

**LIFE SKETCH:  
GERHARD F. HASEL, 1935-1994**

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Gerhard Franz Hasel was born in Vienna, Austria, on July 27, 1935, the third and next-to-youngest child of Franz Joseph and Helene (née Schroeter) Hasel, and passed away on August 11, 1994, aged 59. At the time of death he was serving as the first John Nevins Andrews Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Theology and as director of the Ph.D. and Th.D. programs at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University. Earlier he had served seven years (1981-1988) as dean.

He was a widely-known scholar, a productive author, an effective administrator, an active leader in his local church, and an affectionate family man.

As a child, Gerhard spent the war years, 1939-1945, in or near Frankfurt, Germany. His father, a Seventh-day Adventist minister and literature evangelist, was early drafted into the Wehrmacht and assigned to the Russian front. From time to time, when alone, he drew courage from a fading picture of the Daniel 2 image, which he treasured in a pocket, reassuring himself that Hitler must fail sooner or later. A convinced noncombatant, Hasel's father saw his share of danger; but under heaven's blessing he became one of only seven out of his original battalion of several hundred to return home alive. He was one of the two who came home uninjured.

Gerhard's mother took a firm stand that none of her children would attend school on the seventh-day Sabbath. On one crucial occasion, while her small children waited at home for her to return or for them to be scattered to unknown destinations, the officer who was expected to sentence her fell ill. At that critical moment he was replaced by an officer who had once been befriended by a Seventh-day Adventist couple. Gerhard's mother returned home to very happy children! The immovable commitment of his parents to God's Word became Hasel's own.

The passing of years found Gerhard completing elementary and secondary schools and entering a trade school. In 1953, when he was 18, he was identified as the best apprentice in electrical engineering in Frankfurt. Subsequently he was designated the best apprentice in electrical engineering in the state of Hessen. With these impressive citations came an invitation to the Technical College in nearby Darmstadt, with full scholarship support through graduate school. But he kept asking himself, "Why should I work in a field that anyone else could choose? Why don't I do something for the Lord that only I could do?"

So thinking, he turned down the proffered scholarship and enrolled in the theology program at the small Seventh-day Adventist Marienhöhe Seminary (also in Darmstadt), completing the licentiate program in 1958. To meet expenses, he did colporteur work every summer, selling Christian books from door to door, following in the footsteps of his father, who, after the war, served as the leader of all Adventist colporteurs in Germany. Hasel often observed later that the literature work is a most valuable preparation for the ministry.

Having completed his work at Marienhöhe, in 1958 Hasel sailed to the United States and enrolled at Atlantic Union College, near Boston. His first goal was to learn English; his second, to find answers to theological questions.

Building on his work at Marienhöhe, Hasel completed a B.A. in 1959 and moved to Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, where he earned an M.A. in Systematic Theology in 1960, still selling books from door to door in the summers to pay his way. By 1962 he had a B.D. But in the meantime, on June 11, 1961, he married Hilde Schäfer. Hilde was still a student at Emmanuel Missionary College and thought she was much too young to get married. But when Gerhard persuaded her that she was unquestionably old enough, she gave her consent. "It was the best decision I ever made," she says. Over time, three children were born to them, Michael, Marlana, and Melissa, all of them now married.

Upon receiving his B.D., Gerhard served first as a pastor in Boston for a year (1962-1963) and then as Assistant Professor of Religion at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, near Chattanooga, for four years (1963-1967), being ordained to the gospel ministry in 1966. In 1967 he began a 27-year teaching career at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University.

In 1970 he completed a Ph.D. program in biblical studies at Vanderbilt University in Nashville. While he divided his class work between New and Old Testaments, his dissertation was in Old

Testament: "The Origin and Early History of the Remnant Motif in Ancient Israel." To help finance his university training, he accepted two named scholarships, a Hillel Scholarship and a Danforth Teacher Grant.

Hasel served as chairman of the seminary's Old Testament Department from 1976 to 1982 and as Director of the Ph.D. and Th.D. programs from 1976 till his death. He also served as dean for seven years, from 1981 to 1988. During his tenure as dean, Hasel balanced the seminary's budget in spite of severe financial difficulties, called several strong faculty members, led in a reorganization of the curriculum which enhanced its "practics" quality, and in general helped developed a seminary that proved to be a delight to the spring 1989 accreditation team. Noting that the seminary was one to be proud of, "equal to any in the land," the accreditation-team leader told the assembled faculty, "You should go out and celebrate."

At the time of his death Hasel was an active member of seven societies: Adventist Theological Society, American Academy of Religion, American Schools of Oriental Research, Chicago Society of Religious Studies, International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Near East Archaeological Society, and Society of Biblical Literature. In addition, he belonged to two honorary societies: Alpha Mu Gamma and Theta Alpha Kappa. He was listed in nine "Who's Who" kinds of publications, including *Men of Achievement*, 6th edition, and the prestigious *Dictionary of International Biography*.

Hasel's publishing profile is impressive. For over twenty years (1973-1994) he was associate editor of *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, being circulation manager as well for seven of those years (1973-1980). For twenty years (1974-1994) he was also an editorial consultant of *Origins*, the Seventh-day Adventist journal of creation science. From 1990 to 1994 he served as a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*. Not long before his death he was appointed an associate editor of *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology*. At the time of his death he was the only writer who had contributed a major article to each of the volumes of the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. By invitation, he wrote the article on the Sabbath for the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. At the time of his death he was working on two volumes, Amos and Hosea, for Eerdmans's *New International Commentary on the Old Testament*.

His son Michael put together a list of his literary work; it follows this life sketch in this special issue of *AUSS*. In addition, Hasel delivered more than 50 scholarly papers to learned societies and denominational study committees. One test of a writer's impact in the academic world

is the degree to which his books are reviewed in scholarly journals. No fewer than 39 reviews of four of Dr. Hasel's books have been located. His publications also led to invitations for guest lectureships in a variety of institutions.

When asked, "Did your Father ever have time for you children?" his grown children respond quickly, "O, yes, lots of time!" When they were growing up, he was often home and available on weekends, and he was conscientious about taking month-long vacations with the family—even if, at times, he spent a portion of the month speaking at a camp meeting. When he was busy, the children sensed, they say, that he was working for God. They also knew that he would "be there" for them whenever they needed him.

Like any man of ardor and profound conviction, it was inevitable that Hasel was at times controversial. But even those who did not agree with all his views acknowledge that he was an outstanding scholar, one who committed robust energy and impressive intellect to the quest for truth, and who exerted a tangible influence in Old Testament circles within and without his denomination, supporting the integrity of the Bible.