



## **Evangelization as portrayed in the liturgical and cultural expression of Saints Cyril and Methodius**

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“The apostles of the Slavs, Saints Cyril and Methodius, are remembered by the Church, together with the great work of evangelisation which they carried out. Indeed it can be said that their memory is particularly vivid and relevant to our day”<sup>1</sup>. These are the first words with which Pope John Paul II introduces the encyclical letter *Slavorum apostoli* indicating the importance of their work of evangelisation.

Sts. Cyril and Methodius are extremely important for Slavs and their presence has been firmly established in the history of Slavic countries throughout the centuries.

The objective of this article is to reflect on missionary activity of the apostles of the Slavs: the foundation of the Slavonic Script, glagolitic. The liturgy in Slavonic language has strongly affected the process of the evangelisation. However, first we can see some historical points about commemoration of Holy Brothers in the celebration of the Church.

### **1. Sts. Cyril and Methodius in the celebration of the Church**

The cult of the Holy brothers began very early after the death of St. Methodius in 885. Testimony about their cult can be found in the second volume of the critical edition of the sources from Great Moravia: *Magnae*

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<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, „Encyclical epistle *Slavorum apostoli*” 1, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_19850602\\_slavorum-apostoli.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_19850602_slavorum-apostoli.html). Epistle was officially published in: *AAS*, nr 77 (1985): 779-813.

*Moraviae fonts historici*<sup>2</sup>. Particularly interesting are liturgical hymns designated for the liturgy of hours:

- a) The oldest one, the fragment from *Služba Mefudiju – The office dedicated to Methodius*<sup>3</sup>, was composed around 885-893. Its author is probably a disciple and collaborator of Methodius.
- b) *Služba Kirillu – The office dedicated to Cyril*<sup>4</sup> is liturgical hymn for 14<sup>th</sup> of February, composed in 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century
- c) Also *Služba Kirillu i Mefodiju – The office dedicated to Cyril and Methodius*<sup>5</sup> is probably from 10<sup>th</sup> century and reflects older Slavonic biographical compositions.
- d) The *Officium Adest Dies Gloriosa*<sup>6</sup> was introduced by the bishop John from Olomouc in 1349. In the diocese of Olomouc, the feast of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, the patrons of Moravia, was celebrated 9<sup>th</sup> of March and the office *Adest Dies Gloriosa* was used for this feast.

The cult of two Saints was extended to the whole Church by Pope Leo XIII with the Encyclical letter *Grande Munus*<sup>7</sup> on 30 September 1880, thus fixing their annual liturgical feast on 7 July. With the renewal of the liturgical calendar after the *Second Vatican Council*, the feast was transferred to 14 February, which is the date of the heavenly birthday of Saint Cyril. However, in some Slavic countries the feast of Holy Brothers is still celebrated on 7 July or 5 July (for example in Slovakia).

John Paul II promulgated a short but important apostolic letter for the remembrance of Sts. Cyril and Methodius. In *Egregiae Virtutis*<sup>8</sup> of 31 December 1980, the pope proclaimed these two saints co-patrons of Europe. The purpose of that document was “to call 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”<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> *Magnae Moraviae fonts historici*, t. II (Brno: Universita J.E. Purkyně, 1967), 319-345.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, 322-324.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, 325-328.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, 329-331.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, 337-345.

<sup>7</sup> Leone XIII, „Epistula Encyclica *Grande Munus*”, *ASS*, nr 13 (1894): 145-153.

<sup>8</sup> Ioannes Paulus II, „Epistula Apostolica *Egregiae virtutis*”, *AAS*, nr 73 (1981): 258-262.

<sup>9</sup> Id, „Epistula Encyclica *Slavorum apostoli*”, 2.

## 2. Biographical sketch of Sts. Cyril and Methodius and their mission

In this biographical sketch I would like to highlight just a few points from the lives of Sts. Cyril and Methodius and stress particularly those elements that are connected with the invention of glagolic script and its importance for proclamation of God's word in Slavonic language. This activity had also enormous value for development of Slavonic culture. Very unique in the mission of two brothers is their use of the Slavonic language in the liturgies of both the Byzantine and the Roman rite.

