

Religions of Love: Judaism, Christianity, Islam

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter explores the place of love—of human towards humans or towards God, and of God towards humans—in the Abrahamic traditions. Christianity frequently presented itself as a religion of love, as opposed to ‘loveless’ Judaism and Islam. However, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have all used love to imagine, contest, and represent relations both proper and improper between and among created beings and divine creator; and all three religions have also used love to imagine their relation to each other (as well as to other religions), and to represent the stakes in their competing claims to truth. Although claims of love animate many Abrahamic ethical, social, and onto-theological ideals, the same claims underpin many of the sectarian dynamics and discriminations through which religious communities distinguished themselves from one another. The chapter focuses on various types of love from the Hebrew Bible and Quran to medieval Jewish and Islamic philosophers.

Keywords: love, lovelessness, lovingkindness, passion, ahava, Maimonides, Nachmanides, maḥabbah, mawadda, ‘ishq

□ *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, T. E. Lawrence (‘Lawrence of Arabia’) describes the interruption of his bath in Wadi Rumm (southern Jordan):

a grey-bearded, ragged man with a hewn face of great power and weariness, came slowly along the path till opposite the spring: and there he let himself down with a sigh upon my clothes spread out over a rock beside the path....He heard me and leaned forward, peering with rheumy eyes....After a long stare, he seemed content, and closed his eyes groaning, ‘The love is from God; and of God; and towards God.’ His low-spoken words were caught by some trick distinctly in my

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water pool. They stopped me suddenly. I had believed Semites unable to use love as a link between themselves and God. (Lawrence 1926/1985: 364–6)

Lawrence's narrative is of transformative revelation. But for us, the anecdote is more useful for what it reveals about the world the author came from. For his 'Semitic' prejudices flowed within a stream of Christian thought—secularized into the philosophies and sciences of European modernity—that articulated the failings of Judaism and Islam (as well as of Jews and Muslims), in terms of handicaps in spheres of love.

The history of this articulation is very long. The earliest Christian writings already attempt to distance salvific forms of loving relation to the world and its creator from the alleged practices of Jews and pagans. In the Sermon on the Mount, for example, Matthew's Jesus presents his teachings in contrast with those that had come before:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. (5: 43–4)

The Gospel authors surely knew that the injunction to love one's neighbour is nowhere joined to the hatred of enemies in the Decalogue or the Pentateuch. The Gospels' (p. 519) misrepresentation of the teachings on love of Jesus' predecessors and rivals (most notably the Pharisees) was rather part of a sectarian strategy through which Jesus' teachings were presented as the perfection and fulfilment of a flawed law that came before. (A sectarian strategy that, in John, does take the form of a stress upon the love of one's 'friends' and brothers within the sectarian community, rather than one's 'enemies' outside of it: John 13: 34–5; 15: 9–13; 1 John 3: 14, 4: 12.)

Over time the utility of this strategy, sometimes combined with classical stereotypes of Jewish misanthropy, produced a powerful theological discourse about the supersession of a loveless Judaism by a loving Christianity. That discourse was not overturned by modernity, so much as put to new kinds of work. When Spinoza, for example, launched his revolutionary criticism of priestly political power in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* (= *TTP*) of 1670, he did so by suggesting that the basis of this power was in the bad laws of the Old Testament, bad (among other reasons) because they instructed the Hebrews to love only themselves and hate all others. Spinoza's choice of proof-text is striking: '[i]t was for this reason that they were told: "Love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy"' (*TTP* 216/iii.233, citing Matt. 5: 43).

We should stress that 'Jewish' lovelessness was not only a charge against Jews. St Paul, for example, used the verb 'to Judaize' in one of the earliest Christian writings (Gal. 2: 14) in order to criticize St Peter for urging what he deemed to be an inappropriate

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attachment to the ritual laws of Judaism upon Gentile followers of Jesus. 'Judaizing' was here a Christian error: the error of placing (as the Jews had allegedly done in rejecting Jesus) excessive attention on earthly signs rather than on the divine signification of those signs. Such inappropriate love came to be thought of as 'Judaizing' the Christian. Some 1,600 years after Paul, the English poet George Herbert put the point bluntly in his poem 'Self-Condensation' (of 1633): 'He that doth love, and love amisse, | This worlds delights before true Christian joy, | Hath made a Jewish choice... | And is a Judas-Jew' (Herbert 1991: 160-1).

Nevertheless, for all that love could discriminate among Christians, it drew an even sharper line between religions. Blaise Pascal provided a lapidary version of the logic in his *Pensées* of 1670: 'Carnal Jews are half-way between Christians and pagans. Pagans do not know God and only love earthly things; Christians know the true God and do not love earthly things. Jews and pagans love the same possessions, Jews and Christians know the same God' (Pascal 1995: 85). Within this comparative scheme, improper love is the common characteristic of the condemned, whether they know God (like the Jews) or not (like the pagans).

