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The Bulgarian Orthodox Church: the Continuing Schism and the Religious, Social and Political Environment[1]

JANICE BROUN

Introduction

During the four years of the second Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) government in Bulgaria from 1997 until 2001 the Bulgarian Orthodox Church continued to be split by an apparently insoluble schism, started by the previous UDF government in 1992. The church was also involved in significant developments in relations with other Orthodox churches beyond its borders, especially within the Balkans, where it tried to protect the beleaguered Bulgarian minority in the former Yugoslavia. It created a sensation when it followed the precedent set by the Georgian Orthodox Church and withdrew from the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1998. Its relations with the strongly rooted local Catholic Church and the Vatican were reserved in character. Internally, its relations with both long-standing Bulgarian evangelical churches and with new incoming churches and sects were generally hostile as it exerted its influence to restrict their scope, in particular by its input into the proposed new Law on Confessions (*Zakon za veroizpovedaniyata*). It attempted to reintroduce and monopolise religious education in universities and schools and to regain its confiscated property.

To a limited extent, the far smaller schismatic church, which would have been ineffective but for its backing from the government, was also involved in some of these issues. Rooted as it was in the south-west Pirin region adjacent to Macedonia and Greece, it dabbled in the ecclesiastical affairs of other schismatic churches over the border, and more controversially, even in the affairs of the embattled Macedonian minority in Greece (see sections below). As far as attitudes towards religious minorities were concerned, it was not much different from the canonical church. The burning issue that aroused antagonism between the divided churches was that of property ownership.

Repercussions from the War in Former Yugoslavia

Until 2000 Bulgarians had understandably felt uneasy about events on their western borders, and even more so on account of their concern for their own minority in Yugoslavia. On 4 May 1999 a National Assembly (*Narodno Subranie*) dominated by the UDF voted by 154 to 83 to let NATO use Bulgarian airspace to attack Yugoslavia, discounting a significant pro-Serb group and opinion polls which indicated that 77 per cent of the population opposed NATO strikes. The large anti-NATO rallies that the main opposition party, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), hoped for did not however materialise. The foreign minister, Nadezhda Mikhailova, accused those who voted against

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of silent complicity in Serbia's continuing violence against its own citizens, and of voting to prolong the conflict and prevent a united Europe (Lebor, 1999). The main reason for the government's stance was obviously to provide an irrefutable reason for hastening Bulgarian integration into the European Union (EU).

The spokesman for the schismatic church Kamen Barakov truculently accused Maksim of trying to rally support for Slobodan Milošević – unjustifiably, given the reserved nature of Maksim's statements, which were in line with those of other moderating Orthodox leaders and in sharp contrast with Moscow Patriarch Aleksi's defence of Serbia and condemnation of NATO bombing. Here was proof that Maksim and the Bulgarian Holy Synod – despite a majority of pro-Russian metropolitans – were not totally in the Moscow Patriarchate's pocket. In a message read out in all churches they appealed to leaders on both sides for a non-violent solution, demanding an immediate end to NATO air strikes and the murderous conflict. Prayers were needed for all victims, Serbian and Albanian alike. Nevertheless they unequivocally condemned Milošević's policies as an 'insult' to Orthodoxy: 'It is not possible for war and slaughter like these to be fomented and perpetrated in the name of Christianity' (SOP, 1999b, p. 8). The Holy Synod's spokesman Marin Varbanov stressed that inter-Orthodox solidarity could not condone Milošević's crimes and described his policies as vicious, serving only to increase tensions between Serbia, Macedonia, Bulgaria and Albania. 'We are particularly sensitive here in the Balkans to the Serbian government's attitude towards its own citizens of Albanian origin', he pointed out, regretting its failure to pay heed to prophetic voices like that of Serbian Patriarch Pavle. Orthodox primates had not expressed unconditional support for Serbia and had no intention of following any ideological slogan blindly (SOP, 1999a, p. 16).

