

Hans Nielsen Hauge, Norway 1771 – 1824

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Introduction

In the history of Norway very few people have dominated their own time and influenced the time following their own death as Hans Nielsen Hauge. His combination of a Christian life, preaching and business activities contributed to the legalisation of the market as an institution which at the same time was given a clear social function. Hauge also formed a new religious philosophy by shifting focus from the group to the individual: individuals were no longer only a part of a social group, but individuals with a responsibility for their own lives. This contributed to a spiritual and mental liberation throughout the country, and along with other social currents, Haugianism was a contributing factor to Norway's constitution and independence in 1814.

Who was this man who became so important to his country's history? What motivated him, how did he go about his activities and what was the background for his calling? In this talk I will try to provide the answer to how a farmer's son from Tune was able to contribute to moulding a whole nation both during his lifetime and after his death.

His Spiritual Experience

In the morning of 5 April 1796 Hans Nielsen Hauge went out to plough the lower field beyond his father's farm. At the time he was 25 years old. As he walked behind the plough, singing a hymn, he suddenly felt that his mind was lifted up to God. He was past feeling, outside his body and could neither say what was happening to him nor within him. It was such an overwhelming, ecstatic experience that words could not describe what he had seen, nor the joy he had felt. Later, he could not say how long the experience had lasted nor what really had happened. The spiritual experience had liberated him and given him a mission.

The call he had heard in his mind was going to be an inspiration for the rest of Hauge's life. He experienced God Himself asking him to proclaim His name to men and to exhort them to repentance. But as time passed, Hauge became certain that it was the Spirit of God who had extended the call to him. Besides, as he studied the Bible more closely, he received a confirmation that God had called shepherds, fishermen and others of lowly station in the same manner, to do His work. This gave him courage.

The person Hans Nielsen Hauge

Hauge was a determined, active and purposeful man. He travelled all over the country, preaching and simultaneously establishing small industries in several places. He usually travelled on foot and often knitted as he walked. The gloves and socks were then given away to the poor who needed them. It was his incredible working capacity combined with his

pioneering spirit that made him such a successful businessman. He was at the height of his activities in the years 1800-1804. During this period, he established many industries all over the country, from Lista in the South of Norway to Troms in the North. Fishing industries, brickyards, spinning mills, shipping yards, salt and mineral mines, the harnessing of waterfalls, paper mills and printing plants were some of the industries he established. The profits were always used to invest in new activities; neither did he hesitate to ask his friends for loans and investments if he thought they were in a position to assist.

Once he had established these ventures, he delegated the daily management to those he considered the most capable. Later, whenever he was in the area, he would come and visit, and he would contribute and help where necessary. Because he established so many industries, saw possibilities and was successful in most cases, he became an inspiration and an example to those who met him. Many found the courage to break away from traditional patterns - especially in the countryside - and to establish their own enterprises, once they had seen Hauge do it and understood that it was possible. Even the civic authorities recognised his business acumen.

Although business activities were a large part of Hauge's life, he remained faithful to his calling from God to the very end. Everywhere he went he preached the word of God to the people, and his preaching was even better known than his business.

In addition to preaching, he was an effective correspondent; more than 500 of his letters are kept in the national archives. He published 33 books and writings of his own, in addition to writings from other authors whom he had profited from reading himself. 200 000 copies were published of his own books for a population of about 800 000, which made him the most frequently read author of his time. He also developed an efficient system of distribution throughout the country. Following his imprisonment, letter writing was the most important means of keeping in touch with all his friends throughout the country.

Finally he was arrested in 1804 for a breach of the "Konventikkelplakaten", the Konventikkel Ordinance, a law, which denied lay people the right to preach. He stayed in prison for ten years. In 1814 he was finally found guilty and ordered to pay 2000 riksdaler, a fine he paid with the help of gifts from friends. Until his death in 1824 he lived on his own farm outside the city Christiania (Oslo). His health was poor following the years of imprisonment, so he discontinued his travelling. But at the end of his life Hauge was accepted and honoured by many of the most important men in the country. Both priests, bishops, professors and representatives of the Norwegian Storting came to meet him.

His Vision and Driving Force

The vision behind Hans Nielsen Hauge's versatile activities was based on the calling God had given him through the spiritual experience in 1796. In a newspaper article in 1802 Hauge formulated it this way:

"My calling is to love God and my fellowmen" (Hauge).

