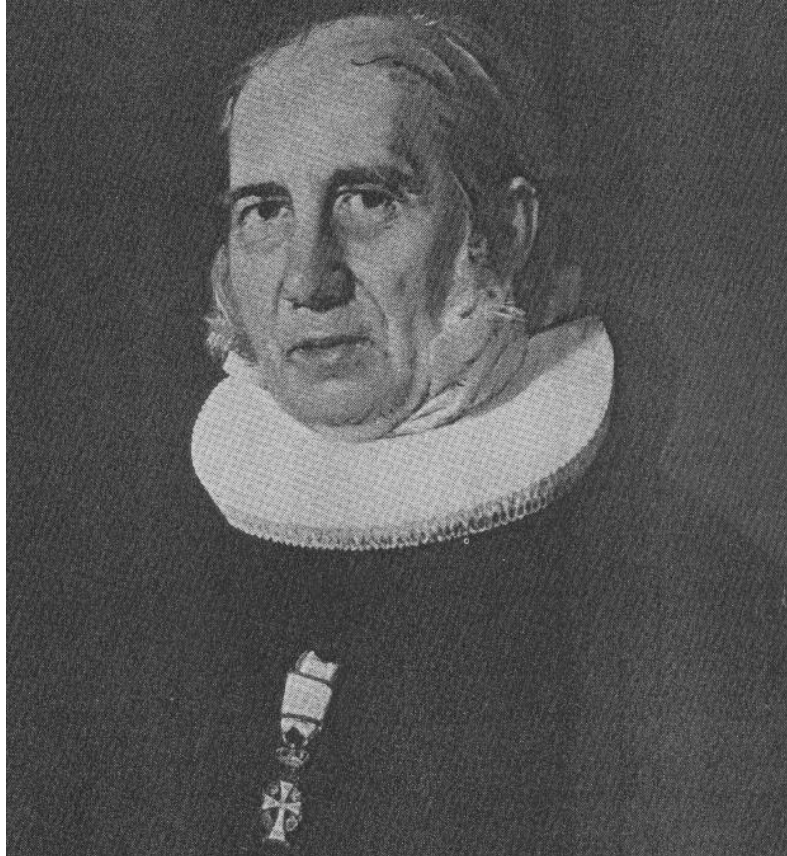


*In all its Splendour now the
Sun shines*



The Dynamics between Popular Culture
and Christian Theology in four Hymns
written by N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872)

master-thesis written by
Maarten Diepenbroek

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and Christian Theology in four Hymns written by
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* The title is based on Christian Thodberg's translation of Grundtvig's hymn for Whitsun *I al sin glans nu stråler solen* (cf. Chr. Thodberg, 'Grundtvig the Hymnwriter' in: Chr. Thodberg, A.P. Thyssen (eds.), *N.F.S. Grundtvig, Tradition and Renewal: Grundtvig's Vision of Man and People, Education and the Church, in Relation to World Issues Today*, Copenhagen 1983, p. 188).

Figure 1 (front page): Grundtvig in 1843 painted by C. A. Jensen. The picture shows Grundtvig as minister at Vartov, just before his sixtieth birthday (source: P. Hansen, F.A. Larsen, *Factsheet Denmark / N.F.S. Grundtvig*, p. 3).

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Prologue

My first encounter with N.F.S. Grundtvig was at the teacher-seminary in Jelling (Denmark), in the year 2000. In that time I was studying to be a teacher at primary school and I took the opportunity to study in Denmark for three months to learn about the Danish educational system. I was especially interested in the way in which children with learning difficulties were integrated in the public primary school. Part of the program was an introduction to the Danish educational and pedagogical ideas. In this context Grundtvig was mentioned as the one who stood at the cradle of the folk high school-movement (*Folkehøjskole*). In the Grundtvigian way of learning songs and stories took the place of books. Later on I was able to experience this in practice, when I could teach some lessons at a primary school near Give. This school was a so called *Friskole* ('Free-school') and very much influenced by the ideas of Grundtvig. In this school learning was considered not only as a cognitive activity. The whole identity of the child was involved in the learning process. Every Monday morning the whole school gathered in the school hall to open the week with songs and often these were songs of Grundtvig's.

Since I am highly interested in church music (I am a church organist myself) I discovered that our own Dutch Protestant hymn book contained two hymns of Grundtvig's as well! Through these hymns I learned that Grundtvig was not only a man with a distinctive vision about education, but that he was first and foremost a theologian and a priest. In my spare time I read something about his theological ideas and when I started to study theology I decided to broaden my knowledge about Grundtvig. Now during the last phase of my study I have finally got the possibility to do so by writing a master-thesis. During my short visit at the University of Aarhus in November 2006 my enthusiasm for Grundtvig increased. There I realized that the theology of Grundtvig is also relevant for us now and I experienced how Grundtvig still has a huge influence on the life and practice of the Danish Church.

At this place I would like to thank the members of the Centre for Grundtvig Studies of the theological department of Aarhus-University for offering me the possibility to study there for a couple of weeks. I thank Ulrik Overgaard for inviting me to Denmark and arranging all the practical things. Professor Jens Holger Schjørring I would like to thank for guiding me through the enormous world of Grundtvig and for the detailed exegesis we did on some of Grundtvig's hymns. Also I am very grateful to Professor Christian Thodberg for offering me the possibility to have several conversations with him about his ideas on Grundtvig's hymnal work. The members of *Vartov Kirkeligt Samfund* in Copenhagen I would like to thank for letting me study there in the Grundtvig-Library and for allowing me to stay in *Vartov* for a couple of days. It was a very nice experience to remain in the place where Grundtvig had worked for so many years. Last but not least I would like to thank three persons in the Netherlands. First of all Professor Marcel Barnard of Utrecht University, who guided the whole study process. I would like to thank Drs. H. van der Maten and Mrs. F. Snippe-Datema for correcting the English spelling and grammar.

Chapter 1: Introduction

N.F.S. Grundtvig: *homo universalis*, a prophet of the North or a monster?

N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872) is a man with a lot of different faces. First of all he was a theologian and a priest in the Danish Lutheran *Folkekirke*. Furthermore, he worked as a historian and philologist. He translated and edited old Norse and Anglo-Saxon literature. He also wrote his own poetry and songs for church and school. He influenced major educational developments and was involved in politics and the emancipation of the lay people. It is almost impossible to give a complete description of Grundtvig. There is always the danger of neglecting some aspects of his life. About almost every aspect of life he had a vision. Not without a reason he was called a prophet of the North. I consider Grundtvig as a kind of *homo universalis* of the nineteenth century. One can call him a founding father of the national Danish identity in Church¹ and society, or as the well-known Grundtvig-scholar Professor Christian Thodberg said to me: “Grundtvig, he really is a monster!”.² Everyone who enters into the fascinating world of Grundtvig will discover that his cultural legacy is enormous indeed.

This thesis deals with Grundtvig’s hymnal work, so I don’t want to pay too much attention to Grundtvig’s cultural legacy. For a solid introduction to Grundtvig I therefore refer to the introduction edited by Christian Thodberg and Anders Pontoppidan Thyssen.³

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a brief introduction to the Danish Church and society in Grundtvig’s days. However, before doing this I first want to describe and explain the research question of this thesis and clearly define the field of research. For a biography of Grundtvig I refer to the appendix of my thesis in which a short biography is included.

Introduction to the research question

It is almost impossible to think about the history and identity of Denmark without mentioning Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig. This priest and poet-educator not only left his mark on the Danish life of the nineteenth century, but his theological, educational and political thoughts still influence current Danish society.

Grundtvig’s hymnological legacy is astonishing. The number of hymns he wrote, translated and edited is estimated around 2,000.⁴ The current Danish hymn book contains still a lot of hymns written and rewritten by Grundtvig.⁵ Even the Dutch *Liedboek voor de Kerken* (the official hymn book for the Protestant churches in the Netherlands) contains two hymns by Grundtvig.⁶ So although Grundtvig’s hymns are strongly rooted in the Danish culture, they also have something to say to Dutch believers. What is it that makes his hymns so special? It is the aim of this thesis to give a possible answer to this question. Because Grundtvig’s hymnal oeuvre is so huge I am going to focus on four of his hymns, which are representative for Grundtvig’s understanding of Christianity. I will investigate those hymns from a specific

¹ When I speak about Church, I always refer to the Danish Lutheran Church, the *Folkekirke*.

² In November 2006 I had the opportunity to meet Professor Christian Thodberg at Aarhus University in Denmark. We spoke about Grundtvig’s hymnal heritage. The first thing about Grundtvig he said to me was: “Grundtvig, he really is a monster!”.

³ Chr. Thodberg, A.P. Thyssen (eds.), *N.F.S. Grundtvig, Tradition and Renewal: Grundtvig’s Vision of Man and People, Education and the Church, in Relation to World Issues Today*, Copenhagen 1983.

⁴ G.F.W. Herngreen, in: W. de Leeuw, Th. J.M Naastepad, W.G. Overbosch, W. Vogel, J. Wit, *Een Compendium van achtergrondinformatie bij de 491 Gezangen uit het Liedboek voor de Kerken*, Amsterdam 1978, p. 538.

⁵ *Den Danske Salmebog*, 2002 contains 163 hymns written by Grundtvig and 90 translated or reworked hymns (compared to a total of 791 hymns).

⁶ *Liedboek voor de Kerken*, ’s-Gravenhage 1973, nr. 220: ‘Zingt nu de Heer! Hij zag ons aan’ (‘Herren han har besøgt sit folk’) and nr. 458: ‘Tot U is het, Heer, dat ik vlucht’ (‘Vor Herre, til dig må jeg ty’).

point of view. I am interested in the relation between theology and popular culture. During his lifetime Grundtvig paid a lot of attention to the subject of the identity of the Danes. National history and most of all the mother language were extremely important for Grundtvig. His thoughts on the popular culture of the Danes also influenced his theological way of thinking. Therefore I presume that popular cultural elements play a role in Grundtvig's hymns. The aim of this thesis is to describe how these elements are used in his hymns and how the dynamics between popular culture and theology is taking shape. The research question for this thesis is the following:

Which kind of dynamics is there between the theology and poetry in the hymns of N.F.S. Grundtvig on the one hand and the Danish popular culture in the nineteenth century on the other?

Grundtvig seemed to incorporate pre-Christian Scandinavian mythology into his understanding of Christianity. I think this attempt of his to integrate pagan elements into theology is very interesting and exciting, not only from a formalistic point of view, but this question is also relevant to the current developments in the hymnological field. How, if at all, we deal with elements from contemporary culture in our liturgy? Present day churchgoers often complain that the language of the liturgy and hymns have no bearing on their every day lives. They experience a gap between the liturgical language and the current culture. At the end of my thesis I want to answer the question how Grundtvig bridges this gap between ordinary culture and theology in the four analyzed hymns. Maybe his method is also relevant to our present time. For that reason chapter four contains an appreciation of Grundtvig's hymns in light of the task of present-day poets to write modern hymns for the Christian church.

Danish society and Church after 1800

During Grundtvig's life major transformations took place in Danish church and society. In this paragraph I outline some developments and characteristics of Danish life in the nineteenth century. This era is often called the golden age of Denmark. Cultural and intellectual life flourished as never before. The philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) and the writer Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) dominated the intellectual scene, while the sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770?-1844) was an important figure in the artistic climate of nineteenth century Copenhagen.⁷

When Grundtvig was born in 1783 Denmark had been an absolute monarchy for over a century, an agricultural country without any big towns apart from Copenhagen and with a poor population dominated by farmers and craftsmen. The first decades of the nineteenth century were not prosperous for Denmark at all. The bombing of Copenhagen in 1801 by the British Navy had an enormous impact on the city. In 1807 the Danish monarchy became involved in the conflict between the Napoleonic Empire and Great Britain. Again Copenhagen was bombed by the English, who feared that the Danish Navy would become a possible threat, if it fell into the hands of Napoleon. The following years of war meant a period of economic recession for Denmark.⁸ Besides, the size of the country decreased: with the peace

⁷ M. Schwarz Luasten, 'Dänemark I', in: G. Krause, G. Müller (Hrsg.), *Theologische Realencyclopädie* Bd. VIII, Berlin 1981, p. 308.

⁸ L. Rerup, 'N.F.S. Grundtvig's Position in Danish Nationalism', in: A.M. Allchin, D. Jasper, J.H. Schjørring, K. Stevenson (eds.), *Heritage and Prophecy: Grundtvig and the English-Speaking World*, Aarhus 1993, p. 243.

of 1814 a resolution was passed that Norway should unite with Sweden. Until 1814 Norway had been ruled by the Danish crown for more than four centuries.⁹

After 1830 the country recovered slowly and some profound changes in society and Church took place. First of all there was a relatively calm transition from an absolute monarchy to a modern democracy. In 1848 Denmark became a constitutional monarchy and in 1849 the constitution was accepted in which the freedom of religion was announced.¹⁰ The Danish government remained related to the Church of the majority, the Evangelical Lutheran Church. In the constitution of 1849 the state Church was renamed *Folkekirke* ('The People's Church'). This meant that it was still controlled by the state, but that in practice the Church was administered by the bishops and the provosts.¹¹ The parishes were now allowed to be responsible for their own churches. The task of the government was to protect and guarantee the Church of the majority.¹²

The sociological structure of society was also changing. A growing class of independent farmers demanded freedom and emancipation. A series of agrarian reforms and the establishment of co-operatives meant the growth of the welfare state. The lower middle-class of peasant farmers became the most influential class, with its own economic and cultural system.¹³ An example of the latter is the rise of the Folk High schools (*Folkehøjskole*), a development strongly influenced by the educational ideas of Grundtvig.

The process of democratisation and emancipation of the peasantry is influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment.¹⁴ Parallel to this is the growing stress on Danish identity. Poets and painters emphasize specific Danish cultural elements. This kind of nationalism is influenced by Romanticism. Nature is praised in lengthy poems. The voice of common people is the real spirit of the nation.

The theological atmosphere at the University of Copenhagen is marked by German Rationalism.¹⁵ Also in the life of the Church rationalistic ideas became noticeable. Scripture and confessions of faith had to be interpreted with the help of intellectual thought (*Vernunft*).¹⁶ Enlightenment, Rationalism and Romanticism influenced the contemporary debate in the Church. During the nineteenth century we can distinguish three groups: *Kirkeligt Centrum*, *Indre Mission* and the so called *Grundtvigians*. At the beginning of the nineteenth century small groups of religiously awakened common people gathered together. This movement was influenced by Pietism and in strong opposition to the Late-Enlightenment Bible interpretation and the new rationalistic hymn book of the Church. Followers of this movement organised themselves into two different groups: the *Indre Mission* and the *Grundtvigians*.¹⁷ The *Grundtvigians* combined their emphasis on liturgy and sacraments with their emphasis on freedom and the emancipation of the common people. Baptism, Eucharist and hymns were important aspects of the Grundtvigian movement and since the 1860's even the integration of Nordic mythology in sermons!¹⁸ The more pietistic followers of the movement gathered under the name of the *Indre Mission* ('Inner Mission').¹⁹ During the second half of the

⁹ P. Hansen, F.A. Larsen, *Factsheet Denmark / N.F.S. Grundtvig* [Published by the Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs], Copenhagen 1983, p. 3.

¹⁰ Schwarz Lausten, 'Dänemark', p. 308.

¹¹ V. Wählin, 'Denmark, Schleswig-Holstein and Grundtvig in the 19th Century', in: Allchin (et al.), *Heritage and Prophecy: Grundtvig and the English-Speaking World*, p. 254.

¹² F.J.C. Brouwer, *Vernieuwing in drieklank: Een onderzoek naar de liturgische ontwikkelingen in Denemarken (±1800 - ± 1950)*, Utrecht 1990, p. 44.

¹³ Wählin, 'Denmark, Schleswig-Holstein and Grundtvig in the 19th Century', p. 247.

¹⁴ Wählin, p. 244.

¹⁵ Schwarz Lausten, 'Dänemark', p. 311.

¹⁶ Brouwer, *Vernieuwing in drieklank*, p. 43.

¹⁷ Wählin, p. 250.

¹⁸ Brouwer, p. 125.

¹⁹ Schwarz Lausten, p. 308.

nineteenth century a third group entered the stage. They didn't want to make the strong division between the people of God and the world (as did the Pietistic orientated *Indre Mission* and on the other hand didn't underline the Grundtvigian urge for freedom. They organised themselves into a group called *Kirkeligt Centrum*.²⁰

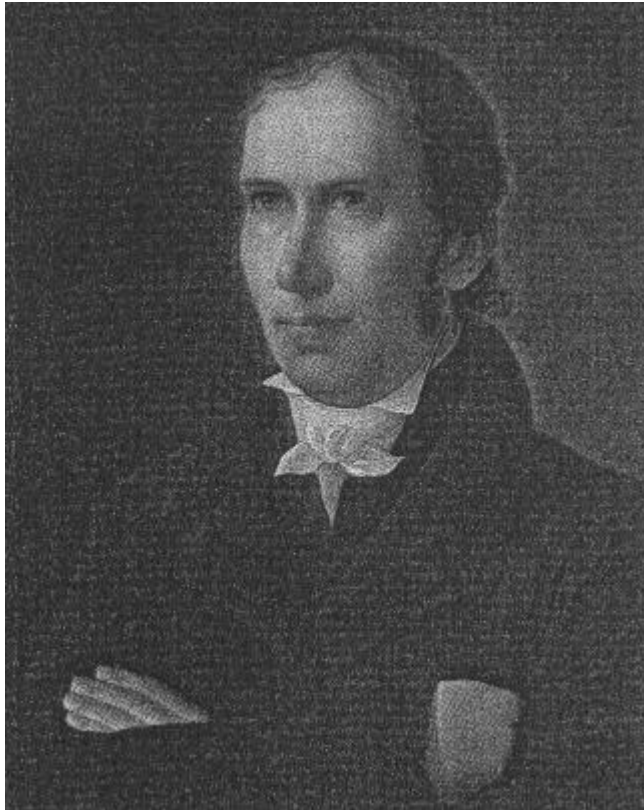


Figure 2: Grundtvig at the age of 36 painted by C.F. Christensen in July 1820 (source: P. Hansen, F.A. Larsen, *Factsheet Denmark / N.F.S. Grundtvig*, p. 1).

²⁰ Brouwer, p. 542.

Chapter 2: A general understanding of Grundtvig's liturgical theology.

“Kun ved Badet og ved Bordet / Hører vi Guds Ord til os.”²¹



Figure 3: Altar and pulpit from the church in Vartov in Copenhagen, the place where Grundtvig worked as a pastor for so many years.

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to give an introduction to Grundtvig's liturgical ideas. In this chapter I will deal with words and notions that play an important role in Grundtvig's theology. Since Grundtvig is a *homo universalis*, a man who developed a distinguished meaning about almost every aspect of life, this chapter can only address some aspects of Grundtvig's ideas. I hope it will function as a threshold, before entering into the fascinating world of his hymns.

The challenge of this thesis is to answer the question how the interaction between theology and popular culture takes place in Grundtvig's world. Therefore we have to place Grundtvig within a liturgical praxis, the liturgy of the *Folkekirke* which meant so much to him. The best way to consider Grundtvig's theological ideas is to see them within the liturgical framework of the Church. Christian Thodberg sees in this respect a strong connection between Grundtvig

²¹ “Only at the fond and at the altar / we hear God's word for us.”: Grundtvigs Sang-Vaerk, Salmer og kristelige digte 1855-1872, V. Bind, No. 232 (Guds-Ordet til os), p. 385. Also cited in Chr. Thodberg, ‘The importance of Baptism in Grundtvig's view of Christianity’, in: A.M. Allchin, D. Jasper, J.H. Schjørring, K. Stevenson (eds.), *Heritage and Prophecy: Grundtvig and the English-Speaking World*, Aarhus 1993, p. 133.

and the so called *liturgical exegesis*. Liturgical exegesis is defined as the way in which the Church re-actualises the words and deeds of Jesus in the service of worship. The biblical events are placed in one line with the liturgical rites. In baptism and communion God's power of salvation is at work.²²

At the end of this chapter I will conclude that the way Grundtvig proposes is unique in his time. It is modernity without the costs of tradition. Nor is it a romantic Nationalism that loses itself in longing for the good old days. It is modernity which stands in the tradition and that is open to the present reality.

Grundtvig's 'unparalleled discovery'

Grundtvig's visions about Christianity and the nature of the Church are connected with his ideas about *det levende ord* ('the living word'). It is closely related to the 'unparalleled discovery' (*mageløse opdagelse*) which Grundtvig had in July 1825. At the time Grundtvig was a minister at the *Vor Frelzers Kirke* ('Church of Our Saviour') in Copenhagen. To acquire a post at a parish in Copenhagen was something Grundtvig had been hoping for a long time. In the autumn of 1822 that long cherished hope became reality when he was made an assistant pastor of *Vor Frelzers Kirke*. His first period in Copenhagen (1813-1821) was a bit of a disappointment, because he didn't get the appreciation for his literary efforts he had expected.²³ Grundtvig considered himself as a prophet, with a message for the Danish people and the universal Church. He was often highly disappointed about the lack of response to his message.

A.M. Allchin describes how Grundtvig in this period of his life was highly caught up in his own thoughts and experiences. The weight of the visions and ideas he had was so heavy, that he in a way lost touch with society. In the year 1825 this came to a head.²⁴ In this year Grundtvig had a major theological dispute with Henrik Nikolai Clausen (1793-1877), professor at the University of Copenhagen. It is in that debate that Grundtvig unfolded the results of his discovery and his ideas about the living word.²⁵ In his literary efforts of the years before 1825 it is already possible to discover pre-figurations of this ideas, especially in the poems *Det levendes land* ('The Land of the Living') and *Nytaarsmorn* ('New Years Morning'), both written in 1824.²⁶ But the publication of professor Clausen's massive book was a grand opportunity for Grundtvig to divulge his antagonism against the Rationalistic thoughts of his age.

