
CULTURAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE MISSION OF SAINTS CYRIL AND METHODIUS ON OUR TERRITORY

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Abstract

The 1150th anniversary of the arrival of Cyril and Methodius to our territory is a chance to realize the remarkably huge and powerful effect of their missionary work, despite its short duration. Their missionary work and fruits of their activities are deeply rooted in our cultural genotype, and helped to preserve it against ethnical extinction in the course of history adversity. It is usually the *experience* making the effect successful, that means the interpreted texts, spiritual texts, Bible, etc. and their words are *vivid*, initiated and dynamized by their *meaning-Logos*. The theme will be portrayed not only in terms of interpretation and effect, but predominantly in terms of determining factors being its prerequisite.

Keywords: logos, memes, Ss. Cyril a Methodius, mission

1. Introduction

The 1150th anniversary of the arrival of Solun Brothers Saints Cyril and Methodius to the territory of Great Moravia, where our ancestors used to live, made us once again research the sources of authenticity, currency, respect and culture and historical spirit. Our research is of interdisciplinary nature dealing with new knowledge from the fields of culture and cognitive sciences.

“The great mission of both brothers finished with the death of Methodius in 885; Brother Cyril had died 16 years before in Rome. The two great preachers had been entrusted by the eternal Pastor to proclaim the Gospel among the Slavs. They became the first evangelists of nations inhabiting Eastern and Southern Europe. They became Fathers of their faith and culture.” [1]

What is the message of Ss. Cyril and Methodius for people of our times – we ask fairly legitimately? We believe it is mainly building up the unity:

1. with the Pope and the authentic teaching on the Church;
2. between East and West;
3. among Slavic nations, whole Christian Europe and all people of good will

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around the world [Ján Pavol II, *Slavorum apostoli*, 13–14].

Because:

- However, accused of heresy, vague and incorrect Christian teaching they came to Rome in 867 when the Pope Adrian II fully approved their apostolic mission and the use of Slavonic language. After the death of his brother, Methodius had been attacked by numerous accusations and persecution, summonsed to appear at the court, and the Emperor Ludwig II sent him to prison. He was not released until the Pope's order, and most likely settled down in Velehrad. Then, he was once again accused of heresy, yet in Rome successfully defended, and the Pope John VIII acknowledged his position. Despite all nastiness Methodius never lost his heart or diminished his zeal, but with full devoutness continued his work dedicated to his entrusted People. Thus, Pope John Paul II writes: "In our times, because our nation was always neglected, is elevated to a high level our teacher, Saint Methodius. If we compare all his virtues and great achievements to 'judges, prophets, apostles, martyrs and other men of greatness and fame' these Saints, we can be proud of. He embodied the awe of God, honour the commands, perpetual prayers and sacred acts with bodily purity, powerful and delightful language, powerful for antagonists and delightful for those who embraced admonishments, ire, quietness, mercy, love, perseverance and patience." [Ján Pavol II, *Convenistis – Zišli ste sa*, 117–127]
- Ss. Cyril and Methodius had carried out their missionary service both in harmony with Church of Constantinople in the East and Roman Church in the West. During their lifetime and work, in defiance of grave tension, the Church had not been hit by the unfortunate split of the Catholics and Orthodox until 1054, resulting in the translation of Eastern liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom – Byzantine, as well as the liturgy of Saint Peter – Roman [1].

The evangelic work of Ss. Cyril and Methodius is still present in the history and life of nations and ethnic communities in the post-countries of Great Moravia where Methodius served as Metropolitan: Moravia, Slovakia and Pannonia (i.e. the area of later Hungary) next to the Western Slavs, particularly the Czechs, Lusatian–Sorb tribes and the territory of Southern Poland. The achievements of the Holy Brothers mission were noticeable particularly among Balkan Slavs, and owing to their apostolate the previously rooted Christianity in Croatia had been reinforced. Strangely enough, it was the outcast pupils of Ss. Cyril and Methodius who build up their mission in Bulgaria. Thanks to Clement of Ohrid a potent centre of monastic life was established. Especially, in Bulgaria the alphabet called Cyrillic had been developed. From there Christianity spread to Old Kiev Russia and later from Moscow further towards the East. Up to the present day this is the language used in the Byzantine liturgy of the Slavonic Eastern Churches of Constantinople Rite, 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 by the Catholics of Croatia [Ján Pavol II, *Slavorum apostoli*, p. 21-24].

