

## ISAAC'S SACRIFICE ILLUMINATED (on the topic of Divided God)

God has many faces. So many faces we cannot fit all of them into a single positive image, even though we wish to do so. We see the most sincere of God's faces when we try to be intimate with Him and entrust ourselves to Him. We get to know a different face when looking at the exotic religions of our neighbours or when watching the daily news, reporting about bloody battles for one's own and the only true image of God. We familiarise ourselves with mercy and ruthlessness, reflected on God's face during our hardships and pleads. We recognise the whole bizarreness of religious institutions, manipulating with ignorance and fear of afterlife. God's benevolence, described in many religious tomes, is a most eluding quality, which people resort to when they seek to find reasons for God's sometimes bizarre actions. We want Him to be responsible for everything we should be responsible for ourselves. And nevertheless, regardless of all this, we face a strategic dilemma: should we throw away the promised heavenly holidays by being disobedient, or shall we cowardly seek shelter in the luxurious labyrinths of church buildings.

It is difficult to choose the right way in the peculiar Tower of Babel which we ended up in during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century, after we succeeded in increasing our own horizons enviably and witness the infinity of space. Even God had to adapt to new dimensions and redefine Himself. We now live in a world of multiple truths and we have renounced what was the only superior truth until now – God's truth.

What does this mean? Could all these new truths be various faces of God?

In this throng of civilisations it is by all means useful to explain the world in an abstract and empirical manner up to a certain degree, regardless of how religious we are and which religion we belong to. If I think about God with European roots, I see a myriad of images and stories, making up a huge myth about God. We cannot spend a day without some image of God reaching us from somewhere, reminding us of our dialogue with God; and if there are no images, then our guilty conscience may easily remind us that we afforded more than God's teachings let us.

It is easier to behold the mystery of God through the material world surrounding us, and to feel unburdened awe of the exquisite beam of the afternoon light, shining through our window and warming our soul. Is there anything godlike about it? Through history artists frequently painted light as a substitute for an allegoric depiction of God's presence. All the nuances of the light painted in the works of

Caravaggio and Rembrandt express God's inspiration, transferred into concrete space. Therefore light is the messenger, the bringer of God's messages, Hermes, miraculously impregnating Mary.

"Let there be light!" God said.

If for a moment we digress from the spiritual and enter the empirical world of science, we see that light is also an extraordinary phenomenon here. With its unimaginable speed of 300 000 kilometres per second it defines the present moment, here and now, ensuring the conditions for life, on the basis of which we try to comprehend this world and integrate it into a manageable scheme of our experience and conceptions. We know that the concept of reality fails as soon as we travel a few light years from Earth. We enter the realm of relativity.

But let us return to the spiritual nature of light. Let us focus on the familiar biblical story of Abraham and Isaac.

The constant testing of human attitude and unconditional devotion is also one of the faces of God. He commanded Abraham to father a child with a much younger Sarah, later Sarai. Abraham loved his son very much, perhaps even more than his God, so God presented him with a new trial, hard without comparison.

He should sacrifice his son Isaac to him. Of course, Abraham feels terrible, but his devotion to God finally makes him leave for the mountains with his son, where they are supposed to offer the customary lamb. However, the closer they get to the altar, the quieter Abraham becomes. He finds it hard to respond to Isaac's enquiries about how they are to sacrifice a lamb when there are none around. Abraham does not respond and the tension mounts. The hardest moment arrives when the father looks into his son's eyes. His silence and his inexorable, grief-stricken gaze reveals his true intentions to Isaac. Isaac is shockingly calm; he knows what awaits him, but on the other hand he trusts his father – whatever happens, his father would not let him suffer. However, Abraham's soul is in hell, the battle with himself stays his hand, reaching for the dagger. But the knife finally comes to light, Abraham in emotional agony, and a stretched-out arm mercilessly plunges it in Isaac's heart. It is the end. Abraham collapses into the pool of blood next to his dead son and roars in desperation.

