

Becoming a Christian in a Non-Christian Age

An attempt to answer an old question from a modern grundtvigian standpoint.¹

by Hans Raun Iversen

Introduction

For most Danes the priest, politician, poet and prophet Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872) is the greatest Dane who has ever lived. At any rate he takes up more room in Danish history and culture than any other Dane. Just to mention one example: Grundtvig has written a third - and in fact the best and most popular third - of the hymns in the our great hymnbook. Though a number of works have so far been published in foreign languages², internationally Grundtvig is still far from being as well-known as his 19th century contemporaries Søren Kierkegaard and Hans Christian Andersen.

Grundtvig is a magnet, who seeks to gather up the whole of Danish culture. But he is also a catalyst putting it back into circulation. As an intermediary he is often effective, yet often it is he himself who is felt to block the road. His importance is therefore hard to calculate. It is impossible to say what is his own work, and what he has simply picked up from all those theological and cultural traditions that he studied. And it is equally hard to tell what Denmark would have been without Grundtvig. For we have not been without him for more than 200 years.

It is highly unfair only to deal with Grundtvig as a historical figure. True he studied history day and night - but it was always for the sake of the present and future life of his people and the church. Grundtvig therefore is best regarded as our early contemporary. As it happens he also left more than 100,000 written pages, so one can easily spend a whole life in dialogue with him. It is regrettable that Grundtvig is so hard to translate into a foreign language from his Danish vernacular, for he was a very fine poet, who expressed himself not only in a very beautiful, but also in a very precise way in the composition of his countless poems. Thus we find astonishingly sharp and clear statements on deep and difficult questions in his poetry. Even if one misses out on the beauty of his Danish language, however, one can enjoy the clarity of his thinking, when drawing on his poems to illustrate, for example, the question of how to become a Christian.

Even though Grundtvig did not think of his own time as a non-Christian Age in our modern sense of the words, he is as outspoken and distinctive on the question of becoming a Christian as on most other fundamental human and Christian questions. Firstly we shall try to read Grundtvig's contribution to this issue through the glasses of our time. Later we shall try to read our own situation through Grundtvig's glasses.

I. BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

¹ Lecture at six theological colleges in midwest America, October 1992, arranged under the aegis of The Nordic Center in Minneapolis. Presented together with a similar lecture by Professor Paul Holmer, Ph.D, who was talking from the standpoint of the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855).

² In English there are two major textbooks: Selected Writings. N.F.S. Grundtvig. Edited and with an Introduction by Johannes Knudsen, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1976, and A Grundtvig Anthology. Selected by the Grundtvig Society, Centrum Publications, Århus/James Clarke and Co., Cambridge, 1984. A comprehensive introduction to the different areas of Grundtvig's life and work is found in N.F.S. Grundtvig. Tradition and Renewal. Grundtvig's Vision of Man and People, Education and the Church, in Relation to World Issues Today. The Danish Institute, Copenhagen 1983. It has a full bibliography on Grundtvig literature in English. Parallel editions are found in Danish, German and French. Also worth reading is Ernest D. Nielsen: N.F.S. Grundtvig. An American Study. Augustana Press, Illinois 1955, which is among the sources of inspiration for my own Ånd og livsform. Husliv, folkeliv og kirkeliv hos Grundtvig og sidenhen, Århus 1987.

1. Living Human Beings will be Christians Tomorrow

In a famous poem from 1837 Grundtvig writes that the precondition for becoming a Christian is that we are human. Animals cannot become Christians. And even though we are called sheep we must not think of adding animals to the flock of God, nor cast pearls before swine. While devils even the Almighty himself cannot remake into Christians. But since we are human beings, we have every chance to become Christians, because man is created in the image of God.

