THE EVILNESS OF HUMAN NATURE
IN IENOC, JUBILEES, PAUL, AND 4 EZRA:
A SECOND TEMPLE JEWISH DEBATE

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1. The Legacy of Enochic Judaism

In the last fifty years critical scholarship has built a solid case about ancient Jewish diversity. When in 1913, in the Introduction to his collection of The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, Robert Henry Charles described Second Temple Judaism as “a church with many parties,” he was largely an isolated voice, surrounded by the loudness of normative Judaism and orthodox Christianity.¹ The discoveries at Nag Hammadi and in the Desert of Judah (and the trauma of the Holocaust) forced scholars to question the ancient paradigms inherited by the Christian and the Jewish tradition.² The term “Judaisms” coined by Jacob Neusner in the 1980s (and its specular companion “Christianities”) may not have gained universal acceptance,³ but all contemporary specialists feel compelled to use some form of plural to describe the varieties of Judaism (and Christianity) in the Second Temple period. What once was described as a theological monolith, it is now commonly presented as the diverse and lively world out of which both Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism emerged in a variety of competing expressions.⁴

² Gabriele Boccaccini, Middle Judaism (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); and Idem, Portraits of Middle Judaism in Scholarship and Arts (Turin: Zamorani, 1992).
³ Jacob Neusner, et al., ed., Judaisms and Their Messiahs (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987) and Bart D. Ehrman, Lost Christianities (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) are among the texts that more have contributed to popularize the usage of the plural even outside the boundaries of the scholarly world.
The contemporary “rediscovery” of Enochic Judaism has added an important component to such diversity. After the publication of the Qumran fragments by Milik in 1976, the Enoch literature has become a subject of intensive study among specialists from all around the world, culminated in the 2000s in the series of biennial international conferences promoted by the Enoch Seminar, and in the publication of the two-volume Hermeneia commentary on 1 Enoch by George W.E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam.

The debate about the existence and the features of “Enochic Judaism” is today as open and lively as ever. Some conclusions are more widely accepted than others. Most specialists would today agree that the Enoch literature was composed within a movement of some sort, which the Enoch texts refer to as “the plant of righteousness and truth” (10:16) or “the chosen righteous from the chosen plant of righteousness” (93:10). Other features are more controversial, especially the supposedly “priestly” character of Enochic Judaism, and the time of origin of the movement (late Persian or early Hellenistic period).

No issue, however, has been more controversial than the attitude of “Enochic Judaism” toward the Mosaic Torah. It is a fact that the Enoch literature seems largely to “ignore” the Mosaic Torah. This is indeed a conspicuous absence in texts composed during the Second Temple period, when the Mosaic Torah had already gained an authoritative status as the law of the ruling priesthood. It is more difficult to assess the motivations and ramifications of such a phenomenon.

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5 Gabriele Boccaccini, Roots of Rabbinic Judaism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).
7 The first meeting of the Enoch Seminar was held in Florence in 2001 and the group has met every other year. For the activities of the Enoch Seminar see www.enochseminar.org