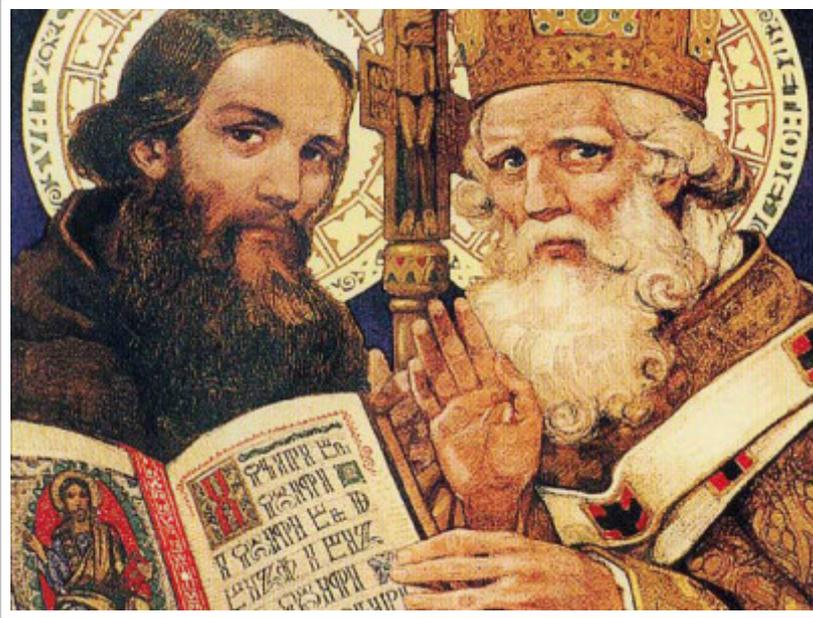


Something that Missionaries Could Learn From Cyril and Methodius

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In AD 863, saints Cyril and Methodius (henceforth C & M) brought the light of the written Gospel to my illiterate Slavic ancestors. If you haven't heard of these “Apostles of Slavs”, please read the [Wikipedia article](#) at least. As I was looking through their life and ministry again, I realized how much do they challenge some of the present missional practices and paradigms. Let me show you four of my points.

Firstly, C & M didn't choose the destination themselves. They were chosen according to their abilities. I've heard many (wanna be) missionaries going like, “God has called me to ...” China/India/Hungary etc. I know that it sounds crazy, but in most cases, I hear people being “called” to countries that are extremely distant, have culture of totally different sort and

speak language that's extremely debilitating for English speakers (such as Chinese, Czech, Hungarian or Hindi). One could wonder whether it was God who spoke to these adventurers or whether it rather was their desire for flight into the wild (see [the movie](#))!

C & M were chosen because they knew the language already from their Slavic mom, they already were competent church leaders and (equivalent of) PhD theologians. They have already proven to be faithful, diligent and reliable.

Note that this principle of *the church appointing missionaries* instead of *missionaries appointing themselves* is backed up by Acts 13:2, where the Holy Spirit commanded the church to set apart Barnabas and Paul and where this command apparently wasn't heard from the mount of the missionaries.

Secondly, their preparation. Before the departure, C & M spent two years but by revising the language, developing the alphabet and translating some key liturgical and biblical texts. They did not waste time with fundraising! No stupid advertisement trying to convince every donor that their particular project is the best one to support. They were supported by people who have appointed them to do the thing.

I hear you crying that the present system of fundraising is better because it allows bigger number of missionaries to go. Well, maybe? But I hold that sending two mature specialists to meet very particular needs of the local churches is better than sending 10 not really trained guys to hang around overseas and “do discipleship” (read [this intriguing blog post](#) by a former missionary).

Thirdly, C & M went to a place where they were invited. Rostislav, the ruler of the Great Moravia at that time, recognized the political need for escaping from the claws of German influence. Particular evil of this influence was that German missionaries, who were already present, didn't prioritize education of Moravian peasants. They would rather rush in and sprinkle people with water, blabbering some Latin liturgy. No big deal. What the German missionaries did prioritize, was spreading their political influence over the country. And Rostislav, as a politically involved patriot, didn't like that. We can tell that his motives weren't all that godly. But reading his invitation that he have sent to Byzantine emperor Michael III leave us with impression that he recognized the need for religious education of his people, which would result into independence on the Western Latin influence of German priests.

My people have rejected paganism and hold the Christian law, but we do not have a teacher who could preach to us in our own native tongue.

— See [English analysis of the Old Slavonic text](#).

Rostislav's recognition of the need and sending missionaries as a response for his request is something I consider as a sane paradigm. Of course, you shouldn't expect official note from North Korean government requesting your presence there. But if you go to the North Korea, you should primarily seek for a desire of local people that you can fulfill. Remember that “those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick” (Mk 2:17). And it is the Holy Spirit, who will call the nations to realize their despair and to look for healing. You won't!

In the 9th century Great Moravia, the needs were obvious. Illiteracy of Moravian countrymen, their pagan syncretism and lack of the Scripture in their mother language. What are the needs of your destination and how can you meet them? If you can't provide a definite answer on these two questions, please give up your adventurous dream.

Fourthly, C & M were ready to sacrifice their comfort and to even put the life in a line. Here I don't want to point to their deaths. I want us to realize that Slavs of the 9th century were not as well-mannered and house-trained as I am. German missionaries and other people, who had the luck to visit Rome or France, called them “smelly Slavs”. And their observation was correct! But here the apostles came to “know what it is to have little” (Ph 4:12). Humbling my high western standards seems very difficult to me. I can't imagine going to missions and not making sure that I'll have warm water and a grocery store nearby. Therefore, Paul, Cyril and Methodius are charging me with gluttony, indolence and fearfulness. And not only me, I guess.

A number driven missionalist will choose to ask the final question. **What was the result of their mission?** Well, it was tremendous. Biblical and public education raised by hundreds of percents. Dozens of close pupils and tens of thousands people impacted. Cyril stood behind a gargantuan political achievement, as he convinced the pope to legalize Old Church Slavonic to be a legitimate liturgical language. Political and military havoc of subsequent period seemed to bury C & M's contribution as it forced their disciples out of the country. But on the contrary, this dispersion brought about fantastic flourishing of their legacy in other (not only) Slavic countries and we can boldly claim that the whole Slavic world was impacted and transformed by their ministry.

Please let us learn from these examples of faith. Don't choose the field yourself. Prepare well. Look for the needs that you can meet and get used to a modest lifestyle.

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