

## Odin v Olaf – The Cardinal Virtues

### Introduction

In defining virtues, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states that “a virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good,” and that “the goal of living a virtuous life is to become like God” (CCC 1803). Seeking to grow in his image, we practice the three *theological virtues* of faith, hope, and love (1 Th 1:3; 5:8; 1 Cor 13:13),<sup>1</sup> and the four *cardinal virtues* of antiquity: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Focusing on the latter, this paper first examines the cardinal virtues themselves, second what they meant to the pagan Greeks who practiced them, third how Viking culture comparably understood them, and fourth how acquiring norms from other cultures through *enculturation* became the means by which the church acknowledged and incorporated pre-existent beliefs ultimately proceeding from the cardinal virtues into recreating Europe, using Norway as example, as a Christian continent.

### The Cardinal Virtues

“The cardinal virtues play a pivotal role and accordingly are called ‘cardinal;’ all the others are grouped around them. They are: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance” (CCC 1805). These terms were not only adopted from the Greek philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, but are also to be found throughout the writings of Hellenistic Jews such as Philo of Alexandria, the Fathers of the Church including Clement of Alexandria, Origen, the Cappadocians and Maximus the Confessor in the East, and Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory the Great, as well as “the

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<sup>1</sup> Obviously we did not invent faith, hope, and love, but Christian revelation contextualizes these virtues as theological.

scholastics of the Middle Ages, the post-Tridentine moral theologians, and now in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*” itself (Ashley 1996, 34-35).

First among these virtues is *prudence*, which “disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it...it guides the other virtues by setting rule and measure” (CCC 1806). In terms of defining and systematizing the virtues, prudence receives pride of place, for it is the cause of the other virtues being virtues at all. Prudence is the perfected ability to make accurate decisions, and only by perfecting this ability are natural inclinations toward goodness elevated into the “spiritual core of man’s decisions, from which truly human acts arise” (Pieper 1966, 6-7). We need prudence as a guide for right action, for it is the measure of justice, fortitude, and temperance (Pieper 1966, 8).

*Justice* is a habit (*habitus*) whereby we render to others their “due with constant and perpetual will” (Pieper 1966, 44), inclining us to positive interactions and relationships with other people (Mattison 2008, 67). The Catechism states that it is “the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give (one’s) due to God and neighbor” (CCC 1807). Pertaining to both divinity and humanity, this reduces to human beings possessing inalienable rights because we are God-created persons, which is “an act beyond all human discussion” (Pieper 1966, 51).

“*Fortitude* is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good” (CCC 1808). Vulnerability is presupposed, for “to be brave actually means to be able to suffer injury. Because man is by nature vulnerable, he can be brave” (Pieper 1966, 115). Ultimately referencing death itself, every courageous

action is rooted in preparedness to die, and fortitude that does not demonstrate this willingness is “spoiled at its root and devoid of effective power” (Pieper 1966, 115).

As the moral virtue that moderates pleasure and provides balance in using created goods, *temperance* “ensures the will’s mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable” (CCC 1809). In addition to ordering pleasurable desires (Mattison 2008, 67):

*Temperantia* is distinguished from the other cardinal virtues by the fact that it refers exclusively to the active man himself. Prudence looks to all existent reality; justice to the fellow man; the man of fortitude relinquishes, in self-forgetfulness, his own possessions and his life. Temperance, on the other hand, aims at each man himself. Temperance implies that man should look to himself and his condition, that his vision and his will should be focused on himself. The notion that the primordial images of all things reside in God has been applied by Aquinas to the cardinal virtues also: the primordial divine mode of *temperantia*, he states, is the “turning of the Divine Spirit to Itself.” (Pieper 1966, 147)

For human beings, this process of turning to oneself can be selfless or selfish. Given that only the former leads to self-preservation, temperance is “selfless self-preservation” (Pieper 1966, 148).

The cardinal virtues are acquired through education and are purified by divine grace, so that “with God’s help, they forge character” and provide happiness in virtuous practice (CCC 1810). As Catholics, the Catechism gives a basis for more deeply exploring the virtues, yet it is understood that the historical context for them is pre-Christian. What did they mean to the pagan Greeks who initially practiced them?

