

**THE GEORG SVERDRUP
SOCIETY NEWSLETTER**

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Ordet Blev Kjødt
(The Word Became Flesh)

Directors

Loiell Dyrud, President
Steve Mundfrom, Vice President
Marian Christopherson, Secretary
Kris Nyman, Treasurer
Larry Walker, Editor
Micah Hjermstad
Craig Johnson

Prospective members are invited to contact the treasurer at the above address.

The Georg Sverdrup Society was organized in December 2003 and is open to anyone interested in the life and work of noted Norwegian-American theologian Georg Sverdrup (1848-1907). The society is registered in the State of Minnesota as a 501(C)(3) nonprofit corporation. Its activities, which are guided by a seven-member board of directors, include:

- Promoting the study and understanding of the New Testament congregation as understood and explained by Georg Sverdrup;
- Endeavoring to advance the ideal of “free and living congregations” as envisioned by Sverdrup;
- Seeking to foster further translation of Sverdrup’s writings into English;
- Encouraging the study and application of the “Fundamental Principles” and “Rules for Work” as used in the Lutheran Free Church and as continuing to be used in the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations;
- Enlarging the interest in Sverdrup’s works by organizing discussion groups and providing speakers on request;
- Operating a **Sverdrup Society** website linked to <www.aflc.org> for members of the Society and others interested in the life and work of Georg Sverdrup;
- Maintaining a current bibliography of Sverdrup’s translated work as well as a current bibliography of materials written about him;
- Publishing a newsletter for members that provides information on the Society’s activities as well as general information about Georg Sverdrup;
- And encouraging research and study of Sverdrup’s life and work by publishing an annual *Sverdrup Journal*.

Photos From Society Events



Pastor Martin Horn addresses the Society Annual Meeting program in October.



Panel discussion at January Discussion Forum at AFLTS.



Seminarians participate in the Discussion Forum.

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NEWSLETTER

Georg Sverdrup Society Holds 2010 Program and Annual Meeting



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The Georg Sverdrup Society held its 2010 program and annual meeting on October 9 at Maranatha Lutheran Church in Glyndon, Minnesota, just east of Moorhead.

Following the noon luncheon, Rev. Martin Horn, Society President, led the program. Rev. Lloyd Quanbeck, host pastor, gave the Invocation, followed by a “Sverdrup Songfest” with Marian Christopherson leading songs known at the time of Georg Sverdrup. This year’s selections were Grundtvig’s *Guds ord det er vårt arvegods* (“God’s Word Is Our Great Heritage”), Martin Luther’s *Hold oppe, Gud,*

hos os dit ord (“Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word”), and Landstad’s *Du hellige Guds kirke her* (“Thou Holy Church, God’s City, Shine”).

Mr. Larry Walker read his recent Sverdrup translation, “Luther and the Bible,” and Mr. Loiell Dyrud spoke on “The Influence of the Sverdrups in Norway and America.”

After a coffee break, the society held its annual business meeting. After discussing several potential topics for 2011, the group passed a motion calling for the GSS board to make the final decision. Board members elected for three year terms were Rev.

Stephen Mundfrom, Rev. Micah Hjermstad, and Loiell Dyrud.

Immediately after the business meeting, the board met to reorganize. Loiell Dyrud was elected President; Steve Mundfrom, Vice President; Marian Christopherson, Secretary; and Kris Nyman, Treasurer and Membership Secretary. The board chose “Georg Sverdrup and the Role of the Laity” as the 2011 topic for study and discussion.

The 2011 annual meeting will be held in Minneapolis on Saturday, October 8.

Georg Sverdrup

- Born to Pastor Harold Ulrich Sverdrup and his wife Caroline Metella, nee Suur, at Balestrand, Sogn, Norway, on December 16, 1848.
- Died on May 3, 1907, in Minneapolis, MN, and buried in the Lakewood Cemetery

FLHF Plans Weenaas Event

“Prior to Sverdrup and Oftedal, there was August Weenaas.”

