ADAM:
CREATED IN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD

MOSHE REISS

This article is dedicated to the memory of Patricia Berlyn z"l who assisted the author enormously in her role as associate editor.

Only man is distinguished from all the animals by being noted as being made in the image and likeness of God. In some way man is like God. Even if the similarity between man and God could not be defined more precisely, the significance of this statement of the nature of man for the understanding of biblical thought could not be over-emphasized. God has impressed His image on this particular creation; man is thus the one godlike creature in all of creation.

Man's nature is not understood if he is viewed merely as the most highly developed of the animals with which he shares the earth, nor is it perceived if he is seen as an infinitesimal being dwarfed by the enormous magnitude of the universe. By the doctrine of the image of God, Genesis affirms the dignity and worth of man, and elevates all men to the highest status conceivable, short of complete divinization.

The story of the creation of the first man and the first woman is told in two different accounts. The idea that man was created in the image and likeness of God appears in the first account:[1]

> *'Let us make a human* [adam] *in our image* [be-tzalmenu], *by our likeness* [ki-demutenu], *to subdue*[2] *the fish of the sea and the fowl of the heavens and the cattle and the wild beasts and all the crawling things that crawl upon the Earth.' And God created the human* [adam] *in his image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them* (Gen. 1:26-27).

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ANGELS

This account seems to begin in heaven. God speaks in the plural, 'our image.' It is not clear who besides God is being referred to here. Several answers have been presented: God is referring to the Creation (Radak and Maimonides), the heavenly Court (angels), Himself or the plurality of His majesty (Gen. Rabbah 8:3,5). The midrashic idea that man is created in the image of both God and angels is supported by many biblical accounts of angelic beings. God can appear in the guise of an angel and angels can appear as an image of God; as divine agents. In Mamre 'the Lord appeared' as three men that come and speak to Abraham; one of them tells him that 'I [God] will return and Sarah shall have a son;' she laughs and then 'the Lord' speaks directly to Abraham (18:1-16). Jacob fights a man all night, the man renames him 'Israel', and the man turns out to be Elohim (32:29-32). In Exodus an angel whom the people are to heed has God's name within him (Ex. 23:20-21). The line between angels and the divine seems almost intentionally ambiguous.

These angels, in the Pentateuch, appear on earth; in the various books of the prophets we find angels with wings (Is. 6:1-3) and more bizarre images in Ezekiel (chapters 1 and 10). The different descriptions of angels may represent different aspects of God.

The aspects of the books of prophets noted above seem like the Gnostic and theosophic ruminations of the kabbalists. Michael Fishbane refers to *midrashim* as myths and sees the kabbalists as inheritors of the *midrashim*.[3] "They imply that this canonical source conceals a deeper dimension about the acts and nature of God, and thus the language of the readable text is but the surface of another narrative about divine deeds or divine feelings hidden from immediate view. To know how to read rightly is thus to know that the historical character of Scripture is but the verbal outcropping of another narrative – not an account of Israel but of God, and not of the events of the earth but of the hidden acts of the Lord in heaven . . . Scripture suffuses all; for it is the real myth of God, insofar as this is ever or at all sayable in human speech or accessible to the human imagination. God's truth is refracted in fragments of myth bound by the syntax of Scripture".[4]

Divine agents are seen in the Pentateuch and expanded in the Prophets as noted above. Various Jewish texts from the fourth century BCE show a ten-

dency to expand such agents.[5] Michael is noted in the book of Daniel; he will protect the righteousness of Israel (Dan. 12:1); while Gabriel interprets Daniel's dreams (Dan. 8:16; 9:21-27). Daniel also refers to a heavenly being *one like a son of man* (Dan. 7:13). Beyond the Tanakh, we find the four Holy Watchers named Sariel, Raphael, Gabriel and Michael, or the seven adding the names Uriel, Re'uel and Remiel, in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the First Book of Enoch.[6]

Although the idea that man is created in the image of God and the angels is found in the Midrash and may be seen in various biblical texts, most commentators focused on the idea that man is made in the image of God, and did not relate to the image of angels.[7]

IMAGE OF GOD

Genesis 1:26 makes it clear that it is by the image of God that man is distinguished from all the animals, which share with him the sixth day as the moment of their creation. Who or what is meant by 'our image' and 'likeness'? In what respect is man is like God? Various answers have been proposed.

