

A Tribute to Hans Kasdorf: Gentleman, Scholar, and More

Elmer A. Martens

Dr. Hans Kasdorf, missiologist and a good friend, died at age eighty-two on March 26, 2011, in Fresno, California. While he now lives in glory he also lives on in the memories of his teaching colleagues, students, and grateful missionaries world-wide.

Dr. Kasdorf (he much preferred to be known as Hans) was a gracious and deferential person. He walked erect like an exclamation mark, but he was anything but stiff and unapproachable. Though he was not gregarious, his cordial smile and warm and hearty handshake put people at ease at once. His colleagues valued his dry sense of humor. All knew him as a man of the highest integrity.

He was industrious, highly self-disciplined, and persistent. Growing up in poverty in Brazil after he and his parents came from Siberia, he was largely deprived of early education—he received his first book at age eighteen. Following studies in Canada and Oregon, he taught linguistics at Fresno Pacific College (now University), in Fresno, California. Later, when teaching at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary from 1978 to 1993, he welcomed students to submit their papers in German, Portuguese, Spanish or French, rather than English, if they preferred. After retirement he taught at the Freie Theologische Hochschule in Giessen, Germany (1994–1998).

As a scholar, Kasdorf wrote and researched in areas of mission, history, and theology and published in both English and German. He was nothing if not thorough. He earned two doctorates, one from Fuller Theological Seminary and another from the University of South Africa in Pretoria. A pamphlet, “It’s Sunrise in World Mission” (1984) was a vision statement launching the Master of Arts program in the Department of Mission which

Elmer Martens is President Emeritus of Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary (formerly Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary).

he headed at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary. His book, *Christian Conversion in Context* (Herald Press, 1980), gained credibility from his own five-year missionary service in Brazil.

Although his passion was for global mission, Kasdorf cared also about history and theology. This interest was reflected in his second doctoral dissertation of 706 pages entitled, "A Century of Mennonite Brethren Mission Thinking, 1885–1984." Even preceding his death, though with limited energy, given a failing heart, he was at work on a manuscript, tentatively titled "Theology and Mission." He and his wife Frieda translated diaries of mission personnel from the German.

His autobiography, *The Design of My Journey* was published in 2004. A volume of essays was published in his honor in Germany: *Die Mission der Theologie. Festschrift für Hans Kasdorf zum 70. Geburtstag* (Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 1998). The journal *Direction* devoted an issue (1994) in honor of Dr. Kasdorf

Hans was a Spirit-filled man of deep piety and devotion. He reveled in Bible study; his lectures were laced with biblical insights. A man of prayer, he prayed earnestly for missionaries, among them many who graduated from the Master of Arts program, several of whom are administrators in mission agencies. He was in love with his Savior and relished conversation about the God whom he served. His life's motto and orientation might be summarized, as his friend, John N. Klassen, a missionary in Europe, put it: "Not to us, not to us but to your name give glory" (Ps. 115:1). To my mind, he was one of God's choicest servants. His life deserves to be emulated.

SELECTED WRITINGS BY HANS KASDORF

Mission

Reflection and Projection: Missiology at the Threshold of 2001: Festschrift in Honor of George W. Peters for his Eightieth Birthday. Bad Liebenzell: Verlag der Liebenzeller Mission, 1988. 504 pp. Klaus W. Mueller, co-editor. Published in German as *Bilanz und Plan: Mission an der Schwelle zum Dritten Jahrtausend. Festschrift für George W. Peters zu seinem achtzigsten Geburtstag.*

Gemeindegrowth als missionarisches Ziel: Ein Konzept für Gemeinde- u. Missionsarbeit. Bad Liebenzell: Verlag der Liebenzeller Mission, 1976. 283 pp.

Gemeinsam im Auftrag des Herrn: Gemeinde – Weltmission – Theologische Ausbildung: Festschrift für John N. Klassen. Heinrich Loewen, Jr. co-editor. Bornheim; Bonn: PULS-Verlag, 1999. 221 pp.

History, Theology and Mission

Christian Conversion in Context. Scottsdale, PA.: Herald, 1980. 217 pp. Published in German as *Die Umkehr: Bekehrung in ihren theologischen und kulturellen Zusammenhängen*. Erzhausen: Logos, 1989.

Gustav Warnecks missiologisches Erbe: Eine biographische-historische Untersuchung. Basel: Brunnen Verlag, 1990. 488 pp.

Flamen unauflöslich: Mission der Mennoniten unter Zaren und Swojets, 1789–1989. Bielefeld: Logos, 1991. 221 pp.

Werdet meine Zeugen: Weltmission im Horizont von Theologie und Geschichte. Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänslers Verlag, 1996. 290 pp.