

Innovations in Justice According to Saint Isaac the Syrian

Depictions of war in Homer's *Iliad* and similar works including Aeschylus's *Oresteia* show that Ancient Greek notions of justice emphasize an "eye for an eye" mentality. This perspective is challenged by commentary from Saint Isaac the Syrian, who writes, "Conquer men by your gentle kindness, and make zealous men wonder at your goodness. Put the lover of justice to shame by your compassion. With the afflicted be afflicted in mind. Love all men, but keep distant from all men," (Homily 64). Justice, according to St. Isaac, is measured in the context of God rather than traditional Hellenistic demonstrations motivated by conflict and glory. Relative to earlier Greek philosophers, this new understanding of justice becomes significant, as it marks both a gradual progression away from its vengeful attribute along with previous tendencies of contextualizing the virtue on the basis of social institutions. Although previous scholars, such as Anthony Kaldellis, outline the interaction between paganism and Christianity during the early periods of the Middle Ages and its subsequent revival in later years within Byzantium, this presentation offers a new approach to the understanding of justice in light of St. Isaac's theology. The moral degradation of characters including Agamemnon and Achilles within Homer's *Iliad*, and their adherence towards moral boundaries present within the narrative, is enough to invite further interpretations. By examining how ideas of justice evolved over time while considering early interactions between Christianity and paganism during the initial years of the Byzantine Empire, this talk will demonstrate how Saint Isaac the Syrian's commentary can provide a new perspective for interpreting justice in one of the most influential texts within the ancient world.

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