(1) Some have seen the image consisting in man's physical form, which is in some way understood to be similar to God's. According to Goshen-Gottstein, "in all rabbinic literature there is not a single statement that categorically denies that God has a body or form." He continues that "the creation of man in God's image refers to man's physical [bodily] form."[8] Rabbi Isaiah of Trani (1180-1250), an Italian scholar in Talmudic studies, believed that some of the Talmudic Sages believed in God's corporeality.[9] This despite Maimonides' third article of faith and many other commentator's rejection of such a belief.

At an evacuation in Northern Syria a statute was found of King Hadduyiti, of Guzana. The inscription in Aramaic states that the statute is the likeness (*demuta*) and image (*tzelem*) of the King.[10] This suggests a context for the biblical term. The word *tzelem* may imply that God has an image that can be replicated. In Genesis 5:3 we are told that Adam's son Seth has the *likeness and image* of his father, referring to his physical likeness. Based on this, one can construe that Adam resembles a similar bodily image of God. Later on the Torah states *He who sheds human blood by humans his blood shall be shed, for in the image God He made humankind* (Gen. 9:6).

The physical meaning of *tzelem* was emphasized in a paper by Paul Humbert, who concluded from a study of *tzelem* and *demut* in the Bible that the phrase *be-tzalmenu ki-demutenu*, 'our image according to our likeness' in Genesis 1:26 means that man was created "with the same physical form as the deity; of which he is a molded three-dimensional embodiment; delineated and exteriorised."[11]

Ludwig Koehler similarly considered, in examining the use of *tzelem* in other Semitic languages, that *tzelem* is primarily an upright statue, and that the image of God is to be seen primarily in man's upright posture and more generally, in man's creation according to God's *tzelem*, i.e. His image in the sense of form.[12] One of the chief distinguishing marks of man in relation to the animals is his upright posture, as was already recognized in antiquity. Man named and was to subdue all the animals.

God in the Bible is described as if he had hands, eyes, ears, and physical actions are attributed to Him such as laughing, smelling, and whistling; He was also spoken of as feeling the emotions of hatred, anger, joy, regret. De Geradon suggested that the image may be compared to man's possession of heart, tongue, and limbs, corresponding to the divine faculty of thought, speech, and action.[13] These are human attributes; of course one can state they are anthropomorphic allegories, but the *peshat* can have a literal meaning. In the ancient mid-east these were meant as literal attributes of gods. The Hebrew Bible was written at that time and its people would have expected what the words meant in the broader culture they belonged to.

(2) The divine image is some spiritual quality of man: his self-consciousness and self-determination, his reason and understanding, his capability for thought and his desire for immortality. For Maimonides this is human intellect which resembles divine intellect and allows humans to commune with God.[14] Sforno, in his commentary to Gen. 1:26, explains that it is man's free will. Whatever the case, the image and likeness of God that is found in man is a non-physical characteristic.

(3) The image may be a term for the immediate relationship between God and man. According to Abraham Joshua Heschel, "in a very deep and strong sense God cannot be conceived by us in complete detachment from man. God and man have to be thought of together. A prophet is a man who holds God and man in one thought and at one time. He does not think of God without

man and he does not think of man without God."[15] Heschel believed that biblical, rabbinic, and kabbalistic thought converge on the idea of the interdependency of the divine and the human. Perhaps the image can be seen as the access, the conduit to God.

