

N.F.S. Grundtvig as Charismatic Prophet: an analysis of his life and work in the light of revitalization-movement theory

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ABSTRACT *An analysis of Grundtvig's personal development is presented, particularly as reflected in events between 1825 and 1832. These events and their consequences are seen primarily through the lens of an anthropological theory of social movements based on Anthony F.C. Wallace's concepts of cultural revitalization and 'mazerway resynthesis', the permanent alteration in personality that is undergone by the charismatic leader or prophet of a revitalization movement. Finally, an anthropological perspective is developed on the Danish folkelige social movements of the nineteenth century using Wallace's concept of the 'revitalization movement'.*

A PRELIMINARY PROBLEM FORMULATION

The *folkelige* social movements of Denmark, which originated in the nineteenth century, have made significant contributions to Danish social evolution over the course of more than 150 years [1]. They were instrumental in facilitating the growth of parliamentary democracy, the appearance of new types of educational institution, and the development of new forms of social and economic co-operation. One of their major achievements was to set in motion, through primarily non-violent means, a significant long-run trend toward enfranchisement of formerly marginalized social groups within Danish society, including tenant farmers (*gåardmænd*), landless agricultural workers (*husmænd*) and industrial workers (for a discussion of this long-run trend see Borish, 1991).

The need for a wider perspective on the *folkelige* social movements in Denmark was recognized as early as 1951 in an initial treatment by the Danish historian Skovmand (1951). Gundelach (1988) made the specific comment that 'on Danish ground, Skovmand's (1951) little volume is still the only integrated, general description of the *folkelige* movements', and added to this the more general observation that 'in Danish social research systematic investigations of social movements over time have not been made' (pp. 22-23) [2]. The topic in itself will prove large enough to astonish most non-Danish readers: the useful register of *folkelige* movements

included by Skovmand at the conclusion of his book is three-pages long, single-spaced, in small print and contains nearly a hundred references.

Given the density and complexity of the topic, it is necessary to limit the focus of this paper in two ways. First, it will focus on events relevant to that stream of the rural *folkelige* movements which derives its basic character from the life and work of the minister, poet, historian and social reformer N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783–1872). Secondly, it will be primarily concerned not so much with the unfolding of the movements themselves, but with the particular nature of the role played by Grundtvig himself in their origin and early development. That Grundtvig's life and work were of central importance in the genesis of the *folkelige* social movements in Denmark is established beyond any question. Indeed, these social movements have typically traced their charter and programme from a core of ideas—a complex of thought, program and action—traditionally referred to by Danes as *Grundtvigianisme*. Those active in the *folkelige* movements drew not only on Grundtvig's writings and philosophy but (in many cases, and particularly in the early decades) on sustained personal contact with Grundtvig himself. Indeed, the word '*folkelige*' itself was, if not actually invented by Grundtvig, certainly first brought into widespread popular use as a result of his life and work: the term continues to be important in Danish cultural life down to the present day [3]. If we wish to gain insight into the origin and nature of the *folkelige* movements in Denmark, we must examine closely their relationship to the life of Grundtvig. Two preliminary questions are suggested. First, what *kinds* of social movements were these Danish *folkelige* movements? How ought they be classified in terms of social-movement theory? Secondly, what specific role did Grundtvig play in the dynamic of historical events which gave rise to them?

These movements included the folk-high-school and free-school movement, the free congregations, the gymnastic associations and rifle clubs, the local-meeting-house movement, the credit associations and savings banks, local agricultural schools, consumer co-operatives, co-operative dairies, export co-operatives, and co-operative insurance societies. It is clear from this imposing list that many different types of social activity and organization (educational, religious, economic) are included within the analytic sphere of the *folkelig* movement [4]. Yet one thing that all of these diverse social structures have in common is the goal of cultural revitalization—that is, renewal, purification, a finding of lost cultural roots—all in a specifically Danish context. It will therefore be useful to examine both the life of Grundtvig and the nature of these social movements through the conceptual lens that has been provided by the American anthropologist Anthony F.C. Wallace in his theory of revitalization processes [5]. Wallace has defined a revitalization movement as 'a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture. Revitalization is thus, from a cultural standpoint, a special kind of culture change phenomenon [...]'. Dissatisfaction with the present leads a small group of individuals to organize themselves around a blueprint for social action. Often based on a mythologized view of the past, their expressed goal is to create a better future.

The interpretation to be offered here is that the events between 1825 and 1832 were of critical importance in Grundtvig's personal development. The deep

psychological crisis set in motion by the events of 1825 had led him by 1832 to what Wallace has called a 'mazeway resynthesis', a rare type of psychic transformation which involves a total reorganization of fundamental elements in the personality configuration. In the years from 1832 until his death forty years later in 1872, Grundtvig's quintessential role was to serve as the charismatic prophet of a revitalization movement, which represents a cultural response to an intensifying social stress and disorganization experienced by those within the culture in the period immediately prior to its origin.

REVITALIZATION PROCESSES AND THE NATURE OF CHARISMA (A FIRST LOOK AT WALLACE'S THEORY)

Revitalization and the Role of the Charismatic Prophet-Leader

Max Weber first introduced the significant distinction between charismatic and bureaucratic sources of authority. Weber is also responsible for the phrase 'routinization of charisma', which he used to capture the process by which once charismatic social movements become bureaucratized, dogmatized and rigid. Weber observed that in the early and most active phases of social movements a special form of authority is often found, one for which he used the term 'charismatic'. To be dominated by the spirit of charismatic authority means a rejection of all ties to any external order in favor of the exclusive glorification of the genuine mentality of the prophet and hero. Hence, its attitude is revolutionary and transvalues everything; it makes a sovereign break with all traditional or rational norms: "It is written, but I say unto you [...]" (Weber, 1968, pp. 1113-1115. Gerth & Mills, 1976, pp. 245-262).

