

## Notes on the Concept of *Imitatio Dei*

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Unless it is granted that there is some common element that binds Creator and creature, some minimal resemblance between God and man that cries out for fulfillment, then He is so totally "other" that He does not really matter. If God and man cannot meet on the plane of moral character, then religion is completely deistic, man is utterly alone, and faith is nothing more than unprovable assent to a set of metaphysical propositions totally devoid of ethical consequences. Such a philosophical religion is unthinkable to the Hebrew mentality.

It hath been told thee, O man, what is good and what the Lord doth require of thee: only to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly *with* the Lord thy God. (Micah 6:8)

The ideals of justice and mercy and humility are not rationally arrived at or supported by man independently of his religious affirmations. Nor are they solely disembodied commands issued forth magisterially by the Absolute out of the infinite recesses of His celestial heights. They are an invitation to man to *participate* in the divine activity. God both appeals and commands. He tells us what is both "good" and "required": that we act "*with* the Lord thy God." (The phrase may be read to apply to all three antecedent elements—"to do justly" and "to love mercy" as well as "to walk humbly.")

The passage from Micah is reminiscent of the words of Moses at the end of Deuteronomy 10:

And now, Israel, what doth the Lord require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him . . . For the Lord thy God . . . doth execute justice for the orphan and the widow and loveth the stranger . . .

Micah uses the verb *doresh*, "require" or "demand"; Moses uses the gentler *sho'el*, "ask." Like Micah, Moses sees God as the model for human conduct. At the very beginning he indirectly implies the "withness," or fellowship, of man and God (*sho'el me'imak*, which literally means "asks from with you," rather than the standard *sho'el mi'meka*, "asks of you") and then explicitly commands the imitation of God: "to walk in all His ways." By means of the imitation of God, we learn to do that which neighborly love itself cannot teach us: to love the *stranger* and plead for the outcast and the disadvantaged. Thus the retort of Ben 'Azzai to R. 'Akiva—who held that "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" is "a great principle in the Torah"—that "'This is the book of the generations of man . . . in the likeness of God made He him' [Gen. 5:1] is a greater principle than that."<sup>1</sup>

The concept of man's creation in the divine Image implies not only a new identity for man, but the possibilities of self-transformation; the Image immanent within him both represents and challenges him to transcendence. To put it pithily, the *imago Dei* is linked with *imitatio Dei*.<sup>2</sup>

The Image is more than a metaphor for a metaphysical deposit of dignity which magically calls man forth out of the stifling uniformity of

1. *Sifra* 4. Both here and in P.T. *Ned.* 9:4, only the first half of the verse is cited, but it is standard practice in rabbinic literature to quote the beginning of a verse when the middle or end is intended as the proof-text. So RaABaD to *Sifra*, loc. cit., and see *Torah Shelemah* to Gen. 5:1, no. 1.

2. The concept of Imitation, of *hepu theo*, "go after God," was known to Plato; see *Republic* 613a, *Theatetus* 176b, and elsewhere. Philo (*Migr.* 24, 132) quotes Plato approvingly, adding as a proof text, "And Abraham came near to God" (Gen. 18:23), i.e., Abraham assimilated the divine quality of pity and thus pleaded for Sodom. A similar interpretation is offered by the medieval talmudist R. Eliezer of Metz, *Sefer Yereim*, 3. The idea was known to both Islamic and Jewish philosophers; for references see Sarah O. Heller Wilensky, "Isaac Ibn Latif—Philosopher or Kabbalist?" in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge, 1967), p. 190 f. See too S. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, chap. 13; Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo*, II, pp. 194–96; David S. Shapiro, "The Doctrine of the Image of God and *Imitatio Dei*," in *Judaism* (Winter 1963), pp. 69 ff.



cosmic naturalness into a special place in divine providence. It is a concept filled with ethical content, and one that is intimately connected with the supplementary notion of the Imitation of God.

