

Life of the Righteous Konstanty Vasyl Ostrogsky

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Vasyl Konstantinovich Ostogsky (1526 - Feb. 13th 1608)

EARLY LIFE

Konstanty Konstantinovich was born in 1526 and baptized with the name Vasily (Basil) at his baptism. It is likely he was born in December and named after St. Basil the Great. He was called "Konstanty" after his father, Prince Konstantin Ivanovich -- a Voivode -- who reposed before Konstanty was an adult and he was raised by his mother and second wife of Prince Konstantin Ivanovich, Princess Alexandra Semyonovna (nee Princess Slutskaya). He was an ethnic Rusyn (Ruthenian). He spent most of his childhood and early adulthood in his mother's ancestral city of Turov, where, under the guidance of learned teachers, he received a very thorough education in the Orthodox Faith. When he came of age, Prince Konstanty Konstantinovich married Sofia Tarnovsky, a daughter of the Galician magnate Jan Amor Tarnovsky, with whom he had five children with, and he became the count of Ostrog in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (now Ukraine).

Around this time, Prince Konstanty's faith began to grow cold, and so did his connection to his Rusyn heritage, and he began to live a secular life influenced by Western culture. He also began to become indifferent with even his duties as a Prince, as public and stately affairs interested him little. A turning point began when the Jesuits started to influence the Orthodox people of Poland to abandon their faith and become Papist, which affected Prince Konstanty on a personal level.

The Jesuits at first attempted to convince Prince Konstanty to abandon the Orthodox Faith, which he refused, they then went to his daughter-in-law, Princess Beata, and with her attempted to convert Prince Konstanty's niece, Elizabeth, to Papism. Prince Konstanty Ostrogski managed to stand up for his Faith and the honor of his house and had his niece Elizabeth marry the Orthodox Prince Dmitri Sangushko. However due to the intrigue of Beata and the Jesuits, Sangushko was accused and convicted on false charges of "treason" and on his way to Bohemia (modern Czech Republic) he was killed by the Poles. Elizabeth was returned to Poland and forcibly married by the Jesuits to the Papist Count Gurka.

Ostrogsky fought in the courts for the rights of his niece against the Jesuits and Count Gurka. Elizabeth, being unable to handle the persecution of the Papists, went mad. Ostrogsky had her moved to his home, where the unfortunate woman lived until her repose in 1582. This incident had rekindled the Faith of Prince Konstanty, and had made him aware of the danger and evil of the Jesuits, and they in return focused their envy and hatred towards him from thereon.

STRUGGLE AGAINST PAPIISM

At this time in Poland was very difficult for the Orthodox. Their culture was being increasingly influenced by Western Culture and the Poles were forcing the Rusyn people to adopt their customs and culture. Rusyns were abandoning the Orthodox Faith to become Papist, due to the oppression of their Roman Catholic landlords. The Poles in 1569 allied themselves with the Russian state in Lublin, which gave the Jesuits opportunity to spread their heresy into the Russian lands. Prince Ostrogsky and a few others were of a small population to defend the Orthodox Faith and culture of the Rusyn people against the intrigues of the Jesuits, and the Polish state become increasingly hostile towards Orthodoxy.

The Jesuits began to infiltrate the schools, colleges and even the families of the magnates to win them over to Papism, and with the help of the Polish government, quickly gained more and more influence on the public life in the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Orthodox clergy and population fought an uphill battle against the Jesuits. The clergy themselves were often uneducated, and the Papists offered luxury and wealth for those who joined their side. Soon all classes of people started to leave the Orthodox Faith. Prince Konstanty, a pious man, could not remain indifferent towards these events, in his domain were 25 cities, 10 towns and 670 villages, the income of which reached 120,000 zlotys per year.

Due to his position and wealth in the Polish court, he began to influence things towards Orthodoxy. He made his land open for all those who were zealots for Orthodoxy to turn into brotherhoods, churches and monasteries, and forbade the Jesuits from entering his territory. The most important thing Prince Ostrogsky realized was that the Orthodox needed schools to educate the people in their Faith. He opened up several schools across Poland including the most famous, the Ostrog Academy, in 1576. To counter the printed propaganda of the Jesuits, Prince Ostrogsky funded the efforts of Ivan Fedorov to turn the Slavonic script into a typeface and purchase printing presses to print Holy Scripture, works by the Holy

Fathers and apologetic material to help develop the Faith of his people.

