

though it can be distracting at times—has to do with the number of typos and awkwardly constructed sentences, although these are perhaps understandably due to the fact that English might not be some contributors' first language. Nevertheless, the hope that Yiu Sing Lúcas Chan held for doing Asian theological ethics truly lives on in this important volume.

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The Love of God: Divine Gift, Human Gratitude, and Mutual Faithfulness in Judaism. By Jon Levenson. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016. xxiii + 226 pages. \$29.95.
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Years ago I was privy to a gentle ongoing debate between the rabbi of a tiny congregation and an older Catholic gentleman of the same small town. Among their topics of contention was the meaning of love for God—was it a command to act or an affective invitation? This lovely text by Jon Levenson would have delighted their debate, challenging and nuancing insights for them both.

Love of God is essentially neither a private sentimental matter nor a dry obedience to law. It is the heart of the covenant expressed in the Shema and reflected in Deuteronomy. As the subtitle of this book reveals, it is in divine gift that the love of God originates. God has first loved in the unmerited, mysterious, and arbitrary choice God has made to covenant with Israel. Therefore Israel's love of God is primarily a duty owed by Israel to God as suzerain of the covenant, the gracious liberator of their bondage. But that vassal duty flows from a relationship that is personal and affective. In fact the very deeds this duty commands play a role themselves in creating the emotive response, or in sustaining it through affective dryness. Yes, love can be commanded because the command to remember the covenant, even on doorposts, arises from and is generative of affective response.

Further rabbinic exposition of the behavioral implications for loving God “with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut 6:12) reveals that far from simple sentiment, such love involves the dimension of self-sacrifice, sacrifice of natural inclinations, of worldly goods, of even the very self to the point of martyrdom. It is not feelings, especially those of suffering, but the foundational gift of divine love that defines the covenant relationship and calls forth a love stronger than death.

The erotic is also a dimension of love of God but not an idyllic romance of contemporary association. Prophetic literature offers rich imagery of a love

story gone sour in Israel's capacity for sin but redeemed by God's faithfulness. Rabbinic commentary on the Song of Songs deepens the romance not as allegory but as insight into Torah narrative itself and the passion that binds God with Israel, revealing both the erotic depth of covenant love and the spiritual importance of erotic love. The images of the Song of Songs may be about sex. "But what is sex about? What higher reality does human sexual love disclose?" (141).

Levenson samples the effort of philosophers to retain the practice of loving God at the center of Jewish life in the Jewish-Muslim symbiosis of medieval Spain. Especially for Bahya ibn Paquda in *Duties of the Heart*, the love of God becomes the "consummation of the spiritual life" in a journey of ascent to the One.

It is in the Enlightenment emancipation of Jews and the reduction of religion to voluntary association by citizens of a secular state that the real existential challenge is presented. The command to love of God becomes not duty, but private choice. Here Levenson considers an exchange between Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, offering personal religious experience as key to transformation of external law to the inner power of commandment, to the "primal commandment of the lover: 'Love me'" (196).

There is too much nuance in Levenson's meticulous scholarship for a humble review to do justice. It is a book that holds insights for Christians as well as Jews. How might the love of God change when the relationship is not to superior suzerain or mutual lover or philosophical entity, but to God identified with "the least of these"? The text belongs in libraries to be savored in small sections and shared in graduate conversations, for Levenson does not simply explore the concept of love of God through Bible and tradition. Reading his graceful prose, like performing the deeds commanded by Torah, also evokes and inspires the very love it has so carefully described. Act cannot be separated from affect, as I suspect the rabbi and her Catholic interlocutor really knew after all.

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Jesus and Buddha: Friends in Conversation. By Paul Knitter and Roger Haight. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015. xvii + 253 pages. \$26.00.
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In today's transnational and global world, as peoples of diverse religious backgrounds increasingly live, work, and pray alongside each other, they have to confront the question, "what is the significance of understanding