I would first like to respond to Alon Goshen-Gottstein's 'Thinking Of/With Scripture: Struggling for the Religious Significance of the Song of Songs.' After offering his own account of scriptural reasoning, including the dimension of personal reflection and religious experience, Goshen-Gottstein proceeds to his interpretation of the Song. Goshen-Gottstein sympathizes with the wide variety of reading the Song has generated over the millennia. More importantly, he bears witness to a crisis of relationship with the Song as part of scripture because of the immensity of 'secondary' interpretations. But perhaps he makes his own approach problematic almost immediately when he looks for an original 'religious significance' to the Song. Equally important is Goshen-Gottstein's rejection of situating the Song within the wisdom tradition as, say, an elaboration of Prov. 31. What then this celebration of eros? And is it a religious celebration? As Goshen-Gottstein also points out, early rabbinic interpretation did not present the Song as an allegory of love. Indeed, Goshen-Gottstein is dubious about the entire project of interpretation that convinces us of the Song's authenticity as an allegory of divine love. Goshen-Gottstein becomes quite enamored with the hermeneutic of praise he finds in the preponderance of rabbinic interpretation. Praise is the intertextual link with the rest of scripture: anything worthy of praise, should be praised; and so it receives its own inscriptions. Whether one can detect a reverse trend, a rabbinic eroticizing of the rest of scripture, Goshen-Gottstein declares will have to wait for another study. But the great problematic of interpretation is that the religious potency of the book so often rests with the tradition rather than with the scripture itself. And yet, with Goshen-Gottstein, perhaps the chief lesson...
What strikes me, as a reader of scripture intent upon hearing God's voice, is that the canonical interstices between the Song and other books of scripture present wider gaps than perhaps at any other point. This intertextual factor, as well as the language and perspective of the Song, does not find resonance quite anywhere else in scripture—and so Goshen-Gottstein's litany of 'unique-nesses' toward the end of his paper. That the 'secondary' readings mystically close these gaps through allegory and anagogy at least is not a bit surprising. The theme of love for God and love for the human in the Psalms, their spiritual personalism, e.g., 51, 84, et al., could be easily transposed upon the Song. Indeed, the titles of the two books are at least conceptually cognate with each other. So the intent to praise the God of Abraham is equally intent upon praising this God through this Song. And in doing so, the Song lends to this intent a whole language it would otherwise not have used—or would it? Indeed, the nuptial metaphors are there, actually, throughout the prophets. Instead, what the Song is 'called' to do by its interpreters, mystical and otherwise, is to become a set of voices of the intensest spirituality. Another interpreter in this vein is St. John of the Cross whose Song-based mystical poem is the inspiration for one of his greatest books of mystical theology, Ascent of Mount Carmel. Echoing the early verses of the Song and yet reflecting an utterly internalized mystical bliss, a segment of the poem reads:

"I remained, lost in oblivion; my face I reclined on the Beloved. All ceased and I abandoned myself, leaving my cares forgotten among the lilies."

Ellen Davis's 'Reading the Song Iconographically' also pursues a sense of what type of reader approaches what type of text. Straightaway, Davis indicates that she believes the canonical reason for the Song's acceptance was as the earliest allegorical reading of a portrayal of God's relationship with Israel. The nature of the text of the Song is then 'iconographic'. Citing the work of LaCocque, with whom she agrees, Davis suggests that the text, authored by a woman, achieved its subversive insertion within the canon as a means of healing the disruptions narrated in the early chapters of Genesis. Referring to the principles of Gunkel, highlighting especially the virtue of humility in interpretation, Davis reminds us that historical interpretations are fully imaginative constructions of 'original' Sitz im Leben. Davis is pursuing a kind of balanced hermeneutic where subjectivity and humility keep one both focused on the text and open to the widest possible range of meanings. Appropriating the reflection by Rabbi Akiba who referred to the Song as the 'Holy of Holies,' Davis likens the song to the iconostasis of Orthodox churches where image and sacrament meet and are consecrated most holy. As such, the Song is a 'verbal analog' to the icon because for her, it is 'essentially a mystical text' by means of an otherwise 'theocentric' hermeneutic. Through the employment of this hermeneutic, Davis resolves what Goshen-Gottstein claimed could not be resolved, i.e., identifying the religious function of the Song. Of course to do so, Davis does not proceed from markers within the text, but markers within the reader. These of course are not markers rooted in any particular experience; they are installed and shaped by 'catholic Christianity' and a humble devotion to scripture.

