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(Hrsg./eds.)

**Das Erbe der Slawenapostel
im 21. Jahrhundert**
**The Legacy of the Apostles
of the Slavs
in the 21st Century**

**Nationale und europäische Perspektiven
National and European Perspectives**

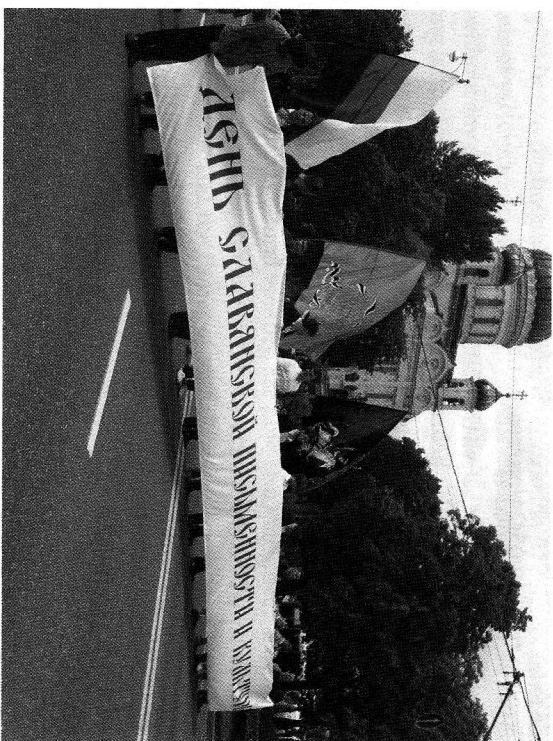


Figures

Fig. 1: Priesthood during the procession in 2010.



Fig. 2: The feast in Moscow 2010.



Dejan Donev (Skopje)

Enlightenment of St's Cyril and Methodius as cultural and ethical task

The most important duties of the people are their education, learning, self-evaluation and providing assistance for raising others, so that they can educate and train for themselves. Teaching and education of the people is a holy thing called by one of the most beautiful names – *enlightenment*. It is not only a supreme cultural, but primarily ethical task. Many ethicists were/are teachers and educators, especially Saint Cyril of Thessalonica, also known as Constantine the Philosopher, and Saint Methodius.

The work of Saints Cyril and Methodius was accepted not only as a language innovation and cultural progress, but also as an ethical virtue and moral covenant. They were not simply teachers of the illiterate, but sought to exalt people – to teach those who were on the edge of civilization to reveal the secrets of the spirit and mind, to help the maladapted to get trained, the ignorant to be literate and to learn the secrets of life. Doing these things they were actual teachers or educators and the wise can thank them for these divine benefits.

The mission of enlightenment by Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius as a cultural and ethical task

In the living situation and conditions of the postmodern and hyper-consumerist society of the 21st century and its distinctively strife-torn tempo of existence, it seems that the return and preservation of the real human essence is mostly looked for in the necessary performance of the most significant responsibility of people today – their education, “self-enlightenment and offering help to others to uplift, to be educated and become capable of humanity” (ТЕНКОВ 2003). For these very reasons, teaching, upbringing and educating people is considered “sacred work” and is called by one of the most beautiful names – *Enlightenment*. Thus, it is revealed to be not only a prime cultural, but primarily an ethical task.

In that context, most of the moral philosophers have been teachers, educators, saints of the illuminating word and deed because they were guided by the idea that teaching considered as enlightenment is an important cultural and ethical achievement. Among them, two names are prominent, the first one being Saint Cyril of Thessalonica (also known as Constantine the Philosopher) and the second one his

older brother Saint Methodius, both being Byzantine missionaries “brought up in the upper class of the Byzantine social hierarchy, the carriers of the affirmation of the Slavic spiritual and cultural tradition, which as Slavic teachers were in service of the Byzantine political and military interests”¹¹.

Without aspiring to logical completeness, scholastic rationalization or a synthetic view of this problem in the worldwide framework, only aspiring to a problem review of some special aspects of this topic, with the objective to truly understand who Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius were and what their historical role and the role of their ethics in the foundation and the development of the universality of the ethical values and the axiology system derived from it were, one should primarily mention the conditions they lived in, i.e. their life journey and specific events and activities.

