Lutheran Revival and National Education in Denmark: The Religious Background of N. F. S. Grundtvig's Educational Ideas

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Abstract

N. F. S. Grundtvig's idea of national education has usually been regarded as a part of the history of adult education or as a complex of national ideas. This article takes into consideration that Grundtvig was first and foremost a clergyman, a founder of grundtvigianism and of the Grundtvigian revival movement. It presents a new perspective on the Lutheran background of Grundtvig's educational programme, and its impact on the shaping of a civic society in Denmark. A religious revival which Grundtvig underwent during the first decades of the nineteenth century shaped the background of his educational programmes.

Keywords

N. F. S. Grundtvig, Lutheran revival, Grundtvigianism, national education, education in Denmark

Introduction

The nineteenth-century modernisation process in the Scandinavian countries has usually been presented as an example of a rather unique interplay of various agents: a peaceful transition from absolutist to democratic systems, the emergence of a free market economy, a crucial role for the state and the development of the underpinnings of the Nordic welfare model, a special position for the Lutheran churches, a wide spectrum of various popular movements, and the growth of civic society. The process of building a modern national identity is common to all those forms of modernisation, however different in particular Nordic countries. Romantic philosophy, with its sympathy for nationality and national identity (and even the idea of a new Nordic union: Scandinavianism), constituted a basis for the emergence of nineteenth-century social movements like national and pan-national organisations, popular education and folk high schools. Of particular significance were the religious revival movements, which were extremely successful and widespread all over the Nordic region. As a form of popular Lutheranism and widespread mostly among peasants, these movements played a significant role in the process of reshaping of Nordic societies, the state Lutheran churches, and in secularisation as well. In general, the religious revival movements had a great impact within a broader process of deep cultural change. The main aim of this article is to examine the connections between Danish revival movements and religious grundtvigianism on the one hand with grundtvigian concepts of national education on the other hand. While not neglecting the importance of the religious aspects, I want to show how Grundtvig's educational ideas, initially based on Lutheran Christianity, led him to a significant and new engagement with a national and public-spirited understanding of education.

Grundtvig and grundtvigianism

A crucial role in the revival movements was played by several laymen (preachers) or clergymen, among whom Nicolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783–1872) in Denmark emerged as the most

significant personality in Scandinavian nineteenth-century culture. N. F. S. Grundtvig was a clergyman, an author of hundreds of popular psalms, a poet, a philosopher, a romantic historian, a founder of folk high schools, a teacher, and a politician, struggling for a liberal constitution and freedom of speech. He was one of the most influential personalities in nineteenth-century Danish culture and history, as his national philosophy gave birth to a new kind of nationalism in Denmark in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was rooted in national literature and ancient history, and also supported by Lutheran spirituality, insofar as Grundtvig and the grundtvigian movement gradually absorbed a greater part of the Danish revival movement in the first half of the nineteenth century. His historiosophy, theology and Lutheran ideology, liberal ideology and educational programmes were tightly bound up with each other and formed one of the most powerful movements of nineteenth-century Denmark: grundtvigianism. Grundtvigianism is usually explained as a religious movement among Danish Lutherans founded on the ideas presented by Grundtvig: religious freedom for both the laity and its congregational activity, and, for a clergy restricted by the rules of a rationalistic and orthodox Church, a freedom to choose a free church based on the idea of the living word of Christ instead of the authority of the Bible and faith principles. But grundtvigianism is above all a complex programme of common national education, national history and religious literature, encompassing hundreds of hymns as well. Grundtvig and his followers are regarded as very influential in the formulation of both modern Danish national consciousness and a new stream of thought about religion and education.

During the first years of the nineteenth century, Grundtvig underwent two remarkable conversions or turning points: a romantic one and a religious one. In 1802 he attended lectures by a Norwegian-born German philosopher, Henrik Steffens, who presented a new romantic German philosophy emanating from Johann Gottfried Herder, Friedrich Wilhelm Johann Schelling and Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Steffens' lectures, combined with Danish romantic poetry, especially by Adam Oehlenschläger, opened Grundtvig's eyes to a new era of philosophy and literature. What Steffens spoke about most of all was nations,

national identity and pan-national Nordic national spirit (*Volksgeist* in German or *Folkeaanden* in Danish) stressing that history was strictly connected with a mythological era. 'History starts with gods, and mythology should be regarded as the genesis of History', Steffens told his audience. He urged them to seek out what was special about the Nordic spirit or a northern national identity: the ancient heroes, Old Norse sagas and myths. Steffens dedicated one of the lectures to the subject of the importance of a free spirit and the necessity of being tolerant (quoted in Rønning 1907: 59). New romantic philosophy and historical thought directed Grundtvig towards his conclusion that it was necessary to work on old Norse history and culture. By 1809 Grundtvig had had a number of books published, showing a growing interest in Old Norse mythology, history and culture, among them *Lidet om Sangene i Edda* (A Few Words about Songs in the Edda) (Grundtvig 1806) and *Nordens Mythologi eller Sinds-Billedsprog* (Northern Mythology) (Grundtvig 1808).

