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FOREWORD TO FOREWORD

When SS Cyril and Methodius arrived in Great Moravia in 863, with the gift of the Holy Scriptures, the Church had been living in the spirit of God's Word for centuries. There were about 30 dioceses in Spain and an equal number in Gaul. In Britain and Ireland the Church had established a strong foothold and Germany felt the blessings of the activities of Irish missionaries St Columban and St Boniface. Although Italy was being destroyed by the wars with the Goths, Rome remained the spiritual centre of the world. But Constantinople was much bigger. It had armies and wealth, architects and artists, it had theologians and philosophers and above all Constantinople had a rich tradition of academic life and education. Greek literature was after Thucydides and Plato enriched also by SS Athanasius, John Chrysostom and Basil who apart from Athens studied in Constantinople too. St Irenaeus of Lyon in Gaul, Hieronymus, Augustine and the sons of St Benedict had, through their works, great influence on the west. This culture reached Slovakia via Charlemagne, and our forefathers became acquainted with the riches of the East from Constantinople through SS Cyril and Methodius.

When SS Cyril and Methodius brought to Great Moravia the Old Slavonic alphabet and the translation of both the Old and New Testament, they were aware of the value of their gift. Nowadays we are inundated by books that are of no value, which carry no ideas, or just tiny bits and faint traces of wisdom. But centuries ago one book was above all the treasures of the Earth. It was called the Book-or the Bible. There people could find the essence of wisdom. They honoured this book, so strong and brilliant in its wisdom, unique in the context of the world's literature. This book formed the life of nations and their cultures. The Church placed the Holy Scriptures at the altar as the Word of God. Ceremonial oaths were made upon it. This reverence is still there. When the Gospels are read in the church amidst burning candles and incense people stand up. After the reading the Gospels are kissed by the priest.

According to the Church it is Christ himself who talks through the Bible. The love of the Scriptures is love of Him. For centuries the most precious gifts of nature were used and the most skilful artists were called to celebrate the Scriptures. The text was written on the finest parchment often in gold or silver calligraphic letters. The names of God and Jesus were often written in gold. The cover of the Scriptures, ornamented with ivory and gems, spoke of love and reverence of the Scriptures.

After SS Cyril and Methodius had finished their translation of the New Testament, especially of the Gospels, it was probably St Cyril, then called Constantine the Philosopher, who then introduced this spiritual masterpiece in a very special way-with the so-called "Proglas". It is a "Foreword to the Holy Scriptures"-a wonderful poem, a literary jewel that stands at the very beginning of our culture.

...“for as it was promised by the prophets Christ comes to gather the nations for He is the Light of this world... Verily I say unto you, Slovienes this gift is indeed a gift from God... a gift to souls, a gift that never perishes a gift to all the souls that accept it.... Matthew and Mark, Luke and John teach all the nations saying:... Hear! Listen to the voice of your reason hear you, the whole Slovien nation hear the Word, sent by the Lord Word that feeds hungry human souls...”

The arrival of Constantine and Methodius in Great Moravia must have been a true spiritual revolution. They came to Nitra and to Devín with books translated in our language, they gathered the best of our youth at their academy and gave them education in philosophy, mathematics and music. They taught them how to study the Bible and how to understand its mysteries – all in a language they understood. And at the end, they celebrated the "service-mass" in Old Slavonic, together! The script they brought became the basis of Slovak and other Slavonic cultures. It was a treasure more precious than gold and silver. This script made a reality the hope that the Emperor Michael III expressed in a letter to Prince Rastislav, in which he spoke of "a new script for your language... so that you too are counted among the great nations".