To be heathen is no hindrance to becoming a Christian. In fact it is the precondition itself. To be heathen means literally to be someone from the heath. Which is where we all come from inasmuch as God originally placed us there, says Grundtvig.³ We might also call to mind Adam or Enoch, or even better Noah. They were heathens not Christians, but they were clearly in the state of God's grace. And Abraham, David and John the Baptist were friends of God, even though they were clearly not Christians. For Christianity by definition did not exist before Christ. To be a Christian means to believe in and be baptised into Christ, to be swaddled with Christ.

But if we are truly human, we can become Christian. In fact we can hardly escape it, according to Grundtvig. He concludes his poem as follows:

Man first and then a Christian,
That is a major point,
Christianity is given free,
It is the purest joy,
But a joy which only comes to him
Who already is a friend of God,
Belonging to the noble tribe of truth.

Therefore every man on earth
Must strive to be truly human,
Opening his ears for the word of truth,
And giving God the glory;
If Christianity is the truth
Though not a Christian today
He will be one tomorrow!⁴

Christianity always comes free of charge. Christian faith is given freely by God to human beings belonging to the noble tribe of truth. But we cannot be Christians against our will. In fact we have to strive to be truly human in order to become Christian. This is the content of Grundtvig's famous statement **First a man, then a Christian**. He is not suggesting that we should just relax, since if we are not Christians today we will probably be Christians tomorrow anyway. Nor does he mean, as theologians inspired by secular theology have claimed in recent years, that human life should be separated from Christian life in the organisation of modern society.⁵

Grundtvig's statement is theological: **What is truly human is truly Christian**, he says. This we know to be true, in that God's sending of Christ is a re-creation of what he created in the beginning. Thus when human beings live out the human, we are always close to the Christian in

³ In Danish "from the heath" (hedenifra) or "heathen-old" (hedenold) means from very old days.

⁴ Grundtvigs Sangværk, III, no 156. Five verses from this poem have been translated into prose English by Johannes Knudsen in Selected Writings, p. 140-41.

⁵ This is the tendency in Kaj Thaning: N.F.S. Grundtvig. The Danish Institute, 1972.

at least two ways: perhaps human life flows over with gratitude and happiness directed to the God of Creation. Or perhaps - and this is something we all experience - we weep gold tears because we cannot live up to our golden human life. But then the gold tears show that we have had a glimpse of the gold, that is, we have understood that we are created in the image of God. And so defeat on a human level can also send us on to Christianity, provided the path is not blocked by the prejudices and barriers which mankind has set up in the course of history. Once we have become Christians, there is one thing above all we must use the new life for: to become and remain truly human. In fact Grundtvig's central statement about the purpose of life - human as well as Christian - runs like this:

To be human in everything,
Strong in the spirit, despite the dust,
To honour God in mankind
As our Creator's masterpiece.

History has shown that Grundtvig's phrase **First a man, then a Christian** can be misused to separate the human and the Christian. This is not at all his intention. In fact his concern is to understand his own way of being a Christian and to point to how we can invite others to become Christians. A number of people have tried to reformulate Grundtvig's phrase in order to clarify his intention. The best suggestion comes from a modern Danish poet, Poul Borum: **Man and therefore Christian. Christian and therefore Man.**⁶

2. Faith, hope and love from below and above

Grundtvig firmly believes in the principle of contrary terms: Light is the opposite of darkness, life is the opposite of death, good is the opposite of evil; he also believes that these opposites cannot be mixed. His point is that we cannot label somebody as a totally evil person and still preach the gospel to him. Grundtvig firmly opposes Luther when he speaks of men who have been turned into devils because of the fall of Adam.⁷ If we wish to invite people to become Christians, we must begin with the belief that each person is created in the image of God. And we must be ready to answer when we are asked what is the content of that image of God in which we have been created. The full response from Grundtvig to that question is complicated. But its core is faith, hope and love. Faith - that is, a life lived in confidence in other people and perhaps in God. Hope - that is, a life where some sort of meaning is glimpsed in its course. And love - that is, a mutual life of giving and receiving.

