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BOOKS IN REVIEW

FAITHFULLY YOURS,
OTTO A. OLSON (1920-1976)

FERDY E. BAGLO, *General Editor*

Published by the Central Canada Synod of the
Lutheran Church in America, 1978, 134 pp., \$4.95

Most of you who read this review knew Otto Olson or at least knew of him by reputation; nevertheless, a careful reading of this book will provide new insights into and a deeper understanding of his life. *Faithfully Yours* is divided into three sections, Otto A. Olson — His Story; Otto A. Olson — In Pulpit, Print and Public Forum, and Otto A. Olson — Insights from Others. There is also a photo section which delightfully depicts the many facets of his life and work.

Section one deals with the historical facts of Otto Olson's life using the anecdotal method relying on the interesting anecdotes of family and friends, as well as Doctor Olson's own comments. It is ironical that an American, who later became a Canadian, should be one of the strongest exponents of an autonomous Canadian Church. With unabashed enthusiasm he celebrates his adopted country in his writings and in the example of his life. The first section contains this comment: "The history of Canada is in the long and continuing procession of all the peoples who passed the way before us and left memories of themselves and the places they knew . . . What a blessing for our country it would be if we could once again find the way to this rugged and unashamed trust in God . . . Life so lived could never become commonplace or meaningless, but would necessarily always be marked by expectancy and hope". In these lines he identifies himself as a Canadian; he also reveals himself as a man totally committed to his God and to his fellowman — a man who himself lived in expectancy and in hope.

Probably nowhere in the book does the irenic spirit of Otto Olson ring clearer than in the second section which is a collection of his own thoughts about life. Section two deals with his many sermons and articles published over the course of his ministry. The material from these sources is carefully annotated and classified by topic and theme. These are short, highly readable excerpts ranging from a few lines to one page. He speaks sensitively about Saints, Sense of Humor, Unity of the Spirit, On the Joys of Life, Our Chief Business as well as many other topics. This section is the most instructive since it reveals the inner man, his thoughts, hopes and his concept of discipleship.

Section three is devoted to the observations of those who knew Otto Olson well and worked and served with him. Sally Swedberg, a pastor's wife, said, "I've met four people in my lifetime who, in my estimation, have outstanding characteristics of humbleness, warmth and friendliness, and Otto Olson was one of those people". Rev. Don Sjöberg has this to say, "Otto was his own person, independent in his thinking . . . but was also capable of changing his mind . . . He never did have a closed mind on an issue". Sjöberg continues, "Over a year after his death, I still have a strong sense of

his person and presence. I expect him to walk into one of the meetings dressed in a brown suit, brief case in hand and that warm smile on his face.”

His wife and children lovingly write about husband and father. Mark Olson recalls a trip with his father to Sweden to attend the World Hockey Tournament. “Those two weeks laid a smooth and firm foundation that would help make it easier to get us through my later and typically trying and difficult years as a teenager, with an already very patient and understanding father.”

In one of his sermons on “Saints”, Otto Olson comments; “I used to believe that the essence of the Christian hope was to be alive when Jesus comes, I now believe that all is summed up in these words — so we shall always be with the Lord. He talks about our awaiting the coming of the Lord, not by sitting idly by and waiting, but by busying ourselves in preparation for His return. “An employee whose employer is away, would like to be found at work when the employer unexpectedly returns.” Otto Olson, a saint in life and a saint in death, was indeed about the Lord’s business when he was unexpectedly taken and the Employer found His employee worthy.

God’s smile will come
from both sides of His brightness
and my brown-fashioned friend
will know all joy.

(C. Robert Pearson)

Reviewed by Morris A. Anderson

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