In August 1825 Clausen's book *Catholicismens og Protestantismens Kirkeforfatning, Laere og Ritus* ('Catholic and Protestant Church Constitution, Doctrine and Ritual') was published. It was an impressive work in which he described the organisation, doctrine and ritual of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Clausen proposed some liturgical changes in a more rationalistic way. He tried to set the liturgy free from magical elements, such as the questions of forsaking the Devil, which took part in the classical Lutheran baptism-rite. Clausen's approach of the liturgical rites was reasonable and Rationalistic.²⁷

Clausen understood the Church as a religious community of people who had dedicated themselves to the Christian teaching of moral life. Clausen studied in Berlin where he was very much influenced by Friedrich Schleiermacher. Clausen considered the Church as a community to promote general religiousness. In his view baptism was more an incorporation

²² Chr. Thodberg, 'Grundtvig and Liturgical Exegesis', in: *Grundtvig-Studier 2000*, p. 220 (English translation of 'Den liturgiske eksegesis og Grundtvig', in: *Grundtvig-Studies 2000*, København 2000, pp. 118-125).

²³ Thodberg, Thyssen (eds.), *N.F.S. Grundtvig, Tradition and Renewal*, p. 12.

²⁴ A.M. Allchin, *N.F.S. Grundtvig. An Introduction to his Life and Work*, p. 44.

²⁵ Chr. Thodberg, 'Grundtvig', in: Krause, Müller, *Theologische Realencyclopädie*, p. 284.

²⁶ Thodberg, 'Grundtvig', p. 285.

²⁷ Brouwer, *Vernieuwing in drieklank*, pp. 76-79.

into the church than a sacrament efficient in itself. Baptism as a sacrament was only complete together with the confession of faith (confirmation).²⁸ In Clausen's opinion the Church was guaranteed in the Holy Scriptures, in which modern biblical scholarship played an important role.²⁹ Clausen depends here on the *sola scriptura* principle of the Reformation. The Scriptures are the rule of faith for the religious community. But since the Scriptures are often uncertain, ambiguous and contradictory the Church always needs the exegesis of the theologians to find the correct interpretation of the text.³⁰

Grundtvig was heavily agitated by Clausen's book and wrote a furious reply: *Kirkens Gienmæle* ('The Church's Protest'), which was published a couple of weeks after Clausen's book. The introduction is dated on Irenaeus-Day (August the 26th), which is not a coincident as we will see later on in this chapter. Grundtvig accused Clausen of being an anti-Christian teacher and urged Clausen to resign his post as a professor at the University of Copenhagen. In response Clausen didn't start the theological debate at all but sued Grundtvig for libel. Grundtvig lost the case and was placed under censorship until 1837.³¹

What actually was the great discovery Grundtvig in July 1825 did? For Grundtvig the most important question was where God's living voice could be heard. Since modern biblical scholarship had criticised the historical credibility of the Bible, the foundation of the Church could not be the Bible itself.³² Or as Grundtvig puts it:

“Scripture is often silent where we wish it to speak. It is vague and obscure where the eye yearns for a guiding light. (.....) Biblical criticism and hermeneutics show us problems which will forever lead to polemics in the Christian world.”³³

According to Grundtvig it is absurd to say that the Bible is the foundation of the Church and to admit at the same time that the interpretation of the Bible is uncertain.

“All readers must therefore be convinced that the Protestant church, with which Professor Clausen is pregnant, is a curious castle in the sky. There has never been a more foolish belief in the whole world than the insistence that a book at one time can be a source of information and Rule of Faith for its readers and at the same time be their dust-rag.”³⁴

But if the Bible is not the place where God's living voice can be heard, where can we find Christ's voice? The answer is: in the Apostolic Creed. It should be mentioned that Grundtvig here speaks about the Apostolicum in connection with baptism and eucharist.³⁵ Only in the sacraments can we hear God's living voice. In the Apostolic Creed and the sacraments of baptism and eucharist it is Christ himself who speaks directly to us now.³⁶

Grundtvig considered the Church as a living community, a present reality in our history. This Church is based on the living word, the word of God, which has been heard in the Church

²⁸ Chr. Thodberg, 'The importance of Baptism in Grundtvig's view of Christianity', pp. 147f.

²⁹ S.A.J. Bradley, 'Nicolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872)' in: *The Cambridge Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 4, 2002, p. 312.

³⁰ Th. Jørgensen, 'Grundtvig's The Church's Retort - in a Modern Perspective' in: Allchin, Jasper, Schjørring, Stevenson (eds.), *Heritage and Prophecy*, p. 178.

³¹ Bradley, 'Nicolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872)', p. 312.

³² Thodberg, 'The importance of Baptism in Grundtvig's view of Christianity', p. 133.

³³ J. Knudsen (ed.), *N.F.S. Grundtvig: Selected Writings*, Philadelphia 1976, pp. 16f.

³⁴ Knudsen, *N.F.S. Grundtvig: Selected Writings*, p. 17.

³⁵ Jørgensen, 'Grundtvig's The Church's Retort - in a Modern Perspective', p. 179.

³⁶ Thodberg, pp. 133-135.

from the beginning. Thus the *regula fidei* of the Church according to Grundtvig are Christ himself in His living presence in the word of faith and the words of the sacraments.³⁷

“The peculiar characteristics upon which the oldest Christian church was founded and by which it was recognizable by its enemies but most of all by its friends must be found in every church with the justified claim of being Christian. This, I insist, will be found in our church and will be found wherever the apostolic Confession of Faith is made the exclusive condition of admission into the community, and where the means of grace, baptism and Communion are taken to have a similar salutary power as the Confession of Faith.”³⁸

So the source of Christianity is not a rational reflection about theological ideas, nor a Pietistic feeling of the heart, but God’s living word. Through the medium of God’s living word the individual believer becomes a part of God’s living community. Being a part of a living unity is very important for Grundtvig. We can also find this notion in his ideas about the Nordic history and cultural identity of the Danes. For him it is the living, communicative situation that is central in poem and tale. Although the modern reader and the old text are separated from each other by letter, they are united in the spirit.³⁹ The spirit is the unifying factor, which changes the dead letter into a life-giving word. Grundtvig defines the Scripturer as the dead word, that could only be a light-giving word (*lysord*) when you read it with the Holy Spirit and with watchful eyes. The living word (*livsord*) can only be found in the sacraments. The Holy Scripture and the sacraments can only together be the light-living word (*lyslevende ord*). *Lysord* and *livsord* are best found in poetry, not in prosaic texts or intellectual discourses. In the liturgy the living word can be found in specific spoken words: the Apostolic Creed, the words of institution during the eucharist, the Lord’s prayer, the forsaking of the devil and the confession of faith which are part of the baptism-rite. All those spoken words together with the sacraments are the living words of Christ, directly addressed to his flock.⁴⁰ Those living words are the entering gate for us to become a part of Christ’s living Church. That is why the theology of the living word is so important to Grundtvig, it relates deeply to the nature of the Church. Clausen’s view of the Church is based on reason. Grundtvig on the contrary uses a concept of experience: the Church invokes a real evidence in history.⁴¹ In the Grundtvig reception this is often called his *historico-ecclesiastical* view of Christianity.⁴² As mentioned before, the influence of Irenaeus on Grundtvig’s theology is remarkable. Grundtvig translated Irenaeus’ work *Adversus omnes Haereses* (‘Against all the Heresies’). In his dispute against Rationalism and later on with professor Clausen, Irenaeus’ theology became very helpful to Grundtvig. Irenaeus defended the Christian faith against non-Christian interpretations with the help of the tradition and the apostolic witness. In Irenaeus Grundtvig found an answer to the challenges of biblical criticism and rationalism. If we don’t have the Scriptures to guide us in matters of truth and authority, what else could form the basis of the Church? With Irenaeus Grundtvig answered: the apostolic witness. There is an unbroken tradition from the apostles (the first appointed mediators of the Christian revelation) to the present age. This Church is a historical identity, which we can all experience. It is the

³⁷ Jørgensen, p. 180.

³⁸ Knudsen, *N.F.S. Grundtvig: Selected Writings*, p. 18.

³⁹ Thodberg, pp. 77. 82.

⁴⁰ Brouwer, *Vernieuwing in Drieklank*, pp. 80. 514.

⁴¹ Jørgensen, pp. 174f.

⁴² N.L. Jensen, ‘Introduction’ in: N.L. Jensen (General Editor), *A Grundtvig Anthology. Selections from the writings of N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872)*, Viby 1984, pp. 20f.

embodiment of the living word: the creed taught to the apostles and the sacramental words spoken at baptism and the eucharist.⁴³

“The Christian church is no empty of disputable fancy; it is an obvious reality, a well-known historical fact, which can neither be shaken nor destroyed by the protests of the world. What has probably been Christianity from the beginning, this is and will remain Christianity to the end of the world and in all eternity.”⁴⁴

A theology of creation and recreation: the divine origin of men

We have seen above that the liturgy is the place where Christ’s living word is to be found. This living word changes our dead lives into a living world. Here we need to examine this issue a bit further. The ability of the living word to change our world implies a specific theological view. Alongside Grundtvig’s theology of the living word, there is the theology of creation and recreation, which plays a very important role in Grundtvig’s liturgical theology. In this paragraph I am going to describe this theological view and also its implications to the Christian rites, such as the sacraments and the singing of hymns.

As in the first chapter of John, the Word of God has a close connection with God’s creational work and Jesus Christ. In the beginning the Word was already there. The earth was created by God’s Word and in Jesus Christ the Word was incarnated on earth. For Grundtvig the doctrine of creation is very important: mankind has a divine origin. Therefore mankind has a heart which can respond to the heart of God and in this response things can come together in a unity. In this marriage of heaven and earth, the Holy Spirit plays an important role. The Holy Spirit brings the divine plan into fulfilment, namely the transformation of the natural order. The incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ is a turning point in history. The resurrection of Christ implies the resurrection of the whole universe. There is an essential God-relatedness of the whole world. The whole creation praises God, for the whole creation is full of God. The Fall of man after the creation marks not a sharp distinction between God and man but from the beginning to the end, the whole creation is developing to his fulfilment. God will not let his creation come to nothing. The ultimate goal of creation is life. Grundtvig understands this fulfilment as an universal redemption, having its effects on nature as a whole and on our whole history. Like the Holy Spirit, it is not bound by any specific situation in history. God’s Holy Spirit can dwell among all earthly things, because it is on earth from the beginning. Since the creation of man the Spirit is the giver of life and growth to all things. With all this in mind one can say that Grundtvig is an Orthodox theologian. This theology of creation and redemption is strongly influenced by the Trinitarian doctrine as well as by the Chalcedonian notion of the union of human and divine natures in the person of Christ.⁴⁵

Humankind as a divine experiment in our history

The uniqueness of Grundtvig is that he combines this orthodox theology with his distinguished opinion about the identity of man. The theological statements fuse together with the Danish cultural identity. Since God is the creator of this world, Grundtvig does not think negatively about the phenomenal world and our history.

The following sentences from Grundtvig’s first book *Maskeradballet i Danmark 1808* (The Fancy-Dress Ball in Denmark 1808) are often quoted:

“Høje Odin! Hvide Krist! / Sletted ud er Eders Tvist, / Begge Sønner af Alfader.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Bradley, pp. 322f.

⁴⁴ Knudsen, *N.F.S. Grundtvig: Selected Writings*, p. 12.

⁴⁵ Allchin, *N.F.S. Grundtvig. An Introduction to his Life and Work*, pp. 144-149.

⁴⁶ “High Odin, White Christ, your fight has ceased, both sons of the father of all.”

Although the book got little attention and was written in a period when Grundtvig mind was confused about his own position as a writer, these words stress Grundtvig's attempt to incorporate the pagan past into the current Danish Christian identity. Grundtvig does not make a sharp distinction between Christianity and the old Nordic cultural heritage. For Grundtvig they are both the expression of the same source of life, unified in the same spirit.⁴⁷ In this respect it is not astonishing that Grundtvig does not place nature and revelation opposite to each other. We should not consider nature as the property of the enemy, but as the work of God. Revelation and nature go together. Nature is the work of God which he will never forsake. God will bring his whole creation to salvation.⁴⁸

Cosmic renewal

Grundtvig translated a lot of Greek hymns and elements of the Greek liturgy. Christian Thodberg calls this Grundtvig's *Greek Awakening*. In the Greek liturgy there is the so called resurrection poetry (anastásima), which is sung every Sunday throughout the year to point out that every Sunday is in essence the day of Christ's resurrection. The resurrection of Christ is relived every Sunday, it is happening today and now.⁴⁹

Like in the Easter hymns of John Dasmascenus (675-749) it is the whole creation which praises God, for the whole creation is full of God.⁵⁰ Grundtvig found the biblical language to express this in Romans 8, which he expressed in a number of sermons based upon this chapter. Here it is the whole creation both of heaven and earth which is longing for God's overall renewal.⁵¹

The sacraments of baptism and eucharist represent the divine reality of this cosmic renewal. At the moment of worship there is the real presence of the divine, the word of creation, the living word. So the sacraments are full of the divine potential of the renewal of creation. The eucharist is the foreshadowing of the fulfilment of all things to come. But at the table there is also here and now a *sammensmelte* ('fusion') of the earthly and the divine.⁵²

This radical transformation is a very important notion in Grundtvig's liturgical theology. It is the fulfilment that had already begun at the first creation. The Holy Spirit is continuing his work of the radical renewal of the whole creation. This work has an eschatological aspect, but also an aspect which is already clear for us, here and now.⁵³ This is because there is not a sharp distinction between heaven and earth; after the Fall the link between God and his creation is not destroyed. There is still hidden in the human heart a morsel of the earth of paradise. It is the earth which carries in itself God's image and likeness. Grundtvig calls this the motherly soil, our mother earth.⁵⁴

Important is thus the transformative power which is found in the Christian faith. This power is the work of God, the living word of God, the Holy Spirit. It is found in human history from creation on, and it is found in the living word which can be heard in the sacraments. So for Grundtvig, the Christian liturgy is a renewal of the divine acts of deliverance. That is why Holm sees in Grundtvig a dynamic-mythical approach of the Christian rites. Here the rites

⁴⁷ Brouwer, p. 513.

⁴⁸ Allchin, pp. 148f.

⁴⁹ Chr. Thodberg, 'Grundtvig the Hymnwriter' in : Chr. Thodberg, A.P. Thyssen (eds.), *N.F.S. Grundtvig, Tradition and Renewal*, pp. 178f.

⁵⁰ Grundtvig translated for example Damascenus' hymn 'Deute poma piomen kainon', cf. Chr. Thodberg, *Tradition and Renewal*, p. 180. See also *Liedboek voor de Kerken*, hymn nr. 206. Grundtvig's translation is still used in the current Danish hymnbook, cf. *Den Danske Salmebog*, 2002, hymn nr. 246.

⁵¹ Allchin, pp. 146f.

⁵² Ibidem, pp. 152-153f.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 155.

⁵⁴ Id., p. 157-158.

function as a renewal of the divine acts in the beginning. The purpose of this renewal is to maintain life and protect life against death and chaos.⁵⁵

Grundtvig kept the biblical world view, where there is a struggle between the divine powers and the powers of Satan. Our whole history is the arena where this cosmological struggle takes place, like a drama. The start of the drama is good (the creation) and also the end (God's final victory over Satan). In between there are our lives and with the help of the rites we can maintain God's order over the universe. Holm considers the way Grundtvig thinks as pre-philosophical and some parts even as pre-Christian. That is because Grundtvig uses the myth and cult in a primitive way, namely the maintenance of the cosmic universe.⁵⁶

Because of this cosmic renewal, the dwelling of God's spirit in earthly things, it is possible for Grundtvig to speak positively about the phenomenal world. But Grundtvig never speaks about the spirit of nature in the way the Romantics spoke about it. It is God's Spirit that comes transcendentally into our nature.⁵⁷

The Christian rites

Let us now turn back to the specific Christian rites such as the sacraments and hymn-singing. Holm calls Grundtvig's hymns cultsongs. For Grundtvig the whole service on Sunday-morning was a cultic feast. In this feast the ancient divine acts are repeated. In this way the service functions as a renewal of Christ's triumphant acts: it is the ritual replay of Christ's journey from heaven to earth and from hell to heaven.⁵⁸ In the rites of the Church the individual believer follows the same path as Christ once did. A good illustration of this is Grundtvig's hymn *Søndag morgen fra de døde*.⁵⁹ Here follows the first stanza, translated by A.M. Allchin:

“Sunday morning from the dead / Jesus rose triumphant / Every Sunday's dawn / Now brings healing in place of death / And wonderfully recalls / All the days of the Lord's life.”.⁶⁰

The worship is full of the experience of Christ and repeats Christ's triumph over death. Every Sunday is the day of Christ's resurrection. Grundtvig uses the image of the morning dawn to picture the new tidings: every Sunday morning's dawn brings salvation instead of death (“Hver en søndags morgenrøde bringer nu for døden bod”). Not only the resurrection of Christ, but all the days of the Lord's life are recalled on Sunday morning. As a Lutheran Grundtvig was familiar with the old Roman system of readings. In this lectionary the stories of Jesus' miracles were told every Sunday. Allchin speaks about a *liturgical realism*: the celebration of the living Christ in the midst of his people.⁶¹

This cosmic renewal does not only occur on Sunday morning and on Christmas, Easter, and Whitsun, but also during the liturgical rites. Baptism and eucharist are for Grundtvig of paramount importance, because at those moments the living word is heard, directly spoken to the Christian flock. For Grundtvig the Devil was a real entity. When during the baptism rite the forsaking of the devil took place, this renunciation of evil was for Grundtvig a radical transformation of the phenomenal world. Grundtvig considered baptism as an all-inclusive

⁵⁵ S. Holm, 'Mythus und Kult in Grundtvigs Kirchenlieddichtung' in: *Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie*, 24. Jahrgang 1955, 1. Heft, p. 18.

⁵⁶ Holm, 'Mythus und Kult in Grundtvigs Kirchenlieddichtung', pp. 18-19.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, p. 29.

⁵⁸ Idem, pp. 22f.

⁵⁹ *Den Danske Salmebog*, København 2005, no. 406.

⁶⁰ Allchin, *N.F.S. Grundtvig. An Introduction to his Life and Work*, p. 18.

⁶¹ Allchin, p. 17.

revolution in human life.⁶² Baptism and its ritual form were a constant theme in Grundtvig's hymns and a source of inspiration. When Grundtvig was having his fits of deep depression the baptism ritual could give him comfort, because it was God's own voice which spoke to him there and God's own hand which baptized. Baptism had a deep existential consequence, namely God's unconditional forgiveness.⁶³

In *Kirkens Gienmæle* Grundtvig stresses that the Church is realized in history through the sacraments and the confession of faith. The revival of the sacraments was Grundtvig's answer to the dominant Rationalist theology of his age. For the confession of faith in order to express the real presence of Christ in the Christian worship, the congregation needed hymns.⁶⁴ Especially through the medium of the singing of hymns the transformation of our phenomenal world takes place. Or, in the words of Chr. Thodberg:

“Grundtvig's hymns are sacramental through and through, because something happens in those who sing them. The Christian is led by the hymns from the deepest doubt and depression to the fulfilment of salvation in God's kingdom, because the history of salvation in the macrocosm is repeated in the microcosm - in the history of each particular human being.”⁶⁵

A hermeneutics of the Spirit

Holm stresses the influence of the ancient popular beliefs in the way in which Grundtvig understands Christianity. The acts of God such as the creation are not something that happened long ago, which we can only remember. They happen again and again in the divine cult. The rites function as a renewal of the cosmic order. It can be doubted if this *mundi renovatio* mainly has pre-Christian features. As we have seen, A.M. Allchin pointed out the influence of the Orthodoxy. The doctrine of trinity and the two natures of Christ are very important for a correct understanding of Grundtvig's theology. Apart from that Grundtvig developed a distinguished hermeneutics. We have already seen that for Grundtvig the living word is decisive. Instead of the Bible, the living word is found in the Christian rites. Instead of the books, the living word is found in the spirit. This is why Grundtvig thinks negatively about theological scholarship and dogmatics. Grundtvig prefers the singing of hymns to dogmatics. It is not right to say that this way of thinking is mainly pre-Modern or medieval. It is Grundtvig's search for the living spirit that led him to this way of thinking. This living spirit is Grundtvig's hermeneutical key. Although Grundtvig did not write a hermeneutical treatise, on the basis of all his texts it is possible to get an understanding of the way in which Grundtvig regarded written texts and the historic legacy.⁶⁶ Grundtvig looked for evidence of the spirit's presence in national cultures. He always searched for evidence of the vitality of people and culture within a given historical period. This positive interest for the spirit is also important in his studies of biblical and church history. But here the spirit is the Holy Spirit, who as God's Spirit is the Spirit over all spirits.⁶⁷

Grundtvig was a man who thought in antithesis. His main antithesis was that of life and death. In a conversation with the German theologian P.K. Marheineke (1780-1846), who was much influenced by the work of Hegel, he made one of his most famous utterances:

⁶² Chr. Thodberg, 'The Importance of Baptism in Grundtvig's view on Christianity', pp. 142f.

⁶³ Ibidem, p. 151.

⁶⁴ Allchin, p. 114.

⁶⁵ Thodberg, 'The Importance of Baptism', p. 152.

⁶⁶ D.J. Sneen, 'The Hermeneutics of N.F.S. Grundtvig' in: *Interpretation. A Journal of Bible and Theology* January 1972, Vol. XXVI, No. 1, pp. 42-61.

⁶⁷ Sneen, 'The Hermeneutics of Grundtvig', p. 46.