### Greek Culture

Plato used the four virtues to describe well-ordered societies and well-ordered individuals alike, and the cardinal virtues are considered such instinctive guidelines for

living well that they are even called the “natural law” (Mattison 2008, 69). What more have these virtues meant to their practitioners?

Given that Christians refer to God as the object of morality, and that Catholic theology is grounded in the philosophical tradition that culturally drew from Greek myths (even if only to illustrate larger points), I look to pagan deities to further understand the contextual role of the cardinal virtues in Greek culture. Tales of supernatural beings permeated ancient Greece from top to bottom, but the primary deities consisted of Twelve Olympians: Zeus, Poseidon, Hades, Hestia, Hera, Ares, Athena, Apollo, Aphrodite, Hermes, Artemis, and Hephaestus. Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades were brothers, with Zeus as chief of the gods with a special patronage over air, Poseidon ruling as lord of the water, and Hades taking up the underworld or afterlife as his realm.<sup>2</sup>

As to how prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance are evidenced throughout their myths, we are left with a conundrum: in terms of standing as objective others who serve as relatable templates from which we can understand virtuous activity, the gods often fail. Moral contradictions occur across the entire pantheon, and so for expediency I refer to Zeus specifically as emblematic. Though presiding over nature and the universe, being associated with moral as well as physical governance, benevolently patronizing statehood and social welfare, supervising the gods so that they would perform their individual duties, and demonstrating care for human beings, this all took place from within a deeply disturbing marital environment, as made obvious by acquaintanceship with his wife.

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<sup>2</sup> The remaining Olympians’ patronage briefly follows – Hestia/hearth, Hera/marriage, Ares/war, Athena/wisdom, Apollo/sun, Aphrodite/love, Hermes/herald of the gods, Artemis/hunt, and Hephaestus/fire and blacksmithing. Greek Mythology.com. “Greek Mythology / Olympians.” Accessed February 3, 2021. <https://www.greekmythology.com/Olympians/olympians.html>.

Hera the wife of Zeus is the predominant goddess, patron of marriage, childbirth, and special caretaker of married women; though examining her patronage reveals serious cracks in any moral foundation. For starters she is Zeus' sister, contributing to her marriage being founded in discord:

Zeus tricked Hera into marriage. Knowing full well that the goddess loved animals, he transformed himself into a distressed cuckoo and reverted to his original form only when Hera took the poor creature to her breast to warm it. Ashamed for being taken advantage of, Hera agreed to a marriage.<sup>3</sup>

We are thus left with an inconsistent worldview that is apparent at the root. Namely, while Greek culture provides an indispensable philosophical basis from which the cardinal virtues were elevated toward theological infusion in the Christian epoch, it does so amidst sacred tales that demonstrate imprudence, injustice, and an intemperate lack of moral fortitude as modeled by god himself! If the great god Zeus does not consistently model virtue for us, who (or what) will?

Though Greek mythology anthropomorphized virtue and a lack thereof, naming Arete as its goddess and the daimon Kakia patroness of vice,<sup>4</sup> the bulk of theologically applicable moral teaching about the virtues proceeds from the philosophical tradition. One telling example is how Plato, directly perceiving a need to untangle how piety and virtue with an emphasis on justice would have interrelated at the end of the Platonic dialogue *Euthyphro*, shows Socrates essentially conclude that what any god would want as piety is justice. Being pious and being good is exactly the same thing in other words,

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<sup>3</sup> Greek Mythology.com. "Greek Mythology / Olympians / Hera." Accessed February 6, 2021. <http://greekmythology.com/Olympians/Hera/hera.html>. Given that most stories about Hera deal with her jealous revenge for Zeus's infidelities, we are presented with a telling ideology of womanhood. Apparently it was assumed she would take marriage to her brother seriously enough to actually be jealous when he strayed, and simply choose to embrace her duty of caring for married women for all eternity.