The Bulgarian Minority in Serbia

Inevitably, Bulgarian support for NATO rendered the status of the 25,000 Bulgarian minority around Tsaribrod and Bosilegrad in the neglected and backward Zapadni Pokrainini border region of south-east Serbia even more precarious (Broun, 2000, p. 279). Once numbering around 125,000, it had been subject to every kind of pressure and attempts at assimilation, and by 1997 barely survived, according to Zdenka Todorova, chairperson of the Helsinki Committee of Bulgarians in Yugoslavia. She accused the Serb government of systematically running down its agriculture in order to depopulate the border zone. The impoverished community's birth rate had plummeted. Many villages lacked electricity, telephones, roads and communications of any kind. 'The anxiety psychosis suffered by the population ... is mirrored in their fear of the authorities, the police, the border, unemployment and the socio-economic crisis', Todorova wrote. High customs duties prevented people from crossing the border to visit friends and relatives in Bulgaria. The closeness of the Bulgarian and Serbian languages, cultures and religion meant that some of the community had opted for assimilation as the easiest way out. Until 1974 there had been proper provision in schools for the Bulgarian majority living there, but Bulgarian was now studied for only two hours a week. Only the feast day of St Sava was commemorated; St Cyril and St Methodius were entirely ignored. The media were completely under the control of the state and Milošević's Socialist Party; the Bulgarians were the only minority in Serbia without media in their own language (Todorova, 1997, pp. 5–7). There had been local protests against forced conscription, and the secretary of the Democratic Union of Bulgarians had been imprisoned for a short time for leaving his military unit. Bulgarian government lorries bearing much-needed humanitarian aid for the community and for a Belgrade hospital were refused entry. The beleaguered community was patently in need of spiritual and pastoral care. Three years earlier, during Patriarch

Maksim's visit to Serbia, Patriarch Pavle had agreed to provide for the appointment of Bulgarian priests and for Bulgarian liturgy – for liturgies are served only on feast days and then in Serbian – but nothing had changed. Todorova told Radio Free Europe of a Serbian bishop's refusal to ordain two Bulgarians as priests, and that the Committee planned to complain to The Hague on the position of their minority (Standart, 1999c). Refusal to ordain priests who have no impediments represents a serious breach of canon law. Although provision was made for two Bulgarian priests to be sent to these communities, nothing materialised. Local Bulgarians decided to file a suit against the Serbian Orthodox Church because of its role in promoting measures to suppress their nationality (Demokratsiya, 1999a). Archimandrite Sioni, the rector of Sofia Seminary, insisted during his visit to Moscow that the Russian patriarch approach the Serbian Orthodox Church to ensure that two Bulgarian priests could be sent to Zapadni Pokrainini (Demokratsiya, 1999b). *Demokratsiya*, the UDF mouthpiece, which was almost always hostile to the patriarch, claimed that Maksim's Synod had been uneasy about this, saying that there were no priests willing to serve in such a backward region, but members of the pro-schismatic Priests' Union had countered that provided the Serb authorities were prepared to allow priests in to serve there, patriots would come forward. Was this a case of bravado? Subsequently the matter was played down, probably because of the increasingly isolated Serb authorities' desire to keep the issue low-key. Whether there would be much improvement under the subsequent Serbian government remained to be seen.

The Ramifications of the Schism in other Balkan Churches: Macedonia, Montenegro and Istanbul

