

**FAITH AND THE MODERN SPIRIT:
A REFLECTION ON MARTIN RIST
AS TEACHER AND SCHOLAR**

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Religious faith of a high order is not incompatible with the modern spirit of the Enlightenment. Indeed, the modern spirit itself is a particular affirmation of faith; and, a faith that is directed by the empirical, rational methods of the scientific quest can be more satisfying personally than surer opinions which themselves are based on lesser objectivity. Those of us who were students of Martin Rist can testify to the truth of that as he lived it both personally and professionally at the Iliff School of Theology.

Rist was not alone. He characterized the faculty of the school as I knew it during the late fifties and early sixties when I was a seminary student there. Both faith and methodology were pushed with intellectual vigor and an eager, searching, theological analysis of the possibilities for human life in the religious experience. It was not only academic training which prepared us for ministry, but also a contagious excitement which hinted that we ourselves were on the growing edge of our culture's religious life.

Faith and method are integrally related, dialogically related, in both life and scholarship. This paper is a reflection on the relationship of the faith and method of Martin Rist; and, by implication, of the Iliff School of Theology in the formative period of my ministry. This reflection is based upon a rereading of Rist's published material and my own observations from the vantage point of having been his student assistant for three years.

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The postulate underlying both Rist's faith and his methodology was the complete integration of nature and of all reality. Though he was a student of apocalyptic literature, he rejected all dualism for himself and reinterpreted the religious value of the apocalyptic vision into monistic categories. Christianity and scientific knowledge, he insisted, are not to be compartmentalized separately. If Christian belief is preferable, it is because it is more reasonable and fruitful than some other belief structure. In a review of Carl W. Miller's, *A Scientific Approach to Religion*, Rist commended highly the author's insistence that both scientific and religious concepts must be functional as well as adequate in terms of correspondence with observable facts. Enrichment of life, Rist agreed, is a category of functional adequacy, and it includes individual freedom and control, improvement of self and society.¹

The first rule of Rist's method was a thorough and scrupulous handling of the facts. Not everything in the world is objectively verifiable, but by mutual agreement, what does correspond to reality must be treated with loving care because it is the basis of all knowledge, and knowledge is the necessary precondition of freedom and control of one's life. Those who knew him well can surely recall his enjoyment at the discovery of a new fact which would fill out his knowledge of the Hellenistic world or of Methodism on the western frontier. In a tribute to Harry Morris, the highest tribute Rist could pay was that while a pastor in Santa Fe, Morris had discovered some ancient Indian pictographs on a rock wall which had escaped the notice of trained investigators.² Rist could also be highly critical of unverifiable statements of presumed fact. In his doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago, Rist made the wry

1 Rist, Martin, Review of Carl W. Miller, *A Scientist's Approach to Religion*, *The Iliff Review* (Spring 1950), p. 97f.

2 Rist, "Harry Theodore Morris: 1899-1946," *The Iliff Review*, (Spring 1946), p. 91.

comment that it is impossible to know how the gods "actually felt" about Plutarch's account and interpretation of the Isiac mysteries, an account which Plutarch himself said, as if it were fact, was the most pleasing to the gods.³

Such wry humor was the seasoning of Rist's relentless push for primary sources and facts themselves. A salesman appeared in the Taylor Library one day with "actual portraits" of angels. Rist, I recall, told him that the school was not interested in paintings of angels, but that if the salesman could find some photographs, they would be purchased. The salesman, without noticing the lively blue eyes in his customer, made a notation in his book and promised to be back.

