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MISSION OF THE THESSALONIKI BROTHERS AS THE EXAMPLE OF THE INCULTURATION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IN THE TEACHING OF JOHN PAUL II

Summary: The purpose of the article is to show the teaching of St. John Paul II on the Thessaloniki Brothers and their missionary ministry in the dimension of faith inculturation. Constantine (826–869) and Michael (c. 815–885), i.e. Saints Cyril and Methodius – were brothers who came from Thessaloniki, Greece, and are figures who still continue to arouse a great interest because of their contribution to the evangelization of some Slavic people and their cultural development through the creation of the alphabet, a written language in which they were able to learn about the Christian faith and the heritage of ancient Greece and Byzantium. The two Brothers are revered by both Orthodox Christians and Catholics because of their missionary ministry. It was carried out in unity with both the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which they belonged to, and Rome, as the popes gave their blessing and support to their ministry and the methods they used to preach the Gospel to the Slavs. Saint John Paul II, from the beginning of his pontificate, referred to the figures of Cyril and Methodius, emphasizing their ability to adapt their mission work to the mentality of the Slavs. He also declared them co-patrons of Europe that should breathe with „two lungs” – the western and eastern.

The article is divided into three parts. In the first part, we learn about the historical background of their missionary expeditions. The second part presents the development of Cyrillo-Methodian thought in the teaching of John Paul II. The final part includes the Slavic Pope’s statements on the merits of the Holy Brothers for the spread of the Gospel among the Slavs and for the development of their culture.

Keywords: Cyril, Methods, inculturation, John Paul II, culture, Slavs.

Constantine (826–869) and Michael (ca. 815–885), i.e. Saints Cyril and Methodius, brothers from Thessaloniki in Greece, are figures who still arouse great interest because of their contribution to the work of evangelization of some Slavic peoples and the development of their culture by creating the alphabet, the written language in which they could learn about the Christian

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faith, the heritage of ancient Greece and Byzantium. Both the Orthodox and Catholic Christians venerate the Thessaloniki Brothers due to the fact that their missionary activity was carried out in unity not only with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which sent them on missions to the Great Moravian State but also with Rome, whose popes blessed and supported their missionary activity and the methods they used to reach the Slavs with the Gospel. Saint John Paul II – from the beginning of his pontificate – referred to Cyril and Methodius, underlining the ability to adapt their missionary activity to the mentality of the Slavic peoples. He also announced them – along with Saint Benedict – co-patrons of the Church and Europe, which should breathe with “two lungs”, western and eastern.

The purpose of this article is to show the teaching of St. John Paul II on the subject of the Thessaloniki Brothers and their missionary activity in the dimension of inculturation of the faith. The first part will feature a display of their missionary activity. The second part will explore the development of the Cyril-Methodian idea as it was taught by John Paul II. Finally, in the third part, the significance of the Holy Brothers for the process of inculturating the Gospel among the Slavs will be discussed, as highlighted by the statements made by the Slavic Pope.

1. Historical context of the mission of the Thessaloniki Brothers

Slavs in Great Moravia (the hodiernal northern part of Lower Austria, eastern Czech Republic (Moravia) and most of Slovakia) were present from the 5th–6th century, depending on the Avar Khaganate. The latter were defeated by Charles the Great at the end of the 8th century. In 796, a synod of bishops gathered on the Danube declared that the territory taken from the Avars would be Christianized. In the first 30 years of the 9th century, Moravia was reigned by Mojmir, and Pribina reigned in Nitra. Around 835, Mojmir captured the Duchy of Nitra. His principality was called Great Moravia or the Great Moravian State. The first missions, led by Bavarian missionaries, mainly from Salzburg, Regensburg and Passau, took place during the reign of Mojmir and Pribina (Marsina, 2015, p. 37–39; Judák, 2014, p. 19–21; Lešný, 1987, p. 42–43; Ožóg, 2016, p. 22).