The second important turning point was within Grundtvig's religious attitudes. At the dawn of the nineteenth-century Danish neo-pietistic revival movements, he too underwent a Christian Awakening; however, he took a firm stand against typical pietistic forms of ecstatic religiosity. In 1807 Grundtvig published *Om Religion og Liturgie* (On Religion and Liturgy), which was supposed to be his submission in a lively debate about liturgical reforms within the Danish Church in 1806 and 1807 (Grundtvig 1807: 129–221). But Grundtvig did not care about – as he wrote – the details of the liturgy. He went deeper into a new philosophy of religion, apparently influenced by Henrik Steffens and his lectures about German romantic philosophy. Steffens' lectures had been published in 1803, and it was lectures 7 and 8 in particular, together with works of Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, which inspired Grundtvig in formulating his definition of religion (Steffens 1803; Schelling 1979: 27–57; Fichte 1956: 111–203). Together with Fichte, Grundtvig discusses and announces himself to be against the rationalistic attitude that religion is 'knowledge about the extrasensory' (Rønning 1907: 124). Integrating a romantic – Steffens' – understanding of mythology and history with the religious aspect and the power of ancient gods, Grundtvig finally formulates a definition of

religion: religion is a composition of finiteness with eternity (Grundtvig 1807: 139–141).

His religious turning point had been marked with a sermon which he published in 1810 under a title that was strongly provocative towards the official Church of Denmark: *Hvi er Herrens Ord forsvundet af Hans Hus?* (Wherefore hath the Word of the Lord vanished from His House?) (Grundtvig 1810). Grundtvig accused the rationalistic Danish clergy of betraying the true word of the Bible (Grundtvig 1810: 12–21; Rønning 1907: 158–174). Later, his theological views, combined with his provocative character, resulted in a trial (the first of them in 1826 against theologian Henrik Nicolai Clausen) and the court's verdict to debar Grundtvig from preaching for seven years, not because of the defendant's blasphemy, but due to personal offence (a judgement that was repeated several times). What Grundtvig adapted from pietism (which he definitely rejected) was the idea of a new organisation of the church, founded on independent and self-organised congregations. Cutting himself off from the official principle of the Lutheran Church as having its foundations in the Bible, he wanted instead a living community of Christians. The basic notion he expressed in that context was the idea of 'Det levende Ord' (the living word) (used by Christ during the Last Supper), formulated for the first time in 1825 in *Kirkens Gienmæle* (Grundtvig 1825) (The Church's Rejoinder), then explained further in *Om den sande Christendom* (Grundtvig 1826) (On True Christianity) and *Om Christendommens Sandhed* (Grundtvig 1826–1827) (On Christianity). On this basis Grundtvig later formulated his revolutionary opinion that true Christianity was not to be found in religious textbooks, and thus religion should not be taught in school (Grundtvig 1838: 14–15).

Grundtvig's ideas arose in the troubled political situation that obtained in Denmark after the Napoleonic wars. To understand the importance of those dramatic events, which constituted a turning point in Danish history, one has to take into consideration that the Danish monarchy had, since the beginning of the sixteenth century, been a conglomerate Kingdom of Denmark and Norway. It also encompassed several valuable possessions, like the North Atlantic islands (Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands), the Duchies of Schleswig-Holstein,

and some tiny Caribbean islands that were crucial to the Danish economy. During the global conflict between France, Great Britain and other European powers at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Denmark was forced to take part in the wars as an ally of the French Emperor, after the bombardment of Copenhagen in 1807 — despite many dramatic efforts to maintain its neutrality. The results of this alliance turned out to be very unfortunate for the Danish realm: it lost its most important symbol, the great fleet, and in 1814 it also lost Norway as well as that territory's important resources, to a union with Sweden. The Danish state went bankrupt in 1813, but what turned out to be more important for the people was that the monarchy had been deprived of its political position in the Northern region. In 1815 the Danish realm turned into a tiny peripheral state, totally dependent upon European powers.

The traumatic loss of Norway was interpreted by the Danes as a partition of Denmark, triggering an intense wave of national and patriotic feeling. Like many nations in a similar situation in the post-Napoleonic era, the Danes searched for an understanding of their position as a nation and of their national origins, for ways to ensure the survival of their national identity in a time of crisis, and last but not least strategies for the nation's revival. All those issues were bequeathed to historians, who were supposed to find a solution to the issues of the day: the decline of the Danish realm, the loss of Norway, and how to regain the proper and proud position of Denmark.

