

*JOHN PAUL II*



**SLAVORUM APOSTOLI**

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. THE APOSTLES OF THE SLAVS, Saints Cyril and Methodius, are remembered by the Church together with the great work of evangelization which they carried out. Indeed it can be said that their memory is particularly vivid and relevant to our day.

Considering the grateful veneration enjoyed for centuries by the holy Brothers from Salonika (the ancient Thessalonica), especially among the Slav nations, and mindful of their incalculable contribution to the work of proclaiming the Gospel among those peoples; mindful too of the cause of reconciliation, friendly coexistence, human development and respect for the intrinsic dignity of every nation, by my Apostolic Letter *Egregiae Virtutis*<sup>1</sup> of 31 December 1980 I proclaimed Saints Cyril and Methodius Co-Patrons of Europe. In this way I followed the path already traced out by my Predecessors, and notably by Leo XIII, who over a hundred years ago, on 30 September 1880, extended the cult of the two Saints to the whole Church, with the Encyclical Epistle *Grande Munus*,<sup>2</sup> and by Paul

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<sup>1</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Egregiae Virtutis* (31 December 1980): AAS 73 (1981), pp. 258-262.

<sup>2</sup> LEO XIII, Encyclical Epistle *Grande Munus* (30 September 1880), in *Leonis XIII Pont. Max. Acta*, II, pp. 125-137; cf. also PIUS XI, Letter *Quod S. Cyrillum* (13 February 1927) to the Archbishops and Bishops of the Kingdom of the Serbs-Croats-Slovenes and of the Czechoslovakian Republic: AAS 19 (1927), pp. 93-96; JOHN XXIII, Apostolic Letter

VI, who, with the Apostolic Letter *Pacis Nuntius*<sup>3</sup> of 24 October 1964, proclaimed Saint Benedict Patron of Europe.

2. The purpose of the document of five years ago was to remind people of these solemn acts of the Church and to call the attention of Christians and of all people of good will who have at heart the welfare, harmony and unity of Europe to the ever-living relevance of the eminent figures of Benedict, Cyril and Methodius, as concrete models and spiritual aids for the Christians of today, and especially for the nations of the continent of Europe, which, especially through the prayers and work of these saints, have long been consciously and originally rooted in the Church and in Christian tradition.

The publication of my Apostolic Letter in 1980, which was dictated by the firm hope of a gradual overcoming in Europe and the world of everything that divides the Churches, nations and peoples, was linked to three circumstances that were the subject of my prayer and reflection. The first was the eleventh centenary of the Pontifical Letter *Industriae Tuae*,<sup>4</sup> whereby Pope John VIII

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Magnifici Eventus (11 May 1963) to the Prelates of the Slav Nations: AAS 55 (1963), pp. 434-439. PAUL VI, Apostolic Epistle *Antiquae Nobilitatis* (2 February 1969) for the eleventh centenary of the death of Saint Cyril: AAS 61 (1969), pp. 137-149).

<sup>3</sup> PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter *Pacis Nuntius* (24 October 1964): AAS 56 (1964), pp. 965-967.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Magnae Moraviae Fontes Historici*, t. III, Brno 1969, pp. 197- 208.

in the year 880 approved the use of the Old Slavonic language in the liturgy translated by the two holy Brothers. The second circumstance was the first centenary of the above-mentioned Encyclical Epistle Grande Munus. The third was the beginning, precisely in 1980, of the happy and promising theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches on the Island of Patmos.

3. In the present document I wish to make particular reference to the Epistle Grande Munus, by which Pope Leo III intended to remind the Church and the world of the apostolic merits of both the Brothers-not only of Methodius, who, according to tradition, ended his days at Velehrad in Greater Moravia in the year 885, but also of Cyril, whom death separated from his brother in 869, when he was in Rome, the city which received and which still preserves his relics with profound veneration in the Basilica of Saint Clement.

Recalling the holy lives and apostolic merits of the two Brothers from Salonika, Pope Leo XIII fixed their annual liturgical feast on 7 July. After the Second Vatican Council, as a result of the liturgical reform, the feast was transferred to 14 February, which from the historical point of view is the date of the heavenly birthday of Saint Cyril.<sup>5</sup> At a distance of over a hundred years from

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<sup>5</sup> Only in a few Slav nations is the feast still celebrated on 7 July.

Pope Leo's Epistle, the new circumstances in which it so happens that there falls the eleventh centenary of the death of Saint Methodius encourage us to give renewed expression to the Church's memory of this important anniversary. And a particular obligation to do so is felt by the first Pope called to the See of Peter from Poland, and thus from the midst of the Slav nations.

The events of the last hundred years and especially of the last decades have helped to revive in the Church not only the religious memory of the two holy Brothers but also a historical and cultural interest in them. Their special charisms have become still better understood in the light of the situations and experiences of our own times. A contribution to this has been made by many events which belong, as true signs of the times, to the history of the twentieth century; the first of these is that great event which took place in the life of the Church: the Second Vatican Council. In the light of the magisterium and pastoral orientation of that Councils we can look in a new way—a more mature and profound way—at these two holy figures, now separated from us by eleven centuries. And we can read in their lives and apostolic activity the elements that the wisdom of divine Providence placed in them, so that they might be revealed with fresh fullness in our own age and might bear new fruits.

## II. BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

4. Following the example offered by the Epistle Grande Munus, I wish to recall the life of Saint Methodius, without however thereby ignoring the life-so closely linked to it-of his brother Saint Cyril. This I will do in general terms, leaving to historical research the detailed discussion of individual points.

The city which saw the birth of the two holy Brothers is the modern Salonika, which in the ninth century was an important centre of commercial and political life in the Byzantine Empire, and occupied a notable position in the intellectual and social life of that part of the Balkans. Being situated on the frontier of the Slav territories, it also certainly had a Slav name: Solun.

Methodius was the elder brother and his baptismal name was probably Michael. He was born between 815 and 820. His younger brother Constantine, who came to be better known by his religious name Cyril, was born in 827 or 828. Their father was a senior official of the imperial administration. The family's social position made possible for the two Brothers a similar career, which in fact Methodius did take up, reaching the rank of Archon or Prefect in one of the frontier Provinces where many Slavs lived. However, towards the year 840 he interrupted his career and retired to one of the monasteries at the foot of

Mount Olympus in Bithynia, then known as the Holy Mountain.

