

I'm skating on very thin ice here partly because of the complexity of Church history at the time of Cyril and Methodius and partly because language is still such a divisive issue today, so I quote from Diarmaid MacCulloch:

The great contribution to the Orthodox future from Cyril and Methodius (and behind them their patron, Photios) was to establish the principle that the Greek language did not have a monopoly on Orthodox liturgy.

This is to overlook, at first sight, their celebration today as ecumenical pioneers reaching out to the Latin Church and being venerated as patrons of Europe, willing to integrate their mission to Moravia with the Church in Rome, even seeking ordination for some of their followers from the Pope. Cyril and Methodius are thus celebrated for their creative use of language, establishing the principle that a vernacular language and others, apart from Greek or, one might say, Latin, could be used in worship but, at the same time, as history has made clear, threatening the very unity such diversity is meant to encourage. We know of this within our own Western Church but it has become especially apparent in recent years within the Orthodox Church and so we hear of the following lament by Andrew Louth, remembering with great fondness Metropolitan Kallistos Ware whose great love of Orthodoxy embraced both Greek and Russian traditions and, indeed, Romanian and other traditions, within it in the hope of *sobornost* – *untranslatable, but none the worse for that* – *a unity that undergirded a profound and extensive diversity which might be characterised by another untranslatable word, this time Greek, polyoikilos, expressing infinite variety* (Sobornost Journal p.7 vol. 44:2). Andrew Louth goes on to express despair at the present state of Orthodoxy looking rather at the issues that divide, including language, than those that unite and suggesting prayer as the only remedy, '*not as a last resort, but as expressing the very heart of what it is to be Christian*'. This, of course, is true for all those other divisions which now beset us, not least our own separation from Europe and the need, perhaps, not only for prayer, but for that other word so difficult to translate into action, the word 'love', which always looks towards what is positive rather than the negations that divide us. Love is indeed that other word which only has meaning in so far as it is translated.

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