

# Church and Culture in Living Interaction – Grundtvig the Theologian

*Niels Henrik Gregersen*

In depicting the contours of N.F.S. Grundtvig’s theological universe, we shall trace his progress from a sensitive Romantic poet and historian into a theologian of classic calibre and scope. In his own 19<sup>th</sup> century context, Grundtvig (1783-1872) developed a theological vision with two ellipses: the primacy of God as the source, medium, and goal of all reality, and the primacy of humanity for understanding and living the Christian faith. “Human comes first, and Christian next/for that is life’s true order”, as he argued in a poem.<sup>3</sup> All human beings are created in the image and likeness of God prior to becoming (or not becoming) Christian, and every Christian is called to become a full human person.

Grundtvig understood himself as a theologian *of* the Church – and so he was. Yet he was also a theologian *for* his contemporary culture. It is thus a special signature of Grundtvig’s theology that he anticipates a cultural situation in which some are Christians, others Muslims, Jews, and believers of other faiths, and still others are Naturalists. In his lifetime, Danish society changed from being an absolute monarchy into a more democratic society, in which a number of religious and cultural forces were present. In *Nordic Mythology* (1832) Grundtvig explicitly addresses his potential reader as being “Christian or heathen, Turk<sup>4</sup> or Jew”, or even “Naturalists of spirit”, all of whom are aware of the deep mystery of humanity.<sup>5</sup>

Grundtvig’s theological writings show him to be a champion of what he himself called an “old-fashioned Christian faith”; yet he moves effortlessly between unfolding the message and mission of the Church and engaging the wider public culture. For

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3. The poem ‘Human comes first, and Christian next’ (1837) is no. 123 in *Living Wellsprings. The Hymns, Songs, and Poems of N.F.S. Grundtvig*, trans. & ed. Edward Broadbridge (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press 2015), 249-251.

4. i.e. Muslim.

5. See ‘Nordic Mythology’ (1832), in *The School for Life. N.F.S. Grundtvig on Education for the People*, trans. Edward Broadbridge, eds. Edward Broadbridge, Clay Warren, and Uffe Jonas (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2011), 60-61.

Grundtvig, the Church is a part of the shared human realm, but only one among other voices in society; he himself was active in other areas of life than theology – as a historian and poet, a hymnwriter and translator, an educator and even as a politician. However, underlying these came his theological concerns, guiding him in his endeavours to create a more inclusive human society with greater individual freedom for all.

From 1811 to his death in 1872 (six days short of his 89th birthday), Grundtvig was a pastor in the Danish Evangelical-Lutheran Church, though with lengthy interruptions.<sup>6</sup> Programmatically, he preferred the spoken word to the written language, and he was known as a charismatic speaker also outside the pulpit. In articulating his theology he used poetry more fluently than his more dense prose, and his undisputed influence in Danish church and culture is therefore primarily due to the more than 1,500 hymns from 1810 onwards, in addition to his many popular songs and national poems.<sup>7</sup>

Alongside his published authorship of 37,000 pages (and numerous unpublished papers), Grundtvig was a public figure in Danish culture who debated many of the questions of the day – from the religious, educational, and political situation to the fundamental question of the role of ordinary people in the transition from elitist to democratic culture. In brief, Grundtvig was what we today would call a public intellectual.

In what follows, we shall briefly note facets of Grundtvig's influence in Golden Age Denmark (c. 1800-70). We shall then delineate certain important stages and turning-points in his theological biography, in order, finally, to discuss Grundtvig's relevance in the context of today's international theology. For his personal biography see the introductions to vols 1 and 2 in this series.

## 1. Grundtvig's intellectual context

Even though Grundtvig came to the capital as a pastor's son from the village of Udby in south Zealand, he soon became a household name in the Copenhagen establishment. Copenhagen was then the centre of what has been termed 'Golden Age Denmark'. On its streets or on private occasions, notabilities such as the writer Hans Christian Andersen, the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, the discoverer of electromagnetism H.C.

6. See the Timeline, pp. 19-20.

7. In the current *Danish Hymnbook* (2003), 253 of the 791 hymns have Grundtvig's signature, some written by himself, others as Danish versions of hymns from the Greek, Latin, English, and German Church traditions. Also in the latest, and always popular, *People's High School Song-Book* (18th edition, 2006) Grundtvig has more hymns and songs than any other contributor.

Ørsted, and the theologian Grundtvig, came across one another, each with their likes and dislikes of their Copenhagen fellows.<sup>8</sup>

### Theological Debates

Until around 1830, Grundtvig was more infamous than famous. His difficulties began early on. In 1811 he received an official reprimand from the governing body of the University of Copenhagen for his dimissory sermon of 1810, *Why Has the Word of the Lord Disappeared from His House?* In this he harshly criticised the majority of the Danish pastors for being more interested in human affairs than in the Word of the Lord. Likewise, in *The Church's Retort to Dr. H.N. Clausen, Professor of Theology* from 1825 (Text 1), Grundtvig demanded that the university's leading Professor of Dogmatics, H.N. Clausen, should resign his office, since his theology was in conflict with the beliefs of the Church. In response, Clausen sued for libel; Grundtvig was fined, and his publications put under lifelong censorship. This requirement of a prior *imprimatur* of his writings was not lifted until 1837. By then Grundtvig had already gained a widespread and far more positive reputation, not only among his many followers in the countryside but also in Copenhagen circles, including the royal house.

Grundtvig spoke up also after 1825, though now in a more moderate tone. Since the 1820s, the Danish government (backed by church officials) had been persecuting the new revivalist groups, and from 1840 Baptists were even imprisoned for not baptising their children. Grundtvig publicly defended these 'godly assemblies' as well as the Baptists, even though he did not personally agree with all their theology (Texts 2 & 7). His argument was twofold: Theologically, freedom of conscience is essential in matters of religion; and politically, the revivalist groups do not impose a danger to the order of the state. Only with the Danish Constitution of 1849 was religious freedom given to all citizens, and the State Church was now transformed into a People's Church with voluntary membership, based on baptism.

In his arguments for religious freedom, Grundtvig was initially influenced by German Enlightenment philosophy, but later on he was persuaded by English liberalism. He read periodicals such as *The Westminster Review* (1824-27) and the *Edinburgh Review*

8. Bruce H. Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1990) offers an excellent overview of the intellectual circles in Copenhagen at the time. On Kierkegaard's relation to Grundtvig, see Anders Holm, 'Nicolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig: The Matchless Giant', in *Kierkegaard and His Danish Contemporaries. Tome II: Theology*, ed. Jon Stewart (Farnham: Ashgate 2009), 95-151. Holm shows how Kierkegaard was more concerned about Grundtvig than the other way round, also due to the painful fact that Kierkegaard's elder brother P.C. Kierkegaard became a leading Grundtvigian. Though Grundtvig clashed with Ørsted in 1815, he later became more friendly towards him, seeing him as a 'Naturalist of spirit'. The relation between Grundtvig and Hans Christian Andersen is difficult to pinpoint, and an understudied area.

(1820-27), and in 1829-31 he was able to make three trips to England, supported by the Danish King (Texts 44-46). The experiences in England convinced Grundtvig to trust the empirically-oriented common sense traditions in the vein of John Locke and John Stuart Mill rather than speculative philosophy. While Grundtvig set his own tone and made his own judgments in matters of theology, Grundtvig the politician sided with the English tradition, distancing himself in particular from the French variety of Enlightenment philosophy: “In all parliamentary matters [I] think of the English”, he said.<sup>9</sup>

### Grundtvig as a Politician

Grundtvig lived in a tumultuous but also highly creative epoch of European history. Politically, his life spanned the era of absolutist European kingdoms over revolutionary times up to the formation of modern democracy, instituted in Denmark by the 1849 Constitution. Grundtvig’s newly-awakened interest in politics saw him become not only a member of the Constitutional Assembly which drew up the new constitution, but also an actual Member of Parliament for most of the period 1849-58.

The Danish Constitution of 1849 established a parliamentary democracy, but formally it was still called a ‘constitutional monarchy’, that is, a monarchy framed by a parliamentary system. Grundtvig himself sought to retain a sense of ‘covenant’ or living bond between the King, the national father of Denmark, and Parliament, the living voice of the Danish people.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, he was fully aware that it meant the end of the older concept of the four estates: clergy, nobility, citizenry and peasantry. “The age of the estates is over, now it is time for the age of the people,” he said in a parliamentary session in 1849.<sup>11</sup> In 1866, at age 82, he allowed himself to be elected into the Upper House (*Landstinget*) in order to prevent a revision of the 1849 Constitution to the disadvantage of the peasants. Much to his dismay, Grundtvig did not succeed.

As a member of parliament, Grundtvig was active in furthering the freedom of faith also within the Danish Church. 99% of the Danish population were baptised members of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church, now officially called The People’s Church (*Folkekirken*) in the Danish Constitution (§ 3, today § 4). Already in the 1830s, however, Grundtvig was concerned about the so-called parish-tie. In 1833 Grundtvig wrote to

9. N.F.S. Grundtvig, ‘Parliamentary Speech on Danish Church Freedom’ (*Tale til Folkeraadet om Dansk Kirkefrihed*. Copenhagen: Wahlske Boghandels Forlag 1939), 7, quoted in Ove Korsgaard, ‘How Grundtvig Became a Nation Builder’, in *Building the Nation. N.F.S. Grundtvig and Danish National Identity*, eds. John A. Hall, Ove Korsgaard, and Ove K. Pedersen (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press 2015), 192-209 (193).

