

Prof. Dr. Martin Hengel (1926-2009): In Memoriam*

On July 2, 2009, Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. Martin Hengel unexpectedly died, at the age of 82, succumbing to a severe disease which finally tore him away from his tireless devotion to scholarly labor. Despite his illness, he had been able to see to the 2007 publication of the first volume of his *Geschichte des frühen Christentums* (together with A. M. Schwemer) and to the 2008 publication of the sixth volume of his *Kleine Schriften*, and also to prepare the seventh volume of that collection for publication.

Martin Hengel was the world's most significant scholar among those who combine New Testament scholarship with Judaic studies and ancient history, bringing those different disciplines into conversation with one another. Since Adolf Schlatter, with whom Hengel felt – beyond the institutional link as one of successors at Tübingen – a special kinship, no New Testament scholar has had such an intimate knowledge of Jewish literature and history.

Martin Hengel was not groomed from the cradle into a life of scholarship. Born in Reutlingen on Dec. 14, 1926, he grew up in Aalen and, during most of the first half of his life, remained linked with his father's textile concern. He became free for an academic career only in 1964—a career based first upon his 1959 doctoral dissertation on the Zealots and then upon his 1967 *Habilitationschrift* on Judaism and Hellenism in ancient Palestine. In 1968 he was appointed to a position at the University of Erlangen, but in 1972 he returned to Tübingen to take up the chair formerly held by his teacher, Otto Michel. In Tübingen his work flourished incomparably. To demonstrate the international impact of his personality and his work it is enough to point to the innumerable guest scholars from all over the world, but especially from England, the USA, and Israel, who came to his “Institute for Ancient Judaism and Hellenistic Religious History” to pursue their research but also, always, found the Hengels' home and hospitality open to them. The honorary doctoral degrees he was awarded by the universities of Uppsala, St. Andrews, Cambridge (England), Durham (England), Strasbourg and Dublin, along with the high honors bestowed upon him by the universities of London and Prague, testify to his international reputation, as do his tenure as president of the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas, and his membership in the British Academy and the Netherlands Academy of Sciences. In Germany, too, recognition was not lacking: in 1977/78 he was the dean of his Faculty; he was a member of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences; and as founder of the Philipp Melanchthon Foundation he created an incomparable institution, which opens the world of Graeco-Roman antiquity up to young students of theology.

Martin Hengel's devotion to the study of Jewish texts was grounded in the recognition that the New Testament can be understood only in the context of contemporary Judaism, and in the consciousness of the debt that Christendom, and especially the Germans, owe to the Jews. Martin Hengel will be remembered among those who labored to prepare the way for mutual understanding and respect between Christians and Jews.

Martin Hengel was the teacher of many students, and he was always ready to learn from them as well. He was incomparable as a trustworthy advisor, and quite extraordinary in the way he sympathetically accompanied his students throughout their scholarly and personal lives.

Hermann Lichtenberger

* A translation, by Prof. Daniel R. Schwartz, of Prof. Lichtenberger's German press release.