

wondered whether this seeming discrepancy was due to a European versus an American stylistic difference. However, the more I read and reviewed, and reexamined the prologue and the epilogue, it became clear that A. presents strong pronouncements and characterizations more often than descriptive interconnections between a people and their texts. In this way, Levenson's work again comes to mind as it rightfully describes more than it sermonizes.

Not enough space can be devoted in this review to a discussion of a comparison between Levenson's work and that of A., but two areas are worthy of notice: the discussion about Spinoza and his relationship to the Bible, and the treatment of the Bible among the secular and religious Zionists. While admittedly, Levenson's work is focused on the modern period while A. tries to be more comprehensive (the ancient Jewish experience is the least developed in A.'s overall successful attempt to be comprehensive) I encourage readers to make their own comparisons. In Levenson's work, I receive a well-rounded picture of Spinoza and his influences while A.'s description focuses on Spinoza's ambivalent and even contemptuous feelings about the Jewish community. The second area, which needs a longer and more comprehensive discussion, is A.'s treatment of the Bible by the Zionists, which demonstrates clearly where he falls on the political spectrum. He does this without contextualizing his own views, but couches them in his treatment of Ben Gurion and Ahad Ha-am (148–49). In treatise fashion, the epilogue of A.'s book asks the Jews if the Bible is worth saving, given that it has been used to bolster Israeli claims to the land during the last century. "It is in the power of sons and now also of daughters to bring the Father back to life—or not. And in our world today, beyond all the self-proclaimed orthodoxies, it is in the power of the living tradition, the post-genocide and the post-Zionist tradition to save the Bible—or not" (160). This is a strikingly homiletical way to an end a work that is supposed to be prioritizing history. By stark contrast, Levenson demonstrates the many nuances, shifts, and evolving factors in the way different Zionists utilized the Bible in the creation and development of the modern state of Israel (Levenson, 96–150). And Levenson is by no means an apologist for the Israeli government.

A. never situates himself as an insider, a friendly outsider, a scholar of, or as openly writing a polemic against "the Jews and their Bible." When he uses flowery language coupled with politically and religiously charged rhetorical language, it leaves this reader uneasy. His very vast knowledge and honed insights are too often overshadowed by a tone that conveys an overly attached and still yet an ambiguous relationship to the Jews.

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The Responsive Self: Personal Religion in Biblical Literature of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian Periods. By Susan Niditch. The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library. New Haven: Yale University, 2015. Pp. vii + 190. \$50.

Niditch has produced a volume that, like many of her other works, raises fascinating questions, opens new directions for future research, and provides new questions for older research. Here, she is interested in "personal religion"—thinking about the

expressions of religious faith, both public and (where evidence is available) private, focusing especially in the period after the disastrous invasions by Babylon in 597/587 BCE. As she states, the topic includes “the portrayal of everyday small things that relate to essential aspects of worldview, and descriptions of self-imposed ritual” (1). A brief survey of the chapters effectively shows the range of issues N. has pursued in order to shed light on “personal religion.”

In her first chapter, entitled “Sour Grapes, Suffering, and Coping with Chaos: Outlook on the Individual,” N. begins with the famous example of the saying (one that is, in my opinion, clearly cynical), “The parents eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” It is repeated in both of the “exilic” prophets, Ezekiel and Jeremiah (Ezek 18:2; Jer 31:39). From a perspective informed by anthropology and folklore studies, N. points to a wide variety of assumptions in the literature with regard to this proverb, but I am not sure that sufficient attention is given to the negative implication of how the passage is introduced in Jeremiah 31: “In those days people will no longer say . . . ,” which strongly suggests that Jeremiah, at least, strongly disapproves. As a measure of personal views and religious ideas, however, investigating such “rumors” is clearly a creative approach.

Chapters 2 and 3 reflect on how contemplating one’s own death is a decidedly individual and personal affair, and thus gives rise to precisely the kinds of “personal religious” discussions that are the subject of her analysis, as well as examining (in chap. 3) how the genre of lamentation may well have arisen from incantations, therefore expanding the evidence in the Bible beyond the typical focus on Lamentations and Psalms. N. ends this chapter with a very interesting reflection on the rise of “autobiographical” statements related to lamentation forms.