Charismatic authority 'knows no regulated "career", "advancement", "salary", or regulated and expert training of the holder of charisma or his aids. It knows no agency of control or appeal ... nor does it embrace permanent institutions like our bureaucratic "departments", which are independent of persons and of purely personal charisma. Charisma knows only inner determination and inner restraint.' It is by its very nature unstable: 'Every charisma is on the road from a turbulent emotional life that knows no economic rationality to a slow death by suffocation under the weight of material interests. Every hour of its existence brings it nearer to this end.' (Weber, 1968, pp. 1113-1115; and cited by Alberoni, 1984, p. 5).

The concept of charisma is important in understanding what Anthony F.C. Wallace has called 'the revitalization process', one phase of which is a revitalization movement. The emergence of a genuinely charismatic leader is one fundamental feature of the revitalization movement. An additional distinguishing feature of Wallace's model is that it places these events within the framework of a historical process that involves five overlapping stages. The first three stages precede the revitalization process. They are: (i) a *steady state*, where a given culture functions in a more or less orderly manner in satisfying the needs of its members; (ii) a *period of increased individual stress*, due to such agencies as military defeat, loss of territory, political insubordination, ecological change, economic distress and epidemics; (iii) a

period of cultural distortion, in which the prolonged experience of individual stress becomes greatly intensified and leads to a variety of problems. In Wallace's words, 'in this phase the culture is internally distorted; the elements are not harmoniously related but are mutually inconsistent and interfering [...] stress continues to rise' (Wallace, 1956, p. 269).

During the period of cultural distortion a process of deterioration sets in which, if not checked, can lead to the death of the society. Population can fall due to decreased birth rates and increased mortality. Defeat in war may lead to the loss of both territory and cultural identity. Factional disputes can accelerate these internal processes of decay. What sometimes happens, however, is the appearance of a prophet or leader who sets in motion a fourth stage, the *period of revitalization*. During the period of revitalization, according to Wallace, six fundamental tasks must be accomplished.

The first thing that happens, a central and key event, is '*mazeway reformulation*': a prophet or leader experiences both inspiration and revelation. (Wallace uses the concept of 'mazeway' to refer to the sum total of everything that an individual has internalized about his or her knowledge of the world; it is like a map or series of internal representations of the world (Wallace, 1965, p. 15-16). Normally the reformulation in its initial form occurs in the mind of a single person rather than coming out of a group interaction. The capacity to exert charismatic leadership within the framework of a revitalization movement is something that is convincingly demonstrated in the life of the prophet or leader only *after* the experience of mazeway reformulation (or 'mazeway resynthesis', as Wallace also refers to it—the two terms are equivalent). The prophet, now transformed, feels a need to tell others of his experience. He or she 'may have definite feelings of missionary or messianic obligations. Generally he shows evidence of radical inner change in personality soon after the vision experience [...]' (Wallace, 1956, p. 271) [6].

The first phase of the revitalization movement (itself the fourth phase in Wallace's general model of culture change, following the phase of cultural distortion) is connected with this sudden, powerful redefinition where important elements of the culture come together as in a vision in the mind and heart of an individual: '*mazeway resynthesis*'. It is typically followed by five additional operations: (i) communication (preaching and the gathering of disciples), (ii) organization (converts work together to facilitate its growth and dissemination), (iii) adaptation (political and diplomatic manoeuvre in response to resistance), (iv) cultural transformation (evident as the new system of ideas comes to serve as the blueprint for social action for a significantly large section of the population), and (v) routinization (the organization becomes responsible for the preservation of doctrine and the performance of ritual, conservative rather than revolutionary). A fifth phase in his 'ideal type' analysis is the establishment of a new steady-state period of relative cultural stability.

Wallace draws on two of Weber's key notions, routinization and charisma. Routinization, as implied above, is Weber's term for the problems brought about by the very success of the movement: the tendency over time for the originally 'world-transformative' doctrines to become conservative, rigid, defensive, and

primarily concerned with self-maintenance. More important for the purposes of this paper is the use of Weber's concept of charisma: Wallace remarks that Weber's concept of 'charismatic leadership' provides great insight into the type of leader-follower relationship found in revitalization movements. The fundamental element of the vision experienced by the prophet/leader is:

... an entrance of the visionary into an intense relationship with a supernatural being. This relationship, furthermore, is one in which the prophet accepts the leadership, succor, and dominance of the supernatural. Many followers of a prophet, especially the disciples, also have ecstatic revelatory experiences, but they and all sincere followers who have not had a personal revelation also enter into a parallel relationship to the prophet. [...] Followers defer to the charismatic leader not because of his [or her] status in an existing authority structure but because of a fascinating personal 'power,' often ascribed to supernatural sources and validated in successful performance [...]. (Wallace, 1956, pp. 273-274)

A profound testament to the power of Grundtvig's personal charisma can be seen in his relationship with Ernst Trier (1837-1893). Trier, who founded Vallekilde folk high school in 1865 and ran it until his death in 1893, was an outstanding member of the first generation of Danish folk-high-school principals. He spent his entire working life deeply involved in the tasks of educating young adults from the rural communities. Yet his initial plan was to work not with adults at all but with children. In the aftermath of the tragic war of 1864, he came to visit Grundtvig to gain the latter's help in renting quarters for his proposed new children's school. Interestingly enough, he first discussed his plan with Grundtvig's third wife, Asta Reedt. Trier later wrote:

As long as I live, I will be grateful to her for speaking to me as directly as she did and telling me that my plan wasn't a good one. She thought that my strength and efforts should be used in a completely different way [...] when the two of us couldn't agree, she said, 'Let's go to Grundtvig and hear what he says!' That was a blessed moment. How it still remains beautiful for me when I think of it! I can see even today that venerable figure sitting by the window. I feel as if I can still hear his strange and curious voice, both mild and weighty at the same time. It was as if he took a veil away from my eyes. He showed me the difference between the school for children and the school for adults and declared that in order to help our people to a spiritual renewal, it was precisely the adults toward whom we must turn our efforts. I had never seen things in that light before. It became so clear for me. (Trier, 1890, p. 12)

