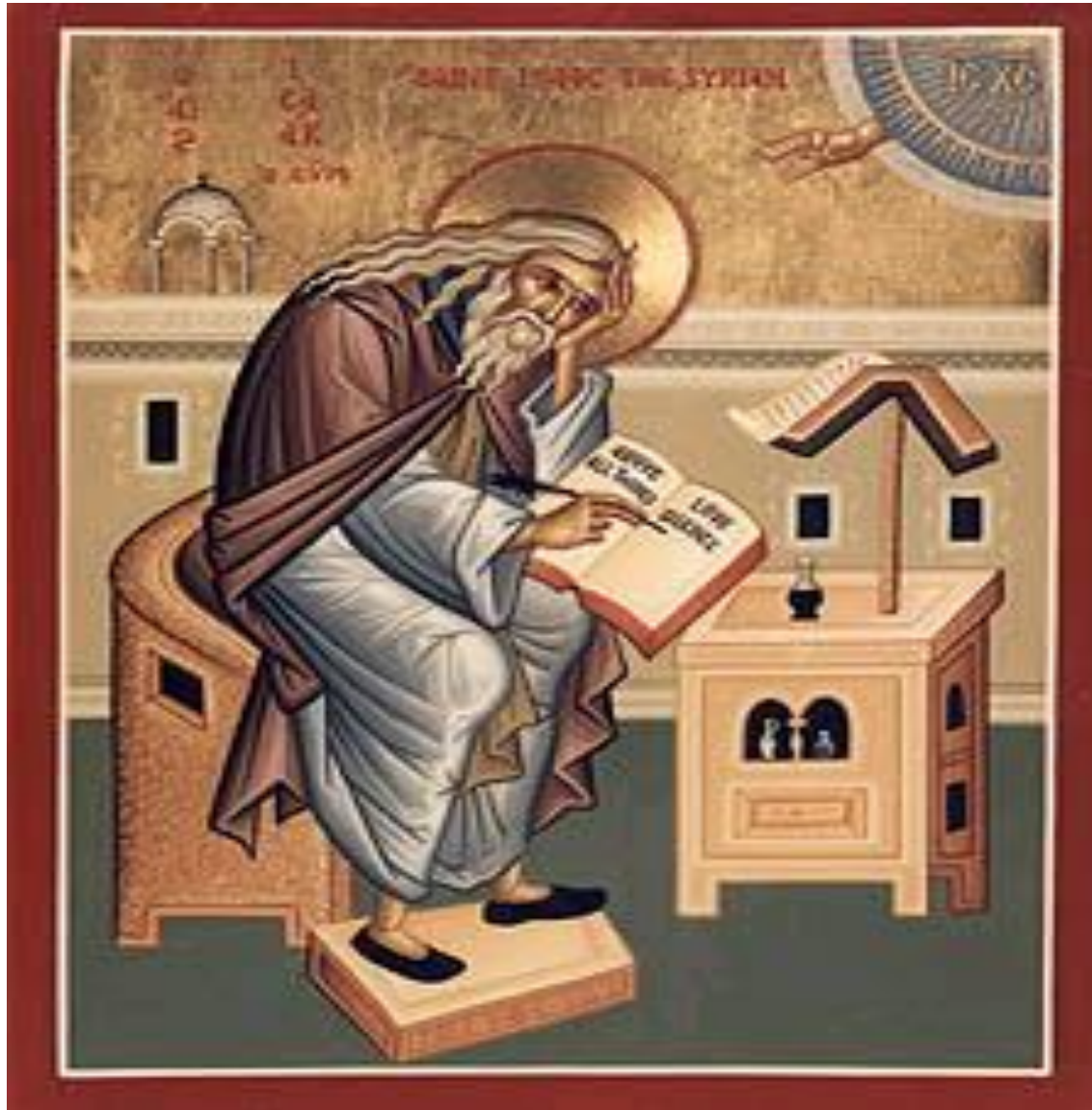


# Mystical Theology

Isaac of Nineveh

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# Isaac of Nineveh

- Born near present day Bahrain. (died 700 AD)
- Named Bishop of Nineveh (Mosul) for the Church of the East but resigned after several months to live as an anchorite. His christological views are compatible with the Orthodox position.
- The Incarnation is the moment when the love of God towards human beings reveals itself in the highest degree, and when human beings, in turn, are called to answer the love of God with their own love for God.

