

**THE GEORG SVERDRUP
SOCIETY NEWSLETTER**

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Ordet Blev Kjødt
(The Word Became Flesh)

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“Prof. Sven Oftedal Has Gone Home” (cont.)

language, though modern Greek specifically, and made two trips to Greece in order to study the language, the history, and culture of the country, especially with regard to the New Testament. (The results of this work, which he began with unabated perseverance and strength after returning from Greece, is not, so far as we know, yet available.)

Through this work Oftedal became intimate with the Greeks, both in Greece and in the Twin Cities Greek colony. He delivered several speeches in Greek to Greek gatherings here in the city, attended their meetings, and not long ago participated in and addressed a mass meeting, formulating an appeal to the American people for the people of Crete, who desire freedom from Turkish oppression, and liberation through association with the

The Georg Sverdrup Society was organized in December 2003 and is open to anyone interested in the life and work of noted Norwegian-American theologian Georg Sverdrup (1848-1907). The society is registered in the State of Minnesota as a 501 (C)(3) nonprofit corporation. Its activities, which are guided by a seven-member board of directors, include:

- Promoting the study and understanding of the New Testament congregation as understood and explained by Georg Sverdrup;
- Endeavoring to advance the ideal of “free and living congregations” as envisioned by Sverdrup;
- Seeking to foster further translation of Sverdrup’s writings into English;
- Encouraging the study and application of the “Fundamental Principles” and “Rules for Work” as used in the Lutheran Free Church and as continuing to be used in the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations;
- Enlarging the interest in Sverdrup’s works by organizing discussion groups and providing speakers on request;
- Operating a **Sverdrup Society** website linked to <www.aflc.org> for members of the Society and others interested in the life and work of Georg Sverdrup;
- Maintaining a current bibliography of Sverdrup’s translated work as well as a current bibliography of materials written about him;
- Publishing a newsletter for members that provides information on the Society’s activities as well as general information about Georg Sverdrup;
- And encouraging research and study of Sverdrup’s life and work by publishing an annual **Sverdrup Journal**.

Greek motherland. At that time he also endorsed the cause of the oppressed. The Greek colony has declared that his death is the loss, not only of a good friend and adviser, but also of a father, and they have sent notice of his death to the Greek National Alliance in Athens, of which he was a member.

Likewise, on the recommendation of the Norwegian government and the king of Norway, he was awarded the Order of St. Olaf by Bishop Bang during his visit to America as the delegate of the Nordman’s Alliance on May 17, 1908.

Prof. Oftedal is survived by his wife, Marie (Gjertsen), daughter Karoline, and sons, Pastor Asmund, Rochester, Minnesota; Sven, Jr.; and George, Minneapolis. His brother, Pastor Gustav Oftedal, also lives in Minneapolis, while a sister, Mrs. Maren Wettland, resides in Portland, Oregon.

* * *

This is a short summary of this man’s life and history. It offers, however, only a feeble outline of his turbulent, active life. The work that he was able to carry on for our people here in this land, the mark he has left, the contribution he has made to the development of the Norwegian-American church, will be better told by history than we can just now as has laid down his day’s labor. It is certain that his great leadership, as well as his work and the steadfast sense of purpose he pursued, will be etched in sharp lines in history’s pages, and he will be judged, by each person who is able and willing to judge impartially and without prejudice, as one of the greatest church pioneers of this country, and a founder and pioneer of the free church work.

Folkebladet, April 5, 1911



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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**

The Georg Sverdrup Society

NEWSLETTER

Eighth Annual Meeting to be Held October 8

The Georg Sverdrup Society will hold its eighth annual meeting in the Hauge Chapel on the AFLC Schools campus, 3120 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, MN, on Saturday, October 8. Lunch will begin at 12:00 p.m., followed by the program at 1:00 and the annual business meeting at 2:30.

Because 2011 marks the 100th anniversary of the death of Sven Oftedal, co-founder of the Lutheran Free Church, the program will include Rev. Raynard Huglen reading his translation of “Professor Oftedal’s Funeral” which

appeared in the April 5, 1911, *Folkebladet*.

The main speaker for the event will be Rev. Robert Lee on the topic of “Georg Sverdrup vs. Gisle Johnson—Lay Preaching and the Augsburg Confession.” The Sverdrup Society’s topic for discussion this year is “Sverdrup and Lay Activity,” and Pastor Lee’s presentation should shed light on one of the hotly debated topics of Sverdrup’s day—should lay preachers be allowed to preach in Lutheran pulpits? This topic had been an issue dating back to the days of

Hans Nielsen Hauge.