“Mein Gegensatz ist Leben und Tod.”⁶⁸

This antithesis of life and death can also be transposed into a hermeneutical formula, that is the antithesis of spirit and letter, the dead Scriptures and the living word. In a Pentecost Sermon in 1858 in Vartov, for example Grundtvig contrasts burning tongues and ice-cold pens.⁶⁹

Conclusion

It is not correct to call Grundtvig's liturgical theology pre-modern or even medieval. One can easily come to this conclusion, especially after reading Holm's article, which I mentioned above. Grundtvig's hermeneutical turn to the living word was not the return to a medieval world, but his solution to the problems of modernity which confronted his theological understanding. Grundtvig was well aware of the problems of his time. Rationalism challenged reason in matters of faith. Biblical criticism doubted the certainty of the Scriptures. Therefore Grundtvig rejected the intellectual scholarship in favour of the living spirit, which can be found in the folk spirit of the nation. As a result he rejected theological dogmatics and exegetical scholarship in favour of God's Holy Spirit, which speaks directly to humankind through the sacraments.

Grundtvig's liturgical theology is in a way a return to the tradition of the Church. In the introduction the hypothesis is postulated that it is a modernity which stands in the tradition and is open to the present reality. In Grundtvig's liturgical theology nature and history are important components. Because of the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit it is possible for them to play a distinctive role in the history of redemption. The phenomenal world becomes the divine world. God created the world and after the creation God's re-creative power is still at work, transforming our world into the divine.

Grundtvig's theology does not deserve the label Romanticism or Nationalism. Grundtvig's way of thinking in this respect is too much Christian. The search for God never starts in nature or in the history of mankind. God's spirit comes always transcendent out of our nature and history towards his people. Therefore Grundtvig's liturgical theology keeps the possibility of a critical distance. The voice of God is heard in the sacraments, which are preserved in the tradition of the Church. Inspired by Irenaeus Grundtvig considered this Church as a collective which can be experienced throughout history. With this Grundtvig's liturgical theology is also critical of individualistic Pietism, because the foundation of the Church is the living congregation experienced in history.

Grundtvig's theology is deeply sacramental. Throughout the sacraments the renewal of our world takes place. That is why one cannot understand Grundtvig's theology without the perspective of liturgy. Reason, intelligence, philosophy and theological dogmatics, none of these are stones you can build faith on. That is why Grundtvig turns to the living Word, the living Spirit. This is the vitality we can find in the whole history of the Church and it is our entering gate into the Church. This vitality can only be described in images, in poetic language, in hymns.

⁶⁸ Allchin, *N.F.S. Grundtvig. An Introduction to his Life and Work*, pp. 62f.

⁶⁹ Sneen, 'The Hermeneutics of Grundtvig', p. 47.

Chapter 3: Analysis of four representative hymns

Introduction

In chapter two an outline is sketched of Grundtvig's liturgical theology. Most outstanding features are his liturgical-sacramental understanding of Christianity and his cultic-mythical articulation of the gospel. Christianity for Grundtvig meant the overall renewal of human life. All aspects of human life are involved in this renewal. The special nature of this renewal is the reunion between heaven and earth. The divine origin of mankind is coming to its fulfilment. This is happening in the current history of the Danes, in every day existence and is repeated in rites and sacraments.

This observation leads to the assumption that there must be a distinctive interaction between popular cultural life and Christianity in Grundtvig's hymns. If Grundtvig's hymns represent his theological thought, then there should occur in his hymns a special dynamics between popular culture and theology. The aim of this thesis is to investigate and describe the nature of this dynamic interaction in four of Grundtvig's hymns.

Grundtvig's position towards popular culture has been examined extensively. His position towards Nordic mythology and the Anglo-Saxon literature has been discussed at length (for example the research S.A.J. Bradley did on Grundtvig's encounter with Anglo-Saxon poetry). But so far as I know there has not been any research on how this precisely occurs in Grundtvig's hymns.

The amount of hymns that Grundtvig wrote and translated is enormous. Most of his hymns are published in his 'magnum opus', *Sang-Værk til den Danske Kirke* ('Song-work for the Danish Church'). This title is in a way symbolical. After the bombing of Copenhagen the tower of the Cathedral was destroyed. The tower possessed a famous carillon (*Sang-Værk*) which played tunes of popular hymns. The ruins of the Church became for Grundtvig a symbol of the decay of the Church. Grundtvig wanted to create a new *Sang-Værk* for the Danish Church that had lost its hymns. The first volume of the *Sang-Værk til den Danske Kirke* appeared in 1836. The framework for the collection is the seven congregations which are mentioned in Revelation 1, 20. Grundtvig identified them as the Hebrew, the Greek, the Roman, the English, the German and the Danish congregation. In the *Sang-Værk* all seven congregations are represented by hymns.⁷⁰ For the following analysis four hymns from Grundtvig's hymnal heritage are selected. This selection is based on the assumption that they represent Grundtvig's liturgical theology as outlined in the previous chapter. Thus the hymns contain elements from popular culture, they are sacramental and based on a cosmic-mythical understanding of Christianity. To make sure that the four hymns are illustrative of Grundtvig's overall theological thought, the selection was discussed with Professor J.H. Schjørring of Aarhus University. It is important that the hymns are still sung in the Danish Church. They all are placed in the new Danish hymnbook of 2002 and function in the contemporary liturgical practice. Since I want to evaluate Grundtvig's contribution to the current Dutch hymnal repertoire in the last chapter of this thesis, this is also a important to realize.

Reis op dit Hoved, al Christenhed, 1837

What makes Grundtvig's hymn *Reis op dit Hoved, al Christenhed* worth paying attention to is that it gives us an astonishing view of his theological way of thinking. We can see how he breaks with Lutheran Orthodoxy and Pietism and how he opposed the Rationalistic tendencies of his days. It also gives us a glimpse of Grundtvig's vision on humanity and the divine

⁷⁰ Chr. Thodberg, 'Grundtvig the Hymnwriter', p. 175.

destination of mankind. But the most remarkable aspect of *Reis op dit Hoved, al Christenhed* is its use of the Nordic cultural images. Therefore the main part of the following analysis will be an inventory of the many images which Grundtvig took from popular Nordic culture. At the end I want to draw a conclusion about the way in which the dynamic interaction between Christian theology and popular culture is taking shape in this hymn of Grundtvig. The version I am going to base my analysis on is the one that is printed in Grundtvig's *Sang-Værk til Den Danske Kirke*.⁷¹ It differs in two places from the version that is used in the last two official editions of the Danish hymnbook.⁷² Both versions omit the second and the seventh stanza. Therefore those stanzas cannot be found in the German translation of this hymn, which I give below.⁷³

1. Dein Haupt erhebe, o Christenheit!
Die Augen öffne und sei bereit!
Den Himmel du hast inne.
Dort ist dein Schatz und dein Herz zugleich,
von dort jäh kommt er, an Ehren reich,
der nie dir aus dem Sinne.

3. Dein Haupt erhebe! Von Herzen sprich
zum Kreuzes-König: "O denk an mich
in deinem Reich schon heute!"
Da fällst wie Schuppen vom Auge dir,
du blickst, wie of du ersehntest hier,
ins Paradies mit Freude.

4. Dort wirst den Lebensbaum du gewahr
und hörst die himmlische Vogelschar
im Garten lieblich singen
vom Zug des Herrn über Wolken frei,
von Erd und Himmel, nun nagelneu,
von Christen, ewig jungen.

5. Nicht mehr dir graut vor des Herrn Gericht,
dein Rechter selbst deine Sach' verficht
und gegen sich gewinnet.
Des Morgens sehnst du dich um so mehr,
bis rosenwolkig erstrahlt der Herr,
und alle Nacht verrinnet.

6. Und wenn du siehst an dem Himmel klar,
an Mond und Sonne und Sternenschar,
des Königs sichres Zeichen,
dein Auge strahlet dann froh aufs neu,
dein Haupt erhebest du kühn und frei,
wenn Sterne sterbend bleichen.

⁷¹ N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Sang-Værk til Den Danske Kirke* I. Bind, København 1944, pp. 672-674.

⁷² *Den Danske Salmebog*, 1953, nr. 229; *Den Danske Salmebog*, 2002, nr. 274.

⁷³ This translation is made by the "Grundtvig-Værkstedet", published as hymn nr. 229 in: *Salmer på dansk og tysk. Uddrag af Den Danske Salmebog met tilsvarende tyske vers*, København 1995. The numbers of the stanza's correspond to the Danish original (see appendix).

8. Obwohl du sehnst dich, o Christenheit,
du kennst des Herren Langmütigkeit,
du weißt, warum er zaudert.
Bitt ihn, die Kräfte des Himmels nicht
zu früh zu lösen zum Weltgericht,
vor dem der Erde schaudert.
9. Du weißt, du dienst einem mildern Herrn,
vor Feuer schont er die Erde gern,
die schuldig schon gesprochen.
Wie kühn "der Freund" einst für Sodom bat,
so bitt auch du für die große Stadt,
bis Er den Stab gebrochen.
10. Ja bitt für Babel, bitt unentwegt,
bis alles Bitten nichts mehr verschlägt
in des Verderbens Welle.
Dan ruft der König: "Ich komme bald!"
"Ja dir", die Antwort der Braut erschallt,
"ich folg mit Blitzesschnelle!"
11. Da dröhnt die Lure zum letzten Mal,
da flammt in Lande das End-Fanal,
da stürzt der Tod vom Throne,
da wird geläutert die alte Erd
im Flammenworte von Gottes Herd,
da strahlt des Lebens Krone.

Historical background

For this hymn Grundtvig was inspired by the hymn *Løfft op dit hoffuit all Christendom*, which was written in 1564 by Søren Kjær, mayor of the Danish city of Kolding. Grundtvig's hymn has in common with Kjær's hymn the structure and the biblical starting point, viz. Luke 21, 27-28:

"Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near".⁷⁴

An important feature of Grundtvig's hymns is that they follow the liturgical order of the year as it was stated in the Danish Lutheran Church in Grundtvig's days. Grundtvig's hymns often developed out of a sermon, as Christian Thodberg has pointed out in his research on Grundtvig's sermons. Grundtvig wrote *Reis op dit Hoved, al Christenhed* for the second Sunday of Advent, where the traditional reading is Luke 21, 25-33.⁷⁵ The folk like melody is written by Cora Nyegaard (1812-1891) in 1840. She was one of the amateur musicians who wrote melodies for the hymns of Grundtvig that were sung in the Vartov-community.

⁷⁴ New King James Version (1982).

⁷⁵ In Danish Churches the hymn is also sung on last Sunday of the Church year ('sidste søndag i kirkeåret'), where the classical focus is on the new era where Christ will be the final victor.

Break with Lutheran Orthodoxy and Pietism

By taking the same opening sentence as Kjær's hymn ('Lift up your head, all you Christianity'), Grundtvig probably wanted to keep the remembrance to the old hymn alive.⁷⁶ For Grundtvig this was a great opportunity to unfold his way of thinking about Judgment Day and to point out the differences with the traditional view of the coming of Christ. In Grundtvig's conception of the coming of Christ fear of the final judgment is replaced by the joy for the happy reunion between heaven and earth.⁷⁷ By placing Judgment Day in the perspective of the overall renewal of heaven and earth Grundtvig distances himself from the Orthodox Lutheran vision about the relationship between God and mankind. For Grundtvig the belief that the existence of mankind was restored in Christ meant that this new existence is already felt and present among us now. Feelings of sin and guilt are therefore reduced to the background.⁷⁸

The coming of Christ marks the fulfillment of God's creation. Within Grundtvig's conception of *Heilsgeschichte* the death of Christ on the cross does not function as a sacrificial act that redeems a sinful world. Grundtvig never pays attention to the suffering of Christ alone; Easter is always a victorious event in history that involves the restoration of the whole creation. Therefore the recognition of Christ's acts of salvation may never lead towards a depreciation of our earthly existence. It is not *solus Christus*, but the whole creation that takes part in the new life.⁷⁹

Thus the theme of this hymn, the coming of Christ, is not placed within a framework of punishment and forgiveness, but within the perspective of the overall recreation (stanza seven). With all this in mind the fear of doomsday is not appropriate any more. But that does not mean that there is now room for Pietistic feelings of longing for the day that Jesus will come. The right attitude is to pray for each other, as once the *friends* did for city of Sodom (stanza nine). It is the involvement with whole of humankind we can learn out of Abraham and his friends. This is precisely God's involvement with his people on earth: He is mild and full of forgiveness.

Fight against Rationalism: Grundtvig's cultic-mythical understanding of human life

Grundtvig's cultic-mythical understanding of human life is closely related to his vision about the destiny of man. In Grundtvig's view man should live his life in happy freedom, unfolding his own possibilities that are given to him in a universe created by God. This results in a mysterious interaction between heaven and earth, where both the earthly existence and the divine origin and destination of man are articulated.⁸⁰ A fine illustration of this form two lines from Grundtvig's poem *Aaben Brev til mine Børn* (1839):

"Med Øiet, som det skabdes, himmelvendt
Lysvaagent for alt Skiønt og Stort heneden".⁸¹

In the translation of A.M. Allchin: "With the eye, as it is created, turned towards heaven, / Wide awake to all that is beautiful and great here below".⁸² This interaction between heaven

⁷⁶ Malling, *Dansk Salme Historie*, p. 311.

⁷⁷ J. Kjærgaard, *Salme Håndbog II, Salmekommentar – til salmere i Den Danske Salmebog 2002*, Esbjerg 2003, pp. 283f.

⁷⁸ cf. Thodberg, p. 187.

⁷⁹ Allchin, pp. 299f.

⁸⁰ Ibidem, p. 166.

⁸¹ R. Skovmand, K. Thaning, *Grundtvigs skoleverden i tekster og udkast*, 1968, Bind II, pp. 167-171.

⁸² Allchin, pp. 165f.

and earth is a typical feature of Grundtvig's poetry. It is thoroughly human, but also deeply religious. Man is standing on earth looking to heaven, but in doing so he should never forget to rejoice in all that is good and great here below.⁸³

The allusions eye (*øie*) and heart (*hjerte*) in the first two stanzas are fine examples of the latter. For Grundtvig they represent a way of living in which the human heart is capable of receiving the Christian message. Beneath this lies his theological conviction that man is made in God's image and that something of paradise has remained at the very heart of human existence. There is still hidden in the human heart a handful of the earth of paradise. Because of this the union between God and mankind is possible and there is the interrelatedness of the whole creation.⁸⁴

The allusions eye and heart reveal something of Grundtvig's view on life and education. This is not the place to go into this matter deeper,⁸⁵ but in light of the research question of this thesis it is important to realize that Grundtvig's emphasis on the heart is his reply to Rationalism.⁸⁶ Because of Grundtvig's concept of *vekselvirkning* ('interaction') learning should be free, living and natural. This results in the removal of the book, the written word,

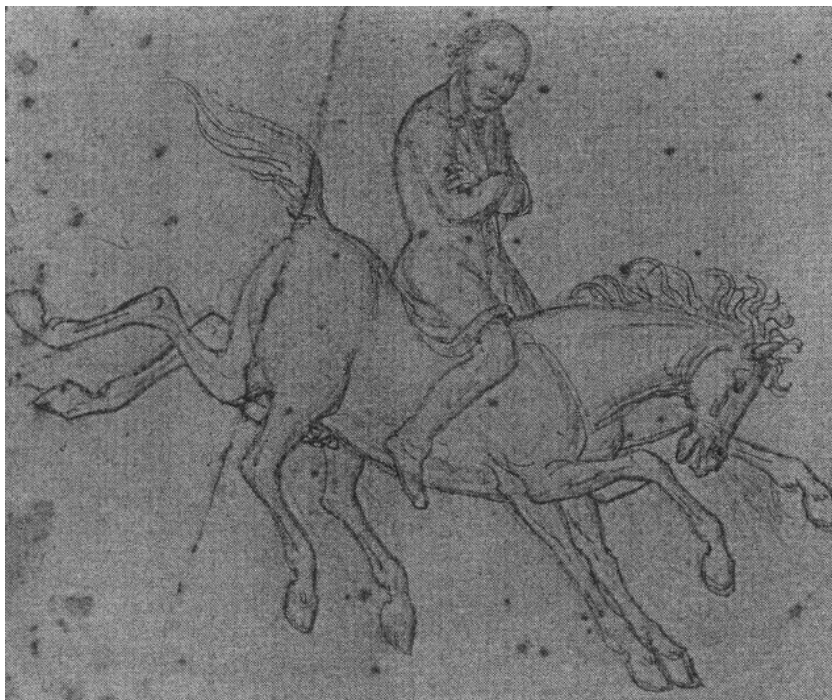


Figure 3: Grundtvig presented in a pencil drawing made by C. Hansen (1846). Grundtvig is riding Odin's eight-legged horse from Norse mythology, Sleipner.

for in Grundtvig's eyes it is superstition to believe that life springs from books and that books can transform people. Therefore education must be historical and poetical (Grundtvig here has in mind the oral folk tradition as articulated in popular culture and mythology). The spirit of the nation and the Danish people should be revitalized in this way, following nature that surrounds the child. Here we can see the warmth of the heart. All this can be linked to Grundtvig's discovery in 1825 (see chapter two).

The intellectual reading of the Bible and theological scholarship could not be the rock of the church, for faith is a matter of the heart.⁸⁷

The last anti-rationalistic tendency to describe here is Grundtvig's use of the motive of Christ's descent into hell. For Grundtvig it was a decisive element for a true understanding of Christianity. But in the theological climate of his days the accounts of Christ's power came

⁸³ Allchin, *N.F.S. Grundtvig. An Introduction to his Life and Work*, pp. 165-166.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 157f.

⁸⁵ For an introduction to Grundtvig's educational ideas see K.E. Bugge, 'Grundtvig's Educational Ideas', in: Thodberg, Thyssen (eds), *Tradition and Renewal*, pp. 211-225.

⁸⁶ E.K. Jensen, 'Hjertets Gudbilledlighed' in: Chr. Thodberg (ed.), *For sammenhængens skyld. Ord og motiver i Grundtvigs salmer og prædikener*, Århus 1977, pp. 68-70.

⁸⁷ K.E. Bugge, 'Grundtvig's Educational Ideas', pp. 216-223.

under critical perspective. In the baptismal rite the word 'hell' was removed from the Apostolic Creed. Liberal theologians tried to get rid of the mythical understanding of the devil and hell and to set Christianity free from all kinds of 'magical' elements. Grundtvig protested heavily against this, because in his view Christianity depended on Christ's true works of power.⁸⁸

Here Grundtvig was not only inspired by the third article of the Apostolic Creed, but also by the image of Christ which he found in early-church literature, especially the Anglo-Saxon poetry. Here Christ is not pictured as suffering, but as the final conqueror of death. Grundtvig's encounter with the Anglo-Saxon literature was formative for the development of his ideas about Christianity.⁸⁹ For more information on how Grundtvig was influenced by this see Bradley's article about Grundtvig's encounter with the Anglo-Saxon literature.⁹⁰ Here it is sufficient to summarize the main ideas that Grundtvig found in this Anglo-Saxon world. First of all, despite the Fall humankind preserves the image of God in which it was created. Secondly, Grundtvig derived from his study of the Anglo-Saxon literature a distinctive philosophy of history. All human history is linked to the present time and to the future within the overall purposes of a providential creator and redeemer. Grundtvig considers the whole history as a overall struggle between the powers of good and evil. The Scriptural history of the Old Testament is archetypal symbolic of events in post-Scriptural history.⁹¹

So the ancient history of the North, the history of ancient Denmark also has its place in the overall history of God and man. Grundtvig considers this history as drama, a conflict between Good and Evil, between God and the demonic powers. Thus for Grundtvig history is *Heilsgeschichte*. Judgment Day will be the fulfilment of this history, when God finally conquers the powers of death. Within this *Heilsgeschichte* Christ's descent into hell (the *Harrowing of Hell*) is an event which cannot be ignored. With the help of Anglo-Saxon literature Grundtvig was able to offer a strong alternative to the Rationalistic liberal theology of his days. It was a form of Christianity which was in Grundtvig's eyes on a par with the New Testament and the traditions of the early church.⁹²

Theological contents

Before focusing on the use of Nordic images in this hymn, it is necessary first to summarize the overall theological message of *Reis op dit Hoved, al Christenhed*. The biblical references in this hymn are numerous. Grundtvig must probably have known the Bible by heart. The main biblical notion is the coming of the Son of Man (Luke 21, 25ff), but Grundtvig's use of Scriptures in this hymn is criss-cross. Words function as allusions and contain several biblical connotations. For example the allusion to heaven (*himlen* in stanza 1, *sky* in stanza 2) refers both to the place where Christ will come from and to the place where the believer has his home (stanza 1, line 3). Heaven is the kingdom of Christ and the destiny of man at the same time.

This brings Grundtvig to the biblical story about the two criminals on the cross on either side of Jesus (Luke 23, 39ff), in Danish: *De to røvere på korset*. It is the robber on the cross, at the right hand side of Jesus, who gets life for free. Therefore Grundtvig can say: everything you

⁸⁸ Chr. Thodberg, 'Grundtvig and Liturgical Exegesis' (English translation of 'Den liturgiske eksegese og Grundtvig') in: *Grundtvig-Studier 2000*, København 2000, p. 220.

⁸⁹ More about Grundtvig's encounter with Anglo-Saxon literature in chapter x and my analysis of the following hymn, *Kommer sjæle dyrekøbte*, where this theme of the harrowing of hell plays a decisive role.

⁹⁰ S.A.J. Bradley, 'Before Irenaeus: The making of Grundtvig the Medievalist' in: *Grundtvig-Studier 2004*, København 2004, pp. 243-254.

⁹¹ Bradley, 'Before Irenaeus', pp. 236-238.

⁹² Cf. Bradley, 'Before Irenaeus', p. 241.

receive in life is like a *røver-køb* (stanza 2, line 5). The latter is the Danish expression for a bargain. Here Grundtvig pictures the *justificatio impii* in every-day language.

