

Ernest G. Clarke

An Appreciation of his Academic Career

R. Theodore Lutz*

It is fitting that we are assembled on this occasion in this place. Ernie, for that was how he was known, even in the hallowed halls of academia, first came to Victoria College within the University of Toronto as a bright undergraduate more than half a century ago. Except for a few brief periods, he never left.

Upon graduation in 1949, as an honor student in the Semitics program, he took up a scholarship position at the University of Chicago, only to return later to complete three years of theological studies at Emmanuel College within the University of Toronto in two years. A year later he had earned the MA degree from the University of Toronto in Hebrew and Arabic and was off to Leiden in the Netherlands to win a Ph.D. degree in the same field from that esteemed University.

Ernie was ordained a minister in the United Church of Canada, the first duty of which was to serve two years wherever Conference saw fit to place him. Ernie's pastoral work was interrupted, however, after only one year, because his skills as a Hebraist were in greater need at Queen's Theological College in Kingston, Ontario.

He spent five very successful years at Queen's, his loyalty to that institution second to no one's, but outweighed by his love for his alma mater, which called him back as an Associate Professor in the Department of Near Eastern and Islamic Studies in 1961. It should be pointed out that after only five years, so beloved was he as a teacher at Queen's that the students established a scholarship in his name as a parting gift.

It was upon his final return to Victoria and the University of Toronto that his skills as an administrator, and his willingness to serve in that capacity, came to the fore. For eight years he served as Senior Tutor (now known as Dean of Students) at Victoria University, five years as Chair of the Department of Near Eastern and Islamic Studies at Victoria College, five more years as Graduate Secretary of the University Department of Near Eastern Studies and eighteen additional months as Acting-Chair of the Department.

Beyond the Department, he served twice, for a total of eight years, as a member of the Board of Regents of Victoria University, four years on the Governing Council of the University of Toronto and three as Chair of its sub-committee on Admissions and Awards, Acting Principal of Victoria College in 1988-89, and Acting Director for the Center of Religious Studies the next year. It would be too tedious to list the names of all the committees on which he sat.

Beyond the University, he served as President of the Canadian Bible Society (Upper Canada District), President of the Canadian Society for Biblical Studies,

* Delivered at a Memorial Service in the Victoria College Chapel, November 26, 1997.

President of the Oriental Society of Toronto, Chair of the Board of the Society for Mediterranean Studies, and Chair of the Aramaic section of the Society of Biblical Literature.

As a scholar, Ernie's most enduring love was for the Aramaic renderings of the Hebrew Bible we call the *Targumim*. Ernie's training was in Hebrew and Arabic, his doctoral dissertation in Syriac, but his life's research has been Aramaic, from the earliest inscriptions to the later biblical translations. These interests are reflected not only in the books and articles he published, but in the dissertations of his graduate students and, sadly, in the work he leaves unfinished on his desk. The caliber of this work was recognized by the Faculty of the Hebrew University, when they invited Ernie to spend a year as a Fellow at the prestigious Institute for Advanced Studies in Jerusalem in 1985; and by the members of the International Organization for Targumic Studies, when they acclaimed him its first president in 1995.

No desk-bound student, Ernie's literary scholarship was informed by three "hands-on" seasons in the field, excavating in Jerusalem two summers with Kathleen Kenyon and Doug Tushingham, and surveying for two months in Jordan with Don Redford.

I was one of Ernie's first students, and what I now say would be echoed many times over if all the students he ever taught were here and given an opportunity to speak. We were inspired by his enthusiasm for the subject he was teaching, we were amazed at his breadth of reading—not just in the Hebrew Bible and ancient history, but in music, literature and Canadian history. We were moved by his obvious interest in us as individuals. Outside of class, he always knew our name, and he never failed to ask how we were.

There are many today whose interest in some aspect of the Hebrew Bible is greater than it would have been if they had never studied under Professor Clarke.