THE CYRIL-METHODIAN TRADITION IN THE CONSTITUTION OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

TRADIȚIA CHIRILO-METODIANĂ ÎN CONSTITUȚIA REPUBLICII SLOVACIA

CZU: 342.4(437.6):235.3 **https://doi.org/10.59295/spd2025s.33**

Matej MINDÁR
ORCID: 0000-0003-3822-8660
e-mail: matej.mindar@tnuni.sk
University in Trenčín, Trenčín, Slovakia

Sumar. *Tradiția chirilo-metodiană are rădăcini adânci și durabile în istoria poporului slovac – o moștenire lăsată de părinții noștri Considerată o moștenire spirituală și culturală edificată de frații din Salonic, Sfinții Constantin (Ciril) și Metodiu, în secolul al IX-lea, pe teritoriul Marii Moravii, într-un interval de timp relativ scurt, această tradiție constituie temelia maturității și măreției națiunii slovace, precum și forța motrice a parcursului său istoric. Scopul articolului este de a analiza semnificația tradiției chirilo-metodiene în contextul actual, inclusiv reflectarea acesteia în Constituția Republicii Slovace. În vederea realizării acestei analize, autorul a utilizat metoda documentară, examinând surse bibliografice și digitale referitoare la viața și activitatea Sfinților Constantin (Chiril) și Metodiu. Tradiția chirilo-metodiană din Constituția Republicii Slovacia este venerată nu doar de politicienii slovaci cu orientare pro-națională, ci și de însăși Biserica Catolică din Slovacia. În interpretarea acestora, moștenirea Sfinților Constantin (Chiril) și Metodiu se reflectă în mod esențial în efortul istoric milenar al poporului slovac pentru dobândirea independenței politice și ecleziastice..*

Cuvinte-cheie: *Marea Moravie; Constituția Republicii Slovacia; Sfântul Constantin (Chiril); Sfântul Metodiu.*

INTRODUCTION

The Cyril-Methodian tradition has deep and lasting roots in the history of the Slovaks - a legacy of the fathers. As a spiritual and cultural heritage established by the Thessalonian brothers Saint Constantine (Cyril) and Saint Methodius in the ninth century in Great Moravia in a very short period, it is the foundation of the maturity and greatness of the Slovak nation and the driving force of Slovak history [6].

Great Moravia as a state was formed by the union of the Nitra principality (Slovak Republic) and the Moravian principality (Czech Republic) in the 830s by the Moravian ruler Mojmír I. This union was accomplished by the expulsion of the previous Nitra ruler Pribina, who had been established as the ruler of Blatnohrad (today territory of southern Hungary). We first hear about the Moravians as an ethnic community in 822 when their representatives came to the court of the Frankish ruler, presented gifts, and submitted themselves [5]. *"In the written reports that the Frankish sources provided about the*

Danube Slavs since the year 791, the Moravians are not mentioned anywhere. However, we hear more often about the Slavs living on both coasts of the Danube, i.e., also in present-day Slovakia." [5, p. 72] Slovak historian Professor Matúš Kučera believes that these Danubian Slavs are the ancestors of the Slovaks – the old Slovaks. *"The "new state" that was formed by the union of the Moravian and Nitra principalities did not receive a new name. By sensitively tracking sources, it can always be determined when only Moravians are referred to and when old Slovaks are mentioned. Mojmír never managed to unite the two countries into a single entity. The dualism of this state continued to function throughout its existence and ultimately was a major cause of its dissolution."* [5, p. 73].

