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Methodist ministers meeting [Letter to Friedman]. 11 April 1949.

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# THE ILIFF SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

DENVER 10, COLORADO

MARTIN RIST

DEPARTMENT OF NEW TESTAMENT  
AND CHRISTIAN HISTORY

April 11, 1949.

Rabbi Herbert Friedman,  
1595 Pearl Street,  
Denver, Colorado.

Dear Rabbi Friedman:

Again I wish to thank you for the fine presentation which you made before our Methodist Ministers' Meeting this morning. In connection with the Last Supper I have looked up an article by Samuel I. Feigin, of the Oriental Institute, "The Date of the Last Supper," published a few years ago in the Anglican Theological Review. He states that as it is described in the Gospels (with the possible exception of Luke) the supper was not the Passover, for no mention is made of the Passover lamb or of the bitter herbs; that the bread is given first, and next the wine; and that in the Passover meal everyone has his own four cups of wine, and there was no need to have a common cup passed around. He might also have mentioned that the Greek word  $\acute{\alpha}\rho\tau\omicron\varsigma$  is used rather than  $\tau\acute{\alpha}\ \acute{\alpha}\gamma\upsilon\mu\alpha$ , unleavened bread. Only in Luke is there any resemblance to the Passover meal, but even here there is no mention of the eating of the lamb or of the bitter herbs. Also, I might add, in Luke as in the other Gospels the word for ordinary bread,  $\acute{\alpha}\rho\tau\omicron\varsigma$ , is used. He concludes: "Thus it is very doubtful that the supper was the Paschal meal. It seems rather that we have here a plain everyday meal, beginning with the eating of bread, and ending with a cup of wine, used for the final benediction on the food. He divided some bread among his disciples, as is customary. He also gave them wine from his cup. Indeed, the meal is mentioned by John, who does not designate it as the Paschal meal but only as "the meal of the evening" (John 13:2)." (More correctly the Greek word seems to mean the "main meal of the day" or a "meal for guests.") Also, according to the chronology in John and in Sanhedrin 43a Jesus was crucified before the Passover meal. In John this event coincides with the killing of the Paschal lamb (as it also seems to do according to I Cor. 5:7, I might add). This, in brief, is the evidence back of the statement I made this morning.

I trust that you did not misconstrue the remarks I made after the meeting. In private and in public I have consistently opposed anti-Semitism in all of its forms. Four weeks ago I told the preachers (including the one who raised the question with you) that the film, "The King of Kings," was decidedly anti-Semitic and that they should in no way be sponsors of it. I also told them - with illustrative quotations from the Gospels - that the Gospels were anti-Semitic, and most decidedly so in the Passion narratives. Furthermore, I called their attention to a logical dilemma of those who say (as do the Fundamentalists and others) that the death of Jesus was all prearranged by God in keeping with his divine scheme of Salvation; for,

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if this be true, then those who according to the Gospels are represented as having had a part in causing his death (including Judas, even) are not to be blamed, but instead are to be praised as agents of God. Just last night I made these same statements to a group of young people in one of our important Methodist churches, and was gratified to note their wholesome reaction. All of the group, I feel sure, left the meeting with the belief that the Roman military governor was primarily and almost entirely responsible for the crucifixion. Last fall I gave a course on the life and teachings of Jesus to a class of some thirty juniors and seniors at the University of Denver, and did my best to disabuse them of the traditional belief that the Jews were responsible for the crucifixion. I feel that here, too, I was fairly successful in my attempt. I mention all this to show that, as one of my students, Rev. Roberto Pedraza said to you after the meeting, I have been doing my best to remove the causes underlying anti-Semitic attitudes among Christian people.

Cordially yours,

*Martin Rist*

