



# The Georg Sverdrup Society

## NEWSLETTER

### 2012 GSS Annual Meeting Honors Dr. James S. Hamre

**In This Issue:**

<b>2012 GSS Annual Meeting Honors Hamre</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>"Sven Oftedal" Study Choice for 2013</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>"Sverdrup and Controversy Discussion Forum</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Photos</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>"It Is Finished" Translation</b>	<b>4</b>

The Ninth Annual Meeting of the Georg Sverdrup Society was held October 13, 2012, at the Radisson Hotel in Fargo, North Dakota, the site of the Georg Sverdrup Society's organization in December 2003. The first annual meeting was also held there in October 2004.

This year's program was organized as a tribute to Dr. James S. Hamre, an inspiration and guide to the society for the past decade. Rev. Terry Olson of Grand Forks, North Dakota, gave the Invo-

cation. Rev. Robert Lee, faculty

member at AFLC Schools, led the "Sverdrup Songfest," including "Jeg har en ven" ("I Have a Friend") and "Den Himmelske Lovsang" ("The Heavenly Hymn"). The latter came to Madagascar with Norwegian missionaries and is still sung by Malagasy carolers each Easter Sunday morning at sunrise. After the audience had sung a verse in Norwegian, Pastor Lee asked Mrs. Karen Knudsvig, who served on the mission field in Madagascar, to sing a verse in Malagasy. It was a reminder to everyone of Sverdrup's

*(continued on page 2)*



*Dr. James S. Hamre (left) receives a plaque from GSS Pres. Loiell Dyrud, "For a Lifetime Devoted to Preserving the Legacy of Georg Sverdrup" at the Annual Meeting in Fargo.*

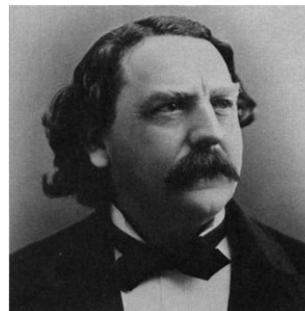
### "Sven Oftedal" Choice for Study in 2013

**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.

Georg Sverdrup and Sven Oftedal were lifelong friends—inseparable during their tenure at Augsburg Seminary and collaborators in the founding of the Lutheran Free Church. Their friendship began years before coming to America, as N. N. Rønning explains: "I remember Oftedal telling me that he and 'Georg' [Sverdrup] had discussed their common aims and plans in Paris while cracking nuts."<sup>1</sup>

Born in 1844 in Stavanger, Oftedal studied languages,



philosophy, and theology in Norway and on the continent. He arrived at Augsburg on November 4, 1873, at age 29. The young school had 30 students and had recently moved from Wisconsin.

Prof. Oftedal taught church history and perhaps New Testament, as he could preach in Greek.

Soon he prevailed on his friend Georg Sverdrup to join him at Augsburg, and Sverdrup arrived in 1874. Oftedal was an adherent of the "new school," promoting the concept that "the individual congregation is 'the church,' and should act with other congregations for common purposes only, and reserve to itself control re-

*(continued on page 2)*

## Annual Meeting Honors Dr. James S. Hamre (cont.)

interest in missions and particularly his devotion to the early Madagascar mission.

Rev. Martin Horn of Kenyon, Minnesota, past president of the GSS, and Dr. Francis Monseth, Dean of Association Free Lutheran Seminary, spoke in tribute to Dr. Hamre.

Pastor Horn told how his father, a Norwegian immigrant, loved Sverdrup's work greatly and translated articles from *Samlede Skrifte i Udvalg*. Horn also shared that after seminary he discovered Dr. Hamre's dissertation on Sverdrup and was captivated by Sverdrup's views on the congregation, explained in Hamre's 150 pages of translations. Through the years, Horn has actively shared Hamre's work with others, finally resulting in the organization of the GSS. Horn cited the value of Hamre's articles about Sverdrup, especially his 1986 biography *Georg Sverdrup: Educator, Theologian, Churchman*.