Since canonical Orthodox churches cold-shouldered them, Metropolitan Pimen of Nevrokop, head of the schismatic synod until his death in 1998, and his supporters, could establish connections only with breakaway Orthodox churches. Metropolitan Filaret, head of the Russian Orthodox Church – Kiev Patriarchate in Ukraine, graced Pimen's uncanonical council (*subor*) with his presence in 1996. This led to speculations about the emergence of a second Orthodox centre as separatist churches came closer together in a joint front against recognised local churches (Kontinent, 1998, quoted in Raikin, 1998, p. 230, note 66). They would be under the aegis of Filaret, who envisaged creating by the millennium a parallel Orthodox jurisdiction, which Georges Tsetsis, Ecumenical Patriarchate representative in Geneva, dubbed a 'schismatic internationale', with alternative metropolitanates and autonomous bishoprics in every Orthodox country. To this end Filaret had taken under his wing several breakaway factions from the Orthodox diaspora in Western Europe and the USA, bestowing grandiose titles on various bishops of doubtful provenance and on defrocked priests. He had established relations with Old Calendarists in Greece, Bulgaria and Romania, which are relatively stable and undoubtedly devout communities, though some of their leadership is ill advised, according to mainstream Orthodox observers. He naturally forged links with the schismatic Bulgarian church, the autocephalous Macedonian church and the Georgian Orthodox Church, which left the WCC in 1997. To further this policy, Metropolitan Danylo of the Kiev Patriarchate celebrated a liturgy in a schismatic church in Silistra in June 1998. Tsetsis admitted that he feared possible long-term effects of Filaret's expansionist policy on traditionalist Orthodox Eastern- bloc countries whose people had suffered systematic brainwashing and disinformation. He maintained that it was imperative to expose and condemn such para-church groups by countering them with sound theological, ecclesiastical and canonical arguments. People needed to be warned about the uncanonical nature, antecedents and ethos of pseudo-bishops who on the pretext of defending the true faith and Orthodox

tradition were exploiting popular piety and credulity, tarnishing the image of Orthodoxy among other Christian confessions and mounting a counter-witness to genuine Orthodoxy (Tsetsis, 1999, pp. 17–18).

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomaios and Patriarch Aleksi of Moscow denounced schismatic churches at Odessa on 24 September 1997 (SOP, 1997, pp. 5–6). However, in October an Orthodox Balkan summit in Salonika appeared to give the green light for full autocephaly for churches eventually, provided their nations were properly recognised as independent.

Macedonia

This decision was relevant in the case of Macedonia since it had been, belatedly, recognised (under the name 'Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia') by the Greek government in 1995 and by the rump Yugoslavia in 1996. Since its politically motivated creation under Tito in 1967 the Macedonian Orthodox Church, with 1.2 million members, had become the *de facto* Orthodox Church in the republic, representing 60–70 per cent of the population, with practically only the small Serb minority dissenting. Patriarch Bartolomaios said he was in favour of granting it canonical autocephaly, provided its mother church, the Serbian Orthodox Church, agreed (G2W, 1997, p. 8). At an international colloquium on Orthodoxy in Athens in September 1999 Patriarch Ignatius of Antioch referred to lack of progress in establishing relations between local Orthodox churches and Old Calendarists in Greece, Bulgaria and Romania as well as efforts through the Sofia summit to resolve the major Bulgarian schism (SOP, 1999f).

Pimen, whose metropolitanate bordered long-disputed territory in the grey zone along Bulgaria's southern frontier, even dabbled in parishes across the Greek border. With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century Macedonia, in its broadest sense, had become an ecclesiastical battleground between Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians and, after 1925, Albanians, each church founding schools to promote their respective languages and cultures as a back-up to claims to the disputed territory.

Essentially Slav Macedonians are Bulgarians, and the dialect they speak is closer to Bulgarian than Serbian. Nevertheless, during the Bulgarian takeover of Vardar and Pirin Macedonia in 1942 the insensitive behaviour of Bulgarian bureaucrats and the reimposed Bulgarian Orthodox bishop dampened the widespread pro-Bulgarian sentiment among the majority of the Slav population there (Poulton, 2000, pp. 101–2, 118, 162–71). However, in the aftermath of the civil war in Greece the Greek government's extremely repressive policies, including enforced assimilation policies and population transfers, effectively hellenised Greek Macedonia. The Macedonian minority there, estimated by outside observers as between 150,000 and 200,000, is not recognised by the Greek