

Appendix B to *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*,
Selections from the Book of Grace / Epistle to Abba Symeon:

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APPENDIX B — PART I

*A Selection From The Book of Grace**

FROM THE FIRST CENTURY

1:1 Faith in Christ is living, noetic light.

1:2 The teaching of Jesus is the knowledge of the truth. Through the word of light¹ it is poured upon the hearts of believers and confers on them true light and life.

1:7 The man who possesses hidden consolation drives away from himself outward converse, lest he lose his interior consolation. And the man who has found the truth within himself will no more weary himself with methods.

1:8 The man who possesses noetic light has no need of visible light. Now the light of the mind, they say, is the knowledge of the truth, whereby the soul can distinguish the truth from similitudes. The man who has found this, has found a treasury of life.

1:17 Although knowledge precedes ascetical discipline, still, through the crucible of excellent discipline, knowledge is cultivated, and it flourishes, yielding good fruit.

1:18 The foundation of all knowledge of the truth is excellent ascetical discipline; and the foundation of excellent discipline is patience in good works.

1:19 If, as the Fathers say, stillness gives birth to stillness, knowledge to knowledge, and discipline to discipline, then it is evident also that patient endurance of compulsory labours gives birth to voluntary patience.

1:24 Virtues accomplished by the body cause onlookers to marvel and draw them to

* Concerning *The Book of Grace* see the Introduction, pp. lxxxi-lxxxv.

¹ I. e. Scripture.

THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

repentance, just as the visible sun enlightens the exterior eyes and by its light delivers most men from darkness.

1:25 But virtues accomplished secretly within the soul, and noetically by means of the intellect's rumination, enlighten the eyes of the soul and cause them to behold divine, supernatural beauty with inexpressible delight.

1:27 We are captivated and drawn to new life in God by the mercy of God's tender care for us (shown in the delectable things and the delight of the Kingdom) and by the terror and torment of Gehenna.

1:45 The intellect in which divine love is implanted, and which by grace has been accounted worthy of the knowledge of the truth, never ceases from spiritual rumination upon divine mysteries. At times it contemplates God's tender care which embraces all things. At times it muses upon the providence of His mercy shown in all generations. And at times it reflects upon the wisdom of His creation, so full of diversity. Then it turns to the twofold character of a man's own formation, the marvellous unification of body and soul, the glorious mysteries hidden within him, and the divine vision and the intuitions which supernaturally rise up in him. Then it reflects again how, being one and the same, a man is both glorious and contemptible, both lofty and above corruption, and yet abhorrent and wallowing in corruption and aberration.

1:50 A man who stands on a high place breathing fresh air is filled with more cheerfulness and strength than someone who stands below in darkness breathing gloomy, stagnant air. Likewise the man who, because of his hope upon the promises of the Spirit, labours with steadfast faith receives greater consolation, joy, and encouragement, and is more sanctified by the Spirit, than the man who with remorse, sorrow, bitterness, and distress of heart labours in self-applied compulsion without the consolation of reaching the harbour of hope.

1:53 When the love of Jesus is kindled and burns in the souls of the saints, it imprints in their hearts the new things of Heaven.

1:54 The light of Jesus is noetic light, and blessed is the soul which is accounted worthy to see it!

1:57 God will not be slow to hearken to a soul which unremittingly implores Him with groans, with contrition, and with pain of heart.

1:58 The labour of the saints, the sons of light, is the labour of Gabriel's and Michael's assembly, and they are nourished from one and the same table.

1:59 The prayers of the saints, the sons of light, are unceasing. They have consecrated unto God a temple, even their souls. An inner priest² has been anointed and a spiritual

² I. e. the intellect.

APPENDIX B: A Selection From The Book of Grace

altar³ is prepared. The priest takes his stand and offers up a living sacrifice for the people of Christ.

1:63 For a man to exist, or not to exist, is not within his power. But for us to be righteous or sinners is within our power, and the power of the help furnished by Christ's grace. The help of the grace of Christ cleaves to the work of righteousness, but not to sin.

1:76 Although the rebellious demons are the enemies of God's creation, yet unless we voluntarily become the cause of [God's] abandonment, and they find in us material for their wickedness, they cannot harm us.

1:84 The angel who is always near us is by nothing so distressed and made indignant as when, without being constrained by some necessity, we deprive ourselves of the ministration of the Holy Mysteries and of reception of Holy Communion, which grants remission of sins. For at that hour the priest offers up the sacrifice of the Body of Him Who gives us life, and the Holy Spirit descends and consecrates the Body and Blood and grants remission to creation. The Cherubim, the Seraphim, and the angels stand with great awe, fear, and joy. They rejoice over the Holy Mysteries while experiencing inexpressible astonishment. The angel who is always by us is consoled, because he also partakes in that dread spectacle and is not deprived of that perfect intercourse. For spiritual beings gaze⁴ spiritually at this living Mystery and it causes them delight, even as the saints also gaze with a spiritual eye at the living Mystery which is being offered up.

1:94 The intellect which desires to perceive the revelations of the mysteries of God should not possess anything else besides, nor accept within itself any alien thought at all, whether good or evil.

FROM THE SECOND CENTURY

2:1 The truth of Christ has bestowed light and life upon the world. The word of Jesus transcends all who know it. Through His holy commandments the knowledge of the truth has dawned in the hearts of the faithful.

2:2 The door whereby the saints enter into the knowledge of the truth is the teaching of the holy Scriptures. Through the light of the soul's rationality they search out the mysteries which lie hidden in the Scriptures; and through profound intuitions they perceive God's tender care and governance, the wisdom of His creative acts, and the glories of the new world. Now to the degree that men increase the subtlety of their disciplines, they make progress in instruction and insight, and they explore heaven and earth and all that is

³ I. e. the heart.

⁴ Reading *hzin* for *hdin* (*rejoice*).

therein according to the intention of their minds. The majority of men are like partridges caught in the bird-cage of the world. But some of them take the place of conduits to bring life to many souls. Some of them, again, bury themselves in wilfulness, envy, and so on. Others are lamps upon the lamp-stand of the Church.⁵ But scarcely a few love the poverty and crucifixion of Jesus, neglect the wealth of education they have amassed, and choose instead the simplicity and innocence of the fishermen. In the ingenuousness of their hearts they are crowned with the crown of Christ.

2:3 O how difficult it is to amass the wealth of education! Nay, but how many times more difficult to disperse it!

2:5 Alas for the wealth of the soul! The more her knowledge is enriched by the instruction of books, the more she entangles herself in the labyrinthine ways of the subtle passions and the twistings of error, and she will not submit herself to the sweetness and the self-abasement⁶ of Jesus, which is enjoyed by those who are conscious of their infirmity and sinfulness.

2:8 One cannot eat of the tree of good and evil and, at the same time, eat of the tree of life. For the former generates the turmoil of wilfulness, awakens envy, and creates darkness. But the latter generates the tranquillity, meekness, and kindness of love, and pours out light upon the mind.

2:9 By nature, the soul is unable to carry on two meditations at once, and she is always found with one. But when a second and a third meditation press upon her at the same time, she herself is divided into many. She regards the one guilefully, with the second she converses artfully, and to the third she is oblivious. When the soul is divided against herself, she is brought to desolation, as our Lord said.⁷

2:15 The harbour of destination for the steadfast discipline of the new man (in so far as the soul can attain to this by her discipline in the present life) is limpid purity and serenity of soul, when she stands firmly in the freedom of her created nature.

2:16 Limpid purity is the harbour of the saints who have endured hardship and weariness here because of the passions and who, by divine help, have redeemed their lives, entering into the land that is free of the stumbling-blocks of wickedness, envy, wilfulness, treachery, devices, vexations, and bitterness of soul, and is filled with tranquillity, peace, love, and joy.

2:18 Limpid purity is not to be called a virtue, because it is not a path wherein the virtues of ascetic discipline are practised. It is, rather, the rest of the saints and a limpid region free of the wickedness of the passions and full of tranquillity, peace, and joy. Here,

⁵ Cf. Matt. 5:15.

⁶ Perhaps one should read here *the sweetness of the self-abasement*.

⁷ Cf. Luke 11:17.

APPENDIX B: A Selection From The Book of Grace

labours have ceased; and the saints, being accounted worthy to perceive in their intellects the spiritual knowledge of the mystery of the new world, take delight in the revelation of God's mysteries.

2:19 The perfect rest of the saints is the land of promise and the heavenly Jerusalem into which they cannot enter as long as they are clothed with this garment of flesh. But as in a mirror they are vouchsafed the sight of its glory from the broad plain of limpid purity like the great Moses.⁸ And they find rest from their hardships in the regions of peace, according to the degree that they have been deemed worthy to strip off the body and what pertains to it, while taking delight at times in awesome vision.

2:21 Even venerable elders, who from youth to old age have exhausted themselves with asceticism in the vineyard of the Son, practising excellent disciplines, are scarcely accounted worthy of partially receiving one of the gifts of the lands of peace.

2:22 But youths, with the impetuosity of their nature and with disorderly fervour, audaciously rush upon the mysteries of the Fathers hidden in their books. Or else they receive by instruction and hearsay from others that which they ought not. Then grace cuffs them and educates them to delay and not to rush headlong upon lofty things, but, on the contrary, to labour quietly in the vineyard until such a time as they attain to true rest.

2:23 If, however, they continue in their audacity, grace withdraws from them a little, and they are seized by ten thousand temptations. They are smitten by the passions of the body, the very same passions which they had formerly held in contempt, and they are tormented by dark periods of soul and abused by the demons. Violent uprisings, as well as confusion and listlessness of mind, assail them. If they do not recollect themselves and put themselves in order, they will go insane.

2:24 O how many afflictions, trials, snares, and stumbling-blocks in this, our Lord's, narrow way are arrayed against those who, with the impulses of nature, disorderly fervour, keen wits, and the accepting [of hearsay] from others, wish to enter the abode of life and partake of the honeycomb of the Spirit!⁹

2:26 A soul which has dedicated herself to Christ and whose intellect has perceived the mysteries of the Kingdom, has reclined at the spiritual table, has tasted the sublime things of God in the converse of secret prayer, has supernaturally beheld His glories, but then forgets her own nature, unbinds her mind to roam amid conceptions of created things and to creep among things visible, exchanges one table for another and one converse for another. At first grace awakens her by the summoning of the conscience. But thereafter grace begins to terrify her in the dreams of sleep, to shock her by stupifying visions, and to buffet her with injuries both internal and external. It belongs to the soul herself to choose the new life or noetic death.

⁸ *Vide* Deut. 34:1.

⁹ *Vide* Luke 24:42.

THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

2:28 The true door whereby painstaking elders have entered into the land of promise is submersion in the river Jordan by means of the streams that flow from the eyes, not from compulsion or voluntarily, but from joy which transcends nature. Besides this, a man is in need of the help of grace and the guidance of a spiritual father.

2:29 The monk who has been deemed worthy of dispassion and has perceived in a supernatural way the sublime things of God, will not fall into despair when he is defeated by natural passions; rather, he will heal his wound by repentance. The natural passions, while strengthening nature, also strengthen all our sufferings. Even the saints are in need of repentance until their last breath.

2:30 When a passion tarries in the heart, and the soul is excited by love for it, the Spirit of the Lord has not yet found rest in the soul. He knocks, but passes by. If the soul resists passion, then the sign of the love of Him tarries in her.

2:31 A man who is spiritually born by holy baptism and has been instructed in the angelic discipline ought to toil and wrestle against the passions. And he should entreat grace that he also receive birth into purity and be accounted worthy in a supernatural manner of perceiving the mysteries of the revelation of the Spirit. Thus even from now he will receive mystically through revelation the earnest of the glory of adoption, which we shall receive in very deed at the universal renewal.

2:32 A monk dwells in our Lord and our Lord dwells in a monk when his heart attains to the mansion of purity and beholds the light of dispassion.

2:33 When the light of Christ's revelation is suddenly poured forth upon the light of the mind, the mind is silenced by awe and retires to its own place.

2:34 An alien recollection or thought does not enter into the bridal chamber of an intellect which is accounted worthy of the revelation of the Spirit and is united mystically to our Lord. For otherwise it would defile the Spirit's habitation.

2:35 We obtain the Holy Spirit from baptism as an earnest for the abolition of sin and for power to wage war against the passions and Satan. When, so they say, through labours in stillness and struggle against the passions we are accounted worthy of purity of heart, the very same power of the Spirit is added unto us, so that we should be able in a supernatural way to receive the majesty of our Lord by the revelation of His ineffable glory.

2:36 This power of the Holy Spirit perfects the just and the righteous in their paths, and it perfects the saints supernaturally by grace, because of the unity of Jesus, since they are united to God the Word supernaturally.

2:37 This is the Holy Spirit Who was named the Comforter by our Lord,¹⁰ the Perfecter of the saints by His Apostle,¹¹ and the Spirit of revelations by the Fathers.

¹⁰ John 14:16.

¹¹ Cf. Heb. 12:2.

APPENDIX B: A Selection From The Book of Grace

2:38 The Fathers say that until the soul becomes perfect in the light of her nature and is accounted worthy to receive the light of the revelation of our Lord, she undergoes many variations in gloom and brightness, darkness and light, truth and error.

2:39 Just as there are many different degrees of purity in the mirrors of the hearts of the saints, so the saints likewise have many different revelations of our Lord.

2:40 Although in many and diverse manners the minds of the saints are illumined, in various divine visions full of the Spirit, in faith in God's promises, in reflection upon the glories of the new world, in the pure prayer of a collected mind, and so on, and although Christ mystically gives refreshment to them all, yet He especially works His glorious revelations through the light of dispassion when the mind, being emptied of all things and abiding in the light of its own nature, is engulfed by love and becomes one with Him.

2:42 A sun that continually rises and sets is a sign of both dispassion and negligence [in a man].

2:43 The crown of the intellects of the saints is the radiance of the orb that dawns in the firmament of their hearts.

2:44 When the air of the heart is clear, even if there be no noetic moon, the heart has consolation from the radiance of the stars. When the heart is found in the murkiness of grief, it has no consolation, but darkness and remorse fill the soul.

2:45 The mist of envy, wilfulness, and wickedness partially conceals the sun that dawns in the heart's firmament. But the cloud of anger and wrath completely eclipses it.

2:46 Peace of heart, quiet of mind, tranquillity of thoughts, and joy in God are born of each other. Although this be so, yet a man will not be vouchsafed the gifts of them all.

2:47 The mind of a monk who is dead to the world and its knowledge, and who continually ponders upon the glories of the new world, is a bright midday.

2:48 The workings of the revelations of Christ are many and diverse; they transcend speech and do not fall within limitations.