The name Great Moravia (hé Mégalé Morabié) was first used by the Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII. Long after the state fell apart [5]. Another Slovak historian and former politician Anton Hrnko believes that the creation of a unified Great Moravian state under the leadership of the Moravian Mojmír dynasty was the culmination of the unification process in the old Slovak society [3]. *"When we look at the unification of Moravia with Nitra in broader contexts, we find that it happened at a time of weakening Frankish power. Perhaps that is why the Franks temporarily tolerated it, especially when Mojmír I did not challenge the vassalage to the Frankish Empire."* [3, p. 95]. After the Franks stabilized internally in 846, they dethroned Mojmír I. and placed his nephew Rastislav on the throne. According to Anton Hrnko, at this time there was a renewed division of Great Moravia into the Moravian and Nitra principalities [3]. *"However, the Franks did not install their trusted vassal Pribina on the Nitra throne at that time, who was certainly striving for it, but the young Svätopluk from the Mojmír dynasty was installed on the throne."* [3, p. 95]. Anton Hrnko also states that in the early periods following the replacement of Mojmír I, Rastislav and Svätopluk most likely cooperated successfully. He therefore holds the view that the integration process of the Old Slovak tribes across the Danube was not disrupted by the intervention against Mojmír I [3]. *"It was during this period that the Great Moravian state took on its form, which lasted until the actual dissolution of Great Moravia at the beginning of the tenth century."* [3, pp. 95-96]. The centre of what was then Great Moravia was located in the territory of present-day Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Austria, and Hungary. The Moravian and Nitra Slavs were most likely one ethnic group during the existence of the state of Great Moravia – the old Slovaks, despite the existence of two principalities, Moravian and Nitra. After the dissolution of Great Moravia, the Slovaks living in the Moravian part gradually became part of the Kingdom of Bohemia. Slovaks inhabiting the Nitra region of Great Moravia were gradually integrated into the emerging Hungarian state. This assertion is also confirmed by some Slovak historians.

The Cyril-Methodian tradition for contemporary Slovak society within the Slovak Republic cannot be understood without an explanation of important historical contexts. Slovak political scientist and historian Eduard Chmelár argues in this regard that the Great Moravian ruler Rastislav wanted to politically free himself from the control of the

Franks by achieving ecclesiastical independence for Great Moravia. In the year 861, he requested Pope Nicholas I of Rome to establish an independent ecclesiastical province for Great Moravia. However, the pope rejected his request. As a result, a year later in 862, he turned to the Byzantine Empire with his request [4]. *"At this point, it should be noted that establishing one's own bishopric was a goal for every monarch in the Europe of that time who wanted to consolidate power. It was a sign of sovereignty."* [4, p.33]. The original request of Prince Rastislav for the creation of an independent ecclesiastical Great Moravian province was rejected by the Byzantine Emperor Michal III. [4]. *"The envoys of Great Moravia arrived at the court of Michal III at a time when the conflict between the Roman pope and the Byzantine patriarch was reaching its peak, and Photios did not want to escalate this dispute further... As a skilled diplomat, however, he proposed to the Byzantine emperor to send brothers Constantine and Methodius to Great Moravia instead of a high church official."* [4, p. 34].

Before the arrival of Cyril and Methodius in Great Moravia in 863, Christianity was already present in its territory. The first Christian missionaries were Irish and Scottish monks, who also converted the Bavarian Germans. After the defeat of the Avars on the central Danube by Charlemagne in 796, the spread of Christianity was handled by Frankish clergy. It was alongside these Frankish missionaries that Cyril and Methodius began to spread Christianity as well. The aim of their mission was to spread the Christian faith in the language of the people, as at that time it was only allowed to spread in Latin, Hebrew, and Greek. Cyril created a script for the old Slovaks and other Slavs, which is now known as Glagolitic. It is considered to be the predecessor of Cyrillic. They translated the entire liturgy, such as the texts of the services, and also part of the Bible, into the language of the ancient Slavs. When Constantine and Methodius went to Rome to see the pope at the turn of the years 866 and 867, they had clearly defined goals. Along with the confirmation of Old Slovak as the fourth liturgical language and the ordination of their disciples, they also demanded the establishment of an independent Great Moravian ecclesiastical province. Pope Hadrian II accepted them in 868 and met their demands for the establishment of a school headed by Methodius, the ordination of Old Slovak disciples to various levels of priesthood, and the confirmation of the Slavic liturgical language. Constantine fell ill in Rome and entered a monastery, where he took the name Cyril and died on February 14, 869. However, Methodius did not make it to Great Moravia. He remained in Blatnohrad with ruler Kocel', the son of the ousted Nitra ruler Pribina. He sent a message to the pope requesting that Method be appointed as bishop in Pannonia. The pope complied, and Method became a bishop in 869. The pope appointed him as archbishop and papal legate with authority over the Slavic nations. Later, Pope John VIII officially installed Method as the archbishop of Great Moravia in 873. This way, the sovereignty of Great Moravia was completed. The establishment of an independent ecclesiastical province of Great Moravia was of immense significance for the ancestors of today's Slovaks. At that time Great Moravia was ruled by ruler Svätopluk, who was significantly influenced by the Frankish priest Viching. Method was accused in

