



# The Georg Sverdrup Society

## NEWSLETTER

### Dr. Carl Vaagenes to Speak at GSS Annual Meeting in Minneapolis on October 5

#### In this Issue:

Vaagenes to Speak at Annual Meeting	1
"Sven Oftedal" 2013 Theme	1
"The First Blow"	2
A Giant in the Earth?	2
The Life of Prof. Oftedal	3
Prof. Sven Oftedal	4
The "Open Declaration"	4

#### Georg Sverdrup

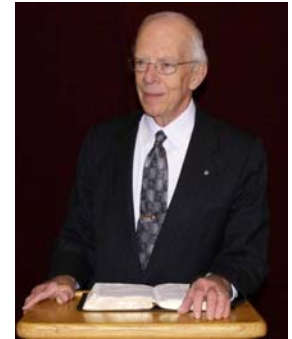
- Born to Pastor Harold Ulrich Sverdrup and his wife Caroline Metella, nee Suur, at Balestrand, Sogn, Norway, on December 16, 1848.
- Died on May 3, 1907, in Minneapolis, MN, and buried in the Lakewood Cemetery.

The tenth annual meeting of the Georg Sverdrup Society will be held Saturday, October 5, in the Hans Nielsen Hauge Chapel on the AFLC Schools campus, at 3120 East Medicine Lake Boulevard, Plymouth, Minnesota. A buffet luncheon will be served at 12:00 noon followed by the program at 1:00 p.m. The GSS Annual Meeting will begin at 2:30.

This year's program speaker will be Dr. Carl P. Vaagenes, presenting on "The Vocabulary of Faith for the Congregation: Georg Sverdrup's Gift of Language in Proclaiming Christ's Message to the World." Dr. Vaagenes has been translating and writing for the Society since 2008, his main focus being Sverdrup's Mission Medita-

tions from Volume 6 of *Samlede Skrifter*. To date, Vaagenes has been responsible for translating 27 of the 85 meditations from this volume, all of which have been published in *The Sverdrup Journal*. Because of his own missionary experience in Madagascar, Vaagenes brings unique insight into and understanding of Sverdrup's passion for missions.

Born in Betroka, Madagascar, Dr. Vaagenes is the son of Lutheran Free Church missionaries Rev. M. G. C. and Hanna Vaagenes. Both parents were born in Norway, immigrated to America for their education, and then left for the mission field. As a result, Dr. Vaagenes had the experience of growing up in a home where Norwegian



Dr. Carl Vaagenes

was the everyday language. When he went outdoors, he conversed in Malagasy with his playmates, and when he went to school, he was taught in English. Fluent in four languages (Norwegian, French, Malagasy, and English), Vaagenes is unusually  
(Continued on page 3)

### "Sven Oftedal" 2013 Theme



The theme of the 2013 Journal of the Georg Sverdrup Society is "Sven Oftedal." This marks a departure for the society, in focusing on a figure other than Sverdrup himself. However, it is impossible to properly understand the dynamics of the young Lutheran Free Church without understanding the contributions of Sverdrup's closest

friend and ally. The two were inseparable, and in at least one collection their sermons were treated as if composed by a single hand. A highlight of the journal will be the first published translation of Oftedal's lecture, "Free Associations Among Free Congregations," a seminal Free Church document.

## “The First Blow”

Translated by Larry Walker

*The following article was first published in the immigrant newspaper, “Danskeren” (“The Dane”), and included in a series of tributes to Prof. Sven Oftedal published shortly after his death in 1911. It offers an eyewitness account of Professor Oftedal soon after he had arrived from Norway and relates how he first appeared as a public figure in the controversy between the Danish-Norwegian Conference and the much larger, more conservative Norwegian Synod. Prof. August Weenaas was the first president of Augsburg College. It is unclear from the published version whether the three paragraphs following the break come from the original “Danskeren” article or not. (ed.)*

We knew him particularly as a young man, when he had just arrived from Norway—both as a teacher and otherwise.

Shortly after he had come to Minneapolis, a discussion meeting was

held in Trinity Church between members of the Conference and the Norwegian Synod concerning “the justification of the world.”

It was there that Sven Oftedal first stepped forward in public.

The Norwegian Synod men had provided themselves with stacks of books; a servant came carrying a whole armful.

When the discussion began, jabs were directed at Prof. Wenaas; his weak side was well known.

