

Kern, Paul Bentley ^[1]

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by Grady L. E. Carroll, 1988

16 June 1882–16 Dec. 1953

Paul Bentley Kern, Methodist ^[2] bishop and educator, was born at Alexandria, Va., the son of Dr. John A. and Margaret Virginia Eskridge Kern. His father was a longtime professor of English Bible at Randolph-Macon College ^[3], briefly president of that institution, and later professor at Vanderbilt University. ^[4]

Kern was a student at Randolph-Macon during the years 1897–99 and was graduated from Vanderbilt in 1905. Ordained deacon and elder by Bishop Elijah E. Hoss, he became assistant director of the correspondence school of the Vanderbilt University School of Religion for training ministers. From 1910 to 1915 he was successively pastor of churches in Nashville, Bellbuckle, and Murfreesboro, Tenn. For the next five years he was professor of ministerial efficiency at Southern Methodist University, where from 1920 to 1926 he was dean of the School of Theology. In 1926 Kern became pastor of a church in San Antonio, Tex., and remained in the post until elected bishop in 1930. Assigned to the Orient for four years, he next became presiding bishop of the four conferences in the Carolinas from 1934 to 1938. Other assignments took him to Cuba, Florida, and Tennessee until he retired in 1952. He was a frequent lecturer at Southern Methodist University, Vanderbilt University, Emory University ^[5], and elsewhere from 1930 until his retirement.

Bishop Kern was the author of *A Methodist Church and Its Works* ^[6] (with Worth M. Tippy), *The Miracle of the Galilean: Methodism Has a Message*, and *The Basic Beliefs of Jesus: A Story of the Assumptions Behind Life*. In 1948 he was a delegate from the Methodist church to the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam, and in 1952 at the General Conference in San Francisco he presented the Episcopal Address which attracted nationwide attention for its incisiveness and comprehensive pronouncements on many subjects. The recipient of honorary degrees from seven colleges and universities, he was called a "vigorous, progressive, dynamic leader."

In 1952 a campaign was conducted and funds were raised for the construction of a youth center at the Lake Junaluska Assembly Grounds and named in his memory. He was a longtime trustee of the Assembly and made his home at Lake Junaluska. There he and E. O. Harbin were instrumental in founding the Youth Caravan Movement of the Methodist church.

Kern married Lucy Campbell, and they were the parents of John Campbell, Virginia, and Katherine. There is a portrait and a manuscript biography of him at Southern Methodist University. He was buried in Nashville, Tenn.

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