From the beginning of the 9th century, the Great Moravian state had difficult relations with the kingdom of the Franks, especially with the East Franks, who, on the one hand, evangelized the Slavs living there, and on the other hand, tried to subjugate them, also using the Church. The successor to the throne of Mojmir I and, at the same time, his nephew, Prince Rostislav, wishing to become

independent from the Franks both from the ecclesiastical and political point of view, in 861 or 862 asked Pope Nicholas I to send missionaries who could teach the people in their language. When he refused, pleading lack of Slavic-speaking priests, in 862, Rostislav asked the Byzantine emperor Michael III to send him a missionary bishop who knew the Slavic language.

The emperor, probably together with the patriarch Photius, chose two brothers for this mission: the priest Constantine, known as the Philosopher, and his older brother Methodius, at that time the superior of the monastery. Both brothers had previous missionary experience, having been sent first to the Muslim Arabs and then to the Khazars in the Crimea. They knew the Slavic language thanks to the presence of Slavs in Thessaloniki (Budniak, 2009, p. 24–28)¹.

In the autumn of 863, Cyril and Methodius arrived in Moravia, ceremonially received by Prince Rostislav. Before they got there, Cyril created an alphabet that was specially adapted to Slavic speech and translated part of the Holy Scripture (Ryguła, 2014, p. 109–123; Leśniewski, 2021, p. 33–41)².

Thus, when the Thessaloniki Brothers arrived in Moravia, missionary activity had been going on there for over 50 years. There were church organization structures and even native priests educated in Passau (Kumor, 2001, p. 111–112)³.

Staying in the duchy of Rostislav, they founded a school where they trained future priests and taught them the Slavic language. However, they did not achieve much success there, also because of the indecisive attitude of Prince Rostislav, who, fearing the German reaction, did not lend both Brothers adequate support. Therefore, after three years of intensive missionary work, they left Great Moravia to go to Constantinople (Marsina, 2015, p. 37–43; Leśny, 1987, p. 4447). On the way, they stayed for almost a year with Prince Kocel in Pannonia, who was a great supporter of the Slavic liturgy. Contact with Kocel turned out to be very useful in the future (Lehr-Spławiński, 1954, p. 150–151; Vavřínek, p. 116–148).

¹ Leśny included information on the origin and youth of Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius, described their first missions, Constantine's work on the Slavic alphabet and the first translations in this language, and the beginnings of the mission in Moravia (Leśny, 1987, p. 28–42).

² Sławski writes, that even before the expedition to Great Moravia, the necessary translations of the Holy Scriptures and liturgical texts needed for missionary and evangelizing work had to be made. It is not hard to guess the difficulties encountered by translators attempting to transfer Biblical and liturgical texts from Greek, a language with a rich literary tradition, into a completely unformed Slavic language. Constantine–Cyril coped very well with this difficult task. He was not only a good translator, but also the first Slavic poet (Sławski, 1991, p. 23).

³ Ożóg writes that according to the note in the Annals of Fulda in 845, 14 Czech tribal leaders with their entourage turned to Ludwig the German with a request for baptism, which was given to them in Regensburg (Ożóg, 2016, p. 22–23).

They then came to Venice. There, while waiting for a ship to Constantinople, they took part in a dispute with theologians, supporters of only three liturgical languages, which today we refer to as the “three-language heresy” (Hebrew, Greek, Latin) or “Pilationian”. In the face of accusations that they celebrated the liturgy in a Slavic language, which does not belong to the three “sacred languages” in which Pilate’s titulus of Jesus’ guilt was written: Jesus Christ the King of the Jews, the Thessaloniki Brothers replied that God wants to be praised in all languages, and the supporters of limiting only three of them were referred to as “pilatians”, i.e. followers of Pilate (Lehr-Spławiński, 1954, p. 151–152; Lehr-Spławiński, Moszyński, 1988, p. 8–13; Judák, 2014, p. 24).

Because there was a coup in Constantinople – Emperor Michael III was killed, and Patriarch Photius dismissed from office – at the invitation of Pope Nicholas I, who learned that the Brothers had the relics of St. Clement, the fourth pope, they went to Rome.