This was the vision for all his work in a nutshell. Preaching, working and production were all parts of serving man, the community, and God's kingdom on earth. Riches and other excess funds were simply gifts from God, which one should use in order to serve one's fellowmen and the community. One was not supposed to use profit for personal aims such as luxury and excesses, but to reinvest in promising projects to create work, and so contribute to remunerative work and a possibility for others to improve their lives and those of their nearest and dearest. A Christian should not consider himself above business transactions, quite the opposite, he should engage in it with enthusiasm when the opportunity presented itself

because in this manner, he could set a good example for his fellowmen. Everything one owned, both capital and other material goods, should be kept in stewardship for the good of one's fellowmen and the community.

Hans Nielsen Hauge's Ethics

There is no collected presentation of Hans Nielsen Hauge's ethics. He has not published anything of that kind, neither has anybody else attempted to make such a compendium in writing. Part of the reason for this could be that it would be a very difficult undertaking since Hauge represents a vision of wholeness that includes a Christian life as well as existence in general. He was no sectarian philosopher with one thought for his private life and quite another for his public life. For him there was a distinct connection between the two, both for himself and for others. This comes across quite clearly in Hauge's correspondence, as previously mentioned. However I will try to render a short and systematic presentation of Hauge's ethics. To simplify the process, they can be divided into three main categories:

- 1) Hauge's vision of mankind,
- 2) Hauge's vision of society,
- 3) Hauge's vision of work.

Hauge's vision of mankind

"Do not demand too much nor place too many burdens on your workers, no more than a Fellow Brother can be expected to bear" (Hauge).

Brotherhood is a central element in Hauge's vision of mankind. This idea of a brotherhood places the interests of the community in its centre and is the direct opposite of the individualism that marks today's society.

Hauge placed this concept of brotherhood in an economic and material context, where those who had extra capital were expected to invest in something useful which would provide people with work and services. Hauge's philosophy of brotherhood includes the challenge to Friends to sustain each other economically in times of difficulty and to lend each other money should the need arise. Hauge himself approached friends around the country on several occasions with requests to help establish new ventures; he also asked for money in order to establish new businesses, or to pay debts. Haugians helped each other economically, which in many ways gave them a head start compared with other traders.

Demands for efficiency and increased production usually take precedence over caring and consideration for individual needs today. However, Hauge was able to place the fellow worker at the centre of attention so that consideration for the individual was balanced with the industry's need for profit. The notions of "burdens and brother" are therefore crucial concepts in Hauge's vision of men. He points out that the leader also has the function of caring, that the person in question must have an eye open for the worker's living and working conditions. If anyone is to function well at the work place, the leader must show care and consideration so that each one can develop his best capacity in the working process and in the community. This requires the right person at the right place, something Hauge emphasised greatly in his work, in addition to people having tasks which interest them and which they can perform in a correct and useful manner. He also emphasised that all kinds of people could be given useful work. Neither handicap nor gender or age were of importance to Hauge when it came to working in his industries or for the Haugian Societies.

Hauge understood that the aspect of caring is of utmost importance for the workers' well being and will to work. Not surprisingly, this element is also considered in modern theories of

leadership. A business which takes care of its workers' well-being, not only their performance, will come to see that there will be greater enjoyment, less absenteeism and in many cases an improvement in the work. Theories of modern leadership include transformation theory or theory of change. This theory concerns the whole person and points to the fact that if a person is to function well in his working situation, then the people in leadership must consider the individual so he can develop in the process of work and in the social context at work.

Hauge's vision of society

"We should use and have the good things of the world to govern as good housekeepers" (Hauge).

It was very important to Hauge to underline that people have no right of ownership over material goods such as money, property or natural resources. These are God's property, which He has given to men in stewardship, for their own benefit and that of their fellowmen.

The expression "good housekeepers" means that individuals have a responsibility of stewardship over something for someone else, that is to say God, so as to serve the community for the greater good. Stewardship requires a far-sighted perspective both of the planning of resources and the fulfilment of the project. It also requires creativity and seeing possibilities, which others may not have thought of. Being an entrepreneur and a pioneer was an important part of Hauge's life, and he encouraged his friends to do the same. *"The good and the wise live and use their talents, strength and fortune for themselves, so that they can shape it for the good of others; they are stewards and look for possibilities" (Hauge).*

The philosophy of stewardship includes also the clear incitement to be steward over ecological values, the resources of the earth, in a far-sighted, responsible and social manner.

"Everyone should help establish and manage factories and works according to their fortune and gifts, so idle hands may work" (Hauge).

There was a large percentage of unemployment in Hauge's time, especially among labourers. As Hauge travelled around the country, he noticed that much of the poverty around was the result of the fact that many had no remunerative work. Therefore it became very important to him to implement measures for creating work places. Much of the reason behind giving people work was to get rid of poverty. To work was to accept one's share of the responsibility, and he sought to have as many people in work as possible.