Dr. Monseth shared how important Hamre's work was to him while studying at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. There in the 1970s he had discovered Hamre's dissertation on microfilm in the library and spent hours reading, studying, and taking notes on "Georg Sverdrup's Concept of the Role and Calling of the Norwegian-American Lutherans: An Annotated Translation of Selected Writings." (This dissertation can now be accessed online, *georgsverdrup-society.org*.) Monseth said that through work like Hamre's, Sverdrup remains accessible and vital to understanding and perpetuating the principles and practices of the Lutheran Free Church.

Loiell Dyrud, President of the GSS, presented Dr. Hamre with a plaque featuring an engraved picture of Georg Sverdrup and the inscription: "In Recognition of Dr. James S. Hamre for a Lifetime Devoted to Preserving the Legacy of Georg

*Sverdrup—Presented by the Georg Sverdrup Society October 13, 2012.*"

In response, Dr. Hamre shared how, as an undergraduate at Augsburg College, he had crossed the river to the University of Minnesota campus one Saturday. There in a used bookstore he discovered a six-volume set written by a man named "Georg Sverdrup," a name he recognized from the Augsburg campus. He bought the set for \$1.00, and "The rest is history." It became the source for his PhD dissertation, several articles, and a biography—the basis of much of his academic work for the rest of his life. He thanked the society for continuing to keep the work of Georg Sverdrup alive.

Rev. Dennis Gray, Newfolds, Minnesota, closed the program with the benediction.

After a break, the 2012 GSS Annual Meeting began. Treasurer and Membership Secretary Kris Nyman stated that we have 103 active members and nine institutional members. Items discussed included a critique of *The Sverdrup Journal* and promotion of the GSS. An attempt is being made to make the journal available online.

Suggested topics for 2013 were "Sven Oftedal," "Sverdrup and Grace," and "Sverdrup and Ecumenism." The final decision was deferred to the board. Members elected to two-year terms on the board were Mr. Loiell Dyrud, Rev. Wesley Langaas, Rev. Stephen Mundfrom, and Rev. Kris Nyman.

The board met briefly after the annual meeting and reorganized with Loiell Dyrud elected President; Steve Mundfrom, Vice President; Tim Larson, Secretary; and Kris Nyman, Treasurer/Membership Secretary. The date and meeting place for the 2013 GSS Annual Meeting was set for Saturday, October 5, in Minneapolis. The board later chose "Sven Oftedal" as the 2013 topic for study.

## "Sven Oftedal" (cont.)

pecting questions pertaining to the administration of its own affairs and those also bearing upon 'purity of doctrine,' as these words are understood among theologians."<sup>2</sup>

Oftedal began publication of the Norwegian language paper *Folkebladet* ("The People's Paper") to pay the debts of Augsburg Seminary. Later he was instrumental in keeping the school out of the United [Lutheran] Church.

Rev. H. C. Caspersen, who studied under both men, said that Oftedal "was the equal of his colleague [Sverdrup]" in learning, "but his temperament was of a more practical bent. He reminds one very much of Luther." He described Oftedal as a larger man than Sverdrup physically and wrote that "as a speaker he was perhaps in his best years without a peer among Norwegian-Americans."<sup>3</sup>

Both Oftedal and Sverdrup were on the committee that drafted the "Fundamental Principles" of the Lutheran Free Church.

Each evening Oftedal would come to Sverdrup's home on the Augsburg campus at 9:00. The men would fellowship together, and promptly at 10:00 Oftedal would leave, knowing that his friend wished to retire at that time.

At Sverdrup's funeral, Oftedal said as he laid a memorial wreath on his coffin, ". . . thou soul of my soul, thou spirit of my spirit, half of my life, my last friend."<sup>4</sup>

—Raynard O. J. Huglen

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>N. N. Rønning, *Fifty Years in America* (Minneapolis: The Friend Publishing Company, 1938), 147.