Trier is trying to describe in these words an enlightenment experience that changed the entire direction of his life. For after this single conversation with Grundtvig, Trier's life goals were reshaped and his professional activity transformed. He spent all of the remaining years of his life—a period of nearly three decades—founding and working in the service both of Vallekilde folk high school and the burgeoning

folk-high-school movement in Denmark. His work in this area of northwest Sjælland, however, was not limited to activity in support of the folk high schools (the area in which he was most directly involved). It also included a devoted commitment to such activities as the founding of free schools, free congregations, independent local meeting houses, gymnastic associations, and a range of co-operative institutions [7]. Trier, one of many who in those days called themselves *Grundtvigianere* (which can loosely be translated as 'followers of Grundtvig'), was by his own later account most powerfully set in motion as a result of this single conversation with Grundtvig himself:

I will never forget how I had been set at ease when I left Grundtvig that day. 'While he talked,' I later wrote home to my fiancé, 'it was as if I came home to myself. The most beautiful dream of my youth had been brought to life again.' I finally knew what it was I had to take hold of. (Trier, 1890, p. 12)

The Englishman Edmund Gosse, in his visit to Denmark in 1872, was fortunate enough to hear N.F.S. Grundtvig preach one of his last sermons. It is clear, from the following description given by Gosse of a sermon preached by Grundtvig near the end of his life, that Grundtvig was experienced by many who knew him as a highly charismatic leader and prophet:

The congregation began to sing hymns of his composition in a loud, quick, staccato manner invented by the poet, which was very little like the slow singing in the State churches. Suddenly, and when we had given up all hope, there entered from the vestry and walked rapidly to the alter a personage who seemed to me to be the oldest human being I had ever seen. Instantly an absolute silence prevailed throughout the church [...] He wandered down among the ecstatic worshippers, and stood close at my side for a moment, while he laid his hands on a girl's head, so that I saw his face to perfection. For a man of ninety, he could not be called infirm; his gestures were rapid and his step steady. But the attention was riveted on his appearance of excessive age [...] From the vast orb of his bald head, very long strings of silky hair fell over his shoulders and mingled with a long and loose white beard. His eyes flamed under very beetling brows [...] His features were still shapely, but colourless and dry, and as the draught from an open door caught them, the silken hairs were blown across his face like a thin curtain. While he perambulated the church with these stiff gestures and ventriloquist murmurings, his disciples fell on their knees behind him, stroking the skirts of his robes, touching the heels of his shoes. Finally, he ascended the pulpit and began to preach; in his dead voice he warned us to beware of false spirits, and to try every spirit whether it be of God [...] Had I missed hearing and seeing Grundtvig then, I should never have heard or seen him, for he took to his bed a few days later, and in a month the magnificent old fighting man was dead. (Gosse, 1911, pp. 85-87)

The Role of Failure, Marginalization and Defeat: revitalization as a response to severe cultural stress

Let us shift our focus from Grundtvig's role as charismatic leader to the revitalization movement itself, seen as part of the larger-scale revitalization process. In Wallace's description of the revitalization process seen as a whole, the phase of cultural revitalization itself (exemplified in Danish history by events such as founding of a folk high school, a free school or a co-operative credit bank) is only one of its later phases. The events of cultural revitalization—the emergence of the revitalization movement with its charismatic leader—typically follow the phase of cultural distortion, a phase marked by severe cultural stresses combined with the experience of failure, marginalization and defeat. The events of failure, marginalization and defeat, are, one could say, the inducers of the revitalization movement that follows. This, in outline, is Wallace's theory. Let us ask: can one identify such a pattern of events connected with this period of Danish history?

The answer to this question is certainly yes, even though the difficult and tragic course of nineteenth century Danish history is virtually unknown outside of the Scandinavian countries. Prior to the Napoleonic Wars, Denmark was, if not a major power, at least a viable second- or third-rank state in European affairs. During the first half of the nineteenth century, however, a series of military and economic catastrophes reduced it to one of the smallest states in Europe. This prolonged and extensive process of territorial loss began with Denmark's misguided entrance into the Napoleonic Wars on the side of Napoleon. As a result, in 1807 the entire Danish fleet was sunk by the British in the Battle of Copenhagen. As one might well expect, this event had devastating consequences for the national self-esteem of a proud, independent and seafaring people. In addition to the loss of the fleet, the country suffered another bitter humiliation when much of the capital city of Copenhagen was destroyed by cannon fire from British soldiers who had landed on the Danish coast.

The catastrophes, however, were only beginning. A state bankruptcy that took place in 1813 had been preceded by seven years of inflation so severe that the national currency fell to less than 10% of its original value. It took more than a decade for the economy to recover. As a further consequence of the Napoleonic War, Denmark was forced by the Treaty of Kiel to surrender in 1814 its sovereignty over Norway. Norway had then been under Danish rule for the last four-hundred years. These events were followed by a major agricultural crisis in the 1820s. In a series of lectures held in 1838, Grundtvig himself spoke of the period after 1814 as the trough of a wave, where Denmark bowed under and sank down into a ten years' time so deep in destitution and despondency, so deep in powerlessness and indifference, that I cannot think myself back to the years between 1820 and 1830 without feeling a certain horror (cited by Skovmand, 1978, p. 73). Yet as devastating as all this was, still worse developments were to come.

After decades of bitter conflict, the provinces of Schleswig and Holstein (in what is today northern Germany) were both surrendered to Bismarck as a consequence of the war of 1864. In addition to the severe damage to Danish

national pride, the magnitude of the loss can be better appreciated when one realizes that between them Schleswig and Holstein contained close to half of the arable land possessed by the Danish monarchy. With the surrender of Holstein, the only moderately industrialized region of the old monarchy had been lost. The extent of the national trauma is further reflected in the fact that the ruling National Liberal government was dissolved, the disgraced and bitter Prime Minister emigrated to New Zealand, and a provisional government that effectively repealed the young Constitution of 1848–1849 came into power. It would govern for thirty years.