2:50 When a monk struggles, practises the labours of both body and soul, pays the debt of the passions, and is accounted worthy of purity, then his intellect is also vouchsafed to receive the spiritual discipline in a supernatural manner. This discipline is not accomplished with the labour of the body or the heart, but is the spiritual movement of grace which stirs and whispers secretly in the inner chamber of the heart and moves the soul's motions toward spiritual prayer.

2:51 The vision of the mind, the blossoming of the heart, and a collected and silent intellect are the spiritual festival of the soul and a haunt of the Holy Spirit.

2:52 If the inner sanctuary is consecrated when the motions of the soul become still, then the understanding, like a priest, whispers and offers glorification with an angelic tongue through the perceptivity of the intellect.

THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

2:53 The motions of the soul will not become still and they will not taste of the tree of life until the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is uprooted from the heart. Such is the Lord's commandment.¹²

2:54 The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is a lair for the passions, and they, in turn, are the recesses of the soul's darkness.

2:55 A mind which shines with the keenness of its thoughts, and by the same is engrossed in contemplation of created beings, will hardly ever be still. But the mind which becomes inflamed with enthusiasm and greedily desires [lofty things] destroys itself.¹³

2:56 A mind which is uplifted by severe labours and mighty struggles will scarcely gain humility before it is cuffed by grace. But a mind which boasts in its own loquacity is a domicile of the passions.

2:57 A mind which shines with faith in the promises of life sees Christ, as does the mind also which ponders upon the glories of the new world, which is liberated from distraction, and is pure and inebriated with love.

2:58 A mind which, with the performance of good works, humbly meditates upon God, is illumined in its discipline; and through grace the inner man shines like the sun.

2:59 If the soul's abasement through discerning sorrow and tears does not take precedence over the tranquil and lofty emotions that spring up from the heart's joy and astonish the inner man, and if a man's conscience does not buffet him with his former failings and his nature's tendency toward aberration, and if he is not also cuffed by grace, his nurse, and accused by his conscience that many times he committed evil unawares, and if the conscience, because of these things, does not bring his mind down from the uplifting of pride and conceit: then the wretched man will perish.

2:60 Christ hides the virtues which the saints practise from their recollection and from their minds, lest because of them they destroy themselves. For it is written that unless a miller places blinds over the eyes of the beast of burden, it will turn round, stop, and eat.

2:61 When the finger of the Lord of all approaches a discerning man, either for instruction or during peace, it causes him, if he is intelligent, to recollect himself: for instruction, when it corrects a man's stumbling; during peace, when it gives him diligence.

2:65 Although the blessed Jacob loved Rachel exceedingly, although he was patient and for seven years he laboured eagerly for her, she was not given to him before Lea. And although he persisted and worked another seven years, still, after he had received her, she did not bear him children until Lea had given birth to all her children.¹⁴ In the same manner, although a monk desires the noetic discipline and the lofty things of the saints' mode

¹² *Vide* Gen. 3:3.

¹³ I. e. because of its foolish zeal.

¹⁴ *Vide* Gen. 29:20 ff.

APPENDIX B: A Selection From The Book of Grace

of life, he will not be accounted worthy of this unless beforehand he has undergone struggle, healed his outward senses, accomplished the labour of both body and soul, and paid the debt of the passions by observing the commandments.

2:66 As hunters change their bait for birds, fish, and wild animals corresponding to their appetites at different times, so the demons likewise take material from us and, to entice us toward the passions, they change their inducements in accord with the leaning of our will, whether toward good things or evil.

2:67 Although all the demons are intent on our destruction, certain of them war against bodily disciplines, others war against noetic disciplines, and still others are like spies and they whisper allurements to those who ardently yearn for perfection.

2:69 When the paths of a monk's discipline are ungoverned, he slides from one wave to another without even being aware of it. But when he is sliding, let him look up toward his own healing, while sorrowing, repenting, and setting himself aright.

2:70 Do not seek to find tranquillity in the heart as long as the senses wander and the conscience is trampled underfoot. From the blossoms, they say, which sprout up from the heart understand your hidden things. And you may do the same from your dreams as well, if you are wise.

2:76 The glory of the saints does not belong to their nature, their joy does not belong to their will, and the crown of their intellects is the gift of God.

2:77 Glorious is the light of the sun, but not so glorious as the light of the saints. The firmament is embellished by the lustre of the stars, but not so embellished as the firmament of the hearts of the saints. Gladsome is the earth in Nisan,¹⁵ but more so the earth of the hearts of the saints.

2:78 The star of prayer which shines in the hearts of the saints is the 'peace of God that passeth all understanding.'¹⁶

2:90 Grief is a manifestation that abounds with passions and worldly knowledge. A monk who is afflicted with grief in his old age bears witness to the fact that he did not labour in the beginning of his monastic life, and that the passions have bound him with the cords of grief and surrendered him to the scourges of remorse and sorrow.

2:97 Tranquillity of soul resembles standing limpid water which has no reptiles within, nor anything without, to trouble and make turbid its limpidity, and which can serve as a mirror for the eyes by reason of its settled state. It is thus also with the soul's limpidity. If it is not made turbid by recollections and thoughts from within, and if what is heard and seen, and so on (that is, things which the senses bring in from outside), do not cause memories, then it will be like a polished mirror for the eyes of the soul, and the soul will be astonished and struck with awe at her own beauty.

¹⁵ I. e. April or springtime.

¹⁶ Phil. 4:7.

THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

2:100 In the divine vision of the Holy Trinity there are no ascents and descents, nor the distraction of transition [from one thing to another]. This divine vision is a strong cord which binds those who are worthy of it in awestruck wonder at the Holy Trinity.

FROM THE THIRD CENTURY

3:3 When a man's hope is made firm by his faith in Christ, and His promises hold sway in his soul, then the soul is set aflame with divine love, straightway the inner doors of the heart are unlocked, and suddenly the light of joy and consolation flashes forth.

3:4 To the degree that a man is aflame with the love of Christ, waits earnestly in His hope, is comforted by His promises, and ponders upon the same, to that degree also he is crowned in his discipline, and his mind shines spiritually.

3:12 O man who truly repents, do not abandon the beginning and middle stages of repentance and suddenly grasp at the stage of perfection, and say, 'God is merciful, and if He wishes, His mercies will, by grace, bestow a spiritual gift on me, even as the gift of His grace was bestowed on many in all generations.' You ignorantly think such things, for signs and miracles, the operations of grace, are not for the faithful, but for unbelievers.¹⁷

3:21 The light of the mind, whereof the Fathers have spoken, is the light of humility and meekness which our Lord showed in Himself.

3:24 As the light of the mind is more glorious than the light of the sun for the man who has been accounted worthy of it, so the blossoming that springs up from a pure heart rich in things divine is superior to whatever material we may receive from others without our own labour.

3:26 Rationality is of no profit to us if freedom is removed from it. Likewise, freedom is of no profit to us if rationality is removed from it. True rationality is when the stability of reason has authority over the free will, and the deeds of its freedom are commended both by its own good conscience and by others.

3:31 Blessed is the soul which tastes within herself the honey of the heart's blossoming when she is entirely still!

3:33 A well-spring of light is a heart that is at peace with all men and with itself.

3:34 A new sun dawns in the heart of a guileless soul which rejoices over the good qualities of all men alike.

3:35 A solitary guards his intellect. Many suppose that he is idle from all work, but there is no one who labours more than he.

¹⁷ Cf. 1 Cor. 14:22.

APPENDIX B: A Selection From The Book of Grace

3:36 Only in the stillness of the intellect does every activity cease, for [herein] a man's mind is swallowed up in the love of God in a way transcending nature. Then God dwells among men, that is, in the hidden realm of a man's intellect.

3:46 A solitary cannot acquire freedom of soul and broadness of heart without seclusion from men. Nor can the heart be accounted worthy of the spiritual blossoming of grace until the fountain of the intellect ceases from pouring forth everything which it knows.

3:55 The life of the cross is hidden in deadness to all things. You will be unable to ascend the voluntary cross as long as you are attached to anything. Drive away and cast out of your heart the considerations of the knowledge of good and evil; then Christ, the Tree of life, will enter and dwell in you. Then you will supernaturally perceive the glorious things of the mystery of the new world.

3:56 A monk who does not gaze into his heart when he prays beats the air, and he does not shine during prayer.

3:57 A monk who with the eyes of his intellect gazes intently into his heart while praying will quickly be deemed worthy of mercy.

3:58 A monk who yokes his tongue to his mind will sing psalms in the Spirit.

3:59 Even by the subjection of the senses the body is humbled and the heart is enlightened. Still, the fruit of the heart is more glorious than the fruit of the tongue, for the lips speak from the abundance of the heart.¹⁸

3:78 If a soul, by employing justice, separates good men from evil, and righteous men from sinners, her knowledge also separates her from God without her perceiving it.

3:79 The monk who leads his life with the employment of justice and compares his bad points with his good points, who is acclaimed to be a man clothed with Christ, and expects reward for his good deeds, has not yet perceived his own weakness, nor the grace of Christ which is poured out freely upon sinners as well as the righteous.

FROM THE FOURTH CENTURY

4:2 The beginning of steadfast ascetical discipline is deadness to all intercourse with persons in one's desire for things divine, for these generate love and fervour for true ascetical discipline.

4:3 Fervour of soul is born of constant reading about ascetical discipline conjoined with the frequent labour of prayer.

¹⁸ Cf. Matt. 12:34.

THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

4:5 Concentration of mind is born of the intellect's spiritual rumination. Freedom from distraction is born of concentration of mind. And of these is born the prayer of the intellect's secret converse.

4:7 From now, by reason of the simplicity of the soul's faith and the force of living hope, we may receive, by grace and supernaturally, the earnest of freedom and the conscience's boldness, with the confidence of sons, in prayer filled with divine love.

4:8 Prayer filled with divine love is the stillness of a divine mind which is wholly immersed in God and secretly stirs and stammers in noetic awareness.

4:9 Even though the stage of divine love is higher than prayer, still, without prayers, supplications, and mournful, protracted shedding of tears, together with vigil and the other labours of asceticism, divine love cannot be achieved.

4:14 Who will dare to speak of the blossoming of tranquillity which suddenly burgeons from within the heart, spills out upon the soul, and spreads over the members of the body, as the soul's motions and the senses are quelled in an unaccustomed manner, and the thoughts are stupified and stopped from all activity?

4:16 Who can ponder upon the blossoming of spiritual joy which springs from the heart while the motions of the soul dance with uncommon gladness and cheer?

4:17 Who has tasted the sweetness of divine love which stirs in the heart and sweetens the soul's palate, while the soul is so inebriated by the fervour of divine longing that she forgets herself?

4:19 Who can tell of the spiritual ascents which take place in the heart¹⁹ when, in the discipline of stillness, the intellect becomes inebriated with the impulses of fervour?

4:20 Or who can express the light of divine vision which dawns in the heart from reading the Scriptures and from the meditation of earnest and poignant prayer?

4:21 Who can perceive by grace that piercing contrition which suddenly bursts forth from the heart and ascends to the head, gripping the eyes and the nose, causing joyful tears to flow, while warmth gently steals over all the members due to the sweetness that stirs²⁰ in the heart, while the passions are effaced, and while both motions and thoughts are silenced by awe?

4:26 Who is the man that is visited by grace as he chants the psalms and prays, and suddenly becomes, as it were, a different person, while his tongue is silenced, the motions of his soul are stilled and quieted, and he is bound²¹ by the working of grace?

4:50 The blessed Moses, the disciple of Saint John, the elder of Mount Matout, related the following: 'One day in a cave of the mountain I saw a brother who was sleeping, but although I called out many times to him, he gave me no answer. Then I made this known

¹⁹ Cf. Ps. 83:5.

²⁰ Reading *nps̄* for *nsp̄*.

²¹ Reading *pkr* for *kpr*.

APPENDIX B: A Selection From The Book of Grace

to the elder, and he advised me, "Take him a loaf of bread and some water and put them down without speaking to him." This I did for six days, and on the seventh he came to the elder and laid bare his thoughts to him. When the elder set him at rest and dismissed him, I besought the elder to tell me his affair. He said, "He found a little repose from the hands of the thieves²² within him, and so he forgot about bread and water and withdrew into stillness to rest a little."

4:55 Through the desire of his eyes Adam departed from his inheritance and through the desire of love for the Cross of Jesus men return to their spiritual inheritance.

4:58 If a man is unaccustomed to diving under the water, he suffers cramps and comes up to breathe in air. In the same manner, if a pure man is unpractised when, by means of grace, he dives away from the world and supernaturally enters into the noetic mysteries of the Spirit, he will suffer cramps and become swollen;²³ he will sink downward, will be reduced to silence, and will return to the realm of his sojourn.²⁴

4:59 When unaccustomed peace and tranquillity suddenly dominate all the motions of your soul and all your members, and your soul dances with joy, and all reflections and thoughts cease within you, then know that at this very hour you have been deemed worthy of the operation of grace.

4:60 When, without any [outward] cause, despondency and depression overpower your soul, causing her to become confused and to feel strangled, and you are tortured with mental anguish, then know that you yourself are the cause of this. Grace has handed you over to these scourges for your benefit, that you may become wise in the path of the angelic discipline, which is traversed in such a manner. If you persevere without complaint, with confession and thanksgiving to God and interior cheerfulness, expect to receive the operation of grace.

4:62 The mind of a monk is unable to converse mystically with the One in prayer as long as it has within it some other deliberation or thought or a foreign reflection, nay, until it is even led away from the inheritance of the saints and becomes one with the One in an entirely simple manner.

4:63 In the mystery of prayer one cannot converse supernaturally with the Creator and with His creation at the same time. When the intellect wishes to go mystically before the One, it must refrain from alien [thoughts]. But if it becomes bold, the merciful answer will be given it as it was given to the great Moses, 'Dismiss all thy people and come up alone to Me.'²⁵ For this hidden mystery, which is uttered mystically and supernaturally by the Spirit, is experienced through the operation of grace. 'I have a secret, I have a secret, I have a secret,'²⁶ as also do the sons of My house.

²² I.e. the passions.

²³ Or *be puffed up [with pride]*.

²⁴ I.e. this world.

²⁵ Cf. Exod. 24:2; 34:2-3.

²⁶ Isa. 24:16 (Peshitta).

THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

4:64 Many times the mind wearies itself in its quest for divine vision and it does not find it. And as soon as a man stands up for prayer, the recollection of finding divine vision and whether the mind will discover it, stirs in the mind, and it thus loses the fruit of prayer. If the mind is not illumined by divine vision, it is grieved, distressed, and is deprived of the converse of prayer. Therefore it is evident that at the time of spiritual prayer the mind must not be double, but one and single (being simple, peaceful, and still), so as to receive the mystery of grace by God's mercy. But if there be with the mind any alien thing, it will not be accounted worthy of this, as it was formerly.

