



GEORGE ANDERSON

*E. J. Brill*

## George Wishart Anderson 1913–2002

GEORGE WISHART ANDERSON WAS BORN ON 25 JANUARY 1913 at 25 Eliot Street, Arbroath. The date of his birth was appropriate for a Scot who was later to become a biblical scholar and a Methodist minister, for it is the day on which the conversion of St Paul is celebrated in the church, and also the day on whose evening the poet Robert Burns is commemorated. He was the elder son of George Anderson (1879–1957), who was a cabinetmaker, and Margaret Gordon, *née* Wishart (1880–1964). He was educated at Arbroath High School, and was awarded a Harkness scholarship to St Andrews University in 1931. There, he read Classics, and graduated with first-class honours in 1935. His studies continued at Cambridge, where he was trained for the Methodist ministry at Wesley House, and where he also read Theology at Fitzwilliam House (now Fitzwilliam College) in Cambridge University, and was placed in the first class in the Theological Tripos, Part IB in 1937. He spent another year reading for the more specialised Theological Tripos, Part II, in Old Testament studies, and was placed in the second class in 1938.

The next academic year was spent abroad in further biblical studies. Germany was, of course, not an appropriate place for such a study in the days of the Nazi regime, and Anderson went on a Finch scholarship to Sweden, a less common country for British scholars in which to pursue graduate studies. He went to Lund University without a knowledge of Swedish, but such was his linguistic ability that by the end of the first term he was able to submit a paper in that language. His special interest continued to be the Old Testament, and he was glad to be able to study under Professor Johannes Lindblom. Anderson made friends with a

number of Swedish students, and he acquired an interest in Scandinavian biblical scholarship that was to continue for the rest of his life.

After returning to the United Kingdom, Anderson served as assistant tutor at Richmond College, London, another Methodist theological college, from 1939 until 1941, and was ordained to the Methodist ministry in 1940. On 14 June 1941 he married Edith Joyce Marjorie (known as Joy) Walter (1912–1958), a tax officer with Inland Revenue, and the daughter of Edwin Harold Walter, and in due course they had a son and a daughter. In 1941 he also became a Methodist chaplain in the RAF, and he served until 1946 in Egypt, the Sudan, and Palestine, and was thus for the first time able to see the land that was the scene of most of the Old Testament story.

Anderson's next work was to teach Old Testament studies to candidates for the Methodist ministry at Handsworth College, Birmingham, from 1946 until 1956, and he was also a recognised lecturer at Birmingham University. Then, in 1956, he went back to Scotland and his own university as Lecturer in Old Testament Literature and Theology at St Andrews, but in 1958 he was appointed Professor of Old Testament Studies at Durham University. Two weeks before the move to Durham, his wife died. In addition to the feelings of loss, he had to care alone for their two children and to face the problems of moving house. Her death cast a shadow over all the time the family spent in Durham. However, on 27 July 1959 he married his late wife's cousin, Annie Phyllis Walter (1908–1999), a schoolteacher and the daughter of Alfred William Walter.

Anderson's final appointment was at Edinburgh University, where in 1962 he became Professor of Old Testament Literature and Theology. In 1968, after the retirement of N. W. Porteous as Professor of Hebrew and Semitic Languages, the title of Anderson's chair was changed to Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Studies. He taught Hebrew to undergraduates in the Faculty of Arts, and lectured on the Old Testament to candidates for the ministry of the Church of Scotland and for the degree of BD. In addition, he taught graduate students, not only from the United Kingdom, but also from various countries, including several from South-East Asia. He was a lucid and thorough lecturer, and he took a personal interest in his pupils. He retired from his chair in 1982 and became emeritus professor.

The contribution made by Anderson to the study of the Old Testament was not confined to the universities and colleges in which he taught. He was an active member of the Society for Old Testament Study. From 1957 to 1966 he edited the Society's annual *Book List*, which contains

brief reviews of books that had recently been published on the Old Testament and related subjects and is an invaluable bibliographical aid to those interested in biblical studies. The issues published during the years when Anderson was the editor were brought together into a single volume in 1967 as *A Decade of Bible Bibliography* (Oxford). It has also been the practice of the Society to publish from time to time, after intervals of some years, books containing a number of essays by various scholars surveying developments in scholarship in the preceding years. Anderson, who contributed to one such volume in 1951, was the editor of *Tradition and Interpretation*, which appeared in Oxford in 1979. He served as President in 1963 and as honorary Foreign Secretary from 1964 to 1974.