Grundtvig's claim is that faith, hope and love can be found everywhere in mankind. If that was not the case, then man would have degenerated into an animal over the years. Without the ability to have confidence, to live in faith, how could we trust our mothers, our husbands and wives, or for that matter our teachers? Only our heart can make us sure of the most important things in life. And when we can be sure in our hearts, then we have faith and are clearly people created in the image of God. Animals and trolls do not know about matters of the heart:

Faith and hope and love,
These jewels of the earth
With God's voice come rushing down
Only to us Humans;

⁶ Paul Borum: *Digteren Grundtvig*. Copenhagen 1983, p.197.

⁷ See 'The Innate and the Reborn Humanity', in *Basic Christian Teaching, Selected Writings*, p.74ff.

To trolls and animals they are but
Idle talk and fairy tales!⁸

These three jewels were given to mankind at creation, and even though they were buried in the desert at the fall of Adam, nowadays out of the heath - among the heathens, such as the Nordic people - these jewels have been ploughed up again, so that we are able to understand the renewed jewels that God laid in the manger-room, from where faith, hope and love grew up again together with God's own Son. And once again Grundtvig puts his basic understanding together in two small verses:

Faith and hope and love
Christian clothing put together
Come to us from above
With God's "Yes and Amen",
Come however as a spring,
Only on the plains and hills,
Where they have been before.

He who knows not what God is
Cannot weep for gold,
Those who are the kin of dust
They can only turn to dust.
Faith and hope and love
From below and from above
Meet in the **Word of God.**⁹

We become Christians when what we as human beings know of faith, hope and love meets God's faith, hope and love in sending his Son. This is so because God works in two ways:

First time as the good creator,
Mild at the dust at your feet,
Second time as the sin-absolver,
gracious God and loving father.¹⁰

Because God works in this double way, it is important that we meet him in a double way: in the goodness of his creation and in the love of his Son. This is also the reason why we as Christians cannot limit ourselves to preaching the Gospel. We also have to reawaken a living folk-life in fact, before we can effectively speak to the people about living Christianity. At least Grundtvig does not, as he says, "envy those who prefer to speak to the dead". He "would rather speak to the living robbers than to the dead saints. The former might be converted but the latter can do nothing."¹¹

There can be no understanding of Christianity, if we have not learnt by heart the human, i.e. God-created, content of the basic Christian words, which are human words:

⁸ Sangværk, V 253, v.1

⁹ Sangværk V 127, vv.1-2.

¹⁰ Sangværk IV 212, v.6.

¹¹ Folk-Life and Christianity, 1847, Selected Writings p.43.

"So if we did not have the Danish words: mankind, father, mother marriage, children, brother and sister, God, Providence and immortality, time and eternity, truth and lying, soul and conscience, faith, hope and love, which made a corresponding human impression on our hearts, then neither gods nor men could enlighten us about them or vitalize us through them. So that it is not only our old ancestors who had to become men before they could be Christians - be heathen before they could become Christian people. It is fundamentally just as true of ourselves and our children, and it has only been hidden from us because either we made no real true use of Christianity, or all that we encountered that was human came to us under one heading, so that we could not distinguish the heathen and the Christian from each other".¹²

3. The Living Interaction

What is needed for humanity is that we live a vital life of faith, hope and love. What is needed for Christianity is that we live a life of Christian faith, hope and love. These two correspond and they can strengthen one another. There can be no living Christian life without living human life. And in the long run, says Grundtvig, there can also be no living human life without living a Christian life.

