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## HISTORICAL SERIES, 5

### Commemorating Hauge and Donne

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*(Editor's Note: The Rev. Telmor G. Sartison was the first Bishop of the Saskatchewan Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, 1986 to 1993. He became the second National Bishop of the ELCIC in 1993, succeeding the Rev. Donald W. Sjoberg, and served in this ministry until 2001. He was a member of the Lutheran World Federation Council from 1994 to 2001, and a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches from 1998 to 2006. This sermon was preached 30 March 2000 at the opening service of the meeting of the ELCIC's National Church Council, the central governing body of the Church.)*

**Text: Mark 10:35-45 (Commemoration of Hans Nielsen Hauge, 29 March, and John Donne, 31 March)<sup>1</sup>**

Yesterday we commemorated the Norwegian pietist Hans Nielsen Hauge, born 3 April 1771, died 29 March 1824. Hauge was a member of the lower class of Norwegian society, a farmer, carpenter, beekeeper, and lay preacher. Tomorrow the calendar of Commemorations recalls John Donne, a member of the middle, if not at times the upper, class of British society. He was secretary, politician, priest, and poet.

The one plodded through a deep sense of spiritual unworthiness, until he discovered in a field, of all places, while at work on his father's farm, that deep sense of God's presence which uplifted and inspired him to a newfound confidence in the Jesus proclaimed. The other plodded through a deep sense of secular and career frustrations until he discovered in seminary, parish and poetry, his call and God's abiding presence.

The one wrote of guilt and deliverance, of faith and obedience. The other wrote of the interrelationship of the spiritual and the

physical, presenting amorous experience in religious terms and presenting devotional experience in erotic terms.

The two are similar in their ability to communicate. They are alike in their ability to be successful within their own secular trades. They are alike in their love of God and life. But it is in the expression of their faith, their use of mood and words, that they are so different. Hauge writes of his conversion:

My heart was so uplifted to God that I do not know nor can I express what really took place in my soul. As soon as my sense returned to normal, I regretted that I had not served the loving and all-gracious God; now I felt that no worldly thing was of importance ... I had a completely transformed mind, a sorrow over all sin.

Donne writes:

Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun,  
     Which is my sin, though it were done before?  
 Wilt thou forgive those sins through which I run,  
     And do run still, though still I do deplore?  
 When thou hast done, thou hast not done,  
 For I have more.

Wilt thou forgive that sin by which I have won  
     Others to sin, and made my sin their door?  
 Wilt thou forgive that sin which I did shun  
     A year or two, but wallowed in a score?  
 When thou hast done, thou hast not done,<sup>2</sup>  
 For I have more.

I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun  
     My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;  
 Swear by thyself that at my death thy Sun  
     Shall shine as it shines now, and heretofore;  
 And having done that, thou hast done,  
 I have no more.

Hauge loved the book of James. He writes:

It is clear enough that true faith is the most powerful factor in the Christian life, and concerning it many write and preach a great deal. We are saved by faith which comprehends Christ without the works of the law. That is very true. But it is equally true that faith without love and good works is nothing but dead in itself.

Hauge wrote and preached with a passion for people – a passion driven by his understanding that they must be converted to faith in

Christ and thereby to a life of obedience. Donne had an equal passion for people, but he expressed it in another fashion. You've heard these words before:

No [person] is an island, entire of itself; every [person] is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is less ... any [person's] death diminishes me, because I am involved in [humankind]; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

In another place, near life's end, he writes:

Thou hast made me, and shall thy work decay?  
Repair me now, for now mine end doth haste.

Hauge, born April 3, 1771 in a small town 80 kilometres out of Oslo, Norway, lived a difficult journey and died an ill and somewhat broken man on March 29, 1824, five days from his 54th birthday. Married twice, the wife and child of his first marriage died. His second wife survived him but they had already lost all three children. Hauge spent about one quarter of his 54 years in jail. Church and State had strict rules about religious meetings and lay leadership. Hauge could not abide those rules. But even in his dying he was attended by several bishops of the Church who found in him a man with a message for a staid and clerically dominated Church.

Donne, on the other hand, served as secretary to a prominent political figure. When he married the boss's 16-year-old niece, without the boss's permission, his job and his political potential plummeted to near zero. Several years of poverty and further studies followed. Writing about Church and State, Donne encouraged English people to pledge loyalty to the king rather than to Rome. The king liked that and made him royal chaplain. Eventually he became Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. On the first Friday in Lent, 1631, he preached his last sermon. He died March 31, 1631, at the age of 58 and was buried in the cathedral. The marble monument covering his grave survived the fire of 1666 and the bombing of 1941.

Commemorations! We remember preachers and poets, artists and monks, Mother Therasas and Popes, reformers and leaders; leaders in vision, action, words, devotion. There is variety. These commemorations and these people serve to remind us of our call, the servant role to which each of us is called in following Jesus. Hauge and Donne followed their own piety. One used prose and a passion

for souls; the other spoke in poetry and with a passion for relationship.

Who are you, and what is your life about? There may be no Hauge in this room, but some of us have been shaped in part by similar ideas. Maybe we are far enough away so that we can love also the vision of the Priest John Donne. And there may be no great poet and priest in this room who will one day be buried in a great cathedral, but some of us have been shaped in part by poetry and Donne-like visions of life in Christ.

Whoever I am or you are, the call from Jesus is simple and clear and extremely hard to live by in this self-centred, commoditized, competitive and insecure world. Nevertheless, Jesus challenges:

Are you able to drink the cup that I drink? Whoever wishes to become great [great, that is, I think, fully what you are meant to be as a child of God in Christ Jesus, certainly not great in secular measure] – whoever wishes to become great and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

A few months later – probably many months later – Paul could write:

Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.

We remember. We commemorate. We eat and drink and hear and pray. Amen.

## Notes

- 1 Sources: Andreas Aarflot, “Hans Nielsen Hauge: His Life and Message,” in G. Everett Arden, ed. *Four Northern Lights: Men Who Shaped the Scandinavian Churches* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1964). Matthias A. Shaaber, ed. *John Donne, Selected Poems* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1958). Philip H. Pfattheicher. *Festivals and Commemorations: Handbook to the Calendar in Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980).
- 2 Here and elsewhere in the poem a pun is undoubtedly intended on the poet’s name, which was pronounced as “done”. Therefore the second last line makes an exceedingly powerful shift from “Thou hast not done” to “Thou hast done.” (Editor)