

Flags of Faith

by Fr. Mark Pavlik

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Next weekend we celebrate our patron, St. Olaf, King of Norway, who, in the tenth century, brought the Christian faith to his people. Many European rulers did the same: Vladimir to Ukraine, Stephen to Hungary, Stanislaus to Poland, for example. Of course, St. Olaf's Norway was not the same as, nor as large as, the Norway of today.

Today's Norway became an independent country in 1905, breaking off from Sweden, which had ruled it for some time. The people of Norway asked Prince Christian of Denmark to be their monarch, and he and his wife accepted, becoming King Haakon VII and Queen Maud. The new Queen was the daughter of Edward VII of Britain. At that time the flag of Norway was adopted: the red ground and white cross of Denmark, one the oldest flags on earth, with the addition of a blue cross imposed on the white one. At St. Olaf, we display flags of Norway outside our building at this time of year in honor of our holy patron.

All the flags of Scandinavia are similar (Sweden's is a medium blue with a yellow cross, for example) and indicates those nations' Christian origins. Most other parts of Europe have flags with three parts or colors, some adopted in imitation of that of France after its 1789 revolution which set aside kings, religion, and many societal norms.

Norway, Sweden, Denmark and some other nations still use flags of faith, with crosses. Most go back in their origins for centuries though some are more recent.

Another flag of faith is that of the United Kingdom, combining the dark blue with white "X-shaped" cross of St. Andrew/Scotland and the white with red cross of St. George/England, and the white with red "X-shaped" cross of St. Patrick/Northern Ireland.

The present King of Norway, Harald, the third monarch since 1905, received a religious blessing in the Cathedral in Trondheim, the place where Christianity was first established in Norway, at the beginning of his reign. This is a faith-connection which still remains in place, paralleled in Britain, Spain and other Catholic monarchies of Europe. All those nations now, like our own, allow freedom of religion, but are aware of their historical origins, witnessed by monarch, flag, ceremony and in other ways.

Let us, in remembering, honoring, and praying to St. Olaf, seek to strengthen true righteousness and faith, even as he did almost 1,100 years ago – in ourselves, in our nation, indeed, in all nations and peoples of the world. Society, built on truth and justice, is strengthened by God, living and active.