

SUSTAINABLE VALUES IN THE WORK LIFE OF CONSTANTINE-CYRIL

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Abstract: ZOZULÁKOVÁ, Viera. *Sustainable Values in the Work Life of Constantine-Cyril*. The study examines the analysis of sustainable values in the Old Church Slavonic work *Life of Constantine-Cyril* from the perspective of ethics and cultural anthropology. Its aim is to identify and interpret the key value categories present in the text and to highlight their significance in both historical and contemporary contexts. Particular attention is paid to four fundamental values – truth, salvation, education, and law – which are presented through the figure of Constantine-Cyril as the integral foundation of his spiritual and intellectual profile. Methodologically, the study is based on a textual analysis of the source, a comparison with the Byzantine patristic tradition, and an interpretation of the concepts in their ethical meaning. The results demonstrate that these values do not merely form part of a historical narrative but constitute a coherent ethical system that unites knowledge with a virtuous life and the spiritual transformation of the human person. Special emphasis is placed on the understanding of philosophy as a way of life leading to the knowledge of God and to the realization of the ideal of the “image and likeness.” The study further shows that the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition conveys a model of cultural and spiritual identity grounded in the interconnection of faith, education, and ethical order. The identified values may therefore be interpreted as timeless and sustainable principles applicable to contemporary discussions on cultural identity, ethics, and intercultural dialogue. The significance of the Old Slavonic literary tradition in shaping ethical and cultural concepts remains indispensable even in today’s globalizing society, where sustainable values are increasingly emphasized.

Keywords: *Constantine-Cyril, Methodius, Byzantine Empire, Great Moravia, values, Slavic script, Slavic literature*

Introduction

The rich cultural heritage of Saints Constantine-Cyril and Methodius has, in recent years, stimulated increased scholarly interest in a deeper analysis of values in the Central European context. Numerous academic studies have been published focusing on the transmission of cultural and spiritual values from the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire to the Slavic environment, initiated by the mission of the Thessalonian brothers to Great Moravia. Examining the impact of Byzantine thought on Central Europe and tracing its influence on the formation of Slavic nations provides important insights for comparing Byzantine values with the contemporary value system of the Slavic cultural milieu. Values, as perceived through the perspective of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius, are gaining increasing relevance in today’s social context. They deserve particular attention, as they directly concern the individual, society, and interpersonal relationships, while also possessing a strong anthropological dimension.

The transmission of Byzantine values into the Slavic cultural environment, carried out primarily through the translation of Greek written sources, represented a significant cultural factor in shaping the spiritual identity of the Slavs (Zozulák 2019, 18). In analysing the Cyrillo-Methodian

heritage, we draw on the work of Antónios-Emilios N. Tachiaos, a prominent scholar of Byzantine-Slavic relations, who interpreted the cultural legacy of the Thessalonian brothers within broader historical and cultural contexts, thereby contributing to a new understanding of the relationship between Byzantium and Great Moravia (Zozulák – Delikari 2024, 150). According to him, the Christianization of the Slavs through the missionary activity of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius brought not only the Slavic script and the development of Slavic literature but also a complex of spiritual and ethical values that profoundly influenced the cultural consciousness of the Slavic nations. These values are also reflected in the ascetic tradition of Byzantine Christianity, preserved in the collection of neptic texts known as the *Philokalia*, which became known in the Slavic world as *Dobrotoljubie* (Tachiaos 1962, 1964, 1986).

Systematic reflection on the Byzantine hesychastic tradition, which spread into the Slavic environment through Paisius Velichkovsky in the second half of the 18th century (Zozulák 2021b, 1–13), provides further insight into the continuity of Byzantine spiritual influence among the Slavs. Tachiaos emphasizes that Paisius Velichkovsky made the rich heritage of neptic ascetic literature accessible to the Slavic world, thereby encouraging a revival of the hesychastic tradition and a return to Byzantine spiritual roots (Zozulák – Delikari 2024, 152).