4:71 The sign, they say, of the blossoming of the intellect's spiritual prayer that comes to pass through grace is this: with every breath, noetically sweet recollection of God is imprinted in the heart and prayer sings with a spiritual tongue and joyously²⁷ cries out 'Holy', while the thoughts and the mind are silent without interruption.

4:75 The monk who in the period of servitude and the toil of work chooses for himself the rest and the freedom of the sons,²⁸ will, in the time of true rest, justly mourn, starve, and be afflicted by remorse.

4:78 The man who does not acknowledge the resurrection of the body will not acknowledge [the value of] bodily labours. And the man who does not acknowledge the renewal which the soul will receive will not acknowledge the noetic discipline. But the man who acknowledges the renewal which both alike will receive, labours in making gradual progress.

4:79 Many men toil without a goal in many different ways. But the fruits of the truth germinate from the goal and not from labours.

4:96 The majority of the Fathers say that the souls of the righteous are found in the abodes [of Heaven]. Others of them say that, as it were in sleep, they sweetly repose in their abodes, having no activity.

4:97 The souls of Christ's saints, which are accounted worthy to receive, by the renewal of their minds, the revelation of the Holy Spirit in a manner surpassing the nature of the body, receive in their intellects, by an ineffable perception, an earnest of how much they will have perception [yonder], and how they will be found, whether awake or resting, in their abodes until the universal renewal.

4:98 From morning until evening a man diligently toils and cultivates the virtues,²⁹ but at the time when he is becoming immersed in sleep he should especially strive to throw the choice aromatic incense of beautiful rumination into the censer of his heart, so that throughout the night this should smoke fragrantly in his heart and he be freed of the disgraceful dreams and spectacles of the night.

4:99 But the righteous, even though they labour from youth to old age in the disciplines

²⁷ Reading *b-hadutha* for *b-hudatha*.

²⁹ Cf. Ps. 103:23.

²⁸ I. e. of the Kingdom.

APPENDIX B: A Selection From The Book of Grace

of virtue, toil especially as they approach the time when they will be immersed in the sleep of death, so that the incense of the virtues and the love of God will smoke fragrantly in their souls until they are awakened for the universal renewal.

FROM THE FIFTH CENTURY

5:1 God is able to do all that He wills, but the initiate of the truth wills to do all that he is able.

5:2 Our nature does not have the power to attain to all that our mind wishes to know; but our mind has the power to understand all that our nature can attain to.

5:4 A soul that is grieved by the occurrences which nature brings upon her lacks inward consolation.

5:12 Release from all is bondage to the One. A man cannot be bound to the One unless his mind is released from all.

5:17 A man cannot draw nigh the Lord's commandments through the discipline of the justice of the Law. In the latter there is 'an eye for an eye' and 'a stripe for a stripe',³⁰ and so forth. But the grace of Christ commands, 'Overcome evil with good',³¹ that is, 'Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also',³² and 'If any man take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.'³³

5:18 The mind is unable to contain at the same time the opposition of justice and grace, for justice begets zeal³⁴ and excites anger, whereas grace pours out peace, love, and mercifulness upon the mind.

5:20 A monk who cuts off the heads of the first blossoms of the thoughts is a distinguished athlete, and he will easily be deemed worthy of purity and liberation from mental wandering.

5:23 The correct aim of noetic discipline, when directed to the love of instruction, causes a man to be engulfed in reading the Scriptures, to be enlightened by reflection upon their meanings, and to taste the sweetness of the divine mysteries concealed in Scripture. Then there is nothing which hinders the soul from becoming inebriated with divine love, if by ascetical discipline she cuts away the passions and is not overcome by their pleasure.

5:24 A monk whose aim is correct and whose mind cleaves to a single rumination, who

³⁰ Exod. 21:24, 25.

³³ Cf. Matt. 5:40.

³¹ Rom. 12:21.

³² Matt. 5:39.

³⁴ I.e. indignation at the misdeeds of other men.

THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

cuts off from himself all concern and every thought that is not directed toward his one rumination, and who unceasingly ponders, converses, trains, and exercises himself in it over a long period of time, will find it so imprinted (like the image on a coin) in his heart through [the action of] grace and habit, that even in his dreams he will converse with it, and his mind will reflect on it involuntarily.

5:38 The new world is noetic light, and every man according to the material he has prepared here receives noetic light there. Suddenly the lamp of a man's soul will blaze and shine forth according to the degree of his discipline.

5:39 For every one of us carries within himself the light and the darkness of the world to come. From within us will blaze forth the light of joy and the darkness of grief and remorse; we shall not receive these things from some other quarter.

5:58 True purity of heart is perfect, indiscriminating, and undeficient love for the entire race of man equally.³⁵ But this cannot exist without the keeping of the commandments, victory over the passions, the light of dispassion, and grace.

5:66 Righteousness is the fruit of good works that are wrought even before the rising of the great Sun of righteousness.³⁶ Holiness is the fruit of the Holy Spirit Who sanctifies the soul at the completion of the course of her struggle, crowns her with the crown of the glory to come, and gives her spiritual vision in a manner that transcends nature.

5:67 When you think that, by the voluntary and special labours of the sons of your inner church (that is, by the beautiful deeds of the virtues), the inner temple of your soul is adorned and completed, and you wish to know whether they are pleasing, and whether the gate of the inner holy of holies is opened, and the inner altar of oblation is consecrated, and grace has overshadowed it, and whether the intellect is permitted to enter within and mystically to celebrate the holy rites and to offer continually the incense of prayer: such things you may understand from the diversity of the fragrant perfumes of peace, love, and spiritual joy which constantly exhale within you through a recollection and unceasing rumination which is stamped with the love of God, and also from the joy and consolation that secretly stir in your soul without your causing them.

5:70 It were not right that our heart should be in need of writings,³⁷ but for the fact that our freedom destroyed the consolation of the heart's understanding of the truth. We should have been so watchful over our discipline that we would not have lost the truth of the understanding of that which was written upon our heart by the Spirit of God and about which our conscience bore witness to us, like the word of Scripture [does now].

5:71 As long as our nature possessed a pure heart, God had no need to speak to us

³⁵ Cf. p. 177.

³⁶ Cf. 2 Pet. 1:19.

³⁷ Or *scriptures*.

APPENDIX B: A Selection From The Book of Grace

through the composition of writings, but He spoke to us as He did to Noe, Abraham, Job, and Moses, without the intermediary of a book.³⁸

5:72 But because our nature fell into an abyss of evils, God spoke with us through writings on tablets of stone, a sign of the hardness of our hearts.

5:73 Now our Lord Jesus Christ did not commit the mystery of His teaching to the holy apostles by means of writings, but instead of writings He gave them the promise of the Holy Spirit when He said, 'He shall bring to your remembrance all things ye need and require regarding the truth.'³⁹

5:74 In the same way He wrote through the prophets, for 'He put His laws into their minds and He wrote them upon their hearts',⁴⁰ so that they should all be 'taught of God'.⁴¹

5:75 If we now set aright our disgraceful lives with the aid of writings on account of the rationality that our nature received from the beginning, how much shall we turn aside from God if we show contempt for the natural book of the heart, the book written by Moses and the prophets, and the light of our Saviour's Gospel of life! Hence we shall bring capital punishment upon ourselves if we gain no help from the hidden book, or from the visible one, or from the Gospel of the life-giving commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ.

5:76 Not even the man who toils and exerts himself in prayer, reading, divine vision, and insight, will make progress in the truth and gain an illumined intellect, unless he aims the intention of his mind toward the strength of what is written by the Spirit in the book of his heart.

5:77 The veil of the passions that overlays our heart prevents us from truly beholding that which is written on our heart by the Spirit. When we pray, read, and sing praises, we float over the surface of our heart without truly perceiving what lies within. But if we raise the veil of the passions by observing the commandments, then with the eye of the spirit we shall see the truth that is imprinted in our heart.

5:85 A sound in the air is shaped by the soul's power of speech, is depicted upon tablets with ink, and then becomes visible to the eyes of the flesh. Likewise the intellect, which is alive through grace, noetically depicts and engraves with the pen of spiritual meditation the simple words of spiritual prayer upon the tablets of the book of the heart. Then the intellect reads them whenever the mind wanders, or the lyre is asleep,⁴² or weakens, or when the light of dispassion dawns and the great Sun of righteousness shines His splendour upon it.⁴³

5:91 Darkness is abolished by light, and light is covered over by dense darkness. Like-

³⁸ Or *scripture*.

⁴⁰ Cf. Heb. 8:10; Jer. 38 (31):33.

⁴² I. e. prayer ceases.

³⁹ Cf. John 14:26; 16:13.

⁴¹ Isa. 54:13.

⁴³ Cf. Mal. 4:2.

THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

wise the simple knowledge of the truth is clouded over and becomes dark from abundant knowledge of methods.

5:94 Let us, then, gain Christ our Life within our hidden, inner man through love which becomes fervent by the keeping of the commandments. And when we gain Him and mystically unite with Him, all that He has will be ours, whether as we now live, or as we live in the age to come. For it would be absurd for us to gain the lofty things of God and His gifts rather than God Himself.

5:95 We gain God when we abandon all, even the Kingdom of Heaven, for His love, like the blessed Apostle.⁴⁴ Let our rumination, our hope, and our expectation be fastened to a heart that during the converse of prayer is secretly and manifestly fired with the love of Jesus Christ, the Mediator of our blessings. Then, in proportion to our earnest desire, He will shine upon us and give us rest as He Himself knows.

5:96 The monk who purifies and adorns himself with the beauties of the virtues as a bride adorns herself with finery, who receives Christ within himself and surrenders to Him his will and everything he has, having no concern for the good and evil things which befall us, will be nourished from Christ's table with the food of angels. Blessed is the soul which is deemed worthy of this!

FROM THE SIXTH CENTURY

6:4 Spiritual love burns (and is made to burn) in the soul through mercifulness, gentleness, cheerfulness, and kindness shown indiscriminately toward good and evil men alike.

6:5 Hope is made steadfast and becomes firmly established in a man through earnest desire and expectation of the good things which he looks for [in the world to come].

6:6 Faith shines and casts its light in the soul through hope in the Spirit's promises concerning the things which will be revealed in us.

6:8 Although the new peace of the soul, tranquillity, love, and meekness (which come from grace) are acquired through voluntary labours, yet when they are accomplished through the Holy Spirit, they do not belong to nature or to the will, nor is their genuineness subject to nature or the will, nor can their genuineness be experienced without grace.

6:9 Blessed is a man if, as he chants the psalms and as he prays, the eyes of his intellect are opened wide by the light of dispassion, and he noetically gazes at the words of prayer which are written down by the pen of the Spirit upon the mirror of his heart! Due to

⁴⁴ *Vide Rom. 9:3.*

APPENDIX B: A Selection From The Book of Grace

these words he will offer up praise to Him Who bestows on him the gift, making him a seer of the soul.

6:12 The sea is said to be calm when all the winds which whip up waves are still. And the mind is perceived to be calm when deliberations and recollections cease from searching out every idea.

6:18 There is no prudent man who will voluntarily be persuaded to board a ship and launch it into the great and spacious sea, there to be buffeted and dashed all the days of his life by violent ocean waves, without possessing hope of reaching a calm haven or a peaceful refuge. Likewise, there is no man who repents with discretion who will launch the ship of his soul into the great sea of repentance without possessing strong hope of reaching the peaceful haven and calm refuge of God's mercy.

6:29 There are two schools within us. One is found in the exercise of unspiritual knowledge and is knowledge of good and evil. The other is found in the exercise of true knowledge and is knowledge of the life and light of grace. In the school of investigation, the knowledge of justice concerning good and evil is cultivated. Now the knowledge of justice gives birth to zeal, confusion, wilfulness, envy, anger, contentiousness, and the rest of the passions. In the school of grace, however, there is cultivated love, peace, meekness, humility, patience, together with the rest of the fruits of the Spirit enumerated by Paul.⁴⁵ See, then, what the school of good and evil teaches and understand from whom it originates.

6:32 The majority of men finish their days in the school of justice, passing judgements upon the deeds of all men. They compare the good and evil lives of others, employing justice, without even being aware that there exists another teaching, that is, the school of grace, compassion, and mercy, which our Lord revealed in His Gospel. Few are able to escape, even with difficulty, from the school of justice, and to enter into the school of grace and compassion. But should they escape, they immediately encounter abundant love, tranquillity, peace, and mercifulness toward good and evil men equally, and they are astonished at the greatness of God's gift.

6:33 The simple rationality of the soul is noetic light which God gives by His grace to the nature of angels and [human] souls.

6:35 The stirring of the simple, inner word which is not compounded with sound, is a noetic power implanted in the soul and continually active. This word resembles simple, unwrought, and unembellished matter. It is, however, adorned by the light of rationality, and is actualized through the intermediary of sounds and the senses.

6:39 If the outward senses are farmers which plant seeds in the field of the heart, it is

⁴⁵ *Vide* Gal. 5:22.

THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

evident that they sow the heart with the material of the seed which they find close at hand, be it tares⁴⁶ or sins. Now that which a man sows, he also reaps.⁴⁷

6:48 When the passions are uprooted by the doing of the commandments, when the gloom of the darkness of delusion is dispelled by labours and there is no shadow of passion over the soul, and when by grace [human] nature stands in the natural glory of its created state, then a man sees with the light of dispassion, discerns the truth from similitudes and error, and without confusion puts thoughts, words, and deeds into action.

6:53 As long as we have within us a passion to which the soul is voluntarily bound by her love of it, the Spirit of God's glorious revelations will not act in us. But if sometimes He should act, this action is only for the encouragement and consolation of simple-hearted persons.

6:59 The life of a monk and the expectation of his hope is to strip himself of this visible world, to efface the memory of its portrayals from his heart, and to depict the new world in his intellect, as he engraves therein its memory and ponders upon it unceasingly.

6:68 Fathers do not reveal to their sons the secret location of their treasures as long as enemies are hiding in their sons' houses. And the Holy Spirit does not reveal the secret of the Kingdom of God within us as long as the soul is voluntarily bound to the passions.

6:79 Just as every virtue shines in its own place, so the saints mystically taste the truth and the love of God in the realm of the Spirit.

6:84 As long as recollections stir up thoughts, and thoughts disturb the mind, and the mind, by reason of its division, confuses the intellect, discernment, and understanding, do not expect to take possession of peace in the land of your heart.

6:86 When you pray, look into yourself to see whether your land is void of passions, that God might place in you the things which you ask of Him. Otherwise, He will compassionately answer you, 'Empty yourself of your inner things, that I may place in you My own things for which you ask.'

6:90 Pure divine vision during the time of prayer resembles a spiritual sacrifice placed with the paten of the intellect upon the altar of the heart, and it gazes into the heart without seeing anything else.