<sup>2</sup>Sven Oftedal, "Affadavit," in *Augsburg Seminary and the Lutheran Free Church*, ed. L. Lillehei (Minneapolis: 1928), 81.

<sup>3</sup>H. C. Caspersen, "Augsburg Seminary," in *Augsburg Seminary and the Lutheran Free Church*, ed. L. Lillehei, (Minneapolis: 1928), 49-50.

<sup>4</sup>Rønning, 147.

## “Sverdrup and Controversy” Discussion Forum Held

The Georg Sverdrup Society held its seventh annual Seminary Discussion Forum on February 1 at the Hauge Chapel on Medicine Lake, Plymouth, Minnesota. About 50 people were in attendance.

Throughout his lifetime in America, Georg Sverdrup was involved in theological controversies. Church historians note that the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was noted for “theological warfare” among Norwegian Lutheran theologians in America. Shortly after his arrival in America in 1874, Sverdrup entered the fray. He was a brilliant, highly trained theologian, an able debater, and not inclined to compromise. Some of his theological positions were aired in sermons, but more often in church periodicals and newspapers where attacks and counterattacks were leveled, often degenerating into personal attacks.

So prevalent were these wranglings that even the immigrants in communities across the upper Midwest were often caught up in them, as reflected in such immigrant novels as Ole Rolvaag’s *Giants in the Earth*, Dorthea Dahl’s *The City on the Hill*, and Johannes Wist’s *The Rise of Jonas Olsen*.

The debates ranged from Election (predestination), Justification of the World, freedom of the congregation, and membership requirements for the congregation to the correct theological education for a pastor.

After an introduction of the Society by Loiell Dyrud and devotions by Rev. Terry Olson, Larry Walker read Sverdrup’s “On the ‘Living Congregation,’” from his longer translation, “Can We

Know Who Are the Believers?”

Two papers were presented: “Sverdrup and the Missourians” by Dr. Francis Monseth; and “The Free Congregation and the ‘Pure’ Congregation,” written by Rev. Stephen Mundfrom and presented by Rev. Terry Olson in his absence.

In “Sverdrup and the Missourians,” Dr. Monseth explained how the Norwegian Synod, the largest Norwegian Lutheran group in America at the time, sent most of its pastoral candidates to Concordia, St. Louis, a seminary of the Missouri Synod. There, in Sverdrup’s opinion, pastors were trained to quibble over nuances of doctrine and to elevate “Pure Doctrine” above the Word of God. Sverdrup believed that “. . . church confessions have authority, not *over* the Word of God, nor *beside* the Word of God, but that they derive all authority *from* the Word of God, the Holy Scripture.” Rather than debating fine theological points such as Election and Justification of the World, Sverdrup believed Norwegians would be better served by uniting around the Word of God, the Augsburg Confession, *Luther’s Small Catechism and Explanation*, and the traditional ecumenical Creeds. These had been agreed upon and accepted by the Lutheran Church of Norway—why not by Norwegian-American Lutherans? Sverdrup blamed “The Missourian Spirit” for the conflict.

The second paper, “The Free Congregation and the ‘Pure’ Congregation,” dealt with the question of whether or not a congregation can be

“living” if it includes unbelievers in its membership. Ultimately, it came down to this: “Can We Know Who Are the Believers?” Can they be identified? Many pastors agreed that Sverdrup and Oftedal were correct to work for the living congregation, but some, like Rev. K. O. Lundeberg, believed that a living congregation could only come about if its membership was limited to true believers. Sverdrup, on the other hand, believed that only God, not man, is able to know who the “true believers” are, and only “living” preaching of the Word can purify the congregation and create living congregations. These differences finally led to the formation of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren in 1900.

