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**UNIVERSITÄT
BERN**

Faculty of Theology
Dean

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Obituary for Prof. Dr. Ulrich Luz (1938-2019)

The Theological Faculty of the University of Bern grieves for Professor Emeritus Ulrich Luz, who died on 13 October in Laupen at the age of 81. The faculty has lost an innovative, internationally renowned scholar and committed teacher; his work as Full Professor of New Testament (1980-2003) fostered the reputation of the faculty for many years. He was an inspiration with a lasting impact for generations of theologians and ministers.

Ulrich Luz was born on 23 February in Männedorf, Zurich, where he went to primary school, attended the Freies Gymnasium in Zurich from 1944 to 1956 and finished with a Matura in 1956. His studies of Protestant theology led him from Zurich to Göttingen then Basel. After his ministerial internship in Wädenswil (1962-1963) and ordination (1963), an assistantship at the chair of Prof. Eduard Schweizer (Zurich) provided the opportunity to obtain a doctorate (1967) and a habilitation (1968) with a well-received thesis on the concept of history in Paul. After a short time as a pastor in Seebach, Zurich, he was a guest professor at two university institutions in Tokyo. After that, he accepted a call to Full Professor of New Testament at the Georg-August-University in Göttingen; afterward, on 1 October 1980, he transitioned to the University of Bern, where he taught New Testament until his retirement in 2003.

An exceptional ability to draw new ideas from scientific, personal, and religious dialogue earmarked the influence Ulrich Luz had as a New Testament scholar. Numerous publications, many of which were translated into other languages, evidence his interest in Christian Jewish dialogue, Japanese philosophy and theology, Buddhism, ecumenical church dialogue, and in the plurality of biblical interpretations or the Orthodox tradition. He was particularly interested in the ecumenical exchange with the Eastern churches. During his student years, he already pursued these interests with enormous personal commitment. Later, he utilized the office as President of the *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas* (1997-1998) to call to life a "Liaison Committee for Eastern Europe," which also, through his unwavering commitment, benefited many libraries and connected a lot of researchers to international networks. The Biblical Institute of the Orthodox Theological Faculty Belgrade received the gift of a large section of his substantial exegetical library during his lifetime. In the final weeks of life, as he felt his strength wane, Ulrich Luz made arrangements for the rest of his library to find its way to Belgrade. The home he shared with his wife Salome in Laupen served over the years as the first point of contact for emerging scholars and colleagues from Eastern Europe.

A milestone of lasting value for scholarship, his four-volume Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, is the culmination of his research, teaching, and publication activity. With this commentary, he not only set the cornerstone in the series "Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar" but at the same time delivered an unachieved model of an exegesis, which is conscious of the Gospel's reception history and history of interpretation. An English translation of the commentary was published from 1989 to 2005. Ulrich Luz succeeded Eduard Schweizer as chief editor of the "Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar", serving in this position for more than twenty years (1995-2016). He also left a lasting imprint as co-editor of the "Werke aus

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dem Nachlass" of Albert Schweitzer, whom he met as a boy in Männedorf. Besides this, he was a longtime co and chief editor of the Journal "Evangelische Theologie." *Theologische Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments*, a late work, brought the broad swath of his career from the church fathers to Bultmann's existential hermeneutic, including liberation feminist theological concepts, and reaching as far as a critical analysis of questions of visual hermeneutics to a conclusion. Concern for the meaning of theological exegesis to the life of the globally diverse church(es) is of noteworthy interest in each chapter of this book. Applying the notion of *Wirkungsgeschichte*, Ulrich Luz worked passionately to observe the inherent power of biblical texts within the broadest possible historical framework. He thereby reminded the exegetical discipline not to keep the Bible in an archival past but to reillumine it continually in consideration of the changing circumstances of the sciences, the church, and society. In this sense, eighty-year-old Ulrich Luz published his final work this past year. It is a book composed together with "ordinary" people, not a book written by theologians, *Das Neue Testament – "Wer, Was, Wo" für Einsteiger* (The New Testament – "Who, What, Where" for Beginners).

The international significance of Ulrich Luz's scholarship is reflected moreover in a large number of academic honors. He received honorary doctorates from Leipzig, Budapest, Sibiu, Lausanne, Prague, Nishinomiya, Uppsala, Cluj-Napoca, Fribourg and Debrecen, the Comenius Medaille Prague as well as the Burkitt Medal for Biblical Studies of the British Academy.

Ulrich Luz began his career in 1980 at the Bern *Evangelisch-Theologische Fakultät*, renamed the Old Catholic and Protestant Theological Faculty in 2001. He was a central figure at the faculty, a man who possessed excellent knowledge of human nature and unerring decision-making ability. From 1986-1988, he was Dean, previously Secretary (1984-1986), and afterward Vice Dean (1988-1990). His clear judgment and his foresight were assets to the Research Commission of the Swiss National Science Foundation at the University of Bern and the University Planning Commission, in which he represented the Protestant-Theological Faculty.

Even after his retirement, Ulrich Luz maintained a presence in the faculty. He was a member of the *Fonds für Ökumenische und Historische Theologie* since its foundation in 1982 – stepping down only this spring. For his eightieth birthday on 23 February 2018, the Institute for New Testament at the Bern Faculty of Theology in conjunction with the Theological Faculty in Basel organized an international symposium to honor Ulrich Luz's life work titled "New Testament and the Church." The collegial ecumenical discussion focused on the fundamental role of biblical tradition and exegetical interpretation for the church and theological discourse.

Ulrich Luz was married to his wife Salome Luz-Keller since October 1968. The couple has three children and five grandchildren. He passed away in the night between October 12 and 13, 2019, shortly after midnight in the company of his family.

The Theological Faculty of the University Bern remember their deceased colleague Ulrich Luz with profound thankfulness.

Prof. Dr. Angela Berlis, Dean