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**LIKENESS AND ALTERITY IN TaNaKh**  
**THESIS**

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## Summary

**Keywords:** likeness, alterity, nepeš, îš, iššâ, person, way of being, communion, theosis.

*Likeness* and *alterity* are two complementary and interdependent aspects of our personal human existence. *Likeness* represents the aspiration of man towards God as an absolute model, the maximal union with God without fusion with Him. *Alterity* (*alter ego* = another *ego* or *other one* than myself) is defined by the notion of *person*, as unicity, specificity, particularity, irepetability, freedom, availability for communion and communication, openness for the other.

The biblical account of anthropogeny accounts for a special and unique creation of man unlike any of the other forms of existence created before. The peculiarity of anthropogeny resides in two aspects: 1) the intra-trinitary counsel that takes place in eternity (Gen 1,26) and 2) the creation in time, in history (Gen 1,27) through the special and direct action of God (Gen 2,7). The peculiarity of the way man is created also emphasizes the complexity and specificity of the human being as a way of being, of the image towards likeness.

The word „likeness” (דְמוּת – *d<sup>e</sup>mût*, *ὁμοίωσις*) appears in the biblical text to define the purpose, aim and fulfillment of man as a created being by „the image of God” (Gen 1,26-27), as the possibility to „be after the likeness of God”, in the communion of love. *Likeness* appears in Tanakh especially in the teophanic section of prophet Ezekiel, as a word by which the prophet expresses his special concern not to claim he has seen God, but only that he saw the „likeness” of God or something similar to the beings and beauties that surround God. In Gen 1,26, where we are told that man was created by the „image and *likeness*” of God, we encounter the term *d<sup>e</sup>mût*, and in Gen 5,3, where „Adam begat a son in his own likeness, after his image”, although the Masoretic text uses the same word *d<sup>e</sup>mût*, LXX translates by *idéa* (*ἰδέα*) purposely to emphasize the fact that the *likeness* of man after God (Gen 1,26) is not identical with the likeness between human persons (Gen 5,3). *Likeness* after God implies and reclaims alterity as peculiarity, unicity and freedom of the human person.

The word „alterity” is not rendered as such in the biblical text. Its meaning and substance are expressed especially in the biblical account of anthropogeny through certain actions (eg. the counsel of the Holy Trinity – Gen 1,26, the direct participation of God in the creation of man, as a special and particular act – Gen 1,27), but also through these words: „male and female created He them” (Gen 1,27), „and breathed into his face (τὸ πρόσωπον) the breath of life (נְפֶשׁ – *nepeš*); and man became a living soul” (Gen 2,7), that defines man as personal alterity through

his way of being. Therefore, the terms זָכָר (*zākār* – manly, masculine) and נְקֵבָה (*něqēbā* – feminine) of Gen 1,27, correspondent to אִישׁ (*’iš* – man) and אִשָּׁה (*’iššā* – woman) from Gen 2,23 that define the two ways of being of the human person, both complementary and intrinsically connected to acquiring life (Gen 1,28; 2,24), as well as נְפֶשׁ (*nepeš*, soul, breath of life, person), define man as unicity, peculiarity, unrepeatableness and freedom, define man as personal alterity.

Although it is a concept of modern philosophy, alterity<sup>1</sup> is rooted in the biblical revelation and was developed on the basis of the biblical concept of personhood (Adam, nefes, prosopon – Gen 2,7), concept that has been clarified and developed in the Patristic theology<sup>2</sup>.

Analyzing the Old Testament text and the Patristic theology, we attempt to determine, in this thesis, on one hand, the meaning and content of two terms: *likeness* as a completion and fulfillment of man (Gen 1,26) and *alterity* as peculiarity, unicity, unrepeatability and freedom of human being expressed through its personal way of being, and, on the other hand, the complementarity and interdependency of these notions as expressions of human personal existence.