10. See Tine Damsholt, ‘Hand of the King and Voice of the People’: Grundtvig on Democracy and the Responsibility of the Self’, in *Building the Nation* (2015), 151-168.

11. N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Danskeren II (The Dane)* (Copenhagen: F.H. Eibe 1849), 81, quoted in Ove Korsgaard, *N.F.S. Grundtvig – as a Political Thinker* (Copenhagen: DJØF Publishing 2014), 23.

the king (Text 45) on this issue, and he also discussed the problem in other writings from the 1830s to the 1850s (Texts 5 & 10). Grundtvig and his allies wished to establish a freedom clause within the Church so that any individual member could ‘break the parish-tie’ that bound them locally, and worship elsewhere. They succeeded through Parliament in breaking the parish-tie in 1855, thus paving the way for the revivalists to remain within the over-all framework of the People’s Church; all members were now free to join the pastors and congregations congenial to their own religious views. In the same manner, Parliament allowed for the establishment of free schools alongside the public schools run by the government.

### The Fight against Slavery

While the trading of slaves was officially forbidden in 1792, owning slaves was still an option in the Danish colonies until 1848, such as in the Virgin Islands in the Caribbean, a Danish colony until 1917. Likewise, until 1847, Danish criminals could be condemned to life-long slavery in the castle of Kronborg at Elsinore. Due to his strong view of the value of the human person as a “unique creature of dust and spirit”, Grundtvig was opposed to the idea of slavery. Under the personal influence of Quakers such as G.W. Alexander and Elizabeth Fry, he became part of a three-person committee in 1839 to put an end to slavery; later the committee brought in two other intellectuals, including Professor H.N. Clausen and the liberal clergyman, D.G. Monrad, who drafted the Danish Constitution of 1849. The Committee Against Slavery dissolved itself in 1848 when its task had been completed.<sup>12</sup>

### Grundtvig and the Danish People

Also in terms of nationhood, Grundtvig’s long life spanned an era moving from a larger unified Danish-Nordic kingdom (at his birth in 1783) to a diminished Denmark with the independence of Norway in 1814, and a further reduction with the loss of Schleswig and Holstein to Prussia in the war of 1864. As a result, Denmark was no longer a multi-lingual state comprising the Danish, Norwegian, and German languages but a smaller, mostly monolingual, country with a relatively unified Danish-Icelandic-Faroese culture. In this process, Grundtvig became an important nation-builder by bringing the peasantry into the cultural and political centre of Danish society. One thing is shar-

12. On Grundtvig’s engagement in the slave cause, see Knud Eyvin Bugge, *Grundtvig og slavesagen* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press 2003), with an English summary pp. 201-208. The subject will also be dealt with in *The Common Good. N.F.S. Grundtvig as Politician and Contemporary Historian*, trans. & ed. Edward Broadbridge, co-ed. Ove Korsgaard (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press 2019).

ing political power ‘from above’ in the parliamentary system of the *state*, another thing is the *nation* understood as a lived culture ‘from below’, i.e. a culture held together by internal communication within the Danish people, even among political opponents.<sup>13</sup>

For Grundtvig it was particularly important to expand education to all classes, and to make sure that education was not only a top-down ‘teaching’ but also a bottom-up ‘learning’. Alongside his historical and political authorship, Grundtvig’s educational writings became highly influential, not only in the Danish People’s (Folk) High School movement in Denmark, but also during his lifetime in Norway and Sweden: The first People’s High School in Denmark was established in 1844, in Norway in 1864, and in Sweden in 1868. In the 20th century, the idea of a People’s High School – learning for life rather than to pass examinations – spread to other countries including the USA, and even China.<sup>14</sup> Grundtvig feared that the ‘dead school’ system educated middle-class people to become a cultural elite and to dissociate themselves from ordinary people by thinking and communicating mostly in German, or by using artificial language such as what Grundtvig called “dog Latin”.<sup>15</sup> In his well-known poem, *Enlightenment* (1839), Grundtvig prioritized the light shining on ordinary people over the learned world of elitist scholars:

The sunrise on the peasant shines  
but on the scholar never,  
enlightening the agile man  
in all his bright endeavour ....

... Enlightenment must be our joy,  
regard to small things giving,  
but always with the people’s voice  
enlightenment for living.<sup>16</sup>

There is an irony here compared with Grundtvig’s own life. Even though he himself routinely criticised what he called the ‘black school’ of Latin and German education, he himself studied many languages, not only the Old Icelandic language and Old

13. Francis Fukuyama is a contemporary political theorist who has pointed to the role of Grundtvig and Grundtvigianism for the formation of a national culture conceived in broader terms than that of the political system of power, see Fukuyama, ‘Nation Building and State Building’, in *Building the Nation* (2015), 29-50.

14. See Clay Warren, ‘The International Reception of N.F.S. Grundtvig’s Educational Ideas’ in *The School for Life* (2011), 352-369. On China, see Wen Ge, *The Deep Coinherence: A Chinese Appreciation of N.F.S. Grundtvig’s Public Theology* (PhD thesis, Aarhus University, August 2013), 237-241 (with bibliography).

15. N.F.S. Grundtvig in *Nordic Mythology* (1832), *The School for Life* (2011), 61.

16. N.F.S. Grundtvig, ‘Enlightenment’ (1839) in *The School for Life* (2011), 255-256.

English, but also Greek, Latin, and German. Like most other learned Danes of the time, he was particularly well-read in German literature and philosophy. His life of studying and writing with such intensity meant that he was not much of an outdoor man who enjoyed the sunlight falling on the agile citizens for whom he was writing.

## 2. Stages in Grundtvig's Theological Development

Although Grundtvig studied theology at Copenhagen University from 1800-03 he had no intention of becoming an ordained pastor. He started his working life as a private tutor, then became a high school teacher, and he made his first forays into the public realm as a translator, editor, and interpreter of Nordic myths and sagas – as part of his work as a historian.

At university Grundtvig was taught the metaphysical school of philosophy of G.W. Leibniz (1646-1716) and Christian Wolff (1679-1754), but over time he also familiarised himself with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).<sup>17</sup> During his early student days he adopted the triad of God, virtue, and immortality as being sufficient for belief. He admired the comedies of the Danish-Norwegian Enlightenment writer, Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754), while distancing himself increasingly from his own father's Lutheran Orthodoxy. German philosophy, however, was not first and foremost channeled to Grundtvig through the transcendental thinkers such as Kant and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814). More important to Grundtvig was the Romanticist strand of German idealism which he met later as a student of theology. Rather than assume a category thinking based on the structure of a transcendental Ego, the Romanticists gave precedence to concepts of intuition and anticipatory feelings (*Abnung*) as well as to the poetic imagination (*Einbildungskraft*). Figures such as Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) and F.W.J. Schelling (1775-1854) were of particular inspiration to Grundtvig, especially in his 'mythological period' from 1805-10. The idea of a poetic imagination remained central to his philosophical writings in 1816-19, though with the amendment that it not only has its origin in the creativity of the 'genius', but is receptive before it becomes creative.

### Chronology and Continuity: Grundtvig's Path Dependencies

Grundtvig research has often focused on the critical junctures in Grundtvig's theological development, and particular interest has been devoted to his spiritual crises and theological breakthroughs. First comes his personal breakdown around the new

17. See his recollections in N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Mands Minde 1788-1838 (Within Living Memory 1788-1838)* (Copenhagen: Karl Schönberg's Forlag 1877), 274: "Our professors at that time were not really abreast with their age, so our theologians knew very little about Kant, and our philosopher taught in strict allegiance to Leibniz and Wolff".

year 1810-11, leading to his return to the Biblical orthodoxy of his father from 1811-14, followed by his subsequent philosophical period 1816-1819, in which he was also highly active as a historian and translator. In 1825 he experiences his so-called 'matchless discovery' of the role of the confession and the baptismal Creed in the oral tradition of the Church. Finally in 1832, on his return from England, he writes the introduction to *Nordic Mythology* in which he argues for the shared humanity of Christians and non-Christians alike in the context of his creation theology.

In Grundtvig scholarship there is overall agreement that the return to Lutheran Orthodoxy in 1811-14 is merely a parenthesis in his theological journey, whereas 1825 and 1832 mark the two major turning-points in his development. There is a difference of emphasis among scholars between the more Church-oriented interpretation of Grundtvig, focusing on 1825, and the more Culture-oriented interpretation which marks 1832 as a major new stage in Grundtvig's theology, pointing forward as it does to his later educational ideas and political activities.<sup>18</sup> Overall, however, there is in fact an astonishing *continuity* in Grundtvig's theological development; even as he broadened and nuanced his theological views, there is a persistent presence of earlier stages in his later views, as he continues to accommodate new insights into his ever more comprehensive theological vision.