Because through Jesus Christ the reunion between God and mankind is completed, Grundtvig is able to combine the motive of the coming of Christ with the paradise-motive. This happens in the fourth stanza, where the tree of life (Genesis 2, 9) stands for the eternal life which God will give to us all. It is life like the original creation in paradise, perfect and undisturbed. The coming of Christ has nothing to do with punishment and doom, but it is the fulfillment of God's beautiful creation. All this is expressed with the help of the allusion *himlens fugle* ('birds of heavens'). The birds are a reminder of the situation in paradise and now accompany the coming of Christ with their sweet music. In Grundtvig's poetically universe *himlens fugle* are angels.⁹³ Angels are frequently used in Grundtvig's language. They are not simply images or figures of speech, but their meaning is strongly Christological. The angels bring together the two parts of God's creation. Heaven and earth, which are first created in perfect harmony but later on separated by sin. They are restored anew in Christ, in whom the unity between heaven and earth is even more perfect. The angels play a specific role in the realization of this unity. They lift up our earthly existence so that we become part of the celestial liturgy.⁹⁴

Use of language: Nordic cultural elements



Figure 4: The Nordic Christ. Crucifix in the crypt church of the Vor Frue Kirke in Aarhus. It is an exact copy of an old roman crucifix, the original can be seen at he National Museum in Copenhagen (source: Brochure *The Church of Our Lady, Clemenstrykkeriet Aarhus*).

What fascinates me most in *Reis op dit Hoved, al Christenhed* is Grundtvig's use of images from the Nordic cultural heritage. To answer the question how the dynamic interaction between Christianity and popular culture takes shape in this hymn, I want to investigate at which places in these hymns the language echoes the Nordic popular culture and Nordic mythological understanding of human life. But before I start my inventory, a few words are due about Grundtvig's special relationship with the old Nordic cultural heritage.

In his lifetime Grundtvig developed a distinguished way of appropriating the old Norse cultural heritage. In his younger years the fascination with mythology and folk traditions was somewhat influenced by Romanticism. However, later on he was able to integrate this within his view on Christianity and the emancipation of the Danes. First of all Grundtvig considered the Norse cultural heritage not as old fashioned pre-Christian thinking. In

1832 his comprehensive monograph *Nordens Mythologi* was published in which he puts forward his ideas for a Nordic renaissance in agreement with the biblical view of man and his history. With this Grundtvig wanted to offer an alternative to the classical learning and

⁹³ Kjærgaard, *Salme Håndbog II*, p. 283.

⁹⁴ Allchin, *N.F.S. Grundtvig. An Introduction to his Life and Work*, pp. 297-300.

erudition of the Italian Renaissance.⁹⁵ In his introduction to *Nordens Mythologi* Grundtvig describes human life as a miraculous experiment by divine powers unfolding its divine origin in the cause of history. This is in stark contrast to the abstract concept of mankind of Antiquity. In school and education the study of the history and language of the native country should form the main activity.⁹⁶ With this the foundation could be laid for a new Danish spiritual culture. In this way of life one regards the world of the spirit with Norse eyes in the

light of Christianity. For Grundtvig the Norse myths carry in themselves a latent universal historical significance. Within the eyes of Christianity they unfold the true meaning of human life, with all its energies, conditions and achievements.⁹⁷

Important is Grundtvig's universal vision of history. There is one universal spirit, shared by all people. The Greeks, the Jews and the Norsemen are united in spirit.⁹⁸ The origin of this spirit is divine and unfolding itself towards complete fulfillment. Therefore there is no break between the history of the Danes before and after Christianization. This allows Grundtvig to picture Christian doctrines with the help of Nordic images. The most striking example of this is in the way in which in *Reis op dit Hoved, al Christenhed* Christ is pictured as a kind of Nordic ruler. In stanza three Christ is called the *korsets høvding*. *Korsets* means cross and *høvding* is an old Nordic word that comes from *hovedmand* and means something like chief, the leader of the folk.⁹⁹ Christ is painted here as a Viking-like chief and the cross means victory. Here all connotations about suffering and death are banned. The crucifix in the crypt of the *Vor Vrue Kirke* in Aarhus carries a strong resemblance with the way how Grundtvig pictures Christ in our hymn (see figure 1).

Another remarkable example of the use of Nordic cultural elements is the sounding of the trumpets (*luren gjalder*) in the last stanza. The figure of the last trumpet has of course a lot of biblical references, but Grundtvig here uses an old Nordic cultural symbol, the *lur*. It is a large hornlike instrument from the bronze age. It was used for gathering the people for a game or an important meeting (see figure 2).¹⁰⁰

People understood this association with the old Nordic cultural heritage quite well, because in 1879 there was a discussion about this last stanza, whether it would be appropriate to include it in the hymnal book. Some pastors experienced the *luren gjalder* as pure paganism!¹⁰¹



Figure 5: Bronze Lur, around 2000 BCE (source: J. de Vries, *Edda. Goden- en heldenliedern uit de Germaanse oudheid*, Deventer 1980).

⁹⁵ W. Michelsen, in: N.J. Jensen (ed.), *A Grundtvig Anthology. Selections from the Writings of N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872)*. Translated by Edward Broadbridge and Niels Lyhne Jensen, Viby 1984, p. 33.

⁹⁶ Chr. Thodberg, 'Grundtvig, Nikolaj Frederik Severin (1783-1872)' in: G. Krausse, G. Müller, et al. (hrsg.), *Theologische Realencyclopädie*, Berlin 1976-2004, p. 286.

⁹⁷ N.J. Jensen (ed.), *A Grundtvig Anthology*, pp. 37f.

⁹⁸ A. Haarder, 'Grundtvig and the Old Norse Cultural Heritage', in: Chr. Thodberg, A.P. Thyssen (eds.), *N.F.S. Grundtvig, Tradition and Renewal: Grundtvig's Vision of Man and People, Education and the Church, in Relation to World Issues Today*, Copenhagen 1983, p. 83.

⁹⁹ Kjærgaard, *Salme Håndbog II*, p. 283.

¹⁰⁰ Kjærgaard, p. 284.

¹⁰¹ Malling, *Danske Salme Historie* (Bind IV), p. 312.

But there are not only *direct* allusions to the pre-Christian history of the Danes in this hymn. The two main motives of this hymn also go back to pre-Christian folk traditions. First of all there is the motive of the destruction of the old world. In *Reis op dit Hoved, al Christenhed* this goes together with the changing of the sun, moon and stars (stanza six), lightning in the sky (stanza seven), the disturbance of all the powers of heaven (*At røre Himlens kræfter*, stanza eight), the coming of fire from heaven (stanza nine) and waves of destruction (stanza ten). It is of course not so difficult to find biblical equivalents for those images, but I think they also form a reminder of the old Norse mythological way of understanding life. For example in the tradition of *Ragnarok* it is also fire and weather that bring about the world's destruction for a time.¹⁰² In Saxo's *History* (Grundtvig had published major translations of Saxo's *History*) a description is given of a terrible battle in Sweden, where Saxo makes a comparison with the world's ending: "You might well have imagined that the heavens were suddenly rushing down at the earth (.....), that the whole creation was in turmoil and had returned to ancient chaos.". Although Saxo writes after the Christianizing of Denmark and gives his description a Christian slant in a reference to Doomsday, it is likely that the comparison is based on earlier heroic traditions.¹⁰³

Thus the imagery of the destruction of earth, sky and sea and the return to chaos goes back to pre-Christian tradition. These old traditions and stories were possibly given new impetus by the Christian teaching concerning Judgment Day. The conception of creation, destruction and renewal has a pre-Christian antecedent in the Nordic myths. For example the destruction by the land sinking beneath the sea was a familiar theme in Danish folklore. It was particularly strong in the folk tradition along the coast of Jutland. There are many local traditions foretelling the world's end, when the sea will rise as high as the church tower.¹⁰⁴

The second motive is that of the fear of the Great Winter and the Cosmic Spring. In *Reis op dit Hoved, al Christenhed* it receives a Christian twist with the help of the image of the fig tree (*figen*, stanza seven). The biblical equivalent here is Luke 21, 30, where Jesus tells his disciples a parable about the fig tree and all the trees: "When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near.". Grundtvig combines the Christian notion of the coming of the Son of Man and the renewal of heaven and earth with images of the beech tree and bursting buds in spring. For Danish countryside people these are common images. The fear of the Great Winter and the festive inauguration of spring also recollect a tradition from popular culture. In *Ragnarok* for example there is the fear of the Great Winter. This goes back to traditions of very early times, when the fear that the sun will never return is combined with popular practices to ensure the return of the sun after winter darkness.¹⁰⁵ Stanza seven of *Reis op dit Hoved, al Christenhed* bursts out into laudation on the renewal of creation, when we see the signs in nature, such as the blossom of the trees, and we know that mankind will live rather than perish. In stanza eleven this goes together with image of the old world melting down. In Grundtvig's view it is a delightful purification. The end of the old world means new life to all of us.

Use of language: existential and antithetical

It is quite remarkable that Grundtvig within the liberal and Rationalistic theological climate of his days took refuge to the old Norse mythological way of understanding life. This way of expressing Christianity not only corresponded in his view with Christianity of the early Church and the New Testament, but it also helped him to overcome his own fears. I think

¹⁰² H.R. Ellis Davidson, *Myths and symbols in pagan Europe. Early Scandinavian and Celtic religions*, Manchester 1988, p. 188.

¹⁰³ Ellis Davidson, *Myths and symbols in pagan Europe*, p. 189.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 190.

¹⁰⁵ *Idem*, p. 191.

there is a high existential dimension in Grundtvig's theological understanding. The theological climate of his time could not help him to overcome his own anxiety. Maybe Grundtvig could recognize something of his own existential doubts in the mythological language, with its dramatic images and antithetical way of speech.

When we keep in mind the context of the liturgical year of this hymn, this throws a special light on it. Especially in this time of year, around the end of November, one could easily get depressed. The sky turns grey and dark. When it is clouded in Denmark, we hardly see any daylight and it is hard to imagine that sky will be light and bright again. Grundtvig himself suffered periods of major depressions during his life. Before the Christmas of 1810 he had a major breakdown which was probably caused by a deep inner conflict. He thought of himself as a kind of reformer of the Church and he could behave very arrogantly towards the settled clergy. At the same time he doubted if he was Christian enough to become a servant of that same Church, and he experienced helpless feelings of dependence. In 1810 his father, who was a pastor in the country village of Udby, requested the young Grundtvig to help him as a curate. But when he finally reached the parsonage, he was to be helped himself instead of being the helper. In his depression Grundtvig felt that his body was visited by the Devil. In the help of his friends he experienced the grace and love of God and finally he managed to overcome his anguish. This period around Christmas 1810 is a turning point in Grundtvig's life. He experienced that even in the deep cold and darkness of winter night the seeds of God's loving kindness grow.¹⁰⁶

Conclusion: the dynamic interaction between popular culture and theology

How is it possible that Grundtvig is able to combine pre-Christian mythology with Christian ideas and what can we say about the nature of this interaction?

First of all there is the theological framework which made it possible for Grundtvig to integrate pre-Christian thoughts in his way of expressing Christianity. Because of the interrelatedness of the whole creation Grundtvig thought positively about man and nature. His theological conviction about the union between heaven and earth resulted in a positive estimation of the culture and identity of the Danes. Apart from this there is his universal vision on history: the ancient history of the North has its own place in the overall history of God and men. Therefore Nordic symbols and oral folk traditions are able to express the Christian doctrine. Because of their use of the mother tongue and images from the nature and countryside that were common to the Danes it was an even better alternative to the Latin erudition of the Italian Renaissance. Grundtvig was well acquainted with the old Norse cultural heritage and he incorporated Nordic images and symbols in the Christian message of this hymn. Grundtvig's poetical language echoes this Nordic mythological concept of human life as a battle between the powers of good and evil. The end of this battle is not bad, but results in the renewal of human life. Like in the first creation the powers of chaos are overcome and life is recreated.

Secondly there is the cultic-mythical understanding of Christianity which helped Grundtvig to incorporate the Nordic heritage. Grundtvig expressed Christianity as drama, the battle between the powers of good and evil. Like the old cultic rites, the Christian rites repeat the ancient divine acts and secure creation against chaos. On the battlefield between good and evil, the threat of our earthly existence, Christ appears and restores the union between heaven and earth. The Christian rites secure and celebrate this union:

¹⁰⁶ A.M. Allchin, *N.F.S. Grundtvig. An Introduction to his Life and Work*, pp. 32-36.

“For the Christians believe that through the Fall human nature has become so corrupted that true healing is impossible, but they celebrate Baptism as a true rebirth in water, in which the believer is spiritually recreated.”.¹⁰⁷

With all this in mind it is quite clear that Grundtvig expressed Christianity in this special way. But how is this interaction taking shape in *Reis op dit Hoved, al Christenhed*? The interaction seems quite natural and smooth. Although there was some debate on the pagan *luren gjalder* the hymn always played a role in Danish church life. I think the main reason why Grundtvig is able to fuse the Nordic and the Christian identity into one is because of his use of allusions. Grundtvig uses essential metaphors and images with narrative power: words that are able to open a whole biblical world but are also rooted in the cultural heritage of the North. Above we saw that a lot of words both have a Christian connotation (they have biblical references) and a Nordic one as well. Images from natural and everyday life (remember the *røverkøb*!) fuse together with Christian words and symbols. Grundtvig combines the cross and the Viking ruler, creating new words. The coming of Christ is a cosmic spring like Nordic midwinter. With this Grundtvig tries to ban all fear of Judgment Day or Pietistic feelings. Grundtvig's theological framework of creation and recreation considers the world's ending from a totally different perspective. Therefore this hymn about Judgment day becomes a hymn that gives comfort. The tone is triumphant, without losing its pastoral content. The prayer for Babel is our involvement with God's whole creation, a creation that will never Fall from God's hands.

¹⁰⁷ Jensen, *A Grundtvig Anthology*, p. 43.

Kommer sjæle, dyrekøbte, 1837

Grundtvig published this hymn for Ascension Day in 1837. It is a beautiful example of the way in which Grundtvig was inspired and influenced by Anglo-Saxon literature. The Anglo-Saxon heritage turned out to be very useful for Grundtvig to develop his own Norse cultic understanding of Christianity. It is the aim of this chapter to describe how this takes shape in *Kommer sjæle, dyrekøbte*.

Below I am going to analyze Grundtvig's hymn with regard to the use of theological language together with the rhetorical forms he derived from the Anglo-Saxon tradition. In order to do this I will use the translation of Cynewulf's poem by S.A.J. Bradley.¹⁰⁸ For the biblical references in Grundtvig's hymn I depend on Kjærgaards description in his *Salme Håndbog*.¹⁰⁹ The literal prose translation I give below has been made by S.A.J. Bradley.¹¹⁰ Bradley also did a very beautiful poetic rendering of Grundtvig's hymn, but the literal translation is more suitable for my analysis, because it follows closely the Danish original. Because Bradley's translation is based on the version of *Den Danske Salmebog* of 1988, it omits the second stanza.

1. Come, souls dearly-bought
and baptized to be more than angels,
siblings to David's son.
Let us, with God's angel-troop
and with him, journey to heaven
and see the great reward of the pure soul.

3. Round about is heard in his reception:
"Welcome from the dead,
terror and horror of all the devils.
Over them go fiery waves:
the people released accompany you,
once lost but now found."

4. Soldiers, you protect the fortress,
the fortress above the sky and stars,
open forth with the lofty portal.
Accompanied by those freed again
comes the world's Redeemer, the world's Judge:
his name is everlasting great.

¹⁰⁸ S.A.J. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry. An Anthology of Old English poems in prose translation with introduction and headnotes*, London 1982, pp. 219-228.

¹⁰⁹ J. Kjærgaard, *Salme Håndbog II*, pp. 262f.

¹¹⁰ S.A.J. Bradley 'Four English translations of Grundtvig's hymns', in: *Grundtvig-Studier 2001*, København 2001, pp. 15-17. A suitable German translation of this hymn is 'Seelen, kommt, ihr schwer erkaufte', nr. 213 in: *Kirchenlieder von N.F.S. Grundtvig, Auszug aus dem Gesangbuch der dänischen Volkskirche „Den Danske Salmebog“*, Tønder 1983.

5. With golden crowns, meet him,
him and the many millions
dearly bought with his blood,
now ascending with him
from the vale of tears to the hall of joy.
Thank him, for he is good.

6. Among the angels men are now counted,
and have everything in common with the Lord:
spirit and body and life and blood,
faith, hope, love, light,
lustre, joy peace.
The tree of life and the river of life.

7. Earth's generations in all ages
can repeatedly choose and refuse,
choose between life and death,
day's light and night's dark,
Paradise and wild desert,
hot Hell and sweet Heaven.

8. Honour be to the Saviour,
with a name like no other,
looser of the bondage of death.
Praise and thanks and everlasting honour,
within the Trinity,
be to Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Historical background

In a footnote to *Kommer sjæle, dyrekøbte* Grundtvig declares that the hymn has been made “Af den Angelsachsiske Messiade I Exeter-Bogen” (“from the Anglo-Saxon Messiade in the Exeter Book”).¹¹¹ The Exeter Book is a church manuscript from the eleventh century and contains old English poetry including poems from Cædmon and Cynewulf.¹¹² The codex opens with three related poems (Christ I, II and III) concerning three aspects of Christ: Christ as Messiah, as Redeemer and as Judge, probably made by Cynewulf (the name of Cynewulf is written in runes in the text of Christ II). Cynewulf was probably active in the earlier part of the ninth century.¹¹³ According to Noack Grundtvig follows even in details its source and it is not an exaggeration to call *Kommer sjæle, dyrekøbte* a regular translation.¹¹⁴ According to Malling the footnote is a vague expression which means that Grundtvig did not attach much value to a direct translation of the Anglo-Saxon hymn. Malling considers Grundtvig's hymn as original and inspired by the English text. He did not find any direct links between Grundtvig's hymn and the English example.¹¹⁵ Grundtvig studied and transcribed Cynewulf's poem *The Ascension (Christ II)* in 1830, during one of his study tours to England. According

¹¹¹ N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Sang-værk til den danske kirke* Bind 1.2, København 1982, pp.474f.

¹¹² J. Kjærgaard, *Salme Håndbog II*, p. 262.

¹¹³ Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, pp. 201, 216-218.

¹¹⁴ B. Noack, 'Grundtvig and Anglo-Saxon Poetry', in: A.M. Allchin, D. Jasper, J.H. Schjørring, K. Stevenson (eds.), *Heritage and Prophecy: Grundtvig and the English-Speaking World*, Aarhus 1993, p. 40.

¹¹⁵ A. Malling, *Dansk Salme Historie* (Bind III), København 1964, p. 168.

to Bradley Grundtvig was for this hymn also influenced by the poems *The Judgment (Christ III)* in the Exeter Book and *Christ and Satan* (Junius 11, sometimes attributed to Cædmon).¹¹⁶ Bradley considers Grundtvig's hymn freely based upon lines in Cynewulf's poem *Christ II (The Ascension)* in the Exeter Book.¹¹⁷

The original music to this hymn was composed by J.P.E. Hartmann (1805-1900) in 1860. Hartmann composed this melody for H.A. Timm's hymn: *Under dine vingers skygge (Den Danske Salmebog, 2002, nr. 50)*. In 1915 Thomas Laub wrote a new melody especially for Grundtvig's hymn.

Linguistic aspects: the use of Anglo-Saxon motives

After a comparison between *Kommer sjæle, dyrekøbte* and *Christ II* I think it is justified to call Grundtvig's hymn not a literal translation, but the extraction of the Cynewulf's lengthy poem in a hymn. If we want to speak about a regular translation of Cynewulf's *Messiad* (like Noack did) I think this qualification suits best to Grundtvig's rendering of the seventh stanza of *Christ II*. Most of the elements in Grundtvig's hymn are influenced by this part of Cynewulf's text.

Grundtvig made a number of translations of Anglo-Saxon Christian poetry. There he found themes and motifs which responded to his own religious convictions, e.g. Christ's descent into Hell and Christ's triumph over death.¹¹⁸ Christ's descent into hell is the main motif in *Christ II*. Christ descended into hell to free the souls:

“Now has the Holy One robbed hell of all the spoil which it wrongfully swallowed up during the strife in days of old. Now the devils' champions are overcome and humiliated and enchained in living torment, stripped of blessings in the abyss of hell. (.....) There from the fortress of the fiends he delivered out of bondage the most enormous booty, a countless tally of people.”¹¹⁹

This motive, also called the *Harrowing of Hell* is a common theme in the early church and Anglo-Saxon literature. The poem *Christ and Satan* (in Grundtvig's time attributed to Cædmon) tells the story of Christ fetching Adam, Eve, the prophets and the patriarchs from hell. In *Christ II* the poet tells the hearer to join this huge crowd of people, to be a part of the huge amount of people who sing and praise Christ. Grundtvig does the same in the second part of the first stanza: “Let us, with God's heavenly crowd and with Him (Jesus) ascend to heaven, to see the reward for the piety!”. This invitation means that Christ's Ascension is not a solo performance, but the whole community takes part in Christ's journey to heaven. And there they see the reward for their piety, which is eternal life.¹²⁰

Another figure of speech Grundtvig derived from Cynewulf's poem is the frequent use of the image of radiance for the heavenly powers. Grundtvig pictures Christ as *ædle Straale-Skytte* ('noble Archer of beams of light', stanza two). Radiance is a divine attribute: “the canopies of the heavens (...) that radiant city”.¹²¹ God is “the radiant King”.¹²²

¹¹⁶ S.A.J. Bradley, 'Four English translations of Grundtvig's hymns', in: *Grundtvig-Studier 2001*, København 2001, p. 15.

¹¹⁷ S.A.J. Bradley, “‘The First New-European Literature’: N.F.S. Grundtvig's Reception of Anglo-Saxon Literature”, in: Allchin (et al.), *Heritage and Prophecy: Grundtvig and the English-Speaking World*, p. 47.

¹¹⁸ A.M. Allchin, 'Grundtvig and England', in: Allchin (et al.), *Heritage and Prophecy: Grundtvig and the English-Speaking World*, p. 12.

¹¹⁹ 'Christ II', stanza VII, in: Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 221.

¹²⁰ Kjærgaard, *Salme Håndbog II*, p. 263.