These political developments were soon to be amplified by additional economic misfortune. When the USA, Argentina and Siberia entered the international grain market in the mid-1870s, the consequences were disastrous for Danish agriculture. Unable to compete against the virgin soil of these countries, and faced with a protective tariff by Germany (previously a major buyer of Danish farm products), Denmark began to show severe signs of economic and political decline. Through epidemics and migration its population was reduced by a third (the post-1864 decades witnessed a massive Danish emigration, mainly to the midwestern region of the USA). Not only was much valuable territory permanently lost, but by 1864 the nation itself had been reduced to less than a sixth of its size at the beginning of the nineteenth century. By all signs the future looked extremely bleak. There were even some within its borders who expressed fears that Denmark would one day soon cease to exist as an independent nation (Grundtvig was one of them). When one considers the hard course of Denmark's nineteenth-century history, this mood of pessimism is not at all surprising.

The facts that have here been outlined above about nineteenth-century Danish history should be seen in relation to Anthony Wallace's concept of the revitalization process. It should be noted that many of the elements of Wallace's period of increased individual stress and period of cultural distortion (the two periods preceding the onset of revitalization) are very much in evidence during this entire period of Danish history: military defeat, territorial loss, national humiliation, epidemics, agricultural crises, inflation and currency crises, followed by massive emigration with loss of population and a serious threat of cultural decline.

To summarize: Anthony Wallace defined the concept of 'revitalization movements' and formulated a five-stage model of how such movements change over time. In addition to further elaborations of Weber's notions of charisma and routinization, Wallace's treatment sets forth a challenging concept of culture as a 'mazeway', and the prophet of such a movement as someone who has undergone 'mazeway resynthesis'.

N.F.S. GRUNDTVIG AND THE PROCESS OF 'MAZEWAY RESYNTHESIS'

Grundtvig's Contributions: a brief overview

Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783–1872) left behind him in Denmark a literary and spiritual heritage so rich and varied that it is virtually impossible to capture the essence of what he was in any single professional title. Writing in 1904

for a series of twelve lectures given some thirty years after Grundtvig's death, Jensen said, 'I will speak of him as a Minister, a Writer of Hymns, a Member of Parliament, a Mythologist, a Speaker, a Historian, a Poet of the People, an Aesthetician, and a Scientist'. (Jensen, 1904, p. 1). Writing in 1942 during the Nazi occupation, Borup commented, 'Through almost three-quarters of a century he worked tirelessly as an Author and Polemicist, as a Minister and School Reformer, as a Historian and Freedom Fighter, but first and foremost as a *folkelig* Bard, whose Hymns and Songs are now among our most precious common spiritual possessions'. (1942, p. 48). Korsgaard (1986) has viewed Grundtvig through the lens of his lifelong spirit of single combat—as a boxer, an athlete and a gymnast. It must be emphasized that Korsgaard did not mean for these images drawn from competitive sport to be taken literally; that is, Grundtvig was neither a boxer or a gymnast, nor was he particular athletic. Yet the metaphorical use of these surprising images provides a creative and acute complement to the more traditional images of Grundtvig cited earlier by Jensen (1904) and Borup (1942). He was all of these things and more: a theologian, translator, scholar, essayist, editor, community organizer, prophet and visionary educator. And he excelled (or at least was inordinately productive) in all of these activities.

Grundtvig lived a long and exceedingly full life. He wrote constantly, year after year, staying up many late evenings and long nights to pen his latest thoughts, insights, hymns and visions. His writings give witness to the unceasing process of psychological growth and change that was his life experience over just short of ninety years. It is perhaps for this reason that there is something very *modern*, or even *post-modern* about Grundtvig's biographical history, even though he lived well before the age of the radio, airplane or automobile. As a result of this stressful inner process, Grundtvig's values, his social and personal identity, his definition of himself and his work—all these things which are fundamental parts of what Wallace calls the 'mazeway' of culture—underwent deep and fundamental transformations in the course of his own development. (For a suitable image of this aspect of Grundtvig's life, I would suggest a scenario of wild ocean waves pounding away at a rocky cliff wall, their constant currents giving rise to scenes both of violence and of grandeur.) As a result of these inner struggles and their sequences of partial resolution, he came to see the world in many different, even opposing ways at different times, mediated always by the complex patterns of unfolding that characterized his individual life history.

Grundtvig's long life history, filled with sweeping changes and new discoveries, has made him a difficult figure for posterity to interpret and understand. For, depending on which text in which period of Grundtvig's life is taken, he can appear as a reactionary defender of tradition or a revolutionary reformer, as an opponent of democracy or its most loyal supporter. He can sound like angry, bitter critic or a gentle lover, a self-centred Danish patriot or a generous seer richly aware of the wisdom in all human traditions. The writings taken as a whole are difficult to evaluate [8]. They reveal on the one hand an inspired genius in whose poetry one can find elevated Shakespearean levels of subtlety and beauty. This is the Grundtvig who has a unique and unforgettable way of using the words and rhythms of the

Danish language ('Denmark, the loveliest field and meadow, bounded by the blue sea [...]'), the Grundtvig whose poems—many of them sung as hymns or as popular songs—remain a familiar part of the cultural experience of all Danes even today. At the same time the writings can show a maddening prose stylist whose thick books are filled with pages that dull the mind (as well as many that illuminate it).

There is an additional dilemma facing those who would understand Grundtvig's life. During the decades of his youth and early adulthood, I believe it is no exaggeration to say that he was on the whole an acerbic and intemperate outcast in Danish society. He was a man who, while possessing his own limited circle of friends and admirers, was widely disliked and even feared by many of his contemporaries. If we are to understand even the outlines of the process by which the Danish *folkelige* social movements came to flower in the decades of the mid- and late nineteenth century, we must develop an illuminating critical perspective on the course of Grundtvig's own life. What sequence of events transformed him from the brilliant bitter pariah of his youthful decades into what he became in his years of maturity—the wise and charismatic prophet of an extraordinarily successful revitalization movement?