When looking for living people we must be open-minded, so as to see how far the human struggle really is a true struggle for human life. An example is to be found in Grundtvig's review of the first feminist booklet to appear in Denmark in 1851 - Letters of Clara Raphael. The name of the author, Mathilde Fibiger, does not appear on the cover. Generally the reviewers were rather negative, whereas Grundtvig was very positive. Even though he did not much care for Clara's opposition to Christianity and marriage, Grundtvig found Clara to be one of the "living people who prove that they are so by loving life and hating death in all its forms". Therefore Grundtvig concluded, "Clara is clearly much closer to the Kingdom of God than both the priest confessing his sins, and the young lady trying to convert her without possessing her living feeling of what man, created in the image of God, even in his deepest fall is and must be, both in God's and in his own eyes..."¹³

Human life can be dead. And so can Christian life. In fact our great problem may be that we take dead Christianity as a measure by which we judge human life. In that way we end up with a superficial Christianity, which closes our eyes to the richness of life. Grundtvig put it this way:

"..talking to people who have settled for the explanation that Christianity is no more than allowing oneself after ancient custom to be married by a priest, having one's children baptised as soon as possible without them catching a cold, and going to church when one does not have a cold oneself and one is not afraid of catching one either and one is not off to the park, and one has no other legitimate excuse - talking to such people about Christianity is a hopeless matter because for them it is almost just as external a thing as the "Christian clothing" in which the children were baptised in former times, and which in the country the priest's or the schoolmaster's wife could lend out to the whole parish."¹⁴

We do not need priests with Roman armour in our churches. We only need to ask people to come to church with their "simple, strong and warm everyday clothes",¹⁵ i.e. their daily life in human

¹² Danskeren, IV, 1851 p.90.

¹³ Danskeren IV, 1951 pp.324 and 327.

¹⁴ Danskeren IV, 1851, p.85.

¹⁵ Danne-Virke 1817 p.217.

faith, hope and love. Thus living human life can interact with living Christian life, and if there is no such living human life, then, says Grundtvig, it must be the job of the church to awaken or create such life.¹⁶

Let us conclude this section by seeing how the living interaction between human and Christian life takes place also in unintended ways. In the book After Grundtvig from 1983 the leader of the Danish-minded Germans south of the Danish-German boarder, Karl Otto Meyer, tells how after the Second World War he was among the Danish children who were sent to Denmark for a summer holiday. The schoolmaster used to gather them in the Danish school and before their departure they would sing Grundtvig's famous hymn "O day full of grace, which we behold", written in 1826 for the millennial celebration of the coming of Christianity to Denmark. "I freely admit that for a long time I thought that the verse "We journey to our fatherland, where day is not frail nor fleeting", was about Denmark", says Meyer. Grundtvig intended to paint a picture of the heavenly fatherland by using words from the earthly fatherland. But the children in fact gained a richer picture of their earthly fatherland by singing about the heavenly fatherland. However unintended, the interaction was living anyway, and so it may have helped the children to join in these very precisely formulated words of praise, which Grundtvig wants us all to do:

God be praised for all his bounty,
Image first and fullness last,
Spirit here, in truth, and grace,
Henceforth everything in love!¹⁷

II. BECOMING A CHRISTIAN IN A NON-CHRISTIAN AGE

1. On the Trail of the Spirit

One of the main chapters in Ernest D. Nielsen's book on Grundtvig is called "On the Trail of the Spirit". The title is very apt, for in all the many areas of his life and work Grundtvig constantly pursued the trail of the spirit, as the spirit is what gives life to every area of life. In the last resort the spirit is always God's own spirit, which he breathed into the nostrils of Adam, giving him the breath of life and thus the human spirit (Gen. 2:7).

The activity of the spirit Grundtvig finds first of all in home life, which feeds on and is borne along by faith, hope and love. But the spirit is also the determining power behind and within the life of the people. As God's spirit in creation expressed itself by living words, so it is with human beings: the clearest expression of the spirit within and among us is the living words with which we communicate:

Souls and bodies a thousandfold
The human spirit can unite,
Piercing them with words like lightning,
So they all are one at heart.¹⁸

The creational spirit of God is in the world, working in and among human beings. The re-creational spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, is among us in the same way. We do not need to cry for

¹⁶ Folk-Life and Christianity, 1847, Selected Writings p.41.