Prince Ostrogsky also wrote out hand-written lists and sent them to Moscow, monasteries in Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Crete and to Patriarch Jeremias II and the Russian Tsar for requests on books to bring to the Rusyn lands in order to translate and re-publish works by the Orthodox in Poland. The printing efforts of the Ostrog Academy and Prince Ostrogsky soon began to print Liturgical books including the first printed Bible in the Slavonic language, the Ostrog Bible, and the first printed Psalter, Horologian and prayer book. They also printed apologies against the Gregorian Calendar including the Sigillion of 1583, St. Basil's "On the One Faith" directed against the work by the Jesuit Peter Skarga, "Confession of the Descent of the Holy Spirit" by St. Maximus the Greek against the Latin teaching of the "Filioque" and "Dialogue against the schismatics" by Patriarch Meletios I of Alexandria, among other works.

The Union of Brest-Livotsk in 1596 did not deter the Orthodox Rusyns or Prince Ostrogsky, but rather compelled them to print more books. He had recruited the priest Fr. Demyan Nalivayko to take over the printing in Ostrog and soon published the Octoechos, St. John Chrysostom's "Verses", a Slavonic lectionary, and tracts against the Uniates. Many of the printing efforts in Ostrog would later be transferred to the Kyiv-Perchersk Lavra. Prince Ostrogsky realized his efforts in educating the people were far from over, he considered the lack of education to be the main cause for the apostasy in Poland, and in one of his letter wrote: "...there is nothing else that has caused such sloth and apostasy among the people...", continuing "...because the teachers are tired of it, the preachers of the word of God are tired, the sciences are tired, the Cossacks are tired, and after that has come much impoverishment and a decrease in the praise of God in His Church, there has come a famine of hearing the word of God, a departure from the faith and the law of God has come...".

Prince Konstanty began to bring more experienced teachers from Greece and Russia to teach at the Ostrog Academy, including the future Patriarch of Constantinople Cyril Lukaris, Job Boretskyi, Stefan Zizany, Ivan Knyahynytski (later Fr. Job of Manyava), Petro Sahaidachny and others -- many of whom became Saints -- eventually, due to the efforts of Prince Konstanty, the tide soon turned in favour of the Orthodox, as the Jesuits such as Antonio Possevin anxiously reported to Rome about the "Russian schism" which was gaining traction in Poland.

Prince Konstanty Ostrogsky used his influence in the courts as well. In 1592 he obtained permission from King Sigismund III Vaza to allow Russian Bishops into Ostrog to ordain more clergy for the Rusyn people. A new threat soon emerged in Ostrog, as now not only the Papists were trying to spread their false faith, but the Protestants had soon arrived and began to deceive people into their heresy. Prince Konstanty began to study the Protestant faith and soon realized its errors. He had the printers of the Ostrog Academy start to write tracts against the Protestant delusion of the Calvinists and Lutherans.

LEGACY

Until the end of his life, Prince Konstanty Ostrogsky fought against the Papists and Protestants, and did everything in his power to defend the Orthodox, including interceding for St. Nikephoros of Brest before his Martyrdom. He reposed at the age of 82, on February 13th, 1608. He was buried in the Catacomb of the Chapel of the Epiphany, within his own castle in the city of Ostrog.

The Papists did not cease their hatred of Prince Konstanty even after his repose. After his repose, his daughter, Princess Anna was forcibly taken to a Papist church by a group of Dominicans and forcibly baptized and tonsured a "nun" by them, and then kept hostage in a Papist convent. One of his granddaughters, the daughter of his son Prince Alexander, Anna Aloysia, was thrown in prison for refusing to renounce the Orthodox Faith. The Papists ordered his relics be taken out of the tomb, washed, consecrated according to the Latin practice, and transferred to the city of Yaroslavl, where they put them in a Catholic chapel, as an attempt to stop his veneration among the Orthodox people.

His efforts to defend the Orthodox Church and his teaching efforts helped preserve the Orthodox Faith not only in the Rusyn lands, but also in Ukraine and Belarus. Many students and teachers of the Ostrog Academy went on to become Saints and important figures in the Orthodox Church. He was a peaceful man and while as a Prince, rarely engaged in military activity. Only once did he send his troops to fight the Hungarians in 1579 in order to please the Polish King. He spent most of his life dedicated to defending Orthodoxy.

The Catholic chapel in Yaroslavl was destroyed in the 1700s, and the relics of Prince Konstanty Vasyl Ostrogsky are presumed to be lost. Today he is well remembered through Poland, Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, and considered to be a Confessor for Orthodoxy and a Righteous Prince due to his fairness towards the

poor and charity. There exist many icons of him especially in Ukraine, including one at the monastery of St. Michael of the Golden Domes, near the iconostasis.