6:93 When the sun dawns, it quickly disperses all the darkness of the night without employing artificial light. Likewise, when the light of Christ dawns within us, the soul has no need of knowing methods.

6:95 At the time of the Spirit's overshadowing when the inner gate of the holy of holies is guarded by grace, and stillness, silence, and stupefaction reigns over the throng within, do not be so bold as to raise up within yourself any request or reflection, like an ignorant

⁴⁶ I. e. the passions.

⁴⁷ Cf. Gal. 6:7.

APPENDIX B: A Selection From The Book of Grace

fellow, lest you repent of it later, but conceal yourself, as it were in sleep, from every activity.

6:97 Do not be astonished if, when you are unoccupied, grace overshadows you and you are found in great peace. This good is not your doing, but belongs to the mercy of God which freely urges and draws us sinners to life.

6:98 When the souls of the saints depart from under the veil of the passions and are renewed by the Spirit, at the time of prayer they are deemed worthy of secret boldness before their Father, and the stamp and material [of this world] is dispersed from before their vision.

FROM THE SEVENTH CENTURY

7:1 The noetic renewal of the saints is the crown of the intellect and the understanding which have communion with God through the revelation of His glorious mysteries, but the universal renewal is the general resurrection of all.

7:2 When mothers completely cease from bearing children, 'The last enemy shall be destroyed, which is death',⁴⁸ and straightway the beauty of the resurrection will radiantly shine forth. The sign of the Lord's Cross will be seen,⁴⁹ Christ will shine resplendently in the great glory of His angels,⁵⁰ the veil of delusion will be stripped off from all, and the resurrection will reign, as it is written. At a signal all created things will be changed⁵¹ and will receive renewal.

7:3 Suddenly justice conjoined with mercy will be revealed. Transgressors and demons will be clothed with shame, darkness, and remorse. The garment of their deeds will come forth from within them; but the righteous will be arrayed in their own raiment of glory. Grace will be poured forth, the firmament will shine brilliantly, and angels, men, and demons will stand in profound awe. The righteous will be raised up on wings of light to meet our Lord.⁵² The Bridegroom will enter into the spiritual bridal chamber,⁵³ making ready for His guests. And with Him will enter in the sons of light, the invited guests, those who by the faithfulness of their works awaited the marriage feast. Then immediately the door of the bridal chamber will be shut⁵⁴ and the evil will remain below in the lot which they have purchased by their fraudulent deeds.

7:4 Great consternation at their own state will suddenly fall upon those who remain

⁴⁸ 1 Cor. 15:26.

⁴⁹ Cf. Matt. 24:30.

⁵⁰ Cf. Matt. 16:27.

⁵¹ Cf. 1 Cor. 15:52.

⁵² Cf. 1 Thess. 4:17.

⁵³ Cf. Matt. 25:10.

⁵⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

below, when they see the righteous being raised up in light to meet our Lord, and that from within themselves a roaring flame of darkness, torment, and mournful regret issues forth, consuming their lives. Thus will they be punished by the justice of God's mercy, and the whole of their existence yonder will be lamentation and gnashing of teeth.

7:5 Then the Son of God, Christ, to Whom all things are submitted, will bring forth the crown of victory in praise of Him Who submitted all things to Him, and God will be all in all, as it is written.⁵⁵

7:6 The heavenly Bridegroom will recline at the head of His invited guests, crowning them with twofold glory. He will cause His guests to recline, they being adorned forever with the glory of their disciplines, and will pour forth on them the gift of His grace. He will crown them with a crown of light and the effulgence of His divinity. He will cover them with the glory of His eternal Kingdom and illumine them with light as they rejoice in the joy of being with Christ in unending happiness and delight.

7:7 Awestruck wonder will fall upon all nature at the great change which, in the twinkling of an eye, will come to pass. The nature of men will receive perfect, undeficient, unwaning renewal. By the general resurrection they will be awakened as though from sleep, the righteous shining like the sun,⁵⁶ the moon, and noetic stars.

7:8 As here there is no knowledge of the new world or language [that can speak of it], so yonder the language of this world will be no more, but stillness and deep silence will reign over all in awe and ineffable glory. For those who have awaited the Bridegroom Christ throughout all generations will be inebriated by His love.

7:11 The act of God's giving men the gift of eternal life will be continuous. If His gift were held back, the everlastingness of their lives would cease. Therefore His gift will not be withdrawn, and their life will not diminish, since they will not be ones who labour, but ones who are spiritual.

7:13 Let us not run after many diverse things whose mystical meaning is hidden and concealed, and let us not slip away from the truth, but let our Faith suffice for the truth. The true knowledge concerning the mystery of the Holy Trinity is known in beginninglessness, begottenness, and procession. The Trinity becomes plain to the naked intellect when in word and spirit we become fully convinced of⁵⁷ the paltriness and feebleness of our nature. As long as we accept the truths of the holy Church about that which has no likeness, then, being gloriously raised on high, we shall attain to true knowledge of the reality.⁵⁸

7:14 Likewise, the glorious mysteries of the spiritual world cannot be expressed by the tongue's fabrications, and they cannot be depicted in a carnal intellect. It is impossible

⁵⁵ Cf. 1 Cor. 15:23.

⁵⁶ Cf. Matt. 13:43.

⁵⁷ Or *we affirm*.

⁵⁸ Lit. *the prototype*.

APPENDIX B: A Selection From The Book of Grace

for a representation of the simple Spirit to be revealed to an intellect which has become complex through complex methods.

7:15 Only through the light of faith can the soul receive what knowledge about these mysteries she has received from the holy Scriptures. For not even the Scriptures are able to transmit to us knowledge that we do not accept concerning these mysteries; and without [the light of faith] they will remain alien to our knowledge.

7:16 By taking material from precious things which we esteem to be glorious and desirable, the Scriptures stimulate our childish disposition. And by taking material from things which alarm and terrify us, the Scriptures terrify the grossness of our thinking.

7:17 When the noetic sun of meekness and humility dawns in the heart and the darkness of the delusion of conceit is dispelled, the soul will never again be in need of the methods of knowledge so as to seek out the truth by their intermediary.

7:18 The silence of the intellect emanates from the operation of grace. This does not greatly differ from the sweetness of sleep, when the soul is not deprived of consciousness that operates unconsciously.⁵⁹

7:20 O man, you who are diligent to preserve the peace of your heart, do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of the good and evil of those who journey with you. Do not investigate the inner nature of their deeds, and you will not lose your heart's peace. But if you begin to scrutinize the deeds of your neighbour, do not murmur when you find yourself agitated.

7:23 If a monk desires to see our Lord within himself through the Spirit, as He promised in His Gospel,⁶⁰ but his will inclines to accept in place of this vision the spectacle, the depiction, and the figment of phantasy, he will not be deemed worthy of entering the spiritual bridal chamber which is within.

7:27 Each day a monk is like a man who gives food and drink to his body and cares for his health. For he goes into his inner man, gives it to drink and cares for its health. Through continual prayers he presents it to Jesus, the Physician of our souls. And every night before sleeping he brings it into the tribunal, reckons up its account, repays what is owed, and asks for mercy and repentance.

7:30 The monk who is rich in prayer is rich in boldness before God. The more frequent and assiduous the labours of prayer, the more grace is poured out and the mind becomes luminous.

7:33 The mind is transformed and renewed during prayer by mourning or by joy. Prayers and sighs well up in accord with discipline, reading, the revolving of thoughts, rumination, and occurrences.

⁵⁹ Or, more literally, *of knowledge that operates unknowingly.*

⁶⁰ *Vide* John 14:17-20.

THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

7:36 If a ship, though it be laden with gold and precious stones, loses its way in the abyss of the great and spacious sea, and has no hope of attaining a calm harbour, it will bring no profit. Likewise, if a soul, though laden with education, knowledge, keen wits, profound opinions, and fountains of insight, should have no hope of attaining purity, limpidity, gentleness, peace, goodness, and gladness, she will have no profit.

7:37 A man will never receive the revelation of the truth and taste the sweetness of God from the instruction of words, spoken or written, unless his spirit partakes of the Spirit of Jesus and, through the Spirit's operation, his soul acquires His meekness, humility, forbearance of the infirmities of others, and overcomes evil with good.

7:38 When the well-spring of the heart is cleansed of the filth of the passions, and when peace and light reign, the heart does not growl at the recollection of the failings of persons afar off, nor does it become excited by wrath and zeal during encounters with sinners. Rather, in both recollection and encounters with good and evil men, a man's mind is gentle and kind, and he is filled with love, much tranquillity and graciousness, like Jesus the Saviour of all, Who did not grow weary of our failings, nor turn away in disgust from our running sores.

7:39 When by grace the intellect is deemed worthy to graze in the meadow of the Scriptures, created beings, God's tender care, the wisdom of His creation, and the many acts of His providence, then it is so swallowed up by the sweetness of these things that it does not perceive either the good or evil lives of a man's companions on his journey.

7:40 When the intellect is accounted worthy to enter the plain of limpid purity, it grazes in those lands of peace, where there are no cliffs or high places, because envy, wrath, wilfulness, malice, and hypocrisy have been utterly cast down. If we encounter incidents, the intellect accepts them as rightfully belonging to it without being disturbed by them.⁶¹

7:42 If you have found the truth within yourself, do not allow yourself to be disturbed by the great diversity of methods employed for virtue. When the air of the firmament of a man's heart is radiant, tranquil, and still, he will know how he has passed from death into life.

7:44 The monk whose recollection is immersed in Christ, whose mind is immersed in light, truth, and life, will not see anything else.

7:46 O man who takes pains to calm the motions of your soul and to cleanse the mirror of your heart from the dust of the passions: while you concern yourself with your interior affairs, also block up the windows of your external senses which import filth and make turbid your soul's limpid purity.

7:49 As long as the winnowing-fan of the tongue has power over your heart's treasures,

⁶¹ *Lit. without undergoing examination by them.*

APPENDIX B: A Selection From The Book of Grace

such that it can embarrass you and put your soul to shame, keep your spiritual riches gathered up within yourself.

7:54 When at first a seed of the passions or the virtues falls into the field of the heart, it is much smaller and meaner than a seed which falls into a field of earth. It dies and perishes, or grows, becomes strong, and produces fruit in accord with the farmer who tends it, either causing it to grow or to wither.

7:58 Woe to the man who is not fervent in his discipline, as were the blessed apostles, whom men reviled in that they were accounted worthy of the new wine and became drunk.⁶² But blessed and twice blessed is the man who after the first fervour is accounted worthy of a second fervour, who receives peace and tranquillity, and who produces the fruits enumerated by the blessed Paul!⁶³

7:59 Just as it is useless for a man to be rich in bodily labours when his mind is blind to any comprehension of the word of light,⁶⁴ so, in the same manner, a man will never prosper whose mind hovers around the thoughts of the intellect's phantasy and incorporeal ideas⁶⁵ and who is devoid of the works of repentance. Therefore our Lord commanded equally to 'Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's.'⁶⁶

7:60 O discerning monk, who captures the words of prayer and sets them free again to fly into the air, gaze within yourself, and with insight comprehend the sayings [of Scripture] composed by the Spirit. Marvel at the strength of their interior composition and not at the sweetness of your melodies.

7:61 O monk, who fashions the words of prayer from wandering thoughts concerning the natures and things of creation, collect your thought from its wandering by reading and progress in spiritual matters. Inscribe the words of your prayer in the book of your heart where Christ, the true Light, dwells.

7:64 The monk who gazes into his heart and imprints the words of his prayer upon its tablet will be freed from distraction and accounted worthy of the illumination of the mind and awesome vision.

7:65 By rubbing wood against wood fire is kindled, and by the prayerful words of rumination within the heart the fire of love is ignited. Through ardent yearning for Christ it bursts into flame.

7:66 It is easier to quell the wild desire of fornication than it is to quell the blazing fire of desire for divine things. A man is reviled and does not know it, glorified and does not perceive it, hungers and thirsts and thinks nothing of it.

7:67 When we are found in the region of limpid purity, the passions do not dare to assail

⁶² *Vide* Acts 2:13.

⁶³ *Vide* Gal. 5:22.

⁶⁴ I.e. Scripture.

⁶⁵ Or *illusions, imaginations*.

⁶⁶ Matt. 22:21.

us by force, nor even to employ their devices, unless we voluntarily consent with them. In just the same way, when we are found in the region of the passions, it is not right to attempt by force to enter the region of limpid purity unless we have thrust away from ourselves the pleasure of the passions and have applied ourselves to tearful prayer.

7:73 O man whose conscience is polluted and wavering, and yet you are filled with zeal and demand that justice be exacted from others: when your brethren seem to you to be doing wrong, do not immediately become upset and disturbed, do not castigate them because of your foolish zeal. Rather, look within yourself and understand that the mirror of your conscience is befouled with the unseemly filth of envy and malice, and that your intellect has begun to see pure things as unclean. Understand that the bad things which you see in others are a shadow of the impure images that are imprinted inwardly on the mirror of your heart, and they become outwardly manifest as imposed on the good actions of your brethren. Thus pure things seem to you to be impure. Do not find fault with exterior things, but interior, that is, with your unstable and polluted conscience.

7:74 It often occurs that due to conceit, or from hearsay, and so on, a man becomes inflamed with a godly zeal, yet 'not according to knowledge', as the blessed Paul wrote;⁶⁷ thus he falls into trials. If a man cannot see his neighbour as he is except by his neighbour's own hidden eye, which thing is impossible to do, then it is evident that every man sees his neighbour as he is himself and not as his neighbour really is. When you see the failings of others, enter within yourself and trace out your own failings. Understand with discretion that if the cause is not this, but due to something else, you will never be liberated and find peace. When certain men see likenesses of flies before their eyes, physicians do not consider the eyes to be unhealthy, but rather the stomach, which lies within. Therefore by a purging draught given interiorly they heal the eyes, and not by drugs applied exteriorly.

7:75 When by the gift of God's mercy the disciplines and actions of all men seem to you to be equally good and beautiful, understand that through grace the mirror of your conscience is limpid and pure of the passions of wickedness,⁶⁸ and that this is not a virtue of your own, but comes from divine help. Give glory to God that your soul has begun to yield the fruits of the Spirit. A man, the eye of whose conscience is pure, does not see the evil of his neighbour. A man, the eye of whose heart is impure, does not see the good of his neighbour; rather his mind is continually agitated, distressed, and growls at whatever it sees, hears, or remembers. Such is the life of the belaboured soul who esteems his own opinions, who scorns, disdains, and holds in contempt his weaker neighbour. He demands that justice be exacted from others and does not wish to pass over into the sublime

⁶⁷ Rom. 10:2.

⁶⁸ Or *malice*.