Rist, in writing reviews, would often criticize an author for using scanty evidence or few primary sources. In 1938, he destroyed the argument of Sir Robert Falconer who made uncritical statements to the effect that the pastoral epistles showed evidence of a Jewish background of redemption. Rist listed data which Falconer had ignored and which pointed clearly to the pseudonymous character of the epistles.⁴ On the other hand, Rist praised an author's position which had, in his opinion, good evidence. Once, also in his early years, he added two pieces of data to support Campbell Bonner's thesis on Melito of Sardis.⁵ He had high praise for the French Modernist, Alfred Loisy, who stated frankly and fearlessly his conclusions in *The Birth of the Christian Religion* which were based on "tireless research."⁶

3 Rist, "Two Isiac Mystics: Plutarch and Apuleius," unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1936, p. 44.

4 Rist, Review of Sir Robert Falconer, *The Pastoral Epistles*, *Journal of Religion* (January 1938), p. 95.

5 Rist, "Additional Parallels to the Rending of the Veil in Melito's Homily on the Passion," *Harvard Theological Review* (July 1938), p. 249.

6 Rist, Review of Alfred Loisy, *The Birth of the Christian Religion*, *The Iliff Review* (Spring 1950), pp. 90-91.

Rist's method of treating the factual evidence was essentially that of scientific historiography. In 1958, he wrote on the subject of Christology.

A fundamental purpose of modern New Testament scholarship is to study the New Testament sources by the generally approved methods of historical investigation, thereby, insofar as is possible, recovering the Jesus of history from the overlay of the Christ of Faith.⁷

Two points made here are important in understanding his methodology. *First*, he was convinced that the Jesus of history could be recovered with a confidence that was relatively sufficient for knowledge needed by the faithful. What could not be recovered, he thought, could not be made up by any "overlay" of a Christ of faith. *Second*, he proceeded by "generally approved" methods of historical evaluation which include not only full and thorough evaluation of limited data and a careful comparison for similarities, but also the drawing of inferences conservatively and consistently.

How he argued for historical method is illustrated in the 1945 article, "What is *Formgeschichte*?" He cited a long line of evidences to support the contention of those who use *Formgeschichte* that a fragmentary, oral gospel preceded the written gospel. He observed that *Formgeschichte* was not entirely new, for it used the methods of history investigation.⁸ Inasmuch as the investigation of the history of literary forms could free the Christian religion from misinformation and misconceptions, it would be positive and valuable.⁹ "Unfortunately," he said, "far too many studies of the gospels and of the life and teachings of Jesus have been and are being produced without sufficient

7 Rist, "Some Aspects of New Testament Christology," *Religion in Life* (Autumn 1948), p. 494.

8 Rist, "What is *Formgeschichte*?", *The Iliff Review* (Winter 1945) pp. 159-169.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 169.

attention being paid to the historical background."¹⁰ I recall how he often expressed admiration of Bultmann's scholarship because the latter was a thorough historian. Bultmann's theology, however, was another matter. In his review of *The Theology of the New Testament*, Rist said, "In the main, Bultmann has been objective in his presentation and conclusions; surprisingly little intrusion of Neo-Orthodox belief occurs, although terms like 'crisis' and 'imperative' do occur rather frequently."¹¹

Rist's own procedure is well illustrated in his 1942 article, "Pseudepigraphic Refutations of Marcionism." He stated the evidence fully and presented it systematically to show that Tertullian's apostolic canon, III Corinthians and the Pastorals all refute Marcion point by point. There is no doubt left in the reader's mind, by the time that the conclusion is reached, that the Pastorals could not have been written earlier than 150 A.D.¹²

It was a passion for rational consistency, along with utter delight in pieces of data, that governed Rist's use of historical methodology. Perhaps his most significant contribution to New Testament scholarship was the definition he gave to 'apocalyptic' as a concept. No definition he had found allowed a satisfactory consistency to appear in the literature. After a survey of the entire range of Jewish and Christian writings on the subject, he noted that authors of dictionaries and commentaries not only differed from each other but had difficulty applying their own definitions. He separated the form of 'apocalyptic' from its content and, choosing content as primary, could define apocalypticism as "the eschatological belief that this present evil and corrupt world . . . will soon be ended . . . by the direct

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹¹ Rist, Review of Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, *The Iliff Review* (Winter, 1956), p. 50.