This process was closely connected with Byzantine hesychasm, as monks of the hesychastic tradition continue to profess “the highest values of Byzantine Christian culture” (Pirivatrič 2019, 52), which attests to their enduring validity not only in a historical context but also in contemporary society. The hesychastic-neptic tradition was also brought to Great Moravia by the missionaries Constantine-Cyril and Methodius, who became acquainted with it during their stay in the monastery of Polychronion on Mount Olympus in Bithynia (Zozulák 2022, 4), where their spiritual orientation was formed. Methodius even served as the igumen (abbot) of this monastery, where more than seventy monks lived under his spiritual guidance (Gonis 1985, 7).

Values in the Work *Life of Constantine-Cyril*

The values reflecting the spiritual tradition of Byzantine thought, in which knowledge is not limited to intellectual activity alone, are closely linked with ethics and the spiritual transformation of the human person. As a starting point for our research, we draw on the *Life of Constantine-Cyril*, in which we have identified the fundamental values shaping the spiritual personality of this great intellectual and missionary. These values are not presented merely as theoretical principles but as defining features of his entire life orientation. They include, above all, the knowledge of truth, repentance and a righteous life, self-restraint, prudence, wisdom, diligence, love of learning, and quietness in behaviour – inner peace and humility in one’s way of life (Zozulák 2021a, 19–20).

A special place in his hierarchy of values is occupied by learning and knowledge (*Life of Constantine-Cyril* 2013, 16), that is, education, which Constantine regarded as a highly important value. He understood education not merely as the accumulation of knowledge but as a path to wisdom, since he considered knowledge a means of approaching truth and, at the same time, a path leading the human person to a deeper knowledge of God and of oneself. According to Constantine, true education unites intellectual cultivation with ethical perfection and leads to an understanding of divine truths. In this sense, knowledge acquires a profound spiritual dimension and is directly connected with the cultivation of virtues.

The *Life of Constantine-Cyril* is one of the most important sources for understanding the life and thought of Constantine the Philosopher, who later took the monastic name Cyril. This work, probably composed at the end of the ninth century, is not only biographical in nature but also preserves valuable testimony about Constantine-Cyril’s spiritual personality and his understanding

of the relationship between knowledge, faith, and ethical life. The text records that when the young Constantine was asked what philosophy is, he answered: “Knowledge of divine and human things insofar as a human being can draw near to God. It teaches a person to become, through his own deeds, the image and likeness of the One who created him” (Life of Constantine-Cyril 2013, 16). This statement is of great importance, as it reveals a synthesis of Greek philosophy and Christian thought (Zozulák 2021a, 17). At the same time, it expresses the essence and goal of human life, which, in Constantine’s understanding, acquires a distinctly Christian dimension.

These words must be examined in a broader context. It is not sufficient to consider only his exceptional education, but also his deep commitment to Christian values. Philosophy, as understood by Constantine, is not merely a theoretical search for truth but a way of life requiring the transformation of human behaviour according to Christ’s commandments. Philosophy is thus connected with the practical realization of ethical principles and with the effort to transform one’s inner world. Life according to Christian law calls a person to change ethical principles, abandon passions, and turn toward virtue and truth. In this framework, philosophy becomes at once education, ascetic practice, and spiritual progress, leading to wisdom and ultimately to the knowledge of God.

This synthesis of education, knowledge, virtue, and spiritual life forms the core of Constantine-Cyril’s thought and explains why he is presented in the Life as a model of a Christian intellectual who unites scholarly knowledge with ethical perfection and apostolic activity.

Two Dimensions of Constantine’s Definition of Philosophy

The aim of our research is not to analyse Constantine’s definition of philosophy itself – which has already been examined by scholars such as F. Dvorník (Dvorník 1970, 78), A. Avenarius (Avenarius 1992, 71), R. Dupkala (Dupkala 2006, 95-102), and J. Zozulák (Zozulák 2021a, 15) but to grasp the essence of his thought in relation to the ethical perspective of spiritual transformation. Within this framework, we analyse two dimensions of his statement:

1. “Knowledge of divine and human things insofar as a human being can draw near to God.”
2. “It teaches a person to become, through his own deeds, the image and likeness of the One who created him.”