Grundtvig as Skjald and Prophet

Grundtvig's sense of personal mission. Grundtvig began as a young man to construct for himself the prophetic role he would play, and it drew him inexorably toward a difficult mission. The mission that he had set for himself was one that we today would describe with the word renewal, or with Wallace's term 'cultural revitalization'. It is interesting that Grundtvig himself used the latter term, as in the following response to a learned critic, which is worth citing not only because it shows his deliberate and conscious focus on the theme of revitalization, but because it provides a fine, albeit somewhat truncated, example of his polemical style: The folk-life of this people of Israel is thus the necessary prerequisite for the advent of Christ. John the Baptist revitalized the memories, the hopes and the imagery of the people, and without this awakening to folk-consciousness, Christianity would not have been known, understood, or believed in Israel [...] Dr Rudelbach must therefore believe that Christianity could come to us in a living way and that it could come alive in us without the same essential conditions with which it came alive for and in the individuals of Israel [...] He must believe that this could happen without a revitalization of the memories, the hope and the imagery of the people (Grundtvig, 1848, p. 45) [9].

Although on one level the above citation must be seen as a theological comment about the history of early Christianity, it also gives rich insight into what Grundtvig had in mind for Denmark and the Danish people. In Grundtvig's language, his mission was to awaken the Danish people to the fact that *life* and *human history* are an expression of the Spirit. One must add to this that for him the Spirit was not an abstract concept but a living, existential force. He would be Denmark's *skjald*, taking upon himself the role of the ancient singer whose improvised courtly song was often a faintly disguised commentary—political and polemical—on events taking place at

the time (Koch, 1943, pp. 86–92). He himself had vowed to open his countrymen's eyes to the rich cultural heritage that lay in their neglected past. Drawing from Scandinavian mythology as well as Christian faith, he would make this heritage live again so that new generations could draw from its strength. It is this mission to which all of his writing was dedicated, and it was a mission, obviously, that was not for the faint-hearted. Yet even Grundtvig himself could not have known of the difficulties it would entail, of all the twists and turnings that were to follow: success and failure, knowledge and despair, the highest spiritual revelation alternating with fits of depression that would lead him near to madness.

Grundtvig's hymns, once banned, now fill the pages of Danish church hymnals as well as the songbooks of Danish folk high schools, athletic associations and many other types of social institution. Although few other than Grundtvig scholars and specialist historians of theology are familiar with the names of his many theological opponents, nearly everyone in Denmark knows about Grundtvig. He is admired and respected even by people who have never read a single word that he wrote. Why, one must ask, is this the case? Why is Grundtvig remembered? I believe that he is remembered because over the course of his life the prophetic mission he set for himself crystallized in a remarkable inner transformation, and it is this transformation that enabled him, in an almost mystical way, to touch the inner core of his people. This has been beautifully put by his biographer and church historian Hal Koch who writes: 'It was to this wandering in the grove of humanity, with its appreciation of everything touched by life, that Grundtvig dedicated the years from 1810 to 1820, and once begun, this wandering never ceased as long as he lived. And in the process he himself was changed from the thundering prophet of doom to life's true seer, and to the glowing lover of Denmark and all things Danish' (Koch, 1943, p. 90).

And yet, particularly in his youth and early adulthood, he was not an easy or attractive person to deal with. In part, this can be attributed to the difficult and ceaseless inner search for what would best serve his mission. It is understandable that the stream of new revelations which came out of this continual searching and sifting of experience was not always received by his contemporaries in the spirit in which they were intended. Particularly during his early years, Grundtvig was engaged in a series of controversies with prominent figures ranging from the philosopher Søren Kierkegård to the great Danish physicist H.C. Ørsted. One of these controversies bears scrutiny, for in its aftermath Grundtvig suffered both deep personal defeat and public humiliation. Indeed, he was even put under official state censorship for a period of nearly twelve years (1826–1837).

The Events of 1826 and the Crisis Years (1826–1831). When the young but distinguished theologian Professor H.N. Clausen published in 1826 his *Church Doctrine, Teaching and Ritual in Catholicism and Protestantism*, a large and learned work of over 800 pages, Grundtvig was appalled by its rationalist interpretation of the meaning of ritual in Christian thought [10]. As Reich has written, 'Most of the 800 pages were meant to show how learned the young professor had become about the foreign and the exotic. But every once in a while, an occasion was also found to

advance the argument that the true essence of the Protestant Church is the freedom of reason. For revelation is only accessible to human beings through reason. And the main enemy of reason is fanaticism and visionary dreaming, much of which goes under the designation of faith' (1972, p. 188).

This was altogether too much for Grundtvig to bear. Less than two weeks later his reply was ready, a 47 page pamphlet immodestly entitled, 'The Church's Reply to Professor of Theology Dr. H.N. Clausen by Nik. Fred. Sev. Grundtvig, Curate of the Church of Our Savior'. The pamphlet began with these uncompromising words: 'I dare say that it will not astonish anyone who has read Professor Clausen's newly published book [...] certainly it will not astonish any of the serious readers of this book, that I make a stand against its author, not as a reviewer, but as the church's opponent [...]' Grundtvig went on to accuse the learned Professor of teaching and spreading false doctrines. Clausen, he said, must either publicly acknowledge his error and repent, or else resign from office. Instead of the lively public debate he had anticipated, Grundtvig found himself dragged into court and sued for personal injury.

Although Grundtvig went through a number of severe emotional and spiritual crises in his life, the crisis that was set in motion for him by these events of 1825–26 may well have been of special importance for his subsequent development, in particular his transformation from 'angry young man' to the prophet and spiritual centre of a successful and enduring revitalization movement. There can be little doubt that the trial and its immediate outcome were of major significance, seen from Grundtvig's perspective. For in the ensuing legal battle, he was decisively defeated. Even before the case was decided, he was forbidden by church authorities to preach at the Pinse holiday and to use the three hymns he had written specifically for that occasion. When attempted negotiations with higher church authorities failed, Grundtvig took a course of action that went against all the warnings he had received from friends. He gave up his position as curate at the Church of Our Savior in Copenhagen just before Pinse in 1826. A half year later in October he lost the case in the courts. His expressions against the Professor were found to be baseless and offensive. He was ordered to pay all court costs plus a large sum of money (100 *rigsdaler*) as a fine.

Perhaps most significantly of all, Grundtvig was set under official censure. From now on nothing of his could be published before a stamp from the police chief reading 'May Be Printed' had been conspicuously placed on the title page. Grundtvig was not to be freed from censorship until 1837. It was not until 1839 that he was given another ministry, this time in Vartov Church in Copenhagen (he would hold this position until his death in 1872). But no one could have known that at the time. As a blacklisted minister, unemployable in the state church, he had to support his wife and children by living as a freelance writer. At the same time, a man who was most known for his furious and intemperate views could now not publish a word without the stamp of approval of the police chief prominently displayed on the title page.