Grundtvig had his own vision of the possibility of Denmark's renaissance — and indeed the renaissance of all the Scandinavian North — by means of national education and the development of a national (and Nordic) identity, especially among the common people. He considered the Danish peasants, who constituted around eighty per cent of Danish society (Johansen 1979: 56), to possess the most valuable national substance. Grundtvig included his first remarks on that matter in his first historical work, *Kort Begreb af Verdens Krønike i Sammenhæng* (Grundtvig 1812) (The First World Chronicle), and later in an expanded version of the same title (Grundtvig 1814). Apart from occasionally criticising the religious rationalistic ideology of many prominent Danes, Grundtvig presented his own and remarkable

historical philosophy, with German romantic speculative philosophy as a foundation. What was especially striking in Grundtvig's historical ideology was a fascinating combination of Old Norse mythology with Christian revival and the thought of Martin Luther. And it was the teaching of the Bible in conjunction with Nordic mythology which, according to Grundtvig, would lift the Danish and Nordic world out of crisis. The philosopher constructed an idea of seven religious congregations of the people, being the seven consecutive stages of the evolution of mankind. The fifth in this chain was the German congregation starting with Luther and his theses, and Grundtvig argued that its progress was expressed in the birth of a national church and the first popular (national) education programmes, especially in Denmark. The sixth congregation was just emerging in the Scandinavian North, with the Christian revival movements and a burgeoning of national (meaning Danish) and Nordic identity. For Grundtvig an inborn conjunction of the pagan Old Norse and Danish mythology with Lutheran Christianity proved quite natural. As he wrote in the poem 'Synet' (Vision), Odin, the leading Nordic mythological figure, was in fact the God of early Danish Christianity (Rønning 1907: 162–164).

The idea of a rebirth of a powerful North had, however, a very practical dimension: it was founded on teaching the people national history, stressing particular glorious moments which made Denmark and all of Scandinavia great. Grundtvig was quite sure that both historiography and popular history teaching should not be seen as scientific and objective truth, which could not be subordinated to any pragmatic interest. History had an important duty, serving the great task of educating society and of strengthening national identity. Grundtvig's understanding of Danish national culture and history — and of independent Christian communities with the free and individual faith which, according to Grundtvig, distinguished Denmark from other Nordic nations — gave birth to the idea of *danskhed* (Danishness).[1]

Another notion should be mentioned here, one which was extremely important for the complexity of Grundtvig's idea of national education and for the general idea of Danish national identity: *folkelighed* (almost impossible to translate, literally 'folksliness'). Formulated by Grundtvig in several works between 1831 and 1848, *folkelighed* was based on the

romantic writings of Rousseau and Herder, and definitely the idea of German *Volk* or *Volksgeist*, meaning Nation or National Spirit (identity). The idea, as understood by Grundtvig, underwent a remarkable development during his lifetime, to 'end up becoming the key concept for everything that ties the Danish people both politically, socially, linguistically and spiritually' (Langkjær Fårup 2009: 74). What tied the people together was democracy and freedom, egalitarianism, the mother tongue and Lutheran Christianity, national history and poetry. Grundtvig himself explained the term *folkelighed* during a meeting of Scandinavian students in 1845 in Copenhagen. He presented the concept as synonymous with nationality, as he showed the similarities and differences between the Danish and a common Nordic nationality. The idea of a Nordic union was popular among Scandinavian students at that moment (Säve 1846: 121–122).

Grundtvig's theory of national education

The above-mentioned ideas were the cornerstones of Grundtvig's theory of national education for the common people (hereafter referred to as *folk*), presented by Grundtvig in 1836. But the idea of a folk high school appeared for the first time in *Nordic Mythology*, published in 1832 (Grundtvig 1904–1909).[2]

Introducing his great work, Grundtvig presented a vision of a folk high school which seemed rather bizarre to his contemporaries educated in classical Humanities. Grundtvig's vision focused merely on national language, history and cultural education, paying particular attention to the Danish and Nordic mediaeval era and mythology; this constituted, for him, the quintessence of Danish-Nordic national spirit. Looking much further ahead than his contemporaries, Grundtvig stressed the importance of such education for the development of a civic society in Denmark. What this means is that the fundamental change in Grundtvig's understanding of education was not based on common religion, but on the idea of Danish citizenship. Recalling his demand for *the living word* as a basic method of teaching, Grundtvig argued it should be used not in the religious sense, but as a way of conducting living lectures and debates with pupils in a form of

mutual education (Grundtvig 1904–1909, vol. 5: 394–418). Those new aspects of his idea of education suggest that Grundtvig, though he was building his educational programme on a religious foundation, wanted to distinguish between the Church and the State, Christianity and education, nationality and citizenship.

