



The Georg Sverdrup Society

NEWSLETTER

Sverdrup Society Annual Meeting to Be Held in Glyndon, MN

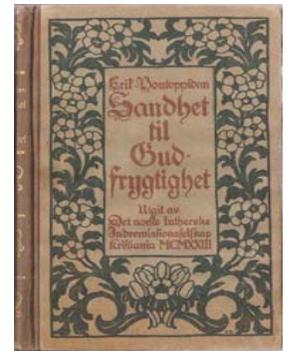
The 2010 Annual Meeting of the Georg Sverdrup Society will be held 12:00—4:00 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 9, at Maranatha Lutheran Church, Glyndon, MN. Lunch will be served at noon, followed by the program at 1:00 p.m. and the business meeting at 2:30 p.m.

The program will feature the traditional Songfest, led by Marian Christopherson. Loiell Dyrud will make a presentation on the Sverdrup family, and Larry Walker will read from a new translation of one of Sverdrup's articles.

For reservations contact Pastor Terry Olson, 6834 14th Avenue NE, Grafton, ND, 58237, telephone 701-330-5757, email terryolson.tflc@yahoo.com.

JOURNAL

The 2010 *Sverdrup Journal* will focus on "Sverdrup and Scripture." Publication is scheduled for this spring.



The cover of a Pontoppidan Catechism. Originally published in Norway in 1737 under the title, *Erik Pontoppidan's Truth Unto Godliness*, this catechism contained 759 questions and answers explaining *Luther's Small Catechism*.

H. U. Sverdrup's Catechism and the Lutheran Free Church "Alterations," by Loiell Dyrud

H.U. Sverdrup's Forklaring (or "Explanation"), a version of Erik Pontoppidan's *Truth Unto Godliness*, was a cornerstone of Norway's religious life. It was used in nearly all the Norwegian Lutheran Synods in America, including the Conference, in whose seminary (Augsburg) H.U. Sverdrup's son Georg served as professor of the Old Testament.

In 1737, Erik Pontoppidan, chaplain to the King of Denmark and later Bishop of Bergen, wrote an explanation

to *Luther's Small Catechism* called *Truth Unto Godliness*. It contained 759 questions and answers, and was used to instruct Denmark's young people.

Since Norway was under Danish rule, this work also became the text for its children, though it is probable that some informal editing and reduction was practiced.¹ Several attempts were made by the Norwegian Church to reduce and edit Pontoppidan. In 1864, the State Church officially accepted Rev. H. U.

Sverdrup's work, and published his edited version as the official catechism for church, school, and home. In 1865 the *Sverdrup Catechism* received royal authorization. Sverdrup, a pastor in Balestrand parish in Sogn, edited and cut over 125 questions from the original. The final reduction came in 1893, when Norway's Department of Church and Education abridged Sverdrup's version to 388 questions and answers, about half of Pontoppidan's

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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 Didn't Mean a Thing to Me

By Kris Nyman

In late August of 1979, I arrived in Oslo, Norway, on the campus of *Det Menighetsfakultet* (The Congregation's [or Independent] Seminary) of the Lutheran Church. I was an exchange student from the United States.

As a first year student at an ALC seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, I learned of the possibility of studying in Norway for a year. My paternal grandparents came from Sweden, and I heard a lot of Swedish as I grew up, but could only speak a few phrases. When I heard about the opportunity to study in Norway, I asked one of the Norwegian students at the seminary in Dubuque to tutor me in Norwegian.

I studied hard and learned quite a bit. At the end of my first year of seminary I applied to study in Norway. I figured that with my limited language skills, I would keep applying each year until, hopefully, I would be accepted during or just after my senior year of seminary. To my amazement, I got accepted at the end of my first year.

My relatives in Sweden owned a metal factory, and I was able to get a job working there for the summer months just before I started at the seminary in Oslo. This gave me a good head start. I was forced to speak Swedish because most of the factory workers were uncomfortable with their English skills. So I had good conversational skills in Swedish when I arrived in Norway. Norwegian and Swedish are quite similar when spoken. In fact, one complaint I heard as I was living in Oslo was that Norwegians watch too much TV from Sweden!