While they were on their way, the pope died, and they were greeted by another one, Hadrian II, who blessed the liturgical texts and the Holy Scripture translated into Slavic in the Basilica of Saint Mary Major and ordered the ordainment of the disciples of Constantine and Methodius. From that moment, the mission among the Slavs was under the direct care of the Pope (Budniak, 2009, p. 29–30).

The Brothers stayed longer in Rome because of the illness of Constantine, who took the habit of a monk and the name Cyril, and died three months later, on February 14, 869 and was buried in the Basilica of St. Clement. A few months after that, the Pope ordained Methodius a bishop and gave him the title of Archbishop of Sirmium (today Sremska Mitrovica in Serbia) (Vavřínek, p. 149–192).

On his way back to Great Moravia in 870, he was arrested upon the order of the Bavarian bishops. He was prosecuted and accused of acting on territory that did not belong to him. Methodius argued that it belonged directly to the Holy See, which had sent him there. The next pope, John VIII, learned about the capture, interrogation and conviction of the archbishop in Rome only in 872, which led to the release of Methodius in 873 (Marsina, 2015, p. 43–47; Lehr-Spławiński 1988, Moszyński, p. 17–47). 18; Leśny 1987, p. 49–62).

Methodius continued the work started with his brother and tried to celebrate the liturgy among the Slavs in Great Moravia in their language. German missionaries protested against this and kept Rome informed. As a result of these intrigues and denunciations, Pope John VIII in 879 forbade Methodius from using the Slavonic language in the liturgy, but he allowed the readings and sermons in this language. However, after Methodius’ visit to Rome in 880 and his explanation, the pope allowed the Slavonic language in the liturgy, but

without excluding Latin. The “German party” headed by Bishop Wiching, the Bishop of Nitra, did not give up on its plans and incited Svätopluk, Rostislav’s nephew and his successor, and the Pope against Methodius and the Slavic language. This made Pope Stephen V write a letter in 885 against the Slavic language in the liturgy and Methodius, who had been dead for half a year already (Leśny, 1987, p. 64–73; Lehr-Splawiński, Moszyński 1988, p. 19–27; Kumor, 2001, p. 113).

To sum up, the use of the Slavic language in the liturgy was first approved by Pope Hadrian II in the bull of 869–870 *Gloria in excelsis Deo*. In 873, Pope John VIII, through his legate Peter of Ancona, forbade the use of the Slavic language, which was confirmed in 879. However, thanks to the personal intervention of Methodius in 880 in the bull *Industriae tuae*, John VIII allowed the use of the Slavic language in the liturgy on condition that The Gospel was read first in Latin, then in Slavic. The Liturgy should be celebrated in Latin there, where the faithful wish it. Incited by Bishop Wiching and Prince Svätopluk, Pope Stephen V in 885 forbade the use of the Slavic language in the liturgy on pain of excommunication (Marsina, 2015, p. 48–56).

The mission of Saints Cyril and Methodius lasted in the years 863–885, and it seemed that after the death of Methodius, the Thessaloniki Brothers’ intention to incorporate the Christian faith into the language of the Slavs collapsed and would not return. After the death of Methodius, his disciples had to leave Great Moravia, which was the main area of activity of Saints Cyril and Methodius, and found shelter and conditions for development in Bulgaria. Thanks to the priests educated by Methodius, The slavization of the liturgical rite and language took place. Bulgaria then became an important center for the development of Christianity with the Slavic liturgy (Ozóg, 2016, p. 28–29; Moszyński, 1991, p. 42–43; Leśny, 1987, p. 82–87). The development of the Slavic language and the liturgy in this language took place together with their adoption, thanks to the activity of Bulgarian missionaries by Kyivan Rus’, several dozen years after the baptism from Constantinople (Leśny, 1987, p. 92–95)⁴.