<sup>4</sup> Theoi Greek Mythology. "Arete." Accessed February 6, 2021. <http://www.theoi.com/Daimon/Arete.html>.

and philosophy can help us understand what it means to be good. Any god worth worshipping ought to want this.<sup>5</sup>

Philosophical monotheism subsequently developed from the Platonic dialogues and introduction of the Forms, where Plato identifies the supreme being as the Form of the Good, and Aristotle as God. Yet even though the Form of the Good and Aristotle's God are impersonally non-Christian regarding a God we would recognize, this period of Platonic-Aristotelian generativity gave birth to Plotinus who in turn taught Origen, who drew not only from the Hebrew Scriptures, but also from Greek philosophy throughout his theological writings.

The point here is that the cardinal virtues are elevated through time, and would have been recognizable in both ancient Athens and Christian Rome. There were key developmental differences such as fortitude being epitomized by death in battle becoming the death of martyrdom, but any virtuous, rational being who utilizes reason and at least strives to hit the mark is capable of being recognized as such.

### Viking Culture

So what about the Vikings? Concurrent with Charlemagne being crowned Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire on Christmas Day in 800 A.D. (Daniel-Rops 1959, 181), the dawn of the "Viking Age" is traced to roughly the same year (Simons 1968, 128). Their dreaded arrival on the larger European stage took place "two generations

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<sup>5</sup> This line of reasoning does not eliminate the possibility of finding the virtues in Greek mythology. Reading the myths undoubtedly reveals many demonstrations of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance by the Olympians and also heroes such as Herakles, Perseus, Theseus, etc. My point is that the tales are so often tragic, revelatory of wounded wisdom, and frequently depicting the gods as cruel, that the objectivity of virtue itself as related in the myths is inherently flawed given their inconsistently demonstrated virtues (consider the earlier Zeus example). Though I do not deny the existence of a contrarian wisdom permeating Greek mythology and would utilize any discernibly virtuous accounts as instructive, I take it as self-evident that any practically applicable virtuous teaching from ancient Greek culture will find its highest expression in philosophy, the way to which the myths can only point.

after the death of Charlemagne” however, and while it occurred within a well-established Christendom, the Carolingian Empire had entered into a moribund state of vulnerability (Simons 1968, 125).<sup>6</sup>

This state was not helped by a distinct lack of virtue demonstrated by the perpetually sacking and burning Viking marauders, and “churches throughout Western Europe were echoing to a new prayer, ‘From the wrath of the Northmen, O Lord, deliver us!’” (Simons 1968, 125) Yet in spite of coming as invaders, they eventually stayed and became colonists, and by the mid-10<sup>th</sup> Century, Norwegians, Danes, and Swedes helped revitalize Europe’s commerce through trade. “Some of their descendants, the Normans, would play a leading role in bringing new order to Western Europe’s shattered political structure” (Simone 1968, 125).

Did the virtues play a role in the Vikings being domesticated, or can examining what virtue meant to them based on their sacred tales yield any results? For context in addressing these considerations, we now briefly examine the Norse pantheon.

Indigenous Scandinavians recognized two tribes of gods, the Aesir and Vanir. The latter are from Vanaheim, which is one of the “Nine Worlds held within the branches of the world-tree Yggdrasil,” and their more famous members are the goddess Freya, and the gods Frey and Njord.<sup>7</sup> The generally best-known deities of the pantheon, however, are of

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<sup>6</sup> “Emerging from the bleak Scandinavian north, the original homeland of the earlier Germanic tribesmen who had assaulted Rome, the Vikings too found a crumbling empire. In this case it was the Frankish state, and the Vikings’ unpredictable seaborne attacks speeded up its disintegration. Once again churchmen saw in the barbarian depredations the demise of Western civilization, and they construed the Viking menace as a divine punishment for society’s sins.” (Simons 1968, 125).