Pascal did not mention Muslims and Islam, a faith and people sometimes classed by Christians among those who 'know the same God', sometimes among those who do not (i.e. as pagans), but in both cases charged with inadequate love. The standard criticisms appear already in the earliest Christian writers about Islam in the seventh century and are still sometimes repeated today: (1) Islam is a religion of fear and violence, not of love; and (2) when Muslims love, they love the flesh, not the divine: even the vision of Paradise offered by their (false) prophet is merely one of carnal lusts writ large (Kaegi 1969; Lamoreaux 1996; Tolan 2002; Nirenberg 2009).

(p. 520) How best to intervene in this long polemic about the relative lovingness of the Abrahamic faiths? We might begin by stressing that love is not a necessary prerequisite for religion. God's love of humanity, humanity's love of god, man's love for man: theogonies, cosmologies, theodicies, and ethics have existed without one or any of these. For an example we need look no further than Aristotle's cosmos, moved by love for an 'unmoved mover' who does not—because incorporeal, unchanging, and unmovable—love anything in return (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1072a27). If we have come to think of these loves as the foundation of religion (see e.g. the recent *Encyclopedia of Love in World Religions* (Greenberg 2007)), it is in part because of the work done by love in the history of the three 'Abrahamic' religions. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have all used love to imagine, contest, and represent relations both proper and improper between and among created beings and divine creator. And all three religions (in their myriad flavours and

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sects) have also used love to imagine their relation to each other (as well as to other religions), and to represent the stakes in their competing claims to truth.

We cannot map, in our brief compass, the work done by love in these three faiths. Instead, we will focus on the faiths criticized within the Christian tradition as relatively loveless—that is, Judaism (beginning with the Hebrew Bible) and Islam. Along the way, we will pay special attention to those moments in which the different religious traditions formulated their claims to love in interaction (real or imagined) with each other. For we wish to insist that although claims of love animate many Abrahamic ethical, social, and onto-theological ideals, the same claims—articulated in terms of the other’s lack of love, or of false love versus true—underpin many of the sectarian dynamics and discriminations through which religious communities distinguished themselves from one another.

Judaism Biblical and Rabbinic

Unlike Aristotle, the compilers of the Hebrew Bible had little trouble imagining God’s love, whether for creation in general or for a particular person or people. In the words of Deuteronomy’s Moses (7: 7–8), ‘the Lord did not set His heart upon you, nor choose you, because you were more numerous than any people, but because the Lord loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore unto your fathers.’ Or as Hosea’s God puts it, ‘I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them’ (Hos. 11: 4). The Hebrew word for love used here is *ahava*, which approximately subsumes the meaning of the Greek words *agape* (‘true love’ or love of God), *philia* (love between friends, love of wisdom), and *storgē* (familial love) (Thomas 1939; Moran 1963).

In the Hebrew Bible, *ahava* is used not only for God’s love of his people and that people’s love of God (as in ‘love God with all your heart’, Deut. 6: 5) but also of the (p. 521) people’s love of each other. ‘Do not seek revenge or hold a grudge, but love your neighbour as yourself’ (Lev. 19: 18). The imperative form of the verb (*ve-ahavta*), used elsewhere in the Pentateuch only with reference to man’s love of God, is in this chapter extended into a command to love one’s *re’a*, an uncommon word in the Pentateuch, and one whose semantic field is therefore difficult to define, but meaning ‘other’, ‘companion’, ‘friend’, and translated ‘neighbour’ by Tyndale and *King James*. A few verses later, the command is extended further: as you love yourself, love the foreigner (*ger*) residing in the land (Lev. 19: 34).

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In these verses love of self is presented as the proper basis and measure for love of others. These verses came to seem to many later commentators, from Rabbi Hillel (*b. Shabbat* 31a) and Jesus (e.g. Matt. 22: 39) in the first century to Hermann Cohen in the early twentieth, as the foundations of the Hebrew Bible's ethical stance toward all humanity (Hirshman 2004). We will return to the future of these verses. But first we should note that *ahava* is only one of several words for love in the Hebrew Bible. *Hesed*, for example, often translated as 'loving kindness', denotes love of the stronger for the weaker (including that of God for creation). 'I show', says God, 'loving kindness unto the thousandth generation of those who love me [*ohavai*] and keep my commandments' (Exod. 20: 5). In God's loving kindness toward his creation, some of the authors of the Hebrew Bible seem to have seen an ethical foundation just as central as love of neighbour. Micah, for example, summarizes all of the commandments as 'just this: to do justice, to love kindness [*hesed*], and to walk humbly with your God' (6: 8). (See generally Harvey 1976.)

Even passionate love—the love of lover and beloved, or husband and wife—is used in the Hebrew Bible to represent the relationship between God and his follower, whether individual or collective. The Song of Songs provides a famous and sustained example, one that rabbinic exegetes would much later extend and apply to the relationship between God and Israel in every time and place (Wolfson 2003). Thus the classical commentators, from the early Song of Songs Rabbah to the eleventh-century Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzhak (Rashi), explained that Solomon (traditionally understood as the author of the Song), foreseeing the exiles of Israel, wrote a love song in order to represent the relationship between God and Israel in that Diasporic future. The song would remind Israel of her earlier marriage to God (cf. Hos. 2: 9), of her betrayal of that love (cf. Lev. 26: 40), and of her lover's ongoing suffering (cf. Isa. 63: 9), thereby recalling her to her divine spouse (cf. Hos. 2: 4).