Rome of improperly using the Old Slovak liturgical language in worship and not being orthodox in some Christian doctrine. Because of this, Method had to go back to Rome, where he eventually convinced the pope. The pope then wrote a letter to Svätopluk – the bull Industriae Tuae (June 880), in which he expresses great favour towards the Slavs and Method. He recognizes and confirms him not only as the Archbishop of Panonia but also as the Archbishop of Moravia. Method continued to strive and put in great effort to deepen the Christian faith among the Slavs. Shortly before his death, Method wanted to complete the translation of the Holy Scriptures into Old Slovak language. He chose two of his students for this task and completed this great work within eight months. He died at the age of seventy on April 6, 885 [2]. Just before his death, he appointed Gorazd, one of his disciples of Slavic (Slovak) origin, as his successor. The place of his death and grave was probably the capital of Great Moravia, but to this day we do not know how to determine its location [10]. After the methodological death, his disciples were gradually expelled from the territory of Great Moravia to neighbouring states, where they continued to spread Christianity. After the fall of Great Moravia at the beginning of the tenth century and the gradual formation of the Kingdom of Hungary, Latin liturgy prevailed in our territory instead of the Old Slovak language. However, the state-forming and spiritual legacy of Cyril and Methodius within the Kingdom of Hungary has persisted among Slovaks to this day. During the nineteenth century, within the framework of the national emancipation struggle of the Slovaks, the legacy of Saints Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius began to be remembered more [2].

The feast of Saint Cyril fell on February 14 and Saint Methodius on April 6. However, Croatia, Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia were granted permission to celebrate the memory of both at the same time, on July 5. On December 31, 1980, Pope John Paul II declared the Thessalonian brothers Saint Constantine (Cyril) and Saint Methodius as co-patrons of Europe [10].

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The aim of the article was to analyse the historical Cyril-Methodian tradition for the present, which is also included in the Constitution of the Slovak Republic. An analytical method was used to examine book and internet sources concerning Saint Constantine (Cyril) and Saint Methodius.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Cyrill-Methodian tradition in the Constitution of the Slovak Republic has a special significance for the Slovak Republic and the Slovak nation. It is stated in the preamble: *"We, the Slovak nation, recalling the political and cultural heritage of our ancestors and the centuries-old experiences from struggles for national existence and our own statehood, in the spirit of the Cyril and Methodius spiritual legacy and the historical legacy of Great Moravia, drawing on the natural right of nations to self-*

determination, together with members of national minorities and ethnic groups living in the territory of the Slovak Republic, in the interest of lasting peaceful cooperation with other democratic states, striving for the application of a democratic form of government, guarantees of a free life, the development of spiritual culture, and economic prosperity, therefore we, the citizens of the Slovak Republic, affirm through our representatives this constitution." [8]. In this regard, the question arises as to why the Slovak Republic refers to the more than a thousand-year-old legacy (tradition) of Saint Constantine (Cyril) and Saint Methodius and Great Moravian statehood?

The first reason can be categorized as the national liberation and national emancipation struggle of Slovaks for their own statehood within the former Kingdom of Hungary and former Czechoslovakia. The Cyril-Methodian tradition and the legacy of Great Moravia still serve as a certain historical identification framework for many Slovaks. When the Enlightenment reached Western Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century, it was Emperor Joseph II of Habsburg who began to implement Enlightenment reform efforts in Hungary. Ideas of national identity and the need for a distinct language came to the forefront. Under the influence of revival ideas stimulated by the Enlightenment, particularly the Bratislava seminary became prominent. Here, the young Catholic intellect is being gathered – the generation of Bernolákovci, led by the Roman Catholic priest Anton Bernolák, who also founded the Slovak Learned Society, which contributed to spreading ideas about the glorious past of the Slovaks and the missionary activities of Saints Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius. In their work, the Bernolákovci saw the roots of the Slovak language and culture, and in Rastislav's Great Moravian Empire, the foundation for Slovak national and state independence [6]. We can therefore say that the Bernolákovci were the first in Slovak history to raise the question of the Slovak written language and closely tied their efforts to the Cyril-Methodian tradition [1].