In the mid-1830s the absolutist regime in Denmark moved towards a limited form of political participation as four advisory provincial assemblies (*de rådgivende stænder*) were introduced: in Roskilde (covering Zealand, Funen and other Baltic islands), Viborg (Northern Jutland), Schleswig (Southern Jutland) and Itzehoe (Holstein). Quite a broad scope of enfranchisement made it possible even for the lowest agrarian classes to participate in the elections. It is worth mentioning that some of the farmers were also able to participate in all debates. As one of them wrote to his wife during the first session in 1835: 'Derimod skylder bøndene tak til de forsamlingerne for den oplysning, som alle de bønder får, der er draget ind i det røre, de har vakt' (quoted in Skovmand 1964: 153) (All the peasants ought to be really grateful to the [religious] societies for all the education they get, as part of the movement they have awoken).

But the great majority of the rural representatives were intellectually 'absent' during the sessions, and this limitation made them unable to take a stand alongside the nobility or bourgeoisie. The enormous difficulties the peasants met during the debates, due to a lack of good education and training in public activities, as well as the 1836 debate in the assemblies about a reform of the Danish education system (Jensen 1931–1934, vol. 1: 453–458), inspired Grundtvig to prepare his two major works on education: *Det Danske Fiir-Kløver eller Danskheden partisk betragtet* (Grundtvig 1836) (The Danish Four-Leafed Clover) and *Skolen for Livet og Academiet i Soer borgerlig betragtet* (Grundtvig 1838) (The School for Life and the Academy in Soer). Together with some later works, these texts by Grundtvig laid out a system of principles for popular education for Danish youth and adults (public elementary education for children was not a concern of his).

Grundtvig is considered to be the founder of folk high schools, but his pedagogical ideas and his conception of how popular education should be reformed were originally focused upon quite another matter.

What the ideas all had in common was a general demand for freedom in education, stimulating the creativity of the students, the principle of the living word as the main method of lecturing, and last but not least the necessity of founding the teaching programme on national history and ancient Nordic sagas and skaldic poetry. However, the term for this system which has tended to be associated with Grundtvig – *skolen for livet* (the school for life) – was actually used for the first time by Tage Algreen-Ussing (1797–1872), a Danish politician and lawyer, in a series of commentaries on the debates (Algreen-Ussing 1836). What the two men had in common was a hatred of the traditional and extremely orthodox Latin school system, so Grundtvig eagerly added the concept of *a school for life* to his idea of Danish national and civic education (Bugge 1965: 293).

In his first work on education, *Det Danske Fiir-Kløver,* Grundtvig presented a philosophy of education. Its essential aim was to elicit love for four 'leaves' of the clover that were crucial to national and civic identity: the King, the people, the homeland and the national language (Grundtvig 1836: Indledning, VI). More specifically, the aim was to develop *livsoplysning* (life enlightenment), to prepare young people to take an active part in public life. Grundtvig used the term *Borger-Selskab*, which should be translated as 'civic society', making him perhaps the first in Danish public debate to present this idea (Grundtvig 1836: 10). With enormous exultation Grundtvig wrote about the freedom of speech which, in his opinion, had been introduced together with the advisory councils ('Folkets aabenlydte Stemmefrihed'),[3] admitting that the law was just a starting point for further development – a proper education in civic and national values (Grundtvig 1836: 13). Following the ideas of Tage Algreen-Ussing, Grundtvig wrote about a 'Høi-Skole for vor borgerlige Ungdom, hvorved den Dannelse og Oplysning, vi maae ønske baade hos Stats-Raadet og dets Vælgere' (high school for young commoners making them well educated and enlightened to meet the demands of public service in assemblies and voting). The high school was supposed to be an independent academy (Grundtvig 1836: 40). And going much further than T. Algreen-Ussing, Grundtvig stressed the national aspect: 'En Dansk Høi-Skole […] hvor Alting dreier sig om Konge og Folk, Fæderne-Land og Moders-Maal' (Grundtvig

1836: 55) (A High School with a teaching programme based exclusively on the King and the People, the Homeland, and Mother Tongue). We should take note of the fact that Grundtvig did not mention the Church and the matters of faith, as in his opinion they should remain outside the school institutions. What he insisted was essential in Danish national education was the history and poetry of the Nordic bards: 'Skjaldene, som besang Kongene og Fæderne–Land med Ordet de tog Folkene af Munden' Grundtvig 1836: 55) (The Nordic bards who sang about the Kings and the Homeland, taking the word from the people's oral traditions). As a high school aiming to build a modern civic society it should focus on such matters as national character, the legal system and the homeland in as many respects as possible (Grundtvig 1836: 57).

