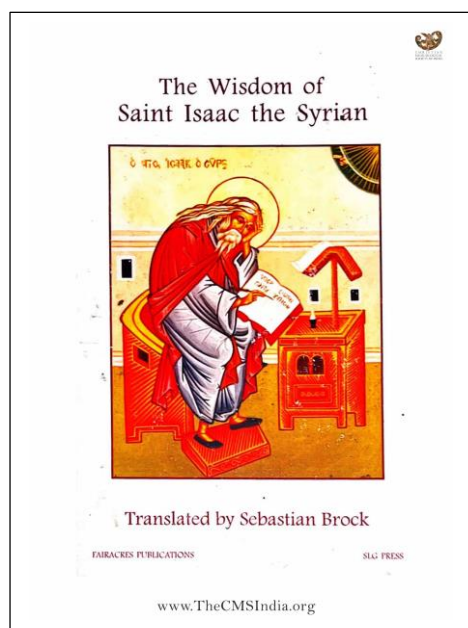


The Wisdom of Saint Issac the Syrian



Call Number	RR-1307/WM
Title	The Wisdom of Saint Issac the Syrian
Topic	The Wisdom of Saint Issac the Syrian
Author	Unknown.
Publisher/Year	SEERI, Kerala / 1995,1997
Printed at / by	SLG Press / Joshua Horgan, Oxford
Total Pages	34
Language	English
Copyright	Sebastian Impression 2014
Contributor	Ann Lia Wilson
Key Words	#thewisdomofsaintissacthesyrian #SEERI #kerala #slgpress #joshuahorgan #oxford #english #sebastianimpression
Disclaimer: Copyright to the Author/Publisher. This Extract of the book is Read Only and cannot be downloaded, copied, printed or published without the prior permission of the Author / Publisher. For more details contact us: info@thecmsindia.org	

The Wisdom of Saint Isaac the Syrian



Translated by Sebastian Brock

FAIRACRES PUBLICATIONS

SLG PRESS

www.TheCMSIndia.org

www.marggam.com

MARGGAM – Digital Library of Christianity in India

The Wisdom of Saint Isaac the Syrian

ܬܚܝܬܐ ܕܝܫܐܥ ܬܝܪܝܐ
Sebastian
ܬܚܝܬܐ ܕܝܫܐܥ ܬܝܪܝܐ

Translated by Sebastian Brock

SLG Press
Convent of the Incarnation
Fairacres Parker Street
Oxford OX4 1TB England
www.slgpress.co.uk

www.TheCMSIndia.org

www.marggam.com

MARGGAM – Digital Library of Christianity in India



First published in 1995 by SEERI, Kerala, India

First Published in Great Britain by SLG Press in 1997

© Sebastian Brock 1997

Sixth Impression 2014

ISBN 978-0-7283-0145-0

ISSN 0307-1405

All rights reserved

SLG Press asserts on behalf of Sebastian Brock the moral right of Sebastian Brock to be identified as the author of the work, in accordance with Sections 77 & 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

Cover illustration: Icon of St Isaac the Syrian which hangs in the Chapel of St Isaac's Retreat, Opononi, New Zealand.

Printed by: Joshua Horgan, Oxford
www.joshuahorgan.co.uk

www.TheCMSIndia.org

www.marggam.com

MARGGAM – Digital Library of Christianity in India

INTRODUCTION

St Isaac of Nineveh, or St Isaac the Syrian as he is often known, is a figure full of paradox. A hermit of the Assyrian Church of the East who lived in the seventh century, he is in the present century perhaps more influential than at any other time in history. In recent years his writings have been translated into a dozen or more different languages. On Mount Athos his works remain favourite monastic reading, and in Egypt their inspiration lies behind the monastic revival in the Coptic Orthodox Church during the last few decades. Through modern translations into English, French and Italian his writings have also become known to, and appreciated by, many outside the monastic circles for which St Isaac originally intended them.