Both in the Christian East and the West, the figures of St. Cyril and Methodius have been largely forgotten. A renewal of interest in the Thessaloniki Brothers and their work and topicality took place in the 19th century when national movements began to emerge among the Slavs. Anniversaries related to the activities of the Brothers (963 – the arrival in Moravia, 869 – the death of Constantine-Cyril, 885 – the death of Methodius) led to the organization of

⁴ Tamborra claims that the entry of Kievan Rus into the Cyrillo-Methodian community gave a European dimension to the world which, if it remained limited to Bulgaria and Macedonia, would become only a linguistic and ethnographic curiosity (Tamborra, 1992, p. 289).

scientific conferences in Velehrad and to the increase of pilgrimages to the tomb of St. Methodius (Budniak, 2009, p. 39–43).

The figures of St. Cyril and Methodius were also within the sphere of interest of Russian Occidentalists and Slavophiles. Occidentalist Aleksandr Herzen saw their mission in a European context: the alphabet they created gave the Slavic peoples access to civilization. Slavophiles saw in the Thessaloniki Brothers and Russian Orthodoxy a manifestation of the superiority of the East over the West and of the Orthodox Slavs over Western Europe. In 1846, a secret Fraternity of Saints Cyril and Methodius was established in Kyiv, whose aim was to unite the Slavs and liberate them from foreign subjugation. The fraternity referred to the mission of the Thessaloniki Brothers amongst all Slavs.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Catholic Church also recognized the importance of St. Cyril and Methodius for the unity of Christians and winning over the Slavs to the Catholic faith. In 1855, the organization *L'Oeuvre de St. Cyrille et de St. Methode*, led by three Russian Jesuits: Ivan Gagarin (1814–1882), Ivan Martynov (1821–1894) and Evgenij Balabin (1815–1895). *L'Oeuvre's* task was to prepare missionaries to work on converting Orthodox Slavs to Catholicism. The patronage of the two apostles of the Slavs was to indicate the unity of the Church in the times of their activity. However, since the Orthodox portrayed Rome as the persecutors of Cyril and Methodius, it was necessary to show how it really was and to convince them of the pope's amity towards the Slavic peoples.

Thanks to Pope Leo XIII, the missionary work of Cyril and Methodius regained its rightful place. It was he who broke the silence prevailing in the West about the Brothers for almost ten centuries. The tribute for them from the Western Church stopped at Pope John VIII, who, in 880, in the letter *Industriae tuae*, wrote that Methodius was a right-believing saint. The benevolence of the popes towards Cyril and Methodius and the Slavonic liturgy were forgotten by the Roman Church for many centuries. Only after the encyclical of Leo XIII, *Grande munus Christiani nominis propagandi* of September 30, 1880, did the Catholics and the entire Christian West draw attention to the evangelizing activity of the Thessaloniki Brothers. In it, the Pope underlined their missionary activity, placing both Brothers on an equal footing with other great missionaries. The Pope emphasized their attachment to the Roman Church. He wrote that the mission initiated by the will of the Byzantine emperor received its seal in the Holy See, which approved the usage of the Slavic language in preaching and translating sacred texts. Due to this work, the Slavic peoples have always held great reverence for the two Saint Brothers. The Roman Church also honored them during their activity, especially since Cyril was buried in the Church

of St. Clement in Rome, which made the communion between the Holy See and both apostles of the Slavs even more clear (Tolomeo, 2015, p. 207–213).

Since the encyclical of Leo XIII, each successive pope: Benedict XV, Pius XI, John XXIII, Paul VI, spoke about the importance of St. Cyril and Methodius for the evangelization and unity of the Church. A special title for this was given to St. John Paul II, the first Slav on the Holy See.

2. The development of the Cyril-Methodian idea in the magisterium of John Paul II

Emilia Hrabovec notes that the Cyril-Methodian thought of John Paul II should be placed in the broader context of his vision of rebuilding the unity of Europe, divided at the beginning of his pontificate into two blocs – eastern and western. This unity was originally based on the following pillars:

- Europe was born and created on the Christian faith, which is the „soul” of Europe and its lifeblood. Christianity is the true spring of unity among the peoples of Europe. Economics and politics alone cannot build true European unity;
- Slavic peoples, who entered the stage of history by becoming baptized, have been an integral part of Europe for over a thousand years. In order to rebuild the unity of the continent, it is necessary to give voice to the Slavic peoples, often marginalized and forgotten, and to make their spiritual riches available to the entire continent. In this sense, the Pope considered the choice of the Slavic Pope as providential (Hrabovec, 2015, p. 322; Kopiec, 2019, p. 364–370).