Just as his Enlightenment motifs continue well after 1825, so do the roles of mythology and history after Grundtvig's 'mythological excitement' of 1805-1810. While he kept silent on mythology between 1811-1814, following his Lutheran conversion, the mythological programme was soon taken up again in his philosophical and historical work, including lengthy translations of Saxo's chronicle of Danish history, *Gesta Danorum*, and Snorri Sturluson's Old Icelandic work on Norway, *Heimskringla*. Even Grundtvig's 'biblical period' from 1811-14 is later enhanced in the numerous biblical references and allusions running through his works. In the present volume, for example, the editor has been able to identify no fewer than 322 biblical references. Something similar applies to Grundtvig's indebtedness to German Romanticism. In the years after 1810, he criticised Schiller's anthropological optimism, and distanced himself from the harmonious view of the striving forces of reality in Schelling's philosophy of nature. Nonetheless, the Romantic tone, and much of its vocabulary, is present throughout his later writings.<sup>19</sup> The same applies even more to this so-called

18. The gravitation around respectively 1825 or 1832 is represented by Hal Koch, *Grundtvig*, trans. L. Jones (Yellow Springs, Ohio: Antioch Press 1952) and by Kaj Thaning, *N.F.S. Grundtvig*, trans. D. Hohnen (Copenhagen: Danish Cultural Institute 1972). A.M. Allchin, *N.F.S. Grundtvig: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press 1997; repr. 2015) takes a mediating position.

19. See the nuanced analysis in Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen, 'Grundtvig and Romanticism', in *N.F.S. Grundtvig: Tradition and Renewal. Grundtvig's Vision of Man and People, Education and the Church, in Relation to World Issues of Today*, eds. Christian Thodberg and Anders Pontoppidan Thyssen, trans. Edward Broadbridge (Copenhagen: The Danish Institute 1983), 19-43.

‘Church view’ of 1825. The central role of baptism and Holy Communion developed also after 1832, as we see in the consummate work of his maturity, *Basic Christian Teachings* (especially Texts 14-16).

All in all, we must conclude that on Grundtvig’s theological journey the pathways tried out and trodden in his early life were never absent from his later views. Rather, the earlier ‘stages’ were refined and developed in new contexts, often in tension with the original sources that influenced his own theological vision. For everything in Grundtvig reveals his particular stamp as a theologian and contemporary thinker.

### 1802-1810: The Romantic and Mythological Period

As early as 1802, Grundtvig attended a lecture series by the Romantic philosopher, the Norwegian Henrich Steffens (1773-1845), who happened to be his cousin. The nine lectures on the philosophy of nature presented in the spirit of Schelling were published in Danish in 1803 as *Introduction to Lectures on Philosophy*. In a poem written after Steffens’ death, Grundtvig described his cousin as the “lightning-man” who appeared in Copenhagen “like an angel from the heavens” rolling away the stone of Enlightenment, much like the stone at Christ’s grave.<sup>20</sup> Grundtvig was forever grateful to Steffens, since he offered him a way out of the confines of Enlightenment Christianity. Although Grundtvig initially found Steffens’ views confusing,<sup>21</sup> he nonetheless experienced a Romantic awakening to such an extent that his early works, 1806-10, linger on a symbolic understanding of Christianity, a sort of *Religion as Art*, in which the Nordic myths seem to be assigned a revelatory character of their own. The scholarly discussion is whether the early Romantic Grundtvig approached the Nordic myths as constituents of a self-sufficient religious system, or only as analogous witnesses and intimations to the Christian faith.<sup>22</sup> The answer depends not least on the interpretation of Grundtvig’s early work, *On Religion and Liturgy* from 1807, in fact the first theological treatise from Grundtvig’s hand.<sup>23</sup> Here he gives full rein to his fervour for Romantic language in an interpretation of the religion of Jesus as the “reconciliation of the finite with

20. See ‘Henrik Steffens’ (1845), no. 145 in *Living Wellsprings* (2015), 300-02.

21. See, for example, Grundtvig’s both appreciative as well as critical evaluation of Steffens in *Verdenskronike af 1812* (*World Chronicle of 1812*), in *Udvalgte Skrifter* (*Selected Writings*), ed. Holger Begtrup (Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1909), vol. 2, 384.

22. Sune Auken, *Sagas Spejl. Mytologi, historie, kristendom hos N.F.S. Grundtvig* (*Saga’s Mirror. Mythology, History, Christianity in N.F.S. Grundtvig*) (Copenhagen: Gyldendal 2005) opts for the former interpretation. For the latter interpretation, see Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen, ‘Grundtvig and Romanticism’ in *Tradition and Renewal* (1983). Lundgreen-Nielsen summarises his interpretation as follows: “in a great many ways Grundtvig came close to romanticism in the first two decades of his writing career, but he never became a proper romantic” (33).

23. N.F.S. Grundtvig, ‘On Religion and Liturgy’ in *The Advance of Learning. N.F.S. Grundtvig’s Philosophical Writings* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, forthcoming 2020).

the eternal” by way of poetry and philosophy. Nonetheless, it is still “by Christ” that the atonement and peace between humanity and God takes place. This suggests that while the young Grundtvig gives poetry and philosophy an elevated epistemic role for religion, he refrains from seeing poetry and philosophy as a self-absorbing ontology. This is even the case where Grundtvig describes Christ in a more symbolic form. In a poem from 1808, he places the Nordic Odin on a par with Christ:

High Odin, White Christ!  
 Settled is your former clash,  
 both are sons of the All-Father!  
 With our cross and sword afire,  
 here we consecrate your pyre:  
 Both of you have loved our Father.<sup>24</sup>

Although he later regretted the comparison, the young Grundtvig obviously wished to overcome the conflict between the Nordic myths and Christianity, while also distancing himself from the horizontal pantheism of Romantic thinking: Life and death are not on the same level as competing powers in a friendly tension; they are enemies, and life will ultimately conquer death. The Romantics opened the horizon to the invisible world, but they did not clearly acknowledge the priority and independence of the spiritual world, in which God is the life-giving creator and spiritual relations are expressions of the divine Spirit. Here Grundtvig the theologian remained indebted to the neo-Platonic tradition, even in the midst of his mythological excitement.

#### 1810-14: Lutheran Orthodoxy and Piety

While Grundtvig’s theological stance was ambivalent in the mytho-poetical years 1805-10, the aforementioned dimissory sermon of 1810, *Why Has the Word of the Lord Disappeared from His House?*, is quite straightforward. It witnesses to Grundtvig’s conversion from a mythologising amalgam of poetry, philosophy, and theology back to an ‘old-fashioned Lutheranism’ with an emphasis on the biblical message and the clarity of the gospel. “Faith comes from hearing, and the Word of God is what should be heard,” Grundtvig proclaimed with Paul and Luther. Grundtvig’s criticism of the majority of his contemporary pastoral colleagues is that they do not themselves “believe the doctrine they are called to preach”.<sup>25</sup> This can be interpreted as a sign of Grundtvig’s Lutheran Orthodoxy, but it is at the same time a typical Pietist complaint

24. No. III in *Living Wellsprings* (2015), 225.

25. N.F.S. Grundtvig, ‘Dimisprædiken’ (Dimissory Sermon) in *Udvalgte Skrifter* (note 21), vol. 2, 11-20 (20 and 17).

about the infidelity of the age. Until his father's death, Grundtvig served devotedly as his father's curate in Udby from 1811-13.

### 1814-1824: The Philosophical Period and the Idea of Universal History

Grundtvig's theological return to the Lutheran faith of his childhood led to a three-year pause in his editing and interpreting of the Nordic myths. When the mythical themes re-appear, they do so in the context of Grundtvig's new concept of a Christian philosophy developed in four volumes of the journal *Danne-Virke*, which he wrote singlehandedly between 1816-19.<sup>26</sup> In this philosophical period, he programmatically criticized the view that human consciousness in general, and the transcendental Ego in particular, are the cornerstones of all philosophy, as argued by Kant and Fichte. In contrast, Grundtvig contends that human understanding takes its point of departure in the human senses (particularly touching, hearing, and seeing) and in the human sense of spiritual relations (beauty, truth, and goodness). Crucially, these are experienced *prior* to the evaluations of the human mind. Since human beings, in body and mind, are part of a greater world – a microcosm of dust and spirit reflecting a wider macrocosm of aesthetic and spiritual relations – we are exposed to real sensory things and real spiritual relations, which are only *subsequently* reflected in our human subjectivity. The passive reception of things-in-relation is thus the basis for the productive power of human imagination.

In the period 1812-17, Grundtvig also makes extensive use of ideas from another German thinker, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), whom he had already drawn on in his earlier mythological period. Though critical of Herder's ambivalent theological stance,<sup>27</sup> Grundtvig shares the idea that each natural language brings with it a particular horizon, at once rooted in the experiences of particular people in world history but also shaping and refining their perception of reality. Herder's *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784-91) was an important impetus to Grundtvig's own thinking of the universal history of humankind, based on the particularities of peoples, languages, and nations. Over the years 1812, 1814 and 1817, Grundtvig produced no less than three world histories.

Later in his life, Grundtvig expanded his vision of world history, which before had been largely confined to European history and the Middle East. From 1847 he further developed his earlier idea of seven basic communities of the Christian Church, going

26. These articles from *Danne-Virke* form the cornerstone of volume 5 in this series, *The Advance of Learning*. N.F.S. Grundtvig's *Philosophical Writings* (Aarhus; Aarhus University Press, forthcoming 2020).

27. See Grundtvig's *Verdenskronike* (*World Chronicle*) from 1812, *Udvalgte skrifter* (*Selected Writings*), vol. 2, 329-330.

from (1) the original Hebrew church to (2) the Greek church, and from here to (3) the Latin, (4) the English, and (5) the German church onwards to (6) the Nordic church. In his most universalist poems, *The Seven Stars of Christendom* (*Christenbedens Syvstjerne*) from 1854-55, Grundtvig hypothesises that the seventh and most fulfilled church would be established in India. Also this preference for India shows how Grundtvig remained a Romantic. While the Enlightenment thinkers used to look to China, the Romantics more often had India as their preferred other.