The AFLTS Seminary Chorus will sing for the meeting. Mrs. Marian Christopherson, AFLC Director of Publications and Parish Education, will again lead us in a “Sverdrup Song-fest,” and Rev. Kris Nyman will be reading a recent translation on lay activity from Sverdrup’s *Samlede Skrifte i Udvalg*.

To help us get an accurate count for the luncheon, please notify Loiell Dyrud by September 30 at email lod@wiktel.com or phone 218-681-6964.

Centennial of Oftedal's Passing

The year 2011 marks the 100th anniversary of the death of Lutheran Free Church co-founder Sven Oftedal. Oftedal, together with his friend Georg Sverdrup, founded the LFC in 1897. Both men had come from Norway to teach at Augsburg Seminary, Oftedal in 1873 and Sverdrup in 1874.

Theirs was a powerful and dynamic friendship. They complemented each other—Sverdrup the brilliant thinker and writer and Oftedal the great promoter and orator. Together they were the formidable force behind



Augsburg and the Lutheran Free Church.

Older than Sverdrup by four years, Oftedal also outlived him by four years. With

Oftedal’s death on March 30, 1911, both the men who had guided Augsburg Seminary for thirty years and the Lutheran Free Church for fourteen years were gone.

To mark the centennial of his passing, we devote the rest of this issue to an article that appeared in *Folkebladet* shortly after his death. This article provides a brief sketch of Oftedal’s life and appears on the following pages in a translation by Raynard Huglen.

September 2011

Volume 8, Issue 2

“Prof. Sven Oftedal Has Gone Home”

Translated by Raynard Huglen

Prof. Sven Oftedal passed away at the Norwegian Deaconess Hospital last Thursday afternoon at 3:10, following bladder surgery in the morning. The operation ended a little before noon and he seemed to have come through it well, but he never regained full consciousness beyond, when his daughter Karoline asked him whether he knew her, whispering her name. He faded quickly, and with his wife and the children, Miss Karoline, Asmund, and George, together with Prof. [George] Sverdrup, Jr., and Mrs. Asmund Oftedal around his bed, slept away.

The news rang out sorrowfully over the city and, undoubtedly painfully, as it spread across the country among our people. Although he had been very sick for over two weeks, and those who looked after his needs wavered between fear and hope, and seemed to fear the worst, yet all had hoped that he would be spared to us at least for a time.

There was always the image of him—as he appeared up until the time he fell ill. They could see him moving about with the same buoyant step and erect bearing; and even before entering the hospital he attended the young people’s meeting at Trinity Church, where he seemed well and high-spirited as always, and with his accustomed youthfulness participated and enjoyed himself among the young.

But his hourglass had run out. The Lord, whose faithful servant he had been, took him home from the battlefield here below, where he had fulfilled a long and active life to build up His church, unto the rest above.

Prof. Sven Oftedal was born in Stavanger, Norway, on March 22, 1844, to his parents, Latin School teacher and bank treasurer S. L. Oftedal, and his wife Gunhild (Stokke) Oftedal. Even in childhood he learned quickly both in home and at school. He attended the Latin

school where his father was a teacher, and graduated from it in 1862. The same year he took his examination for the Bachelor of Arts degree in Christiania [later Oslo], and the year after he took his examination at the same place.

Then he travelled for several years, especially in southern Europe and around the Mediterranean Sea; for some time he was private tutor for a family up in Telemark. He studied at the university again, taking his theology degree in 1871. Through all his studies he devoted much time to the study of both ancient and modern languages, literature, and philosophy. After taking the examination in theology he studied a year in Paris, where Prof. Sverdrup was studying at the same time, and here began the friendship, grounded in a mutual churchly interest and outlook on life, which endured a lifetime between these two, and united them in mutual work and common tasks. And their common work has left such deep impressions on church development among the Norwegian immigrants in this country.

Democratic by nature, through study and research developing with a free, enlarged view of ecclesiastical as well as civic matters, a man of the people in the best sense and widest meaning of the word, he had no sympathy for the state church back home in its deplorable condition. Therefore, when in the summer of 1873 he received a call from the Conference to assume a theological professorship at Augsburg Seminary, he accepted that call, and that same fall arrived in Minneapolis to take up the work.

Here he threw himself into the labor and struggle for free and living congregations based on the catechism [children’s instruction] and the Scriptures. Shortly after he had taken up his duties at Augsburg, the first powerful blow was struck. The thing that revealed the battle lines that would define the work was the publication

of “The Open Declaration” in January 1874. Professor [August] Weenaas, the president of Augsburg Seminary, had co-authored the Declaration with him, but later withdrew his name. Professor Oftedal had no retractions to make, then or later. He had, as he once expressed it, come to this country to clear away the forests and wilderness, and in this little publication the call to battle was given. It should be noted also that it was “The Open Declaration” that hastened the coming of Prof. Georg Sverdrup to take up the work along with him.