Cyril of Thessalonica, also known under the name of Constantine the Philosopher, had the life story of a devoted scholar. Born in the year 827 in Thessalonica, which at the time was “one of the important centers of the former Byzantine Empire, in the house of Leo, a highly ranked dignitary who occupied a high position in the state civil service: he was an assistant military commander of the Thessalonica district, and mother Maria, a woman who came from a wealthy and dignified family, also known in the imperial court in Constantinople” (ПОЛЕНАКОВИЌ 1985: 12–13).

The unique features and skills of Constantine’s are mentioned in *Cyril’s Hagiography*, where it is said that Constantine had at the early age of seven already chosen or determined his life’s commitment to philosophy. In confirmation of this commitment, Constantine narrates a dream he has had in which he has been offered many girls, one of whom to choose as his life companion. Out of all the

girls gathered, he chose one that was “the most beautiful of all, with a bright face, elegantly decorated with gold necklaces and pearls and other jewelry. Her name was Sofia, i.e. Wisdom” (МИЛОВСКА & ТАКОВСКИ 1996: 27) – as in divine wisdom, a beautiful form of the Spirit, or – philosophy.

Due to the public positions held by his father, Constantine had the very best education in the world’s political and cultural center of Constantinople, taught by the greatest scientists like Photios (in dialectics and philosophical sciences) as well as Leo the Mathematician with whom he studied Homer and geometry. “He proved and distinguished himself in all branches of the science, especially in the most difficult one, Logic, and achieved the highest success” (ПОЛЕНАКОВИЌ 1985: 17–18). After graduating from the then famous Magnaura School, he was appointed a librarian in the library of the Constantinople Patriarchate, “followed by an appointment as an associate and teacher, i.e. to teach philosophy in the Magnaura School” (МИЛОВСКА & ТАКОВСКИ 1996: 31).

This was the period of his life where the nickname “The Philosopher” originated. He was also called “the wise one” as well as “a prime teacher”. He had a good and pure soul, he was clever, gentle, calm and temperate. He was offered to marry the richest girl and to become a *kniaz* (МИЛОВСКА & ТАКОВСКИ 1996: 30), but for him there was nothing more precious than learning, the true place where he was looking for real honor and wealth, “which is why he never gave up on his committed dedication to spirituality” (ПОЛЕНАКОВИЌ 1985: 239). Once, he saw the moment of his departure from his earthly life in an apparition, so he put on ceremonial clothing and said that his spirit was uplifted and joyful because he had seen his entering the house of the Lord: “From this point on, I am no longer a servant to the king, nor to anyone on this earth, but only to God Almighty. I was not and I was, and I am in eternity, Amen” (МИЛОВСКА & ТАКОВСКИ 1996: 66). The very next day, he dressed himself in monastic habit, became a monk and took the name of Cyril.

Near the end of his life, he suffered for 50 days from an illness. On his death bed, he left a legacy for his brother Methodius, saying: “Well brother, we were two souls yoked to plow one trench, but I have fallen down on the field, having finished my part. I do know that you adore the mountain (i.e. the monastery), but don’t abandon the teaching for the sake of the mountain, because through teaching you can be saved” (МИЛОВСКА & ТАКОВСКИ 1996: 77). Before his death on February 14, in the year of 869 (Julian calendar) “he prayed to God to reach out and protect the flock with which he had entrusted him, to redeem his disciples and devotees from all evil and sacrilege, to make honest people out of them, to preserve those who diligently do good deeds and please God, as he had himself” (ПАНОВСКИ ЛЕГЕНДИ 1987: 77–78). The Pope ordered a glorious funeral in the church of St. Clement of Rome, to lay to rest the relics brought there by Methodius.