2. Factors influencing the interpretative usage

The missionary work of Ss. Cyril and Methodius on our territory, where Christianity was present long before, had a remarkably powerful and sweeping effect on common people. As a rule, the effect is complete when being caused by experience, which means the interpreted text (spiritual texts, Holy Bible, etc.) and the words become alive being initiated and dynamized by their meaning – logos.

On the ground of theory, proved by the long years integrated experience of the authors, we may observe the interpretative usage, aimed to affect the percipient, to be determined by the following factors:

- personality factor;
- transformation factor;
- technical factor – speech, comprehensibility, voice.

We shall try to assess the work of the Solun Brothers Ss. Cyril and Methodius based on the above mentioned factors.

2.1. Personality factor

The education of Saints Cyril and Methodius was majestic and refined, predominantly that of Saint Cyril who was born Constantine and was very gifted and a talented “reflexive contemplative soul” [2].

By Greek tradition the acme of human dignity rests upon cognition. The Man with his intellect, sense, divine ability surpasses anything in the entire world, and is able to learn about anything, even about God. According to Aristotle and Plato, “the elevation of intellect towards God” was the acme of Philosophy [2]. The Gospel, the Bible denies this – God is non-cognizable, goes beyond man’s understanding, intellect, and man’s perfection resides in the fulfilment of God’s will, and according to the New Testament - in love. From this perspective Saint Cyril was greatly inspired by Saint Gregory of Nazianus, also known as Gregory the Theologian who had a soul of a poet like the Saint Cyril. It was notably the notion on man’s mission on Earth that Saint Cyril had been inspired by. The interpretation relation towards erudite texts and their contents, may it be the Holy Bible or the works of Saint Fathers of Greece or Alexandria, was with the Solun Brothers deeply hermeneutic (primary purpose of hermeneutics was the interpretation of the sacral texts). It offered the experience of the sacred. In the text they felt the need to affiliate the closest to the Other, and avoid the boundaries between Him and those [3]. In the interpretation relationship the interpreter substantially consents with the contents of the idea, identifies with it, and the text serves as source whereas the Second gives himself as gift. To interpret the text, particularly the sacred one, requires passion and longing for it to open. It is a peculiar, intense, creative and deep

relationship. The brothers were interested in the Gospel for they needed it. They needed it as they were interested in it, and they were not interested in any state privileges and offices – they retreated into monasteries, being centres of philosophy at that time, when any political turbulence occurred.

It is necessary to make an observation, as stated by L.G. Benakis, “Regarding the autonomy of Philosophy in relationship to the other sciences, it should be noted that the prevalent intellectual model in Byzantium was a type of encyclopaedic teacher of philosophy, a polyhistor, i.e. an erudite master of scholarship who maintained close ties with the other sciences which comprised the Quadrivium, etc. and who furthermore set the philosophical tone for scientific subject matters and the problems under scholarly investigation.” [4]

2.2. Transformation factor

The pervasion of the interpreter into the text happens simultaneously with the pervasion of the text into the interpreter. The interpreter is submersed by the text and tries to achieve the submersion of the recipient, too. He is enthusiastic about it, meaning the contents resonates with his soul and becomes one. Therefore, here are some attributes – Constantine the Philosopher, Gregory Bogoslov – the Theologian, Maximus – the Confessor, etc. The evidence of the personal transformation of Saints Cyril and Methodius rests in their holiness indicating their inner Spiritual Grace, the highest gift of God a person can be blessed by.

For a better illustration the term transformation factor shall be elucidated on the work of an actor. The aim of actor’s transformation is the character, impersonate, ‘resurrection’ [5] of the character’s text of the play. The actor works, creates the character by means of magic ‘if’, employs sense, will and sensibility. The process of transformation runs through his consciousness towards the unconscious, new consciousness providing he understands the purpose of his character within the play. The actor represses his self, and accepts the new self of the character.