Anderson's interest in biblical scholarship outside the United Kingdom, which was seen already during his year at Lund, and which also appeared in his editing of the *Book List* and serving as Foreign Secretary, led him to play a part in the work of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, which was founded in 1948. He was one of the group of scholars who founded the quarterly journal *Vetus Testamentum*, which was published under the auspices of the IOSOT, beginning in 1951. Anderson was a member of the editorial board from the beginning until 1975, and after that a member of the advisory committee for the rest of his life. He was the Secretary of the IOSOT between 1956 and 1971, and the President from 1971 to 1974, when its triennial congress was held in Edinburgh.

A contribution to the work of Bible translation was made by Anderson for three projects. First, he played a part in the preparation of an English translation of the Psalms (1993) that was intended to help those working for the British and Foreign Bible Society and others seeking to translate books of the Bible into a variety of languages throughout the world. It was intended that such an English rendering would bring the resources of modern scholarship to help translators to understand the meaning of the text which they were seeking to translate into their own languages. Secondly, he was responsible for the first draft of the rendering of one of the books of the Apocrypha for the *New English Bible* (1970). Thirdly, he was one of those who revised the *NEB's* rendering of the books of the Old Testament for *the Revised English Bible* (1989).

Anderson received invitations to give special named lectures: the Charles Ryder Smith memorial lecture in 1964; the Fernley-Hartley lecture in 1969; the Henton Davies lecture in 1977; and the A. S. Peake memorial lecture in 1984. In addition, he was elected to the Speaker's Lectureship in Biblical Studies at Oxford University to give a series of lectures in 1976–9.

He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1972, and was awarded the Academy's Burkitt Medal for Biblical Studies in 1982. The Royal Society of Edinburgh elected him to a Fellowship in 1977. The University of St Andrews conferred on him an honorary Doctorate of Divinity in 1959, and the University of Lund an honorary Doctorate of Theology in 1971.

Anderson's achievements as a scholar were honoured by the publication of two series of essays. The first was the January issue of *Vetus Testamentum*, 32 (1982), with articles by nine scholars, and a list of his publications. The second was a volume entitled *Understanding Poets and Prophets* (1993), which was edited by A. G. Auld, a former pupil, and contained twenty-eight articles and a list bringing Anderson's publications up to date. It is good that the latter publication was able to give a larger number of scholars an opportunity to honour Anderson than was possible in the 128 pages available in a single issue of a journal. It is a pity, however, that the preface to the latter volume (p. 11) said of the former that it 'was largely an "in house" affair', and that only three articles accompanied 'those by his journal collaborators'. In fact, only two articles were by members of the editorial board and two by former members, whereas five (not three) were by scholars without the same connection with the journal.

Two publications edited by Anderson have already been mentioned: *A Decade of Bible Bibliography*, and *Tradition and Interpretation* (for which he wrote an introduction about recent changes in Old Testament scholarship). His knowledge of Scandinavian languages enabled him to translate two books from the Norwegian. The first is *He that Cometh* (1956), by Sigmund Mowinckel, an important study of the origins of the messianic hope and its relation to ideas of kingship. The second, *The Ras Shamra Discoveries and the Old Testament* (1965), by A. S. Kapelrud, is an account of the clay tablets from the site of the ancient city of Ugarit in Syria on which were found texts in a hitherto unknown cuneiform alphabet and a hitherto unknown North-West Semitic language closely related to Hebrew. A further two books were entirely Anderson's own work. *A Critical Introduction to the Old Testament* (1959) was probably the best moderately sized work on the subject, and was widely used by students for many years. Unfortunately, it is in the nature of such works to become out of date in some respects unless they are regularly revised. A second edition in 1994 contained a revised bibliography and also a few pages summarising some recent developments in scholarship. Anderson told me, however, that he would have preferred if it had been possible to pre-

pare a full revision. *The History and Religion of Israel* (1966), in the New Clarendon Bible series, is a text-book of a less advanced level, and a Chinese translation of it was published in 1990. Both books display good judgement and evidence of wide reading in the subjects discussed, and also Anderson's gift of concise and lucid writing.

