

PROFESSOR SHELDON H. BLANK, RABBI

למדי חכמים מרבים שלום בעולם (ברכות סד).

“Scholars add to the peace of the world” (Berak. 64a)

This volume of the *Hebrew Annual Review* is dedicated to Professor Sheldon H. Blank, the Nelson Glueck Professor of Bible, emeritus, at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati. Dr. Blank was born in Mt. Carmel, Illinois, and educated at the University of Cincinnati (B.A. and M.A.), Hebrew Union College (Rabbi, 1923), University of Jena, Germany (Ph.D., 1925), and the Hebrew University and American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem. He has served as president of the Middle West branch of the American Oriental Society and as national president of the Society of Biblical Literature (1952). He has been a member of the Faculty of the Hebrew Union College since 1926, and he served as Chairman of the Faculty for a number of years. Currently he is the editor of the highly reputed *Hebrew Union College Annual*.

Dr. Blank's numerous books and articles, focusing largely on the works of the prophets, provide deep insights into their thought, messages, and values. No wonder, then, that the titles of his books consistently include the word “prophet” or “prophetic”: *Jeremiah: Man and Prophet*; *Understanding the Prophets*; *Prophetic Faith in Isaiah*, and a collection of articles and addresses, which is entitled *Prophetic Thought*. Those men of old emerge as a challenge to our times as they were to their own.

Professor Blank's writings are characterized by a vivid consciousness of the biblical word and the speaking voice, and show remarkable literary and aesthetic sensitivity. His works are balanced, and his viewpoint is enunciated clearly with a syntax of striking simplicity. His theological insights are indeed soul-stirring; they touch the strings of the heart and strike responsive chords.

Dr. Blank's commitment to basic truths and fundamental ethical principles is nourished by the depths of prophetic thought as well as by rabbinic and universal wisdom. Yet he approaches matters with a spirit of free enquiry. Slogans, clichés and conventions, he reiterates, are obstacles on the path of understanding. His teachings call upon his students to assert their independence, to exemplify the Promethean element of individual thought, to identify with the prophets in their concern for ethical living and their stress on the primacy of justice over ritual and

mere ceremonialism. "In our scale of religious values," Rabbi Blank maintains, "morality outranks ceremony." He believes that it is imperative, for the sake of human survival, to safeguard the virtues of tolerance and mutual understanding. Dr. Blank's teachings encourage involvement in society and caution against detachment. One may not live an insulated life in a private shelter: "Complacency is a subtle foe, and to create concern among men is our business."

Dr. Blank's writings breathe the spirit of the affirmation of life. "We want to say," he stresses, "that life is good; it is better than death. We affirm that man is significant, not to be dwarfed by astronomy, capable of nobility. . . . We are convinced that harmony among men is a desirable good and a realizable goal." Religion, therefore, Dr. Blank asserts, should not culminate in contemplation, it must aim at action, it must strive to propagate and give body to distinctive prophetic values.

Dr. Blank's remarkable personality, as "a man of sturdy convictions" (Sandmel) who "practices what he preaches," נאה דורש ונאה מקיים has exerted a penetrating moral influence upon generations of students, myself included, and has greatly contributed to the moulding of their character and mode of life. Among these students were many Christian doctoral candidates, some of whom pay their homage in this volume. He has been an unfailing inspiration and stimulus to his friends and younger colleagues, constantly kindling their excitement for learning. It is indeed an honor and a privilege to dedicate this issue of the *HAR* to Dr. Blank.

May the Lord fill your days, and those of Amy, "the brightest spot" in your life, with love, happiness, strength, and good health, Amen.

אורך ימים ושנות חיים ושלום יוסיפו לך (Prov 3:2)

Reuben Ahroni, Editor
Hebrew Annual Review