The thesis is comprised of four chapters. The first chapter draws the biblical premises of *likeness* and *alterity*, analyzing the syntax and morphology of certain relevant texts. Thus, we point out the biblical words that define, on one hand, „the human being”, „humanity” or „mankind” in general, words such as: *Adam* which is translated as a proper name by Septuagint and Vulgate beginning with Gen 2,19; *enoš* that means „man”, „mortal”, „humanity” in order to emphasize afterwards the biblical words that define man as person, namely peculiarity, unicity, way of being as alterity: *zākār* (masculine), *něqēbā* (feminine) – Fac 1,27, *’iš* (man), *’iššā* (woman) – Fac 2,23, *nepeš*, Adam (Fac 2,7), Eve (Fac 3,20), *geber* with the same meaning as *’iš*.

This chapters also features the meaning and content of *likeness* (of man to God) as it is perceived and developed in the Patristic theology. In this perspective, man’s *likeness* to God is

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<sup>1</sup> The 20<sup>th</sup> century is marked by a serious preoccupation of existentialism and phenomenology philosophical schools regarding alterity. Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas have developed alterity as a major philosophical discourse, whose system of thinking I will summarize below. “Certainly, the matter of alterity has not ever been pervaded in such a depth as nowadays, in the basics of philosophical thought” said Michael Theunissen in the research *The Other: Studies in the Social Ontology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Buber*, trans. C McCann (Cambridge: MIT Press Ltd, 1986), 1.

<sup>2</sup> The Cappadocian Fathers are to be credited for establishing the coordinates of this reality, who, by developing the Trinitarian theology in the 4<sup>th</sup> century especially, have created a “genuine ontology of personhood as an *absolute* concept”.

defined as: „being Christophor”, „getting to know God”, a lifetime effort of man in trying to become more virtuos. Moreover, I emphasized the difference between *image* and *likeness* in Patristic theology as it follows: the image is received as a gift of grace, while likeness is acquired by effort and free will; likeness represents the purpose of man’s life as theosis, that man can become deified; likeness is the result of a virtuous life that is a sign of God’s presence in one’s life; likeness is a theandric work; image is a given reality while likeness is earned and acquired through personal effort as purification of mind, senses, sinful tendencies and passions. Likeness means reciprocity of God and man, revealed ontologically in the relation between Prototype and image.

Also, we present the meaning and content of *alterity* as it echoes in Patristic theology and Talmudic teachings. Although we cannot find the specific notion of alterity in Patristic theology, it is expressed through love and self-sacrifice as reciprocity in man’s relationship with God and fellows. Alterity is defined through a relation of interdependency and complementarity to likeness. Thus, self-sacrifice and love, as expressions of man’s free will, represent the fundamental requirements in order to achieve likeness after God. I emphasized the converging points between Talmudic teachings and Patristic theology regarding the importance and grandeur of man. Therefore, Talmudic teachings portray man’s dignity and grandeur as the highest peak of divine creation through expressions such as: „one human being is equal to the entire universe”, or „It should be known that he who supresses one human life, is blamed by the Holy Scripture for destroying the entire world; also, he who saves one human life, is credited by the Holy Scripture with having saved the entire world” namely, the commandment „Thou shalt not kill” (Exod 20,13), is plainly found at the same time in the Christian Patristic theology.

Also, the ontologic abyss between God and man, defined by the relation created-uncreated, emphasized by the Christian Patristic theology, can be surpassed through the study and observance of Torah, actions aimed to the deification of man. Man is a microcosmos in his structure and constitution, that both reveal the complexity of the universe, which also points to the importance of alterity as specificity and peculiarity. Personal alterity of man in relation with God is affirmed and defined by the love and self-devotion as reciprocity, especially through prayer.