¹⁷ Sangværk IV, 239, v.13.

¹⁸ Danish Folk High School Songbook, 151 v. 5.

the Holy Spirit to come to us, we only need to groan for it to stay with us (Romans 8:26). Grundtvig has a special point, however, which is very important to him: just as God created the first time by his living word, so does he today, when the Christian congregation lends him its mouth by saying the Lord's Prayer, the words of the institution of the Lord's supper and the Apostolic Creed. According to Grundtvig these are the main words that we have from the mouth of Jesus himself. Where these words sound again from living voices, God is creating the Christian faith in those who listen. It follows therefore that the church and its worship are a precondition for the survival of Christianity. In fact, says Grundtvig, the Christian faith has been kept alive for all these years because the living words of Christ have been passed on through history in the living congregations in a living way - not because of, but quite often in spite of, the priests and the church establishment.

We will not dwell here on Grundtvig's concept of the church, but he is right in saying that there could be no Christianity without a living church, just as there can be no children without parents. Christianity cannot survive without places to live, to grow, to be passed on. And that is the church's place. Thus the work of the church is a precondition for men and women becoming Christians today.

For Grundtvig there are seven major peoples in history. And in each of them he finds one of the great people's congregations. He names them according to the seven letters of the seven congregations in the Book of Revelation. The first five congregations are the Hebrew, the Greek, the Latin, the German and the English. The sixth congregation, the one called Philadelphia, is not to be found in the country with a city of that name. That would be a superficial way of theologizing, says Grundtvig.¹⁹ He ends up being quite sure that the sixth one, the congregation of love, is the Nordic congregation, and especially the Danish congregation, of which he is himself the great prophet. He has difficulty guessing where the seventh and last congregation will come into being, but he has heard so much about India that he ends up pointing to the banks of the Ganges as its place of origin.

With this concept of history Grundtvig could not speak of Denmark and other places where Christianity has come alive as if we are living in a non-Christian age. There is a lot of resistance to the church - not least within the church itself - and he himself and all living Christians have a major battle to fight before the whole church and thus the entire people can become a living congregation.

On the other hand Grundtvig is well aware that history can turn again, so that the people and the church of the future will face even greater problems than the people and the church of his age. That was not least what he learned in England during his three trips to London in 1829, 1830 and 1831. The demonic element in English development at the time is simply that technical science and financial power together create a spiritless supremacy. There were certain Englishmen of spirit who recognized this already in 1830, says Grundtvig eight years later, during one of his famous lectures Within Living Memory:

"Machinery turns people by the thousand, large and small, into purely secondary factors, pure appendices to the machinery as the chief concern and basic power; so that even those Englishmen who allow themselves to think about something other than reckoning everything they do in money, regard with secret horror each new discovery and colossal exploitation of the mechanical

¹⁹ Kristenhedens syvstjerne, 1860.

powers that are gradually supplanting all the old craftsman and making them mere tools in the engineer's hand, mindless slaves in the factory owner's yard."²⁰

Industrialization only made inroads into Denmark in the years after Grundtvig's death in 1872. And fundamentally he insisted on his biblical view of history, even though he was aware of tendencies towards what is now called modernization and secularization. In various statements he foresaw the demise of his own philosophy of life, if what he called the "railway-age" was going to take over. In a number of ways conditions of life have developed far beyond what Grundtvig could possibly have imagined; in other ways development has not been as catastrophic as he feared. Life has always been difficult, not least for Grundtvig himself, but now it has become difficult in new ways. One central aspect has been touched on by Carsten Jensen, a modern Danish writer:

"Work has gradually become so specialized that if two well-educated people marry and are not in the same branch they will be unable to talk about anything but their love. They are not allocated many more words in common than those available to relatives during visiting-time in a prison. The rest of the time the lovers sit each in their cells of incomprehensible language and cannot even reach one another by banging on the pipes. That is why we talk more and more about love not in confidence but for everyone to hear and in any place. Not because love is the only universal that exists but because the language of love is the last universal left. When the three words I LOVE YOU become a holy trinity and a true religion in the language it does not mean that life is endlessly rich; it means it is endlessly limited. A society where only feelings are allowed to be rich is a poor society."²¹

In its own almost kafkaesque way this quotation points to one basic fact of our time: there is such a thing as a people and a common cultural identity among peoples of the world, but modernization and internationalization have meant that we are not much aware of our common traditions and common conditions of life. Often we have to rediscover what is common to us, for instance in times of crisis or by living outside our own country for a lengthy period. On our return we can perhaps better see our situation and thus also our common values.

Generally speaking we cannot approach anybody today and address them as part of a group with this or that common culture. In a radical way we have all become what Kierkegaard calls "hin enkelte" - that individual, or the single individual. That is how we regard ourselves and thus also how we wish to be addressed. If we do not want to be superficial in our mission to a people, we have to start with the individual today. It is very important, however, that we do not address the individual only because we have some sort of pious understanding that God only wishes to treat individuals with a broken heart. On the contrary, we should start with the individual because we should always be serious about who people are and who they think they are as people of today.²²

²⁰ Mands Minde, 1937 s.446.

²¹ Carsten Jensen: På en mørkerød klode, Copenhagen 1986 p. 73.

²² Grundtvig, rightly understood, is a great missiologist, even though he has his limitations due to lack of experience of foreign mission, cf. Hans Raun Iversen: Grundtvig som inspiration til mission, in Nordisk Missionstidsskrift 3/1983 pp.94-115. At the beginning of this century a number of German missionaries (e.g. Bruno Gutmann) developed what could be seen as a sort of grundtvigian missiology, mixing the grundtvigian theology of folk-Christianity with the German philosophy of "Blut and Boden". A modern "grundtvigian" missiology is to be found in a book by a Baptist pastor from Chicago, brought up with Norwegian lutheranism in a rural valley near the Canadian border in the state of Washington: Raymond Bakke: The Urban Christian, Marc Europe, Bronley 1987. "The bigger the city the more personal we must become", Ray Bakke says (p. 59).

2. Nomads Without Nomadic Culture.

Grundtvig's designation for the good dwelling-place is 'pavilion', the open tent full of shadows. He takes the expression from the many tents set up in the Old Testament.

It is not only the living-place for the desert nomads, but is also described as the king's dwelling. And the expression 'tent' or 'pavilion' is also used about the tabernacle where the people preserved the ark of the covenant during their desert

wanderings. God too can come visiting or take up residence in a tent, as he did for the first time with Abraham in Mamre. It is the same expression John's gospel uses about Christ who becomes flesh and takes up residence, i.e. raises his tabernacle among us (John 1:14). And when the visionary prophesies how God will have his residence among the people (Revelation 21:3) it is again a pavilion that is God's dwelling-place. If we have become nomads in our own culture, without a fixed common identity, life is not necessarily the worse for that. It is not alien to God to pitch his camp among nomads. Let us finally consider then in what sense of the word we have become nomads.

Nomads move around regularly, and especially those with cattle are always ready to break camp so they can be where the grass is greenest and the water most plentiful. However, nomadic life today is often a battle merely for survival. Grass and water are hard to find and the various governments pursue the same policy of preferring the nomads to settle. So nomadic culture in many places is in a state of crisis. But if nomads are allowed to live as nomads, their culture and their practices fit like a glove. Their life-form is a unity, inseparable from their identity. A nomad normally moves with his whole settlement, and wherever he gets to, he will nearly always find other settlements that belong to his own clan. Above all he will always meet members of his real family, i.e. the age group in the tribe with whom he was circumcised. This is so whether he comes as a warrior or a shepherd in his younger years, or as settlement chief as an elder; he will not move to a new settlement until the women have gone before him with the household. In nomadic culture the man never misses a wife and children, for wives and children are held in common with the same age-group. In addition the Christian nomad who has arranged his settlement as a congregation takes his congregation with him when he moves.

