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## N.F.S. Grundtvig: An Introduction to his Life and Work (Book Review)

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those of other faiths fit comfortably into the non-Christian culture.

I could see both myself and the Reformed community mirrored in *After Heaven*, and the sight was unsettling. I struggled with Wuthnow's strictly sociological methodology which would not consider the possibility that the Holy Spirit may work through various culturally-derived means to further the Kingdom of God. He assumes that culturally influenced practices automatically lead to compromised practices, an assumption which is surely reductionist. Because the Christian faith is this-worldly, it inherently walks that fine line between appropriate, Spirit-led contextualization and compromised impotence. The early church employed the household structure of its day, transforming it to serve the gospel while also tolerating certain compromises (such as slavery) in order to survive in that context. Because he does not distinguish between contextualization and accommodation, Wuthnow's critique becomes imbalanced. Small prayer groups may be partially—but surely not entirely—accommodationist.

In spite of this imbalance, his critique deserves a close hearing. All of the trends he describes are present (to some degree) in the Reformed community, perhaps even more so than in other communities because ethnicity and the church/home/school triad have allowed us to cling to the dwelling paradigm a bit longer while we also are being shaped by the seeking paradigm. Wuthnow's analysis raises some interesting questions. Could it be that the identity confusion among us concerning what it means to be Reformed has more to do with the erosion of the dwelling syndrome and less to do with the loss of a vibrant, Scripturally-informed tradition? Could it be that the rise of parachurch influences such as Promise

Keepers and Willow Creek (and their derivatives) in our circles is illustrative of a shift to the seeking mode of faith? Might Wuthnow's two models shed light on larger cultural dynamics at work within our worship wars?

*After Heaven's* final chapter outlines Wuthnow's alternative to these two models, which he calls "practice-oriented spirituality." His proposal reads like seeking-oriented spirituality with deeper commitment and rootage in any tradition (doesn't much matter which) mixed in. By intentional commitment to a tradition one overcomes the superficial eclecticism of 'if the spiritual shoe fits, wear it,' and living out a tradition's practices of devotional discipline and service in one's daily life provides coherence, defined as "a consistent, fully integrated life of piety, such that one's practice of spirituality becomes indistinguishable from the rest of one's life" (198). Wuthnow's third way is unsatisfying ultimately because it is creation-based rather than Christocentric: "the point of spiritual practice is to electrify the spiritual impulse that animates all of life." (198) This creational foundation allows him to cite an evangelical Christian, a Muslim and an eclectic practitioner of Eastern mysticism as healthy examples of his alternative.

Fortunately the last chapter is incidental to the heart of the book, functioning more as an appendix than a conclusion. The rest of the book provides a tremendous service to the Christian community, challenging it to step outside of its daily busyness and engage in serious self-examination. His creation-rooted understanding of religion—which leads to his universalism—has also convinced him that one's faith is thoroughly interwoven with the entirety of life, a conclusion which makes him an engaging conversation partner for Reformed Christians.

*N.F.S. Grundtvig: An Introduction to his Life and Work*, by A. M. Allchin (London: Darton Longman Todd, 1997). 336 pages. \$39.95, hardcover. Reviewed by Jon Andreas, Ph.D. candidate in educational philosophy, University of the Orange Free State (Bloemfontein, South Africa).

N.F.S. Grundtvig was a scholar, poet, hymnwriter, teacher, and pastor. Growing up in rural Denmark at the end of the eighteenth century, his faith was nurtured by pious parents and an old-fashioned Lutheran church. As a first-rate medievalist and theologian, he fought against the preeminent rationalism of his time, preferred the language of images, and emphasized the interconnectedness of faith and culture. His writings have had far-reaching implications, especially in education, and his hymns remain favorites in many circles. This book by Professor Allchin—which includes the translations of many of Grundtvig's poems, hymns, and sermons into English—is part of an ongoing project to expose this man's thought to a much wider audience.

This book is divided into three parts with the first third serving as a biography. Grundtvig's most prominent childhood memories include the idyllic green gardens of his native country and the connection with the believers of ages past through the traditional liturgy of his old country church. These two themes – the celebration of God's creation and the unity of the church throughout history in the common bond of worship – play an important role for the rest of his life. While other pastors throughout Europe were delivering sermons that more closely resembled seminary lectures, Grundtvig was weaving poetry into his messages, capturing the imagination of the children in his congregation, and punctuating the worship service with the hymns he had written.

