THE “APOCALYPTIC” COMMUNITY, THE MATRIX OF THE TEACHER AND REWRITING SCRIPTURE

George J. Brooke

1. Apocalyptic: Its Problems and Its Possibilities

1.1. Frey on Apocalyptic

The purpose of this essay in honour of Florentino García Martínez is to argue that the practices of scriptural rewriting that are evident in so many of the Scrolls from the Qumran caves need to be seen in some kind of historical framework, against some actual historical circumstances. More than most other scholars, García Martínez has been able to combine views on the history of the Qumran community and the wider movement of which it was a part with the analysis of the literary genres and theological or ideological topics apparent in the Scrolls from the caves. His particular approach has been to argue that the manuscripts from Qumran and apocalyptic cast light on each other, both in terms of genre and in terms of the transmission of tradition. Part of the historical framework for such transmission is famously known as the Groningen Hypothesis. The hypothesis has been widely influential, not so much in terms of the details of its argument, but in terms of the encouragement it has given to what he himself has called an “era of recuperation” in which there has been much activity in providing nuance to the cruder analyses of earlier decades.

A helpful survey evaluation of this activity, both of its background from before the publication of the Groningen Hypothesis and of its

significance since then, has recently been provided by Jörg Frey. Frey has affirmed the widely used distinction between apocalypse as a genre, apocalypticism as possibly defining some groups, and apocalyptic as a set of themes or motifs, in order to address the question again as to whether or not the Qumran community or the Essenes merit the designation apocalyptic. Whilst many prominent scholars of earlier decades of analysis were content to use the label apocalyptic of the Qumran community, others were not. The writings of García Martínez and of John Collins have made the designation of ongoing applicability to various aspects of the phenomena that are both the writings found in the eleven Qumran caves and the community and wider movement which they reflect.

Frey’s own position is in my opinion a helpful one: he has argued that whether or not particular items of literature in the Qumran library deserve the label apocalypse, it is clear that the community that collected the manuscripts together was open to the reception of apocalyptic. For Frey from a textual perspective the label apocalypse applies most obviously to the range of Daniel literature, the preservation of the Enoch traditions (including the so-called Pesher on the Apocalypse of Weeks, 4Q247), the book of Jubilees and related compositions, the Jeremiah Apocryphon, the New Jerusalem text, the Visions of Amram, and 4Q529 (the Words of Michael). He has suggested that none of

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