His brother Cyril studied with great success in Byzantium, where he received Holy Orders, after having resolutely refused a brilliant political future. By reason of his exceptional intellectual and religious talents and knowledge, there were entrusted to him while he has still a young man delicate ecclesiastical appointments, such as that of Librarian of the Archive attached to the great church of Holy Wisdom in Constantinople, and, simultaneously, the prestigious position of Secretary to the Patriarch of that city. However, he very soon made it known that he wished to be relieved of these posts, in order to be able to devote himself to study and the contemplative life, far from the pursuit of ambition. Thus he retired secretly to a monastery on the Black Sea coast. He was discovered six months later, and was persuaded to accept the task of teaching philosophy in the School of higher learning in Constantinople, where by reason of the excellence of his knowledge he gained the epithet of The Philosopher by which he is still known. Later on he was sent by the emperor and the Patriarch on a mission to the Saracens. On the completion of this task he retired from public life in order to join his elder brother Methodius and share with him the monastic life. But once again, together with Methodius, he was included in a

Byzantine delegation sent to the Khazars, acting as a religious and cultural expert. While staying in the Crimea at Kherson, they identified what they believed to be the church in which had been buried Saint Clement, Pope of Rome and martyr, who had been exiled to that distant region. They recovered his relics and took them with them.<sup>6</sup> These relics later accompanied the two holy Brothers on their missionary journey to the West, until they were able to bring them solemnly to Rome and present them to Pope Hadrian II.

5. The event which was to determine the whole of the rest of their lives was the request made by Prince Rastislav of Greater Moravia to the Emperor Michael III, to send to his peoples "a Bishop and teacher ... able to explain to them the true Christian faith in their own language".<sup>7</sup>

Those chosen were Saints Cyril and Methodius, who readily accepted, set out and, probably by the year 863, reached Greater Moravia—a State then including various Slav peoples of Central Europe, at the crossroads of the mutual influences between East and West. They undertook among these peoples that mission to which both of them devoted the rest of their lives, spent amidst journeys, privations,

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Vita Constantini VIII, 16-18: Constantinus et Methodius Thessalonicenses, Fontes, recensuerunt et illustraverunt Fr. Grivec et Fr. Tomsic (Radovi Staroslavenskog Instituta, Knjiga 4, Zagreb 1960), p. 184.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Vita Constantini XIV, 2-4; ed. cit., pp. 199f.



sufferings, hostility and persecution, which for Methodius included even a period of cruel imprisonment. All of this they bore with strong faith and indomitable hope in God. They had in fact prepared well for the task entrusted to them: they took with them the texts of the Sacred Scriptures needed for celebrating the Sacred Liturgy, which they had prepared and translated into the Old Slavonic language and written in a new alphabet, devised by Constantine the Philosopher and perfectly adapted to the sounds of that language. The missionary activity of the two Brothers was accompanied by notable success, but also by the understandable difficulties which the preceding initial Christianization, carried out by the neighboring Latin Churches, placed in the way of the new missionaries.

About three years later, while travelling to Rome, they stopped in Pannonia where the Slav Prince Kocel, who had fled from the important civil and religious center of Nitra, gave them a hospitable reception. From here, after some months, they set out again for Rome together with their followers, for whom they desired to obtain Holy Orders. Their route passed through Venice, where the innovating elements of the mission they were carrying out were subjected to a public discussion. In Rome Pope Hadrian II, who had in the meantime succeeded Nicholas I,

received them very cordially. He approved the Slavonic liturgical books, which he ordered to be solemnly placed on the altar in the Church of Saint Mary ad Praesepe, today known as Saint Mary Major, and recommended that their followers be ordained priests. This phase of their efforts concluded in a most favorable manner. Methodius however had to carry out the next stages by himself, because his younger brother, now gravely ill, scarcely had time to take religious vows and put on the monastic habit before he died shortly afterwards, on 14 February 869 in Rome.

6. Saint Methodius remained faithful to the words which Cyril had said to him on his deathbed: "Behold, my brother, we have shared the same destiny, ploughing the same furrow; I now fall in the field at the end of my day. I know that you greatly love your Mountain; but do not for the sake of the Mountain give up your work of teaching. For where better can you and salvation?"<sup>8</sup>

Consecrated Archbishop for the territory of the ancient Diocese of Pannonia, and named Papal Legate "ad gentes" (for the Slav peoples), he assumed the ecclesiastical title of the re-established Episcopal See of Sirmium. However, Methodius' apostolic activity was cut short as the result of political and religious complications

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<sup>8</sup> Vita Methodii VI, 2-3; ed. cit., p. 225.

which culminated in his imprisonment for two years, on the charge of having invaded the episcopal jurisdiction of another. He was set free only on the personal intervention of Pope John VIII. The new sovereign of Greater Moravia, Prince Svatopluk, also subsequently showed hostility to the work of Methodius. He opposed the Slavonic liturgy and spread doubts in Rome about the new Archbishop's orthodoxy. In the year 880 Methodius was called *ad limina Apostolorum*, to present once more the whole question personally to John VIII. In Rome, absolved of all the accusations, he obtained from the Pope the publication of the Bull *Industriae Tuae*,<sup>9</sup> which, at least in substance, restored the prerogatives granted to the liturgy in Slavonic by Pope John's predecessor Hadrian II.

When in 881 or 882 Methodius went to Constantinople, he received a similar recognition of perfect legitimacy and orthodoxy also from the Byzantine Emperor and the Patriarch Photius, who at that time was in full communion with Rome. He devoted the last years of his life principally to making further translations of the Sacred Scriptures, the liturgical books, the works of the Fathers of the Church and also the collection of ecclesiastical and Byzantine civil laws called the *Nomocanon*. Concerned for the survival of the work which he had begun, he

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Magnae Moraviae Fontes Historici*, t. III, Brno 1969, pp. 197- 208.

named as his successor his disciple Gorazd. He died on 6 April 885 in the service of the Church established among the Slav peoples.

7. His far-seeing work, his profound and orthodox doctrine, his balance, loyalty, apostolic zeal and intrepid magnanimity gained Methodius the recognition and trust of Roman Pontiffs, of Patriarchs of Constantinople, of Byzantine Emperors and of various Princes of the young Slav peoples. Thus he became the guide and legitimate Pastor of the Church which in that age became established in the midst of those nations. He is unanimously venerated, together with his brother Constantine, as the preacher of the Gospel and teacher "from God and the holy Apostle Peter",<sup>10</sup> and as the foundation of full unity between the Churches of recent foundation and the more ancient ones.

For this reason, "men and women, humble and powerful, rich and poor, free men and slaves, widows and orphans, foreigners and local people, the healthy and the sick"<sup>11</sup> made up the throng that amid tears and songs accompanied to his burial place the good Teacher and Pastor who had become "all things to all men, that I might by all means save some".<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Vita Methodii* VIII, 1-2: ed. ctt., p. 225.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Vita Methodii* XVII, 13: ed. cit., p. 237.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *ibid.*; cf. also 1 Cor 9:22.

