

Vatican by Augustinus

Slavorum Apostoli

Using Cyril and Methodius to symbolize the common roots of East and West, raises many ambiguities.

On July 2, Pope John Paul II issued his fourth encyclical: *Slavorum Apostoli*, on the Slavic church, highlighting the roles of Cyril and Methodius, two brothers from Salonica who evangelized the Slavs in the 9th century. The encyclical comes at a time when the Soviets have gone to great lengths to prevent any kind of contact between the Pope and the Slavic peoples.

The Russian Orthodox hierarchy has repeatedly and violently attacked the Pope for his opposition to the pro-Marxist Theology of Liberation. A Bulgarian delegation which went to the Vatican stated clearly that if the investigations continued into the "Bulgarian connection" to the May 13, 1981 attempt on the Pope's life, an entire people would be blamed. Last year the Pope was refused permission to go to Lithuania for celebrations in honor of St. Casimir. And Czech authorities refused to allow the Pope to attend July 7 celebrations in honor of Cyril and Methodius, at Vehelrad in Czechoslovakia.

By issuing the encyclical now, the Vatican is undoubtedly trying to open up a dialogue with the Slavic peoples, despite the hostile propaganda campaigns of those regimes. Cyril and Methodius are the saints most venerated in the countries of Eastern Europe.

Unlike earlier encyclicals, *Slavorum Apostoli* is in the style of an epistle, a less solemn genre, more focused on a specific theme. John Paul II traces the lives of Cyril and Methodius, praising their methods:

"The characteristic which I want to underline in a special way in the conduct of the apostles to the Slavs, Cyril and Methodius, is their peaceful way of building the Church, guided by their vision of the Church as one, holy, and universal." He says that the two brothers maintained respectful relations with the Roman pontiff, while being part of the Eastern Church: "They were authentic precursors of ecumenism. . . . For us men of today their apostolate also possesses the eloquence of an ecumenical appeal: It is an invitation to rebuild, in the peace of reconciliation, the unity which was gravely undermined after the times of Saints Cyril and Methodius and, in the very first place, the unity between East and West."

The document ends with a prayer critical of the Soviet regime, that religious freedom be granted to the Slavic peoples, so that "men and nations can continue again without obstacles" to exercise freedom of conscience, the freedom to live and profess the faith.

Using Cyril and Methodius as symbols of the common roots between East and West opens the doors to many ambiguities, however. The two Slavic brothers spread among the Slavs an anti-Christian doctrine, rejecting the Augustinian *Filioque*—that the Holy Spirit flows alike from Father and Son, who is both Man and God, the foundation of the value assigned to the creative individual in Western culture. By contrast, the Eastern Church, and

the cultish practices it spread through such as Cyril and Methodius, is the theology of the Eastern totalitarian state, submerging the individual.

The conversion of the Slavs was an operation conducted and coordinated by imperial Byzantium, which utilized pagan cults and syncretic religious mixtures centered around the Mithra cult, the official mystery religion of the Legions of the Roman Empire. Is it accidental that the basilicas in which the bodies of the two missionaries are buried, Cyril in St. Clement's in Rome and Methodius in Vehelrad in Czechoslovakia, both arose on the remains of important sites of the Mithra cult?

The noted expert on Slavic religion, the Dominican Father Jiri Maria Vesely, correctly stresses:

"Not accidentally it was the Byzantine Patriarch Photius, bitter enemy of the *Filioque*, who sent the two missionaries among the Slavs to counter the movements inside the Church which wanted the introduction of the *Filioque* into the Credo."

The Pope appears to have kept this little problem in mind, and seems to try to "Westernize" the two missionaries: "Even if the Slavic Christians, more than the others, gladly perceive the sainted Brothers as 'Slavs at heart,' they nonetheless remained men of Hellenistic culture and Byzantine formation, men, that is, who in everything belonged to the tradition of Eastern Christianity, both civil and ecclesiastic."

It has been emphasized that the Pope's encyclical is strictly religious. However, given that the epistemological and philosophical basis of the Soviet system is precisely that paganism against which St. Augustine and his successors fought, it is unlikely that any discussion of Christianity in the East can be nonpolitical.