Richter, Amy E.

*Enoch and the Gospel of Matthew*

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This volume is a doctoral dissertation under Deirdre Dempsey and Andrei Orlov at Marquette University. In it Richter argues that the Gospel of Matthew makes use of the “Enoch watchers’ template.” In chapter 1 (1–20) Richter defines such a “template” as a grouping of elements found in early Jewish myths about the advent of evil in the world (2). She contends that Matthew’s employment of these ideas suggests that Jesus “is able to bring about the eschatological repair of the consequence of the fall of the watchers” (2). She offers a brief survey of Matthew and apocalyptic literature (8–11) and underscores the presence of “motifs and allusions to material” found in both Matthew and 1 Enoch (19).

Richter’s second chapter (“Transgression,” 21–41) outlines more fully the Enochic watchers’ template, examining the origin of evil in the world through the watchers’ sexual contact with women and teaching them illicit arts (esp. 1 En. 7–9). These arts are primarily pedagogical in nature, pertaining to what knowledge was transmitted from the rebellious angels to humans. Richter finds that both the content and recipients differ. The latter can be the watchers’ wives (1 En. 7) or both men and women (1 En. 8, 9). The skills taught fall into three categories: (1) cultural arts regarding metalworking and ornamentation (8:1–2), (2) magical skills such as sorcery and pharmacology (7:1 cd; 8:3),
and (3) divination from cosmological phenomena (8:3). All these skills, Richter suggests, are “linked” to destruction, oppression, pain, and crying out by the earth and humanity for relief in 1 Enoch (37). Moreover, though women play a pivotal role in the Enochic template, they disappear from the accounts of 1 Enoch. This leads Richter to take a close look at the women named in Matthew’s genealogy (41).

The stories of the four named women in Matthew’s genealogy are recounted from the Hebrew Bible in chapter 3 (“Transgression Reassessed,” 42–126). In them Richter finds “echoes” (23) of the Enochic watchers story and suggests that each woman “foreshadow[s] the repair of the watchers’ transgression” (19). Each woman, she suggests, engages in activity named by Enoch as illicit arts, yet does so in a redemptive manner. Their action “corresponds with” aspects of the watchers’ narrative (50). In naming them, Matthew “suggests the reversal of the consequences of the watchers’ transgression” (44). Moreover, Matthew illustrates that “the redemption of the world can be brought about by the use of the very arts originally forbidden and destructive” (51).

How this template relates to Matthew is addressed in chapter 4 (“Transgression Redressed,” 127–93), where Richter examines the birth narrative to show that Jesus is the “repairer of the watchers’ transgression” (19). Like the other women in the genealogy, Richter posits, Mary is presented to assert “that the birth of Jesus overturns the effects of the Enochic watchers’ template by using the very elements of that template” (127). In this and other ways, the watchers’ template “helps to shape the Matthean birth narrative” and draws attention to the birth presented as the interaction (though nonsexual) between a heavenly being and a human woman, and finds “further parallels” (127) such as suspicions, dreams, and other illicit arts attested in the Enochic template.

The final substantive chapter contrasts the results of the watchers’ transgression with the “legacy” of Jesus (ch. 5, “The Legacy of the Watchers’ Transgression versus the Legacy of ‘God With Us,’” 194–211). This entails a “comparison” of results showing that Jesus’ life “stands in sharp contrast to the description of the disastrous aftermath of the watchers’ fall” (194). Here Richter is on sure footing. Yet her further claim that “Jesus is portrayed as the repairer of the watchers’ fall and illicit pedagogy” (194) is less certain. Richter indicates that “themes” introduced earlier are developed later in the Gospel that demonstrate Jesus’ overturning of the Enochic watchers’ template. These fall into six category: illicit versus righteous pedagogy, illicit sexual relationships versus rejection of such relationships, the “family” of the watchers versus that of Jesus, the watchers’ violence versus Jesus’ peace, the watchers’ legacy of disease versus Jesus’ healing, and the watchers’ idolatry versus Jesus’ true worship. This is difficult to maintain. Are not some of these evils found abundantly in other Second Temple texts and the Hebrew Bible? Can it be demonstrated that the Matthean Jesus is presented in such a manner as to overturn the
effects specific to the Enochic template? To be sure, Matthew is presenting Jesus as the one who saves his people from their sins, but there seems to be insufficient evidence to suggest that Matthew’s Jesus is saving people from the sins as introduced into humanity in the manner particular to the Enochic template. The final chapter summarizes the entire work (ch. 6, “Conclusion,” 212–14).

Richter’s work is replete with evidence of the general similarities between Matthew and 1 Enoch. She highlights some key aspects particularly within apocalyptic materials. What remains unclear, however, is whether the commonality of material adduced suggests that the Enochic template “stands behind” (51) the Matthean account or that the Evangelist was even familiar with it. Nor is it entirely clear that Matthew’s presentation of Jesus is in any way a response to the effects of the Enochic account of the origins of evil. That she finds in Matthew “motifs and allusions to material that one also finds in 1 Enoch” (19) tells us no more than they have some things in common, perhaps to be expected in the complexity of Jewish texts in antiquity.

The difficulty of the project is not the similarities of the respective traditions but the nature of their relationships. One finds numerous examples of one concept “connected” (37, 125) or “related” (37) to another. Some provide a “closer link,” exhibit “similarity” (133), or are “associated with” (133) others. Some aspects of Matthew “involve many of the very same elements as the watchers’ stories do” (126). The nature of these correspondences remains unresolved. While I remain unconvinced that the Enochic template stands behind Matthew’s presentation of Jesus, Richter draws vital attention to the congruence of the respective traditions. Richter aims to contribute to the discussion of Matthew and apocalyptic literature (4). In that respect she has brought these two vibrant traditions a step closer in scholarly discussion.