### 2.1. Sources and studies of Cyrillomethodian history

The main sources<sup>10</sup> of Cyrillomethodian history are:

- *Vita Constantini* – written shortly after the death of Cyril, but during the lifetime of Methodius.
- *Vita Methodii* – probably written by Constantine of Preslav, the disciple of Sts. Cyril and Methodius.

Their authenticity is beyond question and therefore we will use these two sources as main reference materials for biographical notes. Among the other sources important for this study are:

- *Vita Italica* written by Bishop Leo of Ostia († 1115), who relied on sources from 9th century. The document was written in Latin. It mainly focuses on the discovery of the relics of St. Clement by St. Cyril.
- *Vita Bulgarica* was written in Greek by Theophylactus, Archbishop of Ochrida about the year 1080. It describes events connected with the banishment of the disciples after the death of Methodius<sup>11</sup>.

There are many scholars who have brought an important insights into understanding of the Cyrillomethodian history, especially significant are:

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<sup>10</sup> Critical editions of *Vita Constantini* and *Vita Methodii: Constantinus et Methodius Thessalonicensis, Fontes*, t. 4b (Zagreb: Staroslavenski institut u Zagrebu, 1960); *Žitije Konstantina*, w *Magnae Moraviae fonts historici*, t. II (Brno: Universita J.E. Purkyně, 1967), 115-133; *Žitije Mefodija*, w *ibidem*, 134-163.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Lacko, *Saints Cyril and Methodius* (Rome: Slovak Editions, 1969), 9-10.

František Dvorník<sup>12</sup>, Franz Grivec<sup>13</sup>, Michael Lacko<sup>14</sup>, Josef Vašica<sup>15</sup>, Stephen Smržík<sup>16</sup>, Vittorio Peri<sup>17</sup> and others.

## **2.2. Birthplace of Brothers and the mission to Great Moravia**

The birthplace of Sts. Constantine-Cyril and Methodius<sup>18</sup> was Thessalonika, which in the ninth century was an important center of political and commercial life in the Byzantine Empire. Its environment was predominantly Slav and the Slavonic language was spoken there. The area was settled by Slavonic tribes who have been migrating there since the 6<sup>th</sup> century<sup>19</sup>. The parents of Constantine-Cyril<sup>20</sup> and Methodius<sup>21</sup> were members of the Byzantine nobility. Of their seven children Constantine was the youngest and Methodius the oldest.

The first Christian missionaries in Great Moravia were Irish or Scottish monks. They had previously converted the Bavarians by working among them since the seventh century. They were motivated by an extraordinary zeal, yet worked independently. During the period the emperor Charlemagne, he inaugurated a new reform by introducing the Benedictine Rule into all the Bavarian monasteries. The monks were assigned to bishops who were themselves entrusted with missionary duties.

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<sup>12</sup> Francis Dvorník, *Les légendes de Constantin et Méthode vues de Byzance* (Prague: Commissionnaire „Orbis“, 1933); Francis Dvorník, *Les Slaves, Byzance et Rome au IX siècle* (Paris: Champion, 1926).

<sup>13</sup> Franc Grivec, *Santi Cirillo e Metodio apostoli degli slavi e compatrioti d'Europa* (Roma: Urbaniana University Press, 1984).

<sup>14</sup> Lacko, *Saints Cyril and Methodius*; id., „The Cyrillomethodian Mission and Slovakia”, w *Slovak Studies I* (Rome: Slovak Institute, 1961), 23-47.

<sup>15</sup> Josef Vašica, *Literární památky epochy Velkomoravské 863-885*, wyd. 2 (Praha: Vyšehrad, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> Stephen Smržík, *The Glagolitic or Roman-Slavonic Liturgy* (Rome: Slovak Institute, 1959).

<sup>17</sup> Vittorio Peri, „Il mandato missionario e canonico di Metodio e l'ingresso della lingua slava nella liturgia”, *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae*, nr 26 (1988): 9-69.

<sup>18</sup> „Methodius is the name he assumed on entering the monastery”; Jan Hnilica, „Sts. Cyril and Methodius and their Attitude toward the Holy Scripture and Rome”, *Slovak Studies*, nr 22 (1982), 49.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

<sup>20</sup> Constantine is better known by his religious name Cyril. He was born in 827 or 828 and died 14 February 869 in Rome.