2.3 Technical factor

There is no doubt, Saints Cyril and Methodius were outstandingly comprehensible, clear, convincing and authentic when performing their missionary work on our territory. They visited places where Christianity had been present for decades. The Duke Rastislav states in his plea to the emperor Michael III ... “we have had many Christian teachers, but they taught us in different manners... we, the Slavs, however are commonality and have nobody to lead us towards the truth and interpret its meaning...” [6].

The truth, Highest Truth, Word, Logos, Divine Algorithm, Highest Wisdom, Incarnated Logos Jesus Christ – these are the denominations for the ‘true light enlightening every man’. It ignites and provokes the process of creation, revives the text, its contents and provides the energy. The Solun

Brothers knew indubitably the entire thorough depth of the meaning of these terms and perceived it through the works of Philo of Alexandria [7], the Greek Saint Fathers of Alexandria and Cappadocia and many others. They had the gift of words, furthermore Saint Cyril had an exceptionally developed “language instinct” [8], he knew which way to speak, reason or explain. Often the opponent had to give up in appreciation, be it the Pope or Saracens, Khazars, or the dispute over ‘trilingual dogma’ of Venice. Since youth, he had a refined sense for grammar, art of grammar, which was one of his subjects when studying at Magnaura in Constantinople. The speech of both brothers was authentic and fervent (only a fervent one can ignite – according the thermodynamic equation which may also be used as reasoning in this metaphorical meaning). It was a comprehensible interpretation of the authentic faith having powerful impact upon young people whose souls were eager to learn. Many of them had experienced the act of initiation and inner conversion. Such mental and moral atmosphere strengthens the empathic feeling and the co-experience of creating the feeling of cohesion and solidarity. When the people are empathic they experience the reassurance of their existence, celebration of their own life, become more sympathetic within their enriched individuality, their own self, learning about spiritual dimension, and what is the most significant, they could embrace the Word of God more intensely through the language they understood, felt its meaning, “such significant need for its meaning, ... being the most human need of all, ... the will towards the meaning” [9].

3. Solun Brothers Ss. Cyril and Methodius, mediators of Christian dogmatic, interpreters of the Gospel

The Solun Brothers did not have any media or mass media instrument at their disposal. The effect of their influence had been spread by oral and memetic way. Nowadays, we can state, from the perspective of the newly constituted, postmodern science of memetics that it was exactly the positive memes having the impact on the change of thinking and lifestyle of people [10]. Pondering upon the origin of religiosity, the author (Viktor E. Frankl) of the following quotation “critically objects against religiosity being congenital, denies hand down by biological way, but stressing on the hand down by tradition. Here we may again observe in appreciation the author’s anticipation of the memes discovery as unit of experience.” [11]

For better understanding of the term *memetics* we quote: “Cultural evolution has always been faster than the biological one, has accelerated, and today we may say the cultural evolution is at last three times faster than the biological one. Memes, different to genes, are the new type replicators and main actors of the accelerating dynamics. Memes are the building components of cultural phenomena. They are working habits, rules of ethics, moral standards, mythical stories, ideas from scientific theories, music motives, fashionable themes, rumours. Memes, like the genes, are transferred amongst individuals they replicate, mutate and recombine. Unlike the genes they are not determined

and affected by the material qualities of individuals but by their spiritual attributes, mental condition, and through it the behaviour.... While traditional Psychology and Sociology deal with the question of how people gain ideas, memetics asks the question upside down of how ideas win the people... The genes have material carriers - the nucleic acids – so do memes, too. The key carrier of memes is the condition of neural networks of human brain. The condition can reproduce, replicate by transfer of their configuration from one individual to another after the transformation into proper signals, mostly verbal. Therefore, the articulated speech was decisive for the massive boom of cultural evolution...” [12].