After the Catholic Bernolákovci generation, the Evangelical generation of Jьtúrovci supporters emerged, led by Ľudovít Štúr, Jozef Miloslav Hurban, and Michal Miloslav Hodža. The Štúrovs relied on the glorious past of Great Moravia and on the legacy of Saint Constantine (Cyril) and Saint Methodius in their political and patriotic actions for liberation from Hungarian oppression [6]. Ľudovít Štúr encouraged Slovak volunteers for the national cause by referring to ancient (old) Slovakia with the words: *"The impoverished and oppressed Slovakia, once the land of Cyril and Methodius, today enslaved and deprived of its independence for a thousand years."* [6, p. 77]. Similarly, Jozef Miloslav Hurban called on volunteers with the words: *"to reclaim the Slovak land which St. Cyril and Methodius once walked upon and which the Hungarians took from the Slovaks, to wrest it back from the Hungarians."* [6, p.77]. The Jьtúrovci, as evangelicals, emphasized the national aspect of the Cyril-Methodian legacy, while the Catholic Bernolákovci stressed its religious aspect. Great Moravia was not only a symbol of a glorious past for the Jьtúrovci, but also a program for national and religious-cultural activities in the present. Their efforts were directed towards the revival of Great Moravia. The revived Cyril-Methodian tradition ignited patriotic enthusiasm among almost all Slovaks

during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries within the former Kingdom of Hungary and former Czecho-Slovakia. At the Memorandum of the Slovak Nation from 1861, a demand arose within the Habsburg Monarchy for the creation of a Slovak district with its own emblem and the declaration of Saint Constantine (Cyril) and Saint Methodius as the national patrons of the Slovaks [6]. The Memorandum states the formulation: *"Cyril and Method converted us Slovaks to Christianity."* [6, p. 83]. From the Memorandum under pressure from the Hungarian government, Emperor Franz Joseph I fulfilled only a few requests. He allowed the establishment of three Slovak gymnasiums, the founding of the Slovak National Society on August 4, 1863, where the first chairman was the Catholic bishop Jьtefan Moyszes and the vice-chairman was the Evangelical bishop Karol Kuzmány. The establishment of the Slovak Matica was closely related to the celebration of the thousandth jubilee of the arrival of Saint Constantine (Cyril) and Saint Methodius to Great Moravia, and thus the founding of the Slovak Matica was a reminder of the Cyril-Methodian tradition. It should also be noted that in 1863, the feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius was moved from March 14 to July 5, and this change was requested from the Holy See by the Bishop of Banská Bystrica, Jьtefan Moyzes [6].

The second reason within the Cyril-Methodian tradition can also be found in the ecclesiastical aspect. By recognizing the sovereignty and independence of this Central European state entity during the time of Saint Methodius as the Archbishop of Great Moravia, the ancestors of today's Slovaks gained international recognition. At that time, such a guarantee was provided by the Holy See in Rome. The Cyril-Methodian tradition was influenced in recent history by the decision of the Holy See from December 30, 1977. At that time, Pope Paul VI. elevated the Trnava Apostolic Administration to an archdiocese through the apostolic constitutions Praescriptionum sacrosancti and Qui divino during the Christmas season and established a separate Slovak ecclesiastical province with its archbishopric metropolitan see in Trnava. According to the recently deceased Slovak Cardinal Jozef Tomko: *"Our forefathers in faith, St. Cyril and Methodius laid the first foundations for such an establishment. As early as 880, a diocese was established in Nitra. After the fall of Great Moravia, our territory became part of the Kingdom of Hungary and was included in the ecclesiastical structures of that state. After the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918, with new state borders, there was also a demand for ecclesiastical organization. Negotiations with the government, World War II, territorial and political changes, and various difficulties delayed the final solution. At that time, it was more important to achieve at least the appointment of good shepherds against the pressure of the anti-religious regime that prevailed. The regime did not wish to strengthen the religious sentiment of the inhabitants by having the seat of the planned Slovak ecclesiastical province established in the capital city of Bratislava. Even the potential election of Nitra was considered too favourable to the Church by the regime. Long and difficult negotiations led to the Holy See elevating the Trnava Apostolic Administration to an archdiocese on December 30, 1977, and simultaneously raising it to a metropolitan see, to which other Roman Catholic dioceses throughout Slovakia were*

