

Gospel spread- Eastern Europe

The great abundance of the eastern European texts. (Byzantine text)

The snippets of history below will illustrate the difference between the approach of Roman Catholic and the eastern European Byzantine church. Examining this information will make it easy to visualize why one would find an abundance of evidence of true, living Christianity in **Central and Eastern Europe** until it was overrun by Islam, the Mongols and other empires. This evidence is in the form of 5300 NT Byzantine handwritten manuscripts, referred to as the Byzantine text, found in the libraries and universities of Eastern Europe. Despite vicious attacks from the modern academia, nothing can dispel the evidence of the great number of manuscripts of Byzantine origin and the great consistency among these 5300 manuscripts.

It is clear that reliable copies of the Greek New Testament were spread far and wide across all of central and Eastern Europe in the first millennium A.D. For those who are not aware that the New testament books were written in Greek, and not Hebrew, and wish to confirm it, please refer to [Greek books 17-05-19](#)

When we look at a map of the middle east, Europe and Asia, the country of Turkey would represent the first successful 'invasion' of Christianity. The apostle Paul's first missionary journeys were all in Turkey, then called Asia minor. (Click on link to view map: [Byzantine text](#)). Ephesus and the other six churches of Revelation were in Asia minor. Then we draw a vertical arrow, pointing northwards, originating from Greece. (Macedonia of that time). Macedonia was the primary gateway of the gospel into Central Europe. North pointed straight into central Europe.

The next the primary country in Europe to colour in is Slovakia, representing the Moravian (Slavic) empire in the 9th century. Moravia was the springboard of much missionary work prior to the reformation, which continued until the late 1700's, also testifying of a vibrant, robust and tested Christianity.

Geographically, the ancient Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Croatia represented a wide and easily accessible gateway from Asia Minor, and the Byzantine empire, into eastern Europe. In contrast, travel to Western Europe was much restricted and in many other ways difficult. Rome, comparatively speaking, was in chaos during and after its demise in 476 AD, when Odoacer became king of Italy.

Western Europe in the first Millennium A.D.

Next we draw a thick line from the Eastern end of Austria to Monaco, curving through Switzerland. This line represents a natural barrier to free travel, the Alps. Then we colour in Italy all the way up to the Alps. Contrary to our expectation, Italy and the Alps represent the opposite, not a gateway but a barrier to the spread of true Christianity into western Europe. The Catholic Church, with its obviously corrupted doctrine, was that barrier. By restricting the common man's access to the Bible, the Roman Catholic church resisted true Christianity, and corrupted the gospel by adding their flavor to salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. Was the Roman Catholic

church then not in any way beneficial to true Christianity, thus representing the gateway for Christianity into western Europe? The answer seems to be no.

Firstly, the Roman Catholic Church was quick to implement 'professional clergy'. These professionals were in many instances naturally inclined to protect their jobs, and it was in their interest to represent the bible as a book that only the learned could interpret. Private study of the bible was discouraged. It did not take long, after that, for the church to outlaw the possession of bibles by laymen. This became such an obsession with the clergy that the death penalty was soon imposed for possessing a bible. Many 'heretics' died at the stake for owning a bible.

Byzantine stability, Roman chaos.

In terms of stability, Byzantium, or the Eastern Roman Empire, established by Constantine in AD 330, maintained power in the region for over a thousand years. (click [HM D2](#)). This provided superior security and a relatively stable base for the spread of the Gospel. Although encumbered by professional clergy, bible usage in Byzantium was not restricted. The countries to the north admired the splendor of its capital, Constantinople, and its Byzantine rulers. One such admiring ruler, north of Byzantium, was the Slavic Emperor Rastislav. While he was in power, Greater Moravia (current Slovakia) had sufficient economic and military power to equal the Frankish Empire. Moravia was Christianised by Byzantine missionaries in the most exemplary way.

Why all this detail? Where am I going with this? The following snippet of history below illustrates the difference between the approach of Roman Catholic and Byzantine church.

Continuing with the Moravians: Rastislav had contacted the Byzantine Emperor Michael III and asked for missionaries to be sent to Moravia to teach Christianity in the Slavic language. The German clergy had come and gone without success, because the Moravians had rejected the incomprehensible Latin, and insisted on ministers who could teach them the Gospel in the Slavonic tongue. Byzantine Emperor Michael III accordingly sent the brothers Cyril and Methodius, who would have a lasting impact on the Slavic language and the alphabet in which it was written.

Cyril and Methodius were born in Thessalonica in 827 and 826, respectively. They came from a wealthy family, but denounced worldly things to become priests. Cyril and Methodius eventually became known as the '*Apostles of the Slavs*'.

The Khazars (east of Moravia) were the first to send requests to Constantinople for a Christian teacher. At the time, Cyril was chosen to fulfil the Khazar request and Methodius was allowed to accompany him. The brothers were so successful in their mission to the Khazars that they were next sent to minister to the Moravians. Cyril and Methodius were already familiar with this spoken language. What was needed was a written version. Cyril created an alphabet and, together, the brothers transcribed the Gospels and relevant liturgical books into this new written (Cyrillic) language. From 863 to ca. 868, the brothers worked prodigiously among the Moravians.

The Germans did not approve of Cyril and Methodius. Part of the problem was that Rome resented the independence of the eastern church centered in Byzantium. The Great Schism with Rome was around the corner (1054), and the disputes that led to this event were very much afoot in the late 800s. Second, the German clergy resented the use of the Slavonic language in conjunction with the Divine Liturgy, instead insisting on Latin, incomprehensible to the Slavs.

Many years later, in 1510, when the printing presses were standing ready to flood Europe with printed bibles, they were waiting for the best Byzantine Greek New Testament text that they could find. They needed a reliable Greek text for the base text, using the Greek words that Paul, John and other wrote, on which all further translations would be based. The Bible could then, for the first time in their own language and in great numbers, enter the homes of the ploughman, the farmer and the common man.

Summary on source documents:

It should be easy to visualize from the above that it would be most likely that one would find an abundance of evidence of true, living Christianity in **Central and Eastern Europe**. This evidence is found in the abundance of NT Bible manuscripts referred to as the **Byzantine text**.

This is contrasted by a scarcity of Greek NT manuscripts in Western Europe. The Catholic church's ban on laymen reading the bible, with the an enforced death penalty accompanying bible ownership, contributed hereto. Would one expect many copies being made and circulated in Western Europe under these conditions? Unlikely.

Hence the Byzantine text became the preferred text for all the reformation bible translations, while Catholic manuscripts were ignored. This preferred Byzantine text has, however, over the last 150 years, been replaced by another NT Greek text. To find out why and how, read on.