¹² Rist, "Pseudepigraphic Refutations of Marcionism," *Journal of Religion*, 22 (January 1942), pp. 39-62.

intervention of God . . . who thereupon will establish a new and perfect age."¹³ Formal characteristics such as visions, he noted, were secondary.

Rist's commentary in *The Interpreter's Bible* is a model of consistency based upon his clear and precise definition.¹⁴ In my own study I have found that his definition of apocalypticism is more useful in explaining apocalyptic issues of both ancient literature and contemporary life than the formal definitions which still appear in Biblical scholarship.

In his review article on the commentary on Revelation, Harold Willoughby, who had been a fellow student with Rist at the University of Chicago, remarked on how Rist's consistent use of a wealth of data could produce a valuable guide to ancient times. Willoughby commented on "his kaleidoscopic, protean method of handling symbolism and typology. This matches and extends the author's own method of using emblems and symbols." Rist, he said, draws parallels with other symbols in contemporary literature. His consistent and comprehensive mastery, his discriminating selection of source material "almost makes the commentary a manual for the comparative study of religions."¹⁵

Rist would later criticize Herbert Wernecke's, *The Book of Revelation Speaks to Us*, for its inconsistency. Wernecke, he said, would allow an error in the timing of predictions -- 1st or nth century -- but not in the predictions themselves.

Why should God so mislead his prophet in these matters? Rather should we not say that the author and not God was in error, and conceived of the world (and the end of the world as well) in thought patterns of his own day? . . . Why not . . . let it be at home in its own historical setting?¹⁶

13 Rist, "The Apocalyptic Pattern," *The Iliff Review* (Winter 1944), p. 15.

14 Rist, "Introduction and Exegesis to the Book of Revelation," *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George Buttrick (12 Vols., New York: Abingdon Press), 1955, 12: 347-551.

15 Willoughby, Harold R., "Rist of Iliff and Hough of Drew: Co-interpreters to John of Patmos," *The Iliff Review* (Spring 1958), p. 41.

16 Rist, Review of Herbert H. Wernecke, *The Book of Revelation Speaks to Us*, *The Iliff Review* (Fall 1955), p. 47. 9 *Ibid.*,

Sometimes Rist would note similarities in a thorough and consistent way without drawing any conclusion because he believed there was not enough evidence to determine cause or effect. In the article on the Metamorphosis of Apuleius, he noted some striking similarities between the Isaic mysteries of Apuleius and the concept of salvation in Paul's writing. He was careful, however, to claim nothing more than similarity.¹⁷

As his students, we were treated to Rist's passion for consistency. Most of the time we enjoyed the foibles of other people, occasionally our own. Once he read in the Denver newspaper that the Pope had had a vision in which Jesus had talked to him. Rist wrote a letter to the Vatican, in the interests of scholarly research, to ask whether Jesus had spoken in Italian or Latin or in Jesus' native Aramaic. If Jesus had spoken in Aramaic, which would be the most consistent with our knowledge of Jesus' time and place, how would the Pope understand? Or, if the Pope had understood the message in Italian or Latin, how could he explain the obvious inconsistency? It was not internal consistency which Rist demanded, it was also historical consistency of social and political settings in particular times and places.

His method demanded, as Willoughby noted, thorough knowledge of broad areas in textual and literary studies as well as in history of the ancient world. We who sat in his classes learned to expect the armload of books and journals Dr. Rist would bring to class. We were impressed with the quiet way in which he would refer to one and then another; and, how, when asked a question slightly off the subject, he would pull a wealth of information and pertinent material from memory. One has to read his articles, however, to get a full sense of his mastery of Hellenistic religions as well as the political, economic and social history of the Roman period. He was thoroughly at home in Rabbinic studies and apostolic literature. Early church history was his specialty, but he knew much more.