As this medieval exegesis makes clear, passionate love could represent the ideal relationship between God and people, but it could also—in its negative form as adultery and infidelity—serve as a powerful metaphor for an individual or a people's straying from that ideal. Even Solomon, for all his inspired knowledge of divine love, was led away from God by inappropriate erotic interests, which, according to the Hebrew Bible, took the form of 1,000 women (1 Kgs 11).

Erotic passion, loving kindness, love: the differences between these affections will become important in all three religions. Within a biblical context, however, those differences should not be exaggerated. God, in Jeremiah 2: 2, remembers 'the loving-
(p. 522) kindness [*hesed*] of your youth, the love [*ahava*] of your betrothal, how you followed me in the desert...'. In such a passage, the multiple Hebrew forms of love stand

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in indistinguishable proximity, expressing the relation between God and Israel. We can still see a similar proximity in the first centuries of the Common Era, when the Talmud treats 'loving kindness' as a commandment just as all-encompassing as love of neighbour: just as in loving kindness God took the time to make 'garments of skin' for Adam and Eve before expelling them from Paradise (Gen. 3: 21), so it is incumbent upon each of us to clothe the poor (*b. Sotah* 14a).

As these examples make clear, each of these loves, regardless of its specific vocabulary, could (and did) serve as the foundation of a system of ethical and even legal obligation. (On the use of *be'ahava*—'with love'—in Talmudic and gaonic formularies for sales contracts see Muffs 1992: 122–3.) This may seem odd to some modern philosophers, brought up on the secularized Christian conviction that love and law are inimical, and that the ethical cannot be imposed but must be self-legislated. (Recall, for example, Hegel's critique of Kant's 'categorical imperative'.) Late antique and medieval Jewish thinkers, less committed to Protestant axioms, did not assume an essential conflict between love and law, though they did explore some potential tensions in the command to love. Thus the thirteenth-century rabbi Moses ben Nachman (Nachmanides) commented on Lev. 19: 18: 'A human heart cannot undertake to love one's other as oneself. Did not Rabbi Akiva himself teach "your own life takes precedence over the life of another"?' (*b. Bava Metzia* 62a). What the mitzvah commands is that one weigh the concerns of another as carefully as one weighs one's own' (Goodman 2008: 3–30, here 13).

Though medieval Jewish thinkers did not worry much about a conflict between love and law, they were quite concerned (particularly the more Aristotelian among them) about the possible incommensurability between love and divinity. In much ancient philosophy, love was thought to result from imperfection or lack. The imperfect loves the perfect, but the Perfect One, lacking nothing, does not, cannot, love the imperfect. This position was problematic for Jewish philosophers working within a scriptural tradition that attributed such an important place to God's love. For example Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides), who was both the greatest systematizer of rabbinic law and the greatest Jewish Aristotelian of the twelfth century, had no difficulty speaking of our human *ahavah* (Arabic: *mahabbah*) for God (Lamm 1995; Vajda 1957). In fact it is the love of God that provides the ultimate stimulus for the study of scripture and law. Students start with baser motivations, but the highest goal is to move (as he puts it in the introduction to his commentary on *Mishna Sanhedrin* ch. 10, also known as *Ḥelek*) from serving for the promise of reward to serving purely for the love of God. He quotes here the words of an early rabbinic commentary, *Sifrei on Deut.* 11: 13: 'Should you be tempted to say "I will study Torah in order to become rich, or in order to be called Rabbi, or in order to receive a reward in the world to come," Scripture says "to love the lord your God": whatever you

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do, it is only out of love'. (Compare this teaching of the early rabbis to the polemic in Matt. 23.)

(p. 523) But for all his emphasis on human love, Maimonides was (with rare exceptions) unwilling to speak of divine *ahavah* toward us, since this would be to attribute a bodily passion to an incorporeal God. Similarly when it came to speaking of erotic love (Greek *éros*, Hebrew *hesheq*, Arabic *'ishq*), he attributed to humans a passionate (intellectual) love for God (*Guide* 3.51), but did not attribute to God a passionate love toward us. In good Aristotelian fashion, the only form of love that Maimonides attributes to God is *hesed*, the loving kindness of the strong for the weak. He cites Psalms 89: 3: 'The world is built on loving kindness' (*Guide* 3.53).

Maimonides seems to have understood biblical suggestions of God's love as heuristic anthropomorphisms, meant to help the weaker in knowledge and faith, but that should not mislead the wise. Other Jewish rationalists were much more willing to put God's love at the centre of creation. Following the Muslim philosopher Avicenna's view that God has a 'passionate love' (Arab. *'ishq*) for creation, Levi ben Gershon (Gersonides, 1288-1344) suggested that Gen. 2: 2 should not be understood as 'And God *concluded* (*va-yekhal*) his work on the seventh day', since God had in fact concluded his work on the sixth day. Instead the passage should be understood 'And God loved (*hesheq*, cognate of Arab. *'ishq*) his work on the seventh day' (Gersonides 1866: 7.2; his commentaries on the Song of Songs and on Gen. 2: 2 are also relevant here). A little more than a generation later Ḥasdai Crescas (c.1340-1410/11) suggested, contra Plato, Aristotle, and Maimonides, that God's creation is itself the paradigm of love. For Crescas, love and perfection go hand in hand, and God is not only the ultimate object of love, but also the ultimate lover (Harvey 1998: 108-9).