<sup>21</sup> Baptismal name of Methodius was probably Michael. He was born between 815-820 and died on 6 April 885.

It is difficult to determine to what extent western Christianity had been accepted in Moravia prior to the arrival of Holy Brothers; yet it must have been sufficiently implanted, for Sts. Cyril and Methodius to take it into consideration when confronted with the necessity of deciding which liturgical rite to use<sup>22</sup>.

The prince Rastislav from Great Moravia wanted to be independent from Bavarian domination. He sought to introduce into Moravia laws uninfluenced by the Bavarians and requested from Byzantine Emperor Michael III the following: a bishop and teacher who are able to preach the Gospel in the Slavonic language and who could make good laws and a Byzantine code of laws.

His request for a hierarchy was only partially fulfilled. The bishop was not immediately forthcoming, but Constantine-Cyril and Methodius were assigned to the mission to Moravia.

### **2.3. St. Cyril, founder of the Slavonic Script. Proglas – the first poem**

St. Cyril's main concern before his departure for Moravian was the translation of the Holy Scripture and the liturgical books into the Slavonic language. But before he could translate them it was necessary that he should devise a Slavonic alphabet. The Script which St. Cyril devised is called *glagolitic*. There is one other script, called *cyrillic*, which was derived from *glagolitic* some years later in Bulgaria.

*Glagolitic* was the most precious treasure that brothers brought to Great Moravia. This script became the basis of Slavonic cultures. Words from the Scriptures and liturgical books became in the Old Slavonic a living and functional language of literature. The Old Slavonic language became the liturgical language and later also became the language of a flourishing literature<sup>23</sup>.

After Sts. Cyril and Methodius had finished their translation of the New Testament, it was probably St. Cyril who then introduced in it a very special way – with the so-called “Proglas”, a “Foreword to the Holy Scriptures” in the genre of a wonderful poem, a literary jewel that stands at the very beginning of our culture:

... “for as it was promised by the prophets,  
Christ comes to gather the nations  
for He is the Light of this world...  
... Verily I say unto you, Sloviens

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Lacko, *Saints Cyril and Methodius*, 75.

<sup>23</sup> About literary activity of Sts. Cyril and Methodius and their disciples see: Katarína Habovštiaková, Ema Krošláková, *Z tvorby solúnskych bratov a ich žiakov* (Trnava: Spolok sv. Vojtecha, 1993).

this gift is indeed a gift from God  
... a gift to souls, a gift that never perishes  
a gift to all the souls that accept it.  
... Mathew and Mark, Luke and John  
teach all the nations saying:  
... Hear! Listen to the voice of your reason  
hear you, the whole Slovien nation  
hear the Word, sent by the Lord  
Word that feeds hungry human souls...<sup>24</sup>

### **3. Introduction of the Slavonic language into the Byzantine and Roman rite**

The most characteristic and principal achievement of the Cyrilomethodian missionary method was the introduction of the Slavonic language into the liturgy. But which rite were the holy Brothers to use in the liturgy?

Constantine-Cyril and Methodius were educated in Greek schools, according to the Byzantine way of life, Byzantine customs etc. Thus it is beyond doubt, that their native rite was the Byzantine. In the past some scholars, emphasizing the Byzantine character of the holy Brothers, held the view that Cyril and Methodius introduced the Slavonic language into the Byzantine rite only. But when, in 1874, the so-called *Kiev manuscripts*, were discovered in Jerusalem<sup>25</sup>, many slavists were forced to change their views. The *Kiev manuscripts*<sup>26</sup> contain a Slavonic translation of the liturgical texts of the Roman rite. "Today, it is generally accepted that the Holy

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<sup>24</sup> Konštantín Filozof, *Proglas* (Bratislava: Herba, 1996), 13.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Cuniberto Mohlberg, *Il messale glagolitico di Kiev (sec. IX) ed il suo prototipo romano del sec. VI-VII*, Atti della Pontificia Accademia di Archeologia, III, *Memorie*, t. II (Roma: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1928), 213.