While Wojtyła’s European thought was the fruit of a long reflection, which matured even before his election to the See of Peter, it seems that the Cyril-Methodian vision took concrete shape only a few months after his accession to the throne of Peter.

Right during his first pastoral visit to his homeland, in a sermon preached in Gniezno on June 3, 1979, the Pope, although briefly, mentioned the evangelizing mission of the Saint Thessaloniki Brothers: „On the occasion of the baptism of Poland we must call to mind the Christianization of the Slavs [...] that of the Moravians and Slovaks, who were reached by missionaries before 850 and then in 863 by Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius, who came to Greater Moravia to consolidate the faith of the young communities; that of the Czechs, whose Prince Borivoj was baptized by Saint Methodius. The field of the evangelizing influence of Saint Methodius and his disciples also included the Vislans and the Slavs living in Serbia” (John Paul II, 1979).

The Cyril-Methodian idea was more clearly visible in the following year, 1980, when there were two anniversaries: the publication of John VIII's bull *Industriae tuae* (880), in which the Pope confirmed the use of the Old Slavonic language in the liturgy and the centenary of Leo XIII's encyclical *Grande munus* (1880) in which he extended the cult of Cyril and Methodius to the whole Church and showed subsequent popes the path of appreciation of Slavic Christianity to rebuild Europe unity and achieve reconciliation with Orthodox Churches.

On May 31, 1980 in Paris, during the meeting with representatives of non-Catholic Christian denominations, the Pope spoke for the first time about the two spiritual lungs of Europe, referring to the words of the Russian poet and convert from Orthodoxy to Catholicism, Vyacheslav Ivanov (Jean-Paul II, 1980).

The first mature speech of John Paul II about Cyril and Methodius took place in 1980 on the occasion of anniversaries related to them. Then the document *Egregiae virtutis* was created, in which the Pope declared both saints, along with St. Benedict, co-patrons of Europe (Jan Paweł II, 1997, p. 451–455). In this way, the Pope wanted to restore to the Slavic peoples their spiritual memory and to do justice to their contribution to the common European heritage, which is almost completely unknown in the West. In the first place, however, the Pope wanted to underline the symbolic dimension of the two saints and the topicality of their evangelizing and civilizational work for every contemporary European. The message of Cyril and Methodius was able to propose to him the discovery of common Christian roots and renewal while respecting the complementary diversity of cultures and rights of each nation, the true unity of nations and the Church (Hrabovec, 2015, p. 323–326).

Hrabovec emphasizes that the raising of the Cyril-Methodian heritage to the European and universal Church level gave Catholics from Slavic countries the courage to discover and appreciate their own historical heritage much older than communism and to strengthen resistance against persecution. At the same time, the West of the Old Continent was too accustomed to identifying Europe with itself and identified Eastern Europe with the Third World countries, not seeing in it the eastern part of its own continent. In this context, the papal document barely broke through the mental closure and the tendency to treat it as a nice but meaningless gesture of the Slavic Pope towards the Slavic nations, without any specific meaning for Western countries. For this reason, in order to reach the consciousness of the West more effectively, John Paul II made the Cyril-Methodian message the leitmotif of many speeches and homilies delivered in 1981 and put in motion many scientific and academic initiatives on this

subject. On February 14, 1981, the Pope, surrounded by cardinals, bishops and priests of various nationalities, presided over the first Holy Mass in the memory of the Thessaloniki Brothers after raising their memory to the rank of a solemnity (Jan Paweł II, 1981, p. 4; Hrabovec, 2015, p. 326–327).