APPENDIX B: A Selection From The Book of Grace

life of grace, the same to which he has called himself from the time he abandoned the world and cleaved to Christ in faith, hope, and love, through free repentance and not with the justice of the Law.⁶⁹

7:78 Just as figures and colours adorn paintings and depictions, so the counsels of elders and the initiates of the truth adorn rational beings and turn them toward excellent ways, customs, and practices. The soul is adorned by continual prayers, reflection on things divine, reading the Scriptures, and watchfulness. The man who inquires into, investigates, and learns many things, but does and practises only those things which he knows and finds pleasure in, resembles the unclean demons. As sunlight is of no use to a blind man, so the advice, instruction, and knowledge of the elders is of no use to a soul that is bereft of the works of a stable discipline and is blinded by the passions.

7:80 O man who has become God's dwelling-place through steadfast ascetical practices, do not rely on yourself, and do not undervalue the works of your discipline! Do not despise, either inwardly or outwardly, the man whose heart is crushed by his own failings and suffers from diverse feverish passions. But fear passions and your own failings until you reach the harbour of the tomb, for you do not know when you will slip into the very same failings as those for which you despised others, or if grace will abandon you and you will fall like lightning⁷⁰ from the lofty summit of your discipline, though you were a director for many.

7:81 Our Lord has laid up great blessedness for the man who comforts someone whose heart is broken by asceticism, who is voluntarily impoverished, and who despises himself. But blessedness upon blessedness is reserved for the man who experiences profound co-suffering with someone brought low by pains, illnesses, and other personal sorrows, and who co-suffers with one who leads a toilsome, unprosperous life, who is scorned, despised, and repudiated, whose heart is crushed in the presence of his comrades, and who is put to shame by others and by himself as well. 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy', our Lord said.⁷¹ But woe to the man who stabs the ulcers within the hearts of feeble men and mocks them! He resembles the thief on the [Lord's] left who mocked.⁷²

7:82 The monk who strives and labours to heal over the open wounds of his soul, but judges and condemns as slothful and lazy those who are crushed and ill with passions, will never see the luminous star which dawns in the hearts of those who know the truth. A monk who acknowledges his own failings, and with love and pity caresses and consoles his smaller and weaker brethren, will be deemed worthy by Christ the Lord to be a temple for the radiance which proceeds from the Father. Amen, so be it! It is written that the consolation of a fool is bruises and wounds for other men, but the crown of a wise man is the triumph of his neighbour.

⁶⁹ Cf. Matt. 6:21.

⁷⁰ Cf. Luke 10:18.

⁷¹ Matt. 5:7.

⁷² *Vide* Luke 23:39.

THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

7:84 The prayer of the sinner, whose heart is broken and humbled by remorse at the memory of his faults and failings, is better than the prayer of a boasting righteous man who is puffed up by conceit, who rides the horse of pride, and who conducts himself haughtily because he [seems to] stand firmly on the spiritual level. When a sinner becomes aware of his failings and begins to repent, he is righteous. When a righteous man becomes aware of his righteousness and his conscience is persuaded of it, he is a sinner.

7:87 The boastful righteous man who is wise in his own eyes is like the bitter and briny sea, whose waves are lifted high, but whose mariners perish from thirst.

7:88 The righteous man who with senseless deeds makes a feeble beginning, who then becomes filled with repulsion, who becomes acrid and austere, and who voluntarily swallows the hardships and severities of poverty, who suffers and is oppressed, who is tried by scorching heat and bitter cold, who is tormented by temptations of every sort, will in the end be filled with sweetness through his forbearance and the peace he receives from on high. He will become initiated into the sweetness of the knowledge of the truth. But scarcely will a man be found who is released from the struggle until his last day. Thus, as it is said in Scripture, the fruit of a man's spiritual knowledge will be sweet for eating, but the leaves of his asceticism required for healing will be repugnant.⁷³

7:92 Shallow knowledge, which consists of acute thoughts and intellections, which is yoked to the passions and far removed from the steady practices and labours of repentance and asceticism (which things break, torment, and humble the heart and, by their vehemence, cause a man to search into the words of Scripture and to meditate upon the mercies of God and the glorious mysteries of the new world), has slain many and begotten many sons for Gehenna.

7:93 A truly righteous man, who perceives the tender care shown by God's mercies toward all, and the renewal which our nature will receive at the end, pours forth his mercy especially upon sinful and feeble men so as to bring them to repentance. He understands from his own experience that although all the members of his body are in need of care, still he must give special attention to a member that is ill or in pain or broken. He must bandage it, apply remedies, and care for its healing even if it is one of the body's less honourable members.⁷⁴ Now the Head of the entire body of the holy Church is Jesus Christ,⁷⁵ and each one of us is a member of Christ⁷⁶ in the body of the Church, whether he is good or bad.

7:94 At the beginning of his prayer a righteous man magnifies and gives glory to God, but he denounces himself. He begins his words by praying for the peace of the world and the kings and rulers. At the beginning of his entreaty he supplicates for the tranquillity of

⁷³ Cf. Gen. 3:6.

⁷⁴ Cf. 1 Cor. 12:23.

⁷⁵ Cf. Col. 1:18.

⁷⁶ Cf. 1 Cor. 12:27.

APPENDIX B: A Selection From The Book of Grace

the Church, Her children, and Her leaders. At the beginning of his supplication he begs for sinners, the fallen, and the feeble. And when he begins to weep and to groan, he makes entreaty for those who repent, who suffer oppression, the afflicted, the buffeted, and the distressed. Thereafter, taking refuge in their prayers, he proceeds to ask compassion, mercy, and forgiveness for himself.

7:95 A man who truly repents, who has been baptized in water and the Spirit,⁷⁷ who has been absolved of his sins through grace, cannot be persuaded to be negligent. Rather, he strives and labours at repentance by keeping the commandments, so that he can also be cleansed of the passions, actively receive renewal in his mind, secretly perceive the earnest of the Spirit⁷⁸ which he received from holy baptism, and mystically delight within himself with joy and spiritual consolation.

7:96 When truthful men fervently and undoubtingly embrace simple faith in Christ and they hear the promises of the Spirit that 'in My name shall those who believe in Me cast out demons, they shall take up serpents, and they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover',⁷⁹ and so on, they easily accomplish with their own hands signs and miracles through the simplicity of their faith. But faith that comes through the divine vision of knowledge searches out and explores the mysteries of the Faith. Now either faith is impeded, when conceit intervenes, and it hesitates at the fork in the road, or, because of painstaking labours, a steady discipline, and mournful tears, it is helped by grace: then [in a second case] it discovers the light of the true knowledge of the new, noetic world. Faith is the eye of the soul, hope is her vision, and love is living, noetic light. The soul cannot be filled with joy and secret consolation except by the operation of grace.

7:97 So long as honour and dishonour, loss and profit, good things and evil come upon us through the senses and trouble us, our soul suffers loss and she has need of labour, training, ascetical discipline, stillness, and the absence of all intercourse. In short, until there is uprooted from our heart the school which cultivates the knowledge of the good and evil of our neighbour, that such a one is good and such a one is bad, that this man is righteous and that man is a sinner, and so forth, and until there is rooted within us the school of grace, which cultivates love, mercifulness, forgiveness of senseless deeds, of sinners, and of the feeble, and we indiscriminately pour forth grace upon good and evil men equally (in the likeness of Jesus, the Saviour of all): until such a time we should not expect the fruits of the Spirit, enumerated by the blessed Paul,⁸⁰ to flourish within us.

7:98 Every man who toils within himself and receives in himself material from the Scriptures and from nature, and so on, adorns himself and satisfies his hunger. A youth, however, receives material from the Scriptures and from created natures, and then runs to

⁷⁷ Cf. John 3:5.
⁸⁰ *Vide* Gal. 5:22.

⁷⁸ Cf. 2 Cor. 1:22.

⁷⁹ Cf. Mark 16:17-18.

THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

satisfy the hunger of many others, so perishing from hunger himself. I earnestly beseech you to forgive me this very folly. Let all who read or hear [this book] say with groans, 'O God, have pity on this sinner!'

7:100 For us and for spiritual beings our Lord has reserved perfection free of aberration as the manner of life of the new world. Here, however, according to the word of the divine Paul, 'God hath enclosed all in aberration that yonder all might be in need of mercy', both the righteous and sinners.⁸¹ The Lord teaches us in the Gospel of life to cleave each day to repentance, and that if we are negligent in works and do not possess daily repentance, we should not resort to the greatness of knowledge, faith, and mercy. Unto Him be glory, and may He make us wise in His truth unto the ages. Amen.

Let every man who comes upon this book pray. And let every man who reads it pray. And let every man who owns it pray. And for him who prays let us all together pray, now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen. Amen.

⁸¹ Cf. Rom. 11:32.





APPENDIX B — PART II

*An Epistle to Abba Symeon of Caesarea**

YOUR EPISTLE, O HOLY MAN, is not simply written words, but as in a mirror you have depicted therein and made manifest your love for us. As you think us to be, so have you written; and you have shown by your very actions that you love us exceedingly, so that on account of your great love, you forget our measure. For that which it were meet for us to write to your holiness and to ask, so as to learn the truth from you (if we were solicitous over our own salvation), this you have anticipated and written to us by reason of the magnitude of your love. But probably you did this with the art of [[divine]] philosophy, so that by means of the subtle and spiritual questions you ask me, my soul might be aroused from the state of carelessness wherein she has become deeply mired. Howbeit, by reason of that same divine love because of which you have forgotten our measure, I now also forget my insufficiency, and so I give heed not to my ability but to what your prayer is powerful to do. For though I forget my measure, you will obtain from God by your prayers the fulfillment of your request and you will certainly receive from Him that which you have sought in prayer, as being His true servant.

And so the first question in your epistle is the following: Must all the Lord's commandments be observed, and is there not a way of salvation for the man who does not keep them?

It seems to me that there is no need even to ask concerning this. Although there are

* See the Introduction, p. xci, concerning the authorship of this epistle. The Greek printed text addresses it to Symeon the Wonderworker, while the Greek manuscripts have Abba Symeon of Caesarea. Judging merely by the content of the epistle it seems most unlikely that it was written to St. Symeon of the Wondrous Mountain (near Antioch), who is also called the Wonderworker.

THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

many commandments, one must keep them, for otherwise there would have been no reason for the Saviour to give them. I think indeed, that our Master said or did nothing superfluous, unreasonable, or needless. For the purpose of His coming was to cleanse from the soul the evil of the first transgression¹ and to bring her back to her primal state. He gave us His life-giving commandments as purifying remedies of the soul's passionate condition. For what medicines are to a diseased body, that the commandments are to the passionate soul. It is clear that the commandments were given to oppose the passions and for the healing of the sinful soul, even as the Lord said plainly to His disciples, 'He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me; and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode in him.'² And again, 'By this shall the world know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another.'³ It is evident that a man can acquire love only after he has received health of soul, and that the soul is not in good health unless she keeps the commandments.

The keeping of the commandments is, however, still inferior to spiritual love. And because there are many who keep the commandments out of fear or on account of future reward but not for love's sake, the Lord often admonishes us to observe out of love the commandments which give light to the soul. And furthermore, 'So that men may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in the heavens';⁴ but it is not possible to see in the soul the good works which the Lord taught, unless a man keep the commandments. And showing that the commandments are not burdensome for the lovers of the truth, the Lord said: 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. For My yoke is good and My burden is light.'⁵ And so that we should carefully keep all the commandments, He also decreed this, saying, 'Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the Kingdom of the Heavens.'⁶ After all these things ordained for our salvation, I cannot say that there is no necessity to keep all the commandments. Nor is the soul capable of purifying herself if she does not keep the commandments which the Lord gave as medicines for the purging of passions and sins.

You know that evil entered into us through the transgression of the commandments. Hence it is obvious that by keeping them, evil departs from us. But without the doing of the commandments we should not even aspire or hope for purity of soul, because⁷ at the very outset we do not walk on the path that leads us to purity of soul. Do not say that God can give us the grace of purity of soul even without our keeping the commandments.

¹ Syriac to cleanse the soul from wickedness.

² John 14:21, 23.

³ John 13:35.

⁴ Matt. 5:16.

⁵ Matt. 11:28, 30.

⁶ Matt. 5:19.

⁷ Gk. *when*.

All things of this sort are the judgements of God, and the Church does not direct us to ask for such a thing. The Jews, at the time of their return from Babylon to Jerusalem, came by the road trodden by nature, and in this manner they reached their holy city and beheld the wondrous deeds of the Lord. But Ezekiel was caught away supranaturally by the action of revelation and he came to Jerusalem; and in a divine revelation he was a beholder of the renewal that was to come.⁸ It is likewise with purity of soul. Some, going by the well-trodden road of the law through the keeping of the commandments in a life of many labours, enter into purity of soul by sweat and blood; and there are others who are vouchsafed purity of soul by the gift of grace. It is a marvellous thing that we are not permitted to ask in prayer for the purity that is granted us by grace and so to reject the active and laborious manner of life. For the Lord said clearly to the rich man who asked how he could inherit eternal life, 'Keep the commandments.' And when the rich man asked, 'What commandments?' He answered, 'At the beginning shun evil works', so reminding him of the natural commandments. But when he sought to learn more, the Lord said to him, 'If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, take up thy cross and follow Me.'⁹ This means, die to all your possessions and thus live in Me; depart from the old world of the passions and so enter into the new world of the spirit. Take up your cross and strip yourself of the knowledge of methods and craftiness and so put on the simple knowledge of the truth. For by saying, 'Take up thy cross',¹⁰ the Lord taught him to die to all things in the world. When a man has killed the old man in himself, that is, his passions, He then says to him: 'Follow Me.' The old man cannot go the way of Christ, as the blessed Paul says, 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God,'¹¹ nor can corruption inherit incorruption; and again, 'Put off the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the likeness of his Creator';¹² and again, 'The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be. So then they that are in the flesh, mind the things of the flesh and cannot please God by being spiritually minded.'¹³ But, O holy man, if you love purity of heart and the spiritual mind of which you have spoken, cleave to the Master's commandments, even as our Master said, 'If thou wouldst enter into life, keep the commandments',¹⁴ for the sake of love for Him Who decreed them, but not on account of fear or the recompense of wages. For it is not when we practise righteousness that we taste the sweetness concealed within it, but rather when longing for righteousness consumes our heart. And it is not when we commit sin that we are sinners, but when we do not hate sin and we do not repent of it. I should say that there has

⁸ *Vide* Ezek. 40:1.

⁹ Cf. Matt. 19:21.

¹² Cf. Eph. 4:22, 24.

¹⁰ Matt. 16:24.

¹³ Cf. Rom. 8:7, 5, 8.

¹¹ 1 Cor. 15:50.

¹⁴ Matt. 19:17.

THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

never been a man, either of the ancients or of those most recent, who has not kept the commandments and still has reached purity of heart and been deemed worthy of the divine vision of the spirit. And as it seems to me, whosoever has not kept the commandments and has not gone in the footsteps of the blessed apostles, is not worthy to be called holy.

