

Disunity within Christendom and, indeed, within Christianity, has always been with us - a reflection, indeed, of the forever tension at the heart of our own constitution as human beings, torn between good and evil. But this is a dynamic tension which always invites us to 'work away at the edges of our freedom' – or not. Cyril and Methodius work away at the edges of their freedom, both personal and territorial, travelling at various times to the Jewish state of Kazak to the north east of the Black Sea, to the Slavs of Moravia in Central Europe and being called, at one stage, to Rome. The significance of this for us today, in a fragmenting Europe, is that they were priests of the Byzantine Church caught in the fractious struggle between East and West for the 'soul' of Europe. Sent by the Byzantine Patriarch to counter Latin influence in Moravia but willing to liaise with the Pope in order to further their mission. Ironically, perhaps, their greatest contribution to the Church was the introduction of Slavonic vernacular in the liturgy of both East and West, but the latter did not last because of Frankish opposition, and the former has encouraged a complex family of Orthodox Liturgies and Churches which are often at loggerheads with one another. For a brief time, both Pope Hadrian and the Patriarch Photius, showed a hope for greater unity or, at least, a peaceful co-existence, and used Cyril and Methodius to that end. They failed but at least they tried and remain an example for us today – their task no less than that of all lovers in pursuit of one another.

Br John Mayhead
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour