



The Georg Sverdrup Society

NEWSLETTER

Walker on Viking Conversion at Annual Meeting



In this Issue:

Walker to Lecture at Annual Meeting	1
Sverdrup Forum Held at Tabor Lutheran	1
“Defense of Wickedness”	2
Photos from Tabor, Webster, SD	4

The Annual Meeting of the Georg Sverdrup Society will be held Saturday, October 5, 2019, in Heritage Hall on the campus of the Association Free Lutheran Schools in Plymouth, Minnesota.

The speaker will be our editor, Larry Walker, who will deliver a lecture on the conversion of the Vikings to Christianity. He previously gave this lecture by invitation at Union University in Jackson, Tennessee, last April.

Walker draws on the ideas of the Norwegian Bishop Fridtjof Birkeli, who argued

that the conversion of Norway was a far more peaceful process than has been portrayed in the traditional narrative, based on the Icelandic sagas.

Lunch will be at 12:00 p.m., and the program will begin at 1:00 p.m. The annual meeting starts at 2:00 p.m.

Larry Walker is a native of Kenyon, Minnesota, and a graduate of Augsburg College, with an MLIS from the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. He was formerly the librarian for AFLC Schools. He now freelances as a Norwegian translator.



Larry Walker lecturing on the conversion of the Vikings at Union University.

Sverdrup Forum Held at Tabor Lutheran

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.

It was a beautiful summer day when Sverdrup Society members and friends gathered at Tabor Lutheran Church in rural Webster, South Dakota, for the Sverdrup Discussion Forum: “Sverdrup’s Understanding of Free and Living Congregations.” The Tabor Lutheran congregation was organized in 1902, and the church was built in 1906, high on a hill among the Coteau Hills of northeastern South Dakota.

As we stood outside the church on that sunny, Saturday morning looking out over



Pastor Raynard Huglen speaking on “The Free Church Congregation in Practice.”

the rolling countryside below, long trails of dust formed behind cars in the distance as

they sped over country roads and up the hill to the church. A hundred years ago, the sight witnessed by Tabor parishioners on a hot summer Sunday morning would have been the same: Dust trails from their neighbors winding their way on country roads to church. Looking at the beautiful, little church high on the hill with its tall steeple topped by a steel cross, one can only wonder how this church avoided being struck by lightning for all these

(Continued on page 3)

From “Defense of Wickedness,” by Georg Sverdrup

The 2019 issue of the Journal of the Georg Sverdrup Society will include a translation by Larry J. Walker of previously untranslated sections of a series of articles entitled, “The Justification of Our Congregations and the Relationship of God’s Children to a Christian Congregation.” These articles, published in 1898, were responses to a lecture by Pastor J. Müller-Eggen, published and distributed by the United Church. Müller-Eggen’s lecture argued that as long as there were “two or three” true believers in a congregation, that congregation was “biblically justified.”

The lecture on the congregation which the United Church’s annual meeting recommended for distribution among our people is intended to defend the congregations as they are; it is to be, as it says, “for our comfort and reassurance.”

After Eggen has said, “We must fear that the largest portion of our congregations are mostly children of the world, alien to life in God; in part also open enemies of the Cross, whose god is the belly, and whose glory is in their shame,” then after all this lecture of his, he wants to give these same congregations comfort and reassurance!

In truth, our people must be contemptible in Eggen’s and the annual meeting’s eyes, if they can handle [the issue] in such a manner. They have deserved something better than this, that one first describes the congregations as unbelieving and blameworthy and then gives them comfort and reassurance, so that they may sleep securely in this ghastly condition in which they are said to find themselves. It seems to us about [the same] as if the officers were to give the crew and passengers on a sinking ship all the beer and liquor they want, so that they may forget the danger.

But what comfort and reassurance can a pastor and an annual meeting then give the congregations after having pronounced judgment on them in such harsh terms?

Indeed, it is actually disturbing and

horrifying to say, but the comfort being offered the congregations is that of Judas and Ananias and Sapphira, the incestuous man in Corinth and those who are blots on the Christian love feasts, the congregation in Sardis which had a name for being alive while being dead, and the congregation in Laodicea which was neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm.

That is the comfort. These shameful examples are to defend our congregations’ biblical justification and make them worthy to be called Christian. We need not demonstrate how this strengthens wickedness in the congregations and dulls the consciences of pastors. Everyone can feel how they are comforted and reassured, growing more and more indifferent to wickedness in the congregations, the more they consider the above-named grounds for comfort.

If Eggen and the annual meeting had handled the testimony of these Scriptures concerning the terrible power of sin among humans in a proper manner and discussed them with a little of the seriousness employed in Scripture, and which the matter demands, they would have connected them to the judgment that came upon Judas and Ananias and Sapphira and the incestuous and the congregations in Sardis and Laodicea. Then it would have been apparent that these examples are not provided for comfort and reassurance, but are precisely serviceable to show that what is written is eternally true, that “the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. . . .”

. . . It stands fast as God’s demand to the congregation, if it has the sorrow and shame of wickedness becoming apparent in it: Expel the evil from your midst!

And not the wickedness of the wicked congregation members, but rather the congregation’s power to expel them will be the evidence of the congregation’s Christianity and its biblical justification for bearing the name of congregation.

It makes no logical or moral sense

whatever to use failures and sins in the biblical congregations or among biblical people to prove that our congregations and people are just as good and justified as they. In this way, one proves only one’s own ignorance and immorality. If anyone wants to prove that our congregations are Christian and biblically justified, he can’t do that either through their failures or our failures, but only through acknowledging that we have the same faith and the same works as the biblical congregations. If one wants to prove that our congregations are as good as the Corinthian church, don’t come saying we have equally great sins in our congregations as they had. That proves nothing. Demonstrate, rather, that we have the same spirit and life and faith and love and gifts of grace and strength as the Corinthian congregation, and that will begin to prove something.

. . . The misfortune is that Eggen really doesn’t examine whether the current [status] is proper and biblical, but he operates on the assumption that he must defend the current [status], and therefore he turns and twists Scripture according to his own thinking until it suits the pathetic undertaking for which he wants it to work. The United Church’s annual meeting ought to know better than to sanction such a thing and distribute such misleading literature among the people in the church’s name.

Sverdrup Forum Held at Tabor Lutheran (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)
years.

Entering the church, one is amazed by its painstaking craftsmanship. Imagine a square box with the main entrance in one corner and the altar sitting in the opposite. The floor is “raked” or slanted from back to front to improve sightlines, and all the original pews are curved to form a semicircle. The intricately detailed chandelier in the middle of the sanctuary has eight globes that once housed kerosene lamps, but today have been wired for electricity.

On the wall hangs a banner: “Tabor shall rejoice and sing for joy at thy name,” Psalm 89:12. Certainly a fitting verse, for as Pr. Mike McCarlson explained in his opening remarks about the history of Tabor, “The congregation was a singing congregation, which often had five choirs at one time—Cherub, Youth, Senior Choir, Men’s Choir, and Women’s Choir—and a director who sat at the piano directing with one hand and playing with the other.” The congregation was established as a Lutheran Free Church Congregation in 1906 and was served by LFC pastors including Rev. Trygve Dahle and Rev. Raynard Huglen. Since 1963, the congregation has been an AFLC congregation.

After Pr. McCarlson’s welcome and brief historical background, Pastor Martin Horn gave the first presentation, “Sverdrup’s Understanding of Free and Living Congregations.”

According to Pr. Horn, the first influence on Georg Sverdrup’s spiritual development in Norway was the work of the lay evangelist Hans Nielsen Hauge, who walked from one end of Norway to the other and brought a Spir-

itual Awakening to Norway’s peasants, and Gisle Johnson, who preached to seminarians at the University and in cities and brought about what became known as the “Second Awakening.”

A second major influence on Sverdrup was what he saw as the restrictive nature of Norway’s state church. Because the church was a government institution, the government had the power to retard spiritual growth among parishioners, a situation completely different from the congregations Sverdrup saw described in the New Testament.

Third, Sverdrup and his colleague Oftedal saw in America the opportunity to develop congregations modeled after the New Testament, free from any form of human control and governed only by the Word and Spirit of God. The congregation under the preaching of the Gospel would free its members from the power of sin, the law, and Satan. According to Pr. Horn, “Those set free by the Gospel have become alive in Christ and are freed to become slaves of Christ: freed to work, suffer, and die for the cause of Christ.” This is what Sverdrup means by a “free and living congregation.”