God, for the Jewish mind, is a demanding, commanding, requiring, inviting, pleading God, and His implorations are directed to man to be "with" Him, to "follow" Him, to "walk in His ways." Anything less yields a God incommunicado, a *deus absconditus*, eternally incarcerated in His absoluteness, and man abandoned to cosmic solitude, his religion ethically neutral and morally dumb, and hence spiritually sterile. Such a deity cannot be imitated. He is more abstract and more sophisticated than the idolater's fetish, but not fundamentally different. Indeed, the psalmist conceives of the "imitation" of the pagan god as a curse: "They have ears but hear not; noses have they but they smell not . . . neither speak they with their throat. They that make them *shall be like unto them*; yea, every one that trusteth in them" (Ps. 115:6-8). Not so with the personal God of Judaism. Image and Imitation are the bridge on which mortal man and his infinite Creator meet. And it is this bridge, this linkage, that gives Judaism its distinctive moral practicality.

The relationship between Image and Imitation must be approached in the context of a further analysis of the Image-idea. Upon reflection, it will be seen that there are two supplementary notions, or moments, in this concept. The first connotes an irreducible, ontically real, and finished quality: man's worth and dignity and separateness from the rest of creation derive from his spiritual nature—whether "spiritual" be defined as Power, Reason, or Freedom—which in turn derives from the divine Source of all spirituality. The value-generating Image is a *character indelibilis* in man; it is irrevocable and uniform and cannot be manipulated by any utilitarian calculus. All men, without distinction, are created in this Image. Hence, murder—no matter of whom, no matter what his moral disposition—is punishable by death (Gen. 9:6).<sup>3</sup>

The second moment is the capacity for spiritual growth, the infinite potential of man for self-transcendence and moral improvement. The first is indicative; it speaks of a gift; the second is imperative and speaks not only of a divine gift but of a human duty: God is not only the prototype *from* whence I derive, but that *to* which I am bound to go, the

3. See Maimonides *Guide for the Perplexed* 1:1, and cf. Commentary of Abarbanel, *ad. loc.*, who suggests the absolute, uniform nature of Imagehood.



model to which I must conform. We may distinguish between the two by referring to the first element as *zelle*m, "Image," and to the second as *demut*, "Likeness." Image is ontological, Likeness is teleological.

It is noteworthy that Ben 'Azzai, in the passage mentioned above, was discriminating in the particular verse he chose to counterpose his "greater principle" to R. 'Akiva's "great principle" of neighborly love. He did *not* cite any of the various verses referring to *zelle*m, "image," in chapter 1 of Genesis, but selected, rather, chapter 5 verse 1: "in the likeness of God made He him." Likeness, or *demut*, the companion concept of Image, or *zelle*m, more pronouncedly implies similitude (and the consequent imperative to realize it). "Image" suggests a grant of value as an impersonal gift; "Likeness" immediately connotes shared qualities, something in which both participate in common, a potentiality waiting to be actualized.<sup>4</sup>

4. Interestingly, the recently discovered Targum Yerushalmi, a pre-Christian Aramaic translation of the Pentateuch, renders *zelle*m itself as *demut* or *demu*; similarly, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan b. Uziel translates *zelle*m, "Image," as *deyokna*, "Likeness" (see Altmann, *loc. cit.*). See too *Mekilta de-R. Simeon bar Yohai*, cited and expanded upon by R. Yaakov Zebi Meklenburg, *Ha-Ketab we'ha-Kaballah* to Gen. 1:26. In terms of practical morality, *demut* is more significant than *zelle*m.