To tell the truth, after the death of Methodius the work of the holy Brothers suffered a grave crisis, and persecution of their followers grew so severe that the latter were forced to abandon their missionary field. Nonetheless, their sowing of the Gospel seed did not cease to bear fruit, and their pastoral attitude of concern to bring the revealed truth to new peoples while respecting their cultural originality remains a living model for the Church and for the missionaries of all ages.

### III. HERALDS OF THE GOSPEL

8. Byzantine in culture, the brothers Cyril and Methodius succeeded in becoming apostles of the Slavs in the full sense of the word. Separation from one's homeland, which God sometimes requires of those he has chosen, when accepted with faith in his promise is always a mysterious and fertile pre-condition for the development and growth of the People of God on earth. The Lord said to Abraham: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing".<sup>13</sup>

In the dream which Saint Paul had at Troas in Asia Minor, a Macedonian, therefore an inhabitant of the European continent, came

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<sup>13</sup> Gen 12:1-2.

before him and implored him to come to his country to proclaim there the Word of God: "Come over to Macedonia and help us."<sup>14</sup>

Divine Providence, which for the two holy Brothers expressed itself through the voice and authority of the Emperor of Byzantium and of the Patriarch of the Church of Constantinople, addressed to them a similar exhortation, when it asked them to go as missionaries among the Slavs. For them, this task meant giving up not only a position of honour but also the contemplative life. It meant leaving the area of the Byzantine Empire and undertaking a long pilgrimage in the service of the Gospel among peoples that, in many aspects, were still very alien to the system of civil society based on the advanced organization of the State and the refined culture of Byzantium, imbued with Christian principles. A similar request has addressed three times to Methodius by the Roman Pontiff, when he sent him as Bishop among the Slavs of Greater Moravia, in the ecclesiastical regions of the ancient Diocese of Pannonia.

9. The Slavonic Life of Methodius reports in the following words the request made by the Prince Rastislav to the Emperor Michael III through his envoys: "Many Christian teachers have reached us from Italy, from Greece and

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<sup>14</sup> Acts 16:9.

from Germany, who instruct us in different ways. But we Slavs ... have no one to direct us towards the truth and instruct us in an understandable way".<sup>15</sup> It was then that Constantine and Methodius were invited to go there. Their profoundly Christian response to the invitation in this circumstance and on all similar occasions is admirably expressed by the words of Constantine to the Emperor: "However tired and physically worn out I am, I will go with joy to that land";<sup>16</sup> "with joy I depart for the sake of the Christian faith".<sup>17</sup>

The truth and the power of their missionary mandate came from the depths of the mystery of the Redemption, and their evangelizing work among the Slav peoples was to constitute an important link in the mission entrusted by the Savior to the Church until the end of time. It was a fulfillment - in time and in concrete circumstances - of the words of Christ, who in the power of his Cross and Resurrection told the Apostles: "Preach the Gospel to the whole creation";<sup>18</sup> "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations".<sup>19</sup> In so doing, the preachers and teachers of the Slav peoples let themselves be

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<sup>15</sup> Vita Methodii V, 2: ed. cit., p. 223.

<sup>16</sup> Vita Constantini XIV, 9: ed. cit., p. 200.

<sup>17</sup> Vita Constantini VI, 7: ed. cit., p. 179.

<sup>18</sup> Mk 16:15.

<sup>19</sup> Mt 28:19.

guided by the apostolic ideal of Saint Paul: "For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus".<sup>20</sup>

Together with a great respect for persons and a disinterested concern for their true good, the two holy Brothers had the resources of energy, prudence, zeal and charity needed for bringing the light to the future believers, and at the same time for showing them what is good and offering concrete help for attaining it. For this purpose they desired to become similar in every aspect to those to whom they were bringing the Gospel; they wished to become part of those peoples and to share their lot in everything.

10. Precisely for this reason they found it natural to take a clear position in all the conflicts which were disturbing the societies as they became organized. They took as their own the difficulties and problems inevitable for peoples who were defending their own identity against the military and cultural pressure of the new Romano-Germanic Empire, and who were attempting to resist forms of life which they felt to be foreign. It was also the beginning of wider divergencies, which were unfortunately destined

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<sup>20</sup> Gal 3:26-28



to increase, between Eastern and Western Christianity, and the two holy missionaries found themselves personally involved in this. But they always succeeded in maintaining perfect orthodoxy and consistent attention both to the deposit of tradition and to the new elements in the lives of the peoples being evangelized. Situations of opposition often weighed upon them in all their uncertain and painful complexity. But this did not cause Constantine and Methodius to try to withdraw from the trial. Misunderstanding, overt bad faith and even, for Saint Methodius, imprisonment accepted for love of Christ, did not deflect either of them from their tenacious resolve to help and to serve the good of the Slav peoples and the unity of the universal Church. This was the price which they had to pay for the spreading of the Gospel, the missionary enterprise, the courageous search for new forms of living and effective ways of bringing the Good News to the Slav nations which were then forming.

For the purposes of evangelization, the two holy Brothers-as their biographies indicate-undertook the difficult task of translating the texts of the Sacred Scriptures, which they knew in Greek, into the language of the Slav population which had settled along the borders of their own region and native city. Making use of their own Greek language and culture for this arduous and

unusual enterprise, they set themselves to understanding and penetrating the language, customs and traditions of the Slav peoples, faithfully interpreting the aspirations and human values which were present and expressed therein.

11. In order to translate the truths of the Gospel into a new language, they had to make an effort to gain a good grasp of the interior world of those to whom they intended to proclaim the word of God in images and concepts that would sound familiar to them. They realized that an essential condition of the success of their missionary activity was to transpose correctly Biblical notions and Greek theological concepts into a very different context of thought and historical experience. It was a question of a new method of catechesis. To defend its legitimacy and prove its value, Saint Methodius, at first together with his brother and then alone, did not hesitate to answer with docility the invitations to come to Rome, invitations received first from Pope Nicholas I in 867 and then from Pope John VIII in 879. Both Popes wished to compare the doctrine being taught by the Brothers in Greater Moravia with that which the holy Apostles Peter and Paul had passed down, together with the glorious trophy of their holy relics, to the Church's chief episcopal See.