¹⁷ Rist, "The Metamorphosis of Apuleius and the Zoolatry of the Egyptian Mysteries," *The Iliff Review* (Fall 1948), p. 141.2

In a review of O. Sydney Barr's book on the Apostles' Creed, Rist criticized Barr's contention that the creed is a distillation of the New Testament faith and pointed out that Barr did not seem to know that the creed is mainly an anti-Marcionite statement. Barr made a sweeping observation that both the New Testament and the Creed are apostolic eye witnesses. Rist criticized his lack of knowledge of the era. "Indeed it is difficult to term the New Testament 'apostolic' to say nothing of this second century creed."¹⁸

In a review of William Farmer's book, *Maccabees, Zealots and Josephus*, Rist pointed out that the author had relied on similarities between the Maccabees and the Zealots but did not seem to know the difference between Syrian and Roman situations well enough to account for some obvious differences.¹⁹

Rist's analysis of New Testament materials shows such a thorough knowledge of both Jewish legends and written material that he was able to show how Christian borrowing took place before the gospels were written.²⁰ He was able to demonstrate also that the central section of Revelation, chapters 16-22, is not direct inspiration, but a literary piece based upon apocalyptic oral tradition similar to that used by the author of the Apocalypse of Elijah and by Lactantius and known by Hippolytus.²¹

In re-reading the articles published by Martin Rist for this reflection, I was impressed with the consistency with which he applied his historical methodology throughout his career. There does not appear to be any discernible retreat from his early commitment to scientific knowledge. The first article

¹⁸ Rist, Review of O. Sydney Barr, *From the Apostles' Faith to the Apostles' Creed*, *The Iliff Review* (Winter 1965) p. 49.

¹⁹ Rist, Review of William Farmer, *Maccabees, Zealots and Josephus, Religion in Life* (Spring 1958), pp. 308-309.

²⁰ Rist, "Old Testament Heroes of Jewish Legend in the New Testament," *The Iliff Review* (Winter 1956), pp. 3-13.

²¹ Rist, "The Common Source of Revelation 16: 17-22: 5 and the Apocalypse of Elijah," *The Iliff Review*, (Winter 1956), pp. 3-13.

published²² shows the same scholarly care in the evaluation of scholarly opinion, the characteristic clarity of argument, and the consistently thorough method of dealing with historical, linguistic and textual data that are to be found all through his career.

One characteristic of his method which should not be overlooked, however, and which is also characteristic of his writing throughout his lifetime, is his clear, concise, nonassuming style. He wrote to inform rather than to impress. The wit and satire were often sharp, but always simply stated. The force was in the argument and not in stylistic form. He was pleased when George Buttrick, the general editor of *The Interpreter's Bible*, told him personally that his manuscript was the clearest and best written of all that had been received. There was little editing to do. He was not pleased, however with the editors' decision to supplement his commentary with that of Lynn Harold Hough, the only supplementary commentary in the twelve-volume edition. Rist suspected that the editors were afraid of public reaction to his commentary and wanted another one which would be more theologically acceptable. He was fiercely loyal to his empirical methodology.

It was the tendency of scholars to theologize, modernize and rationalize that upset him most. Oscar Cullmann, Rist said, modernized when he drew parallels between the satanic Roman Empire and modern, totalitarian states.²³ All "Christ of Faith" assertions, he said, are subjective. Which Christ of faith is meant? Theologizing can lead one into a morass of opinions appearing as knowledge. It is better, he said, to use historical criticism for an objective basis of faith, even though all the

22 Rist, "Is Mark a Complete Gospel?", *Anglican Theological Review* (Spring 1932), pp. 143-151.

23 Rist, Review of Oscar Cullmann, *The State in the New Testament*, *The Iliff Review* (Winter 1957), p. 46.

answers cannot be given.²⁴ Rist, in a review of E. F. Scott's *Varieties of New Testament Religion*, commended the author for recognizing disparate varieties but criticized his attempt to force a unity so as to resolve the paradox of one faith vs. many. It is better, said Rist, to recognize them as they are.²⁵ Rist himself used ancient sources in both the Old Testament and historical literature to argue that there is no one doctrine of the Church in the New Testament, but many.²⁶

Fundamentalism was a favorite example of what theologizing could do to destroy the integrity of the Biblical authors. In 1963, Rist published a review of Howard Hanke's book on the Virgin Birth. It was not immediately clear why he would review a minor book on an unimportant issue. Rist noted, however, that Hanke, while saying nothing new, had the best summary of arguments for the virgin birth. It was characteristic of him to pose the best of his opponent's theological arguments for a devastating attack.²⁷ What Hanke had done was a good example of how fundamentalists do violence to the Bible by forcing it into preconceived theological categories which may themselves be suggested by minor Biblical concepts.

