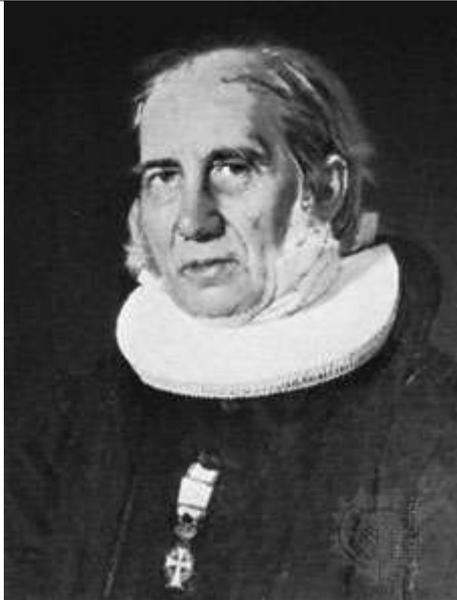


N.F.S. Grundtvig

N.F.S. Grundtvig, in full **Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig**, (born September 8, 1783, Udby, Denmark—died September 2, 1872, Copenhagen), Danish bishop and poet, founder of Grundtvigianism, a theological movement that revitalized the Danish Lutheran church. He was also an outstanding hymn writer, historian, and educator and a pioneer of studies on early Scandinavian literature.



N.F.S. Grundtvig, oil painting by C.A. Jensen, 1843; in the Kunsthistorisk Pladearkiv, Copenhagen.
Courtesy of the Library of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen

After taking a degree in theology (1803) from the University of Copenhagen, Grundtvig studied the *Eddas* and Icelandic sagas. His *Nordens mytologi* (1808; “Northern Mythology”) marked a turning point in this research; like his early poems, it was inspired by Romanticism.

In 1811, after a spiritual and emotional conflict that ended in a “Christian awakening,” Grundtvig became his father’s curate. His first attempt to write history from a Christian standpoint, *Verdens krønike* (1812; “World Chronicle”), attracted much attention. From 1813 until 1821, his criticism of the rationalist tendencies that were then predominant in Denmark’s Lutheran church made it impossible for him to find a pastorate. In poems such as those in *Roskilde-riim* (1814; “The Roskilde Rhymes”) and other collections and in *Bibelske prædikener* (1816; “Biblical Sermons”),

he called for a renewal of the spirit of Martin Luther, and in his opposition to the Romantic philosophers he foreshadowed Søren Kierkegaard. During these years he also opened the way for research into Anglo-Saxon literature with his version of *Beowulf* (1820).

In 1825 he was the central figure in a church controversy when in his *Kirkens gienmæle* (“The Church’s Reply”) he accused the theologian H.N. Clausen of treating Christianity as merely a philosophical idea. Grundtvig maintained that Christianity was a historical revelation, handed down by the unbroken chain of a living sacramental tradition at baptism and communion. His writings were placed under censorship, and in 1826 he resigned his pastorate but continued to develop his view of the Christian church in theological writings and in *Christelige prædikener* (1827–30; “Christian Sermons”). He expounded his philosophy in a new and inspired *Nordens mytologi* (1832; “Northern Mythology”) and in his *Haandbog i verdenshistorien* (1833–43; “Handbook of World History”). As an educator—e.g., in *Skolen for livet* (1838; “Schools for Life”)—he stressed the need for the thorough knowledge of the Danish language and of Danish and biblical

history, in opposition to those who favoured the study of the classics in Latin. His criticism of classical schools as elitist inspired the founding, after 1844, of voluntary residential folk high schools, in which young people of every class were encouraged to be educated. These schools spread throughout Scandinavia and inspired adult education in several other countries.

In 1839 Grundtvig was given the position of preacher at Vartov Hospital in Copenhagen, and in 1861 he was given the rank of bishop. His liberal outlook found political expression in his active part in the movement leading to the introduction of parliamentary government in Denmark in 1849.

Particularly lasting is Grundtvig's position as the greatest Scandinavian hymn writer. His *Sang-værk til den danske kirke* (1837–81; "Song Collection for the Danish Church") contains new versions of traditional Christian hymns, as well as numerous original hymns, many of them well known in Norwegian, Swedish, German, and English translations.

N.F. Grundtvig: Selected Writings, in English translation, was published in 1976.

CITATION INFORMATION**ARTICLE TITLE:** N.F.S. Grundtvig**WEBSITE NAME:** Encyclopaedia Britannica**PUBLISHER:** Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.**DATE PUBLISHED:** 04 settembre 2018**URL:** <https://www.britannica.com/biography/N-F-S-Grundtvig>**ACCESS DATE:** agosto 26, 2019