On the occasion of the 1100th anniversary of the death of Methodius in 885, John Paul II announced a jubilee year, during which (June 2, 1985) he issued the encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli* (John Paul II, 1985). The document is a synthesis of the Pope's Cyril-Methodian thought. John Paul II presents Cyril and Methodius as a bridge between East and West and precursors of ecumenism, as they are the last generation of saints venerated in the East and West, from the period when the Church was still one, although conflicts were already emerging that heralded its division. Nevertheless, they were able to maintain fidelity as well as spiritual and canonical communion both with the Mother Church of Constantinople, which had sent them and with the Roman Church, whose primacy Constantine defended in his *Scholion*, written in Rome in 868, which appointed Methodius archbishop and legate *ad gentes*, as well as with the young Moravian-Slovak Church of which they were the founding fathers (Hrabovec, 2015, p. 323–333).

The Pope devoted a lot of space to “inculturation”, related to the Second Vatican Council and modern theology, present in the mission of the Thessaloniki Brothers. They became „Slavs in their hearts”. They were convinced that the heresy, attributed to them by the Latin clergy, did not involve the use of the mother tongue in liturgical texts. Rather, they believed it was about creating obstacles to understanding the Gospel. To address this issue, they translated the Sacred Scriptures into the language of the people, adapted liturgical and Greco-Roman legal texts to their language and mindset, and made a significant contribution to the culture and social life of the Moravian-Slovak people. This contribution indirectly benefited other Slavs as well. Their efforts not only made them pioneers of the modern missionary method but also inspired others to join the mission. The main topic of the encyclical is the example of the life of the Brothers themselves: their farsightedness, doctrinal orthodoxy, fidelity, apostolic zeal, generosity, love, respect for people and nations, selfless concern for their true good, but also perseverance and a spirit of sacrifice.

Unlike the years 1980–1981, the Methodian Jubilee and the encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli* met with a strong response in the form of many religious, academic and cultural initiatives in various European countries (Hrabovec, 2015, p. 336–337; Berg, 1987, p. 351)⁵.

⁵ One of the important events of the 1100th anniversary of the death of St. Methodius was the request of the Bavarian bishops for forgiveness for the wrongs done to St. Methodius, who was imprisoned

Hrabovec accentuates the fact that after the fall of communism, the ideal of European unity did not disappear from the teachings of John Paul II, who was a great supporter of the accession of Poland and other Eastern European countries to the European Union with the mission of evangelizing Europe (Hrabovec, 2015, p. 347).

Further statements of John Paul II on the importance of the mission of St. Cyril and Methodius can be found in the apostolic letter *Orientalis lumen* signed on May 2, 1995 (John Paul II, 1995a)⁶ and in the encyclical *Ut unum sint*, published on May 25, 1995 (John Paul II, 1995b). In the third point of the first document, *Orientalis lumen*, the Pope puts great emphasis on the fact that Saints Cyril and Methodius are the patrons of the unity of the Church and can be role models for us in this regard today as well. In point number 16, *Ut unum sint*, the Pope recalled his encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli*, published on the occasion of the 1,100th anniversary of the evangelization mission of the Thessaloniki Brothers⁷.

3. The Thessaloniki Brothers as the fathers of the faith and culture of the Eastern Slavic nations in the teaching of John Paul II

The main work of the Thessaloniki Brothers was the creation of the alphabet, called the Glagolitic alphabet.

Dimitri Salachas (Greek Catholic priest of the Byzantine Rite, Apostolic Exarch of Greece in 2008–2016) emphasizes that in the magisterium of John Paul II, Saints Cyril and Methodius remain a living model for the Church and missionaries of all times. They did not force their very rich Greek culture on the Slavic nations and they translated the Holy Scripture and liturgical texts into the Slavic language for this purpose (Salachas, 2014, p. 159; Colzani, 2014, p. 189).

A similar statement is made Zygfryd Glaeser when he writes that in their missionary activity, there are no signs of contempt or superiority towards the Slavs. They certainly tried to spread what was best and most valuable in their

for more than two and a half years and tortured, addressed to the Orthodox bishops of Bulgaria on September 21, 1985 (Berg 1987, p. 351).

