

TEXT AND CONTEXT

PREFACE

We dedicate this edition of **Scriptura** to Professor Alfred George Rooks, emeritus professor of the Department of Religious Studies, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. After his retirement in 1975 Professor Rooks moved to Durban, where he teaches Old Testament in the Department of Old Testament, New Testament and Biblical Studies in the Faculty of Theology, University of Durban-Westville.

Alfred George Rooks was born in Tiflis (now known as Tbilisi), the capital of Georgia in the Caucasus on the 6th of August 1910. The young Alfred Rooks was a British subject because his parents were British. The cultural environment in which he grew up was Russian. His parents provided an English background although he preferred to speak to his father in Russian. His father's career as Civil Engineer made much of his early life a "migratory" one. The family often visited St Petersburg, Moscow, Finland and Germany. He became an avid reader from an early age. Very soon he had read most of the Russian Classics, especially novels of the 19th century. His ability to read and write Western or non-Cyrillic script was acquired at a much later stage.

When the British protective occupation of Georgia ceased in 1921, the Bolsheviks "liberated" the newly established Democratic Republic of Georgia. His parents then thought it wise to move out of Russia. A couple of years of further migration followed, including Italy, Ireland and Germany. Being British subjects, the German government granted the family a residential permit. It was during the uneasiness preceding the Second World War that Alfred Rooks would undergo his theological training in Germany.

In May 1930 he entered the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Berlin, where he was educated. After Hitler came to power in January 1933, Alfred Rooks joined the so-called "Confessional Church". He was later sent to the

Seminary at Naumburg, where he studied under Professor G Gloege and Professor C Westermann. He was ordained in 1937. In that same year he was summoned by the Gestapo to their headquarters, because he resisted Hitler's order to confiscate Church collections. The case against Alfred Rooks was referred to the Prosecutor-General. Goering, however, was keen to gain England's friendship at the time. Alfred Rooks wisely told the Gestapo that his people would call upon the British Ambassador in Berlin for help. The case against him was subsequently dismissed. In 1938 he was free to find his own way into the United Kingdom, and the Gestapo was glad to see him go.

In 1938 he left Germany for London and in that same year was offered a parish in the Union of South Africa. In 1939 he came to Johannesburg. He was appointed to minister the Gospel to four congregations in Pretoria. From January 1940 until December 1945 he was simultaneously in charge of the congregations of Pretoria West, Hercules, Mayville and Pretoria North, some 21 wards of the General Hospital and later also the chaplaincy to the Central Prison and the Gaol. For most of the time his only means of transport was a bicycle. In later life he would still remember his bicycle as a patient but trying companion in the hot summers and hilly country around Pretoria.

He enrolled for his M Div under Professor Stephanus du Toit of Potchefstroom. He later acknowledged great assistance from Professor B Gemser and completed his thesis in January 1946. He immediately embarked on his doctoral thesis which he completed in December 1949. He also cherished his relationship with the late Professor A van Selms as a good friend. In 1952 he was "seconded" by the Presbyterian Church of SA to university work. His career as an academic began at Rhodes University. In May 1951, Rhodes University at Grahamstown invited him to take over some courses and the temporary wardenship of Livingstone House. In September of the same year Fort Hare University College invited him to become Professor and Head of the Department of Divinity at Fort Hare. In 1957 he became Head of the Department of Divinity at Natal University. For 18 years he taught a wide range of subjects and guided many theses at the University of Natal. After his retirement he joined the Faculty of Theology at the University of Durban-Westville, where he taught Old Testament for another ten years of his life. On the 6th of August 1985 he turned 75. Presently he still

teaches Hebrew to students who wish to acquire skills necessary to read the Old Testament.

The editorial committee and the contributors dedicate this special issue of **Scriptura** to their colleague, past tutor and enduring friend, Professor Alfred George Rooks. This presentation is made with appreciation of his person, his scholarship and influence on his colleagues and students. The central theme of this edition of **Scriptura**, viz. **Text and Context**, was decided on because a subject of this nature appropriately acknowledges the scholarship of Professor Rooks. The subject also creates an opportunity to exercise some principles that his scholarship represented: the importance of using primary source material in research; the benefits of a thorough-going literary-critical approach; the need for critical analysis of historical, philosophical and empirical data; and the satisfaction of commitment to an academic task which needs to be done well. Above all, we hope that this presentation will articulate appreciation for a life totally devoted to the interaction of the text, context and the reader.

The contributors to this issue are all colleagues and friends of Professor Rooks:

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