The best argument Rist made against rationalization was in his important article on miracles. He used reason faithfully and insisted on coherent argument in the use of evidence; but rationalization is a misleading error. Those who rationalize the miracle stories, he said, cannot accept them at face value, but must force a consistency upon them which is foreign and external. The miracle stories were introduced into the gospels to serve

24 Rist, "The Validity of Historical Methodology for the Study of Jesus," *The Iliff Review*, 1 (Winter 1968), p. 12.

25 Rist, review of E. F. Scott, *The Varieties of New Testament Religion*, *The Iliff Review* (Fall 1944), p. 140.

26 Rist, "Various New Testament Doctrines of the Church," *The Iliff Review* (Winter 1967), pp. 3-14.

27 Rist, Review of Howard A. Hanke, *The Validity of the Virgin Birth*, *The Iliff Review* (Spring 1964), pp. 47-48.

various purposes. They must be studied objectively and historically. "When this is done they cease to be a problem for the Christian who is living in this period of human history, for he comes to an understanding of their nature and purpose which does no violence to his intelligence."²⁸

The last phrase, "no violence to his intelligence," is a key to an understanding of Rist's methodology. Human intelligence is to be trusted. Ordinarily, reason and coherence are essential to intelligence. A rigid rationalism whether of the doctrinaire, fundamentalist variety or of liberal modernizers, however, was not acceptable or intelligible to him. His method was fundamentally empirical.

The authority of the Bible does present a rational paradox that every Christian, Rist said, must try to resolve.

We believe that the Bible is an inspired collection of books representing the revelation of God to man; and, yet, at the same time, we know that men have had an important part in writing and shaping the various books . . . the question of the divine-human book presents a paradox that each student of the Bible, relying upon his studies of the available evidence, must try to resolve to his own satisfaction.²⁹

One might say resolved to his own "intelligible" satisfaction, but not according to a rationalistic, theological doctrine which minimizes the differences between Biblical authors in order to maintain an artificial, external coherence. He rejected also a subjective guidance from the Holy Spirit because it cannot arrive at a "correct" conclusion, at least not one which is agreeably "correct." Thus, he avoided both the false objectivity of rationalism and the subjectivity of inspiration. The important ingredients in an intelligible approach are knowledge of origins, transmission, translation, geography and literary forms which make the test clear and understandable.³⁰

²⁸ Rist, "How Shall We Deal with the Miracles of the Gospels?" *The Iliff Review* (Fall 1946), p. 109.

²⁹ Rist, "The Bible, Book of Our Faith," 12 lessons, *International Lesson Annual 1969*, ed. Horace B. Weaver (New York: Abingdon Press, 1969) pp. 149-150.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

In our factual knowledge of the Bible, however, there is implied what he thought was the unifying theme in all the variety of human writings of "a belief in one righteous and holy God. Furthermore, the books of the New Testament are to a greater or lesser degree centered in Jesus Christ, what he did, what he taught, and what his significance was to the writers of the New Testament."³¹ Jesus, he believed, was the fulfillment of the law given in the Old Testament which, with a great deal of continuity, portrayed an ethical and moral deity who requires that his worshippers be likewise holy, righteous, ethical and moral in their behavior.³² The factual knowledge and the inferred unity of themes may limit doctrinal activity; but they at least provide an observable objectivity. So it is, Rist thought, that an empirical methodology can outline a core of Biblical faith which will function to inform contemporary faith. The faith one affirms is implied in and evaluated by an adequate methodology. On the other hand, as Rist well knew, his intelligent evaluation of data and his insistence upon coherent argument were matters of integrity implied by his own belief structure. Method and faith evaluated each other. For him, it would have been immoral as well as improper methodologically to 'modernize' or 'dogmatize' the evidence.