⁶ “A Pope, son of a Slav people, is particularly moved by the call of those peoples to whom the two saintly brothers Cyril and Methodius went. They were a glorious example of apostles of unity who were able to proclaim Christ in their search for communion between East and West amid the difficulties which sometimes set the two worlds against one another. Several times I have reflected on the example of their activity, also addressing those who are their children in faith and culture” (John Paul II, 1995a, n. 3).

⁷ “With regard to the Catholic Church, I have frequently recalled these obligations and perspectives, as for example on the anniversary of the *Baptism of Kievan Rus’* or in commemorating the eleven hundred years since the evangelizing activity of Saints Cyril and Methodius” (John Paul II, 1995b, n. 16).

culture. First, they became acquainted with the culture of the people to whom they were sent and which they wanted to develop further. So Cyril, together with his students, developed the Slavic alphabet and translated the Bible and liturgical books into the Old Slavic language. This made it possible to celebrate the liturgy in a language understandable to the Slavs. Thanks to the translation of ideas, theological and philosophical concepts into the Slavic language, they transferred elements of Greek culture to Slavic territories and gave rise to the development of Slavic culture. The program of Cyril and Methodius proclaimed the right to its own autonomous culture and Church, and thus rejected any discrimination between nations. Following Saint Paul (cf. Gal 3:26), they believed that there were no better or worse nations (Glaeser, 2014, p. 33–34.46; Górká, 1991, p. 187).

Beginning in 1980, Pope John Paul II spoke many times about the importance of the Brothers of Thessaloniki for the faith and culture of the Slavs.

In the apostolic letter *Egregiae virtutis* of 1980, which announced Saints Cyril and Methodius, along with St. Benedict, Patrons of Europe, John Paul II emphasized that in order to fulfill their mission among the Slavic peoples, they translated the sacred Books into Slavic language for liturgical and catechetical purposes, thus laying the foundations for all their writings. 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 among all peoples and nations, for whom the first record of the Slavic language still remains the basic point of reference in the history of their literature (cf. Jan Paweł II, 1997, n. 1).

In a homily delivered on February 14, 1981 in the Basilica of St. Clement in Rome, John Paul II emphasized that the translation of the sacred liturgical and catechetical books into the language of the people makes Saints Cyril and Methodius not only the apostles of the Slavic nations but also the fathers of their culture. For Saints Cyril and Methodius, this meant giving priority to the preaching of the Gospel: this proclamation did not kill, did not destroy, did not eliminate; on the contrary, it consolidated, exalted and underscored the authentic human and cultural values typical for the character of the evangelized countries, contributing to the opening and solidarity, thanks to which it was possible to overcome antagonisms and create a common spiritual and cultural heritage. This laid the solid foundations of justice and peace” (cf. Jan Paweł II, 1981).

Also, in a speech to the participants of the international colloquium „Common Roots of the Christian Nations of Europe” given on November 6, 1981, the Slavic Pope said that Cyril and Methodius preached the truth, salvation, peace. This is why they respected the spiritual and cultural riches of each people, convinced that the grace given by Christ does not destroy nature but elevates

and transforms it. It was for fidelity to the Gospel and local cultures that they invented the alphabet to enable the transcription of the sacred Books in the language of the Slavic peoples, and thus, despite the protests of those who treated the three sacred languages: Hebrew, Greek and Latin as a kind of dogma (*pilatiani* – followers of Pilate – as St. Cyril called them), introduced the Slavic language also to the liturgy, with the official approval of the Pope, and translated the prologue of St. Cyril's Gospel as the first message. John. Greeks by origin, Slavs by heart, sent from Rome on a canonical mission, they are a shining example of Christian universalism that breaks down barriers, extinguishes hatred and unites everyone in the love of Christ, the Universal Redeemer (cf. Jan Paweł II, 1991, p. 151).