### 1825 onwards: Grundtvig's Church view

In its briefest expression, Grundtvig's so-called Church view (*den kirkelige Anskuelse*) consists of the thesis that the fundamental expressions of the Christian Church over the ages are the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion: "the Font and the Table" (*Badet og Bordet*). The positive meaning of the Church view is that any Christian, simply by confessing and accepting in faith the baptismal Creed, is included into the body of Christ. Hence, the membership of the one and only Christian Church is given by Baptism; the rest must be left for the free working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individual Christians. Baptism stands out as the beginning of the Christian life (faith), to be subsequently nourished by the preaching of the Word (hope), and to find its fulfilment in the Lord's Supper (love). Grundtvig's 'matchless discovery' in 1825 is that it is the baptismal Creed, not the Bible, which has served as 'the rule of faith' in the Christian Church since the days of the Apostles.

By the early 1820s, Grundtvig had developed a softer tone in his relation to the State Church, but around 1824-25 he once again became agitated, due partly to personal disappointments about the reception of his own work, and partly to the persecution of the revivalist Pietists.<sup>28</sup> Although he shared neither their negative view of culture nor their overheated appeals to conversion, he nonetheless saw them as expressions of "old-fashioned Lutheran Christianity", and hence as fellow-Christians.

Grundtvig vented his pent-up anger on the young Professor of Dogmatics at Copenhagen University, H.N. Clausen, a proponent of the father of neo-Protestantism, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). Like Schleiermacher, Clausen wished to establish a Protestantism which gave equal weight to Martin Luther and John Calvin, and in 1825 he published a massive historical and programmatic work, *Catholicism and Protestantism: Their Constitution, Doctrine, and Ritual*. Grundtvig's verdict on the book was uncompromising:

28. See Anders Pontoppidan Thyssen, 'Grundtvig's Ideas on the Church and the People 1825-47', in *N.F.S. Grundtvig: Tradition and Renewal* (1983), 226-34.

Professor Clausen's Christianity is completely false and his protestant church a temple of idols where falsehood is proclaimed as truth and the attempt is made to revoke the irrevocable divide between truth and falsehood as between light and dark, yes and no, affirmation and denial, claim and counter-claim" (Text I, p. 73).

Against Clausen's desire to construct an amalgam of Lutheran and Calvinist theology by minimising their differences, Grundtvig argued that the nature of the Church is not something to be socially constructed, nor to be defined by academic theologians who want to build a "self-made church-in-the-air". Rather, Christianity is defined by its actual *history* – as inaugurated by Christ, continued by the Apostles, and practised throughout the history of the Church. The rule of faith is found in the Apostolic Creed, and "has been transmitted unbroken through Baptism from the days of the Apostles, from generation to generation and from one people to another".<sup>29</sup>

More precisely, three aspects constitute Christian baptism from its inception: "the renunciation of the Devil, the confession of faith, and the forgiveness of sins."<sup>30</sup> Grundtvig is thus referring to an uninterrupted oral tradition which precedes the written New Testament, and he appeals to existing continuities in the historical Church, despite the theological differences between Catholics and Protestants. His source here is the early Church father Irenaeus (c. 140-202), who cited "the rule of faith" with a substance close to that of the later Apostolic Creed.<sup>31</sup>

In his rejoinder to Clausen Grundtvig appeals not only to the historical Church, but also to a Church from below, existing in local congregations, belonging to different cultural epochs underneath the differences between papal powers, Protestant denominations, and particular schools of academic theology. Christians become Christians by their faithful response to the living Word of the Lord, beginning with baptism, and no Christian should therefore be burdened by the new "exegetical papacy" of a professor who wishes to act as "the Church's exegetical pope" (p. 78). *Vis-à-vis* Clausen, Martin Luther appears in a favourable light:

... it is certain that no one was stronger than Martin Luther in raising up the simple child-like faith of the Christian Church above all academic wisdom. No one showed more clearly his trust in the Church's immutable foundation than by linking the

29. N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Om Christendommens Sandhed (On the Truth of Christianity)* (1826-27), *Udvalgte Skrifter (Selected Writings)*, vol 4, 519-723 (535).

30. *Ibid.*, 618. In a later *Postscript* (1865) to this work, Grundtvig derives the rule of faith from the mouth of Jesus himself ("the Spirit of Christ and the eternal Word of His mouth"). Grundtvig presents this (very!) strong historical claim as his own view, given for the enlightenment (*Oplysning*) of the Christian community, though he also makes clear that it is an offer open to "their free consent", and not a binding view, see *Udvalgte Skrifter (Selected Writings)*, vol. 4, 726.

31. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I.10.1.

Apostles' Creed insolubly to Baptism and, in his *Small Catechism*, making this the basis for childhood faith and childhood teaching wherever there were people who agreed with him (p. 78).

However, Grundtvig's overall relationship to Luther is more complex than indicated here. From one perspective Grundtvig saw Luther as the "unrivalled Church reformer", a man who brought about a new way of life that was "fruitful in Christian enlightenment" (pp. 93-94). But he also had his reservations. Most importantly, written Scripture cannot be the final arbiter in theological matters. The principle of *sola scriptura* features neither in Luther's *Small Catechism* nor in the *Augsburg Confession*, the only two confessional documents from the Reformation acknowledged in the Danish Evangelical-Lutheran Church.

In place of the scriptural principle, Grundtvig developed the view that while the oral confession to the baptismal Creed constitutes the "Word of Life" (*Livs-Ordet*) in the Christian Church, the Bible is to be used as the "Word of Light" (*Lys-Ordet*) only, that is, as a testimony in which Christians find comfort and confirmation of their Christian life already established by baptism. The Bible also offers a deep and penetrating illumination of the human condition, so Grundtvig's Church view assigns to the Bible a central role for the education of the Christian community. Yet he also insists that the written word is secondary to the oral word of promise and faith in the Christian Church – the Living Word. Just as the Holy Spirit precedes the written testimony of the Bible, so does the oral tradition of the Church precede the resulting holy Scripture.

A second critique of Luther is that he and his followers adapted too quickly to the state church, thus allowing it to be imprisoned in the Babylonian captivity of worldly government. In passing, this argument led Grundtvig to a similar, critical view of the First Ecumenical Council in Nicea from 325 CE – not because of the Nicene Creed itself, but because the council was headed by Constantine who was still a heathen emperor! Another problem was that the Greek Orthodox church had allowed the Nicene Creed to *replace* the Apostolic Creed as the baptismal formula.<sup>32</sup> According to Grundtvig, this was a breach with the older view in the Greek church, as found in Irenaeus. Grundtvig's 1827 translation of Book 5 of Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* shows his eagerness to find his way back to the roots of Greek theology – before the Greek tradition became divided into the speculative theology of the Alexandrians after Origen and the ritualistic tradition within the Byzantine church that tended to make any church tradition a matter of faith.

Underpinning Grundtvig's both positive and critical view of Luther was his universal-historical view of the Christian Church. In his distinctive interpretation of the

32. N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Skal den lutherske Reformation virkelig fortsættes (Should the Lutheran Reformation Really be Continued)*, *Udvalgte Skrifter*, vol 5, 296-301. Not included in the excerpts in Text 3.

seven churches of Christendom in the Book of Revelation, the Reformation had been the expression of the German church (the fifth community) which was now, according to Grundtvig's intimation, moving forward to the Nordic countries (the sixth community). Due to his emphasis on the Apostolic church, Grundtvig naturally attached a special role to the original Hebrew church, since no later church will reach such a zenith of faith. Nonetheless, the explication and understanding of the Christian faith is growing over time, from childhood to maturity, and from intuition to wisdom. By looking back on Luther as the highest representative of the German church, Grundtvig can describe him as the Reformer who reached a new clarity of the gospel, whilst elsewhere he describes him as another Moses looking into the promised land without being able to enter it. Grundtvig can thus celebrate Luther as a giant in the development of the Christian church; yet he can also call himself "Luther the Little", for Luther has arisen again in Grundtvig himself in his own life and place – now as a member of the sixth community:<sup>33</sup>

When Luther the Little,  
 who in me arose,  
 sat quietly believing  
 and opened the Book,  
 I then saw a taper  
 go up from the word,  
 then light-angels little  
 did play in the heart,  
 from above they were singing  
 we'll come to the forest,  
 from heaven on high we came here.

To the question, *Should the Lutheran Reformation Really be Continued* (Text 3), Grundtvig gives a resounding 'yes'. The insights of the Reformation must be retained but also purified from their built-in confines. For, as we have seen, Luther is at fault in disregarding the oral testimony of faith in the baptismal Creed, in overlooking the testimony of tradition throughout Church history, and in believing that all theology should be tested on the basis of written Scripture.<sup>34</sup>

33. Stanza 68 in N.F.S. Grundtvig, *New Year's Morning* (*Nyaars-Morgen*, 1824), trans. Kristian Schultz Petersen (Copenhagen: Vartov 2009).

34. No wonder, therefore, that Grundtvig was regularly accused of being a Roman Catholic in disguise. Already in December 1825 he responded to this criticism as "childish talk"; he sought to restore and renew old-fashioned Christianity but did not assign particular authority to later councils of the Church, or to Papal decrees, see *Theologisk Maanedsskrift* (*Theological Monthly*) 1825, 248-278 (274).

