

As the centuries passed, Slovakia, first as a part of the Holy Roman Empire and subsequently as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, suffered invasions, domination by other nations and political subordination and attempts at cultural subjugation. Through all this the Slovak identity and the spiritual quality of this great people never faltered. It has remained strong and vibrant. The seeds which Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius planted so many centuries ago have grown and brought forth fruits which have adorned the church and inspired all mankind. Slovakia truly had a "rendezvous with destiny".

As we gather here in remembrance of the Eleventh Centenary of the arrival of these two great saints in Great Moravia, we must all be very conscious that many of the spiritual, social, cultural and legal values which they taught are being suppressed today in favour of an atheist, materialist ideology.

Many of you are here today because you refused to yield to this materialism, because you cherished the traditional, spiritual and cultural values of Slovakia and were willing to make material sacrifices for them -- sacrifices which in many cases involved the loss of family, position and fortune, and in all cases meant the loss of friends and homeland. The fact that you have had the strength of character to accept such sacrifices and to rise above the bitterness and anger is a source of great inspiration and a lesson in tolerance to all Canadians.

Throughout history, the quality of tolerance has been one of the essential ingredients of any free society. Tolerance is a fundamental prerequisite for freedom. It is also one of the fundamental sources of Canadian unity.