- “God the Lord surrendered His own Son to death on the Cross for the fervent love of creation... This was not, however, because He could not redeem us in another way, but so that His surpassing love, manifested hereby, might be a teacher unto us. And by the death of His Only-begotten Son He made us near to Himself. Yes, if He had anything more precious, He would have given it to us, so that by it our race might be His own. Because of His great love for us it was not His pleasure to do violence to our freedom, although He is able to do so, but He chose that we should draw near to Him by the love or our understanding.

- For the sake of His love for us and obedience to His Father, Christ joyfully took upon Himself insult and sorrow...In like manner, when the saints become perfect, they all attain to this perfection, and by the superabundant outpouring of their love and compassion upon all men they resemble God.”
- The Incarnation is the new revelation about God.

- “Creation could not look upon Him unless He took part of it to Himself and thus conversed with it, and neither could it hear the words of His mouth from face to face. The sons of Israel were not even able to hear His voice when He spoke with them from the cloud. The sons of Israel made ready and prepared themselves, keeping themselves chaste for three days according to the command of Moses, that they might be made worthy of hearing the voice of God, and of the vision of His revelation...

- And when the time was come, they could not receive the vision of His light and the fierceness of the voice of His thunder. But now, when He poured out His grace upon the world through His own coming, He has descended not in an earthquake, not in a fire, not in a terrible and mighty sound, but ‘as the rain upon a fleece, and rain drops that fall upon the earth’ softly, and He was seen conversing with us after another fashion. This came to pass when...He concealed His majesty with the veil of His flesh, and among us spoke with us in that body which His own bidding wrought for Him out of the womb of the Virgin.”

- Not only for humans, but also for angels, the door of contemplation and vision was opened in Jesus when the Word became flesh.
- “If zeal had been appropriate for putting humanity right, why did God the Word clothe Himself in the body in order to bring the world back to His Father using gentleness and humility? And why was He stretched out on the Cross for the sake of sinners, handing over His sacred body to suffering on behalf of the world?”



- I myself say that God did all this for no other reason, except to make known to the world the love that He has, His aim being that we, as a result of our greater love arising from an awareness of this, might be captivated by His love when He provided the occasion of this manifestation of the Kingdom of Heaven's mighty power – which consists in love – by means of the death of His son.”

- The Incarnation and the death of the Cross happened “not to redeem us from sins, or for any other reason, but solely in order that the world might become aware of the love which God has for His creation. Had all this astounding affair taken place solely for the purpose of forgiveness of sin, it would have been sufficient to redeem us by some other means. What objection would there have been if He had done what He did by means of an ordinary death? But He did not make His death at all an ordinary one – in order that you might realize the nature of the mystery. Rather, He tasted death in the cruel suffering of the Cross. What need was there for the outrage done to Him and the spitting?

- Just death would have been sufficient for our redemption – and in particular His death, without any of these other things which took place. What wisdom is God's! And how filled with life! Now you can understand and realize why the coming of our Lord took place with all the events that followed it, even to the extent of His telling the purpose quite clearly out of His own holy mouth: 'To such an extent did God love the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son'- referring to the Incarnation and the renewal He brought about."