Grundtvig's appeal for a self-critical continuation of the Lutheran Reformation was occasioned by the 300th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession of 1530, and it is here that we find Grundtvig's own summary of his view of the Church:

1. The oral Confession of faith at Baptism is independent of all Scripture, and, being the unanimous testimony of the Church concerning its faith ... it is what all Christians believed from the beginning.
2. Being the sole condition of membership of the Christian Church Community this Confession of faith is the Church's unalterable rule of faith and foundational law, which in its indissoluble union with Baptism marks the only secure boundary between the Church and the world or between true Christianity and what is not true Christianity.
3. The oral Word at the Sacraments and especially the Confession of faith is the foundational rule for all interpretation of the Bible in Christendom, by which every theologian who wishes to belong to the Christian Church shall and must be guided.
4. The Bible has never been the rule of faith in the Christian Church, neither from the beginning nor by its nature. (pp. 103-04).

What we find here is the insistent voice of an evangelical theologian committed to the unchangeable nature of the Apostolic Church – Grundtvig himself being at one and the same time a catholic (in the sense of universal and ecumenical) and a Lutheran theologian. In what follows, however, we find Grundtvig also emphasising positive features of modernity, since he makes clear that the Holy Spirit is a divine influence not constrained to the preaching and sacraments of the Church:

1. A border sharper than ever before should now be drawn between what all Christians must believe and confess and what must be left to the free working of the Spirit and the individual Christian.
2. Therefore the University, or Theology, should enjoy far more freedom than Luther intended without laying claim to the least authority over the faith and the Church which the Reformers in their view logically had to allow them (p. 104).

Thus, while Grundtvig's view calls for an absolute certainty about the foundation upon which the Church stands and falls, considerable space is left for free explorations of how Christian lives are to be led in contemporary times and contexts – always open to

the free workings of the divine Spirit. Similarly, there is, and should be, ample space for theological diversity and experimentation in all scholarly matters. Only the confession to God in the baptismal Creed belongs to the *esse* (essential nature) of the Church; other things that might be beneficial for the church, belong to its *bene esse*; and still other things belong to the *adiaphora* (indifferent things) that present-day Christian congregations, and their members, can either adopt or simply omit.<sup>35</sup>

This combination of a concision in basic matters of faith, and a corresponding openness to variation in the many penultimate matters of life is typical of the generous orthodoxy of Grundtvig's Church view. One thing is what constitutes "authentic Christianity", another thing is whether this authentic Christianity is true or not. On the latter point there should be an open discussion, and even a debate between those adhering to authentic Christianity, and those challenging the truth of Christianity. In the years 1826-27, immediately following *The Church's Retort*, Grundtvig wrote two books composed as a twin work, the first *On Authentic Christianity*, and the second *On the Truth of Christianity* in which philosophical and historical issues are discussed at length between defenders of the faith and critics of Christianity.<sup>36</sup>

### 1832 onwards: Grundtvig's Creation Theology and Cultural Agenda

On the shoulders of his Church view, Grundtvig began to develop a more general outlook on the shared conditions of human existence. Here the theme of *creation theology* becomes ever more prominent and lays the groundwork for a new cultural programme, based on a sense of a shared humanity in a shared cosmos. He gave up the assumption that the rediscovery of authentic Christianity can on its own solve the shared cultural problems of his age: politics, nationhood, and education. The Church is no longer a ruling power in society, but more a transactional agent in a wider cultural circulation of drives and ideas.

In his lengthy Introduction to *Nordic Mythology* (1832), Grundtvig states his view of humanity as a "divine experiment of dust and spirit". He begins by distinguishing human beings from the higher animals, mere imitative creatures, whereas creativity and openness to development are specifically human characteristics. The destiny of

35. Even though Grundtvig always stood by his Church view as being ecclesiologically normative, his opinions on the ecclesial order of the Danish Lutheran Church fluctuated over time. See the analysis by Anders Pontoppidan Thyssen, 'Grundtvig's Ideas on the Church and the People', in *N.F.S. Grundtvig: Tradition and Renewal* (1983), 87-120, 226-292 and 344-370.

36. See N.F.S. Grundtvig, *What Constitutes Authentic Christianity?*, trans. E.D. Nielsen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1985) for the twin books: *Om den sande Christendom* and *Om Christendommens Sandhed* (1826), from *Udvalgte Skrifter (Selected Writings)*, vol 4, 442-518 and 519-723.

humanity is to bring dust and spirit *together*, thus uniting heaven and earth under the guidance of divine Providence down the ages. In the end humanity will grow into the divine consciousness itself, out of which human beings were created in the first place:

For man is not an ape, destined first to ape the other animals and then himself until the world's end. Rather is he a glorious, incomparable creature, in whom divine powers through thousands of generations proclaim, develop, and enlighten themselves as a divine experiment, in order to show how spirit and dust can permeate one another and be transfigured into a common divine consciousness.<sup>37</sup>

Grundtvig finds the special role of humanity explicated in what he calls the 'Mosaic-Christian' perception of life, which he takes to be shared between not only Jews and Christians, but also with "Naturalists of Spirit", by which he probably meant the Romantics of his day, such as the scientist H.C. Ørsted. Grundtvig is thus pointing to a sort of cultural alliance between spokespersons of different religious and philosophical views, who nonetheless share the sense of the mystery of the origins, development, and fulfilment of humanity:

The belief that natural humankind is created in the image of God, and through the breath of life from God possesses all that is required to reach its great destiny as children of God – on that point everyone with spirit must surely agree.<sup>38</sup>

The motto, "Human comes first, and Christian next" is a central expression of Grundtvig's creation theology. The Danish can also be translated, "Be first a human, and then be a Christian in accordance herewith," thus pointing to the demand to fulfil our human destiny in faith, hope, and love. At the same time, however, Grundtvig has a keen sense of the great Fall in the history of humanity, and in the biography of individuals. He is well aware that the traditional talk of sin and its basis in a human fall "sounds a bit flat", and he points to other terms more attuned to naturalistic understandings of humanity, such as 'error' or 'aberration'.<sup>39</sup> For Grundtvig, the real difference between Christians and the Naturalists of spirit is concerned neither with the conjunction of

37. *The School for Life* (2011), 66.

38. *Ibid.* 61. Grundtvig articulates his theological anthropology in male-gendered terms, as was customary in his time. It should be noted, however, that in other places he speaks about the "sons and daughters", for example in his sermons, see Text 41 (p. 441). In his later hymns, Grundtvig goes much further by drawing a parallel between the Son of God and Mary as God's begotten Daughter. Thus in the hymn "Earth and heaven, be united" from 1868: "Love, God's once-begotten Daughter,/is both fair and beautiful,/she is ever smile and laughter,/and the Son's bride dutiful,/heav'nly groom and earthly bride,/ever shining at God's side", see *Living Wellsprings* (2015), 256.

39. *The School for Life* (2011), 61.

dust and spirit nor with the failings of human beings to fulfil their destiny. Rather, the divisive issue is whether the damage to human nature can be healed “by natural means”, such as self-improvement, or solely by the divine grace in Jesus Christ:

Christians believe that through the Fall human nature has become so corrupted that all true healing is impossible; they celebrate Baptism as a true *rebirth*, in which the believer is spiritually recreated. The task of the Church, both individually and in general, is to raise this new person to a divine union with the Saviour and Divine Man, Jesus Christ.<sup>40</sup>

This and many other passages show how Grundtvig’s Church view is still operative after 1832, and he frames his argument for our shared humanity in theological terms. Human beings are sinners through minimalizing, diverging from, and corrupting their full humanity as it was intended by God from the beginning. At the same time, human beings are always *more than sinners*. Faith, hope, and love are at work amongst Christians, but traces of the image of God are also present in the lives of non-Christians, even though they do not know Christ as their saviour.

Grundtvig thus establishes a balance in his Christian anthropology between the original *imago dei* and the subsequent development of the self-centred *imago sui*. However, he adds that human beings are also to be understood from their embeddedness in the created cosmos, as an *imago mundi*. We are microcosms of the wider macrocosm, both as sensory and as spiritual beings. In this manner Grundtvig adopted central aspects of the theology of the Eastern Patristic writers, in particular the anthropology of Irenaeus, but also that of a later Eastern father such as Maximus Confessor (c. 580-662).

While some Grundtvig scholars such as Kaj Thaning have interpreted Grundtvig’s idea of “Human comes first” as a secular programme for a culture that entails a clear *separation* between church and culture, it is probably more correct to say that Grundtvig worked for a living *interaction* and *interpenetration* (*levende Vexel-Virkning*) of church and culture. He did so in a cultural context where the people of the Danish Church and the people of the country of Denmark no longer coincided, since the Danish people consisted of both Christians and adherents of other beliefs.

A particular consequence of Grundtvig’s cultural agenda was his distinction between *faith matters* and *school matters* (meaning matters of opinion). Even theology, as we saw, is a school matter compared to the life of the congregations, in which Christians respond in faith to the words of God in confessions, hymns, prayers, and the

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40. Ibid. 61.

sacraments. In a brief article, ‘Is Faith Truly a School Matter?’<sup>41</sup> from 1836, Grundtvig answers negatively: “Faith is not a matter of schooling at all – thank God”. The public schools may well introduce pupils and students into the history and meaning of the church but Grundtvig did not support the established practice of pastors who performed a compulsive catechesis in the public schools. The mechanical exercise in the catechism was for Grundtvig a failed and backward-oriented teaching method. Gently opening a child’s eyes to heaven is in general a good thing, also at school, but “whipping him into heaven does not work at all”. Grundtvig even continues by saying that it is “a sin to say that Christ bade us do so – He who himself did not come to judge but to save, and who told us to be like He was in this world.”<sup>42</sup> Here we see how Grundtvig conducts a secular argument in tandem with a theological argument in which he refers to the purpose of education – all due to the incarnation of God’s Son within this very world of creation.