¹²¹ 'Christ II', stanza VII, in: Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 220.

¹²² 'Christ II', stanza X, in: Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 227.

In stanza three the resurrection of Christ and the Ascension are pictured as a meeting (“Round about is heard in the meeting with Christ: Welcome from the dead”). Christ is coming back to heaven again. But as we have seen above, this is not something for Christ alone (“The released people accompany you”). Christ is our forerunner and his ascension is going to be our reunion with God as well. One can clearly see how Grundtvig could recognize this theme about the happy reunion between God and man in Cynewulf’s poem:

“Henceforth for ever there shall be eternal peace between angels and mortals. There will be a covenant between God and men, a sacred pledge, love, the joy of life and the pleasure of the whole of heaven.” and “Go now, glad of mood, boldly to meet with friends. Open up, you gates! The Ruler of all desires to enter into you, the King into the city (.....), leading into the joy of joys the folk whom he seized from devils by virtue of his personal victory.”¹²³

This exhortation about the coming of the world’s redeemer is expressed in the fourth stanza. In some later versions of the hymn Grundtvig has changed *Verdens skaber* (‘the creator of the world’) into *Verdens frelser* (‘the redeemer of the world’).¹²⁴ This change is more in line with the themes in *Christ II* and *Christ III*: Christ as redeemer and Christ as judge.

Grundtvig’s vocabulary to describe the new life in Christ is closely connected to the Anglo-Saxon language, for example *Lyset, Glandsen, Glæden, Freden* in the sixth stanza compared to the way in which the covenant between God and men is pictured in *Christ II*: “love, the joy of life and pleasure of the whole heaven”.¹²⁵ Also the notion of the possibility for humankind to choose between life and death echoes Cynewulf’s poem, where in stanza VII we read:

(...) so that every man alive (...) may choose as well the humiliation of hell as the glory of heaven, as well of the radiant radiance as the loathsome night, as well the thronging of the heavenly multitude as the exiled state of darkness, as well torment among evil beings as glory among the angels, as well life as death”.¹²⁶

Stanza VII of *Christ II* ends with the doxology (“For this may the Majesty of the Trinity have glory and gratitude without end.”) and so does the last stanza of Grundtvig’s hymn.

Grundtvig’s reception of Anglo-Saxon literature

With Grundtvig’s rendering of Cynewulf’s poem the Danish Church of his days was able to sing about Ascension in a language derived from tenth century Anglo-Saxon poetry. Why was it so important for Grundtvig to make this old language available for his fellow believers? To answer that question we first have to focus on Grundtvig’s encounter with the Anglo-Saxon literature.

Grundtvig’s first introduction to Anglo-Saxon poetry was by the poem *Beowulf*. As a historian he tried to open the world of the Nordic Antiquity and the Middle Ages for the people of his time. In this respect he was very much influenced by the ideas of Romanticism: the people must be brought back to their roots! Therefore he learned Anglo-Saxon and old-Icelandic. But Grundtvig was not only interested in literal prose translations, he wanted to turn the old poetry into a language available to his fellow Danes. Grundtvig tried to make the Danes aware of the strong relationship to the ancient Nordic and Anglo-Saxon culture. If the

¹²³ Christ II, stanza VII, in: Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 222.

¹²⁴ Malling, *Dansk Salme Historie* (Bind III), p. 169.

¹²⁵ ‘Christ II’, stanza VII, in: Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 222.

¹²⁶ ‘Christ II’, stanza VII, in: Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 222.

Danes wanted to understand the history of their country, they should have studied the Anglo-Saxon literature, according to him.¹²⁷

Grundtvig had to resign his post as a minister of the Church after the debacle with Clausen. The years around his dispute with Clausen mark the period that he often was in coalition with the leading figures of his time. He often felt solitary and misunderstood. But his situation began to change by the end of the 1830's. He was becoming a well-known personality, like in the words of Allchin:

“One did not necessarily agree with him; no-one could deny that he was there.”¹²⁸

Grundtvig became a member of the cultural and intellectual life in Copenhagen, which at that time was a tightly knit society; a coherent whole centered around the royal family.¹²⁹ Grundtvig kept a close relationship with the royal family. When the king asked him in what manner he was going to spend his time now he had lost his job in the Church, Grundtvig asked in reply if he could send him to England in order to study the old Anglo-Saxon manuscripts.¹³⁰ In the next years Grundtvig made three study-tours to England: in 1829, 1830 and 1831, allowed by a grant of the king. The work he did as a historian and philologist on Anglo-Saxon poetry is impressive. As a scholar he contributed amazingly to the *Beowulf*-research. He studied the Exeter Book (which was almost forgotten in England) and made translations of many poems, such as *The Phoenix* (published in 1840). In 1861 he published his own edition of *Beowulf*.¹³¹ But Grundtvig was not only interested in the philological aspects of the manuscripts. In his theology and especially in some of his hymns we can observe the main outcome of his research on the old English texts. A couple of years after his third journey to England the first volume of his magnum opus, the *Sang-Vaerk til den danske Kirke* appeared. In this collection he translated and rewrote a lot of hymns from all parts of the world. This ecumenical view on the Church is not purely idealistic, but is part of his overall view on human history. We have already seen that Grundtvig approached history as a whole, a universal development of mankind, being started at creation and leading to its final fulfillment. In this historical point of view the English Church represented a turning point in history, standing between the early Church in the East and the Lutheran Church in the North.¹³² The Anglo-Saxons inherited the Gospel from the decaying imperial Rome and were able to revitalize it by the use of their Anglo-Saxon mother tongue. By Boniface and other English missionaries the good news was brought to the North. The Anglo-Saxons were able to express the Christian message in the language and images of the northern world. Here Grundtvig found a great example of the vitality of the living word.¹³³

Why was this way of putting Christianity into words so important for him? First of all the beauty of the language appealed to his own poetical language. He liked the metaphors, the frequent use of the phenomena of light and radiance and the antithetical thinking of life versus death and light versus darkness.¹³⁴ The Anglo-Saxon poetical language suited perfectly to his worldview of the cosmic struggle between God and the powers of evil. Secondly, as we have

¹²⁷ Noack, 'Grundtvig and Anglo-Saxon Poetry', pp. 33-35.

¹²⁸ Allchin, *N.F.S. Grundtvig. An Introduction to his Life and Work*, p. 49.

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 15f.

¹³⁰ Malling, *Dansk Salme Historie* (Bind III), p. 311.

¹³¹ A. Haarder, 'Grundtvig and the Old Norse Cultural Heritage', in: Thodberg, Thyssen, *N.F.S. Grundtvig, Tradition and Renewal*, pp. 72-74.

¹³² Noack, 'Grundtvig and Anglo-Saxon Poetry', pp. 37f.

¹³³ S.A.J. Bradley, "'The First New-European Literature': N.F.S. Grundtvig's Reception of Anglo-Saxon Literature", in: Allchin (et al.), *Heritage and Prophecy: Grundtvig and the English-Speaking World*, p. 62.

¹³⁴ Noack, 'Grundtvig and Anglo-Saxon Poetry', pp. 40f.; Bradley, "'The First New-European Literature': N.F.S. Grundtvig's Reception of Anglo-Saxon Literature', p. 52.

seen before, Grundtvig considered the Anglo-Saxon as the people who did not only inherit the Gospel but were also able to transmit the message in language and symbols accessible to the people of their own time. In his prospectus *Bibliotheca Anglo-Saxonica* (1830) he wrote:

“It was here that a whole nation listened to the songs of Cædmon and of Alcuin in their mother tongue, while in France and Italy nothing was heard but a jargon of barbarous sounds.”¹³⁵

The biblical history had to be transplanted into one’s own time and circumstances. This was for Grundtvig extremely important. The Gospel had to be absorbed the people’s life. Thirdly, the theological world of the Anglo-Saxon corresponded to Grundtvig’s view of Christianity. It was in accord with his view of the New Testament and the Fathers and with the knowledge he had derived from his studies of Irenaeus and the ancient Greek hymns. It suited his Christology: Christ’s death and resurrection are viewed as redemption by way of battle and victory. By his descent into hell Christ gained the victory over the destructive forces and by his resurrection and ascension the union between heaven and earth, which had already been there in the creation, was restored.¹³⁶ With this the Anglo-Saxon heritage became for Grundtvig a helpful alliance in his battle against Rationalism.

Linguistic aspects: antithetical language

Grundtvig was a man who thought in antithesis. The main theme in his religious thinking was the contradiction between life and death. In the Anglo-Saxon literature he found the same attitude towards life. Here he found the language to express life as a struggle between the powers of good and evil. In *Kommer sjæle, dyrekøbte* the language is quite dramatical: the victorious journey of Christ from hell to heaven is painted in contrasting images: life instead of death, paradise instead of the wild desert, sweat heaven instead of hot hell. There are fiery waves, golden crowns and there is radiance of light. The contradiction between Christ and the powers of evil is huge, like the light of the day and the darkness of the night. Christ appears, as the radiant king, out of all the chaos and turmoil.

From Grundtvig’s biography we can learn that he experienced periods of depressions alternated with feelings of happiness and high self-esteem. In times of depression he found comfort in the belief that Christ had beaten the powers of death and evil and that he had got a new life through his own baptism. The *oldkirkelig* conception of the victorious Christ was therefore so important for him. Because his theology was so existential, he severely agitated against Rationalism and the philosophical ideas of his time, such as the philosophy of Hegel with his ideas of synthesis among polarities.¹³⁷ In Christ the antithetical language comes to a solution. This gives him comfort and rest.

The liturgical-sacramental articulation of the cosmic renewal

Now we have seen which images Grundtvig took from the Anglo-Saxon Christian literature, we have to consider how they function in the overall theological message of *Kommer sjæle, dyrekøbte*. The main theme of *Kommer sjæle, dyrekøbte* is Ascension Day meant as the reunion between God and mankind. In Grundtvig’s poetical universe the link between heaven

¹³⁵ Quotation in: S.A.J. Bradley, ‘Before Irenaeus: The making of Grundtvig the Medievalist’ in: *Grundtvig-Studier 2004*, København 2004, pp. 250.

¹³⁶ Noack, pp. 40-42.

¹³⁷ When the German professor P.K. Marheinecke visited Grundtvig they had a conversation about Hegel’s use of the dialectical method. Grundtvig replied that he was afraid of speculative theology: “Mein Gegensatz ist Leben und Tot.”. See also chapter 2 in this essay or A.M. Allchin, who refers in his article ‘Descent into Hell’, in: *Grundtvig-Studier 2001*, København 2001, pp. 31-40, to this famous conversation.

and earth is often depicted as a double ladder. The word of God is climbing down towards earth and the song of praise is climbing up as a resounding echo. Exactly the same happens when the congregations starts singing hymns. It is the cultic replay of incarnation and ascension.¹³⁸

A beautiful example of this *ladder-image* we can find in Grundtvig's Christmas hymn from 1824: *Velkommen igen, Guds engle små* ('Welcome again, God's beautiful angels').¹³⁹ Chr. Thodberg has translated the seventh stanza as following:

“God's angels then wander up and down
The carol's tonal ladder,
Our Saviour Himself enjoins God's peace
To those desirous of it,
The heavenly gateway opens wide
Then truly comes God's kingdom!”¹⁴⁰

Here it is Christmas and in *Kommer sjæle, dyrekøbte* it is Ascension Day, where the reunion of the earthly existence and the divine kingdom is realized by the singing of hymns. By the singing the congregation becomes a part of the heavenly crowd, following Christ in his journey to heaven.

In *Kommer sjæle, dyrekøbte* there are also references to baptism and eucharist. Both sacraments are the repetition of Christ's acts of redemption. In the first stanza there is a direct allusion to baptism: “come you, dearly bought souls and baptized to be more than angels”. In Grundtvig's poetical world angels always accompany the reunion between heaven and earth and now they point out the divine identity which men obtain by baptism. The sentence “bought dearly with his blood” (stanza five) Grundtvig also uses in a hymn about baptism:

“Jesus Christus, Guddoms-Manden,
som os kiøbte med sit Blod
(.....) Ved Guds Aand, som alt udretter,
Døber, bader og aftvætter!”¹⁴¹

Here again the universal redemption of mankind is revitalized by the sacrament of baptism. In the sixth stanza there is a somewhat hidden allusion to eucharist. The word-pair dust and spirit refers to the divine origin of men. Grundtvig once called mankind a divine experiment out of *spirit and dust*.¹⁴² The word-pair life and blood refers to the theology of the overall renewal of human existence, repeated in the sacrament of eucharist.

The influence of the early Church: break with Lutheran Orthodoxy

The articulation of Christianity in early-Church language results in a break with the classical Lutheran position about the identity of mankind and the nature of Christ. Grundtvig's position is much more related to Christianity of the Orthodox East in the first millennium, according to

¹³⁸ cf. Thodberg, 'Grundtvig the Hymnwriter', in: Thodberg, Thyssen, *N.F.S. Grundtvig, Tradition and Renewal*, p. 168.

¹³⁹ *Den Danske Salmebog*, 2002, nr. 99.

¹⁴⁰ Thodberg, 'Grundtvig the Hymnwriter', p. 169.

¹⁴¹ “Jesus Christ, Divine-Man, / Who bought us with his blood / (.....) With God's Spirit, He saves us all, baptizes us, baths us and washes of our sins!”, cited in: Chr. Thodberg, *En Glemte dimension i Grundtvigs salmer – bundetheden til dåbsritualet*, København 1969, p. 28 (my own translation).

¹⁴² Allchin, *N.F.S. Grundtvig*, p. 145.

Allchin. Christ's descent into hell and His resurrection involves the destruction of the kingdom of the power of death and the universal gift of a new life.¹⁴³

Bradley senses here the influence of Augustinian and *oldkirkelig* traditions of the Anglo-Saxon Church.¹⁴⁴ Christ's redemption of the lost souls out of hell is the fulfillment of the things God started in creation. Heaven is our home and we are just temporal dwellers on earth seeking for our heavenly homeland. The new created Adam has a free will to choose for serving or neglecting God.¹⁴⁵ In my opinion the difference between Luther and Grundtvig is not so great on the subject of the free will but is most sensible concerning the nature of Christ. In Grundtvig's poetry is hardly any attention for the suffering Christ. In *Kommer sjæle, dyrekøbte* we get the image of a conquering Christ. Grundtvig's translation of Martin Luther's hymn *Christ lag in Todesbanden* (1524), translated in 1837, is illustrative for this matter. In the last stanza of *Kommer sjæle, dyrekøbte* is an allusion to this hymn: "Løseren af Dødens Baand!" ("Christ loosened the vessels of death"). But in Grundtvig's translation of *Christ lag in Todesbanden* the stanza with the motive of the Easter lamb is omitted. Grundtvig could not use this figure of speech, in which Christ offered himself like the Easter lamb. Grundtvig's rendering of Luther's hymn is the totally focused on Christ's battle for life and his victory over death.¹⁴⁶

Conclusion: Grundtvig's Norse cultic understanding of Christianity

How is the interaction between popular culture and Christianity in this special hymn of Grundtvig? In this hymn he is strongly influenced by the Anglo-Saxon literature. The antithetical use of language, the dramatic figures of speech and symbols of light and radiance, all this became a part of his poetical universe. From the Anglo-Saxon literature he learned that the best way to express Christ's acts of redemption was making use of the mother tongue and illustrating by present-day images.

Theologically Grundtvig made the following statement: with Christ's descent into hell and his ascension our whole earthly existence is uplifted to the divine. The Christian congregation follows Christ in his journey. This has a consequence on his view of the cultural identity of the Danes. Redemption takes place in the history and existence of the Danes. They are the brothers and sisters of David's Son. They share spirit and dust, life and blood with God.

The translation of Cynewulf's poem was part of the emancipation Grundtvig tried to bring about in the Nordic culture. This was extremely important to him. The Danes should know that they played a major role in God's history of salvation. In the huge number of people who were delivered from bondage of hell and death by Christ, the Danes had their own place. A place which could not be neglected.

¹⁴³ A.M. Allchin, 'Descent into Hell', in: *Grundtvig-Studier 2001*, København 2001, pp. 31f.

¹⁴⁴ S.A.J. Bradley, 'Before Irenaeus: The making of Grundtvig the Medievalist' in: *Grundtvig-Studier 2004*, København 2004, pp. 240-242.

¹⁴⁵ Kjærgaard, *Salme Håndbog II*, p. 263.

¹⁴⁶ U. Hansen, *Grundtvigs Salmedigtning. Dens Historie og indhold, I. 1810-1837*, Odense 1937, p. 312.

Tag det sorte kors fra graven, 1832, 1846

“Yea, He is here, the divine Man (.....).
Now with the golden dawn of morning,
stand up in the name of Jesus,
all the Lord’s dormant dead!”¹⁴⁷

These lines out of Grundtvig’s hymn *Tag det sorte kors fra graven* throw an interesting light on Grundtvig’s opinion about Easter. To him Easter is a cultic event that is happening here and now in front of our eyes. Therefore in an analysis of the dynamics between theology and popular culture this hymn deserves a place.

Grundtvig published the first edition of the hymn in 1832, after a request for a new hymn for the Church. The need for new hymns was felt and this was the opportunity for him to unfold his vision on appropriate hymns that could express the true nature of Christianity. Therefore it is worth paying attention to *Tag det sorte kors fra graven*, especially because of the way the mystery of Easter is expressed in images and symbols out of the Danish cultural life.

A lot of Grundtvig’s hymns have been developed from a sermon. Grundtvig frequently preached in a poetical style and his sermons often read like a poem. Malling has demonstrated the close connection between *Tag det sorte kors fra graven* and the sermon Grundtvig preached on Easter Sunday 1825.¹⁴⁸ After he had made some alterations in the sermon Grundtvig published it in his *Søndag-Bog* of 1830. Because the sermon helps to understand *Tag det sorte kors fra graven* I shall sometimes refer to it in the following analysis. Fortunately large parts of the sermon have been translated into English by Allchin.¹⁴⁹ The literal prose translation of *Tag det sorte kors fra graven* that follows here has been made by Jakob Balling.¹⁵⁰

1. Take the black cross away from the grave!
Plant a lily where it stood!
Flowers shall sprout at our feet
with every step in the garden of the dead.
Angels’ wings shall be spread at our grave
instead of the broken wanderer’s staff,
palm-bird instead of ash-urn,
joyful song in stead of hollow sighs!
2. The sun was blackened when He turned pale,
He who bought us with His blood.
The grave shone out, darkness sank
when He stood up in glory.
Now ring out, our song of praise,
sweetly in the dawn of Easter:
”Jesus Christ is resurrected!
The God-Man lives eternally!”

¹⁴⁷ N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Sang-Værk til Den Danske Kirke* I. Bind, København 1944, pp. 555f.

¹⁴⁸ Malling, *Dansk Salme Historie* (Bind V), p. 19.

¹⁴⁹ Allchin, *N.F.S. Grundtvig*, pp. 242-252.

¹⁵⁰ See also the English literal prose translation of this hymn by Jakob Balling, in: J. Balling, ‘Creative Recycling: A Note on Two Grundtvigian Hymns’ in: *Grundtvig-Studier 2000*, København 2000, pp. 31f.

3. Look at Mary Magdalene!
Just now she wrung her hands in horror,
sighed to move stones:
"Where, o where is the Lord now?"
Look: from the flood of tears in her eyes
the mild morning sun has risen!
In the grave where He has rested,
she has found the angel's smile!

4. Burst open, all ye saint's graves!
In the cool dawn the voice of the Lord
sounds in the garden of the dead,
creates light in the valley of shadows.
The Lord calls, but no longer:
"Sinner, Adam, where art thou?"
Sweetly it sounds – angels are silent -
"Mary, the Saviour is Here!"

5. Yea, He is here, the God-Man.
The bands of death are broken!
Surely, He is resurrected,
every word of Him is life and spirit –
every want made good.
Now, with the golden dawn,
stand up in the name of Jesus,
all the Lord's dormant dead! ¹⁵¹

6. Rise and see God's finger
in the shining garland of witnesses!
Hurry on eagle wings
to where He radiantly shines.
Hurry in the steps of the Lord
to where He prepared a place for us,
where the depths of Heaven
are opened on high to eyes of dust.

7. Thou earth who in the mild spring
wakest up from thy winter's sleep,
now, in the light-green gown
- woven hiddenly, like our hope -
with thy fragrance of teeming roses,
thy voice of soaring larks,
thou shalt yearly become a likeness
of the lot of thy children's hearts!

¹⁵¹ In *Den Danske Salmebog*, 2002, the last four phrases of this stanza are: Nu en forårmorgen skøn, / rinder op for os i løn, / og, som påskesalmen klinger, / vokser sjælens fuglevinger (Now a beautiful spring morning, / arises for us as a reward, / and when Easter hymns are heard, / bird wings of the souls are growing) (my own translation).

Historical background

Gunni Busck (1798-1869), rector at Stiftsbjergby and a friend of Grundtvig's, had requested Grundtvig many times to restore the old hymns and renew the Danish hymnal practice by writing new hymns. When Grundtvig had finished his journey to England the time might have come to write new hymns. In January 1832 Busck asked it again. On the 31st of March Grundtvig replied with the Easter-hymn *Tag det sorte Kors fra Graven!*. Grundtvig was at the time half-way through the new edition of *Nordens Mythologi eller Sindbilled-Sprog* ('Nors Mythology or The Language of Myth') and the first part of his *Haandbog i Verdens-Historien* ('Handbook on World History').¹⁵² The hymn Grundtvig sent to Busck can be considered as a reply for the time being. Later on he had the opportunity to start his systematical hymnal work with his *Sang-Værk*.¹⁵³

Because Grundtvig has written the hymn with Kingo's hymn in mind *Tag det sorte kors fra graven* was probably sung for the first time on the melody of Kingo's *Som den gyldne sol frembryder* ('Like the golden sun arising').¹⁵⁴ This melody was already borrowed from Johan Rist's hymn *Nu velan, vær frisk til mode*, which had been written by Johan Schop in 1642.¹⁵⁵ Kjærgaard means that this melody suits best to the character of Grundtvig's original meaning with the hymn.¹⁵⁶ In 1847 Henrik Rung wrote a new melody for Grundtvig's hymn, which is also the first melody given to the hymn in the new Danish hymnbook. There also is an optional second melody, written by Lasse Lunderskov in 1983.