1 Historical compliance of the time in which they lived confirm another truth, liberated from the canonical cliché of the hagiographic model of rewriting personal biographies, i.e. that they were not of Slavic origin, but probably descendants of the old indigenous Macedonian population that knew the Slavic language and which lived together with the other nations in Byzantium and with the Slavic nations. Therefore, the Byzantine court has used them as intermediaries to impose political and spiritual faith over Slavic people. This conclusion is based on the authenticity of the old chronicles, and on the contents of the famous *Римонин legends* – extensive Biographies of St. Cyril and St. Methodius. The Slavic tribes who have inhabited the region of Macedonia and already grew into the dominant population primarily lived in closed communities isolated from the indigenous Macedonian population. But the indigenous Macedonian population having a need to establish direct trade contacts with Slavic communities, considering they were good craftsmen and farmers and had to exchange goods and weapons with them, came in a position to become bilingual, to know the Slavic speech too.

All Slavic nations have posted boards on his grave in gratitude for his teaching, understood as enlightenment work.

The elder brother Methodius, born between 810 and 820 as the eldest son of Leo and Maria, was also a brilliant person, a law graduate from Constantinople. Even from early age on, he held high state and church positions, i.e. "from a young age, he was appointed by the Byzantine court to military and administrative govern the principality² as a kniaz, serving for a period of 10 years, i.e. between the year of 845 and 855" (ПОЛЕНАКОВИЌ 1985: 14–15). Political defeat later on in life forced him to abandon his sacred career and family, "becoming a monk in the monastery of Polihron in Olympus, Asia Minor, putting on his monastic habit and receiving the name of Methodius" (Панонски ревиди 1987: 69).

Together with his brother Cyril, he had the honor of leading the most difficult cultural mission of the epoch – the literacy of the Slavic people, joined with faith to be readied for the great cultural task of understanding Christianity and its exceptional ethical values. Cyril invented a new Slavic alphabet and translated the first books into Slavic, among which was the Bible. He and his brother, along with their books, set off to Moravia, where they taught and educated the people so well that these regions to this day celebrate and glorify them as their **spiritual fathers**.

Their monumental work as well as the work of their students and disciples, has been largely summarized by science in a synthetically derived, generally known triad:

- they were the founders of the first Slavic alphabet;
- they made the first translations of holy scripture from the then dominant Greek language into Slavic;
- they were the initiators of educational and religious work among the Slavic nations.

Even though these three are the central aspects and pivotal points of their initiatives and efforts, "if we limit ourselves to them in the interpretation of the work of these people, we will not go beyond the general statements and conclusions that have been offered up till date" (ПОПОВСКИ 1989: 133). As Popovski has further pointed out very well, the conclusion is that we will not be able to reach a conclusion of the general European significance and importance of their work, which was based primarily on several cultural and philosophical premises out of which,

for the purposes of this paper, I will single out three, in accordance with my field of knowledge and expertise:

1. Opposing the established trilingual thesis for the interpretation of God, Cyril and Methodius offered an "equality of languages – equality of nations, i.e. a premise that stems from the very essence of Christian ideology" (МУЌК & АДЕНЕЈ 2009: 114), which they use as the basic pragmatic objective in their teaching.

As was written most probably by St. Clement of Ohrid in the *Hagiography of Constantine the Philosopher*: "when he went to Venice, bishops, priests and monks gathered around him, like crows on a falcon, and raised the trilingual heresy saying: How dare you to create books for the Slavic people and teach them by those books. That has not been done by anyone, not the Roman Pope or Gregory the Theologian, neither by Jerome nor Augustine. And we all know only three languages in which it is worthy and dignified to praise God – the Jewish, the Hellenistic and the Latin. The philosopher replied to this by saying: Does the rain not fall evenly on all of us? Does the sun not shine for all of us? Do we not all breathe air equally? So how is it that you are not ashamed to acknowledge and recognize only three languages, while wanting all the other nations to be blind and deaf? Tell me, do you think that God is so powerless that he cannot grant this right, or so envious that he does not want to? And we all know that there are a number of nations who are skilled with their books and do celebrate God each in their own language ..." (МИЛОВЕКА & ТАКОВСКИ 1996: 61–65). Moreover, he said: "... my brothers, if I come to you speaking the languages, what good will I do, if I do not speak for clarity and understanding, or prophecy or teaching? At the same time, if you use an incomprehensible word in a foreign language, who will then understand the meaning of your saying? Because you will be speaking air ... There are so many different words out there in the world and not even one of them is without meaning. If I do not know the meaning of the word, the one who speaks to me will see me as a barbarian, and the one who speaks to me will be a barbarian to me" (МИЛОВЕКА & ТАКОВСКИ 1996: 61–65).

