



July 29

Commemoration: Olaf, King of Norway, martyr, 1030

According to Snorri Sturluson (a 12th and 13th century Icelandic historian), he was baptized in 998 in Norway, but more probably about 1010 in Rouen, France, by Archbishop Robert. In his early youth he went as a Viking to England, where he took part in many battles and became earnestly interested in Christianity. After many difficulties he was elected King of Norway, and made it his object to extirpate heathenism and make the Christian religion the basis of his kingdom.

He is the great Norwegian legislator for the Church, and like his predecessor Olaf Tryggvason, made frequent severe attacks on the old faith and customs, demolishing the temples and building Christian churches in their place. He brought many bishops and priests from England, as King Canute IV later did to Denmark. Some few are known by name (Grimkel, Sigfrid, Rudolf, Bernhard). He seems on the whole to have taken the Anglo-Saxon conditions as a model for the ecclesiastical organization of his kingdom.

But at last the exasperation against him got so strong that the mighty clans rose in rebellion against him and applied to King Canute II of Denmark and England for help. This was willingly given, whereupon Olaf was expelled and Canute elected King of Norway. Olaf fled to Kievan Rus, and during the voyage he stayed some time in Sweden in the province of Nerike where, according to local legend, he baptized many locals.

After two years' exile he returned to Norway with an army. Upon landing in Norway, he met his rebellious subjects led by the Norwegian nobles at Stiklestad, where the celebrated battle took place July 29, 1030. Neither King Canute nor the Danes took part at that battle. King Olaf fought with great courage, but was mortally wounded and fell on the battlefield, praying "God help me."

It must be remembered that the resentment against Olaf was due not alone to his Christianity, but also in a high degree to his unflinching struggle against the old constitution of shires and for the unity of Norway. He is thus regarded by modern Norwegians as the great champion of national independence.