<sup>7</sup> Freya is associated with love, fertility, and beauty; Frey with wealth and prosperity, sexual and ecological fertility, harvests and peace; and Njord (father of both) also patronizes wealth and fertility, and is the god of the sea and seafaring. Norse Mythology for Smart People. “The Vanir Gods and Goddesses.” Accessed February 6, 2021. <http://norse-mythology.org/gods-and-creatures/the-vanir-gods-and-goddesses>.

the Aesir tribe from Asgard whose home is also located in the world-tree. They are Odin, Thor, Frigg, Tyr, Loki, Baldur, Heimdall, Idun, and Bragi.<sup>8</sup>

As with the Greek the Norse gods provide mixed results in demonstrating virtue, so for the sake of illustration I turn to Zeus' counterpart Odin, who "was the highest and holiest god of the Northern races," the "all-pervading spirit of the universe," like Zeus the "personification of the air," leader of rulers and heroes, and the "god of universal wisdom and victory" (Guerber 1895, 23). Though the Vikings were fierce warriors and a terrifying scourge during their active raiding period, a brief examination reveals the surprising extent to which their leader modeled the virtues for them.

For example, as a context for making victory possible as well as having intrinsic worth, *wisdom* is consistently emphasized with this deity, who vigilantly watches over the worlds from his throne – the only other person who had "the privilege of using this seat" was his wife and queen Frigg (Guerber 1895, 23). Two thoughts immediately spring to mind from this simple reference: 1) In sharing overseeing duty with his wife integral association with wisdom becomes divinely feminine, and 2) Viking wisdom thereby demonstrates nascent permeability with wisdom as *sophia*, which is contextually synonymous with *phronesis* or prudence (Ashley 1996, 36, 38).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Odin is the All-Father and chief of the gods, Thor is a great warrior-god, patron of thunder, and son of Odin and Frigg; Frigg is the wife of Odin, Tyr a god of war renowned for courage who shares Thor's parentage, Loki the trickster god of mischief whose parents are giants and who shares a brotherly bond with Odin, Baldur epitomizes handsomeness, graciousness, and good cheer and is also Odin and Frigg's son, Heimdall is guardian of Asgard, and the son of Odin and nine mothers, Idun giver of the fruit that perpetuates the gods' immortality and the wife of Bragi, and Bragi is the wise bard of the Aesir. Norse Mythology for Smart People. "The Aesir Gods and Goddesses." Accessed February 6, 2014. <http://norse-mythology.org/gods-and-creatures/the-aesir-gods-and-goddesses>.

<sup>9</sup> Odin treats his wife as a partner, which itself reveals much of the Norse mindset. In a harsh landscape where it is already difficult enough to survive, even the most masculine of cultures does not have the dubious luxury of misogyny. Another wisdom reference is provided by Odin's ravens Hugin (thought) and Munin (memory), whom he sent out to keep watch every morning and report back every evening. A brief prose reveals further overlap with prudence: "Hugin and Munin fly each day over the spacious earth. I fear for Hugin that he come not back, yet more anxious am I for Munin" (Guerber 1895, 24). The Vikings are



Flowing out of the wisdom he exemplifies, Odin demonstrates prudence; he is also just, for “justice is a habit (*habitus*), whereby a man renders to each one his due with constant and perpetual will” (Pieper 1966, 44). The existence of Valhalla is proof that due is given, for this is Odin’s special palace where the slain warriors who have proven their fortitude by dying in battle get to enjoy the benefits of having lived in their creator’s image.<sup>10</sup> While the chosen consume a perpetual heavenly feast served by the beautiful Valkyries as reward, Odin temperately abstains from food and instead feeds his hunting wolves Geri and Freki by hand, seldom tasting “anything except the sacred mead” (Guerber 1895, 25).

This brief examination is nonetheless telling, and further exegesis of the myths would yield multiple attestations to demonstrated virtue. As in the Greek epics there would likely be many examples of how not to be virtuous or perhaps how to discern virtue, but there is a key cultural difference to consider. I have argued that Greek virtue finds its highest expression in their philosophical tradition due to its proven aptitude of being elevated into theology. The church accomplished this through enculturation, blending existing cultural norms at the time into the emerging Christian belief system, thereby enculturating previously unrelated traditions into one revealing Tradition in progress.<sup>11</sup>

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being taught the value of recalling their experience, counterbalancing what can be known in the present. This contextual basis for knowing calls to mind prudence, which is both the “charioteer of the virtues” (CCC 1806), and the “*cause* of the other virtues being virtues at all” (Pieper 1966, 9).