Fascinated by Anglo-Saxon poetry, he combined the images of the ancient folklore with biblical truths to produce powerful words of praise. In Allchin's words, "He has joined together, as only he could, what is called the sacred and what is called the secular; for him, in differing ways, both are sacred" (53). "The Christianity which Grundtvig represented was something much more deeply earthed in the world" (98).

The second section of Allchin's book develops five major themes in Grundtvig's thought. His ideas and practice are worthy of examination simply because they were so radically different from the rest of Western Christianity at the time. It is also interesting to note that much of what he did prefigured the thought, writings, and actions of another influential pastor who appeared later in nineteenth century Holland, Abraham Kuiper. The first theme explored is Grundtvig's bold definition of the church. "Christianity is not a theory to be derived from the Bible and then elaborated by professors. Christianity is a fact of history" (106). The drive behind his incessant historical search for music and lyrics of praise come from his desire to unify the church throughout all the ages. This unification motif is further elaborated in the second and third themes as he takes issue "against the pretensions of academic theology" (129) and suggests that Protestant scholasticism has, in areas such as iconoclasm, gone too far. He remains tightly bound to the primary orthodox doctrines but, as a hymn-writer and teacher, questions the extreme aversion to images, both poetic and visual. Emphasizing the "primacy of worship" in the life of the church, Grundtvig expands the definition of worship to include all of life, something that is developed in the last two themes of this section. Resting in the eschatological hope of the "already and not yet," he extends the idea of the *imago Dei* to all of creation. In that sense, "our bodily resurrection . . . implies the resurrection of the whole creation" (148). Employing the vivid imagery of the garden and the vineyard, he invites us to celebrate in and with the creation for "A simple, cheerful, active life on earth" (165).

The third and final section of the book focuses on several topics in the Church's year through the lens of Grundtvig's sermons. Addressing such events as Advent, Christmas, Easter, and Whitsun (Pentecost), he weaves a delicate thread of poetry and metaphor through the orthodox Lutheran liturgy. Here he emphasizes the sanctification of the whole creation, eschatological hope, God's initiative and our response of praise, and a poetic sensitivity that catches the attention of even the youngest

members of his congregation. He praises the role of women in the Scriptures and mines the rich ideas and images of the Orthodox East and the Greek fathers. In his emphasis on celebrating the creation, he breaks the bonds of Christian utilitarianism and frees the arts and the imagination for new expression and faithful service.

Grundtvig's ideas impacted Kierkegaard and left their mark on Danish culture in ways that are evident to the present day. He believed that all human lives have the potential "to become God-bearing, pregnant with a meaning and a joy which are fully and entirely human and yet have their origins beyond what is merely human" (19). It was this belief that led him to develop the Folk High School movement: "communities of learning, where teachers taught and shared a common life" (51). Grundtvigianism could be characterized by, among other things, "its dislike of any kind of pomp, its love of a certain frugality and simplicity of life, its overwhelming sense of personal responsibility," welcoming and acknowledging both the intellect and imagination as gifts of God, and cultivating music, poetry, acting, and dancing (172).

Allchin's writing style turns what could potentially be a dry biographical text into something genuinely inspirational. He describes the heart of Grundtvig in a way that leaves no alternative but to deepen the reader's faith and commitment to serving God in every area of life. A good deal of Allchin's own admiration for Grundtvig is easily apparent and with good reason, for the words of his hymns and the ideas behind his sermons deserve to be on the lips and in the minds of Christians everywhere. Allchin allows Grundtvig to have the last word in his book and the same honor is gladly extended here by ending with a poem he wrote for his two elder sons at the time of their confirmation:

A simple, cheerful, active life on earth  
Which I would not exchange for that of kings,  
A way made clear in the path our noble fathers trod  
With equal worth ascribed to cottage and castle,  
With the eye, as it is created, turned towards heaven,  
Wide awake to all that is beautiful and great here below  
But well acquainted with the depth of longing  
Only satisfied with the radiance of eternity.  
Such a life I desired for all my descendants  
And pondered diligently how to prepare it,  
And when my soul was tired of its effort  
It found rest in praying the Our Father.  
Then I felt confidence from the Spirit of truth,  
That blessings hover over our life's garden,  
When our dust is placed in its creator's hand  
And all things are awaited in nature's order (165-6).