

MARTIN RIST-1896-1979

HARVEY H. POTTHOFF

All of us who have had the privilege of knowing Martin Rist in family, school, church, and community recognize that he was his own man. Martin Rist was Martin Rist - vividly, honestly, significantly. In these Iliff halls and rooms he made his way for many years. In his teaching he displayed an amazing quality of scholarship, an insatiable curiosity, a relentless search for facts— all with a style which was his own.

Here he worked with colleagues, setting a high example of faithfulness in all assignments given him, challenging and prodding us to encourage excellence in ministry, displaying deep loyalty to this institution which he regarded as having a distinctive role among the schools of theology.

In the library, to which he contributed so much, he found special joy and rendered special service, kindling in many students an excitement about the treasures to be found in books and journals. In the library are his many writings: articles, his study book, *The modern Reader's Guide To The Book of Revelation*, the exegetical commentary on the Book of Revelation in *The Interpreter's Bible*, articles in *Ferm's Encyclopedia of Religion*, *The Interpreter's Doctrinary of the Bible*, and *The Abingdon Commentary*. Here are also chapters in books and lessons appearing in Church School publications.

With the appearance of Volume Twelve of *The Interpreter's Bible* two distinguished New Testament scholars wrote of Dr. Rist's work and of his contribution. Ernest Cadman Colwell wrote:

Martin Rist's contributions to New Testament scholarship are marked by solid learning and rigorous integrity. There are flashes of insight in his writings, his strength . . . lies in a thorough canvassing of all evidences and its marshalling in logical order. Martin Rist summons scholarly theories to the bar for rational judgment based on all the evidence. His studies of apocalyptic writings are an instance of his thorough-going method of study and report. His contributions to the *Interpreter's Bible* support what I have said. In his work, devotion to the truth that rests on facts that can be cited is always the primary devotion. This integrity is a constant challenge to all of us who labor in this field. (*The Iliff Review*, Vol. XV, no. 2, p. 38)

HARVEY H. POTTHOFF, Professor of Christian Theology, The Iliff School of Theology, delivered this eulogy at the Memorial Service for Dr. Rist on January 29, 1980, held during the Iliff Week of Graduate Lectures.

Dr. Harold R. Willoughby wrote:

Probably very few, who today stand in awe of Martin Rist's masteries of apocalyptic literatures and religious types, realize how very early and how basic were his achievements in this area. While he was still a graduate student and before he became a divinity don, he had made a comprehensive compilation of then-known ancient apocalypses of whatever sort or provenance: Pagan, Jewish or Christian; Oriental or Occidental. These were classified, catalogued, and indexed. Such were the foundation materials that went into the building of his later surveys and seminars and researches into apocalyptic literature and experience. The Ristean literature that eventuated from all this investigation was so considerable and impressive that when the editors of *Interpreter's Bible* needed a scholar to introduce and interpret the Apocalypse of John, almost inevitably Martin Rist was their man. (Ibid., p. 39)

In this chapel, where we are assembled, he sought to exemplify integrity in worship. He brought messages combining historical perspective and contemporary relevance. Many of us have shared in the communion service which he wrote and which has been published. In these halls he found time to talk with students on many topics, often illuminating the conversation with unusual bits of information and unusual perspectives. Many here have experienced the warmth and hospitality of the Rist home, including those beautiful breakfast occasions which Irma planned for so many years for wives of students and faculty.

Martin's interests ranged around the world and across the centuries and yet his commitments were here. We recognize his stature, his enduring influence, his abiding contribution to the life and character of this institution. We count him as one of the central formative figures in the history of our school.

Now I should like to say something about Martin Rist as a churchman. His father was a Methodist minister. Martin was ordained minister of the Methodist/United Methodist Church. He thought of himself as a minister called to the ministry of scholarship and teaching.

In his book *The Christian Scholar In The Age Of The Reformation* E. Harris Harbison has written: "The plain facts are . . . that many a great Christian has felt himself called to be a scholar and that scholarship has played a significant role in the development of Christianity. Learning and devotion *have* joined hands in Christian lives at significant moments in Christian history . . . an educated ministry in any age is never any stronger than its few real scholars and sem-

inal minds. It is they who carry out the top-level intellectual jobs which in the long run have much to do with determining the quality of the thinking and writing, the preaching and teaching, of any Christian generation." (p. 166, 169)

Father Damien, who ministered so wonderfully to the victims of leprosy at Kalaupapa, spoke of having "a call within a call." He was called to be a Christian, he was called to be a priest, and then he was called to minister in a particular place. So Martin Rist had his call within a call: called into the Christian life, called into ministry, called into the ministry of scholarship and teaching.

Several years ago a new sanctuary was built at University Park Church which Martin and Irma attended. The question was raised as to what words would be appropriate over the entrance of the church. Martin made the suggestion which was followed. No doubt recalling the sixth chapter of Isaiah, with the account of Isaiah's experience in the temple, Martin suggested that words from that chapter be used. So if one goes to the Church today one finds the words over the main entrance: "Holy, Holy Holy." Martin did indeed live with the sense of the Holiness of God, whose glory fills the earth.

Those of us who had the privilege of knowing him feel our lives to be enriched through our associations. We think of his delicious sense of humor, his intellectual aliveness, his concern for the world and what happens in it, his commitment to liberal religion, his capacity for friendship and his loyalty in it, his spirit in the midst of illness, his deep, deep love of family.

Yes, Martin Rist was Martin Rist. Here we give thanks for his life, celebrate his memory, and rejoice in his living influence in this institution and in our lives.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Martin Rist received his A. B. degree from Northwestern University in 1919, having served in the United States Army Medical Service from 1917 to 1919, B. D. and Th. D. from The Iliff School of Theology, 1929, Ph. D. from the University of Chicago, 1934, and LL.D., University of Denver, 1969. He married Irma Lane in 1926, who survives him. He was Professor of New Testament and Christian History and also Librarian at The Iliff School of Theology from 1936 to 1967, when he was awarded Emeritus status. He died on November 25, 1979 in Boulder, Colorado.

Professor Rist was, together with Professor Bernhardt, instrumental in establishing *The Iliff Review* in 1944 and served as Business Manager of the journal from 1944 until 1956, and contributed a num-

ber of outstanding articles over the years. The Spring, 1961 issue, which presented articles in honor of Martin Rist, is available from *The Iliff Review* (\$1.00 per copy), as are the following reprints (50c per copy):

Bibliography of the Writings of Martin Rist (1974)

Dr. Lowell B. Swan as a Historian (1969)

The Fable of the Dog in the Manger in the Gospel of Thomas (1968)

John L. Dyer: Pioneer Colorado Preacher and Skier (1975)

Matthew as a Church Manuel (1961)

The Penitentes According to the Rev. and Mrs. Thomas Harwood (1966)

III Corinthians as a Pseudepigraphic Refutation of Marcionism (1969)

The Validity of Historical Methodology for the Study of Jesus (1968)

Varieties of Historical Interpretation (1950)

Various New Testament Doctrines of the Church (1967)

What Is Formgeschichte. (1945)

Worship in the Rocky Mountain Frontier Days (1975)

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