It should be stressed that it was more or less during the same period (1834–1836) that Grundtvig, having a free Church in his mind, started a new campaign aiming at the abolition of one of the most important constituencies of the absolutist state and the Lutheran Church (Danish Law from 1683): a dissolution of the permanent attachment of people to a parish (*sognebåndsløsning*). The law had finally been introduced to the parliament in 1855 by Grundtvig himself, who became first a member of the Constitutional Assembly in 1848, then a member of the Folketing (Rønning 1907–1914, vol.3: 147–174). Twenty–five years earlier the struggle for *sognebåndsløsning* had led Grundtvig to elaborate new thoughts about the relations between the Church and the State; to draw a distinction between those two institutions. Due to his concept of a civic education, Grundtvig drew a line between the School and the Church as well, when he wrote about four 'leaves': the King, the people, the homeland and the national language (Grundtvig 1836: 55). Nationality seems also to be a separate category.

In his later work, *Skolen for Livet og Akademiet i Soer* (1838) (The School for Life and the Academy at Soer), Grundtvig tried to be more specific about his idea of an independent academy. His idea was, rather, a proposal for a reform of a school already existing; an Academy in Sorø (Soer) intended for the young nobility had been founded in 1623 by Christian IV, closed in 1665, then reactivated during the period 1747–1793. Grundtvig wanted to transform the Academy into a school

for future politicians and members of the administration, especially for youth who did not belong to the nobility. They would learn about Danish history and literature (especially the mediaeval era that Grundtvig so loved and admired), contemporary Denmark, and even meet the greatest Danish romantic poets whom Grundtvig regarded as an emanation of the Danish national spirit (Grundtvig 1838: 12–40).

It was an obvious move to abandon Latin and Greek in favour of Danish as the language of lectures. Grundtvig made several unsuccessful attempts to capture the interest of the Danish Crown Prince Christian Frederik (King Christian VIII from 1839) in his idea (Grundtvig 1943: 416–422).

The grundtvigian reform of the Academy in Sorø (Soer) never came to pass, but this somewhat utopian idea formed a basis for further propositions for national education. Firstly, Grundtvig adapted his idea of a high school as an academy for young civil servants and politicians in favour of a more popular high school for young people, especially peasants. We can find such an idea in a work published in Norway at almost the same moment: *Til Normænd om en Norsk Høi-skole* (Grundtvig 1837) (To the Norwegians, on a Norwegian High School). Grundtvig's intention was to participate in a cultural debate that was current in Norway in 1830, about their language, national identity and education (Szelągowska 1984: 63–85). But the Norwegians, being generally hostile towards the Danes and Danish culture after 400 years of a disadvantageous – they claimed — union with Denmark, apparently misunderstood his proposition, interpreting his paper negatively as an act of interference, so the proposition had a very negative reception in the Norwegian press (Yde 2012).

The Norwegians apparently missed the most important elements of Grundtvig's idea of a restoration of the Norwegian national culture: a generally accessible and free high school for common people ('folkelig Høi-Skole'), with an educational programme of national language and history (Grundtvig 1837: 10):

> thi her, hvor Talen kun er om en Folkelig Dannelse, en Dannelse altsaa, hvori hele Folket til Livets Gavn og Landets Tarv, kan og saavidt mueligt bør deeltage […] den er det for Bondens og

> Sømandens, Haandværkerens og enhver Anden.
> (Grundtvig 1837: 13, 15)
>
> (What I am discussing is a popular education, meaning an education in which all of the people for their own benefit, and for the good of the country, can and if possible should participate. […] Like a peasant, a sailor or a craftsman.)

Another remarkable piece of advice from Grundtvig to the Norwegians was how to establish a folk high school: he suggested it should be something like a cooperative or even a shareholder's company:

> 'Høiskolens afgjorte Velyndere skulle derfor ikke nøle et Øieblik med Forsøget paa, ved frivilligt Sammenskud paa Actier, at saae gjort en Begyndelse […] til den Norske Høiskole'
> (Grundtvig 1837: 18)
>
> (The benefactors of the High School should therefore not hesitate one moment to attempt, with voluntary cooperation on shares, to lay the foundations of the Norwegian High School)

The folk high school movement

Of all Grundtvig's works, *Til Normænd…* was written in a particularly simple language, and was both specific and very short (twenty-four pages). No wonder it quickly became a sort of popular manual among Danish activists, especially from the grundtvigian revival movement, including as it did a clear set of instructions on how to establish a folk high school. It was the element of a national programme of education which made the idea especially attractive to Danish ethnic groups in the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein (parts of the Danish realm until 1864), which were embroiled in a deep conflict with the Germans. The population of the duchies was ethnically mixed: mostly German in Holstein and southern Schleswig, and mostly Danish in northern Schleswig. The German national awakening in Holstein, opting for an

unification with Prussia, came into collision with the Danish national movement, which was striving for a reintegration of Schleswig with the Kingdom of Denmark and demanding an abolition of discrimination against Danes in Schleswig (Szelągowska 2002: 101–109). Grundtvig's idea of national education, which was meant to consolidate a Danish identity, seemed to be the perfect answer. Thus the very first folk high schools in Denmark were established in Schleswig and southern Jutland.

