

ERIC F. OSBORN

AN APPRECIATION

Our colleague was born on 9th December, 1922 to William and Hilda Osborn of Ivanhoe. His father was Secretary of a mining company, Broken Hill South, and Eric grew up in a home committed to integrity and unassuming Christian discipleship. At Wesley College Eric had an outstanding academic career, as well as being a Crusader. In his final year he was prefect, school pianist, captain of debating, and editor of *The Chronicle*. He won a Major Scholarship in Queen's College, a Senior Government Scholarship and an Exhibition in Latin.

After one year as an Arts student, he volunteered for military service and was posted to the 33rd AA Battery in New Guinea, until he was invalided out in 1944. His sense of call to the Methodist ministry was undiminished and he resumed his studies. In 1946, he married Lorna Grierson, and completed an Honours degree in Philosophy at the University of Melbourne. He was deeply influenced by Professor A. Boyce Gibson and Professor Norman MacLeish of the Presbyterian Theological Hall. In addition to completing his theological course at Queen's College, he gained a First in his MA in Philosophy and while in the circuits of Alexandra and Mooroopna finished his BD and was ordained in 1950.

He was the first recipient of the Sir Arthur Sims Travelling Scholarship and completed his PhD at Cambridge under W. Telfer and H. Chadwick. His work on Clement of Alexandria was published in 1957 and established him as a major Australian patristic scholar. It was all the more remarkable in that he completed the work while a circuit minister at Colac. In 1958, the Conference appointed him Professor of Biblical Studies in Queen's College, University of Melbourne. 1987 marks the completion of thirty years of teaching and scholarship and the Presidency of the United Faculty of Theology in this his final year as Professor of New Testament and Early Church History in the United Faculty.

His international reputation has grown steadily, with his books and articles appearing in German, French and Italian. He has lectured regularly at universities in Britain, Europe and North America, been guest professor at Göttingen and Strasbourg and regularly delivered learned papers at New Testament and Patristic conferences. His academic achievement has been further underlined by the award of both BD and DD from Cambridge for his work on Justin Martyr and on ethical patterns in early Christian thought. Over the years he has made important contributions to Australian scholarship: Election as Fellow (1971) and then Chairman (1976) of the Philosophy and Religion Section of the Australian Academy of Humanities was recognition of his international reputation.

He edited the *Australian Biblical Review* from 1960-1984 and *Colloquium* from 1968-79. He has been an important mediator of German scholarship because of his conviction of the importance of Ebeling and Käsemann. In addition he has been very generous in his encouragement of younger scholars. Indeed he stands without peer in Australia and he has helped us all understand that New Testament study can only be complete when it is conducted in dialogue with other disciplines and subject to the most robust intellectual scrutiny.

Eric Osborn has always been impatient of intellectual and spiritual laziness and sloppiness. He has a disarming wit and a disconcerting capacity to make opposing positions look ridiculous. Yet he has with that a deep pastoral concern and a passionate commitment to excellence in ministry. He preaches regularly, even if he has not felt a burning call to be actively involved in a multitude of committees. Generations of students remember his teaching with gratitude. Even if they did not always follow the finer points of patristic theology, his Greek songs are unforgettable, as are his apostolic runs.

He made invaluable contributions to the formation of the Uniting Church in 1977, because of the depth of his scholarship and his knowledge of the central Methodist convictions. His friendship with E. Gordon Rupp, one of the greatest British Methodists gave him an abiding conviction about the importance of justification by faith alone and the heritage of the Reformation as interpreted by historic Methodism. Osborn has been insistent that without this foundation, the Uniting Church will slip into a hothouse of pietism. His teaching in the UFT has underlined the importance of the Catholic heritage found in the Fathers' reflection on the New Testament and their own age. He has enriched all the Australian churches by his devotion and scholarship, helping us all better to hear the Living Word. For in the last resort, that is where assessment of our colleague must end.

He has always patently been a disciple of the Risen Lord. His warmth of friendship, his active involvement in college and faculty worship bears witness to his own conviction that study and worship enable us to offer all we are to the service of the one we glorify as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Ian Breward