In other words, by stepping onto the shores of the Mediterranean in a triangle surrounded by Jewish, Hellenistic and Roman culture, Christianity, building on the remains of numerous local and minor religions, grew to be a first modern universal religion, affirming the concept of monotheistic and universal love. Moreover, as pointed out previously by МУЌК and АДЕНЕЈ, "affirming and fighting for the premise of equality of languages, Cyril and Methodius have also promoted views which have strengthened the pragmatic basis of the Christian ideology" (МУЌК & АДЕНЕЈ 2009: 112) – it is a magnificent philosophical idea about the sole humanity and the only ever present world for all, which is "a condition for spiritual understanding and cultural development of mankind" (ТЕМКОВ 2009: 104).

2 His principality was situated north of the city of Salonica (Thessalonikid) – along the lower course of the river Struma and Bregalnica (in the region of Strumica-Bregalnica).

In fact, as noted by Topencharov, “the tradition of Cyril and Methodius, by stepping out of the language-literature and religious frames, enters into social and political knowledge and awareness” (ТОПЕНЧАРОВ 1970: 23). This way, the old-Slavic language or more accurately the south-Macedonian language³ was the first literary language to envelop the European continent. It was a revolutionary act, because it would be followed by dramatic twists several centuries later in Europe: Humanism and the Renaissance (ДВОРНИК 1956). The strike by Cyril and later by Methodius at the trilingual concept actually lay down the foundation for the later struggles of John Ball, Thomas Mincer, Martin Luther King, Jan Hus and other humanists. Thus, to replace Greek and Latin, already abstract languages exclusively used by the elite or the aristocracy, the new social aspirations saw a need for the introduction of new speaking languages – “the written word must reach the people and begin its historical process of democratization” (МЕСЧОННИС 2011: 164).

2. *Humanism through the diplomatic function* of Cyril and Methodius is the second aspect. Their mission among the Macedonian Slavic nation and later on in Moravia was not random and unprepared for, but marked an ending and a completion of one of the most significant humanistic and cultural aspects of their tradition.⁴

The anti-paganist and anti-iconoclastic thesis by Cyril was complemented by a special diplomatic function: in Cherson, among the Khazars, they succeeded at discovering and taking to Rome the remains of Pope Clement, which later granted them in return absolute support by the Roman Pope and the Roman Church in their mission among the Slavic nations in Moravia. At the same time, the only compensation for their tremendous efforts and sacrifice in their missions among the Saracen, Khazar and Slavic people, Cyril and Methodius and their students saw in the liberation of the captives. “When he was sending off the Philosopher, the Klagan of the Khazars offered him many gifts, but the Philosopher rejected all of them and said: ‘Give me all the Greek captives you have here. That will mean

3 All translations of the Church Slavic language are created based on the dialect of the Macedonian Slavic people living in the districts of the city of Thessaloniki, or more precisely the villages of Suho, Zarova and Visoka.

4 For these problems scholars can find further reading and enough materials in two highly useful bibliographies: Илъяжкий, Г. А.: *Опыт систематической кирило-методиевской библиографии*, София, 1934 (where the literature of the life, activity and significance of the Apostles to the Slavs is indexed in comprehensive fashion); Попруженко, Михаил & Романский, Стоян: *Библиографски преглед на славянските кирилски източници за живота и дейността на Кирила и Методия*, София, 1935 (survey of the sources of the life and activity of the two saints).

more to me than all the gifts.’ When they assembled up to two hundred people, they gave him the captives and he went on his way full of joy” (Панонски легенди 1969: 51, 57, МИЛОВСКА & ТАКОВСКИ 1996: 54).

This is an act and an attitude that demonstrate not only an altruistic and humanist vision, but also an “emphasized diplomatic content through which the basic and key theses of Christian philosophy are being affirmed” (Срѣпка 1968: 13). Moreover, the mission proved their great moral capacity and set a reputation for the ecumenical principles of the tradition of Cyril and Methodius (МИНЧЕВА-КОПЧЕВСКА 2009: 28).

