

Published in the Association of Jewish Libraries Newsletter, September/October, 2008, p. 34.

Novak, David. *Tradition in the Public Square: A David Novak Reader*. Edited by Randi Rashkover and Martin Kavka. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008. 372 p. \$42.00 (ISBN 978-0-80283-072-4).

David Novak, professor of Jewish studies at the University of Toronto, considers himself a traditionalist—one who accepts the entirety of the Law. He is also a philosophically-minded theologian, one of whose main influences is Abraham Heschel. This collection of 22 essays, almost all of which have been previously published, covers a broader range than the title indicates. While some essays deal with political questions such as abortion and homosexual marriage, most do not. Dr. Novak's essays are both careful and creative. "Creation and Election" is a fine example, wherein he tries to fathom why Abraham accepted God's election. It is very thought provoking as well as insightful, though one may well question the historical validity. A particularly interesting theme, which runs through a number of the essays, is the importance of the seven Noahide laws (precepts that, in rabbinic thought, are binding upon all human beings), not only in themselves but as a way to help us understand Judaism. Given Dr. Novak's commitment to Judaism and his philosophical bent, it is a pity that no essay attempts an explication of the reasons one ought to commit oneself to observance of the Torah (though he does defend the possibility of revelation). The essays will generally be most convincing to Dr. Novak's fellow traditionalists but any open-minded person will appreciate their seriousness and intellectual quality. Recommended for larger academic collections.

Shmuel Ben-Gad, George Washington University, Washington, DC.