

Transform World
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Speaking at Poverty Challenge
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Subject:
“Hans Nielsen Hauge - A role model for our time?”

Childhood and Youth

Hans Nielsen Hauge was born in Norway in 1771. He was a farmer's son and the fifth of ten children. In his childhood home, Hauge became acquainted with the writings of Pietism's great "fathers," and these writings influenced him. He was raised to fear God through the morning and evening household devotions. On the Sundays the family went to church.

Childhood and youth were important years for Hauge's spiritual development. He read all he could of the religious literature found on the family's bookshelves. He studied the Bible thoroughly, and was a deep thinker. He spent most of his time at home, and was seldom together with friends. It might even be said that the young Hauge was a little odd! But he was hardworking and his father wanted him to take over the farm after him.

The turning point

One day 5 April 1796 Hans Nielsen Hauge had a special spiritual experience while he was working out in a field. 5 April 1796 became the big turning point in his life.

What happened? Here is the version of Hans Nielsen Hauge himself written down 20 years later:

"One day while I was working outside under the open sky, I sang from memory the hymn, "Jesus, I long for Thy Blessed Communion".

I had just sung the second verse:

*Mightily strengthen my spirit within me,
That I may learn what Thy Spirit can do;
Oh, take Thou captive each passion and win me,
Lead Thou and guide me my whole journey through!.....*

At this point my mind became so exalted that I was not myself aware of, nor can I express, what took place in my soul. For I was beside myself. As soon as I came to my sense, I was filled with regret that I had not served this loving good God. Now it seemed to me that nothing in this world was worthy of any regard. That my soul experienced something supernatural, divine and blessed; that there was a glory that no tongue can utter - that I remember as clearly as if it had happened only a few days ago. And it is now nearly twenty years since the love of God visit me so abundantly".

So, Hans Nielsen Hauge was given an order. The Lord Himself had given him the message that he should preach. He should be God's messenger in a time when just the ordained clergy had the right to preach God's word. In the same year as Hauge had his spiritual experience (1796), he started preaching, first at home for his sisters, then in the countryside, and before long he had the whole country of Norway under his feet.

Hauge had gotten a call from God to preach. Therefore, there was no power or authority that could keep the lay preacher from going from one end of the country to the other to tell of God's word. People liked Hauge's form of preaching. It was plain and direct.

So here is the beginning of a very special life for a very special man. A man of whom a Norwegian historian Karsten Alnæs said:

"Hans Nielsen Hauge is one of the most important men in the history of Norway"

Something new was awakening in Norway. His voice and his footsteps should change the country.

But what was the driving force behind his work? For me it was a bit problematic to find the answer in all the sources I have been reading. But listen to me; in a

Norwegian newspaper from 1802 he wrote an article where the answer of that question was given. There he told what was the driving force in all his work. He said:

"My calling is to love God and my fellowmen".

Here you have the driving force of Hans Nielsen Hauge. First he said, **loving God** and so **loving your fellowmen!**

What did he do to? What happened in his footsteps?

Yes, he began:

- To preach the gospel
- And to help poor people for better living conditions

Therefore he began walking on his feet all around in the country of Norway. When he walked he was knitting socks (as I did when I entered this room) But in the footsteps of Hans Nielsen Hauge several of his friends' were also walking from place to place. They were singing and preaching. Young women too did the same. They had been inspired of Hans Nielsen Hauge to do that. And for Hauge it was natural to use women for preaching the gospel because man and woman are equal in the eyes of God.

What grew up in the footsteps of Hans Nielsen Hauge?

1. A new spiritual revival all over the country. And as a consequence Hauge organized several Societies of Friends in different parts of Norway. A network of Haugian societies of friends grew up.
2. Hauge established 30 different business activities all over the country. Such as Paper Mills, Fisheries, Miners, Printing works, Farms, Brick factories.

Are there other consequences of the work of Hans Nielsen Hauge?

3. We have heard that his preaching led to spiritual freedom for many people in Norway. Nearly 90 % of the Norwegian people in the beginning of 1800 were small farmers. They were poor people, and when Hauge preached the gospel to them, many of them became Christians and Gods followers. The Lord set them free and give them hope. Many of them developed responsibility for the community where they are living, and created a hope for national freedom too. You see; Norway was not a free nation at that time, but there was a dream to be free. And many of the Haugians became pillars in building democracy in Norway.

Former head of the Nobel Peace Price Committee, Professor Francis Sejersted, has explained:

"The Haugian movement was an important contribution for building democracy in Norway".

Is there anything more which grew up in his footsteps?

4. Hans Nielsen Hauge had an intense desire to reach all over the country with his message. That led to an adventurous writing career. Hauge was at that time the greatest Norwegian author. He wrote 33 books and tracts. He also published and gave out the writings of other authors. In a population of 900,000, there were 200,000 copies of his books. An effective distribution system resulted in his books reaching areas all over the country. Most people were enthused after reading Hauge's books, and some of these books led to increased reading and writing skills among the general public.