Jewish mysticism, too, produced a powerful discourse of love between and among humanity and divinity, a discourse saturated with erotic vocabulary of love, and even ascribing feminine and masculine 'attributes' (*sfirot*) to the godhead. The medieval Kabbalists of the Castilian and the Catalan schools understood the divine as itself caught up in a process of separation and reunification, of alienation, yearning, and recuperation, and often they represented the history of that process in terms drawn from human spheres of love and the erotic (Scholem 1946: 225; Idel 1989; Idel 2009; Wolfson 1994; Wolfson 1995). The same was true of relations between human and divine. In *Iggeret ha-Qodesh* (The Holy Letter), for example, Nachmanides or one of his students undertook to show how knowledge of and union with God is achieved through 'proper sexual intercourse'. The project was explicitly posed as a philosophical polemic, here taking aim at Maimonides and Aristotle: 'The matter is not as Rabbi Moses of blessed memory said in his *Guide of the Perplexed*. He was incorrect in praising Aristotle for stating that the

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sense of touch is shameful for us. Heaven forbid! The matter is not like the Greek said' (Nachmanides 1976: 42; Mopsik 1986; Mopsik 2005).

Such texts make clear that 'philosophical Judaism' had many streams. In some of these streams love and even marital intercourse remained a powerful way to imagine the overcoming of the gap between God and creation: so powerful, in fact, that soul and body, god and matter, might even become one flesh in nuptial union. In this sense, we can say (anachronistically) that love provided these strands of Judaism with a (p. 524) dialectical power capable of overcoming the stark gap between the created and mutable on the one hand, and on the other the eternal and divine. Thus in his *Shnei Luhot ha-Brit* (two tablets of the covenant), the early seventeenth-century rabbi Isaiah ben Abraham Halevi Horowitz (also known by acronym as the Shlah) could write: 'In one respect, the body and the soul are both equal: i.e., both are spiritual, as was the first man before the fall and as he will be in the future....Even earthly matter becomes spiritual again and both will have the same value. This is the goal: [that the body and the soul] are eternal...' (Mopsik 2005: 72).

Islam Early and Classical

Islam, like Judaism, had many ways of thinking about the roles of love in the relationship between and among God and creation. We might begin with the nature of revelation itself. Islamic classical theology understood the Quran as God's word made book, an intermediate space between the transcendent God and his creature, a space in which the disclosure of God's will unfolds through qualities of act (as distinguished from qualities of essence, that is, from God's uncreated eternal 'meanings', *ma'nā*) (Gimaret 1990; Frank 1999). One of these temporal qualities of action in relation to created being is God's infinite mercy (*rahma*). The twofold concept of *al-rahmān al-rahīm* encompasses the whole range of divine grace and benevolence offered to the human understanding. Indeed God's revelation to Muhammad is itself an act of divine mercy in history: 'It is only as a mercy that We sent you to all people' (Q. 21: 107).

Love is another quality with which God acts within history. Indeed if we take seriously the classical Islamic idea that the quranic revelation should be understood in terms of the historical context of its revelation, the manifestation of the concept of love undergoes a marked evolution (Rippin 2001; Dammen McAuliffe 2003a; Hawting 2003). The classical method of Quran interpretation—as established by Ṭabarī in the tenth century—depends upon the identification of historical causes, or occasions, for the revelation of individual verses (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) (Rippin 1988). In the specific case of the vocabulary of love—

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ḥubb, or *maḥabba* (in its general meaning of love) and *wadd*, or *mawadda* (loving affection, friendship)—we can distinguish between its use in the (earlier) Meccan revelations and in the Medinan, revealed after Muhammad’s establishment of a polity.

In the Meccan revelations, terms of love appear as relevant features of the relational system between God, human beings, and the community of believers: one of the names of God, for example, is *al-wadūd*. Whether such names indicate God’s attributes or essences has long been a subject of debate in Islam. We might want to infer from the name *wadūd* that loving affection is part of the nature of God and is therefore infinite. But at the very least we can say—adhering to the position of the classical theologians (p. 525) that we can know only the will and not the nature of God—that loving affection is one of the manifold manifestations of God’s will in the created world.

The Meccan revelations are marked by apocalyptic tension, and it is within this tension that Muhammad exhorts his hearers to ‘ask forgiveness from your Lord and turn to Him in repentance: my Lord is merciful and most loving’ (Q. 11: 90). Conversion to a God who ‘is the Most Forgiving, the Most Loving’ (85: 14) emerges here as the human’s (loving?) response to God’s love. This response, in turn, is the first step toward a collective love expressed in terms of a mutual affection between believers, mediated through the figure of the prophet: ‘Say (Muhammad), “I ask you no reward for this, only the affection due to kin (*al-mawadda fī’l-qurbā*)”’ (42: 23).

