

Professor Georg Sverdrup

Sermons, Essays, and Reports

Concerning the Augsburg Seminary and the Lutheran Free Church

Edited by

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The English translations in this volume were generated primarily through artificial intelligence-based language tools operating under detailed scholarly instructions. These translations were subsequently reviewed, evaluated, and corrected through an independent secondary AI process for semantic, theological, and stylistic fidelity to the original Norwegian sources. Editorial responsibility in the present edition is limited to methodological design, critical oversight, and presentation; the original source texts remain authoritative.

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Editorial Sigla.—

Notes marked “—Ed.” originate with Andreas Helland, editor of the 1910 volume.

Notes marked “— Present Ed.” indicate editorial responsibility in the present edition. Preface

As mentioned in the subscription invitation issued more than a year ago, the intention was that one volume of Professor Sverdrup's Collected Writings in Selection should deal with "the education of pastors, and this especially in connection with the school in which the author carried out his long and blessed work." As the work of organizing the exceedingly rich material progressed, it became clear, however, that a considerable portion of what was originally intended to be included in this volume would almost necessarily have to find its place in the volume dealing with the congregation, if a break in the coherence of several of the articles published there was to be avoided. The author also regarded the education of pastors as an exceedingly important link in the work of "building the congregation."

This made it necessary to alter the plan for the present volume somewhat, with the result that it deals chiefly with Augsburg Seminary and Lutheran church doctrine. As such, it is for the most part of a historical nature, since I have included excerpts from the reports that the author submitted in connection with his work for the school and the church. With reference to what is stated below, page 29, note, concerning the omissions that have been made, I will say here only that it has been my intention and is my hope that the published statements from the reports will be suitable and sufficient to give the general reader a reasonably clear picture of the institutions concerned, whereas the historically and scientifically trained student will in any case have to turn to the original sources.

Here, too, I have sought to follow the principles for the treatment of the material that I set forth in the preface to the first and second volumes. Many persons and circumstances had at the time necessarily to be mentioned in reports and elsewhere, in order that the situation might become clear and unmistakable to those who were affected by it in one way or another. When several names have been omitted here, although they will surely have to find a place again in a future North American church history, this has been done in the recognition that no one would be readier than the author himself to concede that "one should write feelings in sand, but benefactions in metal."

As is well known, Professor Sverdrup died early in the morning of May 3, 1907. He had been at the school on Tuesday, but not on Wednesday and Thursday. On Thursday evening the school's closing celebration was held, conducted by Professor Stetzel in Veitkirch's stead. It will also be remembered that the "Augsburg editor," Pastor Ole Paulson, had died a little more than a week earlier. After Professor Sverdrup's death, a piece of paper written in pencil was found on his desk. From its contents it was easy to see that it was a preliminary draft of a speech for the closing celebration. In a few short sentences it contains, as is said, the whole of Professor Sverdrup's outlook on life. In this volume, where a series of speeches delivered by him on various occasions has been gathered, it seems fitting that this, his last speech—the one he never came to deliver—should also be included. There is reason to believe that through these few, simple yet soulful words he still speaks, though he is dead.

With the hope that the present volume will, for many, revive old, valuable memories and help toward a better understanding and a more just assessment of Augsburg Seminary and Lutheran church doctrine, it is sent out on its way.

Augsburg Seminary, May 7, 1910.

Andreas Helland.

1 Address at the Conclusion of the Chair-Year, 1884

Folkelbladet, 13 May 1884. The closing celebration was held on 7 May. — Ed.

This section appears on pages 110—114 of the original volume. — Present Ed.

It is in a moment such as this, when the joy of youth at having advanced so far mingles with the deep seriousness awakened by the thought of what is yet to come, that the fitting hour has arrived to pause, to cast a glance backward, and, if possible, to try to see a little way forward.

For this is what makes the farewell celebration from the chair so strangely moving, so inwardly beneficial for the young: that the whole of life, with its joy and its sorrow, gathers itself into a single brief second. The memories become so vivid, so luminously alive, as though they did not belong to the far past, but gathered with smiling countenances about us, nodded toward us, and said: Here we are; we have all been with you and done our part that you have come thus far. Now we will be with you to keep festival and to rejoice that this was not in vain and passed through sorrow; it was not useless that we brought you joy.