In addition, he wrote letters. Over 500 letters are preserved at National Archive in Oslo, and most of them are published in book form. Through his preaching and writing, Hauge presented Christianity simply and plainly.

In the written material we meet not just the spiritual instructor; he appeared also as a person with practical and organizational talent. Hauge reached out to the common man and woman with his message.

5. The unemployment rate at that time was high, and Hauge saw that many of the poor did not have access to profitable work. To remedy this need was the basis for Hauge and his friends starting businesses.

So, many poor people in Norway started small industries and businesses at home and near by. You might ask; did they have money to start up activities? Not all of them, but if they didn't have money, Hauge start helped them. The Hauge friends gave them loan which they had to pay back again.

All over the country Haugian activities grew up, a new class/group of people appeared in different parts of Norway, I cities and in rural surroundings.

They had begun working to earn money and these people sold their products in the marked. For the established merchants it became a threat.

Now, let me again refer to Professor Francis Sejersted, former head of the Nobel Peace Price Committee. He says:

"A new lower middle class in Norway grew up in the footsteps of Hans Nielsen Hauge"

A light for a new day, a new future appeared in Norway. Poor people in Norway met the light of God, and they began working for better living conditions.

A new dawn started for the Norwegian people.

The light of God come to Norway 1000 years ago, the same light of God was striking the hearts of many Norwegians 800 years later. Thanks to Hans Nielsen Hauge.

I am wondering;

Could the same happening in poor countries all over the world today?

I ask you, and you can give the answer.

Let me introduce some ethical principals for sustainable development which were guidelines for Hauge to bring the poorest in Norway to become self-sustaining and self-led.

Is Hans Nielsen Hauge an Ethical Role Model for our Time?

For the most part, history books show an incomplete picture of Hans Nielsen Hauge. They mention the spiritual experience out in the field, the lay preacher who walked all over the country, that he knitted socks and gloves that he gave away to the poor, and that he was released from prison for a half year in order to cook salt for those in need in the war year of 1809. This is the picture of Hauge that many are acquainted with in my country Norway. Less known is that versatile and complex person was Norway's most read author of his time. He started, or motivated his friends too, to start a great number of different businesses all over the country. In the first four years of the 19th century, Hauge was one of Norway's most prosperous business leaders before his 10 years imprisonment put a stop to it.

There has been a continuing question as to why Hauge's leadership position was so strong. There can be many explanations. Much suggests that the answer is a combination of spiritual power, professional competence, a great knowledge of people, and an unusually large capacity for work. This strengthened his authority and trust among the people. He was someone that the friends could depend on.

Let me present to you some of the most important ethical principals of Hauge: Hans Nielsen Hauge was not a philosopher. He was a practical man who derived his models of ethical thinking from the Bible and carried them out in everyday life. *My calling is to love God and my neighbor* was Hauge's vision for his work in Norway. Here lies the motivation behind his preaching and many business ventures. He was not just a lay preacher, and not just a business leader. The spiritual side of the person must be taken care of, but the responsibility for material

things and social relationships must also be taken seriously. The union of these two resulted in a person where “Spirit and Hand” went together.

So let me line up for you some of the most important ethical principals of Hauge:

BROTHERHOOD AND LOVE OF NEIGHBOR

“Do not demand too much from your fellow brother, nor place more burdens on him than he can carry” (Hauge).

Here Hauge presents some of his thoughts on the ethics of brotherhood. This has a clear connection with what Jesus said about regarding our fellow humans as brothers. Hauge also states that “*we should beware of all outward appearance of pride and selfishness*”. Hauge warned against letting egoism and greed gain entry into Haugean businesses and the societies of friends. The friends were to strive for moderation, contentment, and fellowship. Such attitudes could not be developed in an egocentric space, but in a community where one shows humility and respect toward fellow human beings.

Caring and fellowship

For Hauge, the ethics of brotherhood was very important. Especially inside his own society of friends, it was important to show “brotherly love” in order to function. It should be shown to the outside world that the friends loved each other. Hauge often used the expression “brother” and “fellow believer” when he appealed to his friends in his letters and other writings. Hauge inspired his friends to participate in fellowship. He knew that strong feelings of fellowship would make it easier for them to be a part of the society both in a spiritual sense and with the practical duties in which they were engaged. Still, it was not the motivation for community which would win the public’s favour and acceptance. It was the individual person’s life and actions that first and foremost would be noticed.

Therefore it was decisive for Hauge to urge moderation and hard work, and seek that which was good for our fellow human beings. By taking such a stand, the focus would be taken away from oneself and aimed at others.

The Haugeans should be influenced by a feeling of fellowship and caring and not by egoism and individualistic attitudes. They should not just think of themselves, but show consideration and ease the burdens of others. Love of neighbour and attitudes of brotherhood must, according to Hauge, be seen in practice. Works do not necessarily have great value in themselves, but they are practical expressions for virtues based on genuinely felt love of neighbour. The Biblical principles of love of neighbour and brotherhood were foremost in Hauge's ethical thinking.