But at a wave from the Chairman, he sat down, and Oftedal spoke up and thereafter led the discussion from the Conference side.

He was equipped only with his New Testament in Greek and “*Børnelærdom*,” which was their term for the extract of Pontoppidan’s *Explanation*.

Everyone gazed on that dignified young countenance with its blond locks around a plump face.

We were immediately impressed that it was the figure of a leader that stood there.

It did not take long before he had rendered his opponents’ many books and patristic authorities redundant. He kept himself to the New Testament and *Børnelærdom* and demanded answers “with neither horns nor fangs.”

The entire assembly stared in amazement at this young man. He was even compared to Luther.

\* \* \*

This was a characteristic of Oftedal’s and Sverdrup’s church work, which the young Oftedal at that memorable meeting introduced—“The New Testament and *Børnelærdom*.”

It was of first importance for them to hold fast to, and to dispense, God’s Word, and to give it to the people in a manner which the congregation members could understand.

Therefore let their memory be blessed!

## A Giant in the Earth?

Translated by Larry Walker

At the news of his death, this association feels that it has grounds, no less than others, to say with the poet, “Great is our loss.” For among us Norwegians in America there is none who, through their life and work, has served precisely the cause for which our association labors than you. Clearly have you shown us that there is no contradiction in being at once an American and a Norwegian. As an American, you have for nearly forty years devoted to your new Fatherland all your labor. You have lived for

America, and especially for the Norwegian people in America. But you have been just as fully and completely a Norwegian. You were not only quick to recognize and appropriate to yourself the good you found in your new Fatherland, but you also sought to preserve and—so far as possible—to transplant what you brought of your heritage which you recognized as greater than so many among us would believe. Therefore we must also add with the poet, “Great is our gain.”

And it is especially for this reason that the Association feels obligated to express to you our profound thanks.

The leadership of “The Society for Norwegian Language and Culture,”

Via a committee:

O. E. Rølvaag, P. J. Eikeland

## GSS Annual Meeting (cont.)

gifted as a linguist and a translator. Largely because Norwegian was his first language, his understanding of and appreciation for Sverdrup's use of language is evident, as will be seen in his presentation

Vaagenes is a graduate of Augsburg College and Theological Seminary, where he earned a BTh (MDiv). He attended the University of Paris, Sorbonne, 1955-1956. He returned to Madagascar with his wife, Ruth Oredson, whom he married in 1950. They served as Lutheran Free Church missionaries until 1972.

Upon their return to the United States, they served calls to Ebenezer Lutheran Church in Northwood, North Dakota (1973-1978), and Lutheran congregations in Tofte and Lutsen, Minnesota (1978-1991). He earned a Doctor of Ministry from Luther Northwestern Seminary in 1988 where his dissertation was "The Gifts of the Holy Spirit in a Lutheran Congregation."

From 1991-1994, he served a call to Brooklyn Park Lutheran Church and was at North Heights Lutheran Church, St. Paul, from 1994-2012.

Dr. Vaagenes and his

wife, Ruth, have four children and several grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Since Sven Oftedal is the society's study topic for this year, a recent translation of one of his writings will be read. The program will also include the traditional "Sverdrup Songfest," and special music will be provided by AFLC schools

To help give an accurate count for the luncheon, please contact Loiell Dyrud before September 30 by email: lod@wiktel.com or phone: 218-681-6964.

—Loiell Dyrud



## The Life of Prof. Sven Oftedal

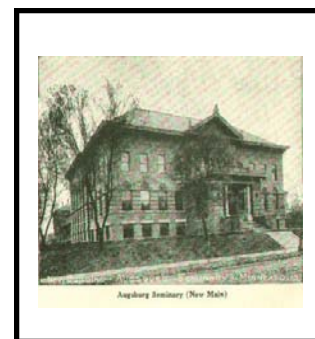
Sven Oftedal (March 22, 1844 –March 30, 1911) was born in Stavanger, Norway, and studied at the University of Oslo. He came to Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1873 to serve as a professor of the New Testament at Augsburg Seminary, predecessor to Augsburg College. Augsburg was the first seminary founded by Norwegian Lutherans in America. August Weenaas, Augsburg's first president, had recruited both Sven Oftedal and Georg Sverdrup from Norway to join the faculty. Sven Oftedal and Georg Sverdrup were scholars from prominent Haugean families in Norway who came to Augsburg College, bringing with them a genuinely radical view of Christian education, centered on Scripture and the

simple doctrines of Christianity. In time, both Oftedal and Sverdrup would serve as presidents of Augsburg College. Additionally, Oftedal was chairman of the board of regents at Augsburg College for 36 years.