<sup>10</sup> Norse fatalism also lives in Valhalla, for while prolonged this heaven is finite, and at the final battle of Ragnarok all the gods die. The sons of Odin and Thor will arise and life will continue, but there is no guarantee that the warriors Odin has chosen will personally witness the new creation.

<sup>11</sup> Cultural amalgamation was already underway, and the Oriental mystery cults of Isis, Serapis and Cybele were fashionable across society. Among soldiers the Persian god Mithras, ally of the Sun and champion of light against darkness, was immensely popular. Christianity emerged in the midst of a paradigm shift in which the many gods of the pagan pantheon were increasingly understood as personified attributes of one supreme God (Kelly 2012, 11-13).

But the Vikings left behind no philosophical corpus to enculturate, and though there were demonstrations of recognizable virtue in gods and persons, Christianity had to adopt a different approach in Christianizing Norway. How would the church adapt itself so that Norwegians cared enough to convert? Hindsight reveals that the Christian strategy was more about elevating a person than adapting doctrine to pre-existent norms; and the man history set apart for this was King Olaf, whose assigned role was nothing less than essentially superseding Odin. His was the formidable task of replacing a god as a saint of God.

### Enculturating the Vikings – from god to God

Born in 995 and dying on July 29, 1030, in battle against his rival King Cnut with the words “God help me” on his lips,<sup>12</sup> Olaf was canonized in 1164 by Pope Alexander III,<sup>13</sup> is venerated by Catholics, many Protestants, is the first saint to be recognized throughout Scandinavia,<sup>14</sup> and the last Western saint accepted by Eastern Orthodoxy.<sup>15</sup> His major shrine is in Trondheim, Norway,<sup>16</sup> and his annual feast day is observed on the date of his martyrdom. He is symbolized by the crown, axe, and dragon,<sup>17</sup> and holds patronage over carvers, difficult marriages, kings, and Norway.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> New Advent. “St. Olaf Haraldson.” Catholic Encyclopedia. Accessed February 16, 2021. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11234a.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> CatholicSaints.Info. “Saint Olaf II.” Accessed February 16, 2021. <http://saints.sqpn.com/saint-olaf-ii>.

<sup>14</sup> Flemestad, Most Rev. Roald Nikolas. 2014. “Olavus Coronatus Per Martyriam.” *The Bishop’s Blog*. July 20. Accessed February 16, 2021. <http://nordiccatholic.org/?m=201407>.

<sup>15</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica. “Olaf II Haraldsson: King of Norway.” Accessed February 16, 2021. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/426663/Olaf-II-Haraldsson>.

<sup>16</sup> Encyclopedia.com. “Olaf II.” Accessed February 16, 2021. [http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Olaf\\_II.aspx](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Olaf_II.aspx).

<sup>17</sup> Flemestad, Most Rev. Roald Nikolas. 2014. “Olavus Coronatus Per Martyriam.” *The Bishop’s Blog*. July 20. Accessed February 16, 2021. <http://nordiccatholic.org/?m=201407>.

<sup>18</sup> Catholic Online. “St. Olaf II of Norway.” Accessed February 16, 2021. [http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint\\_id=4899](http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=4899).

In *Ólafs saga Helga* (written c. 1230-35) (DuBois 1999, 166), the Icelandic historian Snorri Sturluson (1179 – September 23, 1241)<sup>19</sup> presents Olaf as an authentically Christian king who is “guided by God and firmly devoted to the Cross” (DuBois 1999, 166). Devoted to Christianizing Norway and uniting it under a single ruler, Olaf painted white crosses on his soldiers’ helmets and shields, marching beneath white banners marked with crosses of gold (DuBois 1999, 166). This action was meant to recall Constantine, a point further reinforced by the obligation to invoke the Constantinian formula – “Christ, Cross, and King – in their battle cry” (DuBois 1999, 166).

