

## A Synthesis of Traditions, Part II: Byzantine Carmelites in Pennsylvania<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

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By means of original, on-site research, including personal interviews with the members of the Byzantine Discalced Carmelites of the Holy Annunciation Monastery of Sugarloaf, Pennsylvania, the author has begun to set down some of the history of this community in ways not previously told. This history is bound up with some of the major events of the twentieth century, including the Russian Revolution, the rise of Communism, the martyrdom of many Eastern Catholics in the Soviet Union, and then the collapse of the USSR and emergence of underground Eastern Catholic communities post-1991. Having sketched the history in outline, the author then proceeds to analyze the liturgical and pastoral life of the Byzantine Carmelites, employing a comparative methodology to set them alongside comparable Latin and Byzantine communities.



### *Introduction*

If the life and history of Eastern Catholics in general is not well known, how much more recondite is the life and history of Eastern Catholic “monastics,” especially those who, for a variety of reasons and with varying degrees of success, attemp-

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<sup>1</sup> Part I, focusing on Byzantine Franciscans in Pennsylvania, was published in *Logos* in the Fall 2013 issue.

ted to create something of a “hybrid” in the form of Eastern Catholic communities within the extant structures of Roman Catholic religious orders – e.g., Byzantine Jesuits, Byzantine Franciscans, Ukrainian Redemptorists, and Byzantine Carmelites. This essay, the second of two parts, is but a beginning of an attempt to tell some of the history of two of these Byzantine-rite communities within the Catholic Church, a history which in some cases has never been told before but very much deserves narration, not least as the ageing members of these communities, and the dearth of new vocations to them, may very likely see several of them close in the coming years. This history, moreover, deserves telling because many of these communities have had a very considerable impact not only on the Eastern Catholic Churches, but on the Roman Catholic Church, and on Orthodox-Catholic relations. These communities were also at the crossroads of some of the major events of the past century – the Russian Revolution and creation of the Soviet Union, the Second World War, the ecumenical movement, and the Second Vatican Council.

The essay is based on interviews (in person, and by e-mail and phone) and on-site research in visits to the community in question. It uses some comparative methods to examine the old suspicion that Eastern Catholics are a *tertium quid* – neither fully Eastern nor fully Latin. By examining the constitutions and structures of Latin orders on the one hand, and of some authoritative documents of Eastern (Byzantine) monasticism on the other, the study reveals that within the lives of those examined here, one finds a synthesis of the Byzantine tradition and the traditions of the particular order without sacrificing the integrity of the former to the demands of the latter.<sup>2</sup>

In the Roman Catholic Church, religious life is organized into different religious orders. Each order has its own rule or constitution and all communities within that order are bound

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<sup>2</sup> For critical-but-sympathetic treatments of the vexed questions of “Latinization,” see Taras Khomych, “Eastern Catholic Churches and the Question of ‘Uniatism’: Problems of the Past, Challenges of the Present, and Hopes for the Future,” *Louvain Studies* 31 (2006): 214–237; and Michael Plishka, “From Easternization to Inculturation: Re-Interpreting the Mission of the Eastern Catholic Churches,” *Worship* 71 (1997): 317–334.

by this legislation. The Eastern Churches (whether Orthodox or Catholic), however, have traditionally organized religious life differently. Instead of being separated into various religious orders, religious life is organized into separate monastic houses or communities (e.g. monasteries, sketes, etc.).<sup>3</sup> Each of these monastic communities has its own rule of life, called a typicon, which is usually “drawn from the traditions of the desert fathers” who laid the foundations for communal monastic life. While some religious orders have more recently been formed in the Eastern Churches, they remain the exception and not the rule.<sup>4</sup> This being the case, in the Eastern Churches, men or women who want to enter religious life will most likely join a specific monastery and follow that monastery’s rule of life.

Having said this, in the Eastern Catholic Churches, some men and women who sought religious life made a different choice, and as a result there are currently Byzantine Catholic groups and/or individuals within numerous Roman Catholic religious orders. Some of these are solitary members while others were sufficiently numerous to merit an entire “province” or similar structure within the larger structure of the order in question. In some situations, the formation was the same, but liturgical life was different; in others, liturgy, theological formation, and much else besides was fully Eastern and functioned more or less semi-autonomously inside the order. Despite the fact that many of these orders have had Byzantine Catholic members for decades in various configurations, they have not been properly acknowledged and their way of life has been little examined. To begin filling such a lacuna, this essay started by providing snapshots of the lives of the (male) Byzantine Franciscans of Sybertsville, Pennsylvania. Now we examine their near neighbors (just a scant two miles up the hill), the (female) Byzantine Carmelites.

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<sup>3</sup> A skete, at least on Mount Athos, is normally the term used to refer to a monastic structure which consists of “several houses of one to six monks grouped loosely together around a central church”: Alexander Golitzin, *The Living Witness of the Holy Mountain: Contemporary Voices from Mount Athos* (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 1996), 22.

<sup>4</sup> “Rule of Life,” Monastery of the Holy Cross, <http://rumkatkilise.org/stmhc.htm> (accessed March 1, 2013).