<sup>26</sup> "The renowned Benedictine liturgist, Dom Cunibert Mohlberg, undertook research, looking for the Latin proro-type from which the text of the *Kiev manuscripts* was translated. In 1926, he drew attention to the textual resemblance between the *Kiev manuscripts* and the so-called *Paduan Sacramentary*, a manuscript dating from the ninth century, preserved in the Padua Chapter library, and designated D-47. Further study ascertained that the two manuscripts are related only, but both have the same archetype, the so-called *Sacramentarium Gregorianum*, of the seventh century"; Michael Lacko, „The Cyrilo-Methodian origin of the Byzantine-Slavonic and the Roman-Slavonic liturgy”, w *Slovak Studies III. Cyrillo-Methodiana* (Rome: Slovak institute, 1963), 84.

Brothers introduced the Slavonic language into both rites: the Byzantine and the Roman<sup>27</sup>.

### **3.1. The moment of the inculturation in the mission of Sts. Cyril and Methodius**

Cyril and Methodius were primarily interested not in national conquests, but in the spread of Christianity. In the mission to Great Moravia we can notice the Brothers' sense of inculturation. As noted earlier, prior to the arrival of the Brothers, Christianity had already made some development in Great Moravia through the instrumentality of Bavarian missionaries, who followed the Latin rite. When Cyril and Methodius discovered that some of the people of Great Moravia were already following the Roman rite, the holy Brothers themselves accepted this rite in order to avoid confusion and they translated its liturgical books into the Slavonic language<sup>28</sup>.

An interesting reconstruction of this point is proposed by Michael Lacko SJ, former professor at *Pontifical Oriental Institute* in Rome: "The course taken by Sts. Cyril and Methodius may be described as follows: Cyril devised the Glagolitic alphabet following his appointment to the great Moravian mission. While still in Constantinople, he began translating the most important liturgical books into Slavonic, using the Macedonian dialect, which he had learned at home. Informed by Rastislav's messengers that Bavarian missionaries had introduced the Roman or Latin rite into Great Moravia, Cyril made preparations to worship in that rite (the Ordinary of the Mass) from the text he had at hand. It was a Greek text called the *Liturgy of St. Peter*, used in Thessalonica and elsewhere"<sup>29</sup>.

### **3.2. Approbations of the liturgy in Slavonic language by the Pope Hadrian II and the Pope John VIII**

In *Vita Methodii* we read what happened in Rome in 867 after Pope Hadrian II received the Holy Brothers together with their disciples: The Pope Hadrian II "blessed their teaching, put Gospels in Slavonic at the altar of St. Peter the Apostle"<sup>30</sup>. In *Vita Constantini* it is said: "The Pope accepted Slavonic books, blessed them, laid them in temple *Ad Praesepe (Fatne)* and holy liturgy was sung upon them. Then he ordered the Slovien disciples to be ordained by two bishops: Formas and Gondrich. And after they were

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<sup>27</sup> Ibidem. 80.

<sup>28</sup> Id, *Saints Cyril and Methodius*, 101-102.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, 102.

<sup>30</sup> *Vita Methodii, w Constantinus et Methodius Thessalonicenses: Fontes*, VI.

ordained they sang the liturgy in the Temple of St. Peter the Apostle in Slavonic...<sup>31</sup>

The Pope Hadrian II made the first approbation of the liturgy in Slavonic language. It was made by his letter *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, written before October 869. In this letter there is a brief summary of all arrangements made with the Pope concerning the young Church in Moravia: “The ordination of the Cyrillomethodian disciples, the approval of the Slavonic liturgy and the establishment of the independent hierarchy. Especially the grant of the Roman-Slavonic liturgy, which is unique in the history of the western rite, is due to the extraordinary personalities of Sts. Cyril and Methodius<sup>32</sup>.”