The Christian Interpretation of Philosophy as a Way of Life

In ancient Greek philosophy, knowledge of “divine and human things” was considered the fundamental aim of philosophical inquiry. Aristotle, in his *Metaphysics*, defines philosophy as the science that investigates the first principles and causes of reality, stating: “All men by nature desire to know” (*Metaphysics* A 1, 980a). Philosophical knowledge according to Aristotle thus aims at understanding the essence of the world and the fundamental principles that govern it. A similar understanding can also be found in later philosophy.

In Christian thought, however, the concept of philosophy acquires a deeper theological dimension, as it becomes directly connected with the soteriological perspective of the human person and with one’s personal relationship with God. Christian thinkers did not reject Greek philosophy but approached it critically and created a new synthesis between philosophy and Christian revelation. In patristic literature, philosophy is often identified with a way of life leading to spiritual perfection and union with God. Thus, true philosophy is not limited to theoretical

knowledge but is expressed primarily in practice – through the cultivation of virtues and the spiritual formation of the human person.

Knowledge of God is not a static state but a dynamic journey of continual spiritual ascent. In this context, Constantine's statement should also be understood, namely that philosophy is the knowledge of divine and human things insofar as a person can draw closer to God. This formulation, on the one hand, acknowledges the value of human knowledge, but at the same time points to its limits. In Byzantine thought, the full knowledge of God is considered unattainable for the human intellect, since God transcends all created reality – a distinction further elaborated by Gregory Palamas in his teaching on the Divine essence and energies.

Humans can draw near to God through spiritual experience, prayer, and participation in Divine grace. Thus, the knowledge of God is not merely the result of intellectual effort, but the fruit of spiritual experience and a deeper relationship with God, which presupposes spiritual purity. The integration of philosophy and ethical life therefore constitutes one of the fundamental characteristics of Byzantine patristic thought.

It teaches a person to become, through one's own deeds, the image and likeness of the One who created him.

Equally important is the second dimension of the definition, according to which philosophy teaches a person to become, through one's own deeds, the image and likeness of the Creator. This statement directly builds on the biblical teaching of the creation of the human being in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26). In Christian thought, a clear distinction is made between these two concepts. The "image" is understood as a gift given to the human person at creation, whereas the "likeness" is not a given state but a goal to be attained through ethical and spiritual progress. Constantine's assertion that philosophy leads a person to become the image and likeness of God thus directly reflects Byzantine anthropology, according to which progress toward the likeness of God is realized through the practice of virtues. This process is closely connected with the teaching of deification, understood as participation in the Divine life. Deification represents the ultimate goal of human existence and is accomplished through cooperation between the human person and God. Within this framework, philosophy acquires a distinctly ascetic and pedagogical character, since it guides the human person toward spiritual transformation, in which one is called to become, through one's deeds, the image and likeness of the Creator. In this way, philosophy becomes inseparably linked with ethical life, spiritual growth, and the search for communion with God, thereby constituting a fundamental feature of the Cyrillo-Methodian spiritual heritage. This means that it is not merely a matter of knowing theoretical principles but rather a path that leads to the transformation of the human person.

Constantine-Cyril's conviction also reflects the high level of education he received in Constantinople. His studies at the Imperial University brought him into contact with classical Greek literature, philosophy, and theology. The synthesis of these elements shaped a distinctive spiritual profile that united Hellenic education with Christian faith. This conception of philosophy as the union of knowledge and a virtuous life is evident both in his teaching and in his activity.

The significance of Constantine's words becomes even more apparent in the historical context of the Cyrillo-Methodian mission. The mission of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius to the Slavs had not only a religious but also a profound cultural dimension. Through the creation of the Slavic script and the translation of liturgical and biblical texts, they strove to transmit not only the Christian faith but also an entire spiritual and cultural system of values. In this sense, philosophy functions as a pedagogical instrument that contributes to the formation of a new cultural identity. N. Malinovska, in her analysis of the identity of the Slavs based on Ján Zozulák's study *A Source*

of *Values in the Cultural Life of the Slavs* (Zozulák 2019, 13-21), emphasizes that “the Moravian mission of the brothers Cyril and Methodius is considered a turning point in the history of all Slavic nations, as the fruits of their work directly influenced the development of every Slavic country” (Malinovska 2021, 165).