3. The honor of leading the most difficult mission of the epoch – *the literacy of the Slavic nations, which joined with the faith are to be reared for the great cultural task of understanding Christianity and its exceptional ethical values*.⁵

Cyril was the first one to offer a definition of philosophy in a Slavic language, while stressing its ethical dimension: “*Philosophy is the understanding of God's and the humans' essence in order for a person to be closer to God. It teaches the person that his deeds are the image and reflection of the One who created him*” (Панонски легенди 1969: 29).

This only confirms that their love for wisdom was in service of **proper and right human acts**. Because of this, people should use their minds and their knowledge in order to distinguish themselves by their actions, which means that by acting ethically they may become similar to the Divine which has created them to do good, and not evil and trouble in the world. Later on St. Clement of Ohrid would express this in his categorical imperative: “It is not enough just to run away from evil, but also to do good!” (Климент Охридски 1996: 110; 151).

In this context, Cyril related the human being and his thoughts to the Divine Being as a real source of logic and ethics. Defining the thesis to the end that individual aspiration towards the good is the most noble and grand deed, i.e. aspiring to the similarity with the good Lord, Cyril steered the human intellectual and moral strength towards seeking and finding what is **truly good**, and thus guided man towards the execution of such good. The good is not unclear, but determined and certain.

In saying this, Cyril pointed out that individual aspiration towards the good, towards similarity with the good Lord, is the noblest one. As was written after the

5 A study of the Christian philosophy as understood in ninth-century Byzantine theology is made on the bases of an utterance of Saint Constantine-Cyril by Иор Явѣвско: The Definition of Philosophy in the Life of Saint Constantine [Cyril], in the volume, *For Roman Jakobson: Essays on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday*, 11 October, 1956, comp. Morris Halle, Horace G. Lunt, Hugh McLean, and Cornelia H. VAN SCHOONVELD, The Hague, 1956, pp. 449–57.

persecution of the human from Heaven and the condemnation to death: "God did not completely abandon the human, but with his great mercy and love, each year and over time shows humanity the deeds and achievements of a few chosen people as an example for all to steer towards the good" (*Панонски легенди* 1969: 68). The logical consequence is that the one who knows, will do good, which means, according to them, that there is no difference between the awareness of the good and the good deed itself. As Temkov points out, this is similar to his "civilization work, which gave light and sight to the people, to see and to learn about the good" (Темков 2003).

This understanding of his of the world, the relationship between God and the human through ethical conduct, where the human can be an image and manifestation and also reflection of the One who created him, formed the basis of the efforts of Cyril's older brother Methodius, because "faith without deeds is dead and those who think to know God shall fall out, while their deeds will steer them away from Him" (*Панонски легенди* 1969: 74). This means that the virtuous devotee Methodius had only one ethical task "to serve everyone with all deeds (i.e. serving everyone with his good deeds), to entice everyone" (*Панонски легенди* 1969: 71) because "what is the benefit for the human, gaining the whole world while emptying or losing his soul? What can a man get in exchange for his soul?" (Климент Охридски 1996: 33). According to the *Римонитан legends*, "to some he was equal, to some slightly smaller, while to others greater than them, surpassing some of them through deeds, others through the word" (i.e. some with humbleness and silence, others even more by fasting and vigil, as well as by prayer and calmness; Климент Охридски 1996: 33).

Among other things, Methodius is also the author of the first philosophical texts created in Slavic language, following his belief that by writing philosophy in the Slavic language he at the same time defended "the right of the Slavic nations to cultural autonomy and identity" (Тасниаос 2001: 77). Moreover, Methodius wrote and gave the Slavic nations their first legal paper *Law on how to judge the people*, a text which introduced the modern Byzantine Christian ethics and other life rules and principles, a work full of advice on the just and righteous relations between people, meaning a book that is as legal as it is ethical.

