

The Vatican by Augustinus

The Pope's Slavic turn

Saints Cyril and Methodius are evoked for the unification of the Eastern and Western churches, with perilous implications.

Returning from East Asia, Pope John Paul II was interviewed by the journalists in his entourage on whether his next trip will be to the U.S.S.R. He answered:

"Russians are my brothers because my language is very similar to theirs. We are brother Slavs."

An unusually explicit statement from the first Slavic Pope, who in 1980, with the Apostolic Letter *Egrediae Virtutis*, announced the march toward unification between the Western and Eastern Christian churches, around a "Slavo-centric" concept of Europe.

The Letter said, "After centuries of separation between the Eastern and Western Church . . . starting from the Second Vatican Council, decisive steps have been taken in the direction of full communion; it seems that the proclamation of Sts. Cyril and Methodius as the patrons of Europe, alongside St. Benedict, corresponds fully to the signs of our time. . . ."

The brothers Cyril and Methodius, born in Thessalonica, set out to convert the Slavs in the first half of the 11th century at the request of Prince Rostislav of Moravia, who asked the emperor and the envoys from the Church of Constantinople to not only teach the Gospel but to make it accessible in the population's own language. Cyril translated the Scriptures into what became known as Old Church Slavonic, developing the "Cyrillic alphabet."

Out of that process was born the Slavic liturgy which spread initially through Greater Moravia, which in-

cluded at that time Bohemians, Czechs, Serbs, and White Croats, and reached into part of Silesia up to Krakow, the city where the current Pope lived and taught.

Modern followers of the two missionaries are distinguished by their crude polemics against the Western tradition linked to the principle of the *filioque*, the doctrine added to the Creed which asserts that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son as well as the Father—affirming the crucial role of human beings in the ongoing process of creation.

Rejection of the *filioque* matches the viewpoint of the Russian Orthodox Church, which has been long devoted to ending the primacy of the Roman Church and elevating Moscow to the rank of "third and final Rome."

The two Eastern tendencies are *apparently* at odds. As a famous priest commented:

"The problem of the Third Rome is not a religious issue but a political one; Moravia was the first Slavic locale reached by Christendom, through Cyril and Methodius. . . . Russia was only converted later—therefore Moravia is the Third Rome."

In the book *Writing Over the Water*, Fr. Jiri Maria Vesely writes: "Cyrillian-Methodian Christendom blends three fundamental European elements: the First Rome (St. Peter's Rome), the Second Rome (Constantinople), and the Third Rome (Velehrad)."

He goes on to assert that in becoming Archbishop of Krakow, Karol

Wojtyla also became the successor to Methodius, and through him the successor to St. Peter.

Despite the fight over whether Moravia or Moscow should be the Third Rome, both sides view the *filioque* the same way. To quote Vesely:

"The Latin clergy sank in the depths of its invidious ambition and greed, but the Latins tried to focus the polemic toward ideological ground by fanning the *filioque* issue. This addition to the Creed was officially presented at the Council of Toledo (675), and the French clergy accepted it at Worms (868). The Cyrillian-Methodian clergy, however, did not insist on the *filioque*. . . ."

The project afoot for an anti-*filioque* alliance between Orthodox and Roman Catholics is highly dangerous. It would introduce a Europe "from the Atlantic to the Urals" where sovereign nations are subordinated to distinctions on the basis of linguistic differences. And it would create "unity" by eliminating the *filioque* which has been the main cause of Western development in the last millennium.

The other threat is linked to the symbiotic relations between the Eastern churches and the political institutions of their respective countries, whose plans for world domination are well known. Concrete proof of how the Kremlin means to use East-West church relations was given in the letter of Patriarch Maximon of Bulgaria to Pope John Paul II demanding the release of the Bulgarian spy Antonov, in jail in Italy for complicity with Ali Agca, who tried to kill the Pope three years ago. Patriarch Maximon states:

"The innocence of our follower and compatriot is beyond discussion." Therefore, Maximon demands of the Pope, "We urgently ask you to show your absolute conviction of Antonov's innocence."