When Grundtvig placed the hymn in the *Sang-Værk* he made some slight alterations to the original version he sent to Busck. In the two last editions of the Danish Hymnbook (1953 and 2002) the two last stanza's are disappeared. The last four lines of the last stanza are also different from Grundtvig's own edition of the hymn in his booklet *Til Paasken*, 1846.¹⁵⁷ In future I will concentrate on the version used in the *Sang-Værk* (1837).

Break with Lutheran orthodoxy and pietism

In his letter to Busck Grundtvig referred to Kingo's Easter hymn *Som den gyldne sol frembryder* and he probably had this hymn in mind when he wrote his new Easter-hymn.¹⁵⁸ Grundtvig was very fond of the old seventeenth century hymn book of Thomas Kingo (1643-1703), which was still used in his days in the Danish countryside villages Thyregod and Udby. He was violently opposed to the replacement of it by the hymn book of 1798, which in his eyes was a product of Rationalistic theology.¹⁵⁹ But there were some striking differences between Kingo's vision on Easter and Grundtvig's hymn. According to Thodberg this hymn completed Grundtvig's break with Kingo's theology, which had already begun in the 1820's.¹⁶⁰ In Kingo's Easter hymn the joy of Easter still has a dark side but in Grundtvig's hymn Easter has overcome all human darkness.¹⁶¹ Here we can see how Grundtvig has broken with Lutheran Orthodoxy and Pietism and how his theology has developed in a different direction. In his conception of the Easter-mystery Grundtvig refused to separate cross from resurrection. The triumph over death is already inaugurated in Christ's death on the cross. The events of

¹⁵² See the Grundtvig Bibliography in: Chr. Thodberg, A.P. Thyssen, *N.F.S. Grundtvig. Tradition and Renewal*, pp. 412-416.

¹⁵³ A. Malling, *Dansk Salme Historie* (Bind V), København 1964, pp. 17f.

¹⁵⁴ *Den Danske Salmebog*, 2002, nr. 227.

¹⁵⁵ *Den Danske Salmebog*, 2002, nr. 758.

¹⁵⁶ J. Kjærgaard, *Salme Håndbog II*, p. 256.

¹⁵⁷ Malling, *Dansk Salme Historie* (Bind V), p. 20.

¹⁵⁸ Malling, *Dansk Salme Historie* (Bind V), p. 18.

¹⁵⁹ A.M. Allchin, *N.F.S. Grundtvig. An Introduction to his Life and Work*, Aarhus 1997, p. 17.

¹⁶⁰ Chr. Thodberg, 'Grundtvig the Hymnwriter' in: Thodberg, Thyssen, *N.F.S. Grundtvig, Tradition and Renewal*, p. 173.

¹⁶¹ Malling, *Dansk Salme Historie* (Bind V), p. 18.

Good Friday may never overshadow the feast of Easter-Sunday. For Grundtvig the emphasis on the death and the Passion of Christ has often resulted in the neglect of the resurrection and ascension. Grundtvig thought of those events not mere as something of the past but as something that is happening again and again in front of our eyes.¹⁶² In his view hymns should express the belief that we have already been transferred from death to life. Grundtvig rejected the old hymns that, in his view, could not express the clear truths about people's natural relationship to God.¹⁶³ The Christian congregation has already obtained the power of the resurrected and ascended Lord. The hymns should express this conviction and should strengthen the congregation in this belief. Likewise Like Chr. Thodberg's words:

“He [Grundtvig] thus moved slowly away from the theology of Kingo's hymns, which deal in particular with what the Christian is freed and saved *from*. The hymns Grundtvig wanted would express positively what man is saved *for*.”¹⁶⁴

Grundtvig's liturgical-sacramental understanding of Easter

Grundtvig's view on hymns has strongly been influenced by his unparalleled discovery in 1825. The hymns should express Christ's living presence in the congregation through the living word spoken in the sacraments of baptism and eucharist. In his hymns we can find therefore many allusions towards the sacraments. In the first chapter of this thesis we have already seen that Grundtvig's theology is thoroughly sacramental. His hymns are deeply rooted in the conviction that the congregation really meets the living Christ during Sunday service. Especially his Easter-hymns articulate this belief. Jakob Balling has demonstrated that *Tag det sorte kors fra graven!* is a remarkable example of this way of expressing the Easter-mystery. The songs of praise on Sunday morning are in its essence the repetition of Christ's resurrection on Easter morning.¹⁶⁵

In stanza five is a direct allusion to the living word: every word of the Lord is *liv og aand* ('life and spirit') and every need is satisfied (*Bod vi fik for alle savn*). In my opinion this combination of words could refer to the eucharist, where in Grundtvig's theology the word of the Lord is really heard and our broken existence is reunited with God. According to Fibiger the words *liv og aand* refer to the praise singing Christian congregation. The resurrection of the Lord becomes synonymous with the Christian service on Sunday morning. The whole service on Sunday morning is sacramental in this respect. Hymns have the power to change our world. This is the power of the living word; the power of the resurrected Lord.¹⁶⁶

The cultic mythical articulation of Christianity

Tag det sorte kors fra graven! is a good illustration of Grundtvig's cultic mythical understanding of Christianity. What has happened in the past through the resurrection of Christ is a vivid reality to the congregation here and now. Through the worshipping life of the Church the gap between past and present is bridged and the living tradition of faith is carried on.¹⁶⁷ According to Balling the hymn *Tag det sorte kors fra graven* communicates the ancient and medieval view of divine service as the present in which all the events of the past are gathered:

¹⁶² Allchin, *N.F.S. Grundtvig*, pp. 247f.

¹⁶³ Thodberg, 'Grundtvig the Hymnwriter', pp. 173f.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 170.

¹⁶⁵ cf. J. Balling, 'Creative Recycling', pp. 27-35.

¹⁶⁶ E. Fibiger, 'Jesus Kristus – Guds Ord', in: Chr. Thodberg (red), *For sammenhængens skyld. Ord og motiver i Grundtvigs salmer og prædikener*, Århus 1977, p. 20.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 242f.

“The hymn’s action takes place now, in a literal and immediate sense. Here and now an Easter congregation is singing.”.¹⁶⁸

The here and now of the hymn is clearly visible in the last three lines of stanza five: all the deceased in Christ should stand up in His name, together with the golden dawn. Christ’s resurrection is not something that happened in the past but this mystery of Easter happens again and again in our daily existence like the sunrise every morning.

Linguistic aspects: images out of nature and Danish cultural life

The hymn opens with the exhortation to take the black cross from the grave and to plant a lily where it stood. Hereby Grundtvig invites the congregation to exchange grief for joy and to draw the consequence of the paschal message.¹⁶⁹ In 1817 Grundtvig has written one of his most successful lyrical pieces, *Paaksen-Lilien* (‘The Easter-Lily’). In this poem we can sense how Grundtvig considered himself to be a living symbol of the modern renewal of Christianity.¹⁷⁰ Easter does not only mean the renewal of our individual existence but it involves the emancipation of Danish cultural life as well. Images like the lily and the phoenix express this belief.

For a right understanding of the third and fourth line we have to keep in mind the Danish countryside-churches. The parish churches are usually surrounded by a graveyard. The churchgoers have to pass the graveyard before entering the church and after leaving the church they confront the same graveyard again. Grundtvig says: every time we pass the graveyard and with every footstep we make, flowers shall sprout at our feet. Grundtvig brings the time of the gospel situation immediately to the graveyard we know by our own experience. The graveyard we pass before entering the church is the graveyard of our died relatives and friends and also our final destination. With the help of the allusion *haven* (garden or churchyard) Grundtvig has opened not only the present world but also the past and the future.¹⁷¹

According to Hansen the wings of angels are a reference to Christ’s ascension. The wings of angels replace the broken wanderer’s staff, a symbol that our earthly journey has ended.¹⁷² In Grundtvig’s poetical universe angels refer to the reunion between heaven and earth.¹⁷³ In this way the earthly graveyard is given a divine destination; it becomes the place where the renewal is happening.

Stanza seven is a beautiful example of Grundtvig’s use of images from nature. The mystery of Easter is like spring when nature awakes from winter-sleep (line two). Grundtvig uses the images of roses and larks. The lark also plays a role in Grundtvig’s Easter-sermon. The voice of the lark is a miracle, a miracle that sings of the Easter mystery.¹⁷⁴ Nature expresses the restoration of the earth. Easter is pictured as cosmic spring, the resurrection of nature. According to Brouwer we can trace in Grundtvig’s understanding of Good Friday and Easter old Nordic cultural elements, like the heroic painting of Christ (the mighty conqueror of death) and the cultic jubilation for the renewal of nature.¹⁷⁵ Both elements are clearly visible in *Tag det sorte kors fra graven!*. In his sermon of 1825 Grundtvig bursts out into an exclamation of joy for with the kingdom of Christ darkness is almost wholly swallowed up in

¹⁶⁸ J. Balling, ‘Creative Recycling’, p. 27.

¹⁶⁹ Balling, ‘Creative Recycling’, p. 27.

¹⁷⁰ F. Lundgreen-Nielsen, *Det handlende ord: N.F.S. Grundtvigs digtning, litteraturkritik og poetik 1789-1819*, København 1980, p. 940 (English summary).

¹⁷¹ Balling, ‘Creative Recycling’, p. 28.

¹⁷² U. Hansen, *Grundtvigs salmedigtning. Dens Historie og indhold*, Bind I (1810-1837), Odense 1937, p. 160.

¹⁷³ Allchin, p. 297.

¹⁷⁴ Ibidem, p. 246.

¹⁷⁵ Brouwer, *Vernieuwing in drieklank*, p. 522.

light, such as in the Nordic midsummer.¹⁷⁶ This cultic joy for the renewal of nature is sensible in the last stanza.

The use of Norse cultural symbols

The palm-bird or phoenix is a distinguished motive in Grundtvig's literature and has a lot of different dimensions. The symbol of the phoenix is very old and is already used in the early Church. J.H. Schjørring has pointed out that Grundtvig could use it as a poetical metaphor and as a symbol for basic Christian confessional truths as well.¹⁷⁷ In his early works it could stand for the course of Danish history, which renewed itself dynamically. After 1824 (remind Grundtvig's unparalleled discovery) it also got a Christological connotation. In Grundtvig's poem *Nyaars-Morgen*, 1824 ('New Years-Morning') the phoenix symbolizes the renewing of creation through Christ's resurrection. After his work on the Exeter manuscript (Grundtvig made a translation of the phoenix-poem, see page 29) a new dimension was added to the phoenix-symbol again. Now it could also refer to the cultural emancipation of the North. Thus the phoenix-symbol is a multidimensional symbol for Grundtvig. It can stand for the Danish royal family, the Nordic battle spirit, the resurrection of Christ and the Danish mother tongue. It is a symbol for the universal history of mankind, a symbol of hope for a bright future, for a situation like paradise that will be realized in the North.¹⁷⁸ In the hymn *Tag det sorte kors fra graven* it functions as symbol for the new created beautiful life in sharp contrast to the ashes of death.

Anti-rationalistic features: the stress on female and non-cognitive aspects of faith

In the third stanza Mary Magdalene appears on stage. We see her in front of our own eyes and perceive how she finds comfort. By doing so this stanza is quite intimate. We meet Maria Magdalene personally and we have a close look at her grieve. And in our present-day world the miracle is happening: out of her flood of tears the morning sun arises. Here Grundtvig mixes together the biblical narrative and images from nature.

The stones that Mary tries to move ('Sukked til at røre Stene') form an interesting parallel to Grundtvig's sermon of 1825. In the sermon the stones have symbolic connotation. Grundtvig refers to the age of the Lutheran fathers, where the *sola scriptura* has meant a high estimation of the reading and exegesis of the Bible. By this Christianity became something for the learned people:

“(.....) so that only those who were dead to the world and those who were lying on their death beds felt themselves at one with the message, while it fell heavy and dead, like great tombstones on the hearts of children, women, inexperienced youth and therefore the great majority.”¹⁷⁹

'Where can we find our Lord?' was an important question for Grundtvig. In his unparalleled discovery he learned the answer: in the living word.¹⁸⁰ This living word had been heard in the Church from the beginning, it was the word Mary had received from the Angel, the word that the apostles had received and had given to the following generations. It is:

¹⁷⁶ Allchin, *N.F.S. Grundtvig*, p. 245.

¹⁷⁷ J.H. Schjørring, 'Om Fugl Fønix-motivet. Til belysning af forholdet mellem poesi og kirkelære', in: C. Bach-Nielsen (eds.), *Ordet, kirken og kulturen*, Aarhus 1993, pp. 383f.

¹⁷⁸ J.H. Schjørring, 'Om Fugl Fønix-motivet', pp. 385-389.

¹⁷⁹ cf. Allchin's translation of Grundtvig's sermon, in: Allchin, *N.F.S. Grundtvig*, p. 248.

¹⁸⁰ Chr. Thodberg, 'The importance of Baptism', p. 133.

“(.....) a great mystery, what a child can see and understand.”¹⁸¹

Here Grundtvig speaks about:

“(.....) the child angel, who both Martin Luther and all childlike believers have always seen at the entrance to the grave and thus let themselves be guided and shown where the Lord lay.”¹⁸²

For Grundtvig a living congregation could not be created by a pen or founded on a book. In this perspective Grundtvig speaks about the “holy grave of *the Word*”. In the holy grave Mary finds the word, the living word. So the grave becomes a place where the living word has been found. There Mary’s tears have been “turned into smiling angels”.¹⁸³ The living words is contrast with the intellectualist wisdom out of books or biblical exegesis. The place to find it is the Jesus’ grave. The living word has been heard by Mary Magdalene; the child angel has preached it and children can comprehend it.

In winter we can hardly believe that our trees will become light-green again. In Grundtvig’s words: our hope is hidden. Faith is like a mystery. It is not comprehensible for intellectual readers but children and women are able to understand it intuitively. Children and women play an important role in Grundtvig’s theology. In a sermon, Grundtvig preached on the second Sunday in lent, he said that women and the female heart possessed the best qualities to accept the word of God. A woman gave birth to Jesus Christ and it was a women who saw the risen Lord first.¹⁸⁴ Therefore the Christian message is spread by female believers, they carry the Gospel through the use of the mother tongue and pass it on to their children. In stanza seven Grundtvig compares this with budding nature in spring. The earth resembles then the hearts of children who receive God’s word.

Theological content: the theology of recreation

In Grundtvig’s theological world Easter is the fulfillment of creation, it is recreation, earth and heaven are united again. In the second part of stanza four the story of creation (Genesis 3, 1) and the gospel narrative (John 21, 16) unite. The garden of paradise becomes the garden of Gethsemane and the garden of Gethsemane becomes the graveyard around the church. God’s question ‘Adam, Sinner, where are you?’ is finally answered with the appearance of Christ the Redeemer and the break caused by the Fall is finally restored. For that reason Grundtvig speaks in present time: ‘Burst open you graves!’. The Lord’s voice sounds in the graveyard and creates light in our shadowed existence. Life is transfigured and not corrupted anymore by sickness and death. The eagle (stanza 6) is the symbol for this new transfigured life in Christ. This is the same in his sermon:

“And the people who had grown old becomes young like an eagle.”¹⁸⁵

Conclusion: the interaction between theology and popular culture

How does the interaction take place between these two elements in this hymn? First of all by the help of allusions. They open different worlds and unite them into a new kind of understanding. The most notable example of this is the word *garden*. Now it is our own

¹⁸¹ Ibidem, p. 250.

¹⁸² Ibid. pp. 249f.

¹⁸³ Id., pp. 250f.

¹⁸⁴ H. Sørensen, ‘Troens grund’, in: Thodberg (red), *For sammenhængens skyld*, p. 120.

¹⁸⁵ cf. Allchin’s translation of Grundtvig’s sermon, in: Allchin, *N.F.S. Grundtvig*, p. 245.

graveyard, in the past the garden of paradise and Gethsemane, and from this moment on it represents our new existence in Christ. Past, present and future are united.

A second feature of these allusions is that they origin from daily existence and natural life: flowers, trees, birds, sculptures on our graves, the dawn, the smell of roses. The Easter mystery becomes tangible and all our sense-organs take part in it. Especially with his poetical language Grundtvig unites theology and popular culture. That language can transform our daily existence into a new kind of understanding. That language can unite our daily existence with the biblical narrative.

Beside this linguistic aspect in *Tag det sorte kors fra graven!* there is Grundtvig's cultic mythical and liturgical-sacramental understanding of Easter at work. Grundtvig paints the dramatic narrative in front of our eyes: we see Mary Magdalene here and now. The cultic rite on Sunday morning repeats Christ's resurrection. With our songs of praise the graves burst open. Our own graveyard becomes the scene where salvation is taking place.

This cultic mythical and liturgical-sacramental feature of Grundtvig's theology is clearly visible in the way in which the living word plays a role in this hymn. Through the Sunday-morning' service and the rites that are part of that service (such as the sacraments and the singing of hymns) the living word enters our world. Christ is to be found in the praise singing congregation. There is the living word at work, changing our deadly existence into a living community with Christ.

I al sin glans nu stråler solen, 1843, 1853

It is almost impossible to imagine Whitsun in Denmark without mentioning Grundtvig's hymn *I al sin glans nu stråler solen* ('In all its splendor now the sun shines').¹⁸⁶ The hymn he wrote for Whitsun is one of his most popular hymns. It is strongly connected with the experience of early summer in Denmark and full of images of the Danish countryside. We can see how Grundtvig's theology of the Holy Spirit supports his stress on the strong relationship between faith and culture. In Grundtvig's theological understanding the Spirit becomes the ultimate example for the relationship between the human and the divine.

According to Thodberg Grundtvig's hymn writing is closely connected with the course of his own life.¹⁸⁷ It first started with Christmas. Grundtvig suffered a major breakdown during Christmas 1810. His first Christmas-hymn, *Dejlig er den himmel blå*, 1810 ('Beautiful is the blue sky') reflects his own situation: Grundtvig returned to Christianity to find truth and comfort.¹⁸⁸ From Christmas it went to Easter (remember *Tag det sorte kors fra Graven!*), the beginnings of the 1830's and after 1837 the discovery of the Greek liturgy, where every Sunday is a living testimony of the resurrection.¹⁸⁹ And from Easter it went to Whitsun.¹⁹⁰ Thodberg considers *I al sin glans nu stråler solen* as the gathering of the whole world of imagery Grundtvig developed throughout the years. It began with the cold and storms in winter, continued with the budding of spring at Easter and ended with midsummer as the fulfillment of God's involvement with human history.¹⁹¹ In this respect *I al sin glans nu stråler solen* is the conclusion of Grundtvig's theological development. Therefore I will end my analysis with this hymn.

Historical background

In 1843 Grundtvig has written the first edition of this hymn. The first two lines differ from the later version of the hymn:

“Opblomstrer nu, Guds Kirkevange!
Gienlyder trindt af lærkesange!”
 (“Now flourishes the meadow of God's church
All around resounds the song of the lark”).¹⁹²

In 1853 Grundtvig has made some slight alterations and has expanded the hymn with a seventh stanza. The first two lines have been changed in:

“I al sin glans nu stråler solen
livslyset over nådestolen.”
 (“In all its splendor now the sun shines
giving light and life over the throne of Grace”).¹⁹³

This is the version that is used in the two last official editions of the Danish Hymnbook, *Den Danske Salmebog*, 1952 and 2002. In the following analysis I will use this version. Allchin

¹⁸⁶ Malling, *Dansk Salme Historie* (Bind II), p. 331.

¹⁸⁷ Thodberg, 'Grundtvig the Hymnwriter', p. 188.

¹⁸⁸ Thodberg, p. 162

¹⁸⁹ Ibidem, pp. 178f.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 188.

¹⁹¹ Id.

¹⁹² N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Sang-Værk til den Danske kirke*, Bind 3.2, nr. 266, pp. 514f., my own translation.

¹⁹³ Den Danske Salmebog, 2002, nr. 290.

has made this translation.¹⁹⁴ In 1859 Henrik Rung has written the melody and this is still used today.

1. In all its strength now shines the sun
The light of life over the throne of grace,
Now comes our Whitsun lily time,
Now more than angel voices foretell
A Golden harvest in Jesus' name.
2. In the short coolness of the summer night
The woodland nightingales sing loud,
So that everything which the Lord calls his own
May sleep sweetly and awake gently,
May dream sweetly of paradise,
And wake up to the Lord's praise.
3. It breathes in a heavenly way over the dust,
It flutters gently through the leaves,
It blows deliciously beneath the sky,
From paradise opened anew,
And at our foot there wells up with delight,
In the meadow, a brook of the river of life.
4. All this is caused by the Spirit who comes down
All this is worked by the Spirit who speaks
Not of himself, but to our encouragement
Out of love, with the voice of truth,
In the name of the Word, who here became flesh
And ascended into heaven in flesh and blood.
5. Awake all deep sounds
To praise the Saviour or mankind,
Gather together all languages
In the sacrificial cup of thanksgiving,
Sound out now over the Lord's table,
the full choir of God's Church.
6. In Jesus' name then tongues catch fire
Amongst heathens as well as Jews;
In the sacrificial cup of Jesus' name
All mother tongues are fused into one;
In Jesus' name there then bursts forth
The eternal hallelujah.

¹⁹⁴ Allchin, *N.F.S. Grundtvig*, pp. 282f.

7. Our God and Father without equal,
Then the rose blossoms in your kingdom,
As suns we rise and set
In the glory of your only begotten;
For you for the heart which we gave you
Gave us with him your heaven.

