

Erhard S. Gerstenberger  
Fasanenweg 29  
D-35394 GIESSEN  
[gersterh@staff.uni-marburg.de](mailto:gersterh@staff.uni-marburg.de)

### Obituary

Prof. Dr. Milton Schwantes, São Paulo, Brazil

It is with deep sadness and a sense of personal loss that I want to communicate to colleagues in the US and other countries the passing away, on Thursday, March 1, 2012, of one of the most eminent Old Testament scholars in the southern hemisphere: Prof. Milton Schwantes, born in 1946 to German descent farmers in the state of Rio Grande do Sul (Southern Brazil). Milton took his theological formation at the IECLB (Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil)-schools at São Leopoldo, RS, from 1958 to 1970. Then he went to Heidelberg, Germany, to earn a doctoral degree in Old Testament studies with H.W. Wolff (1970-1974). Back to Brazil he became a parish minister (by own predilection and church regulations) before he joined the Faculdade de Teologia of São Leopoldo in 1978 as an Old Testament docent. Astonishingly, from early student times on, Milton and other colleagues of his, moved away from merely copying German theological discourses like the post-war Barth-Bultmann controversies. Younger Brazilian theologians wanted to overcome cultural frontiers, integrate themselves into Latin American societies, do theology within their own contexts, often against outspoken resistance of their own traditional-minded churches and teachers. Military dictatorship and mass impoverishment became theologically relevant factors for them (catholic base communities and liberation movements also served as incentives). Radical renewal of unjust social conditions was one of their prime concerns, and the Bible gave ample guidance to them. Richard Shaull, Ruben Alves, Harvey Cox became some of their stimulators. Milton preferred to work as a pastor and a teacher at the same time. He lived among plain citizens, never stopped to engage in parish work, and taught on the “holy hill” of São Leopoldo (Morro do Espelho), since 1987 at the Universidade Metodista de São Bernardo do Campo, SP. Given his excellent command of ancient languages, methodological skills, theological insights and preciseness of speech he impressed and inspired scores of students and doctoral candidates. His renown spread over all of Latin America, so say the least. His concise and eye-opening biblical studies are legion, and larger enterprises he sparked, like journals, series of commentaries, and the famous “Bibliografia Bíblica Latino-Americana” continue to thrive and fertilize biblical scholarship. Twice he received an honorary doctoral degree: of Philipps-University Marburg (2002) and of ITESP (Instituto Teológico São Paulo, 2008). A comprehensive translation of a large part of his work into English would be a blessing for many people dedicated to Bible reading. – Milton leaves behind his wife Rosi and her three daughters.

Erhard S. Gerstenberger