

Martin Rist's Guide to the Book of Revelation- A Review

WALTER G. WILLIAMS

IT IS altogether appropriate that Martin Rist should be selected by the Association Press to write the book interpreting *The Revelation*.¹ For many years now, Professor Rist has been recognized as this country's outstanding authority on apocalypticism in general and the Book of the Revelation in particular. In addition to technical articles in various reference works, he has twice written a series of studies for the Methodist Church and was exegete on Revelation in the twelfth volume of *The Interpreter's Bible*.

This new publication by Dr. Rist is an excellent demonstration of the contribution which can be made by a thoroughly trained and competent scholar who is also a devout churchman. The volume is written simply so that the layman can read and be instructed, yet behind these simple words are many years of painstaking research and investigation. There is no compromise with truth. Every statement of interpretation is undergirded with facts which can be documented and substantiated. The pastor or church teacher can place this volume in the hands of readers knowing that they will be faithfully led to new insights and appreciations for this puzzling book of *The Revelation*.

After a brief preface in which Professor Rist sketches the persistent hold that apocalyptic thinking has had upon people across the centuries, he moves on quickly to give in a dozen pages the historical background of the biblical book. Written at the close of the first Christian century, *The Revelation* brought comfort and encouragement to those who were

being persecuted for their faith. It was a handbook of faith for martyrs.

"The Book of Revelation," writes Professor Rist, "is a cosmic drama of vast proportions involving the entire universe, earth, heaven, and the lower world, and all the supernatural and human life in it. The basic theme of the drama is a desperate all-out conflict between the personified forces of good and evil in the universe" (p. 27). This theme of cosmic conflict between good and evil is the basic motif in Intertestamental and New Testament apocalyptic literature. Professor Rist would claim this same characteristic for all apocalyptic literature, but this reviewer believes that Old Testament apocalyptic does not have the same dualistic view of history or of the cosmos.

The cosmic drama in *The Revelation* is magnificently portrayed. The stage is the whole of creation. It occupies the whole of time and eternity. There are many references to historical events and to various earlier writings of the Jews. These Professor Rist aptly describes as "flashbacks." The drama is in three acts, the first of which is by far the longest and depicts Satan's World Age, covering about three and half years. The second act deals with a thousand years of Christ's reign. The final act is God's World Age and though described briefly, covers eternity. The final outcome is the triumph of righteousness and the gathering in of the martyrs to a just reward.

When read as cosmic drama, *The Revelation* loses none of its majesty, but its message gains new clarity for the modern reader. Terminology which has been used

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¹ Martin Rist: *The Modern Reader's Guide to the Book of Revelation*, New York: An Association Press Reflection Book, 1961, pp. 128, 50c.

by many Christians, oftentimes with meanings not intended by the apocalyptist, is clarified. In his introduction Professor Rist promises to explain such terms as Millenium, First Resurrection, Second Resurrection, Second Death, Babylon, Armageddon, Gog and Magog, Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, and the all important identification of the Beast whose number is 666, and many others. The promises are kept and the book does

bring the clarification the reader hoped for and the identification intended by the author of the Revelation. There is no aid or comfort to those who try to superimpose upon the original writings the fantastic interpretations served up weekly by some of the sects.

The author and the Association Press are to be congratulated upon a job well done and a needed service rendered.

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