Theological contents: Grundtvig's understanding of the Holy Spirit

The interaction between the human and the divine, between Christ and culture is one of the most important features of Grundtvig's theology. His understanding of the Holy Spirit expresses the strong interaction between faith and culture. With the help of the theological notion of the Holy Spirit Grundtvig is able to make the following statements about the relationship between God and men. First of all the Spirit is universal and not against nature and culture. At all times and places throughout human history the Spirit has been at work. Throughout the course of human history we can experience the Spirit of God in particular cultural articulations. First among the Jewish people, later among the Greeks and last but not least among the people of the North.¹⁹⁵

Secondly Grundtvig associates the Spirit with the mother tongue. There is a strong connection between the motherly speech and the higher, spiritual world. This is what happened on the feast of Pentecost: people could hear that they were speaking in their own language about the great works of God.¹⁹⁶ As we have seen in the analysis of *Kommer sjæle, dyrekøbte* for Grundtvig the mother tongue was the ultimate language to express the Christian gospel. Thirdly the Spirit releases and causes to grow the inner capacities of all human beings. There is a hidden, unrealised capacity within every human being.¹⁹⁷ This conviction forms the foundation of his positive view of mankind and his educational ideas.

Thus the theology of the Holy Spirit is an example of the strong relationship between the human and the divine. This results in a stress on national language and identity. The culture of the Danes is the place where God's Spirit is sensible and at work. The Holy Spirit works in the native language, in the bright season of spring, in the elements of nature. It evokes the divine origin of mankind. This is precisely what is happening in Grundtvig's hymn for Whitsun. The Holy Spirit works in all the aspects of contemporary human life: nature, culture and the Christian service on Sunday-morning.

Use of language: Images from nature and the Danish countryside

Allchin has alized that in the first three stanza's the language is dominated by natural imagery.¹⁹⁸ The later adjustment Grundtvig made to the hymn in 1853 makes this only stronger by the beginning of the hymn with the image of the sun: "now the sun shines in all his splendor", see above. The Holy Spirit is not mentioned by name and the focus is on the sensible aspects of the spring season. The fourth stanza functions as a hinge: it declares that all the things we sense in nature are caused by the Holy Spirit.

The first three stanzas picture early summer in Denmark. It is a delightful time: the sun shines bright and clear, the climate is warm and mild, birds are singing. Grundtvig pictures a lovely scene. Although the images are derived from nature, there are some important theological notions at work. The sun becomes an image with a Christological connotation. The light of the sun promises a golden harvest in Jesus' name. In stanza one there is the notion of cosmic fulfillment. This eschatological understanding is closely connected with the idea of the Nordic

¹⁹⁵ Allchin, p. 270.

¹⁹⁶ Ibidem, p. 271.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 271

¹⁹⁸ Id., p. 283.

midsummer, which also plays a role in this hymn. I will discuss this under the next section of the analysis, ‘use of language: Nordic Cultural elements’. For now it is important to realize that Grundtvig’s way of using natural images is not a form of nature-realism. In its essence this hymn is not telling about the Danish summer but the summer of the Holy Spirit, not about the astronomical sun but the light over the throne of grace (stanza 1), not about the brook in the Danish countryside around Udby but the river of life (stanza 3).¹⁹⁹ Grundtvig wants to make the statement it is God’s Holy Spirit who works in the Danish *pinselilje-tid* (‘Whitsun lily time’).

Although Grundtvig settled in Copenhagen, he always remained a kind of country-man. He felt closely attached to the rural population; the ordinary and often uneducated people. About 1830 Denmark was an agricultural society, 80 percent of the population lived in the country.²⁰⁰ Grundtvig did not really integrate in the intellectual scene of Copenhagen but has always remained a critical factor. I think it was the close connection with the royal family why he had become an important factor in Danish cultural life. With his stress on the mother tongue and the understanding of the heart he dissociated himself from the academically trained pastors.²⁰¹ But on the subject of the Danish cultural identity he had more in common with the Romantic philosophers and poets of his days. Grundtvig believed that a nation’s spirit is most clearly preserved by the peasants. According to Rerup this belief is strongly influenced by the ideas of Romantic philosophy, especially by the younger Herder.²⁰² The rural population had to be proud of themselves. There is no reason for a low self-esteem. I think *I al sin glans nu stråler solen* is deeply rooted in this way of thinking. The rural people should realize that they had within their own lives and phenomenological world direct access to God’s universe. The mild breeze that is sensed in the Danish summer is the breeze that comes from Paradise (stanza 3).²⁰³

Use of language: the emancipation of the Nordic culture

In stanza 2 the short coolness of the summer night is mentioned. Allchin has pointed out that the short twilight of the northern summer had a special meaning for Grundtvig.²⁰⁴ The Nordic midsummer symbolizes light’s total victory over darkness. In one of his sermons for Easter Grundtvig associates it with the Kingdom of Christ, where the sun never sets. The twilight of midsummer is like the dawn of Easter.²⁰⁵ The light of midsummer becomes the symbol of the transfigured life. Like the Danish midsummer with the complete victory of light over darkness is Whitsun the fulfillment of God’s involvement with our world.

An interesting cultural element, although it is not specific old-Nordic, forms the word-pair *hvid og rød* (‘white and red’) in the last line of the fourth stanza. Allchin has translated it with *flesh and blood*: “And ascended into heaven in flesh and blood”.²⁰⁶ The words *white and red* are symbols for the human nature of Christ, they underline the incarnation and ascension of Christ in flesh and blood, the two themes of the last two lines. Kjærgaard refers in this respect to the Song of Solomon 5, 10: “My friend is white and ruddy”.²⁰⁷ But the colors white and red are also the colors of the Danish national flag! Christ’s ascension is associated with the

¹⁹⁹ Magnus Stevens, cited in: Malling, *Dansk Salme Historie* (Bind II), p. 331.

²⁰⁰ L. Rerup, ‘N.F.S. Grundtvig’s Position in Danish Nationalism’, in Alchin et al. (eds.), *Heritage and Prophecy*, p. 235

²⁰¹ Allchin, p. 272.

²⁰² Rerup, ‘N.F.S. Grundtvig’s Position in Danish Nationalism’, p. 240.

²⁰³ Allchin, p. 284.

²⁰⁴ Ibidem, pp. 245. 283f

²⁰⁵ cf. Grundtvig’s sermon for Easter Sunday, translated by Allchin, pp. 244f

²⁰⁶ Allchin, p. 283.

²⁰⁷ J. Kjærgaard, *Salme Håndbog II*, p. 299.

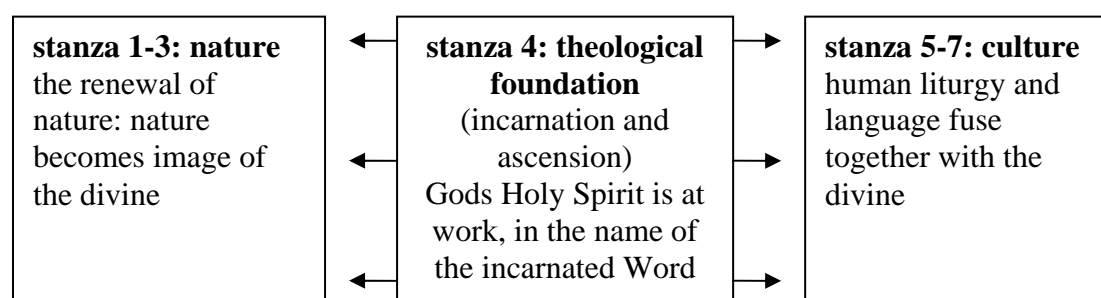
Danish banner.²⁰⁸ People did understand this allusion quite well. In the hymn-book for the Northern half of Slesvig (1889) the words had to be removed, probably because it caused troubles in this German environment.²⁰⁹

In urban circles around 1830 a patriotism of the Danish monarchy developed. The colors, the *Danebrog*, became symbols of this ideology and were often praised in poems and songs. There was a growing awareness of the Danish national language and identity.²¹⁰ Is Grundtvig's use of the national color a form of nationalism? According to Rerup is the nationalism of Grundtvig's days more a literal movement than a political movement (for example poets like Adam Oehlenschläger, Bernhard Severin Ingemann).²¹¹ It was a cultural movement without political implications. Grundtvig's stress on the Danish national identity and language perfectly suits to the sentiments of the nineteenth century. In this perspective Grundtvig is a man of his time. But it is unique for him how he combines this with his clerical background. Grundtvig places the importance of cultural identity in a theological or Christological framework. The whole nation, common history and common culture, urban population and peasants, everything is uplifted, revitalized by the Christian message.²¹²

This happens in the fifth and the sixth stanza of *I al sin glans nu stråler solen*: 'Awake all deep souls (.....) gather together all languages' and 'Then in Jesus' name then tongues catch fire, amongst heathens as well as Jews'.²¹³ The Gospel has a meaning for us right here and now. Therefore it transfigures our nature and our culture. In Grundtvig's way of thinking this is not motivated by nature-realism or nationalism, but by the universal meaning of Christianity.

The Liturgical-Sacramental focus

Above we have seen that the fourth stanza functions like a hinge: it is a theological declaration about Whitsun. It points out that the things we experience in nature are caused by the Holy Spirit. The fourth stanza throws a light on the first three stanzas but on the last three stanzas as well. The reason that nature, liturgy and human language are able to reflect the divine, is caused by the incarnation and ascension. Schematically it is possible to render this in the following way:



Nature does not only bear the image of the incarnated word, human liturgy and language as well. This happens in the last three stanzas. Just like the Word incarnated in flesh and blood and ascended to heaven (stanza 4), our whole existence is uplifted. The countryside is not only the scene where God is acting, God is also acting in liturgy.

²⁰⁸ Kjærgaard, p. 299.

²⁰⁹ Ibidem, p. 298.

²¹⁰ Rerup, p. 236.

²¹¹ Ibidem, p. 238.

²¹² Ibid., p. 242.

²¹³ Allchin, p. 283.

The sacrificial cup of thanksgiving (*takkesangens offerskål*, stanza 5) becomes the symbol of the gathering of all languages and people in Jesus' name.²¹⁴ All languages melt together and our whole existence is glorified. The liturgy is the place where the human and divine fuse. The incarnation of the Word is repeated in Eucharist and in the praise singing of the congregation. The language is full of liturgical images: the sacrificial cup of thanksgiving, the Lord's table (*Herrens bord*), the singing of the congregation (*jærlighedens fulde chor*). It all bursts out in the eternal hallelujah (stanza 6). Human language and earthly liturgy is uplifted into the divine, eternal chorus.

The seventh stanza forms the ultimate climax. Whitsun lily time becomes the time of roses: the time of the eschatological fulfilment.²¹⁵ Now on earth we experience early summer, a foretaste of summer, the ultimate fulfilment of our human existence. The theological foundation for Whitsun is Christ's incarnation and ascension, visualized by the rising of the sun "som sole vi går op og ned" ("like the sun we go up and down"). Like Christ ascended to heaven, our whole life is glorified. In Grundtvig's hymn nature and liturgy are the ultimate testimonials of this. A beautiful illustration of Grundtvig's understanding of the transfigured life is the German translation of the seventh stanza made by the *Grundtvig-Værkstedet*:

Dann, Gott und Vater ohnegleichen,
die Rose blüht in deinem Reiche;
wie Sonnen kreisen wir voll Freud
in deines Sohnes Herrlichkeit;
denn du gabst uns mit ihm zugleich
für unser Herz dein Himmelreich.²¹⁶

Conclusion: the interaction between theology and popular culture

The interaction between theology and popular culture in this hymn takes place by making elements from nature and liturgy into the bearers of the divine interaction between God and men. Grundtvig used images that were accessible for his fellow Danes, especially those who lived on the countryside and they formed the majority of the Danish population during the nineteenth century. The Whitsun lily, the nightingales in the woodland, the brook in the meadow, even the colors of the national banner, they all take part in the divine glorification of human life. This has a Christological reason: Christ's incarnation and ascension makes it possible for human people to do the same; to become a part of the divine choir of God's Church. The ultimate language to express this are the mother tongue, human nature and the native soil. Grundtvig has succeeded in his attempt to make Whitsun to an event in history that happens again and again in our won nature and life. I think this is one of the reasons why this hymn is still very popular in Danish Church and society.

²¹⁴ Allchin, pp. 284f.

²¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 285.

²¹⁶ *Salmer på dansk og tysk. Uddrag af Den Danske Salmebog met tilsvarende tyske vers. Redigeret af gruppen "Grundtvig-Værkstedet"*, København 1995, nr. 247.



Figure 6: Photograph of N.F.S. Grundtvig (source: N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Salmer og aandlige Sange* [Grundtvigs Sang-Vaerk], Kjøbenhavn 1881).

Chapter 4: Conclusions

In this chapter I want to draw final conclusions in accordance to the research question:

Which kind of dynamics is there between the theology and poetry in the hymns of N.F.S. Grundtvig on the one hand and the Danish popular culture in the nineteenth century on the other?

Besides I want to give an appreciation of Grundtvig's hymnal work. The question is if his way of using images and symbols is valuable for our time. I would like to answer this question with the help of Gordon W. Lathrop's article 'A contemporary Lutheran Approach to Worship and Culture: Sorting out the Critical Principles'.²¹⁷ In this article Lathrop proposes a method for integrating new cultural materials into the Christian worship. It is a method of both welcome and critique. I think the basic principles of this method are very useful in the appreciation of Grundtvig's method of integrating cultural elements in his hymns. Lathrop is a Lutheran theologian, too. Although they are separated by a couple of centuries, their ecclesiastical context is almost the same.

The dynamics between popular culture and theology in Grundtvig's hymns

In Grundtvig's hymns the words derived from culture function as allusions. The most beautiful example is the use of the word *garden* in the hymn *Tag des sorte kors fra graven!* This word is both able to open the biblical world and our own phenomenological world as well. In Grundtvig's hymn for Whitsun we experience the same: the breeze we sense in springtime also refers to the Holy Spirit. By using words as allusions Grundtvig makes our world to the scene where God is acting. In other words: Grundtvig's understanding of the world is cosmic or sacramental. The acts of the divine are repeated again and again in our own world. This becomes most visible in his understanding of the liturgy. The earthly liturgy is divine liturgy. We can hear the life-giving voice of God in the words that are spoken with eucharist and baptism. In Grundtvig's hymns there are therefore so many allusions to the liturgy. The liturgy is the ultimate example of God's acting in our existence.

Grundtvig is not afraid of using direct cultural symbols that have a pre-Christian or at least a pagan origin. For example the *lur*, the trumpet as an instrument of the Vikings. Christ is painted like a Nordic chief. The colors of the national banner are mentioned within the context of incarnation and ascension. In this way popular culture and theology melt together. This meant a lot for Grundtvig. The best way to articulate Christianity was to use the national language and images from the motherly speech. Honestly we have to admit that in this respect Grundtvig was a man of the nineteenth century. We have to place him within the overall emancipation of the identity of the Danes that took place in that time. He fits in with the developments in the so-called golden age of nineteenth century Denmark. He tried to emancipate the Danish culture; to be a Dane should be a matter of pride! The Danes should be aware of their roots. The national identity had to be expressed in arts and poetry. Grundtvig does not shun to express this strong awareness of being a Dane in his hymns. In this respect Christianity becomes Nordic Christianity.

Most fascinating is Grundtvig's use of mythology. The eschatological notions of Christianity are expressed in the language of the Nordic Midsummer. The way of approaching life is

²¹⁷ G.W. Lahtrop, 'A contemporary Lutheran Approach to Worship and Culture: Sorting out the Critical Principles', in: S. Antia Stauffer (ed.), *Worship and Culture in Dialogue. Reports of International Consultations* [LWF Studies], Geneva 1994, pp. 137-151.

cultic-mythological. Life is the struggle between the forces of good and evil. The outcome of the struggle is positive. Christ has conquered the powers of death. We already share in Christ's victory. Human existence is transfigured. God and the Devil, the forces of good and evil are real entities and humans do take part in this mythological scenery. In this way Grundtvig's theology is anti-Rationalistic and strongly influenced by the early Church. His involvement in Nordic mythology and Anglo-Saxon literature resulted in a form of language that is highly antithetical.

Last but not least Grundtvig has developed a distinctive theology. Although he has not written a dogmatic treatise, we can extend his vision about the relationship between God and mankind out of his different writings and poetry. I consider the last hymn of my analysis, *I al sin glans nu stråler solen*, as the best example of his understanding of Christianity. The major theological themes in this hymn are creation and recreation. With the incarnation God has transfigured our whole earthly existence. All the elements, nature, mankind and liturgy have to play a role in this cosmic renewal. The motive of creation and recreation is one of the most important features of Grundtvig's theology. It is a fundamental aspect in all of the four hymns I have analyzed. The dynamics between popular culture and theology is always placed in this specific theological framework of creation and recreation.

According to these observations I would like to answer the research question as following:

The dynamics between popular culture and theology in Grundtvig's hymns occur by taking words and symbols derived from the Danish cultural history and identity, the Nordic mythology and the natural environment of the Danes and placing them in the theological framework of creation and recreation, incarnation and ascension.

An appreciation of Grundtvig's hymnal work

Is Grundtvig's method of integrating cultural elements in his liturgical theology valuable for our own time? I think it is but some critique is necessary, too. The power of Grundtvig's hymns is that they can express Christian notions in a language that is accessible for his fellow-Danes. Today still they inspire a lot of believers in the Danish Church and even for Dutch ears they evoke feelings of recognition.

We always need local metaphors to express our Christian faith. If we do not do that, we take the risk of placing ourselves out of the dominant culture. People often experience a gap between culture and Christianity. They feel that the message of the gospel is not relevant anymore for modern hearers. Therefore we need to take Grundtvig's attempt to incorporate cultural elements in his hymns seriously.

We are urged to think about the features of our own culture. What are the icons and symbols of our society? What is the culture of our youth trying to express? How do people find an identity? What are the current identity markers? I think of the *global civilization*, people are making networks everywhere. Now we can ask ourselves: do these things play a role in our hymns? The modern hymns in the current Dutch hymn-book bear the marks of the 1970's. But they do not reflect the problems and the symbols of the post-modern society.²¹⁸

The new hymns originated from the Dutch Protestant ecumenical-orientated circles are totally focused on liturgy and theology.²¹⁹ They are undoubtedly of a high poetic standard but the hymns contain very few allusions towards our present-day culture. On the other hand the

²¹⁸ I have to admit that the *Liedboek voor de Kerken* (1973) was a serious attempt to reflect the cultural society of its time. The result deserves respect: the language was very fresh and modern and newly written hymns were able to articulate the modern *Lebensgefühl*. But I think that we need *new* hymns, because the features and needs of our society are changed compared to the past.

²¹⁹ Here I have in mind the hymn-book *Tussentijds*, published in 2005. *Tussentijds* is a compilation of hymns that were written in the decennia after the publication of the *Liedboek voor de Kerken*.

hymns in the contemporary charismatic movement (the *evangelicals*) are in a way very Pietistic in their total focus on the relationship of the individual believer with Christ.²²⁰ They omit the diversity of the liturgical practice of the Church: most of those hymns are so-called worship-songs. Compared to Grundtvig's hymns the Dutch hymns are not rich embedded with cultural allusions.

Grundtvig's hymns make us aware of the strong relation between faith and culture. But there is always the need for criticism. Christianity evokes criticism as well. Critique of the dominant culture. We can ask the question if there is space for this kind of criticism in Grundtvig's hymns. I think that Grundtvig sometimes has gone too far in his cultural emancipation (remember the allusion to the banner in *I al sin glans nu stråler solen*). Some critical distance is necessary. The method of juxtaposition which Lathrop proposes is very helpful therefore. According to Lathrop we have the center and the method. The center is the Christian assembly that gathers around the sacraments of baptism and eucharist and the Scriptures. In this respect there is a resemblance between Grundtvig and Lathrop in their focus on the sacraments. The sacraments are the reliable center in which new cultural elements can be welcomed.²²¹ But what is brought in must always be capable of serving the gathering of the Christian assembly around Word and sacraments.²²²

I think the cultural elements that Grundtvig incorporates serve the things he held for essential in the Christian gospel. The renewal of heaven and earth, the life-giving words in the sacraments, they are the essential elements in Grundtvig's theology. Grundtvig's poetical language tries to articulate the meaning of Word and sacraments with the help of the motherly speech and cultural images. They all serve gospel and liturgy: the central life-giving elements in Grundtvig's theology. But the critical dimension of Word and sacraments opposite to the (dominant) culture is subordinated. We need this critical dimension. The Word and the sacraments also transcend our culture. If Nationalism is going too far Word and sacraments should criticise it. We can discover God in our phenomenal world but God is not the same as our world. If we become slaves of our cultural context Word and sacraments correct us. Lathrop's method of juxtaposition helps us to keep in touch with both aspects of the gospel: incarnation and the critical distance. So it is a valuable contribution to our encounter with Grundtvig's hymnal legacy.

²²⁰ For the Dutch situation I think here about the songs of the *Opwekkingsbundel*. This is in fact a collection of hymn-books, every year some new hymns are added to the collection.

²²¹ Lathrop, pp. 141f.

²²² Lathrop, p. 147.

Epilogue

It might not be fair to evaluate Grundtvig's contribution to the hymnal legacy in an academic context. As a hymn-writer we meet Grundtvig as a poet and poets in a way need not obey the academic rules. Moreover hymns should be sung! Why do we talk about hymns? They always function within the liturgical context and in this context we should consider them. That is why the framework for this thesis was the liturgical theology of Grundtvig's. The best way to take note of Grundtvig's hymns is to sing them within the context of the Danish Lutheran liturgy. That is at least my experience. Last year I attended some services in the Cathedral in Aarhus. There his hymns deeply touched me. To say it in the Grundtvigian way: faith is a matter of the hearth and in this respect non-cognitive. Together with the sacraments Grundtvig's hymns come to life. In that way they reveal their true meaning.

