



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO BULGARIAN DELEGATION***

*Feast of Sts Cyril and Methodius
Saturday, 24 May 1997*

*Mr President,
Dear Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. I am particularly pleased to welcome your Delegation, which has come to Rome following a well-established tradition, on the occasion of the annual feast of Sts Cyril and Methodius.

Your pilgrimage to the tomb of St Cyril in the ancient Basilica of St Clement shows that the Bulgarian people gratefully recognize the importance of the evangelizing mission accomplished by these holy brothers.

The missionary work of Cyril and Methodius played a decisive role in the destiny of the Slav peoples and profoundly marked the spiritual and cultural history of Europe.

As natives of Salonika sent to the Slav nations on a mandate from Constantinople, the brother saints knew how to preach the Gospel in communion with the whole Church. Even at difficult moments and in adversity, they preserved the bonds of unity and charity to the point of becoming models of ecclesial unity in the East and West. In reflecting on the importance of this great period of evangelization, I wrote in the Encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli* that “for us today their apostolate also possesses the eloquence of an ecumenical appeal: it is an invitation to restore, in the peace of reconciliation, the unity that was gravely damaged after the time of Sts Cyril and Methodius, and, first and foremost, the unity between East and West” (n. 13).

2. The activity of the holy brothers has another dimension closely linked to their evangelizing mission. They did not impose their certainly very rich Greek culture on the Slav peoples, but, remembering the words of Scripture: "Let every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (cf. Phil 2:11), they devoted themselves to translating the sacred books. "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" (*Slavorum Apostoli*, n. 10). Their work, especially the creation of an alphabet adapted to the Slav language, made an essential contribution to the culture and literature of all the Slav nations.

I would also like to remind you that, through their direct disciples, the mission of the holy brothers was confirmed and developed in your country thanks to very dynamic centres of monastic life. From Bulgaria, Christianity then spread to the neighbouring countries and extended as far as Kievan Rus' (cf. *ibid.*, n. 24).

3. If today a large part of Europe seems to be seeking its identity, it cannot fail to return to its Christian roots and especially to the work of Cyril and Methodius. This undoubtedly represents a contribution of primary importance for the unity of Europe in its religious, civil and cultural dimensions. A detailed study of the activity and legacy of the holy brothers will lead to a rediscovery of the values that shaped Europe's identity in the past, but which can still renew the face of this continent today.

As I thank you for your friendly visit, I offer my fervent wishes to your Delegation and to the Bulgarian authorities and people.

I hope that by giving new relevance to the heritage of Cyril and Methodius, everyone can actively help rebuild your country, as well as Europe. I entrust these wishes to the Lord and I implore the benefits of his blessings upon you.