

Rest in peace, Iver!

– About the last Catholic bishop in Ribe and his nephew Oluf



Iver Munk was the last Catholic bishop in Ribe. He was born in 1470 and died in 1539 – his tombstone can still be seen in the Cathedral. He is dressed in his Bishop's Cape, his mitre made of valuable material with thread of gold and silver and his crozier. Iver was of high noble family – the Munk family. He wears a ring on every finger, and two shields in the bottom shows that he is of high noble families – Juel on his mother's side and Munk on his father's side.

First a canon then a bishop

Iver Munk's father had been the Seigneur in Silkeborg, and when Iver in 1499 became bishop in Ribe he relieved his maternal uncle Hartvig Juel. After his studies abroad, Iver became a canon at the Cathedral in Ribe. At that time there were about 20 canons that were responsible for all the service at the 50 alters in the Cathedral.

Appreciated in Ribe and in Rome

When you were appointed a bishop you had to sign up for lots of things. It was very important as the Church owned more than 1/3 of Denmark's lands and the bishop was the lead manager of very large areas. The bishops were responsible for several castles and were priceless to the King if he needed money or soldiers to go to war. He had to be appreciated as a bishop not only by the 20 canons in Ribe, but also by the Pope in Rome. As a result he had to travel all the way to Rome to get his employment papers, for which he paid a large amount of money.

The first service after 14 years on the post

First of all the bishops were administrators of all the properties owned by the Church, and they were all of noble family and therefore members of the Kingdom Council. As a result they were not responsible for many services. In 1513 King Hans visited Ribe in order to attend Bishop Iver's first service and sermon after 14 years on the post. Indulgence letters were being sent out by the Pope in Rome, in which you were promised forgiveness for all your sins if you attended Bishop Iver's first mass and prayed for forgiveness from sunrise to sunset. The Pope did so to urge as many as possible to attend Bishop Iver's first mass. It was a great day, and it was the first time for Iver to preach a sermon. Queen Christine and Crown Prince Christian II and all the bishops in the country attended. On this occasion Crown Prince Christian was dressed in his full Bishop's Robe.

The Virgin Mary and the bishop in the Purgatory as a memorial

In 1514 Bishop Iver donated a big house next to the church to the Cathedral. The priest who lived there had to hold a service in St. Birgitta's chapel each Wednesday to honour the Virgin Mary. Twice a week he had to hold larger services as a memorial to Bishop Iver and pray that his soul wouldn't suffer in Purgatory. He was buried in the Cathedral in 1539. He donated lots of things to the church, and the chairs in the chorus that were donated for the priests can still be seen in the Cathedral.

A life in celibacy with 2 wives and several children

A catholic priest and bishop were supposed to live in celibacy. That obligated them not to get married or to be with women. Nevertheless Bishop Iver had 2 wives and several children. He didn't hide it, and one of his sons was named after him, Frands Iversen who was given the big farm "Strandbygård" in the parish of Stauning. He was a violent son, and during 1536 he was charged with assault three times in court.

Another son of Iver, who was born by one of Iver's maids in Ribe, was only given a small piece of a meadow in Lustrup, only big enough for one cow.

Bishop, warrior and politician

Bishop Iver and his brother were the founders of the riot against King Christian II. The King had given the people and farmers lots of civil rights at the nobility's expense. As a consequence the nobility and the bishops turned against the King, and Bishop Iver had his soldiers lay in wait for the King's emissaries headed for Rome and other places. A number of them were imprisoned in Ribe. On the 1 March 1523 the rebels were gathered in Ribe with Bishop Iver to make plans if a war broke out. 500 men were ready on the wall of the city if King Christian II was to threaten the town. This shows us that a Catholic bishop was more warrior and politician than a priest.

Conditional aid in the bishop's old age

In 1531 when Iver thought he was getting very old, he brought in his nephew Oluf to help him, and later on he was supposed to become bishop. Iver negotiated with the king in Flensburg. His nephew was allowed to become a bishop if Bishop Iver promised to allow the priests in Ribe to get married. He couldn't ask the Pope for acceptance of the election; the evangelical dogma had to be preached. Monks who wanted to escape the convent were not to be punished, and he had to pay the King 2000 Rhenish Guilders (enough money to buy a castle). Bishop Iver agreed to that. The Reformation was reaching Denmark.

From prison to the sweetness of old age

On 11 August 1536, when the King introduced the Reformation, all the bishops were imprisoned. Iver Munk was also imprisoned, and his political power and soldiers were taken from him. He was imprisoned for 3 months. They feared that the mighty bishops might raise an army.

Even if Iver was imprisoned and no longer a bishop, he was still part of the nobility, and the king provided him with great fortunes for his well-being. He could still live at his bishop's palace and was receiving taxes from 33 farms along with 2000 dry fish from the seignior of Riberhus castle to sweeten his old age.

Rest now in holy peace, Prelate Iver

The famous sculptor Claus Berg from Odense created his tombstone as payment for his nephew, who wanted to be a Lutheran vicar, to go to Ribe and be taught as a catholic by Bishop Iver. He composed the inscription himself.

It says in gothic letters: "A grim faith cuts your tread of life, now you rest here Oh Prelate Iver of the noble family Munk, as a noble prelate of the famous family you have lived, now your body rests in this tomb, I ask of each wayfarer: rest now in holy peace, Prelate Iver who died in the year of our Lord 1539 on 2 March.

