



The Georg Sverdrup Society

NEWSLETTER

2013 GSS Annual Meeting Hears Dr. Carl Vaagenes



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The Tenth Annual Meeting of the Georg Sverdrup Society was held Saturday, October 5, 2013, in the Hauge Chapel on the campus of AFLC Schools in Plymouth, Minnesota.

There was a note of deep sadness at this year's meeting as we reflected on the passing of two of our deeply respected members. Dr. Francis Monseth, who was Dean of Free Lutheran Theological Seminary, a founding member of the GSS, a former officer, and regular contributor to *The Sverdrup Journal*, passed away in 2013. George M.

Sverdrup, the grandson of Georg Sverdrup, passed away at the end of September. These men will be dearly missed.

The main speaker for the program, Dr. Carl P. Vaagenes, spoke on the topic "The Vocabulary of Faith for the Congregation: Georg Sverdrup's Gift of Language in Proclaiming Christ's Mission to the World." Vaagenes is well known to Sverdrup Society members as a translator. A former Lutheran missionary to Madagascar, he

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Dr. Carl Vaagenes addresses the GSS Annual Meeting on Sverdrup's use of language.

Announcing the 2014 Topic for Study: "Sverdrup and the Gospel"

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.

Sverdrup clearly identified himself and the Free Church movement he was part of as standing within the tradition of the Haugean awakening in Norway. However, certain elements of the "Haugeaners" in America moved away from Hauge's simple preaching of the Gospel and became law-bound in their approach to the Christian life.

What about Sverdrup? Was his theology and practice law-bound? Or does he stand with historic Evangelical Lutheranism where the

evangelion or the Gospel is the center of theology and practice?

This is the question the Sverdrup Society will examine in 2014. Subjects for study will include "Sverdrup and Baptism," "The Use of The Gospel in Sverdrup's Preaching," and "The Gospel in Free and Living Congregations." Specific areas to be explored will include "To what degree is the biblical congregation simply the fruit of the Gospel—a body of believers set free from bond-

age to sin and death?" "How is the biblical congregation made alive by the Spirit of God so that it freely serves, not under constraint of the law, but motivated and empowered by the Gospel?" "Is it possible for a congregation to avoid Legalism?"

Articles dealing with these questions will be published in the 2014 journal as well as translations of articles written by Sverdrup relating to this topic.

—Martin Horn

Sven Oftedal: Focus of Seminary Discussion Forum

In what may seem a break from past activities, the Georg Sverdrup Society spent 2013 studying Sven Oftedal, the close friend and compatriot of Sverdrup. But in many ways our study was not really a break from the past, since the lives of Sverdrup and Oftedal were inextricably woven together. In fact, one of the truly foundational essays explaining how the LFC was to operate as an association of congregations rather than a synod was written by Oftedal, not Sverdrup. The article was originally presented to the first Annual Conference of the Lutheran Free Church in 1897 under the title “A Free Association Among Free Congregations.” Using biblical references primarily from Acts and Corinthians, Oftedal explains how an “association” is the biblical pattern for a church body to be organized. Though Oftedal’s essay is important in understanding how an association of free congregations should cooperate, it has been virtually unknown because it was never translated. But now, thanks to Larry Walker’s translation, we can see more clearly how Sverdrup and Oftedal envisioned the LFC as a biblically based church body.

On Friday, January 31, the Sverdrup Society held its eighth annual Seminary Discussion Forum at the Hauge Chapel, Plymouth, Minnesota, under the general title “Sven Oftedal: The Forgotten Founder.”

After Loiell Dyrud, president of the GSS, introduced the work of the society, Rev. Lyndon Korhonen, newly elected President of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, gave a devotional.

Oftedal’s “The Community of Pastors or Freedom of the Congregation,” a recently translated article by Larry Walker, was read by Rev. Steve Mundfrom. In this essay, Oftedal explains the importance of having separate corporations governing church-wide ministries rather than church body control.

Two papers were presented: “Sven Oftedal: The Forgotten Founder” by Loiell Dyrud and “August Weenaas: The One Who Brought Oftedal to Augsburg” by Rev. Robert Lee.

Dyrud presented a biographical sketch of Oftedal from his early years in Stavanger, his relationship with Sverdrup as University of Oslo students, and his call to America to teach at Augsburg Seminary in 1873, a year ahead of Sverdrup. Because he was a linguist with over twenty languages at his command, he became a much-loved friend to immigrant groups, especially the Greek community. He organized fund drives for destitute families, translated legal documents for frightened newcomers, and defended their rights at city hall. He was a friend of the common man and a never-tiring crusader for temperance. Always an outspoken promoter of education, he was elected to both the Minneapolis School Board and Library Board, and served as chairmen for both.

When Augsburg Seminary faced financial insolvency, he started *Folkebladet* (“The Peoples’ Newspaper”), through which he raised funds that saved the institution. Together with his other gifts—philanthropist, linguist, editor, musician, and beloved professor—the flamboyant Oftedal was also considered one of the finest orators of his day.

Hardly an evening went by that Sverdrup and Oftedal were not together discussing the affairs of the day and sharing ideas. As a result, it is hard to know which ideas belonged to which man and which were mutually spawned within the context of a lifetime of discussion and reflection. Since Sverdrup was more scholarly and introverted, he left a greater written legacy than Oftedal. Yet, as we have discovered, Oftedal’s literary output, though lesser in quantity, is certainly not lacking in quality.

The second paper, dealing with

August Weenaas, was presented by Rev. Robert Lee, currently Interim Dean of AFLTS. Though August Weenaas was the founder of Augsburg Seminary in 1869, he is today even more “forgotten” than Oftedal. Nevertheless, there is much to admire in him. He was well-educated in Norway and had served a parish on the Island of Loppen in far north Finnmark before coming to America at the age of thirty-three. Here he became a leader in the Conference, one of the Norwegian Lutheran denominations of the day. As editor of *Lutheraneren* and president of Augsburg Seminary, he became a leading spokesman for the Conference.

Returning to Norway to recruit professors for Augsburg, Weenaas brought Oftedal to the faculty in 1873. Grieving over the death of his wife that year and feeling alienated after 1874 when Sverdrup and Oftedal were reunited, Weenaas finally resigned his position and went back to Norway. Later he returned and taught at the Hauge Seminary in Red Wing, Minnesota, before returning to Norway for good.

After listening to Lee’s presentation, one comes away with a good deal of respect for Weenaas, a man who in some circles has been taken as sort of a “lightweight.” Though perhaps not on the same intellectual level as the two men he hired, he was certainly a gifted man and, if for no other reason, deserves a good deal of credit for bringing Oftedal and Sverdrup to America.

The final session was a panel discussion focusing on Oftedal’s aforementioned article, “A Free Association Among Free Congregations.” Panel members included Rev. Robert Lee, Rev. Terry Olson, Rev. Martin Horn, and Mr. Loiell Dyrud. Many points

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Annual Meeting Hears Dr. Vaagenes (cont.)

has translated several mission meditations for *The Sverdrup Journal* since 2008.

Based on his linguistic expertise, Dr. Vaagenes shared some unique facets of Sverdrup's use of language. Quoting from Sverdrup's biographer and the editor of the six volumes of Sverdrup's collected works, Andreas Helland, Vaagenes pointed out how Sverdrup's language, blended learned dialects of the cultured class to which he belonged with dialects of the common people, from which he borrowed rich idiomatic peasant expressions. Though idioms may enhance the beauty and meaning in a language, they are extremely difficult to translate. Despite the difficulty, Vaagenes added, "I am suggesting from all my readings, especially in Volume 6 where I have done some translations, that Professor Sverdrup is continuing to teach us, today's pastors and parishioners, 'The vocabulary of faith for the congregation's testimony.'"

Weaving in examples from several translations, Vaagenes demonstrated various methods by which Sverdrup awakened spiritual life in the congregations and created a zeal for missions with his unique writing style.

Since Sven Oftedal has been the focus of study during 2013, special music was provided by seminarians Steven Jensen and Andrew Olson singing Lars Oftedal's "My Heart Is Longing to Praise My Savior." Lars Oftedal, Sven Oftedal's brother, is credited with writing the text of this hymn. Jensen and Olson were accompanied by Rachel Quanbeck on the violin and

Laura Hedstrom on the piano.

Mr. Tim Larson led the "Sverdrup Songfest," which included the Magnus Landstad hymn *Jeg ved mig en søvn i Jesu navn* ("I Know of a Sleep in Jesus' Name") and *Hvor salig er den lille Flok!* ("How Blessed is the Little Flock") by Nils Holm.

In the absence of Larry Walker, Rev. Kris Nyman, Beulah, North Dakota, read an excerpt from Walker's translation of Sven Oftedal's "A Free Association Among Free Congregations."

Rev. Stephen Mundfrom, Valley City, North Dakota, gave the Invocation, and Rev. Jerry Moan, who is on the faculty of AFLTS, closed the program with a benediction.

Following a short break, the 2013 GSS Annual Meeting began. Treasurer and Membership Secretary Kris Nyman reported that we have 114 active members. President Loiell Dyrud indicated this year's journal will be devoted to "Sven Oftedal: The Forgotten Founder" and will include a biography of Oftedal as well as translations of some of his articles, sermons, and hymns. Though a prolific writer, Oftedal's work was never collected and published in separate volumes as was the case with Sverdrup. As a result, the society is finding it difficult to track down periodicals in which his work appeared.

The members chose "Sverdrup and the Gospel" for the 2014 study topic. It was also announced that the society hopes to have the *Sverdrup Journal* available online by the end of 2014.

Members elected to two-year terms on the board were



Mrs. Marian Christopherson, AFLC Director of Publications and Parish Education, pianist for GSS Annual Meetings.



Rev. Stephen Mundfrom, Valley City, ND, gives the invocation.



Seminarians Andrew Olson and Steven Jensen singing "My Heart Is Longing to Praise My Savior."

Rev. Craig Johnson, Mr. Tim Larson, and Mr. Larry Walker. Rev. Brett Boe was elected to a one-year, unexpired term. Elected to the 2014 Nominating Committee were Rev. Connely Dyrud, Dr. Mark Olson, and Mr. Brent Peterson.

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 for next year's annual meeting was set for Saturday, October 4. The place for the meeting will be decided later, but it will be held in the Fargo/Moorhead area.

—Loiell Dyrud



Accompanying Olson and Jensen, Laura Hedstrom, piano, and Rachel Quanbeck, violin. Kris Nyman, who read Larry Walker's translation, looks on.

**THE GEORG SVERDRUP
SOCIETY NEWSLETTER**

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Ordet Blev Kjødt

(The Word Became Flesh)

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

GSS to Hold April Discussion in “Old Stone Church,” Kenyon, MN



Plans are underway for a spring discussion forum to be held at the historic “Old Stone Church” of rural Kenyon, Minnesota, on Saturday, April 26. “Sverdrup and the Gospel,” the 2014 topic for study by the GSS, will be the topic for the discussion. The forum will begin at 10:00 a.m. with presentations by Rev. Martin Horn, Pastor of Hauge Lutheran Church, Rev. Steve Mundfrom, and Mr. Larry Walker.

After the majority of the membership had gradually moved closer to the town of Kenyon, the Hauge congregation built its present, larger church building in town. Rev. Martin Horn will share details pertaining to the rich history of Norwegian Lutheranism in the Kenyon area 100-150 years ago. Hauge Congregation, according to their 150th Anniversary Book, dates back to 1855, with the actual formation of the congregation in 1859. If the weather doesn’t cooperate, the forum will be held in the church in Kenyon.

This forum is open to the public. GSS members, please invite friends you believe would have an interest in attending this event.

Directions to the Old Stone Church from Kenyon are as follows: from Highway 60, go south 1.2 miles on County 12, turn right onto Monkey Valley Road and continue west for 1.3 miles. The church will be on the right.

—Tim Larson



Pastor Robert Lee makes a point as panel members listen at Seminary Discussion Forum.

Sven Oftedal: Focus of Seminary Discussion Forum (cont.)

from this article were discussed including Oftedal’s contention that, contrary to common belief, the New Testament congregations were not “holier” than our congregations today. If anyone doubts this, study the problems addressed by Paul in his letters to the Corinthians. Furthermore, Oftedal asserts that Scripture more than adequately supports the notion that relationships between congregations are to be achieved through an association-like polity. Nowhere in Scripture do we see a top-down structure with anyone other than Christ above individual congregations. Synods are purely man’s creation. Members of the panel also concurred

that the LFC (which is our heritage) took a middle position between the “pure” doctrine of the Norwegian Synod and the exclusively experiential position of the Haugeans. Concern for more lay activity in the congregations was raised by members of the audience. Today’s laity, some lamented, seem more willing than ever to turn over spiritual activity to the clergy.

Interim Dean of the Seminary Rev. Robert Lee gave the closing prayer, and lunch and fellowship followed. Papers and translations shared and discussed at this forum will be published in the 2013 *Georg Sverdrup Journal* later this spring.

—Loiell Dyrud



Mr. Loiell Dyrud gives presentation of “Sven Oftedal: The Forgotten Founder.”

Rev. Robert Lee presents paper on August Weenas, founder of Augsburg Seminary