- It was the love of God and not the necessity of redeeming humanity from sin that is the sole reason for the Incarnation. God became man because He wanted men to turn to Him as their Father.
- “...When the entire extent of creation had abandoned and forgotten God and had perfected themselves in every kind of wickedness, of His own will and without any supplication or request from elsewhere, He came down to their abode and lived among them in their body just as one of them, and with a love exalted beyond knowledge or description by any created being, He begged them to turn back to Himself, showing them concerning the glorious establishment of the world to come, having intended before all worlds to introduce felicity such as this for creation.

- He informed them of its existence and forgave them all the sins which they had previously committed, and confirmed this goodwill by means of authoritative signs and wonders, and the revelation to them of His mysteries; and finally He has stooped down to such an extent that He is willing to be called ‘Father’ of sinful human nature, dust from the earth, despicable human beings, flesh and blood; can these things be performed without great love?”
- The cross is a symbol of the “Man who completely became a temple” of God; the Cross is made in the name of “that Man in whom Divinity dwells”; the humanity of Christ is the “garment of His Divinity”.

- “For we believe that all that applies to the Man is raised up to the Word who accepts it for Himself; having willed to make Him share this honor. All this is made known to us in the Cross, and through this affair which unbelievers consider so contemptible, we have acquired an accurate knowledge of the Creator.”
- “...Amid ineffable splendor the Father raised Him to Himself to Heaven, to that place which no created being had trod, but where He had, through His own action, invited all rational beings, angels and human beings, to that blessed Entry, in order to delight in the divine light in which was clothed that Man who is filled with all that is holy, who is now with God ineffable honor and splendor.”

- “I give praise to Your holy Nature, Lord, for You have made my nature a sanctuary for Your hiddenness and a tabernacle for Your mysteries, a place where You can dwell, and a holy temple for Your divinity, namely for Him who holds the scepter of Your Kingdom, who governs all You have brought into being, the glorious Tabernacle of Your eternal Being, the source of renewal for the ranks of fire which minister to You, the Way to knowledge of You, the Door to vision of You, the summation of Your power and great wisdom – Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten from Your bosom, and remnant gathered in from Your creation, both visible and spiritual.”

- The Incarnation is the sacrifice of God the Son, offered because of the love of God the Father for the world, the sacrifice that united the created world with God...”creation and Creator have become one!”
- “O Christ who are covered with light as though with a garment, who for my sake stood naked in front of Pilate, clothe me with that might which You caused to overshadow the saints, whereby they conquered this world of struggle. May your divinity, Lord, take pleasure in me, and lead me above the world to be with You.”



- “O Christ, upon whom the many-eyed cherubim are unable to look because of the glory of Your countenance, yet out of Your love You received spit upon Your face; remove the shame from my face and grant an open face before you at the time of prayer.”
- “God has not made His image subject to passion.”
- “Do not reckon as a truly wise man that one whose mind is subject to fear on account of temporal life...No one is able to draw near to God without leaving...bodily affairs behind.”

- "Do not seek the advice of him that is not your fellow in behavior, though he be very prudent. A layman who has experienced things is more to be trusted than a sage who speaks on the basis of theoretical knowledge but without experience.

What is experience? Experience is not this that a man goes and touches things, without acquiring knowledge concerning their advantages and their defects and without remaining with them during a certain time. How often the faces of things give the impressions of defect, whereas within them is found matter full of advantages. In the same way are to be judged things of the opposite aspect."

- "Be an ascetic with the humble, to learn from his ways. If to see his habits is profitable to those who see him, how much more the character of his behavior and teachings received from his very lips."
- "Do not approach the mysterious words in the scriptures without prayer and without asking help from God, saying, Lord, grant me to perceive the power that is in them. Deem prayer as the key to the insight of truth in scripture."

- "Gratefulness on the part of the recipient spurs on the giver to bestow gifts larger than before. He who embezzles petty things is also false and fraudulent concerning things of importance.

The sick one who is acquainted with his sickness is easily to be cured; and he who confesses his pain is near to health. Many are the pains of the hard heart; and when the sick one resists the physician, his torments will be augmented.