This is not the only form of social or ‘inter-subjective’ love in the Meccan suras. The semantic field of *mawadda* extends as well to the expression of marital love: ‘Another of His signs is that He created spouses from among yourselves for you to live with in tranquility: He ordained love and kindness between you. There truly are signs in this for those who reflect’ (30: 21). Likewise, God’s affection for justice and righteousness begins to be affirmed, as in 19: 96 (‘But the Lord of Mercy will give love (*waddan*) to those who believe and do righteous deeds’, echoing God’s special tenderness for Moses: ‘I showered you with My love (*maḥabbatan*) and planned that you should be reared under My watchful eye’ (20: 39). Over time, this specific orientation of God’s love toward justice will be repeatedly declared, shifting the semantic emphasis from *wadd* to *ḥubb*. To give but an example among many others: ‘But if you [Muhammad] do judge between them, judge justly: God loves (*yuḥibbu*) the just’ (5: 42). It is worth noting (given the future of the issue in the history of philosophy) that in the quranic lexicon of love, the multiple significations of the word *ḥubb* and its derivatives clearly include passionate and erotic dimension of human love, as in the Sura *Joseph*: ‘Some women of the city said, “The governor’s wife is trying to seduce her slave! Love for him consumes her heart (*qad shaghafa-hā ḥubban*)!”’ (12: 30).

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In the Medinan suras the social, religiously oriented function of love as a sentiment that ties and binds each Muslim to another and the entire community of believers to God is most fully attested. All the verses in which a vocabulary of love is used in order to represent socio-political bonds are Medinese: that is, their revelation to Muhammad is associated with the establishment of the first Muslim community, and with the accompanying transformation of collective values (such as the rise of spiritual brotherhood alongside the old kinship bonds).

Within this new community of converts, love becomes (much as it had been for earlier Christian and Jewish sectarian communities) a relational representation of an ethic of living in spiritual solidarity within a structured social body enjoined to the good. It is in this context, for example, that charity (the giving to others of worldly benefits that one loves for oneself) becomes a manifestation of the believer's proper loving orientation toward God, as for example in 2: 177: 'The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets: who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherished it (*'alā ḥ (p. 526) ubbi-hi*),¹ to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travelers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage, those who keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms'; or in 76: 8-9: 'They give food to the poor, the orphan, and the captive, though they love it themselves, saying: We feed you for the sake of God alone, We seek neither recompense nor thanks from you.'

Love, in the Medinese revelations, becomes one of the foundations of the believers' covenant (*mithāq*) with God (7: 172) (Nuwya 1970: 46), as in 5: 54 'You who believe, if any of you go back on your faith, God will soon replace you with a people He loves (*qawm yuḥibbu-hum*) and who love Him (*yuḥibbūna-hu*).' This covenant is transferable to the prophet as well, who is told to proclaim: 'Say: "If you love God, follow me, and God will love you and forgive you your sins; God is most forgiving, most merciful"' (3: 31). In fact, the Medinese revelations often refer, whether implicitly or explicitly, to an almost transitive affection between God and Muhammad, between Muhammad and his community of believers, and between *mu'minān/muslimān* and the prophet, as for example in the following verses: 'God and His angels bless the Prophet—so, you who believe, bless him too and give him greeting of peace' (33: 56).

The exemplarity of the prophet could sustain a discourse of *imitatio propheti* capable of framing a communitarian identity in which love (*ḥubb*) for the prophet is a condition of faith and a political expression of loyalty. This potential was thoroughly developed in the prophetic tradition (*Sunna*) (Wensinck 1936: I. 406-10), in which the humanity of the prophet is often used to translate God's transcendent mercy and kindness into an immanent moral and behavioural norm that provides the community with an ethical system. When dealing with the political meaning of love in their works on ethics, Muslim

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philosophers—from al-Fārābī to Miskawayh to Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī—will mirror this political discourse of love, evidently taking inspiration from it, although translating it into philosophical terms (Miskawayh 1969: 211–32; Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī 1981: 275–80). Al-Fārābī provides a good example of this attempt to maintain an ethical convergence between ancient philosophy and the modernity of revelation, for example, when he writes about the legislator’s duty to keep love alive among the citizens of a city ruled by a common law (al-Fārābī 1952: 21; *concordiam* is the Latin preferred by F. Gabrieli to translate the Arabic *maḥabba* with which al-Fārābī rendered platonic *philia*).

But let us remain, for the moment, with the Medinan revelations in order to explore one more political aspect of quranic love: God’s love for his community can imply as well a demand for solidarity against external threats. ‘God truly loves (*yuḥibbu*) those who fight in solid lines for His cause, like a well-compacted wall’ (61: 4). Such passages—which we can understand historically, if we like, as the product of a sectarian community’s logic of solidarity marked by alliances, partnership, and enmities—might strike some modern commentators as out of place in a ‘religion of love’. We should remember, however, that our sense of what religions of love should look like is (p. 527) conditioned by a distinctly modern and secularized interpretation of the Christian injunction to ‘love your enemy’. Historically, all three Abrahamic scriptural traditions have been quite capable of imagining violent enmity as a necessary corollary of ‘love of neighbour’. Think, for example, of Luke 19: 27: ‘But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.’

