



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO A DELEGATION
FROM THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA**

23 May 1997

*Dear Minister,
Gentlemen,*

Once again on the happy occasion of the Feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius you have come in pilgrimage to the tomb of Saint Cyril in the Basilica of Saint Clement, in the centre of Old Rome. Because of their unique role in the development of Europe's spiritual and cultural heritage, the Holy Brothers from Salonika stand out as a symbol of the unity of this Continent, and the lessons of their lives are especially timely today as Europe seeks a new sense of its own identity and destiny.

Cyril and Methodius show above all the importance of seeking the unity of all Christians in the one Church of Christ. They had been sent to Eastern Europe by the Patriarch of Constantinople in response to the request of Prince Rostislav of Great Moravia. The Prince wished to learn about the Gospel of Salvation and asked that there be sent to his people "a Bishop and teacher . . . able to explain to them the true Christian faith in their own language" (*Vita Constantini*, XIV, 2-4; Encyclical Letter *Slavorum Apostoli*, 5). The Western dioceses bordering on Great Moravia believed that the responsibility for bringing the Cross of Christ into the Slav countries was theirs, and so hindered the two Brothers in their undertaking. Cyril and Methodius therefore went to the Pope for confirmation of their mission to the Slavs. Thus, in an age when the Church was not divided between East and West, a joint intervention of Rome and Constantinople proved of great benefit for the work of spreading the Gospel. I continually pray that the moment will soon arrive when the traditions of both East and West, of which Saints "Cyril and Methodius are as it were the connecting links", will come together "in the one great Tradition of the universal Church" (*ibid.*, 27).

The influence of the two Saints endures in our European heritage, especially in the culture of the Slav nations, which owe their 'beginning' or development to the work of the Brothers from Salonika (cf. *Slavorum Apostoli*, 21). Their saintly lives speak to us still of the importance of cross-cultural understanding, essential to co-existence and peace throughout Europe and especially in the Balkans. It is my hope that your stay in Rome will strengthen your commitment to preserve and emphasize the Christian heritage and artistic treasures of your own land that have survived the vicissitudes of history, so that the whole of Europe may benefit.

May Almighty God bless you and your fellow-citizens with unity and peace.

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