Sturluson’s narrative initially depicts Olaf as a king who was “faithful in principle to Christianity” while remaining motivated by a desire for power (DuBois 1999, 167). He was not a pagan disguised as a Christian, however. Olaf was subject to visions, considered becoming a monk and taking a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and is said to have miraculously healed “an afflicted boy” while visiting the Russian court (DuBois 1999, 167). As Olaf’s sanctity magnified and he understood “himself in direct concourse with his God, even if his cult became associated with a mediating Cross and other more standard images of sainthood through the writings of later hagiographers,” it is *Olaf* and “not the Cross whom subsequent Norwegian rulers and peasants invoked as their favored intercessor” (DuBois 1999, 167).

Thus embraced as a Christian leader who became a symbol in his own right, the following hagiographic narrative by Sturluson provides a telling example in affirming the premise of Odin being displaced by Olaf:

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<sup>19</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica. “Snorri Sturluson.” Accessed February 16, 2021. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/550523/Snorri-Sturluson>.

When King Olaf was at a feast in Avaldsnes he was visited by an old man who wore a broad-brimmed hat on his head. He was one-eyed, and very eloquent and had something to tell of every land. He entered into conversation with the king; and as the king found much pleasure in the guest's speech, he asked him concerning many things, to which the guest gave good answers: and the king sat up late in the evening. (Ferguson 2009, 348)

The wanderer turned the tale to the subject of the deceased owner of the household they were visiting during the feast, suggesting that he had made animal sacrifices during his lifetime to great benefit, and that there were nearby sacred mounds. This made the bishop uncomfortable, and though Olaf took his suggestion to go to bed, the old man appeared in his chamber, apparently placing the king under a spell while continuing to regale him with tales (Ferguson 2009, 348).

Unsure exactly what had taken place, when Olaf awoke the next morning he asked his servants if there had been a visitor, and the cook and cellar-master indicated that an old man had left special meat to be included in the next dish, which was presently being cooked. Descrying an unwanted supernatural guest, the king ordered that all the meat should be discarded, claiming that the visitor was none other than the "Odin whom the heathens have so long worshipped; and added, 'but Odin shall not deceive us'" (Ferguson 2009, 348).

The point of the hagiography is to show that Christianity had triumphed. The old gods were worse than dead, for they had become irrelevant nuisances. The ruler and defender of Asgard, the great god Odin whom Scandinavians had worshipped for millennia, was now no more than an easily dispelled, troublesome caller. Increasingly understood as no longer bearing inherent religious significance, Odin's decline cleared the way for major enculturating changes to occur throughout Norway.

One way such changes occurred is through the aforementioned symbols. For instance, associating Olaf with the crown after dispelling Odin solidified the understanding that the nobility bore the power, and the church the authority, to rule. The axe not only served as a symbol of martyrdom, but would have been recognized as the francisca, the weapon of the Franks, the people who gave the West Charlemagne.<sup>20</sup> The dragon<sup>21</sup> was reminiscent of both the great serpent Jormungand who simultaneously killed and was slain by Thor at the battle of Ragnarok,<sup>22</sup> and the dragon against which Saint George fought and was victorious.<sup>23</sup> The significance of rendering Olaf patron over carvers provided continuity with Scandinavia's distinctive stave cathedrals being built over former altars to Odin, difficult marriages representing the difficulties in "marrying" Christianity to Europe, and identifying Olaf with kings sought to stabilize the royal lineage.<sup>24</sup> Contrasted with the All-Father distinction formerly attributed to Odin, Saint

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<sup>20</sup> "The crown places him among Christian kings like Constantine and Charlemagne. The axe expresses on the one hand his authority as lawmaker, but serves also as a reminder that the axe was the instrument of his martyrdom" Flemestad, Most Rev. Roald Nikolas. 2014. "Olavus Coronatus Per Martyrium." *The Bishop's Blog*. July 20. Accessed February 16, 2021. <http://nordiccatholic.org/?m=201407>. In addition, *Saints and Their Symbols: Recognizing Saints in Art and in Popular Images* affirms that "Olaf's principal attributes are: a **crown** in his hand, along with a **two-edged axe**" (Lanzi 2003, 137). This axe, the francisca, "was a light-weight throwing axe more consistently associated with the Franks though its use expanded to that of the Germanic Tribes and beyond... (It) was used as both a psychological weapon as much as a physical one that, when thrown...had a tendency to ricochet off of the ground in any random direction... (It) became a national symbol and is still most closely related to (the Franks) than any other group... (It was named) francisca (or "francesca") ...by the Spanish." Military Factory.com. "Francisca Cutting/Throwing Axe (500 AD)." Accessed February 16, 2021. [http://www.militaryfactory.com/ancient-warfare/detail.asp?ancient\\_id=francisca](http://www.militaryfactory.com/ancient-warfare/detail.asp?ancient_id=francisca).