In the course of cultural evolution not only the positive memes but also negative ones have been transferred, e.g. fallacious or twisted ideas [13], bad habits, etc. in terms of cultural evolution, or culture itself, Slavomír Gálik distinguishes between cultural and civilization activity. He believes civilization activity is based on abstract rationality being implemented in Science and technology, partially in rational politics and economy. The law of summing, accumulation and progress is applied, and more or less spreading amongst cultures without problems. The genuine cultural activity, such as the mission of Saints Cyril and Methodius, is spiritual, original and usually with obstacles at the beginning. One of the original deeds of their mission was the translation of the Holy Bible into Old Slavonic language causing outrage by the Frankish clerics. The genuine cultural memes are under constant pressure and tension of decadent or replicable civilization memes. Civilization memes itself are not of bad nature, however become bad when destroying or suppressing spiritual culture. Then, the civilization activity loses axiological clue, orientation and finally may lead to self-destruction. This has happened to the European civilization leading into two extremely destructive world wars of the 20th century [14].

Civilization memes are greatly present in the field of media influence upon the society. As Pravdová states: “The escapist, and mainly hedonistic nature of media production and reception has become the principle of creation and reception of media contents and messages, not solely of an entertaining manner (within the determination by genre and contents). It has become part of media production across the whole spectrum, and the fascination by entertainment within the borders of hedonistic ideals and requirements of escapism, mediated by media, have influenced thinking, ideals, life style and everyday lives of contemporary populations.” [15]

The tradition of Cyril and Methodius, *legacy of Fathers*, has been preserved and kept despite the Frankish Church authority, or later the Hungarian oppression. In the course of history it was smouldering like a hidden fire preserving the faith in the people, and predominantly their language.

May the words of one of the greatest Slovak poets of the 20th century, Milan Rúfus speak as the proof from his essay Three Dates with Marína (referring to Andrej Sládkovič, one of the codifiers of Slovak as standard language and his poem Marína).

“... The book was published when the language had been codified for just three years. An apparent paradox originated. Could a three year old child prattle such a master poem? The explanation is only one. The child must have been a lot older than his birth certificate. It is more than obvious that Štúr’s followers (group of Slovak academics gathered around Ľudovít Štúr, authors’ note) did not invent the nation... Štúr and his associates just codified what the inscrutable life had created itself. Nation cannot be invented.

This obscure premature outpouring of the nation spirit through yet masterful word of the poem was fully understandable. After all, the work of art, in any way being also horizontal, it is chiefly the vertical of the spirit. It is a beautiful cross. It applies for Sládkovič’s *Marína*, too. The beginning of the word was the nation. Parent of the word... ” [16]

The idea of brotherhood of all people in Christ led the Saints Cyril and Methodius to an original mission, enculturation-evangelization among the Slavs, and thus protected from the very beginning against the ethnic death. For mankind they have left permanent values co-building the spiritual culture of Europe [17].

4. Conclusions

“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.” [Ján Pavol II, *Slavorum apostoli*, p. 25]

It is all about spiritual renewal: to unite with the Christ and his Church, unite for we are people who appreciate material and spiritual values. Do not fight each other, and be tolerant when our attitudes and opinions may differ.

May the speech on Saints Cyril and Methodius serve as building stone of unity in Slovakia and Europe – simply put wherever we go because as John Paul II prayer goes: “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” [Ján Pavol II, *Slavorum apostoli*, p. 30].

The 1150th anniversary of the arrival of Saints Cyril and Methodius to our territory, their missionary work, apostolic activity from the present point of view, offers a chance to realize, that their life story and fate are the expression of

the Word of God and responsibility. It was the responsibility for the Word of God in the eyes of God. Through their acting they were responsible to God for the people who had found and felt the reason for living and hope by learning about the Gospel. Therefore, they had served self-sacrificing to this purpose which was their reason for living, and no hardship, suffering, unlawfulness or malevolence of the mighty men put them off from their path.

This is how we feel about their message and the example of the Saints Cyril and Methodius, and from this perspective we feel their continuous patronage over Europe, so troubled today by many crises caused predominantly by morality issues.

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