

# Professor Bernhard Word Anderson\*

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(First United Methodist Church of Sunnyvale, California, celebrates its centennial this year of 1998. To celebrate this, I, as chairperson of the Administrative Council, will read this devotional at the beginning of the April meeting.)

Business sent me to Montreal, but Administrative Council vice chairperson Curtis McAllister agreed to present this meeting's devotional.

Last month, we learned about William K. Hooper who served as Sunday school superintendent for fifty years. Today, we enter the academic realm, discussing the contributions of our church's most famous member: Pastor Bernhard Word Anderson.

## 1 Anderson's Service in Sunnyvale

In 1937, 134 members comprised our Sunnyvale church. That year, a young Bernhard, his wife Joyce, and two daughters arrived to minister to the church. We have already heard some of his preaching: at our January meeting, we heard his description of Sunnyvale in the late 1890s.

Before he left in early 1941, our church's nave was remodeled. Also, our church was renamed the First Methodist Church of Sunnyvale because the Methodist Episcopal Church North and the Methodist Episcopal Church South merged to form the Methodist Church.

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## 2 Anderson's Life

His service at Sunnyvale was just one small piece of a productive life. We read bibliographical information from his book *Out of the Depths: Studies into the Meaning of the Book of Psalms* [And70].

Born in Dover, Missouri, Dr. Anderson was educated in California where he received degrees from the College of the Pacific and Pacific School of Religion. In 1939, he was ordained to the ministry of The Methodist Church. He served Methodist churches in California, as well as Congregational churches in Connecticut and New York.

In 1945 he received the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Yale University where he specialized in Old Testament studies. . . . He holds honorary degrees from the Pacific School of Religion, the University of the Pacific, and Colgate University.

As a professor, he served Colgate University in New York, the University of North Carolina, the Colgate Rochester Divinity School, Drew University in New Jersey (where he served as Dean of the Theological School for nine years), and finally as a Professor of Old Testament Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary.

## 3 His Writings

Among his numerous books are *Rediscovering the Bible* [And51] and *Understanding the Old Testament* [And66]. (If you have a copy of either book you no longer want, Jeffrey will gladly accept them.) He also contributed many of the annotations in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* [MM91].

When trying to decide which of his writings to read here today, I considered reading from his academic essay on why Christians need the Old Testament [And63]. After all, Jesus gave us a new covenant so why do we need the old? Instead, I will quote from his undergraduate-level textbook *Understanding the Old Testament* [And66].

In the first chapter of the book, Dr. Anderson spends twenty pages placing the Hebrews among the political situation in the Middle East up to Moses's time. The movements, politics, and military actions of the Amorites, Hittites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, Hurrians, Egyptians, and Habiru (some of which became the

Hebrews) all impact each other, but the reader is left wondering what separates the Hebrews from the other groups. We quote,

From all that has been said, it is clear that the biblical narratives reflect the sober realities of the political situation. But these realities were interpreted through the eyes of Israelite faith. Many other peoples, and many other Habiru, were involved in the disturbed political situation of the Fertile Crescent during the latter half of the second millennium B.C. But only the Hebrews who stood in the circle of Moses experienced the depth of historical meaning that led to the remembering and eventually the writing down of these historical traditions. Historical investigation can help us to understand that the biblical story was intimately tied up with the political development of the time. But it takes religious imagination to go beyond the externals to the inner meaning of the events that Israel proclaimed in the exalted language of worship. In the last analysis, the significance of the Exodus is not determined by its date but by its place in the unfolding of the divine purpose in human affairs.

I leave you with his thought that, amidst the daily tribulations of life, we must actively discern and remember God's work.

## **4 Opening Prayer**

## **5 Closing Prayer**

## **6 Acknowledgments**

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## References

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