The first high school, which later served as a pattern for establishing such schools, had been organised in Rødding in north-western Schleswig by intellectuals from Copenhagen, Danish intelligentsia from Schleswig, and, most importantly, Danish peasants from Schleswig. However, it was the members of grundtvigian revival societies in particular who took the first initiatory step. At the beginning of February 1842, *Dannevirke* (a Danish magazine published in Schleswig) inserted a notice about a German project establishing a school for peasants in Schleswig and Holstein (*Danske politiske Breve* vol. 2: 304–305).

The subject was immediately taken up by Professor Christian Flor from the University in Kiel, one of the most important members of the Danish national movement in Schleswig, as he proposed to establish there a high school intended for young peasants (Flor 1841). And, exactly as Grundtvig wrote in his paper for the Norwegians, Flor suggested that it should be set up as a cooperative: to gather, to draft a plan, to invite the peasants to buy the shares at the lowest price possible (it was crucial for its success that the poorest peasants could afford to buy them), to buy a piece of land, to build a school, to employ a group of teachers and then just start teaching. On 20 December 1841 the company — two grundtvigian preachers and nine farmers — met in a tavern in Brøns on the western coast of Schleswig, and decided how to formulate an invitation to potential shareholders, and on the purchase of a farm to transform it into a school and homes for teachers. A general draft of the teaching programme was drawn up as well, with – at the peasants' request – additional lessons in German language. Along with Grundtvig's ideas, the syllabus was based on Danish language, the history and geography of Denmark, the history of the Church, Bible readings, geometry ('with practical fieldwork', as the report said) and singing practices (Skovmand 1960: vol. 1, 9–11).

The Danish Schleswig Society granted the school committee a high subsidy as the peasants' shares proved insufficient to buy the farm. In December 1843 the Society applied to King Christian VIII for permission to inaugurate the school:

> Det Maal, vi har sat os, er at grundlægge en Anstalt, hvor Bonde og Borger kan erholde saadanne Kunskaber og Færdigheder, som kan være til Nytte og Behag, ikke saa meget med Hensyn til hans Særlige Næringsvej og Bedrift som med Hensyn til hans Stilling som Landets Søn og Statens Borger. Anstalten skulde altsaa have en velgørende Indflydelse paa hans huslige og private som paa hans offentlige og borgerlige Liv […] Vi kalder den en Højskole, fordi den ikke skal være nogen Sædvanlige Drengeskole, men en Undervisningsanstalt for unge Mennesker efter Konfirmationsalderen, dels for fuldvoksne Karle og Mænd, og vi kalder den en Folkehøjskole, fordi Medlemmer af enhver Stand kan faa Adgang til den, om den end nærmest anlægges for Bondestanden. (Skovmand 1960: vol. I, 19)
>
> (Our aim is to establish an institution which should make it possible for any peasant and citizen to attain knowledge and skills which can be useful and pleasant, not so much with regard to his particular way of living and making money, but as a son of this land and a citizen of the State. The institution should thus have a beneficial influence on his home and private life as much as on his public and civic duties as well. […] We call it a High School, because it will not be an ordinary school for boys, but a learning institution teaching young people after confirmation [at the age of 14 – G.Sz.] and for adult men as well. And we call it a Folk High School, because people of every social standing can access it, but most of all it is for the peasants.)

The school, which was a boarding school, was inaugurated on 7 November 1844. It had twenty students aged sixteen to twenty-seven, who participated in classes only in the winter months due to

the traditional agrarian schedule. Johan Wegener, the first director of the school, pointed that the tuition was calculated at a very low level; however, many of the students applied for dispensation from the fee. They received mostly negative answers, as the school had to pay enormous debts (Flor 1766). The first folk high school operated until 1870, when Schleswig was annexed by Prussia after the Danish–Prussian war of 1864. Thereafter, the school in Rødding served as a pattern for all other Danish folk high schools, and a place of practice for future high school teachers and the grundtvigians.