Previously, Constantine and his fellow workers had been engaged in creating a new

alphabet, so that the truths to be proclaimed and explained could be written in Old Slavonic and would thus be fully comprehended and grasped by their hearers. The effort to learn the language and to understand the mentality of the new peoples to whom they wished to bring the faith was truly worthy of the missionary spirit. Exemplary too was their determination to assimilate and identify themselves with all the needs and expectations of the Slav peoples. Their generous decision to identify themselves with those peoples' life and traditions, once having purified and enlightened them by Revelation, make Cyril and Methodius true models for all the missionaries who in every period have accepted Saint Paul's invitation to become all things to all people in order to redeem all. And in particular for the missionaries who, from ancient times until the present day, from Europe to Asia and today in every continent, have labored to translate the Bible and the texts of the liturgy into the living languages of the various peoples, so as to bring them the one word of God, thus made accessible in each civilization's own forms of expression.

Perfect communion in love preserves the Church from all forms of particularism, ethnic exclusivism or racial prejudice, and from any nationalistic arrogance. This communion must elevate and sublimate every purely natural legitimate sentiment of the human heart.

#### IV. THEY PLANTED THE CHURCH OF GOD

12. But the characteristic of the approach adopted by the Apostles of the Slavs Cyril and Methodius which I especially wish to emphasize is the peaceful way in which they built up the Church, guided as they were by their vision of the Church as one, holy and universal.

Even though Slav Christians, more than others, tend to think of the holy Brothers as "Slavs at heart", the latter nevertheless remain men of Hellenic culture and Byzantine training. In other words, men who fully belonged to the civil and ecclesiastical tradition of the Christian East.

Already in their time certain differences between Constantinople and Rome had begun to appear as pretexts for disunity, even though the deplorable split between the two parts of the same Christian world was still in the distant future. The evangelizers and teachers of the Slavs set out for Greater Moravia imbued with all the wealth of tradition and religious experience which marked Eastern Christianity and which was particularly evident in theological teaching and in the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy.

The sacred rites in all the Churches within the borders of the Byzantine Empire had long been celebrated in Greek. However; the traditions of many national Churches of the East, such as

the Georgian and Syriac, which used the language of the people in their liturgies, were well known to the advanced cultural milieu of Constantinople. They were especially well known to Constantine the Philosopher, as a result of his studies and of his many contacts with Christians belonging to those Churches, both in the capital and in the course of his journeys.

Both the Brothers were aware of the antiquity and legitimacy of these traditions, and were therefore not afraid to use the Slavonic language in the liturgy and to make it into an effective instrument for bringing the divine truths to those who spoke it. This they did without any spirit of superiority or domination, but out of love of justice and with a clear apostolic zeal for peoples then developing.

Western Christianity, after the migrations of the new peoples, had amalgamated the newly arrived ethnic groups with the Latin-speaking population already living there, and had extended to all, in order to unite them, the Latin language, liturgy and culture which had been transmitted by the Church of Rome. The uniformity thus achieved gave relatively young and rapidly expanding societies a sense of strength and compactness, which contributed to a closer unity among them and a more forceful affirmation in Europe. It is understandable that in such a situation differences sometimes came to be

regarded as a threat to a still incomplete unity. One can also understand how strongly the temptation was felt to eliminate such differences, even by using forms of coercion.

13. At this point it is an unusual and admirable thing that the holy Brothers, working in such complex and precarious situations, did not seek to impose on the peoples assigned to their preaching either the undeniable superiority of the Greek language and Byzantine culture, or the customs and way of life of the more advanced society in which they had grown up and which necessarily remained familiar and dear to them. Inspired by the ideal of uniting in Christ the new believers, they adapted to the Slavonic language the rich and refined texts of the Byzantine liturgy and likewise adapted to the mentality and customs of the new peoples the subtle and complex elaborations of Greco-Roman law. In following this programme of harmony and peace, Cyril and Methodius were ever respectful of the obligations of their mission. They acknowledged the traditional prerogatives and ecclesiastical rights laid down by Conciliar Canons. Thus, though subjects of the Eastern Empire and believers subject to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, they considered it their duty to give an account of their missionary work to the Roman Pontiff. They likewise submitted to his judgment, in order to obtain his approval, the

doctrine which they professed and taught, the liturgical books which they had written in the Slavonic language, and the methods which they were using in evangelizing those peoples.

Having undertaken their mission under orders from Constantinople, they then in a sense sought to have it confirmed by approaching the Apostolic See of Rome, the visible center: of the Church's unity.<sup>21</sup> Thus they established the Church with an awareness of her universality as one, holy, catholic and apostolic. This is clearly and explicitly seen in their whole way of acting. It can be said that Jesus' priestly prayer- *ut unum sint* <sup>22</sup> is their missionary motto in accordance with the Psalmist's words: "Praise the Lord, all nations! Extol him, all peoples".<sup>23</sup> For us today their apostolate also possesses the eloquence of an ecumenical appeal: it is an invitation to restore, in the peace of reconciliation, the unity that was gravely damaged after the time of Cyril and Methodius, and, first and foremost, the unity between East and West.

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<sup>21</sup> The successors of Pope Nicholas 1, even though they were concerned at conflicting reports regarding the teaching and activity of Cyril and Methodius, expressed their full agreement when they had a direct meeting with the Brothers. Prohibitions or limitations in the use of the new liturgy are to be attributed more than anything else to the pressures of the moment, to changing political alliances, and to the need to maintain harmony.

<sup>22</sup> Jn 17:21 f.

<sup>23</sup> Ps 117[116]:1.

The conviction held by the holy Brothers from Salonika, namely that each local Church is called to enrich with its own endowments the Catholic "pleroma", was in perfect harmony with their evangelical insight that the different conditions of life of the individual Christian Churches can never justify discord, disagreement and divisions in the profession of the one faith and in the exercise of charity.

14. As we know, according to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council " the 'ecumenical movement' means those activities and enterprises which, according to various needs of the Church and as opportunities offer, are initiated and organized to promote Christian unity".<sup>24</sup> Thus it seems in no way anachronistic to see Saints Cyril and Methodius as the authentic precursors of ecumenism, inasmuch as they wished to eliminate effectively or to reduce any divisions, real or only apparent, between the individual communities belonging to the same Church. For the division which unfortunately occurred in the course of the Church's history and which sadly still persists "not only openly contradicts the will of Christ, (but) provides a stumbling block to the world, and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the Gospel to every creature".<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1.



The fervent solicitude shown by both Brothers and especially by Methodius by reason of his episcopal responsibility, to preserve unity of faith and love between the Churches of which they were members, namely, between the Church of Constantinople and the Church of Rome on the one hand, and the Churches which arose in the lands of the Slavs on the other, was and will always remain their great merit. This merit is all the greater if one takes into account the fact that their mission was exercised in the years 863-885, thus in the critical years when there emerged and began to grow more serious the fatal discord and bitter controversy between the Churches of the East and the West. The division was accentuated by the question of where Bulgaria, which had just officially accepted Christianity, canonically belonged.