The second chapter features a biblical perspective on the content of “likeness and alterity” through the concept of *personhood*. *Personhood* as a human way of being defines alterity as uniqueness, particularity and freedom of the human being. In this respect, starting from the biblical text, we analyze the meaning and purpose of *personhood*, because this concept is for the first time featured in the biblical account of anthropogeny (Gen 1,26-27; 2,7; 2,18;

2,23-24). For starters, we made a short historical review of the conceptualization, statement and restatement of the meaning and content of *personhood*, through an interdisciplinary approach. In this perspective, we drew the specific elements that define personhood as *alterity* on one side, and on the other side, from the perspective of Modern philosophy.

The philosophy of Antiquity defined *person* as a mask of individual identity used in theatrical plays or an „official” image in society of negation and affirmation of human freedom. The meaning and content of *personhood*, as we nowadays understand it, is to be found in the context of the dogmatization of Holy Trinity in the 4th century.

The biblical and patristic perspectives feature some characteristic of *personhood* as a definition of alterity and the possibility to acquire likeness after God: the person has a transcendent dimension that cannot be conceptualized as it is part of the human mystery – both image and likeness of God; the person represents the principle of the being’s existence, the unique and particular fashion of the way *being* as alterity exists (Gen 2,23); personhood is the unique and unrepeatable expression of *being*, „the face” (*prosopon*) of the being or the direction and expression of being as alterity; the person cannot be comprehended as individuality in itself and for itself (*in-dividum*), but is defined by the relation of giving and self-sacrifice for the other and communion with him (Gen 1,26; 1,28); personhood implies and claims reciprocity, mutuality that affirms and guarantees alterity. Therefore, the *person* is defined by „the modus vivendi of nature”, which means the possibility of acquiring likeness after God.

In biblical and patristic anthropology the core distinction is not that between soul and body, which form a unity, but that between *nature* and *person*, distinction that is expressed as it follows: *person* is defined by *who*, and nature by *what*. Resultingly, Patristic theology prioritises person before essence, nature. That which defines person is not essence, nor nature, but the way of being as alterity, the unique, unrepeatable and peculiar way to form nature. The human person is defined by „someone” according to the biblical text: „Moreover He said, I *am* the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God” (Exod 3,6). The human person is defined as a unitary existence of dichotomous being of created man by the image and likeness of God (Gen 1,26; Sol 2,23), unity suggested by *nephes* (“breath of God”), which means the alterity of person through animating the human essence of man.

Personal alterity expresses peculiarity, unicity and freedom of man, in that man is not different from the other creatures only by reason and senses, but especially through his free will. Personhood is defined as irreducible to being, opened for absolute, uniqueness, appetite for infinite, mystery of alterity, judgement and responsibility, free will. Personal alterity as



surpassing being is specific and characteristic of biblical theology by the word: “grow” (Gen 1,28; Ps 7,4-8); John 1,16), and also of Patristic theology defined by the dogma of epectasys as unceasing evolution and ascent to eternal beauty. Personal alterity is defined as freedom of will and work in the likeness of God (Gen 1,26) for, if God is absolutely free and man is created by His image, he ought to be free as well. This means that, through the creation of man, God takes the risk of human freedom, freedom that can develop after His likeness or opposite to it.

The fulfillment of personal alterity as completion of likeness after God, is fully achieved only through Christ for “with His stripes we are healed” (Is 53,5). Personal alterity cannot be fully achieved and affirmed but in/through an adequate approach of the biblical text: “man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen 1,26) and “*It is not good that the man should be alone*” (Gen 2,18). Therefore, man as personal alterity is a communitary being and designed for communion. Personal alterity is defined as possibility and privilege of communication and communion in freedom. In this respect, the divine call represents a fundamental element of Adam’s alterity and entails three interdependent existential aspects: relation, freedom and alterity. Thus, the call establishes relation that can happen only by free response, response that affirms the alterity.

From the biblical and patristic perspective, personal alterity and likeness after God as purposes of man are interdependent, imply and reclaim each other. In order to achieve likeness to The Personal Holy Trinity, man has to be defined and understood as personal alterity, and absolute personal alterity cannot be fulfilled other than through the likeness after God. In “likeness”, man as personal alterity does not disappear, nor does he fuse or merge with God, but likens himself with God in the way of being and not in an ontological way.