(4) David Clines summarizes his view as follows: "Man is created not *in* God's image, since God has no image of His own, but *as* God's image, or rather to be God's image, that is to deputize in the created world for the transcendent God who remains outside the world order. That man is God's image means that he is the visible corporeal representative of the invisible, bodiless God; he is representative rather than representation, since the idea of portrayal is secondary in the significance of the image. However, the term 'likeness' is an assurance that man is an adequate and faithful representative of God on earth."[16]

If we take the whole history of interpretations into account, we find two quite distinct basic approaches to the meaning of the image. One view locates the image in some spiritual quality or faculty of the human person. It is from the setting of the image doctrine at the apex of structure in the creation narrative and from the solemnity of the statement of divine deliberation with which it is introduced that we have a carefully considered theology expressing the dignity and spiritual capacities of man. The other approach, which leads to a physical interpretation of the image, while equally ancient, is not always well appreciated in modern times.

DIVINE NATURE

Throughout Genesis chapter 1, the transcendence of God is firmly established. God stands outside and above the created order, and the only continuity between God and his work is the Word pronounced in the Torah. It is of the greatest theological moment therefore that precisely within this depiction of God's transcendent freedom over the whole world-order we find the doctrine of God's image, that is to say, of the real presence, or immanence, of the deity within the world through the person of man.

One senses in the opening chapters of Genesis the two aspects of the divine nature, transcendence and immanence. They have at one and the same time freed God from bondage to the world-order by asserting the creaturehood of all that is not God, and have ensured that the statement about the immanence

of God firmly excludes any possibility of man's divinization, for man too is explicitly said to be a creature of God. The Bible, at least as interpreted by Jewish commentators, does not see the relation of the transcendence and immanence of God as a problem. Isaiah quotes the angels singing *Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord . . . His glory fills the whole earth* (Is. 6:3). The Hebrew word *kadosh* meaning 'holy' also means 'separate.' Thus one can say the Lord is separate in heaven and still fills the whole earth. Yet there is considerable tension between these two aspects. Here the polarities are merged in the conception of the transcendent God immanent through the person of man. To be human and to be the image of God are not separable.

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise stated all translations are from Alter, Robert, *The Five Books of Moses,* (New York: Norton, 2004).
2. Alter uses the term 'sway', I prefer 'subdue'.
3. Fishbane, Michael, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) p. 11.
4. Fishbane, p. 309-310.
5. Nickelsburg, George, W.E., *Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003) p. 90.
6. Nickelsburg, p. 99.
7. One notable exception is Sforno, who explains that man is like angels who act consciously but unlike angels (and like God) in that man acts according to free will.
8. Goshen-Gottstein, Alon, "The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature", *Harvard Theological Review*, 1994, 87:2, pp. 172-174.
9. Rabbi Isaiah of Trani, *Sanhedrei Gedolah le-Massekhet Sanhedrin* (Jerusalem, 1972), volume 5, section 2, p. 118. See also Marc Shapiro, *The Limits of Orthodox Theology*, (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004) pp. 45-70.
10. Andreas Schule, "Made in the Image of God", *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 2005, 117, pp. 9-11.
11. Quoted by Clines, D.J.A., "The Image of God in Man", *Tyndale Bulletin*, 1968, 17, p. 56. "Avec la même physique que la divinité, qu'il en est une effigie concrète et plastique, figurée et extérieure" (P. Humbert, *Etudes sur le récit du paradis et de la chute dans la Genèse*, Secrétariat de l'Université, Neuchâtel (1940) 153-175, especially 157). Cf. also his 'Trois notes sur Genèse I', in I*nterpretationes ad V. Tertinentes Sigmundo Mowinckel missae*, Forlaget Land og Kirke, Oslo (1955) pp. 85-96.
12. Clines, pg. 56, L. Koehler, "Die Grundstelle der Imago-Dei-Lehre", *Theologische Zeitschrift* (hereafter *TZ*) 4 (1948) 56-22, especially 20f.
13. B. de Geradon, 'L'homme à l'image de Dieu', *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 80, 1958. pp. 683-695, especially p. 689, quoted by Clines, p. 60.
14. Maimonides, Moses, *The Guide Of The Perplexed*, Tr. Shlomo Pines, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963) pp. 24-25.

15. Sussanah Heschel, ed. *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, A. J. Heschel, (New York, Farrar Straus, 1996) p. 159.
16. Clines, *The Image*, p. 101.