In this stormy period, which was also marked by armed conflicts between neighboring Christian peoples, the holy Brothers from Salonika preserved a resolute and vigilant fidelity to right doctrine and to the tradition of the perfectly united Church, and in particular to the "divine teachings" and "ecclesiastical teachings"<sup>26</sup> on which, in accordance with the Canons of the ancient Councils, her structure and organization was founded. This fidelity enabled them to complete their great missionary tasks and to

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<sup>26</sup> Vita Methodii IX, 3: VIII, 16: ed. cit., pp. 229; 228.

remain in full spiritual and canonical unity with the Church of Rome, with the Church of Constantinople and with the new Churches which they had founded among the Slav peoples.

15. Methodius especially did not hesitate to face misunderstandings, conflicts and even slanders and physical persecution, rather than fall short of his exemplary ecclesial fidelity, and in order to remain faithful to his duties as a Christian and a Bishop and to the obligations which he had assumed vis-a-vis the Church of Byzantium which had begotten him and sent him out as a missionary together with Cyril. Then there were his obligations to the Church of Rome, thanks to which he fulfilled his charge as Archbishop in "the territory of Saint Peter";<sup>27</sup> likewise his obligations to that Church growing in the lands of the Slavs, which he accepted as his own and successfully defended-convincing of his just-right before the ecclesiastical and civil authorities, protecting in particular the liturgy in the Old Slavonic language and the fundamental ecclesiastical rights proper to the Churches in the various nations.

By thus acting, he always resorted, as did Constantine the Philosopher, to dialogue with those who opposed his ideas or his pastoral initiatives and who cast doubt on their legitimacy. Thus he would always remain a teacher for all

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Vita Methodii IX, 2: ed. cit., p. 229.

those who, in whatever age, seek to eliminate discord by respecting the manifold fullness of the Church, which, conforming to the will of its Founder Jesus Christ, must be always one, holy, catholic and apostolic. This task was perfectly reflected in the Creed of the 150 Fathers of the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, which is the unalterable profession of faith of all Christians.

## V. CATHOLIC SENSE OF THE CHURCH

16. It is not only the evangelical content of the doctrine proclaimed by Saints Cyril and Methodius that merits particular emphasis. Also very expressive and instructive for the Church today is the catechetical and pastoral method that they applied in their apostolic activity among the peoples who had not yet heard the Sacred Mysteries celebrated in their native language, nor heard the word of God proclaimed in a way that completely fitted their own mentality and respected the actual conditions of their own life.

We know that the Second Vatican Council, twenty years ago, had as one of its principal tasks that of reawakening the self-awareness of the Church and, through her interior renewal, of impressing upon her a fresh missionary impulse for the proclamation of the eternal message of salvation, peace and mutual concord among peoples and nations, beyond all the frontiers that

yet divide our planet, which is intended by the will of God the Creator and Redeemer to be the common dwelling for all humanity. The dangers that in our times are accumulating over our world cannot make us forget the prophetic insight of Pope John XXIII, who convoked the Council with the intent and the conviction that it would be capable of preparing and initiating a period of springtime and rebirth in the life of the Church.

And, among its statements on the subject of universality, the same Council included the following: "All men are called to belong to the new People of God. Wherefore this People, while remaining one and unique, is to be spread throughout the whole world and must exist in all ages, so that the purpose of God's will may be fulfilled. In the beginning God made human nature one. After his children were scattered, he decreed that they should at length be unified again (cf. Jn 11:52)... The Church or People of God takes nothing away from the temporal welfare of any people by establishing that kingdom. Rather does she foster and take to herself, insofar as they are good, the abilities, resources, and customs of each people. Taking them to herself she purifies, strengthens, and enobles them... This characteristic of universality which adorns the People of God is a gift from the Lord himself.. In virtue of this catholicity each individual part of the Church contributes

through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church. Thus through the common sharing of gifts and through the common effort to attain fullness in unity, the whole and each of its parts receive increase".<sup>28</sup>

17. We can say without fear of contradiction that such a traditional and at the same time extremely up-to-date vision of the catholicity of the Church-like a symphony of the various liturgies in all the world's languages united in one single liturgy, or a melodious chorus sustained by the voices of unnumbered multitudes, rising in countless modulations, tones and harmonies for the praise of God from every part of the globe, at every moment of history-this vision corresponds in a particular way to the theological and pastoral vision which inspired the apostolic and missionary work of Constantine the Philosopher and of Methodius, and which sustained their mission among the Slav nations.

In Venice, before the representatives of the ecclesiastical world, who held a rather narrow idea of the Church and were opposed to this vision, Saint Cyril defended it with courage. He showed that many peoples had already in the past introduced and now possessed a liturgy written and celebrated in their own language, such as " the Armenians, the Persians, the Abasgians, the

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<sup>28</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 13.

Georgians, the Sogdians, the Goths, the Avars, the Tirsians, the Khazars, the Arabs, the Copts, the Syrians and many others".<sup>29</sup>

Reminding them that God causes the sun to rise and the rain to fall on all people without exception,<sup>30</sup> he said: "Do not all breathe the air in the same way? And you are not ashamed to decree only three languages (Hebrew, Greek and Latin), deciding that all other peoples and races should remain blind and deaf! Tell me: do you hold this because you consider God is so weak that he cannot grant it, or so envious that he does not wish it?".<sup>31</sup> To the historical and logical arguments which they brought against him Cyril replied by referring to the inspired basis of Sacred Scripture: "Let every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father";<sup>32</sup> "All the earth worships you; they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name";<sup>33</sup> "Praise the Lord, all nations! Extol him, all peoples!".<sup>34</sup>

18. The Church is catholic also because she is able to present in every human context the revealed truth, preserved by her intact in its divine content, in such a way as to bring it into

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<sup>29</sup> Vita Constantini XVI, 8: ed. cit., p. 205.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Mt 5:45.

<sup>31</sup> Vita Constantini XVI, 4-6: ed. cit., p. 205.

<sup>32</sup> Vita Constantini XVI, 58: ed. cit., p. 208; Phil 2:11.

<sup>33</sup> Vita Constantini XVI, 12: ed. cit., p. 206; Ps 66 [65]:4.

<sup>34</sup> Vita Constantini XVI, 13: ed. cit., p. 206; Ps 117 [116]:1.

contact with the lofty thoughts and just expectations of every individual and every people. Moreover, the entire patrimony of good which every generation transmits to posterity, together with the priceless gift of life, forms as it were an immense and many-coloured collection of tesserae that together make up the living mosaic of the Pantocrator, who will manifest himself in his total splendour only at the moment of the Parousia.

