



March 29

Commemoration: Hans Nielsen Hauge, renewer of the Church, 1824

Hans Nielsen Hauge (April 3, 1771 – March 29, 1824) was a noted revivalist Norwegian lay minister who spoke up against the Church establishment in Norway. Hauge is considered an influential personality in the industrialization of Norway. He is commemorated annually on March 29 as a renewer of the church by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Hans Nielsen Hauge was born the fifth of ten children in his ancestral farm of Hauge in Tune in the county of Østfold. His father was Niels Mikkelsen Evenrød (1732–1813) and mother Maria Olsdatter Hauge (1735–1811).

He had a poor and otherwise ordinary youth until April 5, 1796, when he received his "spiritual baptism" in a field near his farm. Within two months, he had founded a revival movement in his own community, written a book, and decided to take his mission on the road. He wrote a series of books in his lifetime. In a total of 18 years, he published 33 books. Estimates are that 100,000 Norwegians read one or more of them, at a time when the population was 900,000 more-or-less literate individuals.

In the next several years, Hauge traveled - mostly by foot - throughout most of Norway, from Tromsø in the north to

Denmark in the south. He held countless revival meetings, often after church services. In addition to his religious work, he offered practical advice, encouraging such things as settlements in Northern Norway. He and his followers were persecuted, though their teachings were in keeping with Lutheran doctrine. He began preaching about "the living faith" in Norway and Denmark after a mystical experience that he believed called him to share the assurance of salvation with others. At the time, itinerant preaching and religious gatherings held without the supervision of a pastor were illegal, and Hauge was arrested several times.

Hauge faced great personal suffering: his first wife died and three of his four children died in infancy. He was imprisoned for much of the period between 1804 and 1811. At the time, Norwegians did not have the right of religious assembly outside of the auspices of the state church. Hauge also found himself accused of various other spurious charges. By all accounts, his time in prison broke his health and led to his premature death. Upon his release from prison in 1811, he took up work as a farmer and industrialist at Bakkehaugen near Christiania (present day's Oslo), and in 1815 he married Andrea Andersdatter, who died in childbirth. In 1817, he remarried Ingeborg Marie Olsdatter and bought the Bredtvet farm (now the site of Bredtvet Church in Oslo) where he died.

It is generally agreed that Hans Nielsen Hauge had a profound influence on both secular and religious history in Norway. Hauge's message emphasized the type of spirituality he felt originated with Martin Luther. He led charismatic meetings, and his organization became an informal network that in many ways challenged the establishment of the state church. As a result, he and his followers were persecuted in various ways. Hauge was imprisoned on several occasions, spending nine years in prison.

Over time the Haugean movement increased its influence throughout the country. Some figures might illustrate that fact. In the late eighteenth century a normal service in the church in Christiania would be attended by fewer

than 20 people - of a population of nearly 10,000. Christianity in Norway was nearly becoming a framework for traditions, and ethics and spiritual life were nearly non-existent. It is not an exaggeration to state that he revived the faith in most of Norway.

Turning to his achievements as an industrialist, the number of factories and mills that Hauge founded around the country were numerous. All but one disappeared during the industrial revolution, which in Norway took place in the mid-19th century. Even so, his modesty prevented him from becoming a capitalist, and he gave away all he had founded and inspired to others - brethren and friends. In a period of extreme economic crisis, when almost all the prosperous timber barons and iron works owners went bankrupt because of the Napoleonic wars, he showed a way to prosperity for anyone with initiative, and this led to the new rise in Norwegian economics some years after the independence in 1814. In this matter Hauge was but one of several contributors, but he was one of the most influential - especially so in the way he combined economics and Christian morals: modesty, honesty and hard work among them.

Painting: The only known original portrait of Hans Nielsen Hauge, painted in Copenhagen about 1800.