

REVIEW

Milan Čáky, *Politický a štátopvorný význam Veľkomoravskej a Cyrilo-metodskej tradície* [Political and state-building importance of the Great Moravian and Cyril-Methodius tradition], pp. 325.

First of all, I have received this book as a courtesy from my colleague, doc. PhDr. Milan Čáky, CSc. He had no intention to ask me for a review. I have decided to do so after reading the introductory part of the book. The rationale for my personal selection is a multitude of logical reasons. First, there is a complete lack of academic and political writings or books dedicated to the political features of the Cyril-Methodius tradition and most importantly their heritage to the country and regions I (we) live in. The second reason is rather simple; I have studied and have been working at the institution that carries the name of both Christian missionary brothers. One of the other reasons is vested in the recent 1150th anniversary of their mission to Great Moravia. For more or less, it is an incredibly interesting publication pointing on the invaluable effect of the early missions to the region of Central Europe with the cultural, political, linguistic and religious legacy.

Most recent books dealing with Cyril and Methodius heritage were published either by historians analyzing their lives and activities during their mission to Central Europe or the other publications have exclusively religious context. The reviewed book combines these approaches and adds the political context and importance. The author has written 325 pages that almost exhaustively confront the Saints' missions with relation to the building of the Slovak history. The book is structured into nine uniformly arranged chapters with a preface both in the Slovak and English language. At the end of the publication we may refer to the list of the most important documents related to then political and ecumenical processes. The list of references also contains multiple sources, from Slovak Christian archbishops to academic scholars and historians at the Slovak Academy of Sciences (including authors Ratkoš, Kučera, Maršina as well as archbishops and cardinals of Slovakia). The reference list confirms the narrative and comprehensive structure of the book itself.

It is important to state that the author of the monograph is not a novice in the research area. Partial results of his current research have been published in three reviewed studies in *Studia Politica Slovaca*, a journal for political science, latest political history and international relations issued by the Institute of Political Sciences of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava. Similarly, a foreign monograph has been published by the author in 2013.

The essential aim of the publication strives to examine the political relations established as a result of Cyril and Methodius activities in scope of the political development in Great Moravia. The major part of such relations are developed

multilaterally, but mostly on the level between the Great Moravian Empire and the Holy See, while enabling the progress in the foreign policy of Great Moravia - such as Svätopluk's efforts to gain a state sovereignty acknowledged by Rome. Similarly, the author's approach considers relations between Great Moravia and the internal state power as a part of establishing the power structures by means of promoting sovereign church institutions: Archbishoprics of Moravia and Nitra which serves as the basic link between the throne and Holy See. Another relation is based over the creation of a liturgical language for Slavs, moral and legal norms and Christianity deprived of the political pressure fueled by the Bavarian (East Frank) Episcopal Church. The author stems from these relations as the academic and historical background for his interpretation and thesis construction.

The book is based on a premise that the two missionaries are perceived in our society as those whose task was to introduce Christianity and to carry out the religious process for the Slavonic pagans, firstly to codify the new alphabet, to write liturgy in the language spoken by the people and, importantly, to establish a scholarship system (p. 13). This is also illustrated by the statement: *"The activities of Constantine and Methodius and the task of the Byzantine mission were at first of education, cultural and then of political importance resulting in the state sovereignty of the Great Moravian Empire that at that time was a state of our Slavonic ancestors. This political aim was achieved in the period of Methodius life"* (pp. 13-14). This statement clearly indicates the long-perceived historical, cultural and political legacy of the two missionaries which ultimately resulted in the Preamble of the Slovak Constitution adopted on September 1st 1992.