The Gospel does not lead to the impoverishment or extinction of those things which every individual, people and nation and every culture throughout history recognizes and brings into being as goodness, truth and beauty. On the contrary, it strives to assimilate and to develop all these values: to live them with magnanimity and joy and to perfect them by the mysterious and ennobling light of Revelation.

The concrete dimension of catholicity, inscribed by Christ the Lord in the very make-up of the Church, is not something static, outside history and flatly uniform. In a certain sense it wells up and develops every day as something new from the unanimous faith of all those who believe in God, One and Three, revealed by Jesus Christ and preached by the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. This dimension issues quite spontaneously from mutual respect proper to fraternal love-for every person and every

nation, great or small, and from the honest acknowledgment of the qualities and rights of brethren in the faith.

19. The catholicity of the Church is manifested in the active joint responsibility and generous cooperation of all for the sake of the common good. The Church everywhere effects her universality by accepting, uniting and exalting in the way that is properly hers, with motherly care, every real human value. At the same time, she strives in every clime and every historical situation to win for God each and every human person, in order to unite them with one another and with him in his truth and his love.

All individuals, all nations, cultures and civilizations have their own part to play and their own place in God's mysterious plan and in the universal history of salvation. This was the thought of the two holy Brothers: God "merciful and kind",<sup>35</sup> "waiting for all people to repent,) that all may be saved and come to the knowledge of the Truth,<sup>36</sup> ... does not allow the human race to succumb to weakness and perish, and to fall into the temptation of the enemy. But year by year and at every time he does not cease to lavish on us a manifold grace, from the beginning until today in the same way: first, through the Patriarchs and Fathers, and after them through

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Ps 112 [113]:4; J1 2-13.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. 1 Tim 2:4.



the Prophets; and again through the Apostles and Martyrs, the just men and the Doctors whom he chooses in the midst of this stormy life".<sup>37</sup>

20. The message of the Gospel which Saints Cyril and Methodius translated for the Slav peoples, drawing with wisdom from the treasury of the Church "things old and new",<sup>38</sup> was transmitted through preaching and instruction in accordance with the eternal truths, at the same time being adapted to the concrete historical situation. Thanks to the missionary efforts of both Saints, the Slav peoples were able for the first time to realize their own vocation to share in the eternal design of the Most Holy Trinity, in the universal plan for the salvation of the world. At the same time, they can recognized their role at the service of the whole history of the humanity created by God the Father, redeemed by the Son our Savior and enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Thanks to this preaching, duly approved by the authorities of the Church-the Bishops of Rome and the Patriarchs of Constantinople-the Slavs were able to feel that they too, together with the other nations of the earth, were descendants and heirs of the promise made by God to Abraham.<sup>39</sup> In this way, thanks to the ecclesiastical organization created by Saint Methodius and

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<sup>37</sup> Vita Constantini I, 1: ed. cit., p. 169.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Mt 13:52.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Gen 15:1-21.

thanks to their awareness of their own Christian identity, the Slavs took their destined place in the Church which had now arisen also in that part of Europe. For this reason, their modern descendants keep in grateful and everlasting remembrance the one who became the link that binds them to the chain of the great heralds of the divine Revelation of the Old and New Testaments: "After all of these, the merciful God, in our own time, raised up for the good work, for the sake of our own people, for whom nobody had ever cared, our Teacher, the holy Methodius, whose virtues and struggles we unblushingly compare, one by one, to those of these men pleasing to God".<sup>40</sup>

## VI. THE GOSPEL AND CULTURE

21. The Brothers from Salonika were not only heirs of the faith but also heirs of the culture of Ancient Greece, continued by Byzantium. Everyone knows how important this heritage is for the whole of European culture and, directly or indirectly, for the culture of the entire world. The work of evangelization which they carried out as pioneers in territory inhabited by Slav peoples—contains both a model of what today is called "inculturation the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures and also the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church.

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<sup>40</sup> Vita Methodii II, 1: ed. cit., pp. 220f.

By incarnating the Gospel in the native culture of the peoples which they were evangelizing, Saints Cyril and Methodius were especially meritorious for the formation and development of that same culture, or rather of many cultures. Indeed all the cultures of the Slav nations owe their "beginning" or development to the work of the Brothers from Salonika. For by their original and ingenious creation of an alphabet for the Slavonic language the Brothers made a fundamental contribution to the culture and literature of all the Slav nations.

Furthermore, the translation of the sacred books, carried out by Cyril and Methodius together with their pupils, conferred a capacity and cultural dignity upon the Old Slavonic liturgical language, which became for many hundreds of years not only the ecclesiastical but also the official and literary language, and even the common language of the more educated classes of the greater part of the Slav nations, and in particular of all the Slavs of the Eastern Rite. It was also used in the Church of the Holy Cross in Cracow, where the Slav Benedictines had established themselves. Here were published the first liturgical books printed in this language. Up to the present day this is the language used in the Byzantine liturgy of the Slavonic Eastern Churches of the Rite of Constantinople, both Catholic and Orthodox, in Eastern and South

Eastern Europe, as well as in various countries of Western Europe. It is also used in the Roman liturgy of the Catholics of Croatia.

22. In the historical development of the Slavs of Eastern Rite, this language played a role equal to that of the Latin language in the West. It also lasted longer than Latin in part until the nineteenth century-and exercised a much more direct influence on the formation of the local literary languages, thanks to its close kinship with them. These merits vis-a-vis the culture of all the Slav peoples and nations make the work of evangelization carried out by Saints Cyril and Methodius in a certain sense constantly present in the history and in the life of these peoples and nations.

## VII. THE SIGNIFICANCE AND INFLUENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN MILLENNIUM IN THE SLAV WORLD

23. The apostolic and missionary activity of Saints Cyril and Methodius, which belongs to the second half of the ninth century, can be considered the first effective evangelization of the Slavs.

