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## Foreword

Through the power of his work and personality and as “an agent that provokes or speeds significant change or action” Nicolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872) can rightfully be called the catalyst of modern Denmark. For he contributed decisively to gathering the Danish people into a nation with a common identity – and a search for the common good. His weapon was the pen – “the pen’s a spear” – with which he carved his way into Danish hearts and minds, particularly through his hymns, his songs, and his ideas on education. However secular Denmark may seem today, the Danes still live with the resonance of Grundtvig’s thoughts in their foundational beliefs – in freedom, in happiness, in dialogue, and in moderation.

Grundtvig’s motto, “My life is to fight”, is a fair judgement on himself, for he never ceased to be, in Sid Bradley’s encapsulating words, a “warrior-scholar”<sup>1</sup> for God and Denmark. ‘God’ and ‘Denmark’ do not sit easily with one another nowadays, but to understand Grundtvig they must be taken in tandem. Behind all his thought lay the servant’s wish to work for the glory of God, as God was working for the glory of Denmark. So, however pugnacious and self-willed Grundtvig was throughout most of his life, so humble was he before God – as his hymns and sermons attest. He knew himself to be a proud man, and he was in an ongoing battle with his own character. Only God could humble him, and this too was a constant theme in his work. All theologians have emphasised God’s grace in the *salvation* of humankind, but drawing on Irenaeus Grundtvig stressed the very same grace at work in the *creation* of humankind. Grundtvig is the great hymnwriter to the Creation, to Nature. This essential grounding explains the sense of joy that he brought to Danish Christianity. No wonder that those of his countrymen who emigrated to America in the 19th and 20th century with Grundtvig in their luggage were known as “the happy Danes”.

Crucial to the book’s treatment of Grundtvig is the demonstration of how *active* he was, not just as a great thinker but as a great doer. The Danish word *ildsjæl*, ‘fiery soul’, describes him in a nutshell. Grundtvig’s Christian-Danish passion was the greatest source of attraction for his followers. Naturally, it also created antagonists, including

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1. GS 1989-90, 235.