The second presenter was Rev. Alex Amiot, who spoke on the topic of “The Congregation as the Bride of Christ.” A recent graduate of Free Lutheran Seminary (FLS), he said that studying Sverdrup in seminary gave him an understanding of the congregation and a love for the congregation. He was convinced that “Love for the Congregation” should be the goal of every seminarian. This love comes when one begins to understand that Christ looks at the congregation as saints, redeemed by His blood as in I Corinthians 1:2-4. Though the

Corinthian congregation was by no means a perfect congregation, yet Paul refers to them as being sanctified in Christ Jesus and “called to be saints.”

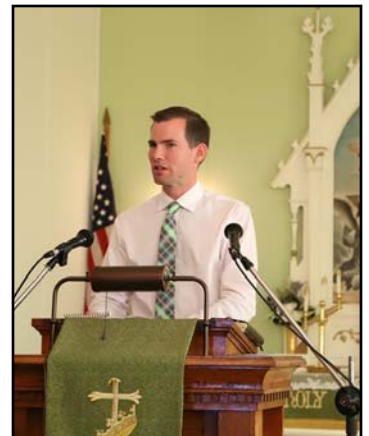
The Apostle Paul also describes the congregation in Ephesians 5 as one that Christ loved “and gave Himself for it that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.” Forgiven by the blood of Christ, we should have a sense of awe toward our congregation. “They are precious souls and members of the Body of Christ,” said Amiot. “God looks at you as you are in Christ, not in what you have done by your own good works.” If the congregation, according to Paul, has been washed and is without blemish as the Bride of Christ, how can we fail to recognize the congregation’s holiness? How can we not love the congregation? And even if there are sinners in the external congregation, this does not stain the congregation that is the Bride of Christ.

The final presenter was Rev. Raynard Huglen speaking on “The Free Church Congregation in Practice.” Having graduated from Augsburg Seminary in 1953, Pastor Huglen has had the distinction of serving congregations in both the Lutheran Free Church and the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations over a sixty-year period. His first ten years in ministry were in the Lutheran Free Church. He had served congregations in Medicine Lake, Montana; New Effington, South Dakota; and Hatton, North Dakota; before being called to Roslyn, South Dakota, where he served the Tabor Congregation as part of a three-point parish. He served there for nine years,

(Continued on page 4)



Pastor Mike McCarlson,
host pastor at Tabor.



Pastor Alex Amiot speaking on
“The Congregation As the
Bride of Christ.”

THE GEORG SVERDRUP
SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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Photos from Tabor Lutheran Church, Webster, SD



Pastor Martin Horn speaking on "Sverdrup's Vision of Free and Living Congregations" and Mr. Tim Larson giving devotions. (photos, Pastor Alex Amiot)

Sverdrup Forum Held at Tabor Lutheran (cont.)

(Continued from page 3)

1963-1972. The merger issue was paramount during the time he served here, as some LFC congregations were transitioning to the AFLC rather than merging with The American Lutheran Church. According to Huglen, the transition from the LFC to the AFLC in the Tabor congregation was a peaceful one.

Huglen also pointed out that Rev. Fritjof Monseth (father of the late Dean of FLS, Dr. Francis Monseth) installed him at Tabor. Rev. Monseth told of how as a boy he remembered being at a prayer meeting where a layman had prayed that they could have a "Tabor Moment." It was an obvious reference to Christ's Transfiguration that had allegedly taken place on Mount Tabor. When the disciples opened their eyes, they saw "Jesus

Only." Certainly, a fitting focus for Huglen's ministry in the Tabor congregation.

Pr. Huglen pointed out the good fellowship he had always had in the Tabor congregation, even though at the time he was serving there he had also been called to be editor of *The Lutheran Ambassador*, which was considered a half-time position. In reality, however, both were full-time positions, but he trusted things had gone well in both cases.

Huglen ended his presentation with a statement he had written in *Free and Living Congregations: The Dream That Would Not Die* concerning the Lutheran Free Church and its traditions that were continued in the AFLC: "Those of us in the minority decided to continue a fellowship as close as possible to what we had known. . . . I have always had great love and affection for those who stood together and dared

to walk the 'old paths.'"

The ladies of the congregation provided great food for the coffee breaks and the noon meal.

The Sverdrup Society has been holding discussion forums in historic churches during the summer months. This was the third such event. Past Sverdrup Discussions have been held in "The Old Stone Church," rural Kenyon, Minnesota; Satersdal Lutheran Church, rural Thief River Falls, Minnesota; and now Tabor in South Dakota. For those who might be interested in hosting a Sverdrup Discussion, the Sverdrup Society would welcome an invitation.

—Loiell Dyrud