It is tempting to interpret these events in Grundtvig's life through the lens provided by Wallace's description of the revitalization process. Recall that the

'mazeway reformulation' occurs initially in the mind of a single person. The person who will become the charismatic prophet is 'faced with the opportunity (if not the necessity) of assuming a new cultural role and of abandoning an earlier role in order to reduce stress which they will not be able to resolve if they stand pat. A precipitating factor in many cases is some sort of severe physical stress, such as illness, starvation, sleeplessness, or fatigue.' The prophet or leader comes to experience both inspiration and revelation, and 'generally shows evidence of radical inner change in personality soon after the vision experience [...]' (Wallace, 1956, p. 271).

The period of more than a decade of censorship begun in 1826 may have had as one of its consequences the precipitation of an inner crisis of the kind described above by Wallace, and the resolution of that crisis in a series of visionary insights which involved a deep personality transformation. There are some facts of Grundtvig's life which can be used to support such an interpretation. The two years 1825 and 1832 are often described as critical years by Grundtvig scholars [11]. Thus Koch has written 'it is important to establish that with and from 1825, this is his constant never to be abandoned position' (1943, p. 108). (Stated with unconscionable brevity, the position to which Koch is referring is Grundtvig's deep conviction that the essence of Christian faith was not Bible reading, but performance of the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion by the gathered community of worshippers.) Yet Kaj Thaning has held that '1832 marked his conversion to "life," immediate, real human life. He said himself that it had dawned on him "as if by a miracle"'. And Thaning has stated that 'this new realization altered his religious discovery of 1825'; it is 'the turning point' in Grundtvig's spiritual development. According to Thaning, the critical events of 1832 provided the integrating visionary experience which guided Grundtvig's activities and efforts for the remaining forty years of his life (1972, p. 75, see discussion pp. 71-83).

These issues remain the subject of lively debate among present day Grundtvig scholars. Yet the importance of the years immediately after 1826, and of the role of crisis in Grundtvig's life, are themes that have long been recognized by Grundtvig scholars. Writing of these events in 1919, Bredsdorff concluded, 'It was probably good that it went this way. Perhaps if it hadn't, Grundtvig's work in the coming years would have belonged only to Danish church life. But he was ... more than a minister. He was not only a man of the church, but a man of the people.' Another of his many biographers, Borup, has given the following characterization of Grundtvig's response to crisis:

Every person creates himself the conditions under which he is most creative. And Grundtvig was most creative in the face of resistance. His element was storm and conflict, and the harder the world went against him, the more the sublime forces that he carried within him came to expression. One could have expected that he—after all that had happened—would rise in wrath against the society that had so cruelly misjudged him. But instead of remaining furious about that which had happened to him, he would sit back and console himself by writing a hymn. (1944, p. 75)

The contributions of Grundtvig to the Danish Lutheran church are of such significance that they have been called 'the Grundtvigian reformation' (Engberg, 1978). Yet his influence on the more general process of cultural revitalization is of such an all-pervasive nature that it transcends his accomplishments in any one single cultural area of thought or action. In the anthropological language of Anthony Wallace, Grundtvig experienced in the course of his adult life that rarest of events, a true 'mazeway resynthesis'. One feature of mazeway resynthesis is the lasting nature of the revolution in world-view that has taken place:

This kind of resynthesis produces, apparently, a permanent alteration of mazeway: the new stable cognitive configuration is, as it were, constructed out of the materials of earlier configurations which, once rearranged, cannot readily assemble into the older forms. (Wallace, 1965, p. 153)

It may well be that the initial series of insights gained by Grundtvig in 1825 were worked through to a deeper resolution in 1832 during the course of the censorship years. Regardless of how we choose to interpret these events, it is clear that the period of censorship acted as a powerful catalyst. It goes against our intuition to say so (and it can only be said due to our privileged position of hindsight), but the experience in a sense both freed him and at the same time forced him into some of his most important work. Another set of facts that supports this interpretation is the sudden flowering of his mature and productive authorship beginning in the year 1832 and immediately thereafter. His first insights into the need for a new school, a *folkelig højskole*, came as a result of three summer voyages to England in 1829–31; he would come to spend the rest of his life in active support of these schools, first calling for their establishment and then supporting them and catalysing their growth once they had made their initial appearance (we have already seen one example of his role as charismatic guide and prophet in the conversation with Ernst Trier that led to the founding of Vallekilde folk high school).

His *Norse Mythology* was published in 1832, a volume that is regarded by many as his most significant work. From 1833 onwards came the comprehensive *Handbook on World History I–III*. In 1834 he wrote *Statsmæssig Oplysning: et udkast om samfund og skole*. In 1836 appeared *The Danish Four-Leaf Clover*, the first of his formal proposals for a folk high school, and a year later in 1837 came the first volume of his *Song-Work For the Danish Church*. It was in these years that his fame and reputation began to spread. The term 'Grundtvigianer'—follower of Grundtvig—came into common parlance (though the first to speak of 'a Grundtvigian party' was, ironically, not a supporter but a theological opponent, Bishop Mynster) [12].

By 1832 his many years of searching back to the heroes of the old Norse myths, in order to find deeper meanings that could light up the darkness of the present, had led him to a concern with what he called 'universal history'. A famous passage from his *Norse Mythology* provides insight into his views on the human condition.