Part of my seminary training was continuing to learn Norwegian, which I did at the University of Oslo, whose campus was only a few blocks from the seminary where I was studying.

Though I never used the University's library, I later found it was named *Georg Sverdrup Huset* (The Georg Sverdrup House). At the time, it didn't mean a thing to me.

Fast forward 24 years, and I was welcomed into the family of the AFLC from the ELCA! One of the first names I learned, within the first month of coming into the AFLC, was Georg Sverdrup. The Georg Sverdrup Society was just getting started, though I had totally forgotten about the name of the university library.

Now, years later, it meant a lot to me that the University of Oslo's Library was named *Georg Sverdrup Huset*. I assumed it was named after the founder of the Lutheran Free Church. Then my bubble was burst. I read a Wikipedia article about the library, and learned that the library was named for a *different* Georg Sverdrup. Not only was he a different Sverdrup, but he was born with the name Jørgen Sverdrup! He was the first librarian at the university library.

I have come to learn that the name Sverdrup is quite prominent in Norway, and there are many different things named after one Sverdrup or another. Even here in the U.S., there are many things with the Sverdrup name.

There is a Sverdrup engineering corporation in Missouri. Sverdrup is a township in Minnehaha County in the Sioux Falls metro area. There is a Sverdrup insurance company in Underwood, MN. There is even a Sverdrup Lutheran Church in Underwood, located between Fergus Falls and Battle Lake, MN. Presently this congregation is part of the ELCA.

There are the Sverdrup Islands, an archipelago of the northern Queen Elizabeth Islands, in Nunavut, Canada. The islands are situated in the

Arctic Ocean, west of Ellesmere Island at around 82° north and 95° west. The islands are named after Norwegian explorer Otto Sverdrup, who explored and mapped them from 1898 to 1902.

In fact, Sverdrup is even a technical term in oceanography! "The **sverdrup**, named in honor of the pioneering oceanographer [Harald Sverdrup](#), is a [unit of measure of volume](#) transport. It is used almost exclusively in [oceanography](#), to measure the transport of [ocean currents](#). Its symbol is **Sv**. Note that the sverdrup is *not* an [SI](#) unit, and that its symbol conflicts with the [sievert](#)'s symbol. It is equivalent to 10⁶ [cubic metres](#) per second (0.001 km³/s, or about 264 million U.S. gallons per second). The entire global input of [fresh water](#) from rivers to the ocean is equal to about 1 sverdrup." (Accessed, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sverdrup>).

Though the name Georg Sverdrup didn't mean a thing to me until 2004, when I heard it at my first Pastors' Conference at the Association Retreat Center, it means a lot to me now. The principles Sverdrup fought for and taught, concerning founding a free church in a free land based upon the Word of God, have been and continue to be a great blessing to me.

H. U. Sverdrup's Catechism

(Continued from page 1)
original. But it retained the name *H.U. Sverdrup's Forklaring*.

When the Lutheran Free Church was established in 1897, largely through the work of Georg Sverdrup, the use of his father's catechism was a foregone conclusion. But some alterations were made. Augsburg Seminary Professor H. A. Urseth says in his 1900 catechism translation that in 1897 "Some alterations were made in answers 244-252." (The alterations actually included question 243 as well.) Apparently a committee rewrote some questions on the Third Article of the Creed, specifically the section on the role of "The holy Christian Church; The Communion of Saints; [and] The Forgiveness of Sins." This seems to have been to make the section conform more closely to the congregationalism of the Fundamental Principles, around which the Lutheran Free Church had been organized.

Examination of this ten-question section reveals that the wording of some questions was indeed changed to promote the "congregational" beliefs of LFC. But why question 250 was altered as it was is somewhat mystifying.

In the following discussion, whenever reference is made to *Sverdrup's Catechism*, it is always to the authorized Norwegian State Church catechism, revised by H. U. Sverdrup and used in most Norwegian Lutheran synods in America well into the twentieth century. When reference is made to the LFC catechism, it is to the same catechism with alterations to questions 243-252.