Quran and *Sīra* (Muhammad’s biography) varied in their sense of how the adherents of Muhammad’s prophetic predecessors should be classed within the friend-enemy distinction. These ambivalent attitudes towards Christians and Jews are often thought to reflect a historical context of actual encounters between Muhammad and representatives of these communities. However that may be, the Quran renders them in prophetic idiom, as at 5: 82: ‘You (Muhammad) are sure to find that the most hostile to the believers are the Jews and those who associate other deities with God; you are sure to find that the closest in affection (*mawadda*) to the believers are those who say, “we are Christians”, for there are among them people devoted to learning and ascetics. Those people are not given to arrogance.’

Certainly there are many quranic passages like this one that proclaim differences between the Abrahamic faiths, and even those that insist on separation, such as Quran 5: 51 which states that Muslim must not take Jews and Christians as ‘close allies or leaders’. Nevertheless, Jews as well as Christians were included within the boundaries of the first *umma* as stipulated in the so-called Constitution of Medina, thereby establishing what we might call a socio-political precedent for the development of the quranic idea of People of

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the Scriptures (*ahl al-kitāb*), with all its historically realized potential for permitting and legitimizing religiously plural societies in Islam.

We might give the last quranic word here to sura 60 (*al-Mumtaḥana*, or ‘Women Tested’), revealed (according to Islamic tradition) after the Ḥudaybiya truce between Muhammad and his Medinan followers, and their Quraish opponents in the city of Mecca. The keyword in this sura, dedicated to establishing both a criterion for and a limit to enmity, is *mawadda*. The sura begins with hostility declaring in 60: 1: ‘You who believe, do not take My enemies and yours as your allies, showing them friendship...’ But this enmity is limited by an awareness of the potential for peace, mutually respectful justice, and even love: ‘God may still bring about affection between you and your present enemies—God is all powerful, God is most forgiving and merciful—and He does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly with anyone who has not fought you for your faith and driven you out of your houses: God loves (*yuḥibbu*) the just’ (60: 7).

Quranic exegesis quickly set to the interpretative work of expanding God’s love for humankind. According to tradition, Muhammad himself began this work, as the Quran’s first exegete, in the *ḥadīth qudsī*, the collection of his sayings that is separated because of its divine inspiration from the canonical corpora of *ḥadīth* literature. Interpretation of the prophet’s words—and criticism of their chains of transmission—was ceaselessly practised in order to put the prophetic texts to living work, producing (among many other things) a long and multi-disciplinary history of debate about love.

(p. 528) We could point to countless examples, among the earliest, the female mystic Rabī‘a (d. 801), whose exegesis gave women access to a transcendental knowledge of God through a de-historicized reading of Quran 5: 54 (‘...a people He loves (*qawmyuḥibbu-hum*) and who love Him (*yuḥibbūna-hu*)’) that stressed the precedence of God’s love over human love for God (Schimmel 1975). We will, however, focus on just two notable thinkers, Ibn Dāwūd al-Iṣfahānī (d. 883) and Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240), both of them representatives of literalist approaches to the Quran.

Ibn Dāwūd, the leader of the *ẓāhirī* juridical school in Baghdad, played a foundational role in the development of Arabic courtly love theory, insisting on the dignity of human love, both spiritualizing it and distinguishing it from mystical love. His school flourished at a time when love was becoming a convergence point of the main trends in an urbanizing Islamic culture newly conversant with Greek terms. It was at this time, for example, that Aristophanes’ myth of the divided androgyne (the only fragmentary witness of Plato’s *Symposion* in Arabic: Gutas 1988) entered the Arab cultural horizon. Ibn Dāwūd, ‘the first of the Arabic writers on love theory (whose work we have) to quote the opinions of Greek thinkers’ (Giffen 1971: 12; Raven 1989), was very much alive to all of these currents.

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He felt (and expressed in his poetry: al-Iṣfahānī 1985: 20–1) the crucial importance of love as existing in human nature as created by God, but as a literalist, he also felt the limits to interpretation imposed by the Quran. His juridical response was to place love outside of the Law. He invoked the prophet's authority, quoting a celebrated (and also much criticized) *ḥadīth* according to which someone who loves, conceals his love in chastity, and dies from love, dies as a martyr (Bell 1979; Gruendler 2004).

This development could be considered a turning point in a quest for a subjective concept of spiritual love imagined as a gendered duality of Lover and Beloved, under the sign of desire. It is analogous to the striking passage, after the tenth century, from *ḥubb* (love in a general sense) to *'ishq* (passionate, extreme love) (Lumbard 2007) in the mystical lexicon of love. In Avicenna's *Treatise on Love* (*'ishq*), we see the achievement of a sublimation into mysticism of cultures of love coming from intellectual debates in many different fields: medicine, philosophy, jurisprudence, and literature (Avicenna 1945; von Grunebaum 1952; Rundgren 1978–9; Bell 1986). God has here become, in a most un-Aristotelian fashion, both the lover and the beloved. (Avicenna 1956: 369; al-Farabi 1985: 86–9, and for the influence upon Judaism of this development in Islamic philosophy, see above.)