Many of Anderson's publications took the form of articles in periodicals or other works. Some of them will not be considered here because they are examples of *haute vulgarisation*, such as the series of articles on books of the Old Testament in the *Preacher's Quarterly* between 1961 and 1964, rather than fresh contributions to scholarship. For the same reason there will be no discussion of such publications as essays in one-volume commentaries on the Bible or new bibliographies added to books by other writers. Sometimes, however, it is difficult to decide to which category to assign a particular publication. For example, a review article in the *Expository Times* for 1962 on T. C. Vriezen's *Outline of Old Testament Theology* was written with non-specialist readers in mind, but it is also worth studying by more advanced scholars. The following discussion of Anderson's work will focus attention on articles intended for them.

One of Anderson's earliest articles, which arose from his studies in Sweden, is 'Some aspects of the Uppsala School of Old Testament Study', in the *Harvard Theological Review*, 43 (1950), pp. 239–56. The article helped to inform readers about a group of Swedish and other Scandinavian scholars and their work on the Old Testament, who were challenging generally accepted views about Israelite religion and the composition and transmission of the books of the Old Testament. The background to the opinions of these Scandinavian scholars, who were far from agreeing with one another on every subject, may be seen in the work of earlier writers in Scandinavia between the two world wars. But the more recent scholars tended to go farther than their predecessors, and their approach took on a particularly aggressive form in the work of Ivan Engnell in Uppsala. The most striking aspects of the views of such scholars are summarised by Anderson as follows:

In the fields of textual and literary criticism great emphasis is laid on the importance and reliability of oral tradition. In the study of religion the school is anti-evolutionist, and is concerned to stress the abiding positive influence of the cult, and the importance of the rôle both of king and prophet in the cult. These lines converge in a rigorous attack on the analysis of the literature and the reconstruction of the history of the religion which are associated with the name of [Julius] Wellhausen (pp. 239–40).

Anderson discusses in detail Scandinavian theories on these subjects, noting also dissenting opinions, such as G. Widengren's argument, which is based partly on a study of the Arabic evidence, that oral tradition was less influential than scholars like Engnell maintained. Anderson's primary aim in his article is to expound the views of the new school of scholars, rather than to assess their strength, but it is evident that he is far from accepting all the opinions that he describes. His disagreement becomes more plain in his later publications.

It was probably Anderson's next article that first drew attention to him as a promising Old Testament scholar. His essay on 'Hebrew Religion' in *The Old Testament and Modern Study* (1951), edited by H. H. Rowley, pp. 283–310, was one of the series of books prepared by the Society for Old Testament Study on recent developments in scholarly work, and Anderson had in mind primarily the preceding fifteen years. Not surprisingly, much space is devoted to Scandinavian work, but attention is also paid to other scholars such as the German Albrecht Alt and his writing on the God of the patriarchs, and the American W. F. Albright and his claim that it is justified to apply the term 'monotheism' to the religion of Moses, whereas the British scholar H. H. Rowley regards the expression 'implicit' or 'incipient monotheism' as more appropriate. Mention is made of the stress by some scholars on the importance of the cult, the status of the Israelite king and the theory of Engnell that the king 'in his cultic role' was 'identical both with the creator high god . . . and, as such,' played 'a decisive part, both as the suffering servant of Yahweh and as the victor over the powers of chaos' (p. 296). Anderson is sceptical about Engnell's ideas on the subject. Mowinckel's claim that the autumnal festival included a cultic enthronement of the God of Israel is criticised, and preference is expressed for Otto Eissfeldt's argument that 'proper names compounded with' the Hebrew word for 'king' are 'very rare until the end of the monarchy, which is hardly what one would expect if the Kingship of Yahweh were being annually celebrated in so popular a festival as that of Ingathering' (p. 297). Various other theories are considered, and Anderson comments in the final paragraph of his article that 'Hebrew religion cannot be described in terms of a smooth, orderly historical development' (p. 309).

A later article in the *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute*, 6 (1967–8), pp. 4–19, discusses the career and publications of his teacher in Lund, Johannes Lindblom, whose views differed from those of the so-called Uppsala school. Lindblom wrote on various biblical subjects, among them the religion of ancient Israel, Job, and the prophets. His

study of Isaiah 24–7 regarded it as a cantata composed for use in Jerusalem to celebrate the fall of Babylon to Xerxes in 485 BC. Lindblom also wrote on the Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah, and more generally on prophecy in ancient Israel. Anderson writes appreciatively of Lindblom's work, and he was himself later to write on Isaiah 24–7.

