

in which they emerge, they point to the existence of a transcendent being who is the author of truth'.

This is a sweeping statement to come at the end of a book. It is all very well for Dr Nicholls to claim that 'today, when all disciplines—not least the natural sciences—are in danger of being swamped by an all embracing relativism which threatens to undermine the idea of truth itself, theology by its very definition witnesses to a transcendent reality which alone is able to give substance to the concept of truth'. Dr Nicholls' subject is the relationship between Christianity and politics, and in that field (as he is inevitably aware) the normative images of God which (he says) Christians believe are given in divine revelation have been used to defend every variety of political organization from anarchism to absolute monarchy. There is no question here of being saved from relativism. Theologians have always tried to dominate the political sphere. Why else would they have spent so much time in the past forty years writing for and against varieties of marxism? But the ambiguous history of theology rules out a new Christian intellectual domination of political thinking. An ecclesiastical domination of politics would have to come first, but the 'New Right' is not going to agree to that, and welfare-liberalism does not need an ecclesiastical base. Dr Nicholls has given us an elaborate and well-read account of the religio-political ideas of European Protestantism since 1789, but I think that he underestimates the extent to which the use of Biblical images is influenced by the socio-economic context in which they are perceived.

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THE LOST PROPHET. THE BOOK OF ENOCH AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CHRISTIANITY by Margaret Barker, *SPCK*, London. Pp. xi, 116. £4.95.

The lost prophet is Enoch, the great-grandfather of Noah, who lived only three hundred and sixty five years (the average of earlier and later patriarchs was more than nine hundred, according to Gen. 5). But 'Enoch walked with God; and then was seen no more, because God had taken him away.' Not surprisingly Enoch became a popular figure for Jewish religious fantasy, especially in troubled times when it seemed an advantage to make appeal to a patriarch possessing secret information of heavenly intentions. Writings attributed to Enoch were known in the early Church (he is quoted in Jude 14–15), but no copy of them was available until the end of the eighteenth century when Ethiopic manuscripts were obtained from Abyssinia. Since then, partial texts, quotations, and fragments have been identified in Aramaic, Greek, and Latin (though not for section II, the so-called Parables which sometimes refer to the Son of man).

Margaret Barker tells this fairly well-known story in what, it seems, is a more popular form of her recent book *The Older Testament*. She suggests that the New Testament writers were fully at home in the world of Enoch and so took its thought for granted. Hence they accepted (though scarcely ever mentioned) the belief that the final judgement was a trial of strength before God, between two angel princes and their cohorts, when the wicked would get their deserts and the righteous

would be exalted to the stars and become angels. The early Christian world was peopled by angels and so must have been sympathetic to Enoch's view that the world was corrupted not by human disobedience but by angelic misbehaviour. Enoch's ascents to heaven and visions of God explain much of John's Gospel, throw light on the Beatitudes, and are illustrated by Paul's journey to the third heaven.

But Enoch is more than explanatory: it is corrective. It provides an alternative view of the origin of evil. It re-introduces the divine-king mythology and the Son of man imagery—'so widely used and in such a variety of ways'—though seldom using the Son of man expression. The Parables produce 'the integrated world-view of the apocalyptists and the first Christians ... earthly life already linked to and intersected with the other dimension, allowing what is beyond to suffuse and transform what is here. This is the essential meaning of the Eucharist' (p. 75). 'The son of man figure was a human being who became divine and was given dominion ... an angelic figure' with strong messianic associations (p. 96)—and that is important 'for the central theme of Christianity is that Jesus was the Messiah, the Anointed, the true king of Israel' (p. 19).

That last astonishing remark perhaps explains why this whole ingenious argument is on the wrong track. Although it is now commonly held that most of I Enoch comes from the second century BCE with the Parable section added at the end of the first century CE, Barker is confident that in essentials it is far older, indeed pre-exilic; that it preserves the ancient messianic ideal but was censored and excluded from tradition by Ezra's passion for Mosaic legalism. But however ancient the mythology may be, it was clearly activated by the threat of Antiochus in the second century BCE; and it was possibly re-activated (to produce the Parables) by the Roman military action in 66–70 CE—certainly not before. I Enoch 37 introduces 'the visions of wisdom', and wisdom does three things: it defines the situation (the righteous are oppressed by the wicked); it provides an incantation for changing it; and it confirms the rules for maintaining faith within a fanatical but ineffectual sect which regards itself as God's Elect One whose heavenly image can be called (in Danielic fashion) 'that son of man'.

The best thing to do with I Enoch is to read it—several times. It is an example of how to be confused without even trying. Clearly the Ethiopic tradition was little interested in coherence since some passages are obviously in wrong sequence. Much of it is on a low level of non-literate fundamentalism: there is a calendrical obsession worse than Old Moore, an Animal Farm kind of Jewish history, a magical mystery tour of the world of Disney-land vulgarity, and obsessive paranoid ravings against enemies. None of that matters if the sect needed incantations and a secret boost to their morale. But holy scripture needs style, quality, and self-critical limitation. If the early Christians knew and read Enoch but excluded it from scripture, well done!

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