The gendered nature of lover and beloved (conceived by Rabī'a even before this philosophical turn) provides one way of thinking about the remarkable presence of women in Islamic mysticism, seeing in the role mysticism assigns women as subjects of desire a clue to the disruptive potential in mystical discourse. The mystical/philosophical (male) treatment of love, which borrows its most powerful metaphors of salvific knowledge from the language of courtly love, introduces the possibility (not to say the necessity) of a feminine element in the worldly manifestation of God's wisdom and beauty (think of Ibn 'Arabī's *Niẓām*, or in the Christian West, Dante's 'donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore') (Corbin 1995; Schimmel 1975). This possibility does not, however, (p. 529) prevent the establishment of an implicitly male gendered order in such discourses of love, even one that represents women's bodies as an obstacle to the attainment of knowledge, and excludes women from the possibility of a spiritualized subjectivity or a relation of love with the transcendent Beloved.

Our second example, Ibn 'Arabī, belonged like Ibn Dāwūd to the literalist juridical school, and shared the singular *ẓāhirī* sensitivity to issues of profane love (as did Ibn Ḥazm, author of *The Neck of the Dove*). Again like Ibn Dāwūd, his hermeneutical approach was based on a range of *ḥadīth* not unanimously recognized as authentic. For example, the long chapter 178 of his *Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* introduces a *ḥadīth qudsī* explicitly defined as unestablished by transmission: 'I was a hidden treasure and was not known; I loved (*aḥbābtu*) to be known, therefore I created the creation and made Myself know to them

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so that they came to know me' (Ibn 'Arabī 1911: II. 399; Chittick 1995; Addas 2002). Ibn 'Arabī juxtaposes these words to Quran 5: 54 and 51: 56 in order to suggest that God created the world out of desire, including his desire to be loved. Such a concept of God might seem far from orthodox tenets, according to which love and longing for the beloved are qualities that God, the self-sufficient, could not possess. But such a position, with all of its potential antinomianism, is implicit in Ibn 'Arabī's definition of *his* Islam as 'the religion of love' (*dīn al-ḥubb*), a definition that culminated in the mysticism of the Persian Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī (Chittick 1983). One way to understand the relationships implicit in this definition between a loving and a legal knowledge of God was offered by another Persian mystic, 'Ayn al-Qudāt al-Hamadānī (executed in 526/1132), who explicitly used the Islamic notion of *madhhab* (a juridical school) to define the mystical path: 'The lovers...do not follow the religion (*madhhab*) of Shāfi'ī or Abū Ḥanīfa or anyone else. They follow the religion of love and religion of God (*madhhab-i 'ishq wa-madhhab-i Khudā*)' (al-Hamadānī 1961: 114).

Polemics of Love

Just as all three Abrahamic traditions make claims on God's love, all three also make claims about the love of others. Perhaps already in the early Israelite context, we might want to see in the Decalogue's assertions about the murderous cruelty of Ba'al worshippers a sectarian strategy of representation whereby one's lovingness is established through negative contrast. But contrast need not equal exclusion. In the Hebrew Bible God loves not only the Jewish people (for example, Deut. 7: 7-8), but others as well: 'The Lord is good to all and His tender mercies are over all his works' (Ps. 145: 9). God acts in the world for the benefit of many peoples, including Israel: 'Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Captor, and the Syrians from Kir?' (Amos 9: 7). Even at the end of the world, at least according to Isaiah's visions, there are competing versions of God's love. At times, the prophet tells us that all the nations will be saved, at times, that all but Israel will be destroyed. Very (p. 530) different visions of the future, to be sure, but among them the possibility that God's love extends to all.

This possibility persists in rabbinic Judaism. When Maimonides, for example, explicates the biblical commandments to know and love God in his *Foundations of the Torah* (*Mishneh Torah*, 1-4), he does not mention Israel. According to him, the commandment is addressed to the human being, with no distinction between Jew and non-Jew. Almost four centuries later, in his *Dialoghi d'amore* (Abrabanel 1535), Judah Abrabanel/Leon Hebreo draws on philosophical and Kabbalistic themes (as well as many other materials) in order

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to present love as a universal cosmological principle, orienting the relations of all things and persons in heaven and earth.

Christianity, too, has found ways to include non-Christians in its community of love. But what is more important for our topic here is the roles that Christian arguments about the insufficiencies of Jewish and Muslim love have played in the development of western thought about these religions (and hence, in the development of disciplines such as the history and philosophy of religion). There is of course a great deal of historical variation in these roles, but there are also important continuities. In the case of Judaism, the long history of complex interaction between classical and Christian motifs of Jewish misanthropy and lovelessness creates a formal continuity between, for example, G. W. F. Hegel's remark about Abraham's decision to follow God's instruction and leave his homeland—'Love alone was beyond his power'—and the condemnations of Abraham that Philo of Alexandria had attempted to rebut almost 2,000 years earlier (Hegel 1948: 185–7).