And the dreams of the future, they too present themselves in such an hour. Half-veiled are their faces, yet they bend lovingly and gently over our head and whisper to us: Give not up; we are still here, and what was set before you was Christ as the goal; it was He we held before you in the heavy hours of your life.

And when past and future thus assemble in the glad hour of youth, it lifts around the young man's eye a firmament of glittering, blinking stars, and he scarcely knows toward which he shall reach—whether it be into the deep spring of memories, or toward the blue star of longing.

He who has experienced such moments never forgets them; therefore it is precious to be allowed to lay down a small seed of solemn earnestness in such an hour; if it reaches the soul, then in its own time it will come again with increase and with fruit.

What lies nearest at hand for us is to speak together of what the time means which we have spent together at Augsburg.¹ So many, and so many kinds of feelings are there, that it is only fitting to ask: what does our school will, and why does it will to be what it is? Many, many times will your thoughts go back to old Augsburg; and then we would so gladly have it be the case that there should be a strong reminder of the chair's founding thought in your hearts.

There are many things which in the future will rise up in your remembrance and give you a wholesome, heart-moving laughter, and I would say: would that there were many such things that you might take with you; they are well granted. But it is not of these that we will speak; those things speak for themselves.

There are things which have happened to you and to us, which you will never be able to remember without melancholy and pain; neither of these will we speak of now.

¹Augsburg Seminary, Minneapolis, founded in 1870.

There are holy moments which we have had together and each one by himself; they will knock many times upon the door of the heart; open to them when they come again, for they will bring new strength with them each time. Neither of these will we speak of now.

But of this one thing will we speak together: what has our school, in all this, sought to accomplish for you? There is one great thought running through it all. It is the thought of being a school for personal development.

It was the home with the building, it was the thought in the timetable, it was the intention of the instruction, it was the plan of the boarding club and the sick-benefit association, it was the principle in the whole governance and ordering.

There are schools whose thoughtless, spirit-drying task seems to be that of stuffing knowledge into the young, as one puts peas into an empty sack. That was not our intention.

There are schools whose conscience-less work is that of being a Procrustes-bed for the young, where all were to be made the same size and the same smallness, clipped off or stretched out until the same coat and the same uniform fitted them all. Inhuman schools, whose teachers have not understood that the coat must fit the man, not the man the coat. These are the schools of dogmatic systems, where all are to be driven to think other men's thoughts, not their own. Such schools we will not have.

There are schools that think more of what is useful than of what is true, where youth from the very first hour are trained for a station in life in a merely mechanical, handicraft fashion; where the first and highest rule is this: Think never! But learn to do according to this or that rule, and you will make your fortune in life. Such was not our intention with the school.

There are schools where the teachers are eloquent and the pupils mute; where the teachers are interesting, but the pupils tedious; where the pupils are daily flooded with a deluge of words, whether they gape from drowsiness or from astonishment; where everything is communicated, but little or nothing received; where everything is swallowed, but little or nothing digested. We would not have such a school.

The purpose of Augsburg was to cultivate and promote a free and manly and independent personality. We desired, if it were possible, that everything should draw toward one goal: that there should go forth from here men whose spirit and heart were awakened and set free by the knowledge of the truth; men who had learned to think truly and to speak freely; men who possessed both the ability and the strength to step forth into the life of the people for the victorious cause of truth.

To what end, then, the many languages and the much grammar? Why this, and why that? Surely not in order that a young man should have occasion to make himself a fool when he lifted his nose on high because he was one who knew Greek or Latin. But rather to remove a little of the many barriers and fences that are set about a man by the dividing languages. A man must have a little breathing space in life, a little elbow-room, lest he too soon be met by jabbing walls. It is indeed possible to live in a narrow, shadowed valley, especially when one has never seen anything else; but tenfold happy is the young man who is able to escape up onto the wide heights and look out over them. So it is also with him whose life is fenced in within the narrow bounds of a single language. There is need of a somewhat wider space, in

order to look out over the course of the world's development and to stand independent and free in life's struggle.

But it is not all that is needed for a sound and free development, that barriers and fences be torn down round about us. He who would be free—for him the chief thing is this: that his spirit be penetrated by the immovable conviction of the Truth, so that in the whirl of the world's life, into which we are fastened, he knows both whence he comes and whither he goes, knows both the Source of life and the End of life.