Martin Rist's personal faith no less than his method followed upon his definition of truth as correspondence with observable fact. That definition rested in turn on his assumption, as noted earlier, of the unity of reality as opposed to any dualism, rational or otherwise.

Furthermore, in his faith as well as in his methodology, Rist distrusted the subjectivism of intuition and revelation, the latter of which he tended to equate with the former. He seemed to reject, as a sure guide to truth, even the inner guidance of

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 216.

the Holy Spirit because it cannot arrive at a "correct" conclusion. The keys to understanding the Bible, he said in the 1969 *International Lesson Annual*, are knowledge of origin, transmission, and translation, geography, culture, and literary forms.³³ All these help make the text clear and understandable.

This did not mean, necessarily, that the experience of the Holy Spirit was not useful in the Church. Rist commended William Warren Sweet's *Revivalism in America* as a well documented study which recognized both the good and bad results of revivalism.³⁴ He noted the latter's statement that only a return to personal and individual religion -- but not a return to revivalism -- was needed. Rist had a thorough admiration for spirited Methodist preaching and the part played by revivalism on the western frontier. The subjective experience of the Holy Spirit was, for him, still desirable in the Church; it was simply not useful in helping one arrive at "correct" conclusions. The Holy Spirit was useful religiously, but not epistemologically.

The facts are neither easily come by nor always satisfying. People, he said, will not settle for one interpretation. In the complexity of data, cause and effect are not easily determined. The historian, he said "does not rule out God, but sees God as immanent in the world, working through the natural and human factors."³⁵ There is a complexity to reality which our knowledge can only partially illuminate. An objective observer of historical facts can infer a providence but only one that is part of and not separate from the reality observed.

Absolute immanence was a theological concept consistent with his basic assumption of the unity of all reality, including God.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

³⁴ Rist, Review of William Warren Sweet, *Revivalism in America*, *The Iliff Review* (Fall 1944), p. 141.

³⁵ Rist, "Varieties of Historical Interpretation," *The Iliff Review* (Fall 1950), p. 104.

This was consistent, he thought, with what could be observed of that reality, although God could not be observed. A rationalistic doctrine of the supernatural, e.g., Calvin's, would be more consistent with dualism.

The immanence of God is a belief which could not, of course, be conclusively demonstrated by Rist's methodology. Yet, it was an affirmation which enabled him to organize the results of empirical investigation into meaningful patterns. Ideological interpretations of the facts, e.g., Chosen People and Marxism themselves have an effect on history, he wrote in the same article.³⁶ Indeed, belief systems are necessary. The chief caveat, however, is that we be clear as to how and when we use them so that the evidence is not distorted.

The immanentist interpretation shaped his use of the facts nowhere more than in his interpretation of 'apocalyptic.' Apocalypticism, he noted, promises a new age when the transcendent becomes immanent.

Do we need to wait for a new age for this to occur? Why may we not believe that God is immanent here and now, that he is in and of this world in which we ourselves are living? This seems to be the most reasonable, most logical, most scientific alternative to the dualism which is basic to apocalypticism.³⁷

The immanence of God also implies a process of divine activity in the world. Rist's 'process theology' was not so much philosophical as it was historical and Biblical. He observed dislocations and continuities in history and interpreted them as a dynamic aspect of divine action toward the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God as spoken of in the gospels. "It is this ceaseless process of improvement and innovation, which keeps a religion dynamic, vital and meaningful." Furthermore, "we may be guided by the first Christians, but we are under no obligation to

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

³⁷ Rist, "The Apocalyptic Pattern," *The Iliff Review* (Winter 1944), p. 21.

be controlled by them." ³⁸ The Bible is authoritative; but, as Jesus went beyond the literal authority to fulfill its spiritual authority, Rist said, so must we in our generation make adjustment for the changing times on the basis of our knowledge and judgement. ³⁹ Even heresy fulfills a function in the process.