Similarly in the case of Islam, the long tradition of Christian thought has reproduced and transformed its initial polemical onto-theological commitments about Islamic love in accordance with its evolving historical experience. Thus the earliest Quran translations into Latin (like the one produced, with accompanying commentary, at the request of Peter the Venerable in 1140) were designed to demonstrate the depraved fleshiness of the prophet's passions and teachings (d'Alverny 1947–8; Kritzcek 1964; Burman 2007). The old idea of Muslim lust was here demonstrated through a new Christian attention to the Quran as a religious text, and deployed in a new direction: that of articulating a sharper difference between an emerging 'Christendom' and Islam (Nirenberg 2009). Islam's supposed love of the flesh was posed in seemingly intractable antithesis to the Christian love of God so eloquently preached by Bernard of Clairvaux (in works like *De amore Dei*) and other Latin Christians: an antithesis so stark that it could even justify the Christian killing of Muslims in crusade as an 'act of love' (Riley-Smith 1980).

If today many in the West perceive Islam as puritanical and sex-phobic, the medieval Christian understanding was in some sense the reverse: every kind of lust, from polygamy to homosexuality, was licit to Muslims both in this world and the next. In this sense Christian medieval polemics against Islam were focused not so much on the lack of love in Islam's spiritual and ethical values, but on the type of love—carnal and passionate, which is to say, profane—that Christians understood as characteristic of Islam and enjoined by its law.

(p. 531) We have already given one example—justification for crusade and mission—of the cultural work done by this polemic. We could give many more, for the charge of Muslim lust was a powerful tool through which Christian cultures could proclaim their

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distance from Islam on any number of fronts. One of these, worth mentioning because so well studied, was in the poetic field of the love lyric, a field tilled with precocious genius in Arabic, and one whose sensuous fruits threatened Christian cultivators—themselves aware of the reputation of their Muslim predecessors—with the charge of excessively carnal love.

Christian poetry addressed these ‘anxieties of influence’ (Menocal 1987) by stigmatizing the love culture of the Arabs. Thus Petrarch, himself a founding father of the Christian sonnet, condemned with one gesture both Arabic science and Arabic poetry to the realm of carnality: ‘As to Arab physicians, you know them very well. As to their poets, I know them: nothing more feeble, more spineless, more lewd. What can I say more, hardly someone will convince me that something good could come from Arabia’ (*Seniles* 16.2, in Petrarca 1987: 888) (Petrarch’s knowledge of Arabic poetry presumably came from the few excerpts in the Latin translation to Averroes’ *Commentary to Aristotle’s Poetics* (cf. Bodenham 1982; Mancini 2003).)

We could continue tracing this western criticism of Islamic love poetry from the Middle Ages through A. W. von Schlegel (according to whom Islam was precocious in its poetics, but too ‘cruel’ to know anything of love) and G. W. F. Hegel (who presented Goethe as the heir of a poetic tradition that Islam, because merely a ‘frenzied fanaticism of faith’, had proven unable to sustain) to the ‘Orientalist’ critics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But these are projects for another day. Here we simply want to conclude by reminding ourselves that these polemics of love did not lose their power in Lawrence’s bath. It is certainly true that the decades after the Second World War spoke much less (in the West) of Judaism’s loveless distance from Christianity, and much more (again in the West) of ‘Judaean-Christian civilization’.

In the case of Islam, however, echoes of lovelessness continued to resonate in some modern scholarship. Perhaps not many scholars today would posit the lack of an adequate doctrine of divine love in the Quran (e.g. Sweetman 1947: 48, criticized by Lewisohn 2008: 163). But scholarly approaches to quranic ethics (e.g. Izutsu 1966; Fakhry 1991) usually neglect the considerable space the Islamic sacred book devotes to love between God and the believers, and ignore what we take to be the important work done by love at the intersection of ethics and spirituality in the historical development of Islamic discourse.

The problem becomes more acute the more apologetic the genre. Perhaps the most striking example in recent memory was Pope Benedict XVI’s invocation of love in his Regensburg Address of 2006, which invited Islam to an ecumenical dialogue at the ‘banquet of love’, but at the same time presented Islam as a fanaticism of faith, incapable of love, and hence of dialogue (Nirenberg 2008). Such arguments may seem convincing to

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those brought up (wittingly or unwittingly) in certain traditions of Christian and western thought, but can only lead to an impasse in any attempt at real (p. 532) interreligious dialogue. Attempts at dialogue would be better based, we maintain, on comparative research into the theologies of love produced by the three 'Abrahamic' monotheisms, research that requires our reassessment of the historical development of the interpretative frames of their scriptures (cf. Dammen McAuliffe 2003b). But such reassessment must take place in the awareness that the historical development of love in the theological and exegetical agendas of Judaism and Islam has often taken place (and often takes place today) within contexts of confrontation with Christian categories of love, categories that sometimes aspire to hegemony (e.g. Cumming 2010). If we wish to understand the many roles of love in the Abrahamic faiths, we must bring the same critical eye we apply to charges of Jewish and Muslim lovelessness to these Christian claims of love.

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Notes:

(¹) So M. A. S. Abdel Haleem's translation, from which we quote here; Yusuf Ali's renowned translation renders this passage 'out of love for Him'.

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