THE MISSION OF SERVICE

"Our willingness to work and to serve is something that should shine" (Hauge).

In this statement, which is taken from one of Hauge's letters to his friends, he stressed the power of example, that of being a good model. Hauge used the term "to shine," clearly inspired by Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount: **Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven** (Matt 5:16).

Hauge's mission of service was motivated by his view of the whole person. He believed that the spiritual side cannot be separated from the material. The spiritual side is important, but a person is also made to work, to create something, to be creative in a practical sense. This holistic way of thinking influenced Hauge in his meetings with ordinary people, and this thinking became a starting point for Hauge's work. He took the spiritual side and the practical side of human beings seriously by always combining "spirit and hand." He regarded himself as a servant for the people he came into contact with and for the society of which he was a part.

Diligence in work

Often Hauge's friends met great difficulties in their work to promote God's kingdom. The danger of laziness was also a problem. Hauge therefore made repeated requests to individuals to take seriously the mission they were set to take care of in the world. Hauge often made use of the term "diligent" in his writings.

Be diligent in good works!

Diligence was important for several reasons. Diligence in work would give his friends a good outward reputation, and they would present a positive image in their surroundings.

Laziness was, in Hauge's eyes, very destructive, something his friends must keep away from. He always came back to the value of work. He impressed upon his friends that work was a virtue. Hauge was at times worried that laziness would spread through his societies of friends.

The power of example

Hauge believed he and his friends should be a "lighthouse" to the world, lighting the way to God's kingdom. Hauge made clear the example's meaning in the work life by showing that the individual should stress his or her own work contribution and do their best by using their abilities and talents and gifts. The friends should also be a model for others through the way they made use of their time. He meant that it was important to show competence in work and have honest motives for their actions in order to be accepted by those in authority.

MANAGERIAL RESPONSIBILITY

"We may have and must use the world's riches, as would a good housekeeper (steward)" (Hauge).

What is implied by managerial responsibility? What does it mean to be a good manager of natural and human resources? Hauge took his thinking on managerial responsibility from the Bible. God has given humanity a responsibility for all He

has created and for all the resources humans have received. People are God's stewards on earth. He wrote that a good steward should *make the most of his or her talents*. What he wanted to say with this expression is that one should manage his gifts, his property, and his money in a way which provides income and which leads to a positive development both for the individual and for society. Hauge's managerial thinking provided a basis both for protection of natural resources and a positive attitude toward work. Humans manage the work of creation, but don't own it. Resources should not be squandered away or be destroyed. Resources, gifts, and abilities should be used in the best ways possible—for our fellow human beings and for future generations. This long-range planning for "managerial service" was a concern of Hauge's 200 years ago!

THE THOUGHT OF EQUALITY

"God doesn't see persons, but those who do right and are righteous" (Hauge).

In Norway in the 1800s there existed a clearly defined gender role pattern, and in addition there was great social inequality. The principle on human equality was, for Hauge, an important starting point on how an individual should be treated. In the above quote, Hauge says something decidedly important on equality between persons. He believed that, through God, individuals have the same worth irrespective of class, position, age, or gender. The traditional gender role pattern of the 1800s stood in strong contrast to Hauge's understanding of equality between the sexes. Therefore he met much opposition, especially when it came to the use of women as preachers in the Haugean Society of Friends.

What was the reason that Hauge, right from the start, made use of young women to preach, not just in their home areas, but over large geographic areas in Norway?

Hauge believed that both men and women had the right to preach God's word. He said that

. . . *"the gift of grace is poured upon many, both men and women, to proclaim God's word"*.

LEADERSHIP

"We should deal patiently with our neighbor and in all ways seek his betterment" (Hauge).

Hans Nielsen Hauge stands out in Norwegian history as one of the most important leaders the country has had. He became the leader for a nation-wide Haugean society of friends where they shared spiritual fellowship. They performed their work with diligence, many carried on extensive trade, and others established industrial concerns. In this network, Hauge was the undisputed and natural leader. He stood forth as an initiative taker and the person who connected the network threads together. Hauge himself formulated little or nothing about his theoretical view of leadership. But by examining his many writings, and above all by seeing how he himself practiced leadership, one finds an integrated ethic and leadership philosophy.

The introductory quote makes noticeable an important principle that was the foundation for his leadership. According to Hauge, an individual should get to improve his or her life, be given the opportunity to develop abilities and skills, and manage property in his or her own best interests and those of the community. Hauge's leadership was influenced by initiative and the desire to work, combined with love of neighbor. As a courageous man who was clearly suited for leadership, Hauge became a model for many at that time. He held on to the vision for his work: to love God and his neighbor. Until his death, he was regarded as the undisputed leader by the Society of Friends.

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 all over the world.