To be sure, heresy and so-called false doctrines have been disruptive of Christianity in the past; but at the same time new teachings and doctrines in keeping with new knowledge and discoveries have been creative and progressive, keeping the church in tune with the times. From the beginning this has been the history of Christianity. Freedom of religion should include freedom of thinking within a religion. ⁴⁰

Freedom and growth through human knowledge were important parts of Rist's personal faith. He saw the Protestant Reformation, for example, as a great movement freeing western humanity from the bondage of superstition and ignorance. The progression of freedom and control, particularly through the development of Biblical and religious concepts through western history, Rist saw as a process of providential immanence. Heresy is not an aberration but rather a necessary component. The more we know about the past, he thought, the better we can use knowledge from the ancients and knowledge of the ancients to criticize and inform knowledge in our own time.

Rist's vantage point, however, was always the 20th century observer; the Bible and the past are authoritative if we can know them and not be bound by their blindnesses. We can only know the past and use it adequately, he thought, if we use the empirical methodology and belief structure of the "modern spirit."

He came close to setting down his own theological credo in the article he wrote for *The Iliff Review* in the Spring 1953 entitled, "The Modern Spirit." He was not an uncritical

³⁸ Rist, "Protestantism and the Primitive Church," in William K. Anderson, ed. *Protestantism, a symposium* (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1945), pp. 20-21.

³⁹ Rist, "The Bible, Book of Our Faith," p. 159.

⁴⁰ Rist, "Righteous Living -- Titus 1:10-2:10," *Adult Student* (November 1964), p. 45.

proponent of Enlightenment faith because of his deep love for the church and his sense of belonging to it. He could criticize an individualistic, cultural enlightenment, but he firmly believed that personal religion in the 'modern spirit' was not incompatible with God's presence in the world and in the church. He said that the modern spirit is defined first of all by conservation and constant testing of tradition. The attitude of observing the world and human history in process is its first mark. Second, the modern spirit would be defined by the acquisition of knowledge. It calls for an empirical method and "requires a disciplined mind, much study, wide reading, the recognition of problems to be solved, and a constant reflection on what has been learned." All of life is the subject of such an inquiry. There is no area of life, including religious belief, which can be set aside. The modern spirit is, third, Catholic in the sense of John Wesley's sermon, "The Catholic Spirit." Fourth, it is always a particularity regularly joined "with other Christians in worship and in practical Christianity, and he [one having the modern spirit] will belong to and support the church of his choice, being united with other Christians by the ties of Christian fellowship."

Not all, however, were sympathetic with his broadly conceived approach. In the same article, Rist told of two theological students who were warned away from Iliff because of its modernism.

I merely said that I personally would be ashamed if we were not attempting to be a modern school in a modern day trying to serve people who should be as modern in their religion as they were in other areas of life, and they seemed to agree with this statement. I was not concerned whether or not they actually decided to come to Iliff as much as I was that they should not be afraid to be possessed of a modern spirit in a modern world, the only world in which they, and you, and I can live.⁴¹

⁴¹ Rist, "The Modern Spirit," *The Iliff Review* (Fall, 1953), pp. 127-131.

The 'modern spirit' has come into increasing criticism in the last twenty years with what has been called the failure of the Enlightenment. Rist clearly did not think, however, that the Enlightenment had failed. He saw it as the hope of humanity's future. In the late fifties and early sixties, the nuclear threat, the cold war, the excesses of an industrial economy and great social dislocation were well known. Rist recognized the limitations of human knowledge and the failures of human use of knowledge; the inadequacy of facts; the misuse of reason. At the same time, however, he always maintained that knowledge and reason were still our best tools to approach even the insoluble problems. He was, surely, an optimist but always with eyes wide open to human inadequacy. He did not insist that an empirical faith or methodology were the only approaches, simply the best we have available.

