

Hans Nielson Hauge: The Influence of the Hauge Movement on Women of Norway

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ABSTRACT

Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771-1824) was a layman theologically untrained but at home with the Bible. His conversion in 1796 and his sense of mission eventually produced a national revival in Norway. He was imprisoned ten times as it was against the law for a lay person to preach and teach in public. Hauge and his movement contributed to the sociopolitical revival in Norway through the influence of laymen who had been trained in an idealistic type of pietism. This research asks if this philosophy, perpetuated through generations of women influenced the feminist movement of Norway.

INTRODUCTION

Following my marriage to John Soltvedt, a second generation Norwegian, virtues of honesty, morality, humility and pietism became apparent. These attributes sparked my curiosity as to the influence of Hans Nielsen Hauge's pietistic beliefs. For instance, the customer's word was gospel; therefore according to my father-in-law Lars Soltvedt, making a written contract became unnecessary. One of many sayings of Anna Kvinge Soltvedt, maintained that anyone up after midnight could only be sinning, for decent talk didn't exist at that late hour. John's purpose in life is to live a life of service, his motto being "I'd rather serve than be served."

My initial hypothesis about the Norwegian woman and the Norwegian/American woman asked why she left Norway in the 1800s. What did she experience during migration? Did the Hauge movement influence her early mass departure to America and did this revival 200 years later stir the feminist movement in Norway and the United States? However, it became necessary to narrow my research to ask if Hauge's pietism affected the traditional roles of women in Norway.

Following a religious conversion at the age of 25, Hans Nielsen Hauge led a pietistic revival from 1797 to 1804. Hauge claimed that everyone had the right to preach and teach the Gospel. Hauge traveled throughout the country establishing brotherhoods that met for religious study and prayer. These meetings conflicted with the current Lutheran understanding of the pastor's office with a formal statement from the Conventicle Act of 1741. Its purpose had been to bring the pietistic lay meetings under the control of the state.

METHOD

My daughter Johanna who lives and works in Oslo found women who would be willing to let me interview them. Before leaving for Oslo, Norway in October 1998, I wrote a letter to

the participants introducing myself and thanking them for their willingness to participate. Explaining about Hans Nielsen Hauge, I asked them to think about how Hauge may have influenced their life. After I arrived in Norway, Johanna became a tremendous help by making the appointments, driving me to appointments and serving as my translator.

To gain deeper insight and understanding of each individual interviewee, I divided my questions into four categories: cultural influence, work ethic, humility & pride and Hauge influence. The interviewees, Lillba Esbjug, Gunvor Foldoy, Selma Forøy, Laila Thees Stang, Tone Moseng, Anne Rognerud, Jenny Lovøy, Aud Strandskogen, and Else Marie Sjølie are between the ages of 34 and 74. All are involved in some type of social work such as counseling, teaching, and youth worker, except Jenny Lovoy who is retired. Five participants are married, three divorced and one never married. Following is a brief summary of the results.

RESULTS

In general Norwegian citizens are familiar with Hauge's pietism. The three agnostics and two atheists assured me pietism hasn't influenced their lives. However, their viewpoints are open for discussion. Whether positive or negative, the other interviewees made a possible correlation to the pietistic influence.

Gunvor a teacher, married with two children, tells me she is agnostic while her husband professes atheism. Through baptism and confirmation their children are members of the state church. Since 1845 a Norwegian could legally withdraw from the state church and join another or no church. Gunvor admits to the "traditional" influence following my question as to why the children are members of the state church.

On the other hand, Laila a family counselor, states her childhood didn't include religious training and she claims atheism, but as a child Laila's father read bible stories to the children so they would know the bible history.

Lillba, a 57 year old divorced mother of two grown daughters works in the social services office in Oslo. She is agnostic, and emphatically tells me Hauge hasn't influenced any area of her life. However, in answer to who is your favorite author, she expresses disappointment with the Norwegian woman writer Bjorg Vik who was Lillba's favorite author, that is, until her last novel. In this novel following her husband's death, the female character moves to Spain with a male without the benefit of marriage. Lillba states, "I just lost respect for Bjorg Vik." However, having revealed this pietistic insight, she informs me that when it became legal to sunbathe topless at the beach, Lillba was leading the crowd. Perhaps in our country we might agree to travel with the opposite sex, but even if it were legal, our Puritan influence would agree that sunbathing topless at the beach would be inappropriate.

