

On Other Differences in the Concepts of Knowledge: St. Isaac the Syrian



St. Isaac the Syrian, (c. AD 613- c.A.D. 700). Ordained Bishop of Nineveh. Great ascetic and teacher. illuminated monastic writer.

On Knowledge, c. AD 688

Knowledge that is occupied with visible things and receives instruction concerning them through the senses, is called natural. But knowledge that is occupied with the noetic power that is within things and with incorporeal natures is called spiritual, since perception in this case is received by the spirit and not by the senses. In both of these kinds of knowledge matter comes to the soul from without to give her comprehension. But that knowledge which is occupied with Divinity is called supernatural, or rather, unknowing and knowledge-transcending. The soul does not gain divine vision into this knowledge through material external to herself, as in the former instances, but immaterially it manifests itself within her by the grace of God, suddenly and unexpectedly, and it is revealed from within. ‘The

Kingdom of Heaven is within you', and you should not hope to find it in a place, nor does it come in observation, according to the world of Christ. But without external cause and without meditation upon it, it is revealed within the hidden image of the intellect, for the intellect cannot find in it any matter [*for meditation—(in Syriac)*].

The first knowledge comes from constant study and diligence in learning; the second comes from a good manner of life and the intellect's faith; and the third is now allotted to faith alone. For by faith knowledge is abolished, works come to an end, and the employment of the senses becomes superfluous. The more knowledge descends from this summit, the more it is given honour. And the further it descends, so much the more is it honoured. When it reaches earth and earthly affairs, it becomes the lord of all, and without it every thing is crippled and inoperative. But when the soul raises up her vision and stretches forth her concepts to celestial things, and longs for what the eyes of the body do not see and over which the flesh has no dominion, then all things stand by faith, which may our Lord Jesus Christ grant us, He that is blessed unto the ages Amen.

[Homily 53: “Short Sections on Other Differences in the Concepts of Knowledge,” in **The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian**, translated by Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, MA 1984, p. 264-5.]