Hans Nielsen Hauge showed that it was possible to combine spiritual and practical activities. The Haugians saw quite rightly that certain tradesmen allowed themselves to be governed by desires for personal gain, but that was something which characterised the person and not trading as such. The market place could serve both God and mammon, if you like, depending on how one behaved there.

Hauge's vision of work

"Our work and our willingness to serve should shine" (Hauge).

Hans Nielsen Hauge often used the words "light up" and "shine" in connection with everyday behaviour, especially with work. Hauge knew that the relationship between living and preaching would be most obvious in the work place. He emphasised the need for enthusiasm, hard work and a humble desire to serve. In this way one could be a good example for one's friends, colleagues and others.

Eiker Papirmolle (The Eiker Paper Mill) in which Hauge was heavily involved was a typical example of including business. Of the 50 employed, 21 were women, 12 were youth, some were physically handicapped and others mentally, and one was weak due to old age. In Hauge's working world there was room for everybody as long as they were prepared to do their part.

Hauge was of the opinion that everybody should be engaged in something worthwhile, having work that was tailored to age, gender and working capacity. The idea of equality was a major principle in his philosophy of work and employment. This was a social and ethical idea, which brought down the barriers of the time and placed a high standard for social and ethical philosophy. Hauge's ideal would even today have problems to be adopted.

Some consequences of Hauge's work

Spiritual liberation:

Hauge's preaching released a spiritual liberation among the people. Most priests at that time were rationalistic. They spoke mostly to peoples' intellect, whereas Hauge spoke to their hearts. As a result to his preaching several spiritual societies were founded, and these centers were organized into a network with Hans Nielsen Hauge as a leader. This network was a first step towards different organisations (for example The Workers' Movement), which developed in Norway in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Despite the resistance Hauge met from the leading men of the church, he still asked his friends to stay in the church. In his testament, which he sent to friends all over the country, he underlined that they had to protect the state church because it was an import foundation for the whole nation. Haugien centers were meant to be living cells within the state church.

Social liberation:

Hauge was born into a particular tradition: Farmers at that time were bound to the farm and the area where they had grown up, a tradition, which had dominated for centuries. Sons took over their fathers' farms and people remained where they had always been. There was no tradition of leaving one's place of birth, and neither was there any tradition of getting established elsewhere, nor of doing anything else. Hauge's ideas stimulated individuals to make independent choices in spiritual and eventually in practical matters. As a result, farmers' sons moved away from their farms to establish themselves as tradesmen in towns, or moved to other parts of the country to live and work in various fields. Over a period of time, there were businesses run by the Haugians all over the country and many of them, encouraged by Hauge or other brothers, moved to other areas to start or run businesses. Some established shops, others started with handicraft while yet others founded factories and other industrial projects. A mental and spiritual liberation occurred which was without comparison in Norway at that time.

National liberation:

It is difficult to document to what extent Hauge and the Haugians influenced the historic events, which unfolded in Norway at that time. There is no doubt that certain basic traits of the Haugian movement represented something completely new. One example is the fact that the Haugian movement was countrywide, which contributed to broadening the individuals' perspective from the local to the national level. During Hauge's lifetime, people went from considering themselves as part of a class in the districts somewhere in the country, to considering themselves as mobile individuals, citizens of Norway with the responsibility and the possibility of influencing Norway's future.

The fact that people to an increasing degree learned to see themselves as individuals in a national context, contributed to the development of a national consciousness, and this in turn contributed to a growing national spirit of community. Eventually, this led to an increasing desire for national independence. In 1814 Norway received its own constitution. Hauge himself was not involved in the writing, but among the 112 men at Eidsvoll there were 3 Haugians. The former president of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee, professor Francis Sejersted, put it this way:

“The Hauge movement was a contributing factor for developing an acting democracy in Norway” (Sejersted 1996)

Equality between men and women

Hauge preached equality between men and women. He encouraged men to learn to do housework and women to work on the farms, because time could come when it would be necessary to manage both. Hauge had no objection to placing women in leadership positions in the Societies of Friends. Many times he also stimulated young women to be preachers, and several of them held meetings, first in their own district, and later on all over the country. This was revolutionary at the time, but for Hauge the most important aim was to engage the right person in the right place.

Conclusion

Hans Nielsen Hauge was an unorthodox man who broke new ground in religion and business in Norway. He lived as he taught and influenced people wherever he went, whatever station in life. Hauge contributed actively to a spiritual and mental liberation, making people more independent than ever before, especially farmers and workers. The influence of the Haugian Movement on the Norwegian population contributed to the formation of a national spirit of community, which was to become one of the fundamental pillars of the Norwegian independence movement. Time has proven that the opinions, which Hauge lived by, both his Christian private life and his business ventures, were timeless and universal. They would be well worth following today.

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