It was at Augsburg College that Oftedal, along with Georg Sverdrup, founded the Lutheran Free Church. Sverdrup, Oftedal, and others felt their beliefs were being compromised and broke away from the United Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, forming the Lutheran Free Church in 1897. The denomination would exist as a separate synod until 1963.

In 1877, Sven Oftedal organized the *Folkebladet* Publishing Company, which would merge in 1922 with

the Free Church Book Concern. That company would in turn merge with Augsburg Publishing in 1963. Oftedal was also elected to the Minneapolis School Board and was appointed to the Minneapolis Library Board. Additionally, Oftedal served as pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Minneapolis for five years. Trinity Lutheran Church, which was founded in 1868, was originally a Norwegian immigrant Lutheran church, which would have roots in the Lutheran Free Church. (Wikipedia)





**THE GEORG SVERDRUP  
SOCIETY NEWSLETTER**

PO Box 400  
Beulah, ND 58523  
www.georgsverdrupsociety.org

---

**Ordet Blev Kjødt**

*(The Word Became Flesh)*

---

Directors

Loiell Dyrud, President  
Steve Mundfrom, Vice-President  
Timothy Larson, Secretary  
Kris Nyman, Treasurer and  
Membership Secretary  
Larry Walker, Editor  
Craig Johnson  
Wesley Langaas

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

## “Professor Sven Oftedal”

Translated by Raynard Huglen

Source: *Folkebladet*, April 5, 1911. Author unknown.

So it is so, Professor Oftedal is dead. He is also taken from us, taken from the noise of strife and struggle here below to the Father’s house above where—after the end of one’s workday, after the end of labor, battle, and trouble—there is rest and peace. The strong figure of leadership with its varied moods, which could be mild and friendly as a child, but also authoritative and commanding as a master and commander, is no longer with us. The leader we looked up to, the friend to whom we could go and open up our hearts, the personality that inspired confidence, which a host of our church people had learned to regard as their spiritual leader and father, has been taken away. The pioneer, foundation-layer, trailblazer for the free church work, which has evolved and gone forth from Augsburg Seminary during his thirty-eight year stewardship there, is taken away.

To our people, who throughout the whole time have shared the good and bad with him, and there are many, and the many he has enlisted to take part in support of the work of the church, he has stood as a champion. They will feel the heavy sorrow and the distressing loss lying over them when the news of Professor Oftedal’s death reaches them. He has followed his life-long friend [Sverdrup] with whom he had worked for most of a generation and at whose casket four years ago he cried out: “Farewell, soul of my soul, spirit of my spirit, half of my life, my last friend. Now you have gone, and I am alone in a strange land; but what is our loss is your triumph, and I will soon follow you. Therefore, farewell again, Georg, and welcome home to the Lord!”

## The “Open Declaration”

Translated by Larry Walker



Prof. Weenaas

*One of the most dramatic events in the formation of the Lutheran Free Church was the publication of the “Open Declaration” (Aapen Erklaring) in 1873. This document, in which a young Prof. Oftedal outlined his beliefs about the church, caused great offense among a number of Norwegian-Americans. It also contributed to an eventual break with Augsburg President August Weenaas, who returned to Norway.*

*Andreas Helland, in his book Augsburg Seminar Gjennem Femti Aar (Augsburg Seminary Through Fifty Years, Folkebladet Publishing Co., 1920) quotes Pres. Weenaas’ explanation of how the Open Declaration came to be written:*

After the free conference in Luther Valley, Wisconsin, relations with the Norwegian Synod were, unfortunately, more tense than ever. Nevertheless this did not prevent so-called “local conferences” being held in various locations in 1873, and when opportunity arose, I and Oftedal also participated in these. Because of this a rumor began to spread, no one knows from where, that Professor Oftedal was a secret friend of the Norwegian Synod, and by subversive and cunning means was laboring for the union of

the Conference with the Synod. This led me to speak with O[ftedal] about this, believing that it was necessary for one of us to give a more accurate explanation of why these local conferences were being held, and to what ends they might be profitable. Oftedal declared himself ready immediately to compose a more accurate explanation, which became “The Open Declaration of What We Are Fighting Against, and of How We Will Fight,” and was signed by both of us.