The distinction here made between Image and Likeness was apparently anticipated by the second-century Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons. His theme has been echoed by other Eastern Church Fathers, and in various forms has been repeated by modern theologians, such as (the Protestant) Friederich Schleiermacher, and (the Orthodox) N. Berdyaev and P. Bratsiotis, and in our own day has been appropriated by John Hick in his *Evil and the God of Love*. However, there are significant differences between the Irenaeus exegesis and the one I am here suggesting. For Irenaeus and those who follow him, the distinction serves the purpose of an eschatological anthropology, as an alternative to the Augustinian doctrine of the Fall. Image, for them, represents man's present spiritual value as a rational and free being, while Likeness, or similitude, refers to man's longing and striving for God, which will be culminated in the eschaton. But here a typically christological element enters—the incarnation is held up as the eschatological fulfillment. Thus, Schleiermacher (who, although he does not quote Irenaeus in this respect, yet follows him in his thinking) speaks of "the first Adam" and "the second Adam," the first referring to the Biblical Adam, who possessed the potentiality for full God-consciousness (equivalent to Image), and the second Adam, identified by Schleiermacher as Jesus, in whom these spiritual potentialities were supposedly actualized (equivalent to Likeness). This pattern is adopted by Hick too (*op. cit.*, p. 290). However, the two terms Image and Likeness are being used here in a different sense, and not only because, of course, no christological reference is intended. My point of departure is not anthropological and eschatological but personal, ethical, and immediate. The growth from Image to Likeness is charged to each individual, not to the race as a whole. It is the immediate source for each person's duty or duties, and cannot be accelerated or impeded by the intrusion of extraneous soteric elements. It therefore does not lend itself to any type of *heilsgeschichte* or any modified doctrine of the Fall or of fallenness, such as Hick has so brilliantly essayed.



Image and Likeness each symbolizes another type of man.<sup>5</sup> Yet existentially rather than typologically, Image and Likeness are in a reciprocal relation to each other. One implies the other. The meaning of each becomes clear in the existential human situation which calls for moral decisions. I confront my fellow man and have the options of either hurting him or doing him good. When I acknowledge that *he* is possessed of the Image of God, I will not hurt him. It is *his* Image which controls my behavior. His Imagehood imposes certain minimal restraints upon me. Simultaneous with this consideration of his objective metaphysical worth is my own subjective awareness that *I* am created in God's *Likeness*, that it is imperative for me to act in a certain manner towards him—with compassion and concern and forgiveness—in imitation of my Creator. The Image within my neighbor gives him, in my eyes, juridical protection against my overreaching and concupiscence. The Likeness of myself generates concern for his well-being, over and above the ethico-legal restraints that flow from his Image status: the *lif-nim mi-shurat ha-din*, supererogatory conduct. Furthermore, Image endows my neighbor with value in my eyes in terms of my relationship with him, urging upon me that course of action which will benefit him or, at least, not injure him. It is an act of *goodness* toward my neighbor, created in the divine Image; and in this sense, it is subject to some of the same limitations that circumscribe neighborly love (a theme I have developed elsewhere). Likeness, however, with its corollary of Imitation, demands *rightness*, my emulation of God's moral attributes over and beyond those of relationship which can be subjected to the utilitarian criterion.

5. These two moments of Image and Likeness may be read as corresponding to "Adam the first" and "Adam the second" in Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's great essay, "The Lonely Man of Faith," in *Tradition* (Summer 1965: vol. 7, no. 2). These two types derive from the two accounts of creation in Genesis. Note that the first verse in the first account, telling of the creation of man (1:26), speaks of both Image and Likeness, but that immediately thereafter (1:27) we read only of *zelle*m, not *demut*. Adam the first reflects Image, the charismatic spiritual endowment, or "dignity," which raises him above the natural order only so as to permit him to confront it as controller and manipulator; but he remains, as Rabbi Soloveitchik puts it, part of the "natural community." Adam the second reveals the Likeness (although Genesis 2 speaks neither of *zelle*m nor of *demut*, its noetic content indeed refers to the latter, which term is used exclusively in the summary given in 5:1), aspiring to fellowship with God, to the redemptive order, thus forming a "covenantal community." The togetherness with God implied in Likeness must result in a normative ethico-moral message in which men open up to each other, even as God steps out of His forbidding transcendence and reveals Himself to man.

Unlike Image, which is constant and indelible, Likeness is fluid and dynamic and can, therefore, be consciously denied fulfillment and subverted. The Sages of the Talmud thus speak of guilt as issuing from the inversion of the Likeness (*demut deyokno*) through sins committed by man.<sup>6</sup>

How is the Likeness to be fulfilled and its frustration or abortion avoided? By "walking in His ways," the Imitation of God. Likeness leads to *imitatio Dei*, which is its fulfillment and realization. It is Imitation which actualizes the moral potential of Likeness, spelling out the plentitude of its significance.