This chapter also features the fundamental characteristics of alterity in the Modern philosophy thinking in order to point out the convergent elements of Patristic and biblical theology on one hand, and divergent aspects on the other hand as well as to account for means and conditions that can provide eventually for an adaptation of the two approaches. I noticed the fact that, in Modern philosophy, personhood is defined by *itself* as a closed unity *in* itself and *for* itself. The person as alterity is defined in this perspective of „being for itself”, namely the person is no longer opened for the other; the self is primarily ontologic, it is firstly rooted in the event of existence; the concept of „being-together” with the other, event which renders world (as a space of meeting and communion) indispensable, that the other is conditioned by the intermediation of world; the presence of the other before me is a deprivation of his being and, at the same time, of the elements his own universe consists of, thus, the other is the cause and source that destroys harmony and equilibrium of the own world („infern for others”).

Western philosophy is dominated by the matter of *self* as an ultimate referrence in the ontologic speech. In this respect, *the other* together with everything his existence consists of starts from *I/self* and is configured and understood as existence through the *self*. Therefore, we could state the fact that not man is the image and likeness of God, but God is configured according to the reason and perception of one's self.

Personal alterity of man is differently understood by biblical-patristic theology (built and developed on the biblical revelation – „God created man by His image and after His likeness”), and Modern philosophical thinking that sets the *self* as its starting point. An approach of biblical and patristic theology that allows a certain accomodation of biblical proclamation and modern philosophy and culture is remarkable in the philosophy of Martin Buber and Emanuel Levinas, two important modern philosophers of the philosophical and religious Judaic thinking.

Martin Buber, a philosopher of relation and dialogue as forms of religious existentialism, defines man as a „dialogical and relational being” through the category of *us*, an event in which I and Thou are both equal and primal in the event of relationship; the Self defines itself by Thou and not vice-versa (the Self does not define the Thou); man is a „dialogical being”, namely man is defined not by his essence/nature, but through the relation expressed in the philosophical category of *us*; the authentication of the human dialogical dimension is achieved through his relation with the eternal Thou that never becomes That; by every calling of Thou, the eternal Thous is actually invoked. This invocation means prayer, the burning urge of heart, the honest quest expressed by Kavanah, as a purposeful movement of person towards completion and fulfillment; in man's relation with the eternal Thou („He who is”) the call always belongs to He Who is the Eternal Self; man is always directed towards God and his fellows by the virtue of his dialogical and personal dimension.

For Levinas, *the other* is in fact the *fellow*, an *alter ego* that is neither configured, nor determined by the own ego, but is *someone*, is a *thou* through which the ego reaches to that it cannot reach without, namely *alterity*; the meeting with the other is not mediated by sight, but by sound as dialogue that guarantees the other's images intimate alterity; the personal meeting is accomplished either by speaking or by sight. In opposition to Heidegger and Husserl, Levinas thinks that *the other* is not configured by the ego, but is found and greeted by the ego, in other words, it lives his own infinity as an alter ego. The difference between utterance and speech as expressions of relationship types: *utterance* initiates and maintains relation with the other's transcendence (eg. the prattling of an infant that adresses to someone other than himself not in

an intelligible fashion and language but as a calling), while *speech* means conceptualization, and thus approaching the essence of speech that is static.

The third chapter develops various specific elements of biblical hermeneutics of alterity in order to emphasize the fact that *alterity* ought to be understood in relation with complementarity and interdependency with *likeness*. In this respect, we indicate the alterity of the created being in relation with the *alterity* of the divine being, with an absolute ontological differentiation. This differentiation is expressed by the fact that the being of God is uncreated, exists for Himself and through Himself, from ages to ages („I am Who He is” Exod 3,14), and the essence of world is created, has existence through the *creatio ex nihilo* („In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” Gen 1,1), but is created for eternity. This „abyss” shall not be understood as a total separation, or impossibility of communication and communion. By creating man „by the image and after the likeness of God”, communion and communication are not only possible, but become something natural and even necessary (not in an authoritarian fashion, but as freedom of will), in order to fulfill the purpose and also to affirm the personal alterity. The divine commandment is, in this respect, the manifestation of man’s freedom of will towards the communion with God.

