

5. BASILIANS.



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BASILIANs. The *Ordo Sancti Basilii Magni*. A monastic cenobitic movement initiated by St. Basil the Great (who died in 379) and influenced by his 55 "Longer rules" and 313 "Shorter rules", which were composed about 362 A.D.. These rules of communal monastic life were written in opposition to unorganized anachoretic and solitary monastic life (hermits or "desert Fathers"). Basilian rules became the foundation of an organized Eastern monasticism and influenced the rules of John Cassian and St. Benedict and through them Western monastic movement.

The early Basilian monastic spirituality was characterized by the spiritual optimism of the Eastern Fathers of the Church. It stressed the life of the Holy Spirit and the exchange of His gifts (or charisms) and fruits among the members of the monastic community. Further, it taught an intense life in the Mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, including frequent reception of the Divine Mysteries (Sacraments) and an intense liturgical life. This includes the celebration of Matins, Divine Liturgy, the Little Hours, Vespers, Great or Small Compline, etc. The spirituality of St. Basil the Great is based on the mystical reality of transfiguration, divinization, fulfillment and glorification of the whole Christian person in body and soul, also of the whole of created reality.

The first monks on the territory of contemporary Ukraine who were influenced by a Basilian spirit were the so-called "gothic monks." They educated indigenous "Scythian monks," among whom were John Cassian, the founder of the first cenobitic monasteries in Western Europe (late fourth century), also Dionysius Exiguus (Denis the Little), the first famous reformer of the Roman calendar and author of the first systematic canonical collection, called "Dionysiana."

The growth of monastic tradition in the Byzantine Church was influenced by the ascetical and mystical writing of St. Basil the Great and the typicon of St. Theodore Studite (759-826). The introduction of Christianity into Kievan Rus as the state religion under Vladimir the Great occurred in 988; and thereafter there was a monastic flourishing, according to the Studite rule. There were no monastic "orders," for monasteries were independent of each other, under the local bishops—or, as an exception, under the direct jurisdiction of the Patriarch in Constantinople (Stau-ropegeion monasteries).

In 1596 the Ukrainian Church entered into union with Rome. In 1617 the Metropolitan of Kiev, Joseph V. Rutskyi, with the assistance of Archbishop Josaphat Kuntsevych, organized the monasteries in the Ukrainian and Belorussian Eparchies into one Congregation of the Holy Trinity and prescribed a rule based on that of St. Basil the Great. The resultant Basilian monasteries were exempt from the jurisdiction of the local bishops and were subject to a protoarchimandrite, who was the head of the whole congregation.

The rule of 1617 was modeled on the rules of Western orders, with the introduction of the general chapters every four years and four-year appointments of hegumens. The archimandrites' nominations were made by the Polish King or other patrons, and those were promoted by the Metropolitan.

In 1624 the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith confirmed this organization of the Basilian Order; and in 1631 Pope Urban VIII added his approval. Thus the Order became partially subordinated to the Metropolitan, and partially to the Pope. Until 1675 the Metropolitans of Kiev were protoarchimandrites for life; thereafter some monks were appointed protoarchimandrites for four years. The Basilian novitiate was located first in Vil'nius and later in Byten, Volhynia. Philosophy was studied at Zhyrovichy, and theology in the West, especially in Rome in the Papal institutions. Finally, by a Papal decree in 1635, all the Ukrainian bishops were to be drawn from the ranks of the Basilians.

All this meant Latinization in policy and practice in the Ukrainian monasteries by transforming them from independent entities into a highly centralized and institutionalized monastic order, which very soon decreased the intensity of its contemplative life to move into missionary and educational fields and into publishing for the purpose of fostering the union with Rome. The Basilians also taught Church Slavonic to the students in Polish colleges in order to keep them in the Eastern Rite. In 1615 Metropolitan Rutskyi received permission from Pope Paul V to establish new schools, and thus almost every Basilian monastery ran a school. The synod of Kobryn in 1626 appointed Basilians as the administrators of the Minsk Eparchial Seminary.

In 1720 the Synod of Zamost' forced all the Catholic Studite monasteries to accept the Basilian Rule, thus creating no other option; and by 1743 there remained only one juridical order. By 1780 the Basilian Order had 1,235 monks. (950 of them were priests.) Again, a Western model was observed: protoarchimandrites for four (then eight) years, while the large monasteries had archimandrites with life-terms; in the smaller ones they had four-year terms. The monks were still kept from the contemplative life, in favor of education, union-polemics and the mission work that this entailed.

The Basilians were in charge of schools in Uman, Hoshcha, Liubar, Sharhorod, Buchach and Volodymyr-Volynskyi, and finally Ostrih. They were engaged in publishing at Pochaiv in Volhynia, Suprasl and L'viv.

When the Russian Empire expanded and the partitions of Poland took place (1793 and 1795), the regions of Kiev, Volhynia and Podillia were taken by Russia. The Basilians in these regions were subordinated to the Archbishop of Polotsk, relations with the West were forbidden, and their self-rule and offices of self-government were abolished. Finally in 1839 they were subordinated to the eparchial consistory. The monasteries were finally closed in 1839, when the Uniate Church in Ukraine and Belorussia was officially abolished. In the final Russian persecution, some monks were exiled, other imprisoned. In 1864 the Russians closed the last five Basilian houses in their territories.

In Galicia, under Austrian rule, the Basilians continued under Maria Theresia (1717-80). However, under Joseph II (1741-90) the state intruded into church life and brought despotism down to the finest detail. Any Basilian house which did not