In her fourth chapter on “Vowing and Personal Religion,” N. argues that vows are a decidedly personal activity, and in this chapter, she follows through on how vow traditions (e.g. Nazirite vows) actually reveal an impressive level of agency for those otherwise without significant power to make decisions—for instance, women. It would be very interesting to take N.’s chapter and bring it into dialogue with early Christian encratic literature, where such vows of purity and chastity may be read in an interesting attempt to gain personal choice.

The final three chapters examine a diversity of issues, including a preliminary analysis of burial sites and how they reveal a variety of personal acts of individual piety, but in chapter 5, she also pursues the use of physical signs and symbols, such as the famous “yoke” on Jeremiah’s neck. Following this discussion, in a chapter entitled “Experiencing the Divine Personally: Heavenly Visits and Earthly Encounters,” N. then wades into dangerous waters—namely, apocalyptic literature. One of the basic questions she addresses is whether dream reports in apocalyptic follow defined parameters for this form of literature, or whether we are reading (in any of these works) an actual personal experience. The issue, then, is whether this is socially defined literature rather than intensely personal, but it is still reported as intensely personal.

Finally, in her chapter “Characterization and Contrast: Dynamics of the Personal in Late-Biblical Narration,” the author focuses on the increase in postexilic biblical writings that mention personal motivations, thoughts, and decisions (such as Tobit, Jonah, Ruth). The presence in biblical stories and narratives of what characters were

“thinking,” their motivations and conversations, is one of the elements of biblical narrative that raise serious difficulties for historical-critical arguments. The problem becomes obvious the moment one imagines reading what is purported to be a critical piece of United States Civil War historiography that suddenly quotes the very thoughts of, say, General Grant! How is this, then, “history” in any real sense? And if it is not, then how can we base historical conclusions on such narratives?

In her brief conclusion, N, states that she has tried to avoid the common observation that “somehow exilic writers discover the individual or invent the self, whereas earlier Biblical writers emphasize community and shared culture. Overt and explicit manifestations of personal religion, however, are preserved in noticeably large numbers in the written tradition in the period following the Babylonian troubles” (135). In other words, N. has concluded that there really is something to these older arguments, and her work explores many examples of this rather effectively.

If I had any criticism of this work, it would be that N.’s most provocative and interesting comments often come in the closing paragraphs of each chapter, and I found myself wishing that those precise points were developed a bit more or were even the central focus of the entire chapter, especially when N. began to address possible connections between social circumstances and diaspora existence as a foreign enclave in the Babylonian heartland. Still, one can certainly measure the success of a work in the questions it provokes—and this certainly is a fascinating series of studies.

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John, His Gospel and Jesus: In Pursuit of the Johannine Voice. By Stanley E. Porter. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015. Pp. xii + 297. \$30.

Porter has produced an excellent collection of essays on the Fourth Gospel, admirably subtitled “in pursuit of the Johannine voice,” and focusing on the Jesus of John’s Gospel. The author sees this book as a prolegomena to further investigations into the text, and refreshingly insists on the absolute necessity of refusing to be dominated by ideology in the scholarly reading of it. He is, as his admirers will know, unconvinced by those who deny the “historicity” of the gospel and those who insist on different (and late) levels of composition, with some very detailed, and to my knowledge, new arguments about the dating of papyri, or that it was written for a “sectarian” audience (this on the basis of the narrative stance of the gospel and the structure of the presentation of its characters). Here P. is in line with the recent swing towards an early date, and perhaps even apostolic authorship, for the Fourth Gospel.

The Jesus of John’s Gospel, he argues, is God’s incarnate word to all humanity, not just to a small and beleaguered group. All this makes the book a refreshing and interesting read, and certainly the arguments that he adduces, though they will not convince everyone, are carefully supported from John’s text. In particular (in his third chapter)