Therefore it is the endeavor of our School in all things to point away from the inflaming winds of doctrine that sweep over the sea of the people, and toward the simple Truth which alone can give the heart peace and the spirit a goal. In the motley multiplicity of history to find the red thread which God's Finger, guiding and leading, draws through the whole movement toward its end—this is the chief matter for him who would become a free man in a free people. With open brow and courageous gaze he dares to go forth into the struggle, who knows that, however it may go, there is a way for him who is driven by the Spirit of Truth. Though many sink and fall on every side, the Truth yet stands firm, unshaken; and in it there is ever new strength and new light to be found in need and in darkness.

It is the Spirit for which the matter stands; and that the Spirit should have His way and His work among us—this is that for which we have prayed, therefore is it that we have labored at Augsburg. Not by many rules and many bonds have we sought to gather and preserve the young, but we have sought to fasten our faith and our trust upon the Spirit's power over hearts unto the victory of Truth in life. And we have not been put to shame. Despite all the faults and shortcomings of our School, despite all the outward difficulties with which we have had to contend, Augsburg has nevertheless become a spiritual home for many young hearts that longed after light and truth.

And when many a time I have asked myself with wonder what it is that binds us together so strangely, there is no other answer to be found than this: it is the power of spiritual freedom which has made Augsburg a home with light and warmth, with memories both wistful and glad.

Thus it is this that we seek to fasten in our souls as a precious, awakening, and strengthening remembrance from our schooldays: our School was a home of Spirit and of Freedom, where we learned that the simplicity and seriousness of the Truth is a man's strength in the battle of life.

And so we fasten our gaze boldly forward. Life lies before us. It is the most astonishing, the most stirred and eventful, and the most variegated life that the history of the world has yet known. And thus our people, who have come from a remote corner of the world, shall have a part therein. It is natural enough that it should be both toil and struggle for our people to keep pace. Yet only few of the peoples who come hither have such favorable conditions for taking part. For if they have learned little at home, then they have the less to unlearn again. And if in the old world they had but little inclination to take part, then they have fresher powers and a sounder nature with which to lay hold together of the mighty life in the new world.

But few of our people in America have had the opportunity to develop their thinking and their spirit as those who have spent their youth here. And a great responsibility rests upon those who have enjoyed such advantages in this respect.

For our people, with its gifts and its life, stands in a perilous position in this land. In many ways it is helpless and groping when it comes to a foreign land with a new language, new laws, and new institutions. It therefore easily falls into the hands of unscrupulous leaders. And it is not altogether free from the charge that it has in many ways come to pass thus, that our people became bound in servitude in the land of freedom. It is almost regarded as recklessness and folly for a Norwegian man to think for himself and to speak his mind plainly without first asking anyone. In a free people and in a free church there always arises such sharp party divisions that it is exceedingly difficult to avoid falling under the judgments of the political or ecclesiastical tribunals of heresy. And for the party chieftains it becomes a chief concern to press their flocks beneath themselves into the straitjacket of their doctrines.

In such a land it is the greatest benefaction that can be done for the people, that there step forth men who ask after nothing else than what is true, and who with ruthless independence uphold the truth, though the judgments of heresy should rain down upon them never so thickly.

And if it should succeed that from Augsburg there might go forth some few such men, then the little struggling school would not have been raised in vain by earnest-thinking men among our people.

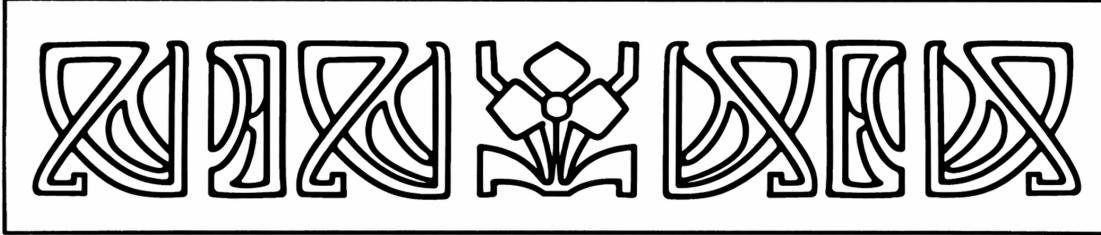
Biblical Echoes

The following passages of Scripture are not quoted directly in the address, but may be heard echoing in its imagery, movement, and exhortational force. Readers are invited to consider where and how these texts resonate within the sermon. —Present Ed.