A human being is not a kind of monkey, condemned to imitate first the other animals and then itself until the world's end, but a matchless, miraculous creation, in whom divine forces shall proclaim, develop and

survive through a thousand races and generations, a divine experiment that shows how spirit and dust can interpenetrate and be explained in a common divine consciousness. (cited in Skovmand, 1978, p. 115)

This frequently cited statement of Grundtvig's provides a key testimony. The language is original, the point of view universalistic and the insight both memorable and provocative. His frequent early mood of dark pessimism has been transmuted by some subtle spiritual alchemy into a new kind of faith and optimism in human possibilities. Humanity is no longer seen as a ship of fools, but as 'a magnificent, matchless creation', as 'a divine experiment'. This passage mirrors a fundamental transformation that took place in Grundtvig's 'ground vision' of human life. His Christianity became what Danes have called 'the joyful Christianity', his pedagogy an overriding concern with what he called 'the school for life'. His zeal for Christianity as the life-giving religion became tempered by a deep understanding that true enlightenment, whether in the church or the school, can never be force fed, or crammed down an unwilling throat.

In the wake of this inner transformation, the angry young man became the people's acknowledged champion and defender, or, to borrow a metaphor from one of his better known contemporaries, the Tragic Hero became a Knight of Faith. It is for this reason, I believe, that so many of his ideas have lingered and that his thoughts on education have taken root. It is for this reason that his hymns are still sung, and his personality remembered with fondness. Many of his sayings have become a part of common Danish parlance: 'As sunshine is to the black soil, so is true enlightenment to the soil's friends', 'He has never lived who became clever and wise about something he first didn't come to love', 'We will have gone far in achieving wealth, when few have too much and fewer too little'.

In the 1840s the first wave of young Grundtvigian ministers would begin to take their places in churches all over Denmark. In 1855 came the first edition of a Danish hymnal containing a reasonable selection of hymns by Grundtvig. But it was really in the 1860s that Grundtvigianism can be said to have first come of age. At the anniversary of Grundtvig's fifty years as a minister in May 1861, there were large-scale public celebrations of the man who was now generally recognized as a major contributor to the cultural history of Denmark. Beginning in 1863, meetings of 'the friends of Grundtvig' (*vennemøder*) became an anticipated yearly event of major importance. His supporters, numbering in the hundreds (and sometimes in the thousands), came to listen to 'The Old One' on his birthday, 8 September. It was an occasion for him to tell them what was on his mind. Two important and recurring themes in his annual talks were freedom in the church (*kirkelige frihed*) and enlightenment of the people (*folkelig oplysning*).

After 1864, the Grundtvigian movement 'would show a greater depth. It would characterize not just the life of religious congregations, but the folk high schools, free schools, rifle clubs, lecture associations, cooperative movement, the movement of the political left on the countryside and the national struggle in Sønderjylland' (Skovmand, 1951, p. 42). And this development has continued down through time: the branches of the Grundtvigian movement, like those which appeared in northwest

Sjælland under the immediate guidance of men like Ernst Trier, were able both to create and to establish functioning institutions. These new social institutions (for example, the folk high schools, free schools and credit associations) ultimately became important cultural forces not only in the rural landscape but in the whole of Denmark. The results of this cultural revitalization were observed not only by the Danes themselves, but by a series of foreign observers who came to Denmark in the years between 1900 and 1930 [13].

CONCLUSION AND SOME LIMITATIONS OF THE MODEL

The central argument of this paper is that the notions of historical sequence represented in the five-phase revitalization process formulated by Anthony F.C. Wallace provide insight both into the dynamics behind the origin of the Danish *folkelige* social movements in the nineteenth century, and into N.F.S. Grundtvig's role as their charismatic prophet. Focusing on the events of Grundtvig's own life, an analysis based on Wallace's concept of mazeway resynthesis, reinforces one traditional view among Grundtvig scholars, namely that the specific period 1825–32 must be seen as a critical period in his development. It does so, however, on some very new grounds. Within that seven-year period, this analysis suggests that it would be of great interest to focus closely on one specific time span, namely the time of Grundtvig's three summer voyages to England and his work on old Anglo-Saxon manuscripts (1829–31).

The events connected with these voyages were almost certainly of critical importance in the final unfolding of events connected with Grundtvig's mazeway resynthesis. I cannot as yet find 'the smoking gun', that is, evidence pointing to the precise days and weeks, the time and moment when the predicted mazeway resynthesis took place. It is hoped, however, that the ideas developed here will prove relevant to the work of those (such as the English classicist S.J. Bradley) who are re-examining this period in Grundtvig's life. What exactly *did* take place when Grundtvig encountered the ancient documents in Exeter Church and the other places he visited? What relationship did his discoveries there have to his later work? Whatever it was, the voices of the dead would in the course of time be transmuted by his seeking, gifted scholarship into profound new forms of vision and insight directed toward the living, both the members of his own generation and those who would come after.

Useful as Wallace's theory is, it is necessary to point out some of its limitations in the Danish context. First, the actual chronology connected with the unfolding of the Danish *folkelige* social movements is more complex than in the simple five-phase theory proposed by Wallace. This may be the case because in his original discussion of revitalization movements, Wallace emphasized smaller-scale tribal societies, such as the Iroquois Indians of New York state. Indeed, his original model was adapted to the treatment of an isolated tribal society such as the nineteenth-century reservation Iroquois, with whose descendents he had worked over the course of many years. Such a society is more easily separated in time and space and analytically followed both in its history and its interconnections with the surrounding society. In

the historical context of a modern European state such as Denmark, the unfolding of events can be expected to follow a much more complex pattern.

Thus, there was one movement and one charismatic leader, among the Iroquois. The transformation to the Handsome Lake religion described by Wallace involved a single Seneca prophet, Handsome Lake himself, and a single revitalization movement. In the Danish case, there may have been a single central charismatic leader (Grundtvig), but his charismatic leadership was a source of inspiration for not one but for many social movements (for example, the folk high school and free-school movements, the free congregations, the co-operative dairies). The relationship between Grundtvig's leadership and the paths followed by these different evolving social movements was considerably more complicated than in the Iroquois case.

The complexities in the Danish case include the following facts: (i) the Danish *folkelige* movements were not one but a *complex* of social movements covering such different cultural spheres as education, politics, religion, agriculture, finance, sport and local culture; (ii) their charismatic prophet, N.F.S. Grundtvig, did not formulate a completely new religion but rather a purified and revitalized version of the traditional Danish Lutheran Protestantism; (iii) the initial appearance of the earliest *folkelige* social movements (*de gudelige forsamlinger*, 1790–1830) preceded by decades the period during which Grundtvig had attained his status as a charismatic leader (this is one of several observations suggesting that the life of Grundtvig was a necessary but not sufficient factor in accounting for the process of cultural revitalization in Danish history).

