

TRIBUTES TO GERHARD F. HASEL

FROM

FRIENDS IN THE THEOLOGICAL COMMUNITY

On this All Saints Day it seems especially appropriate for me to compose a word of testimony concerning Gerhard Hasel, a distinguished member of your Old Testament faculty and a very treasured friend to us here at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Sudden death from a car collision always comes as a cruel blow to family and friends, and as a solemn reminder that life is contingent for all of us. We simply do not know when our opportunities for ministry and work will be abruptly terminated.

Gerhard leaves behind him a legacy of faith and integrity of character, and we will surely miss his warm and abiding insight as a biblical scholar. His course in the minor prophets I especially treasure. My own memory of him goes back to the year when I was invited to serve as an outside examiner of a Ph.D. thesis prepared by a fine young German scholar whose name I have forgotten, but who was a student of Hasel's.

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

We mourn this brother's passing and as he laid to rest,
 We ponder his virtues and his life well spent,
 With longing hearts we wish to see his face again,
 Shall never be forgotten in our hearts again.

FROM

When death has laid its hand upon the loved one,
 And taken him to his eternal home,
 Take heart my friend, will be no long when we our Savior,
 And with our loved ones meet to see and love and dine.

By Walter Lehmann

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Gleason L. Archer
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
Trinity International University
Deerfield, Illinois

On this All Saints Day it seems especially appropriate for me to compose a word of testimony concerning Gerhard Hasel, a distinguished member of your Old Testament faculty and a very esteemed friend to us here at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Sudden death from a car collision always comes as a cruel blow to family and friends, and as a solemn reminder that life is contingent for all of us. We simply do not know when our opportunities for ministry and work will be abruptly terminated.

Gerhard leaves behind him a legacy of faith and nobility of character, and we will surely miss him and his fine insight as biblical scholarship continues its course to the end of this century. I suppose my best memory of him goes back to the year when I was invited to serve as an outside examiner of a Ph.D. thesis prepared by a fine young Mexican scholar, whose name (alas) I forget, but who produced a fine piece of work on a very live OT theme. I appreciated the fellowship with those other members of your faculty who participated in his oral defense.

Our sympathy goes out to his dear ones as they go through the grief process which inevitably follows a sudden death of this sort. We can only look to our blessed Paraclete for His comfort and providential care while the process of healing goes on in his family.

Walter C. Kaiser
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
South Hamilton, Massachusetts

On the Occasion of the untimely death of my friend Gerhard F. Hasel:

On behalf of the wider Evangelical community of scholars, pastors and lay persons around the world, I want to record our sense of loss and to extend my own sympathies and prayers for our Lord's special strength on the sudden loss of our friend and esteemed colleague, Professor Gerhard F. Hasel. But in a larger sense, we acknowledge that our Lord is still sovereign and wise in all that He does, even though we cannot understand the reasons for all that he does or permits.

It is a joy to reflect on the life and ministry of this especially gifted servant of God. His contributions to the life and ministry of the evangelical community at large will continue to go on for generations to come in the providence of our God, and as we await His coming.

Beginning with his doctoral study on the theme of the "remnant" in the Old Testament, Gerhard was at once marked out as an individual who would be greatly used in the academic halls and pulpits of our day. That study was followed by many others, but particularly noteworthy were his frequent contributions to the area of Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments. Few had mastered the breadth of the literature that had accumulated in the areas of historical and theological studies in the Old Testament as Gerhard had. His natural abilities in the European languages, as well as his linguistic skills as an Orientalist, always made what he had to say on exegetical and theological matters in the Old Testament well worth while.

As recently as 1991, I had the pleasure to commend his volume entitled *Understanding the Book of Amos* by saying, "A virtual *tour de force* of surveying some 800 separate contributions." I went on to say, "From now on serious studies of the prophet Amos will need to commence with this volume." This was so typical of the type of work that Gerhard did.

When one considers the fact that for a good period of time he

also carried administrative duties at the Seminary while he strove to maintain his scholarship and writing, his accomplishments are all the more impressive.