Reactions to his teaching, however, have not always been favourable. Not long after his death some quarters within his own Church took objection to certain aspects of his teaching, and in the present century one eminent scholar dismissed his writings with the words, 'We see in him a milestone on the melancholy road whereby the Orient lapsed from Christianity into an unprogressive, uninventive barbarism, in which not even philosophy continued to flourish.'¹ Yet for many people today St Isaac clearly does have the ability to speak directly over the span of thirteen centuries. Eloquent testimony to this is given by a young Greek Orthodox monk, whose words are quoted by Archimandrite Vasileios, of Stavronikita Monastery on Athos:²

I am reading St Isaac the Syrian. I find something true, heroic, spiritual in him; something which transcends space and time. I feel that here, for the first time, is a voice which resonates in the deepest parts of my being,

FURTHER READING

MAIN TRANSLATIONS OF ST ISAAC

First Part

(a) Complete (82 chapters)

A. J. Wensinck, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh* (Amsterdam, 1923; reprinted Wiesbaden, 1969). [From Syriac]

[D. Miller], *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, translated by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery (Boston, 1984). [From Greek; contains an excellent introduction. It should be noted that the order of chapters in the Greek is quite different from that of the Syriac; a useful concordance can be found in this volume]

J. Touraille, *Isaac le Syrien. Oeuvres spirituelles* (Paris, 1981). [From Greek]

(b) Selections

E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer, *Early Fathers from the Philokalia* (London, 1954), pp. 183–280. [Excerpts translated from the Russian *Philokalia*]

S. P. Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life* (Kalamazoo, 1987), pp. 242–301. [First Part, ch. 22; Second Part, ch. 14–15; and short extracts from both Parts]

M. Hansbury, *St Isaac of Nineveh, On Ascetical Life* (Crestwood NY, 1989). [Ch. 1–6]

A. M. Allchin, *The Heart of Compassion* (London, 1989; Japanese translation, 1990). [60 short excerpts]

M. Gallo and P. Bettolo, *Isacco di Ninive: Discorsi ascetici* (Rome, 1984). [Ch. 1–38]

Second Part (41 chapters)

Ch. 1–2: S. P. Brock, 'Two unpublished texts by St Isaac the Syrian', *Sobornost/Eastern Churches Review* 19 (1997), pp. 7–33.

Ch. 3 (Four sets of 'Kephalaia'): P. Bettolo, *Isacco di Ninive: Discorsi spirituali* (Magnano, 1985; 2nd edition, 1991). [The second edition contains some further excerpts from the Second Part]

Ch. 4–41: S. P. Brock, *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian): 'The Second Part', Chapters IV–XLI* (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptores Syri 225; Louvain, 1995).

Ch. 5: 'The prayers of St Isaac the Syrian', *Sobornost/Eastern Churches Review* 16 (1994), pp. 20–31.

x

www.TheCMSIndia.org

www.marggam.com

MARGGAM – Digital Library of Christianity in India



1. The ladder to the Kingdom is hidden within you, and within your soul. Dive down into yourself, away from sin, and there you will find the steps by which you can ascend.

[Hom. 2, B 12]

2. Do not test out your mind on the grounds that you are examining what seductive and impure thoughts look like, imagining that, as you do this, you will not be overcome by them. Even the wise have in this way been thrown into confusion and become infatuated.

[Hom. 2, B 14]

3. Do not be inept in the requests you make to God, otherwise you will insult God through your ignorance.

[Hom. 3, B 32]

4. When someone asks a human prince for a load of dung, not only will that person be despised as a result of his despicable request, but he has also offered an insult to the prince by means of his stupid request. Exactly the same applies when someone asks for the things of the body in prayer.

[Hom. 3, B 32]

5. If God is slow in answering your request, or if you ask but do not promptly receive anything, do not be upset, for you are not wiser than God.

[Hom. 3, B 33]

6. Anything that is easily found is also easily lost, whereas what is found after much labour will be guarded with vigilance.

[Hom. 3, B 34]

7. Thirst for Jesus, so that he may inebriate you with His love.

[Hom. 3, B 34]

8. Without temptations, God's concern is not perceived, nor is freedom of speech with Him acquired, nor is spiritual wisdom learnt, nor does the love of God become grounded in the soul.