Man created from „dust”, as an existent matter and with „the breath of life” (Gen 2,7) becomes personal alterity, solidary on one hand with the created, sensorial world, and on the other hand, dependant on the „breath” of life from his Creator. The creation of man as a special act of God means the creation of an absolute alterity, a *thou* whom God addresses a call, expressed by the divine commandment of love (Gen 2,16-17), and the response (yes/no) which is defining for fulfilling or not fulfilling his purpose (likeness after God). This means that man as personal alterity is fulfilled in the likeness after God through a relationship of reciprocity and interdependency: personal alterity is complete in likeness while likeness is defined by the completion of personal alterity.

Between God, Adam and the rest of the visible creation there is a relation of mutuality. God created Adam by His image and after His likeness, the essence of Adam is bound on one side to the creation „from dust”, and on the other side, aspires towards his Creator through the „breath of life” received from God. This means that Adam as a master and priest of creation is meant to humanize and transfigure the entire creation and offer it doxologically to his Creator. Transfiguration and humanization of creation through Adam reclaims and affirms the alterities of creation according to the names he gave each of them (Gen 2,19). At the same time, the affirmation of Adam’s personal alterity in relation with the visible creation is possible only after the appearance of woman, whom Adam relates as „I-you” (Gen 2,2-23). Thus, the woman is

„a help meet for him”, as reciprocity and interdependency in achieving likeness (Gen 2,24). We emphasize here alterity as equality of man and woman, but not as similarity or fusion, which would dissolve alterity, but as responsibility („grow”, „be fruitful”) and communion ability. Man, as personal alterity expressed as way of being of man and woman, admits and affirms his role as master of creation, as long as he keeps the communion with „Who He is” (Exod 3,14).

An important issue emphasized in this context, is the revelation of the divine name that means revelation of God Himself on one hand, as far as man can comprehend with his understanding, and on the other hand, as much as the spoken or written word can express. In the Hebrew thinking, name expresses, describes and defines the personality of its bearer, being somehow connected to his nature. The name Yahweh („He Who is”) revealed to Moses, expresses the reality of Godhead: on one hand, the existence for Himself as eternity of God, and, on the other hand, the absolute personal alterity of God: „He who is that he is”. The importance of name as revelation of purpose and destiny guidance of his bearer, resides in the example of those who had their names changed by God (Abram-Abraham, Jacob-Israel), but also in the case of those who received their name from heavens (John, Jesus). In the Judaic mystique, the divine name also has magical potentialities, Torah for instance being the name of God par excellence, in that each letter of Torah is a self-existent reality and stands as a divine name.

In this chapter we present two of the most important moments in human existence: the heavenly state and the fallen state of sin as an existential failure. The heavenly state represents the human perfection and completeness to fulfill his personal alterity in the likeness of God. In this respect, likeness can be achieved through freely observing the divine commandments given the fact that freedom is a privilege of person as alterity. Therefore, personal alterity and likeness after God are complementary and interdependent.

The fall of sin represents, however the existential failure of man as an effect of personal freedom and thus, the impossibility to fulfill personal alterity in the likeness after God. That because sin means alterity as division/separation at the level of the entire creation in that sin destroys original harmony and order, fragments and divides creation in its inner structure; the fall of sin transforms personal alterity of man (as a possibility of communion with God) in an individual alterity understood as a lack of communion and alienation from God. In this respect, alterity as division and lack of communion means separation, individualization and lastly death, and the death of man as separation of body from soul is equal to the disintegration of the human person. The fall of sin has brought man a collapse in his capacity of communion with God and

his fellows, tension and imbalance between the elements of creation, but not dissolution of personal alterity and capacity of communion.