The words from the Scriptures and liturgical books became in the Old Slavonic a living and functional language of literature. SS Cyril and Methodius achieved a success that was unheard of – Old Slavonic became the fourth liturgical language just like Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. Later it also became the language of a flourishing literature. In "The Life of Methodius" we read what happened in Rome in 867 after Pope Hadrian II received the Holy Brothers together with their disciples: "Hadrian blessed their teachings, put the Gospels in Slavonic at the altar of St Peter the Apostle. 'In' The Life of Constantine" it is said: "The Pope accepted Slavonic books, blessed them, laid them in the church... and holy liturgy was sung upon them. Then he ordered the Slovien disciples to be ordained. And after they were ordained they sang the liturgy in the Church of St Peter the Apostle in Slavonic... and they sang praises the whole night long... "

Our poet looked at the Word that was at the beginning of the life of our nation and that was its strength for generations: "O, Lord preserve the word of our fathers, for that was the manna on which our youth flourished and gave fruit, that was the manna that gave and will give our people power to grow, even when hit by hard times... "

Look at the ideas that were considered central in the lives of our forefathers. This is a prayer that we can find in "The Life of Constantine:"

"My Lord and my God you extended the sky and laid the earth, you made everything out of nothing you always hear those that obey your will and your commandments. Hear my prayer... "

From the beginning our manna in the desert was the word of the Gospels. This word, which later, due to unfavourable circumstances, was not used directly on our territory, was in an astonishing way preserved among the heirs of eastern liturgy, kept alive though the contacts with other Slavonic languages and incorporated in church songs that were sung here for centuries.

Critics dubbed "Proglas" a "unique piece of poetry, a fervent praise of the Word, written with an exquisite sense for the beauty of the word and a gift to explain the truth and mysteries through metaphors and images." A connoisseur of Old Slavonic and other literatures of that time, wrote that such an invocation to a nation to cherish books written in its own language is absolutely unique. "Proglas" demonstrates the high level that Old Slavonic reached in the field of poetry from its beginnings. This all in age when most of the other nations in Europe could boast no artistically demanding poetry forms written in their national languages.

Today it is necessary to underline that inventing the Old Slavonic script was not only a cultural milestone. It was also a spiritual and a truly Christian act. The first books that were translated into Old Slavonic were the Holy Scriptures and liturgical books. Other books, dealing for example with law and other topics, were written only later. And the first work of art, the wonderful poem "Proglas", was again directly connected with faith. The foremost task of the new script was to serve the faith and Christian life. This is what Emperor Michael said to prince Rastislav in "The life of Constantine": "Try... from the bottom of your heart... to search for God... encourage everyone to walk on the way of truth... so that you too will accept the reward in this and in your future life for all souls that will accept Christ... in that way you will be remembered like the great Caesar Constantine... "

The word of the Gospels was our spiritual treasure from the beginning. Even if, on our territory, it was used in liturgy only scantily, it survived as a part of church and folk songs, proverbs, sayings and folk stories. Today we ask ourselves how could Constantine write such a truthful

and impressive poem as "Proglas", or the Foreword to the Gospels? Fra Angelico is believed to have said : "Who wants to paint Christ must live with Him... "

Constantine lived what he said in "Proglas"-he lived the Gospels and he lived with Jesus Christ. In "The Life of Constantine" we read about his fruitful mission in the land of the Khazars: "When Kaghan said farewell to the Philosopher, he gave him many gifts. But he did not accept them and said: Give me all the Greeks you captured, that will be the most precious gift. They gave him two hundred of them. Satisfied he went on his way. " Such an act of love was quite unique in those times. This was the novelty that the Gospels brought about. The author of "Proglas" lived in their spirit. Not only his words, but his whole life spoke of Christ. A similar act of Christian love testifies to the beauty of his soul and of his personality. This is how "The life of Constantine" describes his visit to Kocel, son of the Prince Pribina: "Kocel liked Slavonic books very much, learned them and chose fifty disciples to be taught them too. He honoured Constantine in many ways and then bade him farewell. And Constantine took no gold, no silver nor anything from Kocel or Rastislav for his teaching, but asked for 900 prisoners and then let them go. " This is the spirit of "Proglas". This is the Christian love and forgiving that the Church through the faithful ones taught both with words and with actions.