Several issues being debated at the time of my visit were of special interest, one, should alcohol be sold only in the state liquor store or should it also be sold in the grocery store. The story of Tone speaks to the issue. Tone a single woman and a teacher of immigrant women grew up influenced by her grandmother's pietism, which limited smoking, drinking, dancing, movies and card playing. However, on special occasions Tone's father a medical doctor occasionally served alcohol to guests. As I listened to Tone tell her history, I sensed her experience with the Hauge pietism left a negative reaction. However, in the midst of discussing the issue of alcohol sales, Tone states: "I think the sale of alcohol should be left as. I think if it is sold in the grocery store also, then the easy accessibility might lead to someone's downfall." Tone reveals further evidence of Hauge pietism as she tells about when working her way through school, she was desperate for a job and took what became available —

working in the liquor store. Her favorite uncle strict to Hauge doctrine kept asking Tone how things were going and where she worked. Tone didn't want to tell him, because she felt guilty and knew he would be disappointed.

The second issue involved the work ethic. At the present time, with a doctor's slip the employer pays employees first three days of work missed then the government reimburses the employer for the rest of missed days. The debate is whether the first day missed should be without pay to alleviate unnecessary absenteeism. Although some of the interviewees didn't agree with this concept, others thought a breakdown in commitment to the job exists in the younger employees.

The questions relevant to women's issues reveal varying philosophies. Selma's 24-year-old daughter graduates from law school this year. She says her daughter doesn't believe in feminism and is tired of hearing about it. Selma remarks, "Perhaps things will be different when she is in the work force." Lilleba's two daughters declare men should know what women want. Of course, this is true, but one must question how have women risen to such influential positions? Surely, not because men know what women want, but because beginning as early as 1854, Norwegian women fought for inheritance rights followed with the right to vote in 1913 fifteen years after Norwegian men. Although the Scandinavian countries are looked up to as leaders of the feminist movement some things haven't changed. As of 1996, pay scale for equal jobs is 21% less for women than for men. Interestingly in the 1960s as the feminist agitation began to escalate, Laila's father a stay at home dad became involved with the feminist movement.

Jenny is 74, retired and resides in Bergen. She also is my husband's first cousin. Her mother the youngest of five children caused a scandal after she went downtown (Bergen) wearing men's trousers. For bringing shame and humiliation to the family her mother was severely punished. This happened in the late 1800s.

With pietistic humility Else Marie tells me she likes art, but she isn't artistic; however, beautiful works of art adorn her home. Johanna disputes Else Marie's statement that she is not very artistic, for Else Marie does beautiful crafts. The idea, of course, is that woman's craft isn't real art. Else Marie, the granddaughter of a Pentecostal preacher, was raised by her parents under the watchful eye of her grandfather and two maiden aunts who made certain everyone abided by the rules of no dancing, card playing, drinking or movies. Despite of a strict upbringing, Else Marie is a devote Christian. Aud also is Pentecostal but has not removed her name from the state church roster. If there is much fun and laughter at a family gathering, Aud relates that her mother-in-law brings out the bible; announcing everyone is to sit down it is time for a bible reading.

Because of Hauge's strong sense of commitment and mission, I asked the participants whether they believed their life's work to be a job or a "calling." Selma emphatically said "No, that is for the priest, but I would be happy as long as the job was working with people. Laila was as zealous in her job as social worker as a priest in his "calling." Social work attracts a higher percentage of women, while managerial positions employee a higher percent of men. Why? Perhaps women by nature are generally concerned for people and their welfare, whereas men by nature are more attracted to leadership roles which expresses their masculinity. However, whether a job or a "calling" a strong sense of commitment is evident. Overall, the Norwegian women's family is first and then their job.

DISCUSSION

Often today in response to “Have you heard of Hans Nielsen Hauge?”, the all knowing response is, “Oh you mean that group called the Haugeaner’s?” Even though the Hauge virtues are admirable the pietism exists; therefore, upon entering this project I believed Hauge’s pietism would have a negative influence on Norwegian women. I thought of him as a dictating patriarch. I visualized this patriarchy telling women what to do and when to do it and how to do it and although this did happen, it wasn’t Hauge’s dream. In fact, he taught that women as well as men should be allowed a voice in assemblies and men should not frown or scorn on housework. He did not deliver his messages with condescension and superiority but with humility and equality. As he traveled he knit mittens and socks which he exchanged for a place to stay, not relying on privilege or entitlement to secure him lodging.

What I have discovered, it appears Hauge’s influence silently continues on and on. So silently that the interviewees weren’t aware of the pietistic significance. It becomes obvious that followers of Haugism such as Thomas Barratt, founder of the Pentecostal church based his church on Hauge principals, but changed some of the disciplines, such as eliminated infant baptism. Followers of Haugism changed the disciplines for current situations. Hauge’s vision included equality; however later in assemblies, women met separately from men and women were not permitted to speak out. This finding was very enlightening not only for me, but also to the interviewees, causing them to think about their lives and how their personal values and morals might stem from the Hauge influence.

The findings of this research give a clearer picture of the Haugean influence through the generations of women in Norway. To further the project, interviewing women throughout the Midwest, particularly in Hanley Falls, Minnesota, the community my mother and father-in-law settled, to see how the Haugean movement might have influenced them would add to my findings.

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