A panel discussion of Dr. Francis Monseth, Rev. Martin Horn, Rev. Terry Olson, and Loiell Dyrud, with participation from the audience, was held during the third hour. The first part was devoted to the doctrinal debates and the second to the debate regarding the believers-only congregation. There was good participation from seminarians and visitors.

Of special interest was the presence of Dr. Dale Varberg and his wife Louise. Varberg, a lifelong member of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, has written *Faith and Fellowship: A Look at Lutheran Brethren Theology 1900-2000*. According to the Varbergs, although membership in a Lutheran Brethren congregation is limited to “believers only,” they do not use the expression “pure congregation.” Instead, “Biblical congregation” is preferred.

Dr. Monseth closed the event with prayer. Lunch and fellowship followed. Papers and translations shared at this forum will be published later this spring in the *2012 Georg Sverdrup Journal*.

—Loiell Dyrud



*Dr. Dale Varberg and his wife Louise attended the GSS Seminary Discussion Forum. Louise is the granddaughter of Rev. K. O. Lundeberg, one of the founders of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. Lundeberg and Sverdrup “crossed swords” over how to create “living” congregations.*



## THE GEORG SVERDRUP SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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*(The Word Became Flesh)*

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*Prospective members are invited to contact the membership secretary at PO Box 400, Beulah, ND 58523.*

## Photos



**Annual Meeting:** Dr. Francis Monseth, AFLTS Dean, pays tribute to Dr. James Hamre (far left) during the GSS Annual Meeting program.

**Annual Meeting:** Past President Rev. Martin Horn thanks Dr. Hamre for his writing and translating work, which has “enabled Sverdrup to speak” to a new generation.



**Seminary Discussion:** Rev. Terry Olson reads “The Living Congregation and the ‘Pure’ Congregation,” a paper by Rev. Stephen Mundfrom.



**Seminary Discussion:** Panel members (l. to r.) Mr. Loiell Dyrud, Dr. Francis Monseth, Rev. Martin Horn, and Rev. Terry Olson during discussion forum.

## “It Is Finished!” (Excerpt)

By Georg Sverdrup, Trans. by James Hamre

The sacrificial Lamb bears the sins of the world so that the whole world, every single person, has free access to God’s grace, to the Father’s heart, to peace and joy, to righteousness and salvation, so long as it remains the day of Grace. The wall of separation has been broken through by Jesus. The dividing barrier is broken down. The curtain of the Holy of Holies is torn aside. The invitation goes out: Come, come!

It is by this invitation that you have come, you who have found peace with Jesus. You did not come by what you accomplished, but you came because Jesus has accomplished everything. And when you found Grace, was it because you were so much better, or [even] somewhat better, than others? No, you were a poor sinner who crept to the cross of Christ because there was Grace there.

You came because you were not righteous, but were in need of righteousness. And you found precisely what you sought but did not have: forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

But, my brother, was not the abundance that was to be found and received by you also to be found by others? Yes, of course, it was for many others, for all who simply were willing to come. There is such abundance for every child of God, for all who believe that salvation in Christ’s blood and death is full and free.

But, as the Scripture says, how are they to believe in One of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to preach? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? That is to say, without mission work, for mission work is nothing other than sending out those who shall preach Christ crucified.

And it is precisely because “It is finished” that the Gospel has such a full sound, such a comprehensive tone. We do not proclaim heavy burdens and difficult tasks. We preach Christ and His work and say, “It is finished!” . . .

*Volume 6 of Sverdrup’s Collected Works, titled “Thy Kingdom Come,” contains 85 mission meditations. “It is Finished!” (#76) appeared in the Lutheran Free Church mission periodical Gasseren (Malagasy) in 1902. As early as 1885, with Sverdrup’s encouragement, Augsburg Seminary students began cooperating with the Mission Society of Norway to support the Madagascar work. From 1900 to 1940 the LFC sent 40 missionaries to Madagascar. The full text may be found in Vol. V of The Sverdrup Journal. (Submitted by Stephen Mundfrom)*