The idea of an independent free school

Apart from the folk high school movement, the grundtvigian concept generated another interesting system: the idea of free and independent elementary schools (*friskoler*) for children of the peasants. These are worth mentioning, as they emerged as a part of the revival societies' activity and as a result of their objection to the religious instruction taught in the official education system. The very first contestations in that matter could be observed among the earliest Danish agrarian revival societies, 'the strong Jutlanders' (*stærke Jyder*), who started their activity around 1800 in eastern Jutland protesting against the official line of religious teaching and textbooks, and rejecting the rationalistic interpretation of the Bible. What the societies demanded was a traditional pietistic handbook for children (Pontoppidan 1854, first published 1737), and the traditional 'Book of Psalms' by Thomas Hansen Kingo (1699). Soon members of another society, followers of blacksmith Hans Nielsen, refused to send their children to official religious lessons in preparation for the act of confirmation (Lausten 2004: 209–211). Very similar action could be seen among the so-called Sect of Kerteminde in Funen, where a peasant named Christian Madsen started a revival society under the strong influence of Herrnhut emissaries and their fraternities. After years of prosecution and trials ending with sentences of imprisonment and high penalties, in 1839 the revival societies received permission to establish independent private schools with pietistic teaching syllabuses and books (Larsen 1933: 78–79).

Meanwhile, in the late 1820s, Grundtvig and his religious and educational ideas consolidated a strong hold upon most of the Danish revival societies and their elementary schools, leaving strongly orthodox western Jutland pietistic societies and their teaching activities on the periphery of the Danish revival movement. The orthodox revival societies were usually very ill-disposed toward the grundtvigian idea (Larsen 1933: 210). Nevertheless, as the schools established according to Grundtvig's model were growing popular, even the orthodox groups decided to establish some free schools according to the well-known pattern.

The near-mass movement of Danish independent schools was therefore much influenced by grundtvigian educational ideas and concepts of general education. As a devotee of natural liberty and freedom of conscience, Grundtvig rejected the system of compulsory education which ignored the responsibilities parents had to their children. The 'åndelige' (spiritual) subjects – as Grundtvig called religion, history, mythology – should be taught not with 'dead' books but narrated in a lively way by the teacher using poetry, songs (like canticles) and music. Grundtvig dreamt of a friendly school where children were respected and could develop their humanity without anxiety, where the education could be focused upon national heritage such as sagas, Nordic mythology, and folk culture. The teacher was not supposed to check the child's level of education by means of tests or exams; it seemed to Grundtvig that this was a form of bullying, as the teacher knew much more than the child. So it was the child who was supposed to ask the questions, not the teacher, and the learning process should be more of a dialogue between the child and the teacher. That was the ideological background of the concept of independent elementary schools established by parents, later developed by Christen Kold, son of a shoemaker from Thisted.

Like almost every other educational activist in nineteenth-century Denmark, Kold also originated from the revival movements. In 1849 he started a grundtvigian folk high school in Ryslinge on Funen for young peasants, who later inspired him to establish an independent elementary school for their children. A dissertation prepared by Kold in 1850 in a competition run by the Danish Pedagogical Society –

Om Børneskolen (On the Children's School) – served as both an ideological plan and practical guide for the educational enterprise (Kold 1944). The basic principles of an independent grundtvigian elementary school were first of all friendly methods of teaching, with a programme adjusted to the intellectual, emotional and age-determined possibilities of a child. According to Kold, history and literature should be taught using legends, fairy tales, sagas and myths (Kold 1944: 14). Along with Grundtvig, Kold rejected the passive methods of learning that were most hated by children, because they were forced to memorise facts without understanding all the information they received from the teacher (Kold 1944: 37–41). Just like Grundtvig, Kold preferred the 'living word' instead of official textbooks. What was especially important for the parents was that Kold was quite convinced that the folk high school graduates represented the best candidates for the teachers' posts (Kold 1944: 50–53).

The first *friskole* (free school), which soon became a pattern for this type of independent elementary education system all over the country, was established in 1852 in Dalby (Funen). The school's activity began immediately after its received its permit from the General School Management – an institution of the Danish administration in charge of the state school system. And in common with the folk high schools, the free school was established as a cooperative amongst the parents (Johansen 1991: 10).

The free education movement initiated by Christen Kold had a crucial impact on Danish education law as regards the independent school system and the state school system as well. Firstly, under the pressure of the grundtvigian milieu, the koldian school system finally became subject to proper legislation in 1855 (with later amendments). This was especially important for the revival societies; one such amendment of 1864 allowed them to set their own independent exams in religion, a subject which, according to pietistic ideology, was supposed to be taught in the home. On the other hand, the state school system, influenced by grundtvigian and koldian ideas, underwent many essential changes during the second half of the nineteenth century as regards the teaching programme, the methods of lecturing, and general modernisation. A good example of these changes is the system

of parent boards developed in state schools in 1856, with obvious inspiration from the principles of cooperative independent schools organised and financed by the parents.