After 1832 Grundtvig was thus able to rearticulate his Church view of 1825 alongside his new universal outlook on a human and natural world shared by Christians and non-Christians alike. He is now able to meet the secular world on its own terms, but he does so out of the fundamental conviction that the secular world is God’s own world creation, and God is forever *united* with this world. There is no purely secular world in Grundtvig, nor does he speak of a purely spiritual world without a firm anchorage in God’s creation. On the twofold axis of his Church view and his more expansive creation theology Grundtvig continued to develop new aspects of his theology in unexpected ways. His majestic *Song-work for the Danish Church* and his *Basic Christian Teachings* are the consummation of his later theological work, in poetry and prose.

### 1837-70: Song-Work for the Danish Church

Grundtvig began writing hymns early on. Immediately after his nervous breakdown in 1810, he wrote an uplifting hymn on the three wise men, *Lovely is the midnight sky*, and in 1826, at the millennial celebration of Christianity’s arrival in Denmark via the German missionary, Ansgar, he composed another of his most beloved hymns, *We welcome with joy this blessed day*.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the positive tone of Grundtvig’s early hymns, in which grace and nature are intertwined, anticipates his later creation theology. This hymnal tone is one of the reasons why foreigners sometimes call Grundtvig and the Grundtvigians “the happy Danes” in contrast to the “gloomy Danes” in the Pietist

41. Text 4 in *The School for Life* (2011) 121ff.

42. Ibid. 122 and 125.

43. Nos. 12 and 53 in *Living Wellsprings* (2015).

tradition. Be that as it may, Grundtvig was critical of the “still waters” of hymns written in a dogmatic and moral style; he wanted to write hymns more “like a running stream,” i.e. using a narrative form with energy and flow.<sup>44</sup>

Inspired by a powerful tradition that included Luther, Kingo, Brorson, and his friend Ingemann, Grundtvig conceived of his hymns as songs of praise written for the contemporary Danish church. Being in his own words “very unmusical” he wrote them as poems, quite often with published tunes in mind, and always to a strict metre. He sent out the subscription request for *Song-Work for the Danish Church* on October 30th 1836, one day before the 300th anniversary of the Danish Reformation in 1536. Published from 1837 and finalised in 1870, the *Song-Work* contains 401 hymns (by 1870: 1,585 hymns), some original by Grundtvig, some translations, and some written on material from the aforementioned five church-epochs prior to the Nordic church.

Grundtvig’s ambition was no longer to point solely to baptism etc. as the *basso continuo* of Christianity. He now wished to show how each of the five ecumenical churches had contributed something novel and specific to the development of Christianity, something useful for the contemporary enlightenment of Christian self-understanding and perception of reality. From the Hebrew community, examples range from new versions of the Psalms of David up to New Testament hymns. More important was his rediscovery in 1837 of the liturgical tradition of the *Greek* church, sometimes referred to as Grundtvig’s “Greek awakening”. The Greek tradition led him to expand the liturgical repertoire of his Church view from 1825, not least by adding stronger Trinitarian motifs and doxological elements. The Greek tradition also brought a greater emphasis on resurrection motifs. His hymns on the resurrection and ascension of Christ are far more plentiful in number than his hymns on the cross. In a sermon given on Good Friday 1843, Grundtvig advises his fellow Christians not to mourn for more than half an hour or so! The concept of the quiet week up to Easter Sunday is a remnant from the Middle Ages, and Christians should joyfully celebrate the great divine work of the sacrifice of love accomplished by Christ rather than sit in gloomy despondency.<sup>45</sup>

From the Latin church Grundtvig is inspired by powerful expressions of a cosmic Christology that absorbs the depth of human suffering. In *Hail, our reconciling saviour!*,<sup>46</sup> Christ is described as the one “in whom all things coinhere” (*den dybe Sammenhæng*, lit. the deep connection). From the body of Christ rent asunder on Calvary springs the overwhelming divine love that melts the icebergs of human hearts. In Grundtvig’s

44. N.F. Grundtvig, *Poetiske Skrifter (Poetic Writings)*, ed. Svend Grundtvig (Copenhagen: Karl Schønberg 1880), vol. 1, 299-300. See Christian Thodberg, ‘Grundtvig the Hymnwriter’, in *N.F.S. Grundtvig: Tradition and Renewal* (1983), 160-210 (162).

45. Grundtvig, *Prædikener i Vartov. Kirkeåret 1842-43 (Sermons in Vartov for the Church Year 1842-43)*, eds. Jette Holm, Elisabeth A. Glenthøj in collaboration with Christian Thodberg (Copenhagen: Forlaget Vartov 2007), vol. 5, 181-186.

46. No. 20 in *Living Wellsprings* (2015), 93.

version of the hymn, reworked from Arnulf of Leuven (c. 1200-50), the Christian is not called to choose between God's world or this world, as in the original, more Augustinian, hymn. In Grundtvig's view, this world is already God's world! Thus, by loving this world with a warming heart, we will meet the self-sacrificing incarnate Christ, resurrected and present in the midst of all reality:

As for me You once have striven,  
 May I love life in you given;  
 May my heart for You alone beat,  
 So my thoughts alone in you meet,  
 In whom all things coinhere.<sup>47</sup>

In Grundtvig's *Song-Work* we thus find new expressions of Grundtvig's ecumenical awareness.<sup>48</sup> One thing is "the Font and the Table", including the faithful response to the words of Christ; this constitutes the common thread throughout the history of the Church. Another thing is the new interpretations of faith, hope and love that emerge in the course of history, alongside new ways of intensifying the response to God in doxology and praise. The contemporary Church as well as individual Christians stand on the shoulders of earlier Church communities, and can reap the harvest of experience and wisdom from earlier epochs of Christianity. The ecumenical dimension is about accumulating insights from a variegated Christian tradition.

Grundtvig's new songs and hymns are intended to enable contemporary Christians to channel and spread their praise of God, and to reorient their lives accordingly. For *fruits* are expected to come from new experiences and expressions of faith. As Grundtvig already wrote in *Nordic Mythology* (1832), it is "by the fruits" that we will recognize the difference between Naturalists and Christians.<sup>49</sup>

### Basic Christian Teachings: 1855-61

The same practical interest is evident in *Basic Christian Teachings*, written when Grundtvig was in his 70s: "... we must endeavour in all our speech and writing about the kingdom of God to arouse and sharpen attention to the fruits of the Spirit and the effects of Christianity" (Text 19, p. 292).

In philosophical terminology, Grundtvig the theologian is interested in both the *semantics* of the Christian faith, i.e. its interpretation and understanding, and in the

47. Ibid. 94. The 'coinherence' is Broadbridge's translation of "the deep connection".

48. See A.M. Allchin, 'Grundtvig Seen in Ecumenical Perspective', *Grundtvig Studier* 1989-90, 105-20.

49. *The School for Life* (2011), 61.

*pragmatics* of faith, i.e. its life practices. Throughout his theology, Grundtvig employs not only a descriptive or assertive language, expounding the Christian message to his fellow-Christians; he also speaks in an inviting style, involving a directive tone and advising how to live as Christians in a contemporary context. In Grundtvig, theology is not only knowledge about Christian history and thought; it is also *know-how*, about how to live as a Christian. We must “take possession [of the Christian message] in faith, hope, and love in order to harvest its fruits in righteousness, peace, and joy” (Text 27, p. 370). Thus, to be faithful is also to be fair, righteous, and proportionate; to live in hope is also to give comfort to others, encourage them, and make peace; likewise, love is about the joyful flourishing of life towards the fulfilment of all relations in everlasting life.

For Grundtvig, faith, hope, and love are not mere inner mental states; they are dynamic “life-expressions”, as he says in *Basic Christian Teachings*. Moreover, faith, hope, and love are nourished by the three corresponding external “signs of life”, or characteristics, of the Church: confessing the faith, preaching and praying, and the praise of God in hymns and songs. These “signs of life” are related to baptism, the words of Christ, and Holy Communion, through which the Holy Spirit is at work in the community. Finally, these life expressions must have their ‘fruits’ or ‘effects’ in the social kingdom of God, also *beyond* the Christian community.<sup>50</sup>

*Basic Christian Teachings* (Texts 13-20) takes its point of departure in Grundtvig’s recapitulation of his Church view of 1825, followed by an expanded version of his threefold expressions of Christian life based on the ‘signs of life’ of the church, and their fruits in the wider society (Texts 21-27). What is at stake here is the relation between human existence in general and Christian existence in particular.