In our and in every other country the words of "Proglas" have lost nothing of their power: "Christ comes to gather the nations for He is the Light of this world... " These words written sometime after 863 found their echo in the words of St Peter's successor, John Paul II when he said to the youth of Slovakia during his visit in 1995:

"My dear boys and girls... Christ, son of God and our redeemer fully responds to the purest desires of human heart. He is come so that we" might have life and that might have it more abundantly. " (*John 10, 10*) He has "the words of eternal life" (*John 6, 68*). He is "the way , the truth, and the life. " (*John 14, 6*) J

Proglas tells us: "*Hear! Listen to the voice of your reason hear you, the whole Slovien nation hear the Word, sent by the Lord Word that feeds hungry human souls..... likewise withers the soul. when it lives not the way of God, when it hears not the Word of God.... Verily I say unto you, Slovienes this gift is indeed a gift from God... Matthew and Mark, Luke and John teach all the nations... "*

The same words could be heard from Peter's successor in Nitra, where the first Christian

temple was founded in 828 and first dioceses in 880. "Dear friends, contemplate the priceless value of God's gift. Since the times of St Cyril and Methodius it has been cherished by generations of your forefathers. Accept it in freedom that recognises responsibilities and cultivate it further. "

Pope John Paul II made in Apostolic letter of 31st December 1980 SS Cyril and Methodius co-patrons of Europe-together with St. Benedict. Since that time Constantine the Philosopher has been rediscovered and is more vividly remembered in Christian Europe and other countries. While some historians may have doubts about who was the real author of "Proglas", many take it for certain that Constantine was the spiritual father of this poem that reflects his spirit, his heart, his education, his poetic talents, his apostolic zeal, and his figurative language. The figures of speech and images of "Proglas" are the same as were used during the mission in the land of the Khazars, his disputes in Venice and are remind us of his typical phrases, such as "to write on water" etc. Through his "Proglas" Constantine is alive, here in Slovakia, in Europe and in the whole world. Even today, his words have lost nothing of their power.

Christ comes to gather the nations,... he has been gathering them for centuries even though people, his own people stood in his way. He wants to gather the nations in love and understanding, even if we still most of the time stand in his way. So we live in hope and we live in misery, we live in misery and we live in hope. The words of "Proglas" that describe the soul that is dead without books find a special echo in Slovakia, where we experienced a great persecution of Christ's followers. Jails, gulags and, before that, gas chambers-souls without the law of God were not only dead, but were wretched as well.

How many dead souls are in the world and in Europe today? This is a thought that makes one shudder... Christ is left on Golgotha. He, the Way, the Truth, the Life is exiled far from Bethlehem. What animosity some people show him... One of our poets said: trees and Walls everywhere are trembling with horror. It is as if Herod had come to life again... who will gather the nations if not Christ, the Truth and the Life? What will happen to us if we expel Him? Another poet cried out: "O Lord, do not depart from Europe!"

Slovakia might be unique among the nations of Europe and the world for it carries in its state insignia the cross and the Preamble to the Constitution refers to the truths of Christianity, to traditions of SS Cyril and Methodius and to values of life. Now that we have achieved liberty in the Slovak republic, we often stand looking around and ask, what we are to do, whom we should follow and trust. Is that necessary? We have everything we need for a healthy development of our nation. It is only through our work and our common efforts that we can go forward. Our nation has in the span of a thousand years build a manifold and flourishing culture.

It grew from the lives of our fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, from their hearts and their souls, from their love and their sacrifices. They drew strength inside and outside the temples from prayers, words of God and his mercy. They lived and grew "in God's way" as it is said in "Proglas". This is the way the professors and students of Academia Istropolitana (a university founded in 1465) lived, it is way that was followed by people at the University of Trnava founded in 1635. It was the way of the great spirits of this nation, of people like Bernolák, Hollý, Mojzes, Kuzmány, ·túr, Sládkovič, Radlinský, of the generations of our poets and scientists.

What about us and our time? Today we and our country too have to grow in God's way. Our future too lies in ourselves. As one of our poets said, the seed of things to come, of our destiny and future is not growing outside, but inside, it is in individuals, families, nation, in schools and fields, factories and in life. "Proglas" says: "for to the one who will accept these letters Christ himself will reveal his wisdom, your souls too he will

And it has a lot to offer to other nations too.

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