to the Romans. Some accept his teaching, while others do not. Because of this, a great conflict arises and, seeing this, Saint Paul addresses them the words of the prophet Isaiah<sup>50</sup>.

The reason why this text has been so quoted in the New Testament is because of its perennial nature. In Isaiah's time, God was not incarnate, but people strayed so far from His commandments that they became entrenched in evil. Because of this, God decides that from then on they will remain in this state, only to punish them later. In the New Testament, the same attitude is seen during the work of Christ. This time, God is incarnate and comes in closest proximity to people; he performs miracles before them and shows them by parables what the law of love and the kingdom of heaven entail. But they refuse to listen to his teaching, close their eyes to the miracles and harden their hearts rather than open them to the law of love.

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<sup>48</sup> Ioan Popescu-Mălăiești, „Studii și comentarii. Proorocia lui Isaia cu scurte explicații”, p. 24.

<sup>49</sup> Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, *Comentariu la Isaia; Omilii la Ozia*, trad. de Laura Enache, Doxologia, Iași, 2013, p. 133.

<sup>50</sup> Sf. Vasile cel Mare, *Comentariu la cartea Profetului Isaia*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* 2, trad. de Alexandru Mihăilă, Basilica, București, 2009, p. 216.