In the chapter on “Inborn and Reborn Human Life” (Text 23), we find a more or less systematic attempt to coordinate Grundtvig’s theology of creation and his new ‘Church view’ with its expansive focus on faith, hope, and love. What is the difference, and what is the likeness between the humanity that is *inborn* with creation, and the Christian existence *reborn* with water and Spirit at baptism? Grundtvig answers thus:

... between our inborn and our reborn human lives there is a world of difference. They differ in quality, breadth, and degree with regard to their vitality. They differ in the truthfulness, love, and goodness with which human life expresses itself in human speech. And yet it is the very same human life that we are speaking of, with the same laws and original characteristics, and the same energies and hallmarks. Thus in its darkest, poorest, and murkiest form it is nevertheless of the same basic nature as in its richest, purest, and clearest form. To put it in a nutshell, the thief

50. See the introduction to *Basic Christians Teachings* by Hans Raun Iversen, p. 233-38.

on the cross who shared the same human life as God's only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and to whom he cried, "Remember me, when You come into Your kingdom", received the truthful, uniquely powerful and loving answer, "Truly I tell you, today you shall be with me in Paradise." (p. 324-25)

The difference between inborn and reborn humanity is one of quality, but also one of scope, degree and intensity. Thus the thief on the cross and God's own Son on the cross share *exactly the same human nature*. Grundtvig supports this view in his theological anthropology. Even after the Fall, no human being is *only* a sinner, for the image of God (*imago dei*) was never *fully* destroyed. If that were to happen, no communication whatsoever would be possible between God and humanity. Yet the Bible mentions many such examples:

The so-called Bible Story can only be true on the condition that human life, before and after the Fall and before and after the Rebirth, is extremely homogeneous and basically the same. If Adam's human life in the image of God had been entirely *destroyed* by the Fall, then God could not even *speak* to the fallen Adam, nor could Adam answer Him (pp. 327-28)

On this point, Grundtvig takes issue with Luther's anthropology, insofar as Luther argues that the *imago dei* was totally lost with original sin; on these premises, no faith, hope, or love is possible apart from the rebirth of Baptism, in which the Holy Spirit offers the gift of faith. By contrast, Grundtvig argues that the Spirit of God is at work also outside, and prior to, the Christian Church.

However long it has been overlooked and however boldly it is often denied, it remains as clear as it is certain that the faith, hope, and love of the old being must be uniform with that of the new being. (Text 25, p. 350).

Grundtvig's emphasis on the possibility of a natural faith, a natural hope, and a natural love *prior* to Baptism, also explains the central role he assigns to the renunciation of the Devil at Baptism. This is an aspect of Grundtvig's theology which modern readers may find strange, yet there is a logic to Grundtvig's argument which runs as follows: (1) The baptismal candidate is *not yet* baptised, is *not yet* reborn by the Holy Spirit, and is *not yet* included in the body of Christ. (2) The baptismal candidate must renounce the Devil and all his deeds as a *logical precondition* for becoming aligned with the God of light and love. (3) This requirement only makes sense if the baptismal candidate is *already capable of doing so* due to his or her inborn humanity:

What we can and must say ‘yes’ to with our renunciation at Baptism must be no more than what we can, with God’s help, honestly and sincerely say yes to before the rebirth and renewal that has its source in Baptism (Text 15, p. 257).

In other words, the renunciation of the Devil is the unavoidable counterweight to the positive confession of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We face here the *principle of contradiction* that Grundtvig always cherished: In order to commit oneself to the Truth, one must renounce the Devil as “the father of lies” (John 8:44).

The renunciation at Baptism is only a special case for Grundtvig’s general view that human freedom is part of the *imago dei*, also in spiritual matters. Grundtvig is certainly not a Pelagian presupposing an autonomy of will; rather, like another modern Protestant such as John Wesley (1703-91), he understands human freedom as being circumscribed and assisted by the presence of the divine Spirit. Grundtvig offers a variety of positive examples of faith, hope, and love outside the context of the Christian Church. In many cases he refers to Bible stories, especially regarding faith and hope in his sermons (Text 32), but he can also bring in ordinary life experiences when pointing to the persistence of the *imago dei* after the Fall and outside Christian congregations. Examples are marital love and the love of parents for their children. Here too Grundtvig’s principle applies: “Human comes first”:

Thus the love between parents and children and the love within marriage between a man and a woman in the old being, insofar as it existed and insofar as it stretched, must have been altogether uniform with the love between the heavenly Father and His earthly children and with the love in the marriage between Christ and His Church in the new being’s life. (p. 351).<sup>51</sup>

Grundtvig’s general idea is that as human beings we must know about love relations “from below” before we can speak about divine love as a comprehensive “love from above”. It is important to note, however, that Grundtvig is not speaking of human love as a mere analogy to divine love. Rather he speaks of human love in the world of creation as being “altogether uniform” (*aldeles eensartet*) with God’s love for humanity. The love of parents towards their children is, in other words, of the same character as the love of God the Father for *his* children. Similarly, deep partnerships of love are instantiations of (i.e. exemplify) the same kind of love that comes forth in the relationship between Christ and his Church. What then is the difference between human and divine love, when we take into account that Grundtvig can also speak of a “world of difference” (p. 324) between inborn nature and reborn nature, just as he can also say

51. Text 25, Christian Marriage, p. 343ff.

that divine love is an “unparalleled power and love” beyond comprehension (p. 276)? Nowhere does he give a systematic answer to this question. The best interpretation, in my view, is to say that divine love has a universal scope, thus not confined to the love within the family only, or to the favoritistic love of one’s husband or wife. Moreover, divine love is unparalleled and of another quality by not being conditioned by degrees, since divine love expresses itself in the full vitality of divine life.

The important point is that for Grundtvig also *social life* is part of the image of God. This comes as no surprise when we read his interpretation of the Trinity. He defines the word ‘Trinity’ as the name for the *divine communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*. Already in mid-19th century Europe we find in Grundtvig a proponent of a social doctrine of the triune God:

It is the name of the everlasting communion in which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit enjoy and employ the one true divinity in the order and relationship which their proper names, ‘Father’, ‘Son’, and ‘Holy Spirit’ express (Text 27, p. 365).

Like many Greek Church fathers, Grundtvig speaks of the Father as having a superior position in the triune life, since the source of divinity resides in the one called by the proper name: ‘The Father’, while the proper name of ‘The Son’ is logically subordinate in being the principle of receptivity in divine life. Grundtvig is no doubt historically correct in arguing that this understanding of ‘subordination’ is fully in line with orthodox theology, and is not a subordination which implies that Christ is only *semi*-divine. Rather, the Son is fully divine, and without his eternal Son even the Father could not be the eternal Father: “God could not be the eternal Father if He did not have an eternal Son, and yet He must be the eternal everything – which He is!” (p. 366). The Holy Spirit is fully divine too, also in the sense of being fully self-aware, and is thus able to take initiatives in accordance with the Father’s advice and the Son’s deeds.

Grundtvig supports his social view of the *imago dei* by also pointing to the incarnation of God’s Son. The incarnation implies that God and humanity not only communicate with one another through language, but share one and the same human condition of living in the world of flesh. Fully in line with Martin Luther,<sup>52</sup> Grundtvig argues that divinity and humanity are so intimately interwoven in Jesus Christ that it is impossible to take his humanity apart from his divinity, or to view divinity without God’s inclusion of humanity. In short, the incarnation in Christ presupposes a shared humanity between Jesus and all manner of sinners:

52. Martin Luther, *Confession concerning Christ’s Supper* (1528), in *Luther’s Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1972), vol 37, 218-230.

If this were not so, God's only Son could just as little have willed Himself to be and become a real human child born of a woman as any woman-born *human* child would or could have been a real divine child, born of water and spirit. For then divinity would have excluded humanity, and humanity in turn divinity, and there would no longer be any spiritual or heartfelt reciprocal feeling, no inclination, no interaction (p. 325)

Grundtvig goes on to say that this remains the divisive issue between Muslims and Christians. Muslims declare "divine and human nature so different in kind that no living contact between them was conceivable. They deny the possibility of the incarnation of God's Son and the fusion of divine and human nature in the personality of our Lord Jesus Christ ..." (p. 325). Union, or no union, is the religious question dividing Christians and Muslims, according to *Basic Christian Teachings*. Similarly, a redemption by grace versus a self-redemption by the inborn sparks of light, was the dividing issue between Christians and the Naturalists of spirit in *Nordic Mythology*.

Having argued that faith, hope, and love are part of human nature as created by God, and also a consequence of the incarnation, Grundtvig also develops a new reflection on the Church to avoid its self-understanding being decoupled from local Christian congregations. In *Basic Christian Teachings* Grundtvig is uncomfortable about using the general term 'Church' as being self-evident. At its deepest level, the Church (with a capital C) is "the Holy Spirit's presence in the entire holy Church as being the holy catholic gathering of the people, and in the fellowship of the saints with the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the flesh, and the life everlasting" (Text 17, p. 274). This is certainly a 'high' concept of Church, entailing what the whole ballast of the Christian faith is ultimately about. In more ordinary settings, however, Grundtvig's advice is to eschew self-congratulatory uses of 'Church' and instead use more down-to-earth concepts such as 'congregations' or 'gatherings'.<sup>53</sup> Otherwise church leaders tend to forget the Holy Spirit while highlighting their ecclesial power structures. By using the term 'Church' indiscriminately, we can all too easily become "a loophole for the Pope and all those who as 'Lords of the faith and the Church' wished to set themselves up in place of the Holy Spirit, or at least be assumed to have the Holy Spirit all to themselves and thus be the sole medium between the Spirit and the Church" (p. 275).

Grundtvig's ecclesiology is complex. It seems that he both wants to keep together, yet make a distinction between his 'high view' of the Church with a Capital C, and his more modest, almost congregationalist view of the local gatherings of people as the

53. The same argument as in Martin Luther, *On the Councils and the Church* (1539), in *Luther's Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1972), vol 41, 143-145.

concrete place for the life-signs of the Church, and the life-expressions of Christians. Christian community should appreciate on the one hand that the love of God in the final end “surpasses all natural human love”, while acknowledging on the other that human faith, hope, and love, also outside the Church, exemplify expressions of divine love. Any Christian congregation, and any individual Christian ...

