

presses God's jealousy of idol worship on the part of Israel in very bold terms is found in Hosea, "Now will I uncover her shame in the very sight of

for it is the reason that in the future God will cleanse the land of idolatry. Actually, he will be cleansing himself for the word "jealous" symbolizes

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presses his jealousy concerning idol worship. In deed, his jealousy is connected to his divine love for the people of Israel. God is presented as loving Israel "to death": "For love is fierce as death' (Song 8:6). God's love for you is as strong as death, as it is written, 'I have shown you love, said the Lord' (Mal 1:2)" (*ShirR* 8:4). Consequently, in keeping with his love, God is jealous of Israel when they worship idols, as the Midrash continues, "His jealousy is as difficult as the bottomless pit, when you make him jealous by worshipping idols, as it says, 'They made Him jealous with alien worship' (Deut 32:16)."

The people of Israel are also described as loving God "to death," to the point of their willingness to sacrifice their lives: "The love that a persecuted generation loves God is as strong as death, as it says, 'It is for Your sake that we are slain all day long' (Ps 44:23)" (*ShirR* 8:4). In response to Israel's overwhelming love, God is jealous for Zion: "The great jealousy that God will have for Zion in the future is as difficult as the bottomless pit, as it says, 'I am very jealous for Zion, I am fiercely jealous for her' (Zech 8:2)" (*ibid.*).

To counteract the suspicion that jealousy is so powerful that it possesses the one who is jealous and that even God cannot overcome the urge, the rabbis taught that "I am a jealous God' [Exod 20:5]: A God of jealousy. I rule over jealousy, but jealousy has no power over me!" (*MekhY Ba-ḥodesh* 6). In addition, they said, "Jealousy conquers a person, but God conquers jealousy, as it says, 'The Lord is vengeful' (Nah 1:2)" (*BerR* 49:8).

The commentators also associate God's jealousy with idol worship. Nahmanides (Ramban) posits that "the word, *qana*, jealous, refers only to idol worship" (*Comm. on Exod* 20:5). God demands exclusivity, namely, only he is to be worshipped, "*qana* [means that] God requires exclusive ownership. This is inherent in the Divine and *jealous* is not a mere attribute" (Hirsch, *ad loc.*). According to Maimonides, it is impossible to ascribe to God any positive attributes. However, since idol worship is antithetical to the intellect and to Torah, the Torah permitted itself, so to speak, to attribute to God the characteristic of jealousy. "You will not find the phrases of wrath or even the word, anger, or jealousy except in the context of idol worship specifically.... You can follow this through all of the books [of the Bible]. In the Prophetic books there is a particular emphasis on this because idol worship is a falsehood that is attributed to God, may He be blessed" (*Guide* 1.36).

In the Zohar, the idea is expressed that God's passionate hatred of idol worship and his disgust

From the perspective of religious behavior, the influence of the concept of a jealous God in Jewish thought can work in two opposite ways: it can lead to radical action similar in a sense to God's jealousy (see "Zealot, Zealotry"); on the other hand, the awareness of not being God should deter people from assuming the role of God.

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### III. Christianity

The jealousy, or zeal, of God is the main reason for the biblical prohibition to worship other gods (Exod 20:5; Deut 6:14–15). In the NT, Paul exclaims that he is zealous in his ministry "with the jealousy of God" (2 Cor 11:2). For the Christian mainstream, God challenges the faith, hope, and love of believers and congregations, but rarely at the expense of adherents of other religions. In systematic theology, jealousy of God belongs to the doctrine of divine attributes or perfections. It is seldom regarded as an attribute in its own right, although the exceptional case is that it may top the list (Jenson: 226, without further elaboration). It expresses the conviction that God is concerned with the well-being of God's people and that human behavior has consequences for God's behavior, too. It is an integral aspect of God's uniqueness and holiness, which includes the will and claim to exclusive adoration and confession. Contrary to recent allegations about the perils of monotheism, such exclusivity need not be misunderstood as mere self-assertion, since it is tied to God's patience. From this perspective, the jealousy of God implies hope for eschatological restoration. It is "the energy of God's good will" and includes the "refusal to negotiate away the creature's good" (Webster: 263). It "could not be more powerfully manifested than in the incarnation of God's own Word" (Barth: 470–71). Through the mission of Jesus, God aims at the inte-

gration of the entire cosmos “into the sphere of God’s holiness” (Pannenberg: 432).