- **Hebrews 12:1–2**
- **Philippians 3:13–14**
- **Psalm 19:1**
- **Galatians 5:1**
- **John 8:32**

Questions

- What part(s) of this sermon spoke to you?
- How does Sverdrup relate to the graduates?
- What things does Sverdrup refuse to discuss?
- Where do we see the thread of the church as a living body?
- Does Sverdrup warn of dangers to the flock? How is this warning expressed?



2 The Lord Exalteth the Lowly

Manuscript. No year is indicated. Yet the handwriting suggests that the discourse is from the beginning or middle of the eighties. The title has been added by Wg.

This section appears on pages 354–361 of the original volume. — Present Ed.

The Reformation is one of those remarkable upheavals which the human race experiences only very few of. The old is torn up and overthrown; that which was great is set beneath, and that which was little is set above. Of such an upheaval Hannah, the mother of Samuel, sang when she brought her son up to the temple of the Lord; of such an upheaval Mary sang, when she was the mother of Jesus:

“The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich;
He bringeth low and lifteth up also;
He raiseth up the poor out of the dust,
and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill,
to set them among princes,
and to make them inherit the throne of glory.”

Such an upheaval took place in the highest sense in the life and work of Jesus, when the empire of Caesar fell and the Kingdom of God was planted upon its ruins.

But a similar upheaval took place also at the Reformation. The congregation, trodden down and scorned, was lifted up by Luther unto freedom and restored to its rights. Yet the true vital force in this work, which has transformed the history of Europe and of the world, was that little secret which is in truth the great upheaval in a human heart, whereby that which is great is cast down and that which is little is lifted up. It is a Reformation in the small; it is a thought of eternity laid down within the inward realm of thought. Eternal life in the land of death.

For with faith it is thus: it lays a human being so low as he can possibly come, in order to lift him up again unto the bright and blessed heights of heaven.

It is an solemn hour when the Word—the living, sharp, two-edged Word of God—enters a human life and lays the foundation bare in the heart. As a ploughshare breaks up the earth and turns it over, so the Word of the Lord ploughs in the soil of the heart. Then a human being becomes so small and poor, and God exalts Himself in human hearts, until He fills all

things with His holy presence. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, O sinner! Who then art thou, that thou shouldest stand before His face?

Then a human heart is crushed down into unquenchable anguish; and great is the Lord alone in that day. It is the Day of Judgment in a sinner's heart. Then its pride and strength are cast down; then all its work becomes insipid and vanity; then its best righteousness has become a stinking abomination; then its hopes sink like withered flowers and as dry grass, for the breath of the Lord hath blown upon them.

How exceedingly small it has then become, how feeble and broken its strength! Great words and cheerful smiles avail nothing; it is altogether undone, and in terror a worm shrinks upon the ground before the holy God.

But when then the Holy One bends Himself down to the poor sinner and lifts him up unto Himself and says, Thou art Mine; I have redeemed thee—then is he in truth set upon the throne of glory.

When the clenched hand, by which a human being clung to the world's mere straws, is unclenched, and the soul lays hold on its Jesus as rescue from the threatening doom; and when it perceives that instead of threatening blows it is tender, loving arms that receive it—then there grows within the soul a full trust, a firm assurance, an unshakable faith, which bears through life and death.

And when a sinner goes forth again from such a meeting with God, the living God, then he is wholly renewed. God has become so great, and the world so small; God has become so strong, and sin and death so powerless, that all things are measured with a new measure, and confidence and courage spring forth where before there was weakness and fear.

The assurance of grace, that we are the children of God—that is faith. And this is the secret of the Reformation.

For then a human being stands alone with God. The world is gone, sin is gone, death and hell are gone.

Then, even in the night of death, a human being can have the boldness to say: If God be for me, who can be against me?

This is a human being's Reformation. It casts him down and exalts him; it annihilates him and makes him alive.

Blessed is he who was thus terrified, since he was thus raised from the dead.

These are the children of the Reformation, who in truth have the life of faith in their hearts, and who from being dead have become living, and who know by their own experience that the Lord exalts the lowly.