But we cannot only comprehend Grundtvig's world at a spiritual level. I consider Grundtvig's contribution to the theological debate about the relationship between theology and culture as very important. Grundtvig has shown us that we need not be afraid of our own cultural roots. These roots should play a role in our articulation of Christianity. It is the task for theologians and poets to express Christianity in words and symbols that are attainable for modern believers. Our language must have the quality to open the world of Scriptures and sacraments, as our own natural world, too.

When I studied Grundtvig I often thought about my own cultural background and in what way this could play a role in my theological thinking. To ask this question is exciting and challenging. Christianity pulls us towards Scripture and liturgy, an inward movement, but at the same time it challenges us to explore our natural world. It forces us to go out of the church into the world! Grundtvig's hymns are based on this belief, the trust that God's living voice is present among us and that the life giving word of God is able to change our deadly voices into an eternal song of praise. In my own native language I will illustrate this with one of Grundtvig's hymns (translated by Muus Jakobse, 1909-1972):

*Gij geeft ons in hart en in mond
Uzelf, als de stem aan de vogels.
Gij sloot door uw woord een verbond
en in onze liederen woont Gij.
Zomin als uw woord
vergaat, zal het koor
van die uw lof zingen teloorgaan.*²²³

²²³ M. Jakobse, in: *Liedboek voor de Kerken*, 's-Gravenhage 1973, nr. 458, stanza 3. Translations of Grundtvig's hymn 'Vor Herre, til dig må jeg ty' (*Den Danske Salmebog*, 2002, nr 652, stanza 3: Du er i det hellig ord, / du gav os i hjerter og munde, / du blandt vore lovsange bor / som røsten blandt fugle i lunde; / så lidt som dit ord, / så lidt som dit kor, / dit syngende folk, gå til grunde.)

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Appendix

A short biography of N.F.S. Grundtvig

The purpose of this biography is not to give a complete overview of his life. Therefore not all the works Grundtvig published during his lifetime are mentioned.²²⁴

- 1783 September 8th: Birth of Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig at Udby Vicarage (a village in south Sjaelland). His father was a learned, conservative Lutheran priest. His mother descended from a clerical family. By way of the family's housemaid Malene Grundtvig got acquainted with folk culture and popular beliefs.²²⁵
- 1792 Education by the pastor of Thyregod (Jutland).
- 1798 Education at Aarhus Cathedral Grammar School. This school becomes for Grundtvig the example of the wrong way of education (that is learning by the dead letter and not by the spirit).
- 1800 In September Grundtvig passes university entrance examination at Aarhus and leaves for Copenhagen to study theology.
- 1801 Grundtvig breaks with Orthodox, Pietistic Christianity and adopts Rationalism.
- 1803 First class degree in theology.
- 1805-1808 From March 1805 until April 1808 Grundtvig works as a tutor at the manor of Egeløkke. He soon Falls in love with the young lady of the manor. This experience awakens in Grundtvig the interest in the philosophy of Romanticism and Norse mythology and brings him to reject Rationalism.
- 1808 Grundtvig returns to Copenhagen in April and publishes the first edition of *Nordens Mytologi* in May. Grundtvig aspires a career as a writer. His father requests him to return to Udby to help him as a curate, but Grundtvig refuses.
- 1810 Grundtvig preaches and publishes his examination sermon, entitled: "Why has the Word of the Lord Disappeared from His house?". He accuses the clergy of his time of lack of Christianity.²²⁶ Grundtvig considers himself as a reformer of the Danish Church. In December Grundtvig suffers from his first depression.²²⁷ Shortly before Christmas he has to travel home to Udby. In Udby he slowly recovers from this deep crisis and his father asks him again to become his curate.
- 1811 Although in January Grundtvig is reprimanded for his examination sermon by the University, he passes his final theological exams and is ordained and inducted in May. In September Grundtvig announces his engagement to Lise Blicher Andersen (1787-1851). Grundtvig works at Udby with great zeal. After the crisis he returns to the Orthodox, Pietistic Christianity of his childhood.
- 1812 Grundtvig publishes a brief survey of the history of the world: *Kort Begreb af Verdens Krønike i Sammenhæng*. In this he unfolds his vision about history as controlled by God's providence. It gives rise to many controversies.

²²⁴ This biography is a summary of the brief biography written by A. P. Thyssen and Chr. Thodberg in: Thyssen, Thodberg, *Tradition and Renewal*, pp. 9-16.

²²⁵ A.M. Allchin, *N.F.S. Grundtvig. An Introduction to his Life and Work, with an Afterword by Nicholas Lossky*, Aarhus 1997, p. 27.

²²⁶ Fact Sheet, p. 2.

²²⁷ There has been a lot of speculation about the nature of Grundtvig's mental crisis, cf. Allchin pp. 94f and Brouwer, p. 513. Often it is described as a kind of manic depression; consider the fact that Grundtvig thought of himself as a church-reformer and prophet, combined with deep spiritual crisis about his identity.

- 1813 Grundtvig's father dies in January and Grundtvig has to leave the vicarage. Grundtvig moves back to Copenhagen, where he steadily grows more isolated. His behaviour towards the respected clergy is rather provocative.
- 1815 Grundtvig decides to give up ministry and to live as a freelance writer.
- 1818 Grundtvig is offered financial support by king Frederik VI as appreciation of his translations of Old Norse myths and sagas.²²⁸ In August Grundtvig and Lise Blicher are married. In the following years Grundtvig publishes major translations of Saxo (I-III) and Snorri (I-III), Beowulf and the periodical *Danevirke*, which contains poems as 'The Easter Lily' and essays on philosophical and historical subjects. The foundations are laid of major concepts of Grundtvig's later work, such as the Danish identity, the spirit of the people, the living word, etc.
- 1821 Appointed as parish priest of Præsto and Skibbinge.
- 1822 In the autumn of 1822 Grundtvig acquires the post of curate in the *Vor Frelses Kirke* ('Church of Our Saviour') in Copenhagen. He moves to Copenhagen for good. Birth of his first son, Johan.
- 1824 The years 1824 and 1825 mark the final break-through of Grundtvig's theological thinking.²²⁹ Grundtvig publishes his best-known poems *Nyaars-Morgen* ('New Year's Morning'), *Det Levendes Land* ('The Land of the Living') and the hymn *Velkommen igien, Guds Engle Smaa* ('Welcome Again, God's beautiful angels'). Birth of his second son, Sven.
- 1825 Dispute with professor H.N. Clausen (see chapter 2, page 10). Grundtvig publishes his *Kirkens Gienmæle*. Clausen brings an action for slander against Grundtvig.
- 1826 Grundtvig is placed under lifelong censorship (in practice the censorship went on till 1837). Grundtvig resigns his priestly post.
- 1827 Birth of daughter Meta.
- 1829-1831 Three study tours to England made possible by a grant from the king for the purpose of studying medieval English manuscripts (see chapter 3, page 32).
- 1832 *Nordens Mytologi eller Sindbilled-Sprog* ('Norse Mythology or Symbol-Language'). Grundtvig is given permission to preach at evensong services in Frederiks Kirken in Copenhagen. He works there as an unpaid preacher until 1839.
- 1833 First part of *Haandbog i Verdens-History* ('Handbook on World History').
- 1836 Grundtvig publishes his first educational writing: *Det danske Fiir-Kløver eller Danskheden partisk betragtet* ('The Danish Four-Leaf Clover or A Subjective View of Danish Culture'). Teaching has to be based on the living spoken words in the native language instead on books. Grundtvig advocates the free, living and natural education of the common people.
- 1837 Grundtvig is freed from censorship and thus able to give lectures on the history of the modern age. The lectures are a huge success. In 1837 Grundtvig starts with his structural renewal of the Danish hymnbook. The first volume of the *Sangværk til Den Danske Kirke* is published (see chapter 3, page 19).
- 1839 On June 9th Grundtvig is appointed rector of *Vartov* Hospital Church. *Vartov* is an institution for elderly women in Copenhagen. The appointment means that Grundtvig has a secure financial base for the rest of his life. *Vartov* becomes the breeding place for Grundtvig's renewal of the Church. A lot of people travel to *Vartov* to hear Grundtvig preach, even members of the royal family

²²⁸ Fact Sheet, 2

²²⁹ Brouwer, p. 513.

are among his audience.²³⁰ During his period in *Vartov* Grundtvig's ideas become widespread.

1844 Grundtvig suffers from manic depression again.



Figure 7: Udby Vicarage (source: P. Hansen, F. A. Larsen, *Factstheet Denmark / N.F.S. Grundtvig*, p. 1).

- 1848 Grundtvig becomes a member of Parliament.
- 1851 Death of Grundtvig's wife Lise Blicher. He remarries in October with the 38 year old widow Marie Toft (1813-1854).
- 1853 Third manic depressive attack.
- 1854 Death of Marie Toft, after bearing a son, Frederik Lange.
- 1858 Grundtvig marries for a third time, to the 32-year-old widow Asta Reedtz (1826-1890).
- 1860 Birth of daughter Asta Marie Elisabeth. She is named after Grundtvig's three wives.
- 1861 Grundtvig celebrates his 50th anniversary of his entering the church and is granted the title of bishop by the king.
- 1867 Grundtvig suffers a new, extremely severe attack of manic depression at Easter. He has to give up his work as a priest for over six month to recover from his illness. To everyone's surprise Grundtvig recovers and he experiences some productive years.
- 1872 September 1st Grundtvig celebrates his last service. The following day he dies, almost 89 years old. The great public attendance at the funeral service demonstrates that Grundtvig is highly appreciated by every class of society.²³¹

²³⁰ Allchin, *N.F.S. Grundtvig. An Introduction to his Life and Work*, p. 90.

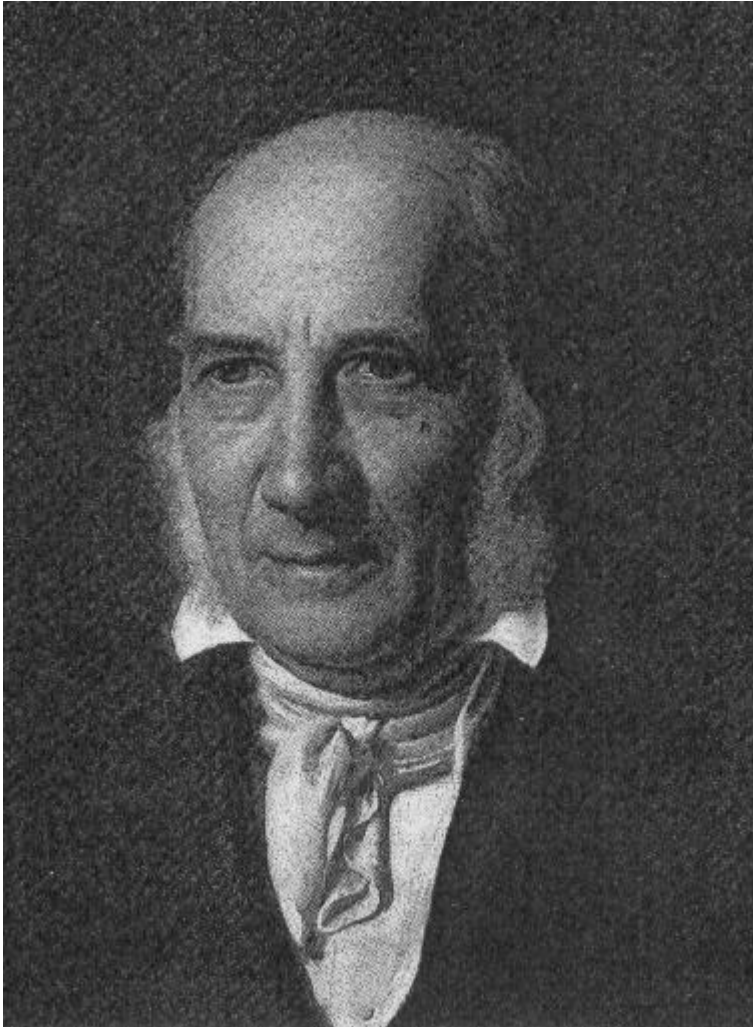


Figure 8: Portrait of Grundtvig made by C. Hansen (1847-1848). (source: P. Hansen, F. A. Larsen, *Factstheet Denmark / N.F.S. Grundtvig*, p. 4).

²³¹ Chr. Thodberg, 'Grundtvig, Nikolaj Frederik Severin (1783-1872)', in G. Krause, G. Müller (Hrsg.), *Theologische Realencyclopädie* Bd. XIV, Berlin 1981, p. 287.

Original Danish texts of the analyzed hymns

Reis op dit Hoved, al Christenhed! ²³²

1. Reis op dit Hoved, al Christenhed!
Opløft dit Øie, slaae ei det ned!
I Himlen du har hjemme;
Der er dit Hjerte, der din Skat
Derfra Han kommer med Æren brat
Hvem du kan aldrig glemme!

2. Reis op dit hoved og stir i Sky!
Der skinner saa blidt dit Nyaars-Ny!
Veltændt ved Jule-Tide!
Siig, hvad dig lyster i Aarets Løb
Det Alt du fanger for Røver-Kiøb,
For Hans paa høire Side!

3. Reis op dit Hoved! af Hjertet siig
Til Korsets Høvding: o tænk paa mig,
Nu er Du i dit Rige!
Da Skiæl der falder fra Øie dit,
Du mægter, som du har ønsket tit
I Paradis at kige!

4. Der seer i Haven du Livets Træ,
Og Himlens Fugle i Lun og Læ
Du hører liflig sjunge,
Om Herre-Færden i høien Sky,
Om Jord og Himmel de splinterny,
Om Christne evig unge!

5. Ei meer du gruer for Domme-Dag,
Du veed, din Dømmer har ført din Sag,
Og fra sig Selv den vundet;
Desmeer du længes hvert Morgen-Gry,
Til Herren dages paa Rosen-Sky,
Naar Nat er heel udrundet!

6. Og naar da under hver Himmel-Egn
Du seer ding Konges det visse Tegn,
Ja, Tegn i Soel og Maane,
Da funkler frydelig Øie dit,
Da reiser Hoved du kækt og frit,
Mens Stjerner døe og daane!

²³² N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Sang-Værk til Den Danske Kirke* I. Bind, København 1944, pp. 672-674.

7. Thi er om Vaaren os Sommer nær,
Naar Bøg, som Figen of alle Træ'r
De knoppes og udspringe,
Den Slægt, som lever, naar Tegnet skeer,
Forgaaer slet ikke, før Ham den seer,
Som Lynet har til Vinge!

8. Men skiøndt du længes, o Christenhed!
Saa glem dog ikke, at godt du veed,
Hvad Herren tøver efter,
Og beed Ham aldrig, før Timen kom,
Til Jordan Gru og al Verdens Dom
At røre Himlens kræfter!

9. Du veed, du tjener en Herre mild
Som ikkun nødig med Himlens Ild
Hjemsøger Jordens Lyder!
Som Vennen dristig for Sodom bad,
Saa beed og du for den store Stad,
Til Selv Han Staven breeder!

10. Ja, beed for Babel, til gradnt du seer,
At Bøn og Sukke ei baade meer
Mod Undergangens Bølge!
Da raaber Herren: Jeg kommer snart,
Og Bruden svarer: med Lynets Fart
I Sky jeg Dig skal følge!

11. Da gjalder Luren for sidste Gang,
Da luer Bavnen i Blomster-Vang,
Da styrter Dødens Throne,
Da luttres herlig den gamle Jord,
I Skiærs-Ild Luer paa Herrens Ord,
Da straal'er Livets Krone!

Kommer Sjæle, dyrekøbte²³³

1. Kommer Sjæle, dyrekøbte,
Og til meer end Engle døbte,
Sydskende til Davids Søn
Lad os med Guds Engle-Skare
Og med Ham til Himmels fare,
See den Frommes store Løn

²³³ N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Sang-værk til den danske kirke* Bind 1.2, København 1982, pp.474f.

2. Hører I de Toner Søde,
Stigende som Liv af Døde,
Himmel-Hærens Velkomst-Sang
Til den ædle Straale-Skytte,
Som med Seier, Priss og Bytte,
Kom fra Hel og Blomster-Vang!

3. Trindt det lyder Ham i Møde:
Vær velkommen fra de Døde,
Alle Djævles Skræk og Gru!
Over dem gaae Flamme-Bølger,
Folket igenløst Dig følger,
Før fortabt, men fundet nu!

4. Kæmper, I, som Borgen værne,
Borgen over Sky og Stjerne,
Aabner brat den høie Port!
Sejerrig fra Dybet kommer
Verdens Skaber²³⁴, Verdens Dommer,
Navnet Hans er evig stort!

5. Møder Ham med gyldne Kroner,
Ham og mange Millioner,
Dyrekøbte med Hands Blod,
Stygende fra Jammer-Dale
Nu med Ham til Fryde-Sale!
Takker Ham, for Han er god!

6. Mellen Engle Mænd nu tælles,
Har med Herren Alt tilfælles:
Aand og Støv og Liv og Blod,
Troen, Haabet, Kiærligheden,
Lysen, Glandsen, Glæden, Freden,
Livets Træe og Livets Flod!

7. Vælge kan igen og vrage
Jordens Slægter, alle Dage,
Vælge mellen Liv og Død,
Dagens Lys of Nattens Mørke,
Paradis og vilde Ørke,
Helled hedt og Himmel sød!

8. Ære være Frelser-Manden,
Med et Navn, som ingen Anden,
Løseren af Dødens Baand!
Lov og Tak og evig Ære
I Tre-Enigheden være
Fader, Søn og Hellig-Aand!

²³⁴ In other versions (*Den Danske Salmebog*, 1953 and 2002) 'Skaber' is replaced by 'Frelser' (Redeemer).

Tag det sorte Kors fra Graven!²³⁵

1. Tag det sorte Kors fra Graven!
Plant en Lilje, hvor det stod!
Ved hvert Skridt i Dødning-Haven
Blomster spire for vor Fod!
Engle-Vinger paa vor Grav
For den brudte Vandrings-Stav!
Palme-Fugl for Aske-Krukke!
Fryde-Sang for hule Sukke!
2. Solen sortned, da Han blegned,
Som os købde med sit Blod,
Graven skinnend, Mørket segned,
Da forklaret Han opstod;
Ton, vor Lovsang, høit i Sky,
Sødt i Paaske-Morgengry:
Jesus Christus er opstanden!
Evig lever Guddoms-Manden!
3. See Marie Magdalene!
Hænder nys hun vred i Gru,
Sukked til at røre Stene:
Hvor, ak, hvor er Herren nu?
See, af Øiets Taare-Flod
Morgen-Solen mildt opstod!
I den Grav, hvor Han har hvilet,
Hun har fundet Engle-Smilet!
4. Brister, alle Helgen-Grave!
Herrens Røst, i Dæmring sval,
Lyder i de Dødes Have,
Skaber Lys i Skygge-Dal!
Herren kalder, men ei nu:
Synder! Adam! Hover er du?
Sødt det toner, Engle tie,
“Her er Frelseren, Marie!”
5. Ja, Han er her, Guddoms-Manden,
Sprængde er nu Dødens Baand!
Han er visselig opstanden,
Hvert Hans Ord er Liv og Aand!
Bod vi fik for alle Savn;
Staaer nu op i Jesu Navn,
Alle Herrens Dvale-Døde,
Med den gyldne Morgenrøde!²³⁶

²³⁵ N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Sang-Værk til Den Danske Kirke* I. Bind, København 1944, pp. 555f.

²³⁶ In *Den Danske Salmebog*, 2002, the last four phrases of this stanza are: Nu en forårsmorgen skøn, / rinder op for os i løn, / og, som påskesalmen klinger, / vokser sjælens fuglevinger (Now a beautiful spring morning, / arises for us as a reward, / and when Easter hymns are heard, / bird wings of the souls are growing) (my own translation).

6. Stander op og seer Guds Finger
I den klare Vidne-Krands!
Iler did paa Ørne-Vinger,
Hvor Han straaler i sin Glands!
Iler did i Herrens Fjed,
Hvor Han os beredte Sted,
Hvor sig aabner i det Høie
Himmlens Dyb for Støvets Øie!
7. Jord, som af din Vinter-Dvale
Vaagner i den milde Vaar!
Nu du aarlig skal afmale
Dine Barne-Hjertens Kaar,
I din Kjortel lysegrøn,
Virket, som vort Haab, i Løn,
Med din Duft, hvor Roser vrimle,
Med din Røst, hvor Lærker himle!

I al sin glans nu stråler solen ²³⁷

1. Opblomster nu, Guds Kirkevange!
Gienlyder trindt af Lærkesange!
Nu kom vor Pinselilje-Tid,
Nu har vi Sommer blank og blid,
Nu lover meer end Engerøst
I Jesu Navn en gylden Høst.
2. I sommer-Nattens korte Svale
Slaer højt, Fredskovens Nattergale!
Saa Alt hvad Herren kalder Sit
Maa slumre sødt og vaagne blidt,
Maa drømme sødt om Paradis
Og vaagne til Vorherres Priis!
3. Det aander himmelsk over Støvet,
Det vifter hjemlig giennem Løvet,
Det dufter liflig under Sky
Fra Paradis, opladt paany,
Og yndig risler, os til Bod,
I Eng en Bæk af Livets Flod!
4. Det virker Alt den Aand, som daler,
Det virker Alt den Aand, som taler,
Ei af sig selv, men, os til Gavn,
I Midlerens, i Jesy Navn,
I Ordets Navn, som her blev Kiød,
Og foer til Himmels hivd of rød!

²³⁷ N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Sang-Værk til den Danske kirke*, Bind 3.2, nr. 266, pp. 514f.

5. Opvaagner, alle dybe Toner,
Til Pris vor Menneskets Forsoner!
Forsamles, alle Tungemaal,
I Takkesangens Offerskaal!
Istemmer over Herrens Bord
Nu kiærlighedens fulde Chor!

6. I Jesu Navn da Tungen gløder
Hos Hedninger saavelsom Jøder;
I Jesu Navn og Offerskaal
Hensmelte alle Modersmaal;
I Jesu Navn udbryder da
Det evige Halleluja!