This activity involved the individual territories in varying degrees, and was mainly concentrated in the territories of the then existing State of Greater Moravia. It principally included the regions belonging to the metropolis of which

Methodius was pastor, namely Moravia, Slovakia and Pannonia, the last being a part of modern Hungary. Included in the sphere of the wider influence exercised by this apostolic activity, especially that of the missionaries trained by Methodius, were the other groups of Western Slavs, particularly those of Bohemia. The first historical Prince of Bohemia of the dynasty of the Premyslids, Bozyvoj (Borivoj), was probably baptized according to the Slavonic Rite. Later this influence reached the Sorbo-Lusatian tribes, and the territories of southern Poland. However, from the time of the fall of Greater Moravia in about 905- 906 the Latin Rite took the place of the Slav Rite and Bohemia was assigned ecclesiastically to the Bishop of Regensburg and the metropolis of Salzburg. However, it is worthy of note that about the middle of the tenth century, at the time of Saint Wenceslaus, there was still a strong intermingling of the elements of both rites, and an advanced coexistence of both languages in the liturgy: Slavonic and Latin. Moreover, the Christianization of the people was not possible without using the native language. And only upon such a foundation could the development of the Christian terminology in Bohemia take place, and from here, subsequently, the development and consolidation of ecclesiastical terminology in Poland. Information about the Prince of the Vislits in the Lite of

Methodius is the most ancient historical reference to one of the Polish tribes.<sup>41</sup> Insufficient data exist for it to be possible to link this item of information with the institution in the Polish territories of a Slav Rite ecclesiastical organization.

24. The Baptism of Poland in 966, in the person of the first historical sovereign, Mieszko, who married the Bohemian princess Dubravka, took place principally through the Bohemian Church, and by this route Christianity reached Poland from Rome in the Latin form. But the fact remains that the beginnings of Christianity in Poland are in a way linked with the work of the Brothers who set out from distant Salonika.

Among the Slavs of the Balkan peninsula the efforts of the holy Brothers bore fruit in an even more visible way. Thanks to their apostolate the Christianity which had already for some time been established in Croatia was consolidated.

Principally through their disciples who had been expelled from the area where they had originally worked the mission of Cyril and Methodius was confirmed and developed wonderfully in Bulgaria. Here, thanks to Saint Clement of Okhrid, dynamic centers of monastic life arose, and here particularly the Cyrillic alphabet developed. From here too Christianity moved to other territories, until it passed through

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. *Vita Methodii* XI, 2-3: ed. cit., p. 231.

neighboring Romania and reached the ancient Rus' of Kiev, and then spread from Moscow eastwards. In a few years, in 1988 to be exact, the millennium of the baptism of Saint Vladimir, Grand Duke of Kiev, will be celebrated.

25. Rightly therefore Saints Cyril and Methodius were at an early date recognized by the family of Slav peoples as the fathers of both their Christianity and their culture. In many of the territories mentioned above, although there had been various missionaries, the majority of the Slav population in the ninth century still retained pagan customs and beliefs. Only in the land cultivated by our Saints, or at least prepared by them for cultivation, did Christianity definitively enter the history of the Slavs during the following century.

Their work is an outstanding contribution to the formation of the common Christian roots of Europe, roots which by their strength and vitality are one of the most solid points of reference, which no serious attempt to reconstruct in a new and relevant way the unity of the Continent can ignore.

After eleven centuries of Christianity among the Slavs, we clearly see that the heritage of the Brothers from Salonika is and remains for the Slavs deeper and stronger than any division. Both Christian traditions—the Eastern deriving from Constantinople and the Western deriving from

Rome arose in the bosom of the one Church, even though against the background of different cultures and of a different approach to the same problems. This diversity, when its origin is properly understood and when its value and meaning are properly considered, can only enrich the culture of Europe and its religious tradition, and likewise become an adequate foundation for its hoped- for spiritual renewal.

26. Ever since the ninth century, when in Christian Europe a new organization was emerging, Saints Cyril and Methodius have held out to us a message clearly of great relevance for our own age, which precisely by reason of the many complex problems of a religious, cultural, civil and international nature, is seeking a vital unity in the real communion of its various elements. It can be said of the two evangelizers that characteristic of them was their love for the communion of the universal Church both in the East and in the West, and, within the universal Church, love for the particular Church that was coming into being in the Slav nations. From them also comes for the Christians and-people of our time the invitation to build communion together.

But it is in the specific area of missionary activity that the example of Cyril and Methodius is of even greater value. For this activity is an essential task of the Church, and is urgent today in the already mentioned form of "inculturation".



The two Brothers not only carried out their mission with full respect for the culture already existing among the Slav peoples, but together with religion they eminently and unceasingly promoted and extended that culture. By analogy, today the Churches of ancient origin can and must help the young Churches and peoples to mature in their own identity and progress in it.<sup>42</sup>

27. Cyril and Methodius are as it were the connecting links or spiritual bridge between the Eastern and Western traditions, which both come together in the one great Tradition of the universal Church. For us they are the champions and also the patrons of the ecumenical endeavor of the sister Churches of East and West, for the rediscovery through prayer and dialogue of visible Unity in perfect and total communion, "the unity which", as I said on the occasion of my visit to Bari, "is neither absorption nor fusion".<sup>43</sup> Unity is a meeting in truth and love, granted to us by the Spirit. Cyril and Methodius, in their personality and their work, are figures that awaken in all Christians a great "longing for union" and for unity between the two sister Churches of East and West.<sup>44</sup> For full catholicity, every nation,

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, 38.

<sup>43</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Speech at the ecumenical meeting in the Basilica of Saint Nicholas at Bari (26 February 1984), No. 2: *Insegnamenti VII*, 1 (1984), p. 532.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 1: loc. cit., p. 531.

every culture has its own part to play in the universal plan of salvation. Every particular tradition, every local Church must remain open and alert to the other Churches and traditions and, at the same time, to universal and catholic communion; were it to remain closed in on itself, it too would run the risk of becoming impoverished.

By exercising their own charism, Cyril and Methodius made a decisive contribution to the building of Europe not only in Christian religious communion but also to its civil and cultural union. Not even today does there exist any other way of overcoming tensions and repairing the divisions and antagonisms both in Europe: and in the world which threaten to cause a frightful destruction of lives and values. Being Christians in our day means being builders of communion in the Church and in society. This calls for openness to others, mutual understanding, and readiness to cooperate through the generous exchange of cultural and spiritual resources.

One of the fundamental aspirations of humanity today is to rediscover unity and communion for a life truly worthy of man on the worldwide level. The Church, conscious of being the universal sign and sacrament of salvation and of the unity of the human race, declares her readiness to accomplish this duty of hers, to which "the conditions of this age lend special

urgency so that all people joined more closely today by various social, technical, and cultural bonds can achieve as well full unity in Christ".<sup>45</sup>

## VIII. CONCLUSION

28. It is fitting, then, that the Church should celebrate with solemnity and joy the eleven centuries that have elapsed since the close of the apostolic work of the first Archbishop, ordained in Rome for the Slav peoples, Methodius, and of his brother Cyril, and that she should thus commemorate the entry of these peoples on to the scene of the history of salvation and into the of European nations which during the preceding centuries had already accepted the Gospel message. Everyone will understand with what profound happiness I will share in this celebration as the first son of the Slav race to be called, after nearly two millennia, to occupy the episcopal see that once belonged to Peter in this city of Rome.