A kind of culmination, but also an extension of the teaching of Pope John Paul II on the original method of evangelization used by the Thessaloniki Brothers was the encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli* of June 2, 1985 (John Paul II, 1985; Górski, 2014, p. 63–67; Kopiec, 2019, p. 357–359). The Pope underlines there that by preaching the Gospel to the Slavs, “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” (John Paul II, 1985, n. 9). “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” (John Paul II, 1985, n. 10).

Conclusion

During his pontificate, Pope John Paul II repeatedly recalled his Slavic origin, which he considered a gift of Providence. In his teaching, he willingly referred to the metaphor of Europe's “two lungs”, which represents Eastern and Western Christianity, but also to the Slavic nations and those living in Western Europe. European identity consists not only of the Western tradition, symbolized by St. Benedict, but also the Eastern tradition, represented by St. Cyril and Methodius, whom the Slavic Pope announced co-patrons of Europe, along with St. Benedict. The Polish Pope, in many documents, especially in the apostolic letter *Egregiae virtutis* and in the encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli*, pointed to the

merits of the Thessaloniki Brothers for the evangelization and culture of the Slavic nations. The key turned out to be the Slavic language, which was introduced to the liturgy by the Thessaloniki Brothers. However, their importance is not limited to the past. Their missionary method, which the Pope calls inculturation, is also a model for the contemporary Church in proclaiming the Gospel not only to people who do not yet know Christ but also to those, especially in Europe, who have abandoned the Christian faith. Saints Cyril and Methodius, according to John Paul II, encourage the hodiernal Church not only for the mission but also for the new evangelization, for the search for a language, in the metaphorical sense as well, in which the modern man will accept the verity of the Gospel.

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Misja Braci Soluńskich jako przykład inkulturacji wiary chrześcijańskiej w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu jest ukazanie nauczania św. Jana Pawła II na temat Braci Soluńskich i ich działalności misyjnej w wymiarze inkulturacji wiary. Konstantyn (826–869) i Michał (ok. 815–885), czyli święci Cyryl i Metody, bracia pochodzący z Salonik w Grecji, są postaciami, które wciąż budzą wielkie zainteresowanie ze względu na ich wkład w dzieło ewangelizacji części ludów słowiańskich i rozwój kultury dzięki stworzeniu alfabetu słowiańskiego, języka pisanego, w którym mogli poznawać wiarę chrześcijańską, dziedzictwo starożytnej Grecji i Bizancjum. Bracia Soluńscy są czczeni zarówno przez chrześcijan prawosławnych, jak i katolików ze względu na to, że ich działalność misyjna odbywała się w jednościsłości z patriarchatem Konstantynopola, do którego należeli, jak i z Rzymem, którego papież udzielił błogosławieństwa i wsparcia ich działalności misyjnej oraz metodom, które stosowali, by dotrzeć z Ewangelią do Słowian. Święty Jan Paweł II od początku swego pontyfikatu nawiązywał do postaci Cyryla i Metodego, podkreślając ich umiejętność dostosowania się w działalności misyjnej do mentalności ludów słowiańskich. Ogłosił ich również współpatronami Europy, która powinna oddychać „dwoma płucami” – zachodnim i wschodnim.

Artykuł składa się z trzech części. W pierwszej poznajemy tło historyczne wypraw misyjnych Cyryla i Metodego, w drugiej rozwój myśli cyrylo-metodiańskiej w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II, w trzeciej – wypowiedzi papieża na temat zasług świętych Braci dla szerzenia Ewangelii wśród Słowian i dla rozwoju ich kultury.

Słowa kluczowe: Cyryl, Metody, inkulturacja, Jan Paweł II, kultura, Słowianie.

Language proofreading by a native speaker: Mark Jensen

Weryfikacja artykułu – finansowane ze środków Ministerstwa Edukacji i Nauki na podstawie umowy nr RCN/SP/0292/2021/1 z dnia 1.11.2022 r.; kwota środków finansowych stanowiących pomoc przyznaną w ramach programu „Rozwój czasopism naukowych” 19 610 zł.