I have attempted in this conclusion to specify some ways in which the theoretical approach taken in this paper must be modified in discussing the Danish *folkelige* social movements. In doing so, I have emphasized the differences between these movements and the type of case originally treated by Wallace, such as the origin of the Handsome Lake religion among the nineteenth-century Iroquois. Yet in one critical area the two cases resemble each other: the continuation of the revitalization movement for long periods after the death of the charismatic prophet. The new cultural blueprints, both of Danish Grundtvigianism and the Handsome Lake religion, survived the death of the prophet by time periods of well over a century, and significant portions of the new blueprint were eventually brought to fruition in both cultures. This feature of extended continuity in time is perhaps the truest indication that what took place was a real revitalization movement. Let me close by remarking that this paper has attempted to shed light on the origin of the Danish *folkelige* social movements, focusing on the Weberian problem of charisma viewed through the formulations of Anthony F.C. Wallace. To understand the fate of the Grundtvigian social movements in contemporary Danish society, however, it would be necessary to treat the equally important Weberian problem of routinization [14].

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NOTES

- [1] The problem of translating key terms from Danish to English is a difficult one that cannot be resolved in a completely satisfying way. Thus the Danish term *folkelig* (see note 4 below) has had among its many meanings the connotations of 'simple, popular, democratic of the people, national'. Edward Broadbridge has suggested that the word *folkelig* should be translated as 'pertaining to the cultural tradition and the national identity of the people'. The concept, however, cannot be given any simple English translation. A more detailed discussion of the cultural meanings of the term *folkelig* (and the related concept of *folkelighed*) for English-speaking readers has been given by Borish (1996, Ch. 4).
- [2] Two perspectives written by Danish specialists available to the English-speaking reader are by Wählin (1980) and by Østergaard (1990).
- [3] The concept of 'the *folkelig*' was of central importance in Grundtvig's thinking as early as 1817. Henningsen (1990, p. 90).
- [4] English-speaking readers should note that the Danish term '*folkelig*' appears at times with an -e suffix (*folkelige*). The former spelling (*folkelig*) represents its use in Danish either as a simple adjective not attached to any noun, or in the indefinite form (*en folkelig bevægelse*, 'a *folkelig* movement'). When it is used as a definite adjective modifying either a singular noun (*den folkelige bevægelse*, 'the *folkelige* movement'), or a plural noun (*de folkelige bevægelser*, 'the *folkelige* movements'), the suffix -e is added. The noun form is *folkelighed* (pronounced roughly as 'full ka li head'—the 'g' is silent).
- [5] First formulated over 30 years ago, Wallace's model is still valuable as an entry point to the study of social movements. As Bock, a recent historian of the field, wrote of Wallace's work recently (1988), 'psychological anthropologists have yet to devise a more workable general model of rapid culture change'. After Wallace, such apparently quite different phenomena as nativistic and messianic movements, reform movements, cargo cults, religious revivals, utopian communities, religious-sect formation and true socio-political revolution could be seen as sharing the theme of revitalization. Wallace was a pioneer in the attempt to formulate cybernetic models of human culture.
- [6] The change can have other dramatic consequences as well. The woman known to the world as Mother Theresa received her vision experience, her 'call within a call' to serve the poor, while on a train to Darjeeling on September 10, 1943. She was at the time being sent to recover from tuberculosis. Those who worked with her for the 19 years at St Mary's school in Calcutta, where she was a teacher and then the principal prior to her visionary experience, all remember that the Sister Theresa's health was then fragile, and that she was not a physically strong woman. Yet after her maze-way resynthesis in 1943, not only her spirit but her health seems to have been positively transformed. She not only single-handedly founded an institution to serve the poorest of the poor in Calcutta, but 'built an organization against all odds, formulated its constitution, and sent out branches all over the world' (Vardey, 1995, p. xxiii).
- [7] Trier's work in this larger social movement context has been treated by the historian Ehlers (1983).
- [8] In fact, as K.E. Bugge has pointed out, Grundtvig cannot 'be taken as a whole' because if everything he wrote were published, it would amount to over 150 volumes. Only a very small fraction of this huge lifework has been published, and the remainder, preserved in library vaults, is largely inaccessible to the public. It is for these reasons—I have been told by Danish scholars—that there is no single person who has come close to reading everything Grundtvig wrote.
- [9] A.G. Rudelbach was, like Grundtvig, a critic of church rationalism; Grundtvig's article is more an example of critical dialogue among friends than an attack upon a theological opponent. A detailed discussion has been given by Lundgren-Nielsen (1992).
- [10] Much of the dispute centred around the true meaning of the ceremony of baptism.
- [11] Other scholars focus on other years. Thus Christensen has remarked that '1815 was in many ways a significant and positive breakthrough year for Grundtvig' (1992, p. 5). Christian Thodberg

regards 1837 as a year of significant theological awakening for Grundtvig. Thaning's interpretation based on 1832 as the turnpoint has been subject to critique in recent years. Given the complexity of Grundtvig's life history, and his intellectual and spiritual development, there are quite probably reasonable grounds for all of these different interpretations. I have greatly benefited here from conversations with Kim Arne Pedersen, and from access to his 'Grundtvig i forskningens lys', a review paper in manuscript, Center for Grundtvig Studies, University of Aarhus, 1996. Other Grundtvig scholars who have shared their deep knowledge with me include K.E. Bugge, Ove Korsgaard and Jens Holger Schørring.

- [12] Skovmand, 1978, p. 400–401. Mynster was specifically referring to the little circle of theologians who supported Grundtvig in his ongoing battle with the dominant, rationalist theology.
- [13] Among them were A.H. Hollman (Germany), H. Rider Haggard (England), Joseph Hart, Dame Olive Campbell and Frederick Howe (the USA) and Shigeoyoshi Matsumae (Japan).
- [14] For a treatment of the problem of routinization with respect to the Danish *folkelige* social movements, see Borish, 1996.

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