Although the problem of free schools dominated in the public discourse throughout the nineteenth century, this type of elementary education represented a rather small number of schools in Denmark overall. From 1859 to 1900 there were seventy-nine schools with 3085 children, compared to around 2500 state elementary schools with around 200,000 children (Larsen1933: 36, 93; Johansen 1979: 255). Much more important was the fact that the graduates of grundtvigian folk high schools formed a well-educated staff of the folk high schools – the second aim for Kold, who finally embodied Grundtvig's romantic idea of a universal university and changed it into an egalitarian concept of general adult education (Appel 6616; Gammelgaard 5446; Grove 5481; Rasmussen 6184, Pontoppidan 6147; Schrøder 6307). As I have already mentioned, the first folk high school was established due to the needs of the Danish national movement in Schleswig. Those folk high schools which subsequently appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century were all strictly connected to the revival societies (Skovmand 1960: vol. 2, 154–155; (Bagge and Engelstoft 1948: 304–330). The methods of learning were quite similar to those of free elementary schools, focusing upon the method of active learning. It is however important to stress that contrary to Grundtvig's sharp distinction between education and the Church, nationality and Christianity, Christen Kold tended to present a less clear opinion in that regard, thus influencing the whole folk high school movement and its programme.

Grundtvigianism and modernisation of Denmark: a conclusion

Grundtvig's educational ideas had a clear and obvious religious background. But in the 1830s, especially after the advisory provincial assemblies had been introduced in 1834, radically changing both Danish state and society, those changes affected Grundtvig's school programme as well moving him towards a more general idea of civic

society. As early as 1832, he presented the idea of a school based not on Lutheran religion but on Danish citizenship. To build a modern community of Danish citizens was a new goal of education. The evolution of the idea moved Grundtvig towards the distinction between the State and the Church, and then between the School and the Church. The concepts of Danishness and *folkelighed* created a new understanding of the terms 'Nationalitet' (Nationality), 'Christendom' (Christianity) and 'Borger-Selskab' (Civic Community).

Grundtvigian folk high schools changed the mentality of the Danes and made Danish peasants more active. As a good example, one can point to a remarkable reaction of the Danes to the fatal military and political defeat at Dybbøl in 1864. Among many public activities, such as the establishment of hundreds of local newspapers and national organisations, one is worth special emphasis: the re-cultivation of heathlands in Jutland. After the loss of Schleswig and Holstein in 1864, which meant a loss of one third of both territory (19,000 square kilometres) and inhabitants (approximately 800,000), the Danes developed a national project of bringing under cultivation the vast territories of the heathlands of the Jutland Peninsula. The poet H. P. Holst created a popular watchword: 'Hvad udad tabes, skal indad vindes' (What we lost outside the country, we shall regain inside it). The heathlands had a territory of nearly two fifths of Jutland (around one million hectares), and to make the process of re-cultivation faster Det danske Hedeselskab (the Danish Heathlands Society) had been established in 1866. The success was spectacular: by 1914, Danish agriculture had around 4000 additional square kilometres to cultivate. The folk high schools played an important and visible part in the process of re-cultivation, and in 1865–1870 there were thirty more of them (Szelągowska 2010: 49–51).

Grundvig's understanding of Lutheranism, Danishness and the idea of civic education influenced Danish culture and society during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. This was mostly due to the advancement of Danish agriculture thanks to new forms of production (like milk and bacon cooperatives) and self-organisation by the peasants (such as in Rochdale-like cooperatives or mutual savings banks). The archival sources show that amongst the founders

of various co-operatives, the grundtvigian revival societies, folk high school graduates and teachers were very well represented. In the political milieu, too – after a liberal constitution had been introduced in Denmark in 1848–1849 – the grundtvigians represented a distinctive group. The transformation of romantic grundtvigianism into a modern political programme had been put into effect by one of the teachers and university activists, Sofus Høgsbro (Skovmand 1964: 132–133). In 1867, twenty-one deputies to the lower chamber of Danish Parliament (*Folketinget*), with strong support from the folk high schools, formed the first Danish liberal party with an agrarian programme: 'Det nationale Venstre' (The National Left). Moreover, despite the political and ideological diversification of the Danish parliament, many of the deputies had a grundtvigian background; in 1890 around twenty per cent of them were graduates of the folk high schools (Lausten 1987: 248–249).

Peasant grassroots organisations, such as cooperative societies with a background in the revival movements and, particularly, grundtvigian schools, were not just a visible sign of new times in a modernising Denmark; they introduced new forms of egalitarian education, accelerated the social and political emancipation of Danish peasants, established new forms of free market economy, developed a modern mass culture, effected changes within collective mentality, and, last but not least, contributed to the social integration of Danish society.

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Endnotes

[1] *Danishness* as a concept and a way of understanding the Danish form of national patriotism has been profoundly explored by Jenkins: 2011.
[2] Grundtvig published the first version of *Nordisk Mythologi* in 1808 (Grundtvig 1808).
[3] Grundtvig proved to be quite naive in that matter as the Danish absolute monarchy, distressed about the Danish liberal press during the election campaign to the assemblies, introduced almost at the same time in January 1835 a new and more sharpened law about censorship.

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