Likeness strains for release, and Imitation, breaking the chains, leads Likeness to the adventure of moral and spiritual growth, urging man on to the unattainable goal of God-likeness. It points to the distant actuality, which man can only approach asymptotically.

The sixteenth-century Safed mystic, R. Moses Cordovero, hints at this process in the opening sentences of his immortal little volume of Kabbalistic ethics, *Tomer Deborah*:

It is proper for man to imitate his Creator, thereby entering into the mystery of the supernal Form: the Image and the Likeness.

In other words: the Imitation of God achieves for man the fulfillment of the Likeness implanted in him *in potentia*. One thinks of the demented Ophelia who, in *Hamlet*, cries out, "Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be." *Imitatio Dei* is the process of actualization of the *imago Dei* of Likeness, "what we may be."

The motivation for this urge for Imitation is love. A Midrashic Rabbi explains it by saying that God is like a king who sanctifies (marries) a wife (Israel) and says to her, "Since you are my wife, my glory; therefore, be holy even as I am holy."

What is meant by the Imitation of God? *Sifre*, one of the earliest Rabbinic Midrashim, explains in a comment on the verse quoted above, "to walk in all His ways" (Deut. 10:12):

6. *Moed Qatan* 15b. But it cannot be completely abrogated, as the Christian scholastics and, later, Reformers maintained. Insofar as *demut* is dependent upon *zellelem*, which as a *proprium* is undeniable and irreversible, it too cannot be lost or removed, but it may be defaced or "turned upside down" as the Rabbis declare (*ibid.*).

7. *Tanḥ.*, ed. Buber, Lev. 37a. (Other metaphors are: a father and his children—*Lev. R.* 24; as clothing that embraces a man's loins—*Tanḥ.*, *loc. cit.* 37b; as the retinue of a king and the king—*Sifra* to Lev. 19:2).



These are the "ways of the Lord": as it is written [Exod. 34:6-7], "The Lord, the Lord, God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin . . ."<sup>8</sup>

The qualities here enumerated, revealed to Moses after the disaster of the Golden Calf, are referred to in the Jewish tradition as the "Thirteen Attributes of Mercy." To "go in all His ways" means, therefore, to emulate divine compassion and forgiveness and love, in all the forms made manifest to Moses.

The same passage continues with an exegesis of the verse in Joel (3:5), "and it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the Name of the Lord shall be saved." Here the *Sifre* focuses on the word "Name," and reads the verse, by repointing one word, as "whosoever shall be called by the Name of the Lord."<sup>9</sup> It attempts to demonstrate that the imitable attributes are aspects of divine conduct and not His essence, an endeavor which anticipates the doctrine of divine attributes popularized and developed by Maimonides. Yet at the same time that the Biblical description of the divine character is declared nonidentical with His essence, we find an implication of the enormous significance of this description for man, for all we can really know of Him is His Name—and a name, for the Semitic mind, is far more than a conventional appellation; it points to a Reality behind the name. Thus:

Is it, then, possible for a man to be called by the Name of the Holy One? But this means: just as He is called "merciful and gracious," so must you be merciful and gracious, and give of your gifts freely to all; just as the Holy One is called "righteous" . . . so must you be righteous. The Holy One is called "loving," so must you be loving.

The definition of the relation between God's character and His essence is a theological one. Let us grant that He is only *called* merciful and gracious and loving. But man is called *by* His Name (the Image) by appropriating these traits as his own (Imitation).

In another passage, the Talmud specifies even more closely the

8. For other references to *imitatio Dei*, see S. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, pp. 119 ff., and Shapiro, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-72.

