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JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER AND THE INNER DIALOGUE WITH THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC

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There is a surprising similarity between the two fathers at the center of the two difficult stories of sacrifice in the Bible: Abraham and Jephthah. Both act out of opposition to the society in which they live. Abraham is the first rebel. He rebels against the accepted religion of his father's house, breaks the idols and sets out on a new path, on a journey of solitary faith into the unknown. Jephthah is his mirror image: he is thrown into a different path. It is not he who chooses to leave, but his brothers and his community who cast him out to deprive him of his share in his father's inheritance, because he is the son of a harlot. Both become charismatic and lonely figures, leaders who organize for themselves a private army in the wilderness.

The trial they both undergo is remarkably similar. Abraham is required to sacrifice his son in order to prove supreme loyalty to God. Jephthah makes a deal with God in order to win the war and gain a new place in the society that had expelled him: «then whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me ... I will offer it up as a burnt offering». Therefore, it seems that his trial too was imposed upon him, a product of a desperate desire to belong.

And what is even more amazing is the silence. It does not occur to either of them that perhaps the decree can be changed.

Abraham, who argues and bargains with God over the fate of the people of Sodom, who does not spare them, is completely silent regarding his own son. He does not ask, does not protest, does not beg for mercy.

Jephthah, when his daughter comes out to meet him with timbrels and dancing, believes his vow cannot be changed. He tears his clothes but does not think to go to the priest, to seek an annulment, to redeem the vow.

Both display absolute loyalty to God at the expense of their child.

But here the story splits into two different voices of the children.

Isaac inquires along the way: «Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?». Perhaps his innocent inquiry teaches us of an unconscious fear creeping into his heart. But at the moment of truth, he does not resist. He cooperates with his own death sentence, allowing his father to bind him.

Jephthah's daughter, in contrast, understands a piercing and chilling truth. She understands that her love and devotion to her father was her downfall. Had she not been the first to run toward him, with such great joy, her fate would have been different. She does not plead for her life, does not beg. She finds solace in a cruel reversal of roles: instead of being a victim of her father's foolishness and haste, she chooses to strengthen him and encourage him to fulfill to the end the promise he vowed. «My father, you have opened your mouth to the Lord, do to me as has gone out of your mouth». She transforms from a passive victim into an active heroine who gives moral validity to her father's act. She is the one who asks only for two months to weep for her virginity in the mountains with her companions. Traditional commentators, who found it difficult to bear the horror of the story, sought to convert Jephthah's daughter's death sentence into a life of seclusion dedicated to the service of God, in solitude.

This interpretation is indeed contrary to the plain meaning of the text – «and he did to her what he had vowed» –, but it mainly teaches how difficult this story was to digest for generations of readers.

The end of the story of the sacrifice of Isaac claims that Abraham went by himself to Beersheva. We do not know what happened to Isaac. Did he run away? Did he decide not to accompany his father? Perhaps he was suffering from post-trauma and stayed on the mountain? We do not know.

In Jephthah's story, the narrative comes to a final issue where the daughter is sacrificed in some way and with this act she joins her father spiritually.

Both of these stories, the Abraham and Jephthah's vow, ultimately present one painful truth: the price paid by the children of ideological leaders whose entire lives are dedicated to the community and to the idea. These children, living in the shadow of great fathers, often become victims of their fathers' lives devoted to higher causes.

SOMMARIO

C'è una sorprendente somiglianza tra i due padri al centro delle due complicate storie di sacrificio nella Bibbia: Abramo e Iefte. Entrambi agiscono in opposizione alla società in cui vivono. Abramo è il primo ribelle. Si ribella contro la religione accettata nella casa di suo padre, rompe gli idoli e intraprende un nuovo percorso, un viaggio di fede solitaria verso l'ignoto. Iefte è la sua immagine speculare: viene spinto su un percorso diverso.

ABSTRACT

There is a surprising similarity between the two fathers at the center of the two difficult stories of sacrifice in the Bible: Abraham and Jephthah. Both act out of opposition to the society in which they live. Abraham is the first rebel. He rebels against the accepted religion of his father's house, breaks the idols and sets out on a new path, on a journey of solitary faith into the unknown. Jephthah is his mirror image: he is thrown into a different path.

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Bibbia
Genesi
Abramo
Iefte
Beersheva

KEYWORDS

Bible
Genesis
Abraham
Jephthah
Beersheva

Contributo, come da regolamento, non sottoposto a procedura di referaggio “double blind”.