<sup>21</sup> "The dragon under his feet carries a face like his own and is usually interpreted as an allegorical expression of his struggle for a better self" Flemestad, Most Rev. Roald Nikolas. 2014. "Olavus Coronatus Per Martyrium." *The Bishop's Blog*. July 20. Accessed February 16, 2021. <http://nordiccatholic.org/?m=201407>. It also symbolizes the "idolatry which Olaf eradicated" (Lanzi 2003, 137).

<sup>22</sup> Norse Mythology for Smart People. "Ragnarok." Accessed February 16, 2021. <http://norse-mythology.org/tales/ragnarok>.

<sup>23</sup> St. George and the dragon, see New Advent. "St. George." Catholic Encyclopedia. Accessed February 16, 2021. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06453a.htm>.

<sup>24</sup> Olaf's patronage over difficult marriages is undoubtedly influenced by his reported personal experience. Having "conquered all of Norway for Christianity," Olaf married. Taking Gudrun, the daughter of a local heathen he had defeated named "Iron Beard" as his wife, Olaf woke on his wedding night just in time to

Olaf's emerging title as Perpetual King of Norway would hardly have gone unnoticed.<sup>25</sup>

In terms of Olaf personifying a traditioning process that would match working “aspects of Christianity” with “pagan counterparts” (DuBois 1999, 159), Odin hung on a tree, Jesus hung on a tree; Odin was wounded in the side by his spear, Jesus was stabbed in the side by a spear. Odin's rebirth as he emerged from his tree, the world tree Yggdrasil, symbol of the Norse cosmos with the nine worlds supported by its limbs and roots, granted him power over the runes.<sup>26</sup> Jesus' death and resurrection revealed the cross as the new tree of life, opening the floodgates of grace, redeeming all Creation, and making divinization an approachable reality.

### Conclusion

Throughout the course of this paper I have sought to frame virtue as a primordial and contemporary means by which humanity understands our inherent creativity as divinely inspired, empowering us to be more than we are. These cardinal virtues lead us through our culturally philosophical origins, engender themselves to theological transcendence, and render human cultures fit for divinization. Toward this end, the person of Saint Olaf provided an indispensable link that incorporated Viking Norway into the church, perpetuating the habitual and firm disposition to the good contextualized by Greek philosophy. Providing the foundational infrastructure for morality, the cardinal virtues remain the common denominator throughout the entire traditioning process. As we incline toward virtuous living and becoming like the gods, or the Good, eventually

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prevent her from plunging a knife into his neck. She then “gathered up her clothes and left” (Reston 1998, 34).

<sup>25</sup> “During the middle ages the *cultus* of ‘the perpetual King of Norway’ spread to Sweden, Denmark, the British Isles and beyond, and he is still regarded by Norwegians as the patron and national hero of his country” (Thurston et al. 1990, 209).

<sup>26</sup> Norse Mythology for Smart People. “Odin's Discovery of the Runes.” Accessed February 6, 2021. <http://norse-mythology.org/tales/odins-discovery-of-the-runes>. In addition, “the two symbols” of Thor's hammer and the cross “became viewed as parallel religious items” (DuBois 1999, 159).

God himself reveals the church as the fittest home for human striving, for “our heart is restless until it rests” in him (Augustine 2008, 3). With *prudence* as possibility, *justice* as will, persevering *fortitude* and the clarity of *temperance*, all are incorporated into the faith, hope, and love that sustain us as we grow in union with God.

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