The blessed Basil and the blessed Gregories, of whom you said that they were lovers of the wilderness, pillars and lights of the Church, and praisers of stillness, did not enter stillness having failed to practise the commandments. Rather, they first lived in peace and kept those commandments which must be kept by men dwelling with many others, and thus they reached purity of soul, and were deemed worthy of the divine vision of the spirit. I truly believe that when they lived in cities they received strangers, visited the sick, clothed the naked, washed the feet of the weary, and if anyone compelled them to go one mile, they went two. When they had kept the commandments which must needs be kept in the company of men and their intellect began to perceive its primal motionlessness and the mysteries of divine *theoria*,¹⁵ then they hastened to go out into the stillness of the desert. From thenceforth they abode with their inner man so as to become continual beholders of divine visions, and they remained in the divine vision of the spirit until grace summoned them to be shepherds of the Church of Christ.

But you say that Basil the Great sometimes praises dwelling with many men, sometimes withdrawal from men, concerning which I reply that truly zealous men find profit in two ways, each man according to his strength, his discernment, and the goal which he has set for himself. Sometimes the strong are profited by dwelling with many men, sometimes the weak also; and it is the same in the desert. The man who stands firmly in good health of soul, whose intellect is united with the Spirit and who is dead to the life of mankind, the same suffers no harm from habitation with many men, if he is very vigilant in his affairs. Such a man dwells with others not to receive profit, but to profit others, since God has called him to this as He did [the Apostles and] the other holy Fathers. But it is also profitable for a weak man, who still needs the milk of the commandments in order to grow, to dwell with many men, until he be exercised, perfected, and buffeted in trials, and he fall and rise up again together with the rest and so achieve health of soul. No infant is nurtured without the streams of milk, no monk without the milk of the commandments is tutored, progresses, vanquishes the passions, and receives purity. And, as we have said, the same holds true for the desert. Sometimes the desert is profitable for those who flee, sometimes for the strong: for the former, so that there be no fuel that could increase their passions; for the latter, so that by being unencompassed by matter, they can confront the onslaughts of the evil one.

¹⁵ Gk. *mystic and divine theorias*.

APPENDIX B: *Epistle to Abba Symeon*

In very truth, as you said, the desert puts the passions to sleep. But not this alone is requisite—for a man to put his passions to sleep—but he must also uproot them, that is, conquer them when they obstinately contend against him. For sleeping passions awake as soon as they meet with a cause which moves them to their activity. But so as to learn that not only the desert puts the passions to sleep, as you say, understand how in the time of sickness and great weakness they do not war vehemently against us. Indeed, the passions themselves often put each other to sleep when they give place to one another. The passion of vainglory often puts to sleep the passion of fornication, and again, the passion of fornication puts to sleep the craving for glory. Let us not, therefore, desire to hasten into the wilderness because it merely puts the passions to sleep, but because by the absence of sensory objects and the withdrawal from all men we become wise in the desert, and our inner, spiritual man is renewed in Christ. And further because at all times we see ourselves, and our intellect becomes wakeful and guards itself at every moment, lest perhaps the memory of its hope be stolen from it. These things, I think, will suffice to answer your first question, if indeed you required them.

Now your second question is this: Is it good to flee from all that excites the passions in us; and is such flight to be considered a victory, or is flight from warfare and the choosing of peace to be considered a defeat of the soul?

On this matter we shall speak briefly. With intelligence the monk should flee whatever excites evil passions in him, and he should especially sever from himself both the causes of the passions and the fuel whereby they operate and increase, though they be insignificant. But if it is a time for resisting and waging war with them, he should do the following also, not rashly, but with much skill: when snares are laid for him in the vision of his spirit, he should always turn his mind away from the passions toward the natural good which the Creator placed in our nature, even though the devil perniciously perverts the truth for a cunning trial of men. And if permissible, I should also say that he should not only flee from outward vexations, but from his own senses as well, if possible. He should dwell with his inner man and there abide, toiling solely in the continual husbandry of the vineyard of his heart. How, indeed, can the name monasticism be fulfilled by works alone,¹⁶ since it is applied to him both inwardly and outwardly to the same degree? For by continually abiding with our inner man we shall become one through the completeness of the knowledge of the hope of Christ Who dwells in us. As long as the intellect abides here, it will not wage war with the passions, but grace herself [will do this]. That is to say, the passions will remain inactive.

The third question: If a man does something for the sake of the purity of his soul,

¹⁶ Gk. *until he corresponds in (his) works with the name monasticism*. With the addition of a *lamedh* before *name* the Syriac might also mean this.

but others, not understanding his spiritual discipline, are scandalized with him, should he desist from his divine discipline because of the scandal, or should he do that which profits him, even though onlookers suffer harm?

We say to this: if, while purifying his intellect, a man does something that he has received from the Fathers who came before him, and the goal he has set for himself is to attain to purity, but others, not convinced of his goal, are scandalized, then the guilt is not his but their own. He does not devote himself to abstinence, fast, strictly seclude himself, and do those things which help him to attain his goal so as to scandalize others, but to render his intellect pure. They, not knowing his aim, find fault with him. They are, however, confuted by the truth, because they are unable (due to their own negligence) to perceive the spiritual goal which he spiritually set for himself, that is, to attain to purity of soul. The blessed Paul wrote of such men, 'The preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness.'¹⁷ What then? Should Paul have ceased from the *kerygma* because the preaching of the Cross was considered foolishness by those who were perishing and did not perceive the Cross's power? Even until this day the subject of the Cross is a stumbling-block and a scandal for the Jews and the heathen. Should we then be silent about the truth, lest they be scandalized? But not merely did Paul not cease from speaking, but he cried out loudly and said, 'Far be it that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!'¹⁸ He did not, indeed, exclaim his boasting in the Cross so as to scandalize others, but to preach the Cross's great power. Therefore you also, O holy man, should accomplish your discipline with the goal that you have fixed for yourself before God, and in this your conscience will not condemn you. You should judge your discipline by means of the holy Scriptures and by that which you have received from the holy Fathers. If you are not censured by these things, have no fear when others are scandalized. No one is able to please all men alike, and likewise to labour for God in his hidden self.

Blessed is the monk, O blessed man, who in very truth runs in pursuit of the purity of his soul with all his strength, and journeys toward it on the lawful path which our Fathers travelled, who skillfully ascends to it gradually by its own steps, enduring the tribulation of afflictions, but not employing the foreign steps of his own devisings. Purity of soul is the primordial gift of our nature. Without purity from the passions the soul cannot be healed from the illnesses of sin and possess that glory which she lost by transgressing the commandment. If in reality and actively a man is deemed worthy of purity of soul (which is the soul's good health), his intellect will receive joy through spiritual perception, for he has become a son of God and a brother of Christ, and his intellect becomes oblivious to the good and evil things that befall him.

Further you write in your epistle that a monk who wishes to love God must above all

¹⁷ 1 Cor. 1:18.

¹⁸ Gal. 6:14.

have concern for the purity of his soul. You have spoken well, if indeed you have strength sufficient for this. You also say that the soul which has not yet vanquished the passions has no boldness in prayer, but these two statements seem to me to contradict one another, though I am an ignorant fellow. For if a man has not conquered the passions, how will he have concern for purity? The just law of spirituality does not permit the soul which has not conquered her passions to seek that which is above her. For it is not known that a man loves from what he desires, but it is known that he desires from what he loves, since love naturally precedes desire. If a man did not love, he would not desire. The passions are a door closed in the face of purity. Unless a man opens this closed door, he will not enter into the unsullied and clear realm of purity of soul. When you wrote that the soul does not possess boldness in the hour of prayer,¹⁹ you said the truth. For boldness is not only above the passions, it is even above purity. This is the order of succession as I see it: patience through self-compulsion does battle with the passions for the sake of purity; if the passions are conquered, the soul acquires purity; and true purity endows the intellect with boldness in the hour of prayer.

Could we, perhaps, be blamed for asking in prayer for that which we are calling purity of soul, or could it be a petition coming from pride and conceit to ask God for that which the divine Scripture and our Fathers command, though it is this very thing which a monk pursues when he withdraws from the world? But I think, O holy man, that just as a son has confidence in his father and does not beseech him, 'Teach me such a craft', or, 'Give me such a thing': so a monk ought not to differentiate in his supplication to God and say, 'Give me this', 'Give me that', for he knows that what a father provides for his son is transcended by God's providence for us. We should, therefore, humble ourselves and mourn over the faults and the stumblings which we have involuntarily committed, whether in our thoughts or our actions. We should say with a contrite heart what the Publican said, 'God, be gracious unto me a sinner';²⁰ and we should do both openly and hiddenly that which the Lord taught, saying, 'Overcome evil with good';²¹ and when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants: we have done that which we ought to have done.'²² In this manner your conscience will bear witness to you that you are a sinner and have need of mercy. And you yourself know, O holy man, that works and disciplines do not open the door closed within your heart, but a contrite heart and humility of soul, when you have overcome the passions by humility and not by scorning them. For the man who is sick straightway humbles himself, being concerned to heal his maladies; afterward he seeks to be a king. Verily, purity and health of soul are the kingdom of the soul. As a sickly prince does not say to his father,

¹⁹ I.e. when the soul has not conquered the passions.

²⁰ Luke 18:13.

²¹ Rom. 12:21.

²² Luke 17:10.

THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

'Make me king', but first cares to regain his health, and after he is completely healthy he receives his father's kingdom; so the sinner, after he repents and receives the health of his soul, enters with his Father into the realm of his nature's purity and reigns in his Father's glory.

We bring to mind how the holy apostle Paul recounts his transgressions and puts his soul in the last and nethermost place, saying: 'Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first He might show forth all His long-suffering. For in the beginning I was a persecutor, a reviler and a blasphemer, but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.'²³ When and at what time did he say this? After great struggles, after mighty works, after the preaching of the Gospel of Christ which he preached throughout the whole world, after continual deaths and manifold tribulations which he suffered from the Jews and from the heathen. He saw himself as still making a beginning, and not merely was he of the opinion that he had not yet attained to purity of soul, but he would not even number himself among the disciples of Christ, as was meet. For he said, 'I am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God.'²⁴ And when more than all men he had gained victory over the passions, he said, 'I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away.'²⁵ But if you were to object, saying that at times he also recounts great things about himself, let him persuade you himself about this. For he says that he did not do this voluntarily, nor for his own sake, but for the preaching of the Gospel. And when he relates these great things for the profit of the faithful, he presents himself as being deprived of all sense because he boasts in such a manner, and he cries out and says, 'Ye have compelled me';²⁶ and again, 'That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting.'²⁷ Behold the righteous and upright rule which Saint Paul has laid down for us! Let us, then, observe it and be zealous in its behalf. Let us cease from entreating God for lofty things when He does not bestow them or give them to us by His grace, for God knows the chosen vessels of His service. And the blessed Paul, even after such things, did not ask for the kingdom of the soul, but said, 'I could wish that myself were anathema from Christ.'²⁸ How, then, even before the time known to God, could we dare to ask for the kingdom of the soul, we who have not kept His commandments, nor overcome the passions, nor repaid our debt?

Therefore I am admonishing you, O holy man, lest such a thing should enter your mind. Above all things acquire patience in what befalls you. In great humility and contri-

²³ 1 Tim. 1:15, 16, 13.

²⁵ 1 Cor. 9:27.

²⁷ 2 Cor. 11:17.

²⁴ 1 Cor. 15:9.

²⁶ 2 Cor. 12:11.

²⁸ Rom. 9:3.

tion of heart with respect to our thoughts and whatever pertains to us let us ask God for the forgiveness of our sins and for humility of soul.

One of the saints wrote that, 'If a man does not count himself a sinner, his prayer is not accepted by the Lord.' But if you say that some of the Fathers wrote on what are purity of soul, health of soul, dispassion, and the soul's divine vision, know that they did not do this so that we should seek these things prematurely, in expectancy, for it is written, 'The Kingdom of God cometh not with the observation of expectancy.'²⁹ Those in whom such an intention is found have gained for themselves pride and downfall. But for our part, let us put in good order the realm of our heart by deeds of repentance and disciplines well-pleasing to God, and things which are of God will come by themselves, if the place of the heart is pure and undefiled. But to seek 'with observation' these lofty things which are of God, is rejected by the Church of God; and those who have so received them have rather gained for themselves pride and downfall. This is not a sign that a man loves God, but that his soul is sick. How can we seek the lofty things of God, when Paul boasts in afflictions and reckons the lofty things of God to be sharing in the sufferings of Christ?

Further on in your epistle you wrote that your soul has come to love the love for God, but that although you have much desire to love God, you have not attained to a real love of Him, and therefore you yearn to withdraw into the desert. By this you showed that purity of heart has made a beginning in you and the memory of God is aflame and burns strongly in your heart. And if these things are true, they are indeed great; but I should not have wished you to write this, since not one of these things is in its proper place. But if you had told me this by way of a question, a question would require a different form. For how could he who says that his soul still does not have boldness in prayer because he has not conquered the passions, dare to say that his soul has come to love the love for God? Divine love, in pursuit of which you mystically run by withdrawal into the desert, can in no wise be kindled in the soul which has not overcome the passions. You say, however, that your soul has not conquered the passions and that she has come to love the love for God, which is out of place. For the man who says that he has not conquered the passions and that he loves to love God is unintelligible to me.

But you would reply that, 'I did not say that I love, but that I love to love.' Nor does this stand if your soul does not possess purity. But if you wished to say this simply in a manner of speaking, know that you are not alone in saying this, but that everyone says he would like to love God; and indeed, not only the Christians say this, but even those who do not worship God aright. This thing each man repeats as being his own, but such words are pronounced by the tongue alone and the soul does not feel what is said. There are

²⁹ Cf. Luke 17:20.

many who are sick and do not even know it. Vice is a sickness of the soul and delusion is a loss of truth. Most men who are sick with the disease of vice and delusion proclaim health and are lauded by men. Unless the soul is cured from vice and is found in her natural state of health (with which she was created) so that she can be reborn by health of spirit, it is impossible for a man to desire the supernatural things of the Spirit. For so long as the soul is sick with passions, her senses have no perception of what is spiritual, and she does not even know how to desire it, saving only from the hearing of the ears and from writings. Rightly, therefore, I wrote above that those who desire perfection must keep all the commandments, since the working of the commandments heals the powers of the soul. The practice of the commandments is not accomplished simply and by chance, for it is written that, 'There is no remission without the shedding of blood.'³⁰ Our nature first received renewal through the incarnation of Christ, and it participated in His passion and death; and then, after the renewal of the shedding of blood, our nature was renewed and sanctified and became able to receive His new and perfect commandments. For if the new commandments had been given to men before the shedding of the Lord's blood, before our nature was renewed and sanctified, then it is perhaps possible that even the new commandments, like those of old, would have merely cut off vice from the soul, but would have been unable completely to pluck out the very root of vice from her. But now it is not so; now there is a secret labour that accompanies the new, spiritual commandments. When the soul keeps these through the circumspection of the fear of God, they renew her, sanctify her, and secretly heal all her members. For it is obvious which passion is quietly cured in the soul by each commandment. The operation of the commandments is perceived only by the healer and the healed, after the likeness of the woman who had an issue of blood.