Question 243 of *Sverdrup's Catechism* (translated in 1900 by Prof. E. G. Lund) asks "Is the word 'Church' always used of the communion of believers only?" [ans.] "No; in a wider sense the word 'Church' is also used of the assembly of all those who are baptized with Christian Baptism and confess the Name of Christ, whether they truly belong to the Lord or not." This same question, in the LFC version (Urseth trans.) asks, "Is the holy Christian church found in this place? [ans.] Yes; *in the congregation*, which in the Scriptures is called 'the body of Jesus Christ,' and 'the house of God'" (italics mine). The emphasis on the local congregation is consistent with the first Fundamental Principle of the LFC, which states: "The Congregation is the right form of the Kingdom of God on earth."

In question 244 we find the word "congregation" again interjected. The *Sverdrup Catechism* asks, "How many kinds of members are there in the outward community of the Church?" while the LFC catechism asks "Are all the members of the organized body, *called a congregation*, true Christians?" (italics mine). The answers in both versions are similar—both hypocrites and true Christians are represented among the membership.

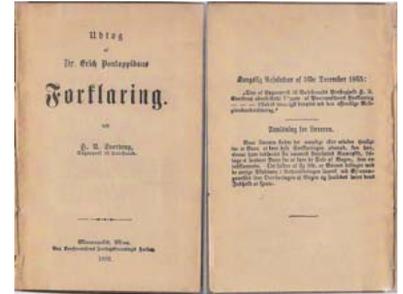
Both catechisms define "hypocrite" in similar terms in question 245, but question 246 in the LFC catechism is an entirely different question, one not found in the *Sverdrup Catechism*: "Should not the congregation remove those hypocrites from its midst? [ans.] Yes; the congregation

should expel the openly ungodly and unbelieving; but it cannot judge concerning the secret thoughts of the heart."² This addition would seem to reinforce LFC Fundamental Principle Four, which originally stated that not all members are believers, "and such hypocrites often derive false hope from their external connection with the congregation."²

Because the LFC catechism includes this additional question, one question had to be dropped from the original *Sverdrup Catechism* so that both would be on track again at question 253. Apparently, question 252 of *Sverdrup's Catechism* was thought expendable: "By what especially is such a sorrow for sin awakened? [ans.] By considering God's boundless love to us and our great ingratitude to Him."

The remaining questions in this section, though differently arranged, are essentially the same.

But there is a seeming contradiction between question 250 in the *Sverdrup Catechism* and its counterpart, question 251 in the LFC version.³ The *Sverdrup Catechism* asks: "To whom has God given authority to declare the forgiveness of sins? [ans.] To the ministers of the Word; but any member of the Christian Church may declare it in case of need. (Confession.)" Rev. H. P. Grimsby in his *Teachers' Helps on Sverdrup's Explanation* makes this comment on question 250: "Not only the minister has power to forgive sin, but any Christian can forgive the sins of a penitent sinner if he is asked to do so."⁴



Title pages from 1864 version of H. U. Sverdrup's catechism, containing 624 questions. This edition published 1892 by the Conference. Note royal authorization on right hand page: "Royal Resolution of December 16, 1865. This edition of Pontoppidan's *Explanation*, produced by H. U. Sverdrup of Balestrand parish, is graciously offered for use in public religious education."

On the other hand, the LFC catechism's question 251 reads: "Whom has God given power to declare the forgiveness of Sins? [ans.] The congregation, through its ministers. [Absolution.]" Why would the *Sverdrup Catechism* say both the clergy and the members of the church have authority from God to forgive sins, while the LFC catechism seems to limit this power to the clergy only?

Why would the LFC, which was organized around principles of congregationalism and the diminution of clerical control, deny the right to pronounce absolution to its congregational members and (on the surface at least) make it appear to be the exclusive right of the clergy? No explanation or clarification seems to have been forthcoming.

But there may be another explanation. At the beginning of the answer in the *Sverdrup*

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THE GEORG SVERDRUP SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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H. U. Sverdrup's Catechism . . .