In other articles, Anderson discusses particular passages of the Old Testament and also particular topics. His article on Isaiah 24–7 was read as a paper at an IOSOT congress and was published in *Congress Volume: Bonn 1962* (Leiden, 1963), pp. 118–26. He discusses various theories and argues (like Lindblom) that 'there is a substantial unity in these chapters', but it is 'the unity of a prophetic response to a particular situation', rather than 'the unity of a carefully articulated argumentative poem' (p. 122). These chapters 'are to be assigned to the earlier rather than to the later post-exilic period, a writing which is prophetic rather than apocalyptic in character' (p. 126). The reference in 26.19 to the swallowing up of death can be understood as a 'promise of national renewal', rather than an example of the later belief in individual resurrection (p. 126). Anderson notes affinities with Haggai and Zechariah (late sixth century), and presumably dates Isaiah 24–7 in the same period. Two shorter articles are a discussion of Psalm 1.1 in *Vetus Testamentum*, 24 (1974), pp. 221–3, in honour of Erling Hammershaimb, a Danish member of the editorial board; and of Micah 6.1–8 (especially of the last verse), in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 4 (1951), pp. 191–7.

An article that is concerned, not with a single passage, but with a subject that appears in a number of passages, is 'Enemies and Evildoers in the Book of Psalms', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 48 (1965–6), pp. 18–29. This is a subject that has attracted various theories, especially from German and also Scandinavian writers. Is the subject of the complaint to be understood as the nation as a whole, or an individual, and, if an individual, is he the king? Are the enemies foreign nations, or are they Israelite foes? Are they godless Jews in the post-exilic period, or do they belong to an earlier time? Is the reference to demonic enemies who threaten the king in the New Year festival? These and other questions have been asked, and corresponding theories have been advanced. Anderson states that there is 'no single solution which satisfactorily accounts for all the factors in the problem'. He also thinks that a number of the psalms have been altered and adapted to fit different situations. There 'is no single key to unlock all the doors', and 'In general, the prayers which they contain were not intended for use on one and only one occasion, but were used on many different occasions' (p. 28).



In an article in *Translating and Understanding the Old Testament: Essays in Honor of Herbert Gordon May* (Nashville and New York, 1970), pp. 135–51, Anderson shares in honouring another member of the editorial board of *Vetus Testamentum*. He discusses the vexed question of the nature of early Israel, with special reference to the theory of Martin Noth that it was a confederation of twelve tribes analogous to an ancient Greek amphictyony. Anderson does not find Noth's detailed theory convincing. 'The indications are', he thinks, 'not so much of centralization and unity as the fragments of a unity not yet realized, or rather of a lost unity surviving as an ideal. . . Further, the narratives about the rise of the monarchy presuppose an already existing consciousness of Israelite unity' (p. 149).

'Some Observations of the Old Testament Doctrine of the Remnant', in *Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society*, 23 (1969–70— but published in 1972), pp. 1–10, notes the various ways in which the Old Testament uses terms for a remnant, and he distinguishes between those that mean, for example, 'what is left over, without any further implication of good or evil', and those that have the connotation of a faithful few who hold a promise for the future. The latter type of passage is more appropriate to theories of a doctrine of the remnant. Anderson returns to the same subject in the *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute*, 11 (1977–8), pp. 11–15, in an issue dedicated to Gillis Gerleman, who had been a fellow-student with Anderson and became a professor at Lund. The article is concerned with the doctrine of the remnant in the book of Zephaniah, and Anderson finds it in 2.3, and 9b; 3.11–13.

A substantial article on 'Canonical and non-canonical' in the first volume of *The Cambridge History of the Bible* (Cambridge, 1970), edited by P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans, pp. 113–59, discusses 'The definition of Canonicity', 'Acts of canonisation', 'The enumeration and arrangement of the contents of the Canon', 'The Canon in different Jewish communities', and 'Canonical and non-canonical' (i.e. the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha).