... must first know the natural life and culture of their own people from its best side. Although carnality continues to be dominant, in our best side there is so much spirituality and cordiality that we can gain from it the living measure which can teach us to appreciate the unparalleled power and love in the spirit of God’s people and the heart of the Christian brotherhood” (p. 276)

We are here placed in the living interaction between church and culture that may be seen as Grundtvig’s particular contribution to theological reflection. On the one hand, he is firm in his conviction that Christian existence offers a life of trust, hope, and love which far exceeds what can be offered on the market of cultures and religions. Hence, being part of the Christian community can never be the same as being part of a particular people – such as the Danes. Christianity and culture never can, and never should, become identical (Text 9). At the same time, life expressions of faith, hope, and love, as well as ideals such as truth, goodness, and beauty, emerge also outside Christian congregations. The Christian therefore has to support any expression of shared humanity, regardless of religious world-views, “for on earth one can never find humaneness without culture” (Text 9, p. 194). It would be curious if Christian congregations, living in different cultural atmospheres, had nothing to learn from the cultures of which they are part. Being a Christian also means being a learner.

### Grundtvig in the context of contemporary international theology

Where does Grundtvig belong in contemporary theology, and what is his potential relevance today? A first observation is that Grundtvig’s theological vision does not sit well with the oft-used dichotomy between conservative and liberal theology; for he was both a conservative and a liberal. The question is, how is such combination possible?

Grundtvig the theologian was very much aware of the identity of the Christian faith, and he was likewise concerned about the authenticity of the one and only Christian Church. With his Church view in place by 1825, he could now relax somewhat as to the penultimate matters of faith, such as the different ways of organizing Christian congregations and the varieties of biblical interpretation in historical-critical scholarship

(see Text 6). In a sense, it was precisely Grundtvig's 'conservatism' concerning the triad of Baptism, the Word, and Holy Communion that allowed him a high degree of flexibility with regard to many other day-to-day theological matters. As we have seen, some things are *necessary* and other things are *beneficial* for the development of the Church, but most things are open to free use and exploration, or can simply be omitted. These tenets of Grundtvig's Church view can speak to our current ideas of an evangelical catholicity based on the claim that Luther and the other magistral Reformers did not plan to create a *new* church but to reform it in continuity with the 'one, holy, catholic, and apostolic' Church.<sup>54</sup>

We have seen that Grundtvig's *Song-Work* of 1837 built on the concept of a growth in understanding, clarity, and wisdom during the history of the Christian Church. And yet he was not a progressivist, for he did not believe that later churches were *per se* livelier than earlier churches. Often on the contrary. Nonetheless, growth is always possible if contemporary churches use the insights of earlier theological epochs, just as Grundtvig himself drew on Irenaeus and Luther. Much like the leading Roman Catholic voices around the Second Vatican Council 1962-65, Grundtvig called for a *ressourcement* of Christian theology.<sup>55</sup> Deliberately, he went back to the Patristic, Mediaeval, English, and German sources of Christian hymns and liturgy – putting these resources into new songs attuned to his contemporary context of Christian life and culture. As we have seen, he also returned to the Bible, absorbing the texts in his own manner, without setting up wedges between the Bible, the living tradition of the Church, and his own time.

There are deep theological reasons for such a 'transhistorical' awareness in Grundtvig's theology. First of all, it is the same Christ and the same Spirit who are at work in the Hebrew church as in his own age – and indeed in ours. Secondly, for Grundtvig eternity is here and now; it is illogical to suppose that eternal life has a beginning 'after death,' for this "could only lead the Congregation to think that it was not until *after* death that Our Lord would grant us a share of eternal life, even though He had promised all his faithful that He would open a life-source in them with His Spirit that would be a wellspring to an everlasting life." (p. 274). Third, Christ's sharing of eternal life *takes place at every Church service*, particularly in Holy Communion, where Christ gives his eternal life to those who partake in the meal. Accordingly, Grundtvig understands the 'real presence' of Christ as not confined to bread and wine; the presence of Christ and the kingdom of God takes place in the community of believers too. This view has a remarkable affinity with the Eastern Orthodox view of the divine

54. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson eds., *The Catholicity of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1996), vii.

55. See Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray eds., *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 2011).

liturgy.<sup>56</sup> In his mature theology, we may say, Grundtvig transformed his Church view into a Liturgical view.

The ‘liberal’ aspects of Grundtvig’s theology come to the fore in his emphasis on human freedom. In political matters, there should be “Freedom for Loki, as well as for Thor”, for a free society must give space to both critics and supporters of the establishment culture, including Christian churches. Freedom must reign in spiritual matters too. From the 1820s onwards, we find in Grundtvig a call for freedom of conscience and religious expression even at a time when this is not yet an established right in Danish society.

Human freedom also plays a significant role within church life, and overall freedom has a special room in Grundtvig’s theology. Grundtvig was enough of an Augustinian and Lutheran to know that a self-salvation via human freedom is at odds with human experience, and will lead us astray. We thus saw how his emphasis on the overwhelming power of divine grace was part of his controversy with the Naturalists of spirit in 1832. Human freedom, he believed, is a divine gift, and an *inborn* gift to humanity prior to Christian existence, and even outside the compass of the Church. The freedom to move in the direction of the Truth (Christ), the Life-force (Spirit), and the Love of God (Father) is accompanied by a human freedom to reject the powers of evil. ‘Wanting’, however, is not the same as ‘having the power’ to turn one’s wants into reality. For Grundtvig, salvation and the flourishing of life require a creative encounter between the longings of the human heart and the life-giving power of grace, so that the affective basis of the human will can be empowered, and the deepest longings of the human being find anchorage, peace, and joy.

Regarding the concept of the human heart, Grundtvig often refers to the *female* aspects of being human. In a sermon from 1848, he argues that in order to be a full human being, Jesus Christ must comprise both male and female characteristics: “the Lord could not be the perfect human being without in fact being man *and* woman ... Only the perfect human being is created in God’s image and according to His likeness; only in the perfect humanity, both male *and* female, can God’s power be revealed and perfected” (Text 33, p. 406).

Grundtvig makes a similar argument concerning the life expressions of faith, hope, and love. Considering that faith, hope, and love are the essence of Christianity, he even says that “two-thirds of Christianity, namely faith and love, are ‘feminine’. Since faith is the first and love the greatest, hope, which is the masculine element in between, can be no more than an empty spiritual death and impotent fantasy if its feminine elements are missing” (Text 32, p. 401). This is indeed a remarkable view of

56. See the classic exposition in St Germanus of Constantinople, *On the Divine Liturgy: Ecclesiastical History and Mystical Contemplation*, ed. and trans. Paul Meyendorff (Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press 1984).

a 19th century theologian, even though some might argue nowadays that it rests on gender stereotypes. However, Grundtvig's view of the feminine can more graciously be interpreted as an argument in favour of a *gender fluidity* so that any Christian – male and/or female – should embrace a fuller gamut of the human expressions of faith, hope, and love, and thereby expand the scope and vitality of Christian existence.

Apart from the breadth of Grundtvig's view of the Christian faith, the most original contribution of his theology is his cultural agenda, developed in the context of his creation theology after 1832. Indeed, a school of theological thinking has developed around Grundtvig's cultural agenda known as *Scandinavian Creation Theology*.<sup>57</sup> This school of thought aims to use Luther in the context of Grundtvig's theology. While both Luther and Grundtvig appreciate the world of nature as God's unpolluted creation, they differ markedly in their theological anthropology. In spiritual matters, Luther's views of humanity are defined by his allegiance to Augustine's doctrine of original sin. Grundtvig, on the other hand, speaks of the *imago dei* as present in all human beings. From this perspective, it is a natural expectation that the life expressions of faith, hope, and love are, at least occasionally, lived out among human beings independent of any relation of faith to Christ. Thus, Christians belong to a specific community but are not thereby lifted up above other people. All human beings share a basic human nature – of body, soul and spirit. All human beings share bodies and feelings – hand, mouth, and heart – and are guided by similar spiritual values and powers: vitality, truth, and the beauty of goodness. Likewise, in any given context, Christians share with non-Christians quite a few cultural forces of the time, basic ambitions, hopes, and often also national identities.

Certainly, church and culture are not the same for Grundtvig, but he would still insist that there are usually overlapping concerns between most people living in the same place, even despite conflicts between ideologies and religions.<sup>58</sup> Otherwise, in situations of conflict, it may be tempting to withdraw from society, and establish counter-cultural religious groups and parallel societies. In today's theology some argue, for example, that congregational life may be seen as a *polis*, an oasis of peace in a world of conflict.<sup>59</sup> However, the price to be paid for such a view is that the majority culture, or particular groups within society, are defined as enemies. Grundtvig's approach was altogether different: "we wish both the Church and the State well."<sup>60</sup>

57. See Niels Henrik Gregersen, Bengt Kristensson Ugglå, and Trygve Wyller eds., *Reformation Theology for a Postsecular Age: Logstrup, Preter, Wingren, and the Future of Scandinavian Creation Theology* (Research in Contemporary Religion vol. 24) (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2017).

58. We find a similar view in Miroslav Volf, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 2016).

59. Examples are Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom?* (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1991), or John Howard Yoder, "How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned: A Critique of Christ and Culture", in *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture*, eds. Glen H. Stassen, D. M. Yeager & John Howard Yoder (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1996), 31-89.

60. *The School for Life* (note 2), 125.