The Free Lutheran Historical Forum, an informal fellowship of some who are interested in our common heritage, will meet at 1 p.m. on Monday, May 2, at Heritage Hall on the AFLC Schools campus. (You may arrive at noon and purchase lunch in the cafeteria.) We will travel together to the Minneapolis Pioneers’ and



Soldiers’ Cemetery in south Minneapolis to visit the

Weenaas family gravesite and then continue on to Faith Lutheran Church (the former Rosedale Church) for coffee, refreshments, and discussion of the place of August Weenaas in the origin of the Free Lutheran movement in America. For further information, contact Pastor Robert Lee, email address rlee@aflc.org.

Georg Sverdrup: “We Lay People”

By Loiell Dyrud

The topic chosen by the Georg Sverdrup Society for study and discussion in 2011 is “Georg Sverdrup and the Role of the Laity.” It is a topic that lies at the heart of Sverdrup’s emphasis on the “living” congregation, in which all members are to be involved.

Though Sven Oftedal (Georg Sverdrup’s close friend, fellow professor at Augsburg Seminary, and co-founder of the Lutheran Free Church) was ordained, Sverdrup was not. Both had earned seminary degrees from the University of Christiania (Oslo), and both had come to America within a year of each other, Oftedal in 1873 and Sverdrup in 1874. Besides a full teaching load in the seminary, Oftedal was called to serve as pastor of Trinity Lutheran Congregation, a couple blocks south of campus. He accepted and was ordained in 1874.

Sverdrup, on the other hand, according to biographer Andreas Helland, never sought “ordination in America, and it was with a certain mixture of humor and seriousness that he often used the expression ‘we lay people’ in contrast to the pastors. But although he was not an ordained clergy, he was nevertheless an able preacher and was much sought as such.”¹ No doubt his work as president of Augsburg Seminary, professor of Old Testament and Dogmatics, and prolific writer of extensive articles afforded him little time to consider an official call to a congregation. Or did he avoid ordination purposely?

Though he was never ordained, Sverdrup was included in the 1928 *Who’s Who Among Pastors in All the Norwegian Lutheran Synods of America 1843-1927*. This compendium of pastors includes pictures and biographical sketches of 2,522 Lutheran pastors. In the Preface, the editors note, “No unordained men

have been included except professors who at some time have taught theology in the seminaries operated by the synods named.”² Their numbers are few. Only eight can be found with “Not ordained” under their names, and Georg Sverdrup is one of them. The remaining 2,516 have their ordination dates recorded.

The *Who’s Who* covers an 84-year period. Considering the number of seminaries and professors involved over that period of time, having only eight non-ordained professors indicates how rare that situation was. Of further significance, five of the eight are associated with Augsburg College and Seminary. Were these Augsburg men following the example of their Mentor?

The five Augsburg non-ordained men in the *Who’s Who* were all graduates of Augsburg Seminary, or at least had attended the seminary. John Thoresen Bugge is listed as having graduated from Augsburg Seminary in 1882 and taught there from 1882 until his death in 1891. John Sigurd “Si” Melby graduated from Augsburg Seminary in 1914. After teaching at other colleges, he came back to Augsburg in 1920 and served as teacher, coach, and Dean of Men until 1942. (Today the multi-purpose athletic facility at Augsburg College bears his name, “Si Melby Hall.”) Johannes Ludvigsen Nydahl graduated from Augsburg Seminary in 1891 and taught in the seminary until he became librarian in 1920. George Sverdrup, son of Georg Sverdrup, attended Augsburg Seminary, came back as a theological professor in 1909, and served as President of Augsburg College and Seminary from 1911-1938.

Two other “Not ordained” professors taught at Red Wing Seminary, the Hauge’s Synod seminary. Hans Hanson Bergsland graduated from Red Wing Seminary in 1886 and was

a theological professor from 1887 until his death in 1907, and Edward William Schmidt was president and professor at Red Wing Seminary from 1908-1918.

The only other non-ordained person included is John J. Anderson, who was teacher and president of Augustana College (Sioux Falls) from 1870-1876 when it was still in Marshall, Wisconsin.

We cannot know for certain why Sverdrup chose not to seek ordination, but his resolute retention of his layman status was perhaps an attempt to emphasize Luther’s “priesthood of all believers” and to send the message that this calling was to be taken seriously by the laity, and that spiritual activity in the congregation was not to be the sole domain of the clergy. It is probably better to view the matter this way than to attribute it to some quirk on his part.

¹ Andreas Helland, *Georg Sverdrup: The Man and His Message 1848-1907* (Minneapolis: The Messenger Press, 1947), 193.