A different type of subject is considered in 'Israel's Creed: Sung, not Signed', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 16 (1963), pp. 277–85, which was Anderson's Presidential paper to the Society for Old Testament Study on 2 January 1963. He maintains that the Old Testament is a confessional document, though not one like the Westminster Confession. It is

neither a consciously formulated propositional confession, nor simply the *disiecta membra* from which the story of Israel's religion may be recovered, but

a *corpus*, or, if you prefer, a collection of *corpora*, which both issued from and moulded the life of a religious community (p. 280).

The Psalter is the supremely representative theological document of the Old Testament precisely because in it you see most sharply not only the available material but also the problems which have to be faced in any attempt at a theological interpretation of the Old Testament (p. 283).

With this article may be compared Anderson's essay "Sicut cervus": evidence in the Psalter of private devotion in ancient Israel', *Vetus Testamentum*, 30 (1980), pp. 388–97, in which he discusses 'whether the Psalter reflects in any measure not only the liturgical worship of ancient Israel but also the inner devotional experience of individual Israelites' (p. 388). He advances arguments for believing that it does thus reflect such individual piety. Related to the conclusions of this article is the discussion of 'The Christian Use of the Psalms', in *Studia Evangelica*, 7 (1982), pp. 5–10, in which he examines ways in which Christians may legitimately use the psalms.

Finally, 'Two Scottish Semitists', *Congress Volume: Edinburgh 1974* (1975), pp. ix–xxix, is Anderson's Presidential address to the IOSOT at the congress over which he presided. He examines the question why, when William Robertson Smith was dismissed from his chair in Aberdeen, A. B. Davidson, who had been his teacher in Edinburgh, did not play an active part in his defence, although he did vote against his dismissal. Anderson accepts the explanation that, although Davidson accepted critical scholarship and agreed with much that Smith said, he thought that he was too aggressive and that his pugnacity was likely to harm the church. 'This may be a partial explanation'; Davidson's 'strategy was not revolutionary but Fabian' (p. xix).

It would be a mistake to look for radically new ideas and revolutionary theories in Anderson's scholarly writings. He was not that kind of scholar. His writings show thorough knowledge of the subjects discussed, a fair but critical evaluation of theories, a balanced judgement, and the presentation of conclusions reached by rational argument.

In character, Anderson was a modest, quiet and friendly person. As a teacher, his lectures were thorough and lucidly presented, as were the papers that he read at conferences. He took a personal and friendly interest in his pupils, and also in others whom he met. It was typical of him that, when I went to Birmingham University as a young and inexperienced temporary assistant lecturer, I found him welcoming, and a friendship began that was to last until his death half a century later. Nor was I

the only young scholar to whom he offered friendship and encouragement. He had a quiet and gentle sense of humour and could enjoy a joke. He observed with humour the foibles of his colleagues in church as well as in the academic community, and had some amusing anecdotes to recount about them, but I never heard him say anything spiteful or malicious. While himself a loyal member and minister of the Methodist Church, he had a broad outlook and could associate happily with people of a different loyalty or faith, or absence of it.

Anderson's interests extended well beyond the limits of Hebraic, biblical, and theological studies. He was fond of literature and poetry, especially by Scottish writers, for he was proud of being a Scot. He was the chairman of both the Walter Scott Club and the Robert Louis Stevenson Club. He preferred these two writers to Robert Burns, though he read much of Burns's poetry in his latter years. He also taught himself Gaelic, and added that language to the many that he knew. Mention was made above of his knowledge of Swedish and his translation of two books from Norwegian into English. He also knew Danish and Icelandic. As well as knowing the language, he enjoyed reading Swedish literature and poetry. Such was his knowledge of Swedish that he was able to help someone who wished to find out about an ancient variety of Swedish turnip that was introduced into East Lothian, and who sent him an eighteenth-century document in Swedish about Swedish agriculture. Anderson was able to translate the document on sight, despite the fact that the Swedish of the eighteenth century differs from that of modern times.

His health was not good in his later years: he had several strokes and was bedridden for his last fifteen months at a time when he was saddened by the death of his second wife, which also brought home to him again the sadness of his first wife's death. Nevertheless, he remained remarkably cheerful and started reading a new edition of Scott's novels. He never lost the twinkle in his eye. He died on 17 March 2002 in his home at 51 Fountainhall Road, Edinburgh, and he was buried by his son and daughter on the twenty-fifth day of the same month in St Andrews in the western cemetery.

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*Note.* I am grateful to Mrs Margaret Hewitson for her help in preparing this obituary of her father.