9. Actually, the *Sifre's* thought is intelligible without the change in pronunciation from *yikra* to the passive *yikarei*; the substitution is for emphasis only.

kind of deeds that are part of *imitatio Dei*. Commenting on the verse, "After the Lord your God shall ye walk" (Deut. 13:5), R. Ḥama b. Ḥanina asks, in a manner similar to that of the *Sifre*, above,

Is it, then, possible to "walk after" the Divine Presence? Has not Scripture already said, "for the Lord thy God is a devouring fire" [Deut. 4:24]? But it means, walk after the attributes of the Holy One. Even as He clothes the naked [clothing Adam and Eve with the garments of skins (Gen. 3:21)]—so must you provide clothes for the naked. The Holy One visited the sick [appearing to Abraham after his circumcision (Gen. 18:1)]; so must you visit the sick. The Holy One consoled the bereaved [blessing Isaac after Abraham's death (Gen. 25:11)]; so must you console the bereaved. The Holy One buried the dead [interring Moses (Deut. 34:6)]; so must you bury the dead.<sup>10</sup>

It is instructive to note two further examples of how Jewish thinkers, centuries apart, formulated ethical doctrines as instances of *imitatio Dei*, or "walking in the ways of the Lord." The first is by the aforementioned R. Moses Cordovero, who begins with the verse in Micah (7:18), "Who is a God like unto thee?"

This refers to the Holy One as an offended King Who patiently bears insult in a manner that surpasses understanding. For without doubt, there is nothing hidden from His providence. Furthermore, there is no moment when man is not nourished and does not exist by virtue of the divine power which flows down upon him. It follows that no man ever sins against God without the divine effluence pouring into him at that very moment, enabling him to exist and to move his limbs. Despite the fact that he uses it for sin, that power is not withheld from him in any way. But the Holy One bears this insult and continues to empower man to move his limbs even though he uses the power in that very moment for sin and perversity offending the Holy One, who, nonetheless, suffers it. Nor must you say that He cannot withhold that good, God forbid, for it is within His power in the moment it takes to utter the word "moment" to wither the sinner's hand or foot, as He did to Jeroboam [I Kings 13:4]. Nevertheless, though it lies in His power to arrest the divine flow, and He might have said, "If you sin against Me do so under your own power, not with Mine," yet He does not, on this account, withhold His goodness from man but bears the insult, pouring out His power and bestowing of His goodness. This is an instance

10. *Soṭah* 14a.



of tolerance and the willingness to bear insult beyond words. This is why the ministering angels refer to the Holy One as the "patient King." And this is the meaning of the prophet's words: "Who is a *God* like unto Thee?" He means: "Thou, the good and merciful, art *God*, signifying the power to avenge and claim His debt, yet Thou art patient and bearest insult until man repents."

This is a virtue man should make his own, namely, to be patient and allow himself to be insulted even to this extent and yet not deny his goodness to the recipients.<sup>11</sup>

In these remarks, couched in an idiom from another era, we feel the remarkable ethical sensitivity that follows from the Biblical ideal of "walking in the ways of the Lord."

The second illustration comes from a modern author, a distinguished Hasidic master of a century ago, R. Zebi Elimelek Shapiro of Dinov. Here the Imitation is formulated more theologically. He treats first of the classical problem of human free will versus divine prescience: If God can foresee all the future, does that not deny man his freedom to act morally or immorally? He answers that we are dealing with a genuine paradox, which cannot be explicated by reason and can be accepted only by faith: God both knows and does not know. In truth, He knows all; yet He restricts His knowledge and prevents it from interfering in the flow of events and thus robbing man of his ethical freedom, so that He acts as if He does not know.

Whatever the theological merit of his argument, the significant step follows: just as God both knows and does not know, so must man, in "walking in His ways," both know and not know. This is what the Sages of the Mishnah meant when they counseled us to "judge every man on the scale of merit,"<sup>12</sup> i.e., to give every man the benefit of the doubt. Now, argues the Rabbi of Dinov, each of us knows full well that man, despite his reason, is full of abominations, his heart evil and corrupt, his instincts foul—a pre-Freudian anticipation of the contemporary disesteem into which we have fallen. How, then, can we be asked to judge man for the good and assume the best of him? His answer<sup>13</sup> is that

11. Based upon the translation into English by Louis Jacobs, *The Palm Tree of Deborah* (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1960).