This approach is closely related to the Byzantine understanding of education, which is not limited to the transmission of knowledge but aims at the formation of character and ethical consciousness. True education leads a person to wisdom, which is expressed through justice, philanthropy, and love for God and neighbour. Thus, philosophy, as understood by Constantine, is not merely an object of knowledge, but a dynamic process that leads to the fulfilment of the human person. The words of Constantine preserved in the *Life of Constantine-Cyril* therefore reveal a profound theological and anthropological understanding of knowledge and of the ultimate purpose of human life.

Ethical Values of Truth, Salvation, Education, and Law in the *Life of Constantine-Cyril*

The analysis of ethical values in the *Life of Constantine-Cyril* can be organized around four fundamental axes: truth, salvation, education, and law. These concepts form the ethical and spiritual core of the Cyrillo-Methodian mission and are presented in the work as fundamental values for shaping the Christian life of the Slavs.

The Cyrillo-Methodian mission (Ivanič 2020, 655-667) brought a new ethical code to the Slavs after the Great Moravian ruler Rastislav, through his envoys, requested that the Byzantine Emperor Michael III send him a teacher who would explain the essence of the Christian faith to the Slavs in their own language. The analysis of this text can be carried out on three levels: historical-narrative, theological, and conceptual-linguistic.

Historical and Narrative Framework

The central figure of the examined passage is the Great Moravian ruler Rastislav, who sent envoys to Emperor Michael III requesting a teacher who would teach Christianity in the language of the Slavs. The narrative emphasizes three key elements:

1. Political-ecclesiastical initiative – ruler Rastislav’s request for a teacher points to an effort toward ecclesiastical autonomy from the Frankish clergy.
2. Educational character of the mission – the teacher is to explain the essence of the faith.
3. Linguistic dimension – education should take place in their own language.

In his letter, Emperor Michael III presents the mission as a gift from God: “Therefore receive a gift greater and more precious than all gold, silver, precious stones, and perishable wealth” (*Life of Constantine-Cyril* 2013, 33). This rhetoric conveys two important messages: the superiority of spiritual value, since the gift is not material but spiritual – namely, knowledge of the faith and Christian teaching with a soteriological perspective.

Truth

In the *Life of Constantine-Cyril*, the concept of truth is not limited to a cognitive meaning but acquires theological and ethical depth. Truth is above all the knowledge of God, the true faith, and a right life lived according to God’s will. The narrative directly refers to Holy Scripture (1 Tim

2:4): “God, who wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (Life of Constantine-Cyril 2013, 32). Truth thus appears as a condition of salvation.

Particular importance is given to the interpretation of the Old Slavonic word ‘true’. This term signifies not only truth in a cognitive sense but also justice, law, and legal order. This semantic richness shows that in the Slavic cultural context, ‘true’ is linked with Divine law, social justice, and ethical order. The transmission of truth therefore means the transmission of the Christian faith and the establishment of a new legal and ethical order.

The text also presents the Byzantine Empire as a source of faith, education, and justice. The claim that good law proceeds from Byzantium “to all sides” (Life of Constantine-Cyril 2013, 32) expresses the idea that Byzantium is the bearer of the true faith, and that the mission among the Slavs has both a civilizational and soteriological character. Thus, the passage is not merely a historical narrative, but presents Rastislav’s political initiative, the Byzantine response as a Divine gift, and the spread of truth as the transmission of faith, justice, and culture. In this context, the mission of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius represents the transmission of truth that leads people to salvation.

Salvation

The second fundamental value is salvation. The mission of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius is presented in the *Life of Constantine-Cyril* as a work directed toward the salvation of nations. Salvation has three dimensions:

- Spiritual – liberation from ignorance and knowledge of God,
- Ecclesial – incorporation of nations into the community of the Church,
- Cultural – transformation of society through Christian teaching.