The second letter of approbation of Slavonic liturgy, *Industriae tuae*<sup>33</sup>, was written by the Pope John VIII in 880. At the end of his letter he wrote: “Finally, within our authority, we approve the Slavonic writings created by the deceased Constantine the Philosopher in the language in which they were written as praiseworthy hymns glorifying God, and we order that the majesty and deeds of Christ, Our Lord, be proclaimed in the language. Indeed, the Holy Scriptures command us to glorify the Lord, not only in the three languages, but in all languages with these words: ‘Praise the Lord, all you nations: glorify him, all you peoples’ (Psalm 116,1)... We are told by Paul in the first letter to the Corinthians to build God’s Church by speaking various languages (1 Cor 14,4). Indeed, neither the faith nor doctrine will be marred by any means, whether the Mass is sung or the Holy Gospel is read, or whether the holy writings of the New or Old Testament, correctly translated, are explained, or whether the Office of Hours is chanted in this Slavonic language, since He who created the major languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, also created all other languages for His own praise and glory<sup>34</sup>.”

#### 4. Conclusion

In this article we pointed to some elements of the mission of Sts. Cyril and Methodius. After some notes about celebration of the feat of Holy

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<sup>31</sup> *Vita Constantini, Constantinus et Methodius Thessalonicenses: Fontes*, XVII.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Lacko, *The Popes and Great Moravia in the light of Roman documents* (Rome: Slovak Institute, 1972), 46.

<sup>33</sup> For original Latin version with Slovak and English translation of the document see: John VIII, „*Industriae tuae*”, w *A liturgia sclavinica ad provinciam Slovacam* (Bratislava: Univerzitná knižnica, 1992) 9-19.

<sup>34</sup> John VIII, „*Industriae tuae*”, 17-19.



Brothers in the Church we proposed *Biographical sketch of Sts. Cyril and Methodius and their mission*.

The Apostles of the Slavs represent a model of the mission deeply rooted in the liturgy, celebrated in the Slavonic language. Their greatness was in their focus on the spreading of Christianity without interest in national conquests. In Slavic countries Cyril and Methodius are accepted not just by Catholics but also by other Christian denominations.

The celebration of Sts. Cyril and Methodius has been always an important for Slavic countries because through it Slavs celebrate and remember their Christian roots.

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## Evangelization as portrayed in the liturgical and cultural expression of Saints Cyril and Methodius

### SUMMARY

The objective of this article is to reflect on missionary activity of the apostles of the Slavs. The introduction of the Slavonic language into the Byzantine and the Roman rite has strongly affected the process of the evangelisation. This mission has been accompanied by very wise liturgical inculturation.

This article indicates the place of sts. Cyril and Methodius in the celebration of the Church and specifies some biographical aspects of the apostles. Particularly important for the mission was foundation of the script, called *glagolitic*, by st. Cyril.

Crucial moments of the mission have been two approbations of the liturgy in Slavonic language by the Pope Hadrian II in his letter *Gloria in excelsis Deo* from 869 and the second approbation by the Pope John VIII in the letter *Industriae tuae* from 880. The Apostles of the Slavs represent a model of the mission deeply rooted in the liturgy celebrated in the Slavonic language.

**Keywords:** Sts. Cyril and Methodius, mission, liturgy, inculturation, Byzantine and Roman rite

## Ewangelizacja ukazana jako wyraz liturgicznej i kulturowej ekspresji Cyryla i Metodego

### STRESZCZENIE

Przedmiotem artykułu jest refleksja nad misjonarską działalnością apostołów Słowian. Wprowadzenie języka słowiańskiego do rytu bizantyjskiego i rzymskiego miało duży wpływ na proces ewangelizacyjny. Misji tej towarzyszyła mądra inkulturacja liturgiczna. Artykuł wskazuje na miejsce świętych Cyryla i Metodego w celebracji Ko-

ściola i specyfikuje niektóre aspekty biograficzne apostołów. Szczególnie ważne dla misji było stworzenie przez św. Cyryla języka, zwanego *glagolitic* (głagolicki). Istotnym momentem dla misji była aprobata liturgii w języku słowiańskim przez papieża Hadriana II w liście *Gloria in excelsis Deo* z 880 r. Apostołowie Słowian prezentują model misyjny głęboko zakorzeniony w liturgii celebrowanej w języku słowiańskim.

**Słowa kluczowe:** święci Cyryl i Metody, misja, liturgia, inkulturacji, ryt bizantyjski i rzymski