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Catechism, the authority to forgive sins is given "To the ministers of the Word." In other words, the clergy first. "But any member of the Christian Church may declare it in case of need." This rendering would seem to reflect the *Emergency Principle* commonly practiced among some Norwegian Lutheran churches at the time. That is, the right to preach and proclaim the gospel was the sole possession of the pastor, except in extreme emergencies.⁵

The LFC answer reverses the order and begins with the congregation. The full statement reads: "The Congregation, through its ministers." In other words, the authority to declare forgiveness of sins

belongs to the congregation as a whole. The congregation possesses this authority. The pastor then exercises it on behalf of the congregation. What may be implied, implicitly, is that since the congregation has this original authority, individual members may exercise it as the need may arise. As Georg Sverdrup writes elsewhere, the fact that it is the pastor's role to visit the sick and the shut-in on behalf of the congregation does not imply that individual members should be excluded from visitation because the pastor is directly involved. Or might this statement be read in yet another way? Could the "ministers" here actually mean "the priesthood of all believers" since the word is not capitalized and is set in the plural? In this case question 251 would include all members of the congregation as "ministers" holding this authority—clergy as well as laity. If the congregation's role discussed in question 251 expresses either of these intents, it would be more consistent with the LFC's understanding of the congregation.

It is always dangerous, however, to read "intent" into statements written well over a hundred years ago. Suffice it to say, question 251 in many ways appears to raise more questions than answers.⁶

NOTES

¹ For an interesting discussion of the role of Pontoppidan's *Catechism* in Norway and America, see Bjørn Sandvik, "'Suffered under Pontius Pontoppidan' or 'Good, Old Pontoppidan'?" in *Crossings: Norwegian-American Lutheranism as a Transatlantic Tradition*, ed. Todd W. Nichol (Northfield, Minnesota: Norwegian American Historical Association, 2003), 57-71.

² The first sentence of Fundamental Principle #4 of the Lutheran Free Church originally read: "Members of the organized congregation are not, in every instance, believers, and such hypocrites often derive false hope from their external connection with the congregation." In 1956, the word "members" was inserted in place of "hypocrites." The AFLC, which subscribes to the Fundamental Principles, uses "members" in its version today.

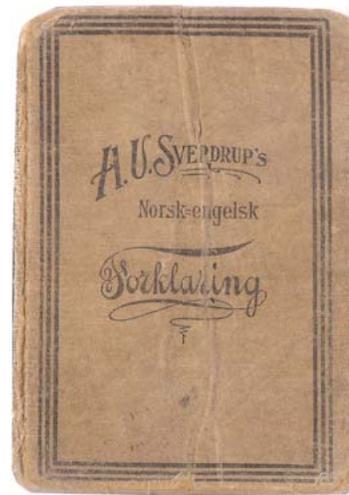
³ Sverdrup's question 250 in Pontoppidan's *Catechism* corresponds with number 535 and reads: "By what means does God impart to men the forgiveness of sins? [ans.] By His Holy Gospel whereby He has

given his ministers power and authority to, in His place, proclaim to the penitent the forgiveness of sins." Sverdrup's version appears to have added the notion of the congregation.

⁴ H. P. Grimsby, *Teachers' Helps on Sverdrup's Explanation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1925), 127.

⁵ For an explanation of the "Emergency Principle" in Norway at the time, see Andreas Helland, *Georg Sverdrup: The Man and His Message* (Minneapolis: Messenger Press, 1947), 32.

⁶ In 2007, the AFLC revised and updated its catechism, the altered LFC version of *Sverdrup's Catechism*. In its rendering of question 251, the Board of Publications chose to go with a combination of the two answers: "Who has God given authority to declare the forgiveness of sins? [ans.] The congregation, through its ministers; but any member of the Christian Church may declare it in case of need. (Confession and Absolution)"



H.U. Sverdrup's Forklaring, published in 1923 by Augsburg Publishing. This bilingual edition includes Prof. E. G. Lund's translation from 1900. This version contains 388 questions and answers, having been reduced to that number by Norway's Department of Church and Education in 1893.