From that time on, Prof. Oftedal devoted all his manly strength and mental prowess to the preparation of the church work he had set as his goal. A freedom-loving, progressive, and battle-eager man, the sound of the clash of armor soon became associated with him. While the finances of Augsburg were laid upon his shoulders from the beginning, and he was also occupied with leading and planning the work of the school, he nevertheless advanced the struggle for the free church program to which he had committed himself.

In 1877, the responsibility of a debt of \$16,000 accumulated by the seminary was passed on to him, and in order to deal with that he established *Folkebladet*. Thus he not only publicized the school’s financial need, but in the paper he also did battle for the spiritual principles for which the school stood. There are still those among our people who possess some of the articles he wrote, and they are cherished not so much as historical documents as as treasured jewels.

The paper was discontinued after the ingathering for the debt had been successful in spite of a poor harvest, but it was revived a couple years later, with Professors

“Prof. Sven Oftedal Has Gone Home” (cont.)

Oftedal and Sverdrup as editors, while Oftedal managed the finances. Up to the end, he was connected with the paper, always one of its directors and most often the chairman, and was one of the paper’s most faithful contributors.

When the Conference, in 1880, decided to set its ingathering for the school at \$50,000, it was Prof. Oftedal who was given the task of carrying that out as well. The amount was raised by 1888. In the Conference years, during both the proceedings and the violent passions of struggle that followed until Augsburg became independent again, Oftedal took a leading role and was for much of the time the particular object of violence directed against the school. And once Augsburg emerged from these tribulations it fell to his lot to look after the school’s financial interests. It was he who headed the ingathering of funds to erect the new building (long the administration and chapel building) even as later, three or four years ago, he had to stand in the breach and take upon himself the collection of money to eliminate the debt the school had accumulated. Prof. Oftedal was, nearly all the time he was connected with the school, chairman of its Board of Trustees. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, he edited and published, along with Prof. Sverdrup, *Kvartalskrift* (a quarterly newsletter). He was also co-editor of the devotional church paper *Lutheraneren* (*The Lutheran*), which the Conference published. He also took an active part in pastoral work here in the city. From 1874 to 1877, he was pastor of Trinity Congregation, just as he had, both

then and later, taken part in the mission work that congregation carried out through establishing congregations in other parts of the city.

Besides this many-faceted work for the school and other concerns, he played his part in the teaching and leadership of the school and in its development and progress. He was a pioneer in other church areas as well. In the Deaconess work, in missions, both among the heathen Santal and Jewish missions, he was among those who laid the foundations and gave of his strength. Over the years he was an administration member for these organizations. He was always willing to serve his people, always willing to sacrifice, whether it concerned being a mediator or working to advance God’s Kingdom on earth, always a leading force wherever he took part.

Prof. Oftedal participated in civic life too and exercised his influence there in various ways. Already in 1878, when he had been in this country only five years, he was elected a member of the [Minneapolis] school board, and he was re-elected to serve for ten years in all. Four of those years he served as board chairman. During that time he established the high school system, of which he is the recognized father. He was also a member of the board of directors of the [Minneapolis] Library from 1886, when the library started, until 1896. The idea of establishing branch libraries around the city so that library books might be accessible to all, especially to members of the working class, was devised and implemented by him.

It can also be laid to his

credit that Scandinavian literature, especially that of Norway, has been as well represented in the library as it has. Over the years he has been an active leader, and a force in the city’s daily life.

Prof. Oftedal was also one of the pioneers in abstinence work. In the establishment and organization of the South Minneapolis Abstinence Society, he took a leading part. He was one of the most vigorous advocates for the institution of police patrol boundaries here in the city. And one of the last things he did before lying down on the sick bed from which he never rose again, was to prepare an address to deliver at the graduation festival of the south Minneapolis Abstinence Society, presenting certificates to the young men who had passed the Abstinence course during the winter. But he grew ill the very day of the festival, and so could not participate.

As mentioned earlier, he devoted himself early to the study of languages and literature, especially modern languages. He pursued his love for these interests even amid his restless labor for the church and people here in this country. . . . It seems rather to have been a cherished diversion in which he found relaxation, when now and then he could break off from his daily life’s tiring work and struggles.

His skill in languages, however, was comprehensive. He was especially familiar with the languages and dialects of southern Europe. Greek had been his favorite study in youth, and when he had retired from active work for Augsburg Seminary he resumed the study of that



The inscription on the Sverdrup and Oftedal Memorial stone in Lakewood Cemetery reads: “In Memory of Georg Sverdrup and Sven Oftedal. On the ground, the footstone on the left belongs to Oftedal while the one on the right is for Georg Sverdrup. Even in death, the close friends are buried side by side.”