[Hom. 3, B 36]

9. Make sure you see to small things, lest otherwise you may push aside important ones.

[Hom. 4, B 44]



96. A person receives illumination in accordance with the quality of his conduct before God. [Keph. I.12]
97. Do not dispute over the truth with someone who does not know the truth; but from the person who is eager to know the truth, do not withhold words from him. [Keph. I.14]
98. With a person who is unable to profit from spiritual knowledge, benefit him instead with your silence, rather than with words about such knowledge. [Keph. I.15]
99. Do not consider a long time spent in worship before God to be wasted. [Keph. I.20]
100. Those who just grab at knowledge are themselves grabbed by pride: the more they study, the more darkened they become. [Keph. I.25]
101. Those who rush at knowledge, without working for it, are the people who grab at it; in other words, instead of the truth, they grab at a semblance. [Keph. I.26]
102. Whenever it is a time of battling with Satan and of darkness, one should spend extra time in prayer and in kneeling on the ground. [Keph. I.30]
103. In the case of thoughts, we have the authority to bridle them—that is, if we are extremely alert; but over the body's functioning we do not have authority. Accordingly, anyone who says that he is without any passion when he fills his belly, or is continuously involved in material spectacles, has gone completely astray. [Keph. I.31]
104. Impassibility does not consist in not being aware of the passions, but in not accepting the passions. [Keph. I.33]
105. For someone to say to his brother 'Love God' is very easy, but what is necessary is to know how to love Him. [Keph. I.36]

144. In love did God bring the world into existence; in love does He guide it during its temporal existence; in love is He going to bring it to that wondrous transformed state, and in love will the world be swallowed up in the great mystery of Him who has performed all these things. In love will the whole course of the governance of creation be finally comprised. [XXXVII.2]

145. Just because the terms 'wrath', 'anger', 'hatred' and the rest are used of the Creator in the Bible, we should not imagine that He actually does anything in anger, hatred or zeal. Many figurative terms are used of God in the Scriptures, terms which are far removed from His true nature. [XXXIX.19]

146. Among all God's actions there is none which is not entirely a matter of mercy, love and compassion: this constitutes the beginning and end of His dealings with us. [XXXIX.22]

147. God's love is not a kind of love which has its origin in events which take place in time. [XL.2]

148. God has a single caring concern for those who have fallen, just as much as for those who have not fallen. [XL.3]

149. It is God's wish that each day we should be renewed and start up again with a virtuous change of will, and with a renewal of mind. [XL.9]

150. God's holy nature is so good and compassionate that it is always seeking to find some small means of setting us right. [XL.12]

151. God's mercifulness is far more extensive than we can conceive. [XL.17]

152. On the subject of God, it is right that only someone worthy of God because of his virtue should speak. [XLI.1]

153. In your heart act as a priest to God, offering up a pure sacrifice. [XLI.2]

SUBJECT INDEX

answers to prayer 5
beginnings, new 24, 25, 149
body and prayer 29, 133, 135
body, slavery to 38
care, divine 14, 15, 30, 125, 127, 148
compassion, divine 31, 60, 61, 150, 151
compassion, human 85, 86, 87, 91
darkness, dejection 27, 50, 57, 58, 59, 102
distraction 121
ease, comfort, luxury 11, 22, 53, 77, 78, 106, 108
eating, excessive 10, 103
faith 25, 40, 75
giving to others 62
heart as priest 153
humility 19, 44, 88, 89, 95
illness 17, 18, 20, 114
intention, right 39, 116
labour, toil, value of 6, 23, 33, 56, 108, 122, 130, 139
ladder to Kingdom 1
love, God's 120, 144, 147
love for God 7, 41, 42, 131, 137
love for neighbour 52, 94, 131
love, sin against 34
poor, helping the 16
prayer 27, 29, 31, 48, 56, 59, 71, 82, 115, 117, 118, 121, 122, 123, 133, 135, 140
providence (see care)
repentance 43, 49, 83
requests to God 3, 4
reverence before God, need for 134, 135, 142
'Satan', meaning of 32
Scriptures 28, 51, 139, 140, 145
silence, value of 107
sinners 21, 64, 73



**A digital archive of Christian Art, Books,
Manuscripts & Manuals, Imagery Literature and Music.**

Support Our Ongoing Projects

- Marggam Digital Library of Christianity in India.
- Aramaic Project - Reclaim Syriac to Reaffirm Identity.
 - Encyclopedia of Syriac Chants.
 - Resources for Researchers.
 - Directory of Christian Songs.
- Christian Arts / Music Iconography.



C H R I S T I A N
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

www.TheCMSIndia.org

An international forum for interdisciplinary discussion, and dissemination of
knowledge, on Art, Literature and Music of about
thirty million Christians in India