Later on with his students (the Seven Ones: Cyril, Methodius, Clement, Naum, Angelarij, Sava and Gorazd), Methodius went through an extremely difficult path of teaching and enlightenment, especially in Pannonia and Slavakia under conditions of hostile behavior and constant attacks. His strong spirit was unbreakable even by imprisonment in Bavaria, by numerous tortures nor by the constant attacks from German priests. He persistently continued with his work, spreading Christianity in the Slavic language throughout Moravia and Pannonia, bringing literacy to many

students, for which he deservedly received the title Archbishop of the Pannonian church.

He died in the year of 885, appointing Gorazd as his deputy, one of his students who had all escaped death threats by swimming across the Danube River into the Bulgarian Empire. Clement and Naum arrived in Ohrid and with their deeds and works as well as with the founding of the Ohrid School, they further developed the ideas and teachings of the Slavic teachers St. Cyril and St. Methodius.

One milestone in the cultural as well as the historical development of all Slavic nations was the work of the Byzantine missionaries Cyril and Methodius – creating the Slavic alphabet⁶, the first Slavic literary language and translating the much needed liturgical books from Byzantine into this Slavic language, as well as introducing the Slavic language into the religious service. If, to all of this, one adds the founding, the existence and the work of a group of enthusiastic students and followers of the Slavic teaching and religious service, it becomes easy to see why the basis of independent Slavic teaching, literature and religious service can be understood as a cultural and ethical task in the broadest sense of the word!

Ever since this historical moment more than twelve centuries ago, the Slavic nations, or, as they were called by the first Slavic writers, "the Slavic tribe", can be considered to have entered the circle of cultural nations of Europe, offering a new form of literacy as well as a new form of ethics. Specifically, as noted by Giorgio NURGIANI in his work *Macedonian geniuses over the centuries*, "in the history of civilization, there are very few achievements alike those of the brothers St. Cyril and St. Methodius, in whose missions we can find the first signs of the Macedonian culture. Their outstanding work has introduced the Slavic nations into the world of culture and has raised them to the level of civilized people" (NURGIANI 1972: 16).

This is so because the work of Cyril and Methodius was not only accepted in the context of developing the idea of linguistic and national equality as well as the idea of Slavic origin⁷, but also as a moral virtue and moral testament. The confirmation and evidence for this can be found within their work, practical carriers of a universal ethical-philosophical idea (СВИДЛЕР & МОУЗЕС 2005: 22) – providing knowledge (on the road to the acceptance of God in itself, for itself and by itself),

⁶ For the purpose of spreading the religious service in Slavic language, the first Slavic alphabet was created – the *glagolica*. Constantine, with the help of Methodius in 862 creates the first alphabet – Glagolitic alphabet, consisting of 38 letters, out of which 24 following the example of the Greek alphabet, while 14 letters were invented by Constantine to fit certain voices of the Slavic language.

⁷ In other words, as a kind of linguistic innovation and cultural benefit.

every human soul can go back to Him as a person! For these very reasons, "they were not just teaching the illiterate, but sought to elevate and extol people to help them discover the secrets of the spirit and the mind, to enable them, to make them literate and to help them discover the secrets of life and living itself" (МИНЧЕВА-КОПЕВСКА 2009: 42). Because of their devotion to the goal of enlightenment of the people, Cyril and Methodius of Thessalonica are saints of the spirit and kindness. In fact, after all, "the ethics itself means commitment to elevating or enlightening people" (ТЕМКОВ 2003).

This is the work only of the great and true teachers, to whom "the most important responsibility of the humans is their teaching, self-enlightenment and providing help for the others to ascend, to be educated and to be enabled to be humans" (ТЕМКОВ 2003). In this context, teaching, upbringing and educating people is sacred work – Enlightenment. But it is not only a supreme cultural, but primarily an ethical task. That is why today all Slavic nations celebrate and glorify St. Cyril and St. Methodius as teachers and bearers of morality⁸ and as missionaries of Christianity. Through their work they influenced the development of the Slavic culture and deservedly received the title *Slavic Apostles*.

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- 8 For illustration, Pope John Paul II, who was a Roman bishop, of Slavic origin and moral philosopher by profession, in 1985 declared St. Cyril and St. Methodius to be patrons of Europe, emphasizing their scholar work, teaching power and moral virtue.

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