Davis turns her attention to the motif of the 'Garden of God' where lost intimacy with God is restored according to the spiritual romance of the Song. Indeed, the world's 'well-being' is dependent upon such intimacy as it is translated horizontally. Indeed, the search of the beloved for the lover in the Song is suggestive to
Davis of the devotion enjoined by the Shema of Deuteronomy 6, you shall love the Lord your God with allâ€™s" Indeed, the nuptial imagery, which portrays God's unrequited love in the prophets, in the Song uniquely shown now to reflect the reciprocal desire of the beloved for the divine Lover. But Davis returns to the hermeneutical move she made at the beginning of her paper and throughout her commentary on the Song and confesses profound uncertainty. This of course is part of humility, part of what the beloved of God know all to well about themselves and God.

Omid Safi's 'On the "Path of Love" Towards the Divine: A Journey with Muslim Mystics' chooses a completely different approach. Rather than opening with a classic Safi introduces us to a profound contemporary expression of devotion and witness in a poem by Hazrat Inayat Khan. As a sufi, his poem echoes the millennium old language of personal devotion in Islam, the madhab-e 'ishq, or "Path of Love". Like Davis's emphases, this tradition has focused upon those portions of scripture which elevate expressions of intense intimacy between God and the human in such phrases as "Infinite Tenderness, Eternal Kindness." But immediately Safi wants to point out that Sufism's love tradition is not a direct expression of reading and commentary on the Quran. In order to understand Sufi reading one must become acquainted with the history of Sufi community. This is a community bound by the synthetic thinking of devotion as a hermeutical framework with an immensely rich tradition of typology. In so doing, they have 'privileged passionate love ('ishq) as the foremost means of attaining to God.'(5)

By exploring 'an immersion in love's baffling aesthetics' Sufi interpreters were furnished with the language of devotion. Safi's recounting of Sufi history exposes the subversive nature of the community and the movement, especially at the point of 'de-exceptionalizing' Islam, in view of devotion to God. This can be summed up by Ahmad Ghazali's 'I was sent to remove customs'. Far from a religious anarchy, Safi asserts that Sufism is a movement transcending conventional Islam, that of mere 'imitationism (taqlid)' (cf. the interesting case of Hashem Aghajari in Iran). In a very interesting moment in the paper, Safi points out that "loving-kindness", mahabba is used for divine love and 'ishq for human love because the latter entails desire which should not or cannot be attributed to the divine.

The major section of Safi's paper is dedicated to the extraordinary work of Ahmad Ghazali and others who elaborate on the intense love that drives the mystic to fasten all attention on relationship. Like Davis's meditations on the Song, the theme of reciprocity in love comes to the fore. A profound exposition of the difference between "loveliness" and "belovedness" elaborates the relation between God and creation. Ultimately when the lover and the beloved achieve a total reciprocity together, one is invited virtually to become the other where needfulness and self-sufficiency become all-encompassing. Indeed, even creation can become part of this love since it always leads to love for the Beloved Creator. Safi finally alludes to a key relation between scripture and the hermeneutics of love: both are generative of the deepest religious understanding and experience.

What all three of our presenters have indicated is a profound comprehension of the issues presented by theologies of love. These theologies are there and can be appropriated in different ways. Both Goshen-Gottstein and Safi are conscious of how the tradition is hesitant about describing the nature of God, and Goshen-Gottstein especially, how even a text like the Song may have no direct theological meaning at all. Davis opens up what Safi elaborates, that the intentionality of love is vast and immensely important in the tradition. Scripture is appropriated
I love the Commentary, thoroughly enjoyed reading it, and have already re-read several sections. I find it spiritually moving and though provoking. Although it is a meticulously detailed and profound theological exposition of the soul and its relationship to God, it is not a difficult book to read. Origen's interpretation of the Song of Songs is expounded with clarity and precision, and Origen draws the reader along to his conclusions in a step-by-step manner. Despite the deep and profound nature of the subject, the meaning (to me) was consistently crystal clear. I finished the book wanting The Song of Songs, also known as Song of Solomon or Canticles (Hebrew: שִׁיר הָשִׁירִים, Greek and Ancient Greek: ᾿σμα ᾿σμάτων, translit. Āisma, Latin: Canticum Canticorum), is one of the megillot (scrolls) found in the last section of the Tanakh, known as the Ketuvim (or "Writings"), and a book of the Old Testament. The Song of Songs is unique within the Hebrew Bible: it shows no interest in Law or Covenant or the God of Israel, nor does it teach or explore wisdom like Proverbs or...