- “There is no sin which cannot be pardoned except that one which lacks repentance, and there is no gift which is not augmented save that which remains without acknowledgement. For the portion of the fool is small in his eyes.”
- “For any repentance which follows the removal of a freedom cannot be a source of joy nor reckoned as a reward of those who repent.”
- “Cover the sinner even though you are not harmed by him. Indeed, encourage him for life and the mercy of the Lord will sustain you.”

- “Support the weak and distressed with a word as far as you are able, that the right hand upholding the universe may sustain you.”
- “And what is a merciful heart? It is the heart’s burning for all of creation, for men, for birds, for animals, and even for demons. At the remembrance and at the sight of them, the merciful man’s eyes fill with tears which arise from the great compassion that urges his heart. It grows tender and cannot endure hearing or seeing any injury or slight sorrow to anything in creation. Because of this, such a man continually offers tearful prayer even for irrational animals and for the enemies of truth and for all who harm (the truth), that they may be guarded and forgiven.”

- “Spiritual knowledge is a consequence of the practice of good works. But both are preceded by love and fear. And fear precedes love.”
- “As among ten thousand persons hardly one will be found who has fulfilled the commandments...Not many are found worthy of pure prayer...But as to that other mystery (unified knowledge), hardly one will be found in each generation who has drawn near to this knowledge by the grace of God...Unified knowledge which is...wonder in God. This is the order of the great way which is to come which will be given in the freedom of immortal life, in that way of life which is after the resurrection.”

- “Leave the things of no value that you may find precious things. Be dead in life and you will not live in death...(observe) His commandments.”
- “Do not be foolish in your petitions...Pray wisely that you may be deemed worthy of glorious things...Solomon asked for wisdom and he received an earthly kingdom with because he knew how to ask wisely...from the King...Israel sought contemptible things and received the wrath of God.”
- “If He delays over your request...do not be grieved...When you wait like this it is either because your life does not conform with your request or because the ways of your heart differ from the purpose of your prayer; or because your inner state is like that of a child in comparison...”



- “Thirst for Jesus that he may intoxicate you with His love. Close your eyes to the precious things of the world that you may deserve to have the peace of God reign in your heart.”
- “Be wise in your innocence lest you be seduced. Love humility in your conduct that you may be delivered from the imperceptible snares which are always found beside the paths where the humble walk. Do not refuse tribulations, for by their means you will enter into knowledge. Do not fear temptations, for in them you will find precious things.”

- Pray not to enter into temptations about your faith; nor that through the mind's self-esteem enter into temptation with blasphemy and pride; nor enter into the manifest temptation of the senses which Satan knows how to bring; nor be tempted to separate from chastity; nor to be contemptuous of anything.
- “Pray lest you enter into temptations of the soul. But for those of the body, make ready with all your strength...Whoever flees from...tribulations...flees from virtue.” (cf Mt 10:38; Lk 22:29; Acts 14:22)
- “One who does not have the labors of the body does not have the labors of the soul...One who does not have the work of the soul is also deprived of the gifts of the Spirit.”

- “Nothing can so banish licentious habits from the soul and restrain (disturbing memories) and stir up troubling flames in the body as can avid devotion to the love of learning and searching investigation into the meanings of the passages of Scripture.”
- The work of the cross is twofold...into endurance of bodily afflictions which comes about through (discipline); and into the...work of the mind in sacred studies and constant prayer...The ascent of the cross that brings wrath is not...crucifixion of the body; but the ascent of contemplation...that which follows the healing of the soul...Even those whose sight is sound and full of light and who have grace as a guide are in peril...With eyes full of tears they continue in prayer...For the things of God come of their own accord...if your heart is pure.”

# Bibliography

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- Hilarion Alfeyev, “The Incarnation of the Word and the Deification of Man According to St. Isaac of Nineveh”, available at the interdisciplinary seminar, Jewish Roots of Eastern Christian Mysticism, <http://www.marquette.edu/maqom>