The same attitude characterized his evaluation of theological developments. I think his response to phenomenological approaches in theology would be much the same as his attitude toward the existentialism of neo-orthodoxy. He would surely grant that the subject-object dichotomy or empirical method is affirmative in character and subjective in that sense; but, so are all other philosophical and theological constructs. The empirical approach, he would still say, is simply more productive of value for human society than all others. He would also insist that Christian empiricism still has particularly productive possibilities for the future of humanity. After all, it is what human society is becoming that is the goal of all faith and method.

The immanence of a providential deity in the process of human history implies also an eschatology of the kingdom of God. Rist interpreted it in terms of social justice which can be realized now. The future is shaped by divine-human cooperation. People do have responsibility for their world and what it is becoming. Rist argues that the church must be a strong advocate

for the social gospel because there is firm Biblical foundation for it in the gospels and in the prophets.⁴²

In the United States it is moral rather than physical courage that is required of Christians, courage to uphold and stand for what is Christian, what is right, regardless of suspicion, criticism, and opposition. To be more specific, it is necessary for the church and its members to speak out for and stand by what is the right thing to do in the whole complex areas of social justice, international relations, minority groups, sexual morality, drinking, gambling. Speaking for and maintaining Christian views in these and other important spheres of our common American life requires wisdom as well as courage on the part of the churches as institutions, on the part of the clergy, and on the part of individuals.⁴³

Rist coupled social justice with personal habits to the point of practicing abstinence from both tobacco and alcohol. He found empirical justification for that in scientific medicine as well as in the Biblical tradition.⁴⁴ On the basis of empirical judgement, he could also say that the Biblical advice to women is not useful to us, but that the Biblical advice on alcohol is total abstinence. In a private conversation, Thomas Trotter who was student and friend of E. C. Colwell, told me that Colwell had held the same personal opinions. Apparently, Rist and Colwell, who were students together at the University of Chicago and life-long friends, saw no contradiction in their modern views on religion and their pietistic views on alcohol held from childhood. Both of them had found a way to combine a Methodist piety and concern for doing good with a thoroughgoing, empirical study of Christian beginnings. Rist's communion liturgy with grape juice, he said, implies a memorial meal; an examination and recommitment of responsible personal and social life.⁴⁵ An

42 Rist, "The Bible, Book of our Faith," pp. 240-241.

43 Rist, "The Bible, Book of Our Faith," pp. 240-241.

44 Rist, "Disciplined Christian Living," *Adult Student* (October 1944), pp. 62-63.

45 Rist, "A Communion Service," *The Iliff Review* (Winter 1957), pp. 41-43.

Enlightened future should be clean and pure and sane as well as just.

In conclusion, for all who knew and loved him, the gentle, witty and humble person that Martin Rist exemplified was combined with a fierce idealist who believed and practiced an Enlightened faith which both demanded and was sustained by an uncompromising, empirical methodology. In 1953, Rist wrote a tribute in memory of the late Lindsay B. Longacre who had been his teacher and colleague at Iliff.⁴⁶ In it, he praised the Old Testament professor who had a deep respect for facts and for careful work which came out of thorough preparation and mental discipline. Longacre, he said, was fearless of the consequences of his own deep convictions on the modern spirit. Yet he had a youthful spirit, was open-minded, humble and giving of spirit. He had a deep faith which stood behind this careful sense of worship. Rist summed up Longacre's life by saying, "He was a mixture of the scholarly, priestly and prophetic in religion."

Rist's tribute is a beautiful indication of what he himself thought valuable in life. He was not "priestly" in the sense that Longacre was. Those of us who knew him and learned from him, however, can affirm everything else in this quotation with respect to Martin Rist. He was both scholar and prophet who loved the Church and its ministry with a sacrificial passion. Most of all his youthful spirit belied the white hair. His use of knowledge in the service of the future gave him and us, his students, an eager anticipation which continually makes the past live again.

⁴⁶ Rist, "Lindsay B. Longacre -- A Tribute," *The Iliff Review* (Fall 1953), p. 140.

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