12. *Abot* 1:6.

13. At the end of his *Benei Yisaskor*.

man, in imitation of God, must both "know and "not know"! We know that man, more often than not, is a beast. Yet in the absence of any incontrovertible supporting evidence, we must "not know" his propensity for evil and assume that he does right. It is this purposeful restraint of knowledge, this transcendental ignorance, which, in imitation of the Creator, makes civilized living possible for His human creatures.

It is God, then, who sets the norms for man's character and conduct, not only by direct command, but by exemplification. Man's response to God is not the impersonal obedience of a subservient vassal to his distant and absolute master, but the intimate implementation by a student of the lessons taught him by his teacher.

"And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord" (Isa. 54:13). We are not only creatures of God the Creator, not only subjects of God the King, not only children of God the Father, but also disciples of God the Teacher.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, the doctrine of imitation was broadened, in the Jewish tradition, to include more than what is commonly understood as moral or ethical attributes. Thus, Judaism considers the study of Torah—the intellectual exercise *per se*—as one of the highest values, if not the highest.<sup>15</sup> But this is more than a commandment; it is an act of imitation. God Himself occupies Himself in the study of Torah.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, even etiquette and courtesy are imitable divine qualities. Man, say the

14. Expanding on this idea, the famous Hasidic teacher R. Moshe Hayyim Ephraim, author of *Deggel Mahaneh Ephraim* (to *Re'eh*) invokes the Talmudic statement (*Ta'anit* 71) of a teacher who said, "I have learned much from my teachers, more from my colleagues, and most of all from my students." In that case, says our author in characteristically quaint Hasidic logic, God the Teacher learns from man the student! What he apparently had in mind is that God acts toward man in the same measure that man succeeds in imitating the divine character. If man is mean and ungenerous and unforgiving to his fellow man, then God "learns" from him and acts toward him in a manner that may be described by the same adjectives. This is reminiscent of the Rabbinic interpretation of *Eheyeh asher eheyeh* ("I am that I am"—Exod. 3:14) as "I shall be to you as you are to me." It should by no means be taken as an assertion of *imitatio hominis* by God, which Schechter (*op.cit.*, p. 37) has purported to find in Talmudic literature. See Shapiro, *op. cit.*, n. 65.

15. *Peah* 1:1, and throughout the literature. For a summary, see my *The Study of Torah Lishmah* [Torah for Its Own Sake] in the *Works of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and His Contemporaries* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mosad Harab Kook, 1972), p. 77.

16. See, for instance, 'A.Z. 3b, *Ber.* 8a, *Men.* 29b, and elsewhere. Cf. Simon Ravidowicz, "Of Interpretation," in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 26 (19), pp. 93–95.



Rabbis, should learn from God, who, though He knew that there were no righteous men in Sodom, did not interrupt Abraham in his plea of intercession, but waited till he finished.<sup>17</sup>

It is important, at this point, to note the limitations of *imitatio Dei*, the commandment to "walk in His ways." All the illustrations cited above call for the emulation by man of those divine attributes which men acknowledge as moral and beneficent: love, patience, forgiveness, graciousness, feeding the hungry, etc. Yet these attributes do not exhaust the description of the divine personality. For instance:

O Lord, Thou God to Whom vengeance belongeth, Thou God to Whom vengeance belongeth, shine forth. Lift up Thyself, Thou Judge of the earth; render to the proud their recompense (Ps. 94:1-2).

Yet this divine attribute of vengeance is clearly *not* meant to be imitated by man: "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people" (Lev. 19:18).<sup>18</sup>

Obviously, therefore, the Imitation of God is restricted to the "Attributes of Mercy" and must not include other attributes, such as jealousy or vengeance.

Thus, a Tannaitic Midrash relates: "Rabbi says: a God above jealousy—I rule over jealousy, but jealousy has no power over Me; I rule over slumber, but slumber has no power over Me."<sup>19</sup> What Rabbi apparently means is that whereas the Attributes of Mercy (*middot ha-*

17. *Derek 'Erez*, chap. 5; *Gen. R.* 8:8; *Sukkah* 30a.

18. Here the King James version of the whole verse is particularly felicitous and far superior to the newest JPS translation (*The Torah*), which breaks up the one Hebrew verse into two sentences and eliminates the conjunction altogether. King James reads: Thou shalt not avenge . . . thy people, *but* thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the Lord." The translation of the *waw* as "but" instead of "and thou shalt love," yields the meaning that the principle of neighborly love is meant to contradict the idea that *imitatio Dei* includes all the divine attributes, including vengeance. We might add that the concluding phrase, "I am the Lord," follows the *etnahta*, and thus refers back to the whole of what precedes it; thus: do not take vengeance or bear a grudge, but instead, love thy neighbor, for only I am the Lord and have the right to take vengeance or bear a grudge.

19. *Mekilta* to Exod. 20:5. Cf. also *Midrash Hagadol*, ed. S. Schechter, p. 549, that God used as His instruments four qualities which should not be imitated by man: jealousy, revenge, deviousness, and exaltation. See the illuminating commentary of Rabbi A. I. Kook to the opening passage of *Sh.A., O.H. (Mizwot Re'iyah* [Jerusalem: Mosad Harab Kook, 1970]).

*rahamim*) are characteristic of God in that they in some way reflect the divine personality, these other, sterner qualities (the *middot ha-din*, or Attributes of Judgment) are *instruments* which He uses to advance His purposes in the world. It is only the former which may be described as the "ways" of God "after" which man is bidden to walk.<sup>20</sup> When man presumes to imitate those divine characteristics forbidden to him, he encroaches upon the divine prerogatives: "I have placed in [men] the likeness of My similitude, and by means of their sins they have overturned it."<sup>21</sup> By overreaching, man's wrongful emulation of God brings into disrepute the fundamental reality upon which Imitation is predicated: the Image and Likeness in which man was created.

These reservations point to the possibilities of abuse inherent in the companion concepts of Image-Likeness and Imitation. The grant of "dignity" implicit in the creation of man in the Image contains within itself the seeds of misuse and usurpation: man, created to be *like* God, imagines himself to *be* God, he mistakes the reflection ("image") for the reality. The Image grants man his dignity—his "honor" or "glory" (*kabod*): "Thou hast made him but little lower than angels, and hast crowned him with glory [*kabod*] and honor" (Ps. 8:6). But man forgets the Source of this dignity and lusts for *kabod* of his own in place of the *kabod* given him by his Creator.<sup>22</sup> It is this latter *kabod*, divorced from its Source, that becomes a rampant monster ultimately driving man out of his world, and against which he must guard himself.<sup>23</sup> Instead of *imitating* God, man begins to *impersonate* Him, and man declares his independence and proceeds on the road to self-apotheosis. The creature aspires to dethrone the Creator and rule by himself. Religious man becomes secularist man.

There are unavoidable risks inherent in the concepts of Image and Imitation. When they are no longer acknowledged as the spur to "walk

20. Alternatively, we may interpret the statement to mean that whereas God is, in His Essence, always beyond and in control of these (actional) attributes, whether of Mercy or Judgment, man is possessed by the more severe attributes and has no power over them once he has submitted to them (cf. Samuel Belkin, *In His Image* [New York: Abelard Schuman], pp. 29 f.). The Commandment to imitate God would therefore not apply to qualities such as jealousy or vengeance or anger, because they contradict man's freedom.

21. *Moed Katan* 15b.

22. *Yoma* 38a; *Num. R.* 4.

23. *Abot* 4:21; *D.E.* 1.



*after the Lord thy God," the moral life becomes impossible. When they retain their theistic base, man is directed toward the unfolding of a noble moral career.*

This essay is part of a forthcoming volume, tentatively entitled *Jewish Conceptions of Moral Character*.