² Rasmus Malmin, O. M. Norlie, and O. A. Tingelstad, eds. *Who’s Who Among Pastors in All the Norwegian Lutheran Synods of America 1843-1927*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1928), ii.

GSS Holds Fifth Annual Seminary Discussion Forum

The Georg Sverdrup Society held its fifth annual Discussion Forum Friday morning, January 28, at Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary in Minneapolis. The topic was “Georg Sverdrup and The Word” and featured papers by Rev. Stephen Mundfrom of Valley City, ND, and Rev. Jerry Moan of the seminary faculty. Rev. Joel Rolf, Dean of Association Free Lutheran Bible School, opened with a brief devotional, followed by Mr. Larry Walker reading his new translation of a Sverdrup article, “Luther and the Bible.”

Rev. Mundfrom presented the first paper, “According to the Word of God . . .” Georg Sverdrup’s Doctrine of the Word.” Citing evidence from Sverdrup’s writings, the historical conditions in Norwegian midwestern America in the latter half of the 19th century, and the reverence for God’s Word in his sermons, and the Fundamental Principles of the Lutheran Free Church, there is little empirical evidence that Sverdrup held any position other than a high view of Scripture.

Rev. Moan’s presentation was entitled “Georg Sverdrup

as Interpreter of the Word.” Moan noted that Sverdrup, the Old Testament professor, spent much of his lectures explaining how Old Testament prophecy foretold New Testament events, including the coming of Christ and the congregation. Much of Moan’s time was spent on Sverdrup’s lectures on Matthew.

The third session was a panel discussion in which Dr. Francis Monseth, Rev. Martin Horn, Rev. Mundfrom, and Mr. Loiell Dyrud discussed Sverdrup’s view of Scripture.

Dr. Monseth quoted extensively from the Systematic Theology text authored by University of Oslo Professor Gisle Johnson. According to Sverdrup, Johnson was the seminary professor who influenced him most. Nowhere is there evidence that Johnson sympathized with the biblical higher criticism common in German seminaries. In fact, the opposite is true.

Pastor Mundfrom pointed out that had Sverdrup held to a more liberal approach to Scripture, it would have contradicted his emphasis on lay activity, as laymen hardly possess the academic

background necessary to analyze Scripture from a critical standpoint. According to church historian E. Clifford Nelson, none of the Norwegian-American Lutheran church bodies of that time were involved in biblical criticism.

Rev. Horn pointed to Sverdrup’s embrace of *barnelaerdom*, the simple Norwegian approach to teaching the Bible in such a way that children and layman of all ages and intelligence could understand their basic truths. Further, Sverdrup rejected the notion that because of their advanced education, the clergy should be an elevated class. He cast his lot with the laity and believed both clergy and laity should work together in the vital ministry of the congregation.

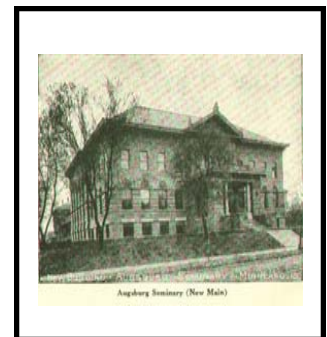
Many in the audience posed probing questions regarding Sverdrup’s high view of the Word and his concept of the congregation.

The papers presented in this discussion forum will be published later this spring in volume 7 of *The Sverdrup Journal*.

Photos on back page.



Larry Walker reads “Luther and the Bible”



Sverdrup Society Website

Members and friends of the Georg Sverdrup Society with internet connections are reminded to check our website at georgsverdrupsociety.org. It includes the mission statement of the society, a list of the current directors, and the following translations:

The Norwegian Lutheran Churches in America (1897),
The Free Church Fellowship

(1877-78),

The Lutheran Free Church (1897),

David and Jonathan (1877),

The Principles of Augsburg (1894) delivered on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Augsburg Seminary, and

A Sermon on John 14:23-31 preached by Professor Sverdrup on Pentecost Sun-

day 1902 at Trinity Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, MN.

There is also a link for those who desire to receive further information about the society.

We are grateful to member Nathaniel Olson, Fargo, ND, for maintaining the site. Future plans call for the inclusion of a biographical sketch of Sverdrup plus other translated material.