The first chapter of the book is devoted to the Slavonic ancestry and the influence of the Western Christianity as the central force in development of the civilization progress in the Carpathian basin. Here, the author states that Christianization of the Slavs is a result of a political compromise – *action politicus* in exchange to power influence of the French empire. These activities even predeceased the events of the Great Moravian Empire and have become one of the major cultural and religious contests of those times. The following chapter argues the reasons of the Byzantine mission in Great Moravia from the Christian, educational and political context. The author declares the power delegations and multifocal cultural and political influence from two centres – Rome and Byzantine. Thus, one of the solutions to guarantee the power distribution in the region was to acquire bishops and teachers who would have been able to spread the religion in an understandable way and language to Slavs. The liturgical language had become central issue of the Great Moravian Emperors as well as the political argument. With such arguments a vital role for a written language was essential as well. The second chapter also comprises the early life analysis of both missionaries and the author continues with a comprehensive analysis of the written word – Glagolitic as the result of the Constantine's initiative and invention. This caused a revolution in literacy and education of people. The third chapter rather repeats the progress of the adoption of a liturgical language for the Slavs and the spread of the mission of Thessaloniki bishops but discusses the Papal Bull *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, which officially confirmed the political and cultural reasons of the mission.

The fourth chapter considers the political activism and influence of Svätopluk, the sovereign emperor of Great Moravia. Here we are informed about rather incomplete

and non-comprehensive information on the political career of Svätopluk which is part of a controversy and different understanding among the historians, priests and analysts. The chapter also provides a story-telling method of the historical grievances towards Methodius, his imprisonment and reconciliation of the relations between the French emperors, Great Moravian political leadership and the Byzantine missionaries. The reconciliation is mostly visible in the following Papal Bull *Industriae Tuae* which belongs to the most important documents of the early Slovak history.

The following chapters offer an analysis of the internal and international conflicts over the systematic use of the liturgical phenomenon in Central Europe and ultimately selecting the future steps for the Byzantine mission. The author correctly argues how the betrayal, corruption and failures of individuals endangered the position and status of early Christianity and power distribution in the region as well as the existence of the Empire itself.

Despite the dissolution of the Great Moravian Empire, the legacy of the mission has lived up to date. It had rooted deeply in the Slavonic political thinking as well as the liturgy spoken by the language of the people enhanced the use of the Christian traditions – in the perspective of Slovakia, Poland and Balkan countries at least.

The second part of the book is devoted to the arguments and interpretation of the Cyril and Methodius tradition as a collective identity which is an update to all the writings and historical legacies available. The author quite comprehensively illustrates the memory of the tradition, its political legacy within the Slovak emancipation process in the early 17th century. A very influential eighth chapter directly focuses on the Slovak national emancipation using the sources from Great Moravia and Cyril-Methodius tradition. These activities are inevitably bound with Anton Bernolák, native of Trnava and his struggles for the language, the codification of the Slovak language and its modifications. This had become a source of national defense and identity enhancement during the Hungarian Empire and the group of activists around Ľudovít Štúr in 19th century which ultimately resulted in the adoption of two important documents – The demands of the Slovak nation and the Memorandum of the Slovak nation. This had also been the starting process of celebrating the mission of Cyril and Methodius in Moravia with the inspiration to set up the holiday of their incoming to the 5th of July.

The final chapter discusses the state-creational importance of the Great Moravian and Cyril-Methodius tradition. The Byzantine mission and the bishops had become integral part of the Slovak history, present and future. The first Slavic Pope John Paul II. claimed St. Cyril and Methodius as co-patrons of Europe as their dedication to pan-European perspective of positive influence.

After reading the book I have received plentiful information about the life and career of missionaries, their political and cultural legacies as well as the insights to the creation and investigation of the Slovak and also pan-European cultural effects and deficits. The author has used plenty of information sources including archive materials which are very beneficial to the ultimate contribution of the publication.

The author has proved to be well informed and studied in the respective field and there is hardly any historical imperfection that I would have claimed without being controversial or anti-systematic. The book is an illustration of how deeply the

tradition and work of the missionaries is rooted in the Slavic annals with a more narrow and interpretative influence over the current political and cultural developments in Central Europe and also beyond.

At the end, let me paraphrase the author who quite comprehensively depicts the contents of the book and its philosophy: *“The Great Moravian and Cyril and Methodius tradition had been a source of the Slovak national life for centuries. Both significantly determined the formation and character of the Slovak national culture, and the spiritual and political life of Slovakia shaping the modern Slovak nation as a political platform for the development of the Slovak Republic in 1993”* (p.14).

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