You know, beloved, that if the passionate part of the soul is not healed, renewed, secretly sanctified, and held in bonds by spiritual discipline, the soul will not acquire health nor be freed from being troubled by what she encounters in created nature. Sometimes the healing of the passionate part of the soul is brought about by grace, as in the case of the blessed apostles, because through faith they were made perfect in love of Christ. And sometimes the soul receives health in conformity with the law.³¹ Be certain that the man who has conquered the passions by the doing of the commandments and the harsh labours of a genuine discipline, has gained health in conformity with the law. In this manner his intellect has also been weaned from the materiality of this world; his habitual subservience to his proclivities has been eradicated from him; he has been reborn, as though from the very beginning, into what is spiritual; he is seen to be by grace in the

³⁰ Heb. 9:22.

³¹ Lit. *lawfully* i.e. according to the established spiritual order of things.

realm of the spirit through the thoughts of the inner man; and a new and simple world has received him.

When the intellect is renewed and the heart is sanctified, all the motions of desire³² that move in the heart are set astir in accord with the nature of that world which a man enters. First there arises in him fervent love for things divine and he ardently yearns for communion with the angels and the revelations of the mysteries of spiritual knowledge. His intellect perceives the spiritual knowledge of created things, and the divine vision of the mysteries of the Holy Trinity together with the mysteries of the worshipful œconomy on our behalf shines forth in him; then he becomes one through the completeness of³³ the knowledge of the hope of future things.

Understand, therefore, your state from the very things which I have written you. If a soul confined in the realm of the passions could truly love God, she would have much need³⁴ to ask questions and to learn the mysteries of the spiritual world. But it is clear that learning and knowledge bring no profit amid the passions, nor do they suffice to open the door closed in the face of purity. But if the passions are removed from the soul, the intellect is illumined, stands firmly in the pure region of its nature, and has no need of questioning, since it distinctly beholds the good things treasured in this region. Our outward senses do not perceive by learning and questioning the natures and the things that are kindred to them, but each sense naturally, and not by questioning, perceives what confronts it. Indeed, instruction does not mediate between the senses and things perceived. However much one may tell a blind man about the glorious light of the sun, the moon, and the choir of the stars, and of the lustre of precious stones, he can grasp, judge, and conceive of their beauty only by their appellation, yet his knowledge and his discerning faculty remain divorced from the sweetness of their sight. In the same manner I conceive of the divine vision of the spirit. For if the intellect, which beholds hidden spiritual mysteries, is in its natural state of health, it distinctly beholds the glory of Christ. It does not question or receive instruction, but more than in the freedom of the will it delights in the sweetness of the mysteries of the new world according to the fervour of its faith and hope in Christ. Even so the blessed Paul wrote 'That which we see, why do we yet hope for? With patience we wait for it.'³⁵

We ought, therefore, earnestly to wait and persevere in a solitary manner with simplicity with regard to our inner man, wherein there are no impressions of thoughts or sight of complex objects. For in relation to what the intellect sees, it receives patterns.

³² Gk. *the thoughts*.

³³ Gk. *becomes completely one with*. The Greek translators read *through the completeness of* as an adverb.

³⁴ The Greek adds a negative here and reads *not much need*.

³⁵ Cf. Rom. 8:24, 25.

THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

When it looks toward the world, the intellect receives impressions and representations according to the diversity of the forms which it ponders. These stir up thoughts in the intellect in proportion to their multiplicity and the diversity of their variations. And when the thoughts are set in motion, they place their seal upon the intellect. But if the intellect looks steadfastly into the inner man, where there is nothing which could give rise to changing forms and no distinction of complex objects differing from one another by their shapes, but Christ is all in all, it is clear that the intellect will enjoy simple divine vision. There is nothing which so makes the soul's depths fragrant and is wont to give her such boldness in the hour of prayer as this, for simple *theoria* is the nourishment of the soul. When the soul stands firmly in the realm of the knowledge of the truth, she has no need of questioning. For just as the eye of the body does not question when it sees the sun, so the eye of the soul does not first investigate and afterward behold spiritual knowledge. It is in this manner also, O holy man, that the mystical divine vision for which you yearn is revealed in the intellect after the soul has returned to health. But intellectual vision, which endeavours to learn such mysteries through investigation and inquiry, is [nothing but] folly of soul. The blessed Paul did not say that by instruction or in a material place he saw and heard mysteries and 'unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter', but in rapture he was caught up into the spiritual realm and beheld the revelation of mysteries.³⁶

Therefore, O holy man, if you love purity, by love cut yourself off from all love that is poured out toward all things, and having entered, labour in the vineyard of your heart, pluck out the passions from your soul, and strive to be ignorant of human wickedness. Purity which sees God does not arise and blossom forth in the soul by searching for it, but by being ignorant of every man's wickedness. But if you wish your heart to be a dwelling-place of the mysteries of the new world, first become rich in the works of the spirit, soul, and body: fasting, vigil, liturgy, ascetical struggle, patience, purging of thoughts, and so forth. Fetter your intellect by reading the Scriptures and pondering upon them, inscribe the commandments before your eyes, and pay the debt of the passions when you are defeated and when you are victorious.³⁷ By the constant converse of prayer and supplication and by your rumination therein, uproot from your heart every image and every likeness which you have received aforetime. Accustom your intellect always to muse upon the mysteries of our Saviour's œconomy; leave off your search for knowledge and divine vision, which, in their time and place, exceed all verbal description; pursue the practice of the commandments and labours on behalf of purity; and beg the Lord in heartfelt prayer that the very same fire which He set into the hearts of the Apostles, the Martyrs, and the

³⁶ *Vide* 2 Cor. 12:3, 4.

³⁷ I. e. we must pay the passions their due by being engaged in struggle with them.

Fathers descend also into your heart in all matters and that you be granted the noetic discipline. The beginning, the middle, and the end of this discipline is the following: the cutting off of all things through union with Christ. If you yearn for the divine vision of mysteries, practise the commandments in yourself by actual deeds, and not merely by aspiring to know them. Spiritual divine vision operates in us in the realm of purity, where Christ dwells, the 'Author of our life'.³⁸ First seek to learn how to enter the realm of the mysteries of the Spirit and in this manner begin.

Purity that is preceded by the practice of the commandments is called the realm of the mysteries. Divine vision is the spiritual vision of the intellect,³⁹ that is, to be awestruck and to have understanding of what is, what has come to be, and what will be. Divine vision is the sight of the intellect,⁴⁰ that is, to be awed by God's œconomy from generation to generation, and to understand the glories of God and the terrifying things of the new world. By these things the heart is made contrite and is renewed, and like an infant in Christ the intellect is nourished on the milk of new and spiritual commandments; it becomes free of wickedness and accustomed to the mysteries of the Spirit and the revelations of knowledge; it is raised from knowledge to knowledge, from divine vision to divine vision, from insight to insight, and mystically it learns and is strengthened, until it is uplifted by love, united by hope, and joy resides in its innermost recesses. Thus it is exalted by God and crowned with the natural glory of its own formation, wherewith it was created.

The intellect ascends into these spiritual abodes by the revelations of knowledge; it falls and stands up, defeats and is defeated, is fried in the furnace of the monk's cell, and in this manner is purified, receives mercy, and in reality is accounted worthy of the divine vision of the Holy Trinity, the very thing which you yearn for. The divine visions of natures whereby the intellect is exalted, becomes active, and exercises itself, are three in number: two are of the natures of created things, rational and irrational, spiritual and bodily; the other is of the Holy Trinity. At first it enters into creation, and the intellect passes throughout all created things by the revelation of knowledge. But for those things which do not naturally fall under the senses, divine vision is noetic. The intellect also has a divine vision so as to behold itself. With this the pagan philosophers distracted⁴¹ their minds dwelling upon the appearances of created things.

The divine vision of the sons of the mystery of faith is conjoined with faith and grazes in the meadow of the Scriptures. It gathers the intellect from all outward distraction and binds it fast by union with Christ, in the likeness of Basil and Gregory, and the intellect's divine vision is upon the mystical words found in Scripture. Then words which

³⁸ Acts 3:15.

³⁹ Syriac *mad'a*.

⁴⁰ Syriac *hauna*.

⁴¹ Gk. *μετεωρίσονται*. This means to raise upward and roam about.

knowledge cannot comprehend are received by us through faith, and we gain knowledge of them in that divine vision which we enjoy after purification. For the sake of the mysteries of the Spirit, which are above knowledge and cannot be apprehended by the senses of the body or by the reasoning power of the intellect, God has given us faith, whereby we know only that these mysteries exist. But this faith gives birth in us to hope for them. By faith we profess that God is the Lord, Master, Creator, and Fashioner of all things. By knowledge we determine that we must keep His commandments and understand that fear keeps the old commandments, but love keeps the life-giving commandments of Christ, as He Himself said, 'I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.'⁴² It is evident that the Son does not keep the commandments of His Father from fear, but from love. For this reason He admonishes us that we should also keep His commandments out of love when He says: 'If ye love Me, keep My commandments. And I will entreat the Father and He shall give another Comforter.'⁴³ By the coming of the Comforter He indicates the gifts of the revelation of the mysteries of the Spirit, since it was by the reception of the Spirit that the apostles received the perfection of spiritual knowledge. The Lord promised to ask His Father to give the Comforter to them, to abide with them unto the ages, after the doing of the commandments and purification. Do you see that by the keeping of the commandments the intellect is accounted worthy of the gift of mystical divine vision and the revelations of spiritual knowledge? Indeed, it is not as your wisdom supposed, namely, that the work of keeping the commandments is a hindrance to the divine vision of the divine mysteries which are accomplished in stillness.

Therefore I entreat you, if you perceive in your soul that you have reached the realm of love, keep the new commandments of love for Him Who decreed them, and not from fear, even as the blessed Paul said when he was aflame with divine love: 'Who shall separate me from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or prison, or persecution', and the rest. Furthermore he adds, 'For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come shall be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Jesus Christ our Lord.'⁴⁴ And so that no man should think that he yearned for great recompense, or honour, or superabundant bestowal of spiritual gifts, as your holiness desires, he said, 'I could wish that myself were anathema from Christ',⁴⁵ that those estranged might become His friends. And so that you know that he did not pursue mystical divine vision enjoyed in solitude (like your fatherliness), or desire that which often certain unworthy men have received by grace, hear what he says in another place: 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not love,

⁴² John 15:10.

⁴⁴ Cf. Rom. 8:35, 38.

⁴⁵ Rom. 9:3.

⁴³ John 14:15, 16.

I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing.⁴⁶ Do you see that the lawful door to these things is love? If we acquire love, she will bring us into them. But if we should be granted them by grace, without love, there will certainly come a time when we shall have to give them up. For the acquisition and the guardian of the more lofty holy gifts [of the saints] and their divine disciplines is love. Immediately when a monk loses possession of love, his heart loses peace (which is God's tabernacle), and the door of grace is shut within him, that same door whereby the Lord goes in and out, as He says, 'I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall live and find pasture',⁴⁷ for the nourishment of his spiritual life. Here he is not bridled by vice or by delusion, but like men free in Christ, by divine love he goes in and out of every ascent of the revelations of knowledge and mystical divine visions. And so that you know the truth of this, learn from the blessed apostle Paul that in reality the spiritual life of the intellect is divine *theoria*, for he cries: I take no pleasure in divine vision without love. If I should not enter through the lawful gate of love into divine vision, I should not desire it at all. And if it were given me by the free gift of grace, when I had not yet acquired love, I should not seek it, for I had not entered into it by the natural door, which is love. I wish, therefore, firstly to acquire love, which is the first divine vision of the Holy Trinity, and then naturally, even without a gift, the divine vision of spiritual things will be mine.

Understand the divine wisdom of the blessed Paul, how he forsook all the gifts which were transmitted to him by grace and he asked for the very substance of the gifts, which both receives all gifts and guards them, as someone has said. The gift of the divine vision of created things was also bestowed upon Moses, and many others were accounted worthy of the same; not, however, permanently, but in a revelation. I, he says, who am baptized in the Holy Spirit and filled with grace, desire to perceive in myself Christ who dwells within me. For Christ effected the renewal of our nature in His own Hypostasis, and by water and Spirit we have put Him on. In an ineffable mystery He united us to Himself and made us members of His body: here, in the manner of an earnest, but in the new world, He naturally imparts life to His members [even as the head of the body imparts life to the rest of the members]. Why, then, do you wish and seek for divine vision that is inferior to love?⁴⁸ The divine Paul rejected it when it is bereft of love.

Your statement that 'the practice of the commandments hinders me from divine vision', shows that you have found fault with the love of your neighbour and have shown preference to divine vision, and you desire to behold it where it is not to be beheld. For

⁴⁶ 1 Cor. 13:1, 2.

⁴⁷ John 10:9.

⁴⁸ Reading *ὐνό* for *πρό* with the Syriac.

the present, O wisest of men, we cannot behold divine vision, but divine vision herself shows herself to us in her own place. Just as with the increase of natural growth the soul receives a diversity of knowledge and apprehends the things of the world and exercises herself therein day by day; so in the things of the spirit a man receives spiritual divine vision and divine awareness and exercises himself therein to the extent that his intellect grows in the noetic discipline and makes further progress. When he reaches the realm of love, he beholds things spiritual in their own place; and no matter how much a man strives to force these things to come down to him, they will not be persuaded. If, however, he should audaciously undertake to behold and comprehend these things before the proper time, straightway his vision will be blinded and he will see illusions and figures instead of realities. As soon as you grasp this fully with your discerning intellect, you will not seek for divine vision when it is not the time. But if it seems to you that even now you see divine vision, know that this vision is an illusion of the imagination,⁴⁹ and not divine vision; for there is a likeness and a figure of the imagination for every noetic thing, and again, there is also a true divine vision of it. For behold, in compound natures phantasy as well as true vision occurs. The eye sees true vision when its sight is sound, light is found before it, and what is beheld is close by.⁵⁰ But when the reverse is the case, the eye beholds a mirage instead of the truth, as when it sees water when there is no water, and buildings raised up and suspended in the air, though they stand upon the ground. Apply this explanation of physical things to the noetic as well.