After a few painfully long minutes a strange light shines upon Abraham. An angel's voice speaks out of it: "Stop, Abraham! Do not harm your son, for I love him as much as I love you!"

That may be so, but it is too late, scientists would say if they presumed light only travelled as slowly as three metres per second. Quickly in our personal range, but too slowly to save Isaac. Reality itself would probably dissolve if that were so. Or perhaps it would be radically different. Moments of direct perception and action would only take place in our immediate vicinity, inside the three-metre circle, while everything else would become an illusion of reality. Anything we saw further than three metres away would have already been long gone. Predators would chase their prey in vain. The food chain would distort fatally and reality as we know it would disappear, as life itself probably would, too.

Sure, sure, but this is only fiction. Of course it is. However, it illustrates that light in all of its scientific beauty on one hand and in the role of the God's messenger on the other hand only work in the immediate vicinity of Earth. Here God can maintain His sense of perfection and only care about being constantly perfect, as Aristotle already explained. However, as soon as we imagine Isaac's story further in space and imagine God as the source of our own light, as that characteristic messenger, that very scenario might take place – the light might get there too late.

But perhaps it is not so. Maybe God oversees the whole of the universe and always calculates everything so that it turns out just right. Well, if we are prepared to flatter Him by believing in such consistency, why then do we not overlook His inconsistencies? Despite the written moral codex He intended for people, He allows his institutional servants to be manipulated in a terrible manner. But perhaps we do not like a relative God. Of course, then He would not represent such flawless superiority, vouching for us and taking care of everything in our stead. He would simply be fallible and as such he could not be an ideal for His worshippers.

But what would we do without flaws?

There is also an interesting story about the race for time. Measuring the cycles of the celestial bodies, placing them in the context of Earth's coordinates and establishing an accurate calendar was one of the most difficult tasks in the long history of mankind. It was not until the reform of Pope Gregory XIII that mankind got the closest to the accurate calendar; however, if Pope Gregory XIII saw how today we measure time with the atomic clock, which registers the oscillations of a radioactive element

and which is so precise it discovers deviations in the Earth's revolutions around its axis, he would at least briefly ask himself about the perfect nature of God.

God, who created a perfect world, is not actually precise. A clever human invention proves his negligence. Time, which God is supposed to measure his universal kingdom with and which he uses to define the precise dimensions that mankind should adhere to, gets used for the opposite goal. With it mankind measures its God; it ascertains His imprecision, discovers mathematical inconsistencies and thus unknowingly ascribes him frailty, characteristic of humans.

Or, to put it more simply:

Is it not easier to recognise one's own human fragility in someone else? Do we not feel safer if we ascribe self-confidence and psychical stability to God, our partner or our teacher?

Certainly. It is far easier to recognise all of our characteristics, wishes and fears in others instead of identifying them within ourselves. It is far easier to take the dirty laundry to the cleaner's and pay for the service than to wash it at home. It is much easier to recognise the aspects of ourselves as sin and wash them away in church instead of having the courage to face them ourselves.

Why? What are we afraid of? The unknown, darkness, loneliness?

It is not possible to live without fear and a certain amount of ignorance, but despite that we can create a bearable context for our lives, which will not push us to the extremes. We would certainly feel better if we shared our fears with others instead of unloading them onto God, waiting for Him to deliver us from suffering.

God would probably also be upset if Isaac's story took place in the manner it was described in the above text. Perhaps in His quandary He would feel the need to confide in someone.

There is no sense in perfection or superiority; these are only concealed human wishes, responsible for vast amounts of harm during all of human history in the name of the divine.

Ultimately, it is not important at all whether God exists or not. We can still recognise Him as light shining upon our existence or we may choose not to. What is important

is that we learn how to cope with our fear of the unknown ourselves, and how to enter the exciting and nevertheless divine areas of our undiscovered reality with good intentions carried within us. God in the human form is still more acceptable than the one above Him.

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