subordinate as suffragans. In addition, it adjusted the borders of the dioceses according to state borders, thus creating the Slovak ecclesiastical province, whose borders coincided with the state borders. And today we commemorate the 40th anniversary of its establishment and our church independence, when no territorial unit of the Church belonged to another state and vice versa. And for that, we thank the Lord God." [9]. In this regard, it is also necessary to remind that the establishment of a separate Slovak ecclesiastical province in 1977 was paradoxically contributed to by the then Slovak communist politician and president of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, Gustáv Husák. Testimony to this commendable activity is also provided by the first Slovak metropolitan and emeritus archbishop of Trnava, Mons. Ján Sokol. *"During that time, the highest party official and president of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic was Slovak Gustáv Husák. As a lawyer, he was very aware that if firm ecclesiastical borders are not set, neither are state borders guaranteed. His support was very significant for us in this regard."* [7].

CONCLUSIONS

The Cyril-Methodian tradition stated in the Constitution of the Slovak Republic is honored not only by pro-national Slovak politicians but also by the Catholic Church in Slovakia itself. In their understanding, the tradition of Saint Constantine (Cyril) and Saint Methodius is primarily about the more than thousand-year historical struggle of the Slovaks for political and ecclesiastical independence.

Current Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico perceives this Cyril-Metodian tradition from a state-building and state-law perspective and commemorates it greatly. As a young starting politician, he voted for the Constitution of the Slovak Republic in 1992, which includes the Cyril-Metodian tradition. Therefore, we can say that the Cyril-Metod message in the Constitution of the Slovak Republic is justified.

REFERENCES:

1. BAGIN, A. 1993. *Cyrilo-metodská tradícia u Slovákov.* First edition. Bratislava: SAP, 1993. 63 pp. ISBN 80-85665-08-5.
2. HNILICA, J. 2012. *Svätí Cyril a Metod (Horliví hlásatelia Božieho slova a verní pastieri Cirkvi).* Bratislava. Vydavateľstvo Spolku slovenských spisovateľov, 2012. 184 pp. ISBN 978-80-8061-648-9.
3. HRNKO, A. 2024. *Prechádzky slovenskými dejinami (Slovenské dejiny v európskom kontexte do roku 1526).* Bratislava: Igor Laciak, 2024. 302 pp. ISBN 978-80-974624-0-6.
4. CHMELÁR, E. 2021. *Rekonštrukcia slovenských dejín (Formovanie slovenskej identity).* Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Spolku slovenských spisovateľov. 2021. 238 pp. ISBN 978-80-8202-149-6.
5. KUČERA, M. 2011. *Slovenské dejiny I. (Od príchodu Slovanov do roku 1526).*

Bratislava: Literárne informačné centrum, 2011. 368 pp. ISBN 978-80-8119-038-4.

6. VRAGAŠ, Š. 2013. *Cyrilo-metodské dedičstvo v náboženskom, národom a kultúrnom živote Slovákov.* Third edition. Bratislava: LÚČ, 2013. 144 pp. ISBN 978-80-7114-929-3.
7. MINDÁR, M. 2020. Interview with Mons. Ján Sokol. In: *Slovenské národné noviny.*. Available: https://snn.sk/mons-jan-sokol-musime-ako-narod-drzat-spolu/ [Cited: 9.7. 2025]
8. Slovak national council. 1992. *Constitution of the Slovak Republic.* Bratislava: [Cited: 8.7. 2025]. Available: https://www.prezident.sk/upload-files/20522.pdf
9. Unknown author. 2023. 46 rokov samostatnej cirkevnej provincie na Slovensku – 30. december 2023. In: *Rímskokatolícka farnosť sv. Martina z Tours v Lipanoch.* Available: https://farnostlipany.sk/?p=2851 [Cited: 9.7. 2025].
10. Unknown author. Cyril a Metod, mnísi, slovanskí vierozvestci, spolupatróni Európy. In: *Životopisy svätých.* Available: http://www.zivotopisysvatych.sk/cyril-a-metod/ [Cited: 7.7. 2025].