If the sight of the intellect is not purified by the practice of the commandments and by the works of the disciplines of stillness, and if it does not perfectly gain the light of love and grow in the stature of renewal in Christ, and by the different quality of its knowledge draw near to the spiritual natures in the order wherein it seeks the angelic discipline of the spirit, it cannot become a true seer of divine *theoria*. However many likenesses of spiritual things the intellect may conceive, they can only be called phantasy and not reality. The cause of the intellect beholding one thing in the place of another is that it is not pure. For the nature of reality always remains unchanged; it is never changed into similitudes. But the cause of the illusion of images is the infirmity, not the purity, of the intellect.

This also befell the profane philosophers, because they regarded as spiritual that concerning which they had received no true teaching from God. Because of the grip and the activity of their rational faculty and the conceptions of their thoughts, they esteemed themselves in their conceit to be something. And further, they deliberated on how they existed, so that they would be able to possess the discovery⁵¹ both of their genesis and the

⁴⁹ Or *phantasy*. ⁵⁰ This is the Syriac reading. The Greek text has become somewhat confused here.

⁵¹ I. e. the understanding.

alterations of their forms. They discoursed concerning these things with unseemly presumption, divided the one God into many gods, and in the ruminations of their thoughts spoke and fabricated things which do not exist. In the train of their deliberations they disputed and argued over the spiritual natures and their activities, and called this insane phantasy of their thoughts the divine vision of natures.

The true divine vision of perceptible and imperceptible natures, and of the Holy Trinity Himself, is given in the revelation of Christ. He taught this and showed it to men when at the first, in His own Hypostasis, He accomplished the renewal of man's entire nature, restored and gave it its original freedom, and in Himself He beat down the path for us so that we can journey to the truth through His life-giving commandments; then our nature became capable of beholding true, not illusory, divine vision. When man has shed the old man of the passions by patiently enduring sufferings, by labour, and by affliction, then even as a new-born babe sheds the membrane of its mother's womb, the intellect is capable of being born in a spiritual manner, of seeing in the world of the spirit and of receiving the divine vision of its homeland.

Although the divine vision⁵² of created things is very sweet, still it is a shadow of knowledge, and its sweetness is not distinct from the dreams of phantasy. But the divine vision of the new world in the Spirit of revelation, wherein the intellect delights spiritually, is the operation of grace, not a shadow of knowledge. The sweetness of this divine vision is not distinct from that of which the Apostle wrote: 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto the saints by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.'⁵³ This divine vision is food for the intellect until it becomes able to receive a divine vision higher than the first. For divine vision conveys the intellect to another divine vision until it is brought into the realm of perfect love. For love is the place of spiritual things and it dwells in purity of soul. When the intellect is established in the realm of love, grace is active, and the mind receives spiritual divine vision and becomes a beholder of hidden things.

There are two modes, as I have said already, whereby the gift of the revelations of divine vision is given to the intellect. Sometimes it is given by grace because of the fervour of faith, and sometimes because of purity and the practice of the commandments. By grace, as it was given to the blessed apostles, who purified their intellects not by the observing of the commandments but by fervent faith, and so were accounted worthy of the revelation of divine vision; for they believed on Christ in simplicity, and followed Him unquestioningly with hearts aflame. And when Christ completed His worshipful ceconomy,

⁵² Perhaps something like *speculation* is meant here.

⁵³ Cf. 1 Cor. 2:9, 10.

THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

He sent them the comforting Spirit, He purified and perfected their intellect, actively put to death in them the old man of the passions, actively brought to life in them the new man of the spirit, and thus they became conscious both of the new and old man. So too, the blessed Paul was first mystically renewed, then he received the divine vision of the revelation of mysteries; he was not, however, made confident by this. He actively and freely received grace, but throughout his whole life he ran his course, that he might, in so far as possible, make recompense for that grace which he received when the Lord conversed with him in the way as with His own servant, and sent him to Damascus. Is it not written that Jesus conversed with him openly? But Scripture says that Ananias also spoke thus to him, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'⁵⁴ And when he baptized him, he was filled with the Holy Spirit and perceived the mysteries of the revelations of hidden things, even as this was accomplished in the holy apostles when Jesus was with them and said: 'I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth and He will declare unto you things to come.'⁵⁵

It is evident that it was only when the blessed Paul received the Holy Spirit and was renewed by Him, that he was granted the revelation of mysteries, that he beheld by the Spirit of revelations, that he delighted in divine *theoria*, heard ineffable words, beheld divine vision more lofty than nature, enjoyed divine visions proper to the celestial hosts and the spiritual orders, and therein he exulted. Let no one say, as the heretics known as the Euchites⁵⁶ deliriously affirm, that Paul achieved these heights by his own desire (since indeed the intellect is wholly incapable of ascending thither)! On the contrary, he was caught up in rapture by the Spirit of revelations, as he himself wrote in his Epistle to the Corinthians,⁵⁷ in contradiction to these vain men, who likened themselves to the holy apostles, but professed the phantasies of their thoughts and called them spiritual divine visions. This error can be found in many of the heretics, I mean Origen, Valentinus, Bardaisan, Marcion, Manes, and many other ancient originators of the wicked heresies which began from the apostolic times and even until this day are found in certain places.

So because some, seduced by the phantasies of the demons, wished to corrupt the teaching of the blessed apostles, the divine Apostle was compelled to disperse the boast of the heretics (who boasted in the illusions of the activity of the demons which appeared to them), by narrating his own divine *theoria* with humility and much fear. This he did in the person of another, saying: 'I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth); how

⁵⁴ Acts 9:17.

⁵⁵ John 16:12, 13.

⁵⁶ Or, Messalians.

⁵⁷ Vide 2 Cor. 12:2, 4.

he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.⁵⁸ He does not say, therefore, that he voluntarily ascended in intellect through divine vision into the third heaven, but that he was caught up by rapture. Indeed, he wrote that he saw divine visions and said that he heard words, but he was unable to describe what those words were or the figures of those divine visions. For when the intellect in the Spirit of revelation sees these things in their own place, it does not receive permission to utter them in a place which is not their own. And even if it should wish, it could not speak of them, because it did not see them with the bodily senses. Whatever the intellect receives through the senses of the body, this it can express in the physical realm. But whatever the intellect perceptibly beholds, hears or apprehends within itself in the realm of the spirit, it has no power to express when it turns again toward the body. It merely remembers that it saw them, but how it saw them, it knows not to express with clarity.

This convicts the false scriptures called *revelations*, which, being composed by the originators of the corrupt heresies under the influence of demonic phantasies, describe the celestial abodes in the firmament—whither they voluntarily betook their intellects for instruction—the intellect’s pathways into Heaven, the places set apart by the Judgement, the manifold figures of the celestial hosts, and their diverse activities. But all these things are shadows of an intellect inebriated by conceit and deranged by the working of demons. For this very reason the blessed Paul by one word closed the door upon all [[divine]] *theoria* and he conveyed it and enclosed it in silence, where even if the intellect were able to disclose that which belongs to the realm of the spirit, it would not receive permission to do so. For he said that all divine visions which the tongue has power to disclose in the physical realm are phantasies of the soul’s thoughts, not the working of grace. May your holiness, therefore, keeping these things in mind, beware of the phantasies of profound thoughts. This warfare especially assaults monks who are keen-witted, who inquire into empty opinions, yearn for novelties, and are superficial.

There was a certain man named Malpas, who was the first to worship the devil and was called Meliton by the multitude, for so is the interpretation of Malpas.⁵⁹ He was a native of Edessa and, at a time when he practised a very lofty discipline, persevering in excessive labours and tribulations, he invented the heresy of the Messalians. It is said that he was a disciple of the blessed Julian, surnamed Sabbas, for a short time and that he accompanied him to Sinai and Egypt and beheld the great Fathers of that time. He saw the blessed Anthony and heard mystical sayings from him on purity and the salvation of souls, and subtle questions on the passions. Hereby Anthony explained how the intellect, after

⁵⁸ 2 Cor. 12:2, 4.

⁵⁹ This man is also known as Adelphios.

its purification, possesses divine vision concerning the mysteries of the Spirit, and that the soul can receive dispassion through grace, when by the practice of the commandments she sheds the passions of the old man and stands firmly in the soundness of her primal nature. When Malpas heard these words in the prime of his youth, his thoughts were inflamed as though by fire and he returned to his own city; and when the passion of love of glory waxed hot within him, he chose for himself a secluded dwelling and gave himself over to austere works and afflictions and unceasing prayer. There burned within him the passion of vainglory (which indeed was the substance of his hope to attain to the sublime things of which he had heard), but he did not learn the art of opposing the enemies of the truth. He did not understand the snares and wiles and machinations of the adversary, whereby the evil one snatches away the strong and powerful into perdition, but he placed his confidence only in works, affliction, non-possessiveness, asceticism, and abstinence. He did not acquire self-abasement, humility, and a contrite heart, which are an invincible weapon against the assaults of the evil one, nor did he bring to mind the words of Scripture which say: 'When ye shall have accomplished works, kept the commandments, and endured afflictions, reckon yourselves as unprofitable servants.'⁶⁰ But on the contrary he was aflame with a lofty self-esteem arising from the labour of his disciplines, and consumed by the desire of the exalted things he had heard. After the passage of much time, when the devil saw him devoid of the work of humility and having the single desire of apprehending the divine vision of the mysteries of which he had heard, he manifested himself to him in infinite light, saying, 'I am the Comforter and was sent by the Father to you in order to vouchsafe you on account of your works the divine vision you desire to receive, and to give you dispassion and repose from further toils.' In return for these things the treacherous one asked that poor wretch to worship him. And that fool, because he did not perceive the devil's warfare, straightway received him with joy and worshipped him and immediately fell under his power. Instead of divine *theoria*, the evil one filled him with demonic phantasy and made him cease from his works for the sake of the truth. He raised him up and mocked him with a vain hope of dispassion, saying, 'Now you have no need of works and of buffeting the body and struggle against the passions and lusts'; and he made him the originator of the heresy of the Messalians. When his followers multiplied, his unholy and spurious teaching became known and the bishop of that time banished them.

Again, there was another man in Edessa by the name of Jason, or Asimas, the composer of many triads⁶¹ chanted even to this day, who practised a very lofty discipline and bound himself imprudently with very severe labours, until he was glorified [by men]. The devil deluded him, led him out of his cell, placed him on the summit of a mountain called

⁶⁰ Cf. Luke 17:10.

⁶¹ A kind of hymn composed of verses three words in length. The Syriac reads here *madrashe*.

Storios, made a pact with him, and showed him the forms of chariots and charioteers, saying to him, 'God has sent me to take you into Paradise like Elias.' In his childishness he was deceived and he sat in the chariot. Then the whole phantasy vanished, he fell from a great height to the earth, and died a death worthy of ridicule.

I have not said these things pointlessly, but so that we should learn the treachery of the demons who thirst for the perdition of the saints, and so that, when it is not the proper time, we should not yearn after the lofty things of the noetic discipline, lest we be made a laughing-stock by our cunning adversary. For I see also nowadays that youths filled with passions babble and fearlessly expound doctrines concerning the mysteries of dispassion.

One of the saints wrote that men who are still filled with passions and indiscriminately converse about both physical and non-physical things, do not differ from men who, though weighed down by illness, give explanations of health. And when the blessed Paul perceived that certain disciples despised the commandments, not having defeated the passions, and moreover they aspired to the blessedness of the divine vision of mysteries, which is possible only after purification, he said to them: First put off the old man of the passions, then aspire to put on the new man, which is renewed after the likeness of Christ its Creator by the knowledge of mysteries. Do not yearn for that divine vision which is allotted to me and the other apostles, which is made active through grace. For God 'hath mercy on whom He will, and whom He will He hardeneth.'⁶² Who shall stand before His face or against His will?

At times God gives freely; at other times He requires works and purification, and only then bestows a gift; and sometimes even after works and purification He does not give [the gift] here, but He withholds so as to bestow it in its proper place. We find that God acts thus also with regard to a lesser gift, namely the forgiveness of sins. For, behold, baptism forgives freely and requires nothing save faith. By repentance after baptism, however, God does not forgive sins freely. He demands labours, afflictions, sorrows of contrition, tears, and weeping over a long period of time, and only then does He bestow remission. The Lord forgave the thief freely, for the mere word of his confession on the cross, and promised him the Kingdom of the Heavens. But from the sinful woman He required faith and tears, and from the martyrs and confessors He required tribulations, torments, straitness, combs of iron, punishments and manifold deaths combined with heartfelt faith and the confession of their mouths.⁶³

⁶² Rom. 9:18.

⁶³ The doctrine expressed here that 'God does not forgive sins freely', is not a teaching accepted by the Church. Works are not demanded by God as reparation for sin. St. Mark the Ascetic writes, 'However great our virtuous actions of today, they do not requite but condemn our past negligence' (*Against Those Who Think to be Justified by Works*, § 44); 'Every virtue that is performed even to the

THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

When your holiness has been persuaded by these things, pay heed to the men of old and to those of recent times, and do not seek for divine vision when it is not time for divine vision. As long as you are incarcerated in the confines of the body, be zealous in the works of repentance, warlike against the passions, and patient in the practice of the commandments. Beware of the treachery of the demons and of those who preach that immutable perfection [can be attained] in this passionate and aberrant world. For this perfection is not even possessed by the angels, the ministers of the Father and the Spirit, since they await the renewal of the middle state⁶⁴ so as to be 'delivered from the bondage of corruption by the freedom of the children of God.'⁶⁵ Can perfection be found here, where the sun rises and sets amid the clouds? Where there is sometimes fair weather, sometimes drought? Where at times there is joy, at times, dejection? What is opposed to these things is the portion of wolves, as one of the saints said.⁶⁶ But may God make firm the steps of our discipline with true certainty and His holy teaching, for to Him is due glory, dominion, and majesty both now and unto the endless ages of ages. Amen.

point of death is nothing other than refraining from sin. Now to refrain from sin is a work within our natural powers, but not something that buys us the Kingdom' (ibid. § 25). Works therefore are nothing but remedies for our passionate state, tools that aid us in amending ourselves. God does not withhold remission until works are offered in payment. Rather, works help repair the vessel of the soul, making it capable again of holding divine grace. St. Isaac says, 'Christ demands not the doing of the commandments, but the soul's amendment, because of which He gave His commandments' (p. 282). Thus even the various *epitimia* prescribed by the Church are given to us, not that we may thereby placate God, nor because He demands satisfaction for wrongs committed by us; rather, they are provided as therapies to help us heal our weaknesses, as weapons to help us combat our passions. For this reason St. John Climacus writes in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* that fasting is used to cure unclean thoughts and overcome gluttony; stillness cures vainglory, almsgiving heals us of avarice, etc.

⁶⁴ I. e. the human state.

⁶⁵ Rom. 8:21.

⁶⁶ See p. 337.