Modern people also move around a lot, in Denmark on average every 7th year. But because many only move a little, there are many others who move even more. In our own way we are becoming nomads, although we do not have a nomadic culture. What we do have are memories of an agriculture and some bourgeois ideas about our home as a castle. But our pretty privet hedges and front-door intercoms cannot protect us either from inner dissolution or extraneous everyday rhythms. That is why we often feel we lack both power and language and even freedom, because our many choices do not make us free but tie us hand and foot. And yet time and again it turns out that the spirit cannot be tied down. Love is right after all, a common will creates living forms, and our life is renewed. What we need to do is go inside the forms, however fragile and provisional they are, to be present where we are, to dare to expect that both life itself and enlightenment as to what life is will meet us in the midst of the concrete form-made life. This is our task in our home and places of work, in national and local movements, in the local communities - and in the church if we believe in it. If we accept that life is always somewhere else, wherever the grass is greener, then in the end life is nowhere. Granted most of us in our day to day lives are confronted by powers, authorities, and demands that make it easiest for us to adapt, to pull away, to resign ourselves to the technologically determined rhythm being whatever it might be. The conveyor belt, of whatever kind, is allowed to run on, even though the man next to me has got something in his eye, or perhaps his heart's core has picked up signals that take his courage away. And yet it is only from inside the forms, within the daily rhythms, that life can be lived, even though it is the same forms and rhythms that often do not allow any life to come back into life. So a genuine revolutionary patience is needed, a firm hope that all the

new life which will also be ours is already growing here where we are right now.

As Christians we need environments where we can live as Christians, as churches and congregations here and now. Our next problem, however, is that all too rarely do Christian environments reach outside their own borders with a credible testimony. In practise we appropriate the gospel - perhaps because in reality we are also frightened that a church will grow up that is out of control. So the Home Mission people still talk of the bulk of the people as the forecourt of the temple and not the temple itself. As followers of Grundtvig speak of the everlasting action of John the Baptist, which consists of preparing the people's soil and creating among them self-reflection and horizons of religious understanding as precursors for the specifically Christian 'event', which takes place somewhere else, ostensibly in church on Sunday at 10 o'clock. To which they do not go anyway. Both strategies overlook in practice that God is among us, that God became man in Jesus, and that his activity is continued through the power of the Holy Spirit in the world to this very day. Therefore the true John the Baptist action today, when Jesus has come, is to say with John "Behold the Lamb of God!" (John 1:36). The difference between John and us is precisely that he was six months older than Jesus, while we come almost two thousand years after. Jesus is here before us - among people. Our task is therefore not to wait for him but to point to him and say, God is among us!

It is fortunate that Grundtvig made a mistake when he visualised Christ on his wanderings among the peoples of the earth visiting the high cultures first. "He who goes with the word of grace/homeless and poor around the earth" (DHS 128, v.1) can surely find his way to the nomads without a nomadic culture. So our eyes can also be among those about whom Grundtvig wrote:

Eyes, you are happy
You who see God's Son on earth!
Ears, you became so rich
When you heard the word of life
Heart, when you believed the word,
The tree of life rose from the root."

(DHS 142, v.7)

3. Conclusion.

We have seen that there are three preconditions for people becoming Christians in our age. 1) That we allow one another to live in such a way that everybody can believe that all of us have been created in the image of God. 2) That the Church is the church - that is, those called out to pass on the living words of God in the places where people live today. 3) That we accept that people of today agree with the modern Danish philosopher of everyday life, Storm P, who once said, "Everybody just thinks of themselves. I am the only one thinking just of me."

(Language revised
and quotations from Grundtvig translated by Edward Broadbridge)