Up to 30 services a day in the Cathedral

Iver Munk's nephew Oluf Munk became bishop after his uncle. He was the son of Iver's brother Mogens who was councillor. Oluf Munk had studied in Germany, and in 1523 when he came to Ribe to be preceptor at the Cathedral, he was 33 years old. His job was to make sure that the approx. 30 services a day in the Cathedral were held appropriately. He was also the principal of the nunnery where 4 nuns lived.

In 1526 he moved in to "Tårnberg", and 5 years later he became a (catholic!) suffragan for his uncle. During "The Feud of the Count" he joined the group of nobility who offered their support to Christian III. When the King won the civil war in 1536, he called for the Council and the bishops – among them suffragan Oluf Munk – to come to Copenhagen.



Marry or stay in prison!

At the meeting in Copenhagen, when the bishops refused to help to pay for Christian III's soldiers, they were imprisoned in the middle of the night between the 11th and 12th of August. The Reformation had now begun.

Oluf Munk was imprisoned in Viborg for 1 year, and he was only released when he promised to get married because if he did so he couldn't be a Catholic bishop. He married Drude, who was the daughter of the King's commander, Johan Rantzau. They had 9 children. Now he was one of the King's seigniors and was granted "Tårnborg" along with lots of farms in the areas of Tvis, Hjerem, Skærum Mølle and several other places.

He eats and gets fat – like some goat

Oluf Munk wasn't popular among those working for him. He gave his farmers a tough time and made them work on his farms all over Jutland. Sometimes it meant a walk of 40 km to get to work. Nobody liked him. A poem was written about him (in Danish it rhymes): "Oluf Munk is erect and strict; he eats and gets fat like some goat."

When Oluf Munk died in 1568, he was a very rich man.

Assignments:

1. Sing "Skipper Clements morning song" and solve the tasks in relation to the song. You'll find the melody on www.højskolesangbogenonline.dk.
2. Sing "On corn farmer's the field" and solve the tasks in relation to the song. You'll find the melody on www.højskolesangbogenonline.dk
3. Discuss what was required if you wanted to become a Catholic bishop.
4. Check out the text on Peder Palladius (item 2) to find which qualifications he had to become the first bishop in Zealand after the Reformation.

Skipper Clements morning song

1. Barricade your house with trends and planks,
hone your scythes' blades shining
fear not the black army of Rantzau
silk will yield to homespun clothes.
Farmers, carpenters, Jutlandic lads
Now, we will be victorious in Count's Feud
2. Behind the shining helmets of the rich
are hiding shivering fearful rogues
the Devil himself has given them, as finery,
armours, shields, lands and coins
3. Men are they trading for money,
the gate of freedom they have locked and closed,
torture and tying down with inheritance and debts
the land, as if they have created it themselves.
4. They say wealth is only for rich,
the Bible tells another story
on earth God's son wandered as a poor
did not to them collect his pay.
5. The black vermins of the church
must protect themselves against the girls laughter.
Gaully dressed men of the squires in position
now they will meet the Danish man.
6. The cock has crowed third time
stand firm we are in majority
do not let the future tell about us,
the riches suppressed us without a fight
Farmers, carpenters, Jutlandic lads
Now, we will be victorious in Count's Feud

Ebbe Kløvedal Reich 1970

Assignment 1

1. Check the Internet to find out who was Skipper Clement.
2. Search the Internet or the library for more information on "The Feud of the Count"
3. Who are "the black vermins" in verse 5?

Assignment 2

1. Catholic priests lives a life in celibacy – what does that mean?
2. Find out whether Martin Luther ended his life in celibacy.
3. Do the vicars in the Danish Lutheran Church have to live in celibacy?

Assignment 3

1. Visit a church in the parish and talk to the vicar about the changes within the church caused by the Reformation.

On corn farmer's the field

1. On the corn farmer's field, near the town of Birkende,
walked a little ploughboy and sang out loud;
he preached like the clergyman while drifting a lazy horse:
"I wish to God Hans Plovkøring a vicar could be!"
2. Behind the plough the farmer nodded on what he was hearing:
"Every nipper a bishop can be, if God is willing.
Did not Morten Børup, run away from plough and horse?
now he chastise runaways to become scholars in Års."
3. It was that little ploughboy, of Birkende
his name, with popular reputation, went out across Denmark
a Danish Morten Luther, he fought with the sword of words
and triumphed with the spirit of the people's army.
4. True, has a ploughman never gone that far;
he trusted God, though not much on himself;
on the day he fought with no adversity and despair,
he feared that God's mercy, which did not previously to him flowed.
5. On the day the proud bishops imprisonment were,
the peasants inscribed God's words on God's alter;
when the people was redeemed and the bitter hatred extinguished,
Hans Tavsén, in Ribe, on the bishop see sat.
6. But more than all the bishops in whole of Denmark
the farmer son cared for women and men.
True, his name shall never die in the hearts of the Danes,
as long a bell rings across the parish.

*B.S. Ingemann 1843
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Questions:

1. Who is the little ploughboy?
2. Which significance did he have to the Reformation?
3. Which connection did he have to Ribe Diocese?
4. Which event is referred to in the last verse but one?