

## **Grundtvig and “community”: The “father” and the “son”.**

A true society or community is basically a relation of two personal agents: a “father” and a “son”. A “father” is wiser, bigger and better and more virtuous than his son. Any sensible son will see the excellence and virtues of his father and want to become like his father.

The whole community is represented by the father. The father is a manifestation of all values and of the common good. A true community is like the “body of Christ” or the congregation. In a way, the son or the sons or the people are the body of the father or of the king.

The son is an “image” of his father and his natural will (what he should aspire to and hope for) is to become like his father. The father realizes and manifests himself in the son and the father loves his son because he is his own son and is his “image”.

*Examples:* Heavenly father-historical Jesus, Jesus-disciples, Christ-Christians, king-people, priest-congregation, parent-child, husband-wife.

These two agents have different virtues, competence, power, responsibilities, roles, functions, character and nature. They are fundamentally unequal. We are not equal to Jesus Christ and a pupil is not equal to his master or a son to his father.

The father is primary. A society or community is established by an initiative by the father. We love him because he loved us first. If the father did not exist there would be no community. The nation is the “followers” of the king. Being a member of a community is by definition following a leader. The son is a “creation” of the father and the son is a son because he has been “elected” by the father (expressions from the Bible).

A society or community is held together by love (trust, loyalty, responsibility, respect, Colossians 3, 14). There are consequently two different forms of love: the love of the son towards the father and the love of the father to his son or sons. Any community is bound together by the “strings” (cf. the word “constraints”) of love.

As time passes we are bound closer and closer together by these strings. Our “freedom” is in this way reduced. We cannot anymore do the bad and sinful things. We become better and better, bigger and bigger and wiser and wiser. In this way we also become happier and more free. “Freedom” is freedom from ignorance, sin, vice, powerlessness, weakness, spiritual death and desperation.

The roles, sorts of love, sorts of responsibilities and the values in this relationship of the “father” and the “son” are “natural” or immanent - and not decided or arbitrary. They come naturally from the character or nature of the community itself. Ethics or what to do or values are not arbitrary but “objective” or “natural”. If the son (or the people or the Christian people) is disobedient to his father it is an unnatural, objectively bad and self-destructive thing. Grundtvig’s thinking is a sort of “moral realism” (like virtue ethics): Values or ethics depend on things as they really are. There is an intimate connection between “is” (what exists in reality) and “ought” (ethical values).

Grundtvig’s model is partially Old Testament, Israel as a community and the Covenant with God.

Grundtvig’s model when talking about human society is partially inspired by his thoughts about the true nature of the Christian community and church.

A true society or community has a certain structure, certain functions and a certain natural “Telos” (Aristotle), purpose or end-point.

The purpose of a community is the development of the son to become like his father. The father is a master, an ideal, a ruler, an educator, a saviour or a teacher. The purpose is a sort of “up-bringing”, development, evolution or growth.

The relation father-son is without compulsion and based on free will, trust, respect and love. The rule, care, advice, education and upbringing of the father are no tyranny.

A community is based on the father *sacrificing* himself for the benefit of the son and on the son *sacrificing* himself for the benefit of the father and the common good. Without such self-sacrifice there would be no true society or community. Talking about individual rights or liberties –as the Rationalists and Liberalists do - is a quite wrong way of talking. A sick man wants to be cured and does not care about individual rights!

Community, martyrdom and self-sacrifice are intimately connected.

Grundtvig thinks about society in organic, biological or health metaphors. A good society is a natural and healthy society. This goodness and health is determined by the true nature of this society – like a healthy person – an “objective” idea.

Grundtvig’s standard expression: The role and salvation of the “son” is to “follow” and “imitate” his “father” (with all the different meanings of “son” and “father”).

When I enter a true society or community I receive a new identity. I become a new man and I am “re-born”. I receive a new spirit. The members of a community are not individuals and they are quite different from what they were before. Entering a community is a sort of death of the old man (expressions from St. Paul).

A father is defined – dialectically or reciprocally - in his relation to his son and the son is defined and determined in relation to his father. A father without a son is not a father at all. A son without a father to follow is not a son at all. He is not “himself” (Grundtvig’s expression). A nation or people without a leader to imitate and follow is not a true people.

All things have an immanent “nature” or character. (Grundtvig thinks like Aristotle). The nature or natural will of a small child is to grow and become like his father. Like the will or energy of a small plant.

The son - or people - does not live in his own country but in the country of his father. The son does not speak his own language but the language of his father and he has the spirit of his master and father and does the deeds of his father and not his own deeds (expressions from The New Testament).

The values of modernity or of Rationalism or of Liberalism – opposition against authorities, criticism, suspicion etc – undermine the relationship of the father and the son.

Society is not an abstract construction – Grundtvig is against the concept of the “state”. Society is a personal relationship or a relationship of personal agents. Nobody can sacrifice themselves for the benefit of the “state”. But we can sacrifice ourselves for the benefit of other human beings. Jesus Christ died to save his friends and this is the model of any true community.

Everybody wants the same things – happiness, joy, success, strength, virtue etc. The purpose of society is to produce and promote these things. Outside a community these good things cannot be attained. The prodigal son in the Bible is lost because he is outside the saving community with his father. Maybe he has a sort of individual “freedom” but this is no good to him.

What is good for me is also good for you. We are not competitors and not enemies. Individualism and Liberalism have a wrong conception of society.

We should formulate a Christian political attitude with a foundation of the Christian values and the values of the Christian congregation.