29. "Into thy hands I commend my spirit": we salute the eleventh centenary of Saint Methodius' death with the very words which as his Life in Old Slavonic<sup>46</sup> recounts he uttered before he died, when he was about to join his fathers in faith, hope and charity: the Patriarchs,

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<sup>45</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Vita Methodii* XVII, 9-10: ed. cit., p. 237; Lk 23:46; Ps 31 [30]: 6.

Prophets, Apostles, Doctors and Martyrs. By the testimony of his words and life, sustained by the charism of the Spirit, he gave an example of a vocation fruitful not only for the century in which he lived but also for the centuries which followed, and in a special way for our own times. His blessed "passing" in the spring of the year 885 after the Incarnation of Christ (and according to the Byzantine calculation of time, in the year 6393 since the creation of the world took place at a time when disquieting clouds were gathering above Constantinople and hostile tensions were increasingly threatening the peace and life of the nations, and even threatening the sacred bonds of Christian brotherhood and communion linking the Churches of the East and West.

In his Cathedral, filled with the faithful of different races, the disciples of Saint Methodius paid solemn homage to their dead pastor for the message of salvation, peace and reconciliation which he had brought and to which he had devoted his life: "They celebrated a sacred office in Latin, Greek and Slavonic",<sup>47</sup> adoring God and venerating the first Archbishop of the Church which he established among the Slavs, to whom he and his brother had proclaimed the Gospel in their own language. This Church grew even stronger when through the explicit consent of the Pope it received a native hierarchy, rooted in the

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<sup>47</sup> Vita Methodii XVII, 11: ed. cit., p. 237.

apostolic succession and remaining in unity of faith and love both with the Church of Rome and with that of Constantinople, from which the Slav mission had begun.

Now that eleven centuries have passed since his death, I desire to be present at least spiritually in Velehrad, where-it seems-Providence enabled Methodius to end his apostolic life:

-I desire also to pause in the Basilica of Saint Clement in Rome, in the place where Saint Cyril was buried;

-and at the Tombs of both these Brothers, the Apostles of the Slavs, I desire to recommend to the Most Blessed Trinity their spiritual heritage with a special prayer.

30. *"Into your hands I commend..."*

O great God, One in Trinity, I entrust to you the heritage of faith of the Slav nations; preserve and bless this work of yours!

Remember, O Almighty Father, the moment when, in accordance with your will, the "fullness of time" arrived for these peoples and nations, and the holy Missionaries from Salonika faithfully fulfilled the command that your Son Jesus Christ had entrusted to his Apostles; following in their footsteps and in those of their successors, they brought into the lands inhabited by the Slavs the light of the Gospel, the Good News of salvation and, in their presence, bore testimony

-that you are the Creator of man, that you are our Father and that in you we are all brethren;

-that through the Son, your eternal Word, you have given existence to all things, and have called human beings to share in your life without end;

-that you have so loved the world as to grant it the gift of your only begotten Son, who for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven and by the power of the Holy Spirit became incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary and was made man;

-and that finally you have sent the Spirit of power and consolation so that every human being, redeemed by Christ, may in him receive the dignity of a child and become a co-heir of the unfailing promises which you have made to humanity!

Your plan of creation, O Father, culminating in the Redemption, touches the living man and embraces his entire life and the history of all peoples.

Grant, O Father, what the whole Church today implores from you and grant also that the people and the nations which, thanks to the apostolic mission of the holy Brothers from Salonika, have known and accepted you, the true God, and through Baptism have entered into the holy community of your children, may still continue, without hindrance, to accept with

enthusiasm and trust this evangelical programme and continue to realize all their human possibilities on the foundation of their teachings!

-May they follow, in conformity with their own conscience, the voice of your call along the paths shown to them for the first time eleven centuries ago!

-May their membership of the Kingdom of your Son never be considered by anyone to be contrary to the good of their earthly homeland!

-May they render to you due praise in private and in public life!

-May they live in truth, charity, justice and in the enjoyment of the messianic peace which enfolds human hearts, communities, the earth and the entire universe!

-Aware of their dignity as human beings and children of God, may they have the strength to overcome all hatred and to conquer evil with good!

But also grant to the whole of Europe, O Most Holy Trinity, that through the intercession of the two holy Brothers it may feel ever more strongly the need for religious and Christian unity and for a brotherly communion of all its peoples, so that when incomprehension and mutual distrust have been overcome and when ideological conflicts have been conquered in the common awareness of the truth, it may be for the whole world an example of just and peaceful

coexistence in mutual respect and inviolate liberty.

31. To you, therefore, God the Father Almighty, God the Son who have redeemed the world, God the Spirit who are the sustainer and teacher of all holiness, I desire to entrust the whole Church of yesterday, today and tomorrow, the Church both in Europe and throughout the earth. Into your hands I commit this singular wealth, made up of so many different gifts, ancient and new, placed in the common treasury by so many different sons and daughters.

The whole Church thanks you, who called the Slav nations into the communion of the faith, for this heritage and for the contribution made by them to the universal patrimony. The Pope of Slav origin in a special way thanks you for this. May this contribution never cease to enrich the Church, the Continent of Europe and the whole world! May it never fail in Europe and in the world of today! May it never fade from the memories of our contemporaries! We desire to accept in its entirety everything original and valid which the Slav nations have brought and continue to bring to the spiritual patrimony of the Church and of humanity. The whole Church, aware of this common treasure, professes her spiritual solidarity with them and reaffirms her own responsibility towards the Gospel, for the work of salvation which she is called upon to



accomplish also today in the whole world, unto the ends of the earth. It is essential to go back to the past in order to understand, in the light of the past, the present reality and in order to discern tomorrow. For the mission of the Church is always oriented and directed with unfailing hope towards the future.

32. The future! However much it may humanly speaking seem filled with threats and uncertainties, we trustfully place it in your hands, Heavenly Father, invoking upon it the intercession of the Mother of your Son and Mother of the Church, the intercession of your Apostles Peter and Paul, and of Saints Benedict, Cyril and Methodius, of Augustine and Boniface and all the other evangelizers of Europe who, strong in faith, hope and charity, proclaimed to our fathers your salvation and your peace, and amid the toils of the spiritual sowing began to build the civilization of love and the new order based on your holy law and the help of your grace, which at the end of the age will give life to all things and all people in the heavenly Jerusalem. Amen!

To you, dear brothers and sisters, my Apostolic Blessing.

*Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 2 June, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, in the year 1985, the seventh of my Pontificate.*

JOHN PAUL II