Jealousy is an emotional disposition, and there is “ample biblical reason to think that God has a rich and intense emotional life, even though [God’s] emotional life must not be thought of as being exactly like ours” (Carson: 48). Like human emotion, the jealousy of God has a cognitive, motivational-active, expressive-communicative, and subjective-experiential dimension. It includes responsive-affective (jealousy provoked) and active-effective (jealousy enacted) aspects. It can be experienced as both threatening and comforting; even when it includes a threat, it is not arbitrary or uncontrolled, since it remains determined by God’s covenant faithfulness (cf. Dietrich/Link: 102–103). The further claim that God “makes the divine self dependent” and “stakes his divinity” (Dietrich/Link: 121) on the history of God’s people and of creation is contested, as the debate about Open Theism shows. For some theologians, the idea of God’s affectivity remains problematic. Even if it is understood as freely chosen by God, it may undermine the core conviction of God’s original impassibility and independence. From this perspective, jealousy appears as an emotion beyond all reasonable measure, “the dark companion of love” (Miggelbrink: 22), which is dispensable in a contemporary doctrine of God. In addition, feminist theologies seek new, non-exclusivist ways of speaking about God, which reach beyond a “theological jealousy that isolates and ultimately destroys the very divine greatness that it seeks to protect” (Schneider: 166).

The debate about affective concepts or metaphors of God received renewed attention in the last decades. Cultural theorists find “semantic dynamite” (Assmann 2006: 57) in scripture and regard God’s jealousy as a central motive of the biblical language of violence, since in some narrations it triggers a corresponding, violent human jealousy for God. Neoconservative critics additionally charge that “the binary or dualistic scheme” is the ideological root of all monotheistic “zealotry” (Sloterdijk: 212). However, the distinction between “true” and “false” leads to violence only when it is related to the additional distinction between friend and foe in a religious sense. Moreover, the biblical narrations are calls not to violence but “to commitment and conversion,” aiming at the vision of “an alternative counter-power to the totalizing claims of the political” (Assmann 2008: 144–45). Perhaps reasonable debate about diverse truth claims actually helps to promote tolerance and to defuse (inter-)religious conflicts. When anthropomorphic language about God turns into the “semantics of partisanship,” it becomes an expression of “sin,” and Christian theology always stands “in need of conversion” (Müller: 80). The implied admonition to acknowledge the limitations of human discourse about God al-

ready featured prominently in 20th century dialectical theology. From this perspective, God’s self-revelation, or self-interpretation, in Jesus Christ leaves room for a plurality of human interpretations, including interpretations of the jealousy of God.

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#### IV. Literature

The jealousy of God, a concept based on biblical texts such as Exod 20:5–6 and 34:14; Deut 6:14–15, and 2Cor 11:2, has inspired and perplexed readers of the Bible across the centuries. Literary works often followed the views of early biblical interpreters who considered God’s jealousy to be just. As such, by the medieval period, godly jealousy had become a desirable trait for humans to possess, being associated with true love. John Donne (1572–1631), in a wedding sermon based on Hos 2:19, describes godly jealousy as marked by care, honor, counsel, and tenderness. It stood in contrast to jealousy that was inspired by the devil and acted with distrust, suspicion, and accusation (Sermon “Preached at a Marriage,” May 30, 1621). Donne, in his Sonnet 17 (“Since she whom I lov’d hath paid her last debt,” even found comfort in godly jealousy. Mourning his wife’s premature death, the poet comes to accept it by setting his mind on “heavenly things.” Yet despite finding fulfillment in God, he still yearns for more love and this disturbs him, fearing that he might stray from God in his pursuit of love. Nonetheless, he remains confident that God’s “tender jealousy” will keep him from the world, the flesh, and the devil. Donne, therefore, demonstrates that God’s jealousy works for the good of humans.

Various writers, however, have found it difficult to reconcile God with jealousy. William Blake (1757–1827), for instance, connects jealousy with