The mission is therefore not only a theological act but also an expression of love for humanity.

Salvation represents the principal goal of the mission, as it implies the transformation of the human person and participation in the Divine life. In the *Life of Constantine-Cyril*, this mission is understood as part of God’s plan of salvation for all people. Salvation as the aim of the mission of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius is not limited to the afterlife but includes the transformation of human existence through the knowledge of God and participation in the life of the Church. The goal of the Incarnation is the deification of the human being, and the mission of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius is seen in this perspective as part of the Divine economy of salvation.

Education

The value of education as a means of transmitting the faith occupies a central place in the *Life of Constantine-Cyril*. The ruler Rastislav requests Emperor Michael III to send a teacher who will teach the faith in the Slavic language. Education in this context means the transmission of theological knowledge, an understanding of Holy Scripture, and the cultivation of the human intellect. The creation of the Slavic script by Constantine-Cyril is an act of great cultural significance, enabling the Slavs to access the truths of the faith. Thus, education becomes a means of spiritual freedom and cultural development.

The mission of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius began on the basis of a request by ruler Rastislav addressed to Emperor Michael III, asking that a teacher be sent who would proclaim the Christian faith in the language of the Slavs. Education here includes knowledge of Scripture, the creation of an alphabet, the translation of liturgical texts, and the transmission of knowledge.

Law

In the *Life of Constantine-Cyril*, the concept of law is closely linked with truth. It is not merely a legal norm, but an ethical order originating from God. Christian teaching introduces a new way of life grounded in justice, virtues, and obedience to the will of God. The spread of the Christian faith thus also entails the establishment of a new ethical framework in which society is ordered according to the principles of justice and love.

These four values – truth, salvation, education, and law – constitute the fundamental pillars of the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition. Truth is presented as the knowledge of God that leads to salvation. Education is the means of transmitting this truth, while law expresses the ethical order arising from the acceptance of the Christian faith, shaping the life of society. Through these values, the Cyrillo-Methodian mission emerges as a significant event in the history of the Church and of European culture. In this perspective, the mission of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius is understood as a spiritual, cultural, and ethical renewal of the Slavic nations, integrated into the broader framework of patristic theology and the Byzantine missionary tradition. The mission of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius thus had not only an ethical, but also a distinctly social dimension.

At the end, it is important to emphasize that the analysis of the values of truth, salvation, education, and law in the *Life of Constantine-Cyril* reveals that this text is not merely a hagiographical narrative, but a work of profound theological and ethical depth.

Conclusion

The values presented by Constantine-Cyril in his work are enduring values that have lost none of their relevance even after nearly twelve centuries. Truth, legal and ethical order, law, and education remain fundamental for the functioning of a stable society. “The effects of human actions on the development of technology, today, are so radical that it is impossible to predict their consequences. They demand many answers concerning ethical issues” (Kuzior - Marszałek-Kotzur, 2022, 200). It can be argued that even in today’s postmodern and technocratic world, rationality, self-restraint, wisdom, and diligence are values closely associated with sustainable and successful systems of governance and organizational management. These are values whose impact can be observed over the long-term period across ages. They have their place in many areas of both professional and personal life, especially in the regulation of behaviour. It is important to emphasize that the value system of the human person is diverse and rich. The preservation of deep and sound values leads a person to success without endangering others through one’s actions. Ethical principles such as spiritual cultivation, the practice of virtues, and the integration of knowledge with a virtuous life foster genuine progress when they are embraced as a natural part of life. At the same time, the emphasis on maximizing performance and the rapid implementation of digital technologies and tools raise numerous ethical questions and introduces new kinds of challenges that must be addressed. Societies and individuals who build their lives upon ethical principles are better equipped to respond effectively to these challenges. This represents a way of thinking and acting that is grounded not merely in theoretical knowledge, but in lived practice – a path leading toward the profound transformation of society.

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