In the fourth chapter we suggest a solution towards restoring the alterity through love. The most representative pattern in this respect is found in the pages of Tanakh, in the Song of Songs that is a hymn of the restored love. Just as a negative consequence of human freedom can be the sin as alienation and lack of communion with God, the restoration of communion with Him is also a result of human free will expressed through the desire to return and seek for the „Desired One”. One of the words that expresses the restoration of communion with God in the pages of Tanakh is *šûb* that means: „to return”, „to reestablish”, „to come back”, „to change oneself”, „response”. The restoration of human communion with God is possible given to the existence of the unbroken, uncorruptible image of God in man that also is the fundamental requirement for returning from the deep darkness of sin through a real penitence, to the beauty of primordial alterity and personal freedom. Therefore, man preserves his personal dimension even in the deepest fall and existential alienation.

The Song of Songs can be considered a hymn of restored love of the personal alterity of man. This implies a pursuit, as a personal effort and lastly finding „the Beloved One”. The fulfillment of personal alterity as likeness is suggested by the expression „I *am* my beloved's, and my beloved *is* mine” (Song 6,3), in the way that love affirms and guarantees the personal alterity of everyone, and the joy of mutual communion of love is completed through the likeness after God. In this context, love is understood on one hand as an echo of the divine call, and on the other hand as a free and conscious response of man as personal alterity. That because freedom is the fundamental characteristic of the iconical alterity of man, freedom that, although is narrowed by sin, was never dissolved. This is expressed in the Christian theology by the Pauline expression: “yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Gal 2,20) meaning the liberation of the human being from all that is alien and unnatural and return to the natural state of the being created by God, being that can come in such a deep union with God that God's will becomes his own will, of course with keeping the personal alterity untouched.

The crowning of the efforts towards shunning of passions is depicted as an act of bravery or boldness (*παρρησία* - *parrisia*), that marks the end of this phase in the spiritual pursuit of perfection. Daring expressed in this respect the idea of familiarity, intimacy, honesty and truthfulness, as fundamental characteristics of interpersonal relationships. In the spiritual dimension, *parrisia* expresses the same truth, that the soul which reached perfection (*ἀπάθεια* - *apátheia*) rears the freedom and authentic personal alterity in this relationship with God, namely he achieves the daring to God and returns in the intimate communion with Him.

Love as restoration of personal alterity is seen in this chapter from the perspective of the deified man, in the light of biblical and patristic theology. This perspective features deification as the ultimate purpose of man which is only possible through/in Jesus Christ, the Incarnated God. Salvation in Christ renews man not by his essence, that cannot be added anything, but through the way of being, of personal alterity that makes him „part of the divine nature” (2Pt 1,4).

The restoration of personal alterity of man in Christ means to achieve God’s way of existence. Through the act of deification, man’s personal alterity is affirmed and protected, and reestablished in the authentic guides of its fulfillment. „Communication” and „interpenetration” of divine and human in the act of deification does not mean fusion or mingling of the natures or wills, but harmonization of the divine works with the human works by affirming the absolute alterity of both. That which is transformed is the *tropos* or way of being of human nature’s logos, that interpenetrates and takes up the divine way of existence. But, the existential change does not stop at an intentional level, but deification as a transformation of man is the real change in human nature personal way of being.

Deification as a personal and unique act, expression of uniqueness and peculiarity of man’s relation as a person with God as Person; every man becomes a personal image through which God as Person shines forth. The deified man keeps not only the alterity of nature but also the personal alterity. The absolute accomplishment of personal alterity of man in the likeness shall fulfill in the age that comes after the communal resurrection, when death, the ultimate enemy of human existence shall be overcome for all and forever (1Cor 15,26; Apoc 21,4).