My one great regret is that apparently we will not be able to enjoy his own complete *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* that he had wanted to make his *magnum opus* and the crowning achievement of his studies. That, I know, was his goal and desire, for he had often mentioned it and talked about it in my presence.

It was my pleasure to have Gerhard teach one of my classes at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. And he kindly invited me to his Old Testament Theology course to teach one of his classes at Berrien Springs. The students loved it as we joined in a vigorous debate about what was the center of Old Testament Theology and how one should go about writing such a volume. That memory will always be one of my fondest recollections of some of the other good times we shared on the telephone or at one or another of the professional Biblical Society meetings where we got to chat with one another briefly each year.

The wider community of evangelical scholars will deeply miss our friend and wonderful colleague in the days ahead, but we are grateful to God for giving him to us for all the days we did have him among us. Indeed, we are taught in Scripture that the death of God's saints is precious in His sight. We can only thank our God a thousand times over for His gift of the life of Dr. Gerhard F. Hasel and pray that the good effects of this valiant servant of His will continue to last until that great day when we are all reunited with each other and our Lord.

We thank God for Gerhard's standing for the truthfulness and authority of Scripture. Never did he cave in to the critical fashions of the scholarship of our day. We thank our God for Gerhard's love for the Church and the way he selflessly served it as he did so for the honor and glory of his Lord. We thank God for Gerhard's godly life and for the legacy of students, colleagues and readers that he has left behind to finish the work he began. We all are heirs of a wonderful legacy of Christian scholarship and Churchmanship that he has left. Thanks be unto God!

**"Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints"
Psalms 116:15.**

My one great regret is that apparently we will not be able to enjoy his own complete biblical theology of the Old and New Testaments that he had wanted to make his magnum opus and the crowning achievement of his studies. That I know was his goal and desire, for he had often mentioned it and talked about it many times. On . . .

I want the pleasure to have Gerhard teach one of his classes at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. And he kindly invited me to the Old Testament Theology course at least one of his classes at Eastern College. The students loved it. We joined in a vigorous debate about what was the nature of Old Testament Theology and how the student should go about writing such a volume. That theory will always be one of my fondest recollections of some of the other good times we shared on the campus, or at one or another of the professional biblical society meetings where we got to chat with one another briefly each year. The cynical comment will deeply miss our friend and wonderful colleague in the days ahead, but we will

credit to God for giving him to us in the days we had him among us. Indeed, we are caught in a rapture that the death of God's saints is precious in His sight. We can only thank our Father and pray that the good effects of this volume remain of the will to do things to last until that great day when we are all united with each other and our Father.

We thank God for Gerhard's example for his spiritual inheritance and for the legacy of students, colleagues and teachers that he has left behind to finish the work he began. We all are proud of the wonderful legacy of Gerhard's scholarship and teaching that we have left. This is the best of all. We thank you for your example of

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Elmer A. Martens
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Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary
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"How are the mighty fallen!" These were the anguished words of David in his lament over the loss of Israel's leaders and his friend Jonathan. "How are the mighty fallen!" These are the involuntary words of sadness spoken by many of us and our colleagues around the world for a brother of tall stature among us, Professor Gerhard F. Hasel.

In his scholarly contributions to Biblical studies, Professor Hasel stood tall. For twenty years, ever since 1974, his articles over a wide range of topics have appeared in some 20 different journals. The introductory volume to New Testament theology, and especially the book, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, now in its fourth edition, alone secure for him an undisputed place as a leading Biblical theologian. Gerhard was one who mastered volumes of information. I understand, via hearsay, one teacher refers to him as "Footnote Hasel." Somewhat disconcerting to the rest of us, he seemed always to be abreast of the latest publication in our field. In private conversation it was common for him to reference a recent book, or one about to be published, likely out of Europe, in a matter of fact way as though to any scholar worth his or her salt such information should not come as a surprise.

Dr. Hasel stood tall in championing an orthodox, evangelical Christianity that was unashamed of its claims about Jesus Christ and its high view of the Scriptures in a pluralist world. In a personal letter to me, dated January 2, 1990, he commented on approaches to biblical interpretation. "The question is whether we shall adopt common presuppositions such as those that drive the historical-critical method. . . or whether our presuppositions are to be formed by the revealed Word of God in order to be adequate and appropriate for that revealed Word. Over the years I have come to be convinced that if we attempt to come to Scripture from 'below' or from the 'outside,' Scripture will become or be seen only from 'below' or from

the 'outside.'" He continued by commenting on the normativity that Scripture should have.

He positioned himself with easy affinity within the Evangelical community. I refer particularly to his role of building bridges from his denominational group to evangelicals. Some here will recall his address given at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in which he spoke to the differences between Biblical and Systematic Theology. As always he was lucid and articulate as well as passionate. Without doubt he greatly helped to dismantle reservations, not to mention stereotypes, which have sometimes been attached by theological conservatives to Seventh-day Adventism.

Gerhard Hasel stood tall as a model churchman. He was not an iconoclastic, cloistered scholar. I know, for in trying to reach him by telephone in conjunction with our joint literary project, the family would report, "O he is not home, he is in South Africa." Or it might be Asia. God had given him remarkable abilities of communication. An international itinerant, he was in demand, not only by academic institutions, but by the church. His concern was for global Christianity. In our fleeting conversations at conventions, he would share the burden of his heart. I experienced him as a kind, warm, and genuinely caring Christian brother, with a care for persons but also for the well-being of the church.

The poet David mourned the loss of front-rank leaders taken by death in a military war. With Gerhard Hasel's death the evangelical community mourns the loss of a front-rank champion for the cause of God's kingdom. Though we thankfully pay tribute to a colleague of tall spiritual stature among us, we lament his absence from our side, shake our heads in dismay and sheer disbelief, and say, "How are the mighty fallen."

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Five years ago, while I was still teaching at Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson, MS), I received a call from Gerhard. He had received my invitation to contribute to *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology*, and wanted to find out some more information. He had a passion for biblical theology that goes back to his days as a graduate student. His work on the "remnant" has made a significant contribution to the study of the Old Testament and, of course, his book *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*.

Over the years, he has been insistent on keeping the growth of the discipline of biblical theology before the students of the Scriptures. When it seemed that biblical theology was dying, his timely reviews on the "retrospects and prospects" and "major recent issues" were successful in reminding the scholarly community that the discipline was still alive in that scholars were still contributing to the discipline. His ecumenicity is apparent in his fair reviews of conservatives and nonconservatives. One could not easily disagree with his review because it was based on an objective grid.

But, what was refreshing was his set of basic proposals for doing biblical theology. In these proposals, we find the spirit of Gerhard Hasel. In an age where the historical dimension has been separated from the theological, he affirmed the importance of a historical-theological discipline. The discipline, being rooted in the study of the text, linked biblical theology with exegesis. Again, he sought an integrative framework for doing biblical theology. Instead of being guided by one theme, he rejoiced in the multiformity of themes. This multiformity was well expressed in his goal of developing a "multiplex" and "complex" theology that was true to the great variety in the Old Testament, but even more so, he wanted to be true to the great variety of the teaching of both testaments.

With this background, Gerhard was well suited to contribute

to the theological dictionary. While he had committed himself to write several articles, he and I were mutually interested in his further involvement by serving as associate editor of the dictionary project. We pursued this more than a year ago. He received administrative permission by the Spring of this year, and was looking forward to giving more time to writing and editing. In God's providence, he was taken away from us. I shall miss him, his scholarship, and his interest in making biblical theology accessible to the Christian community.

Gerhard has left a legacy, but not a vacancy. This is because he was unique, and there is no successor to carry his mantle. Gerhard was here to reflect the glory of God, and in his departure, the glory of God to whom he has borne witness continues to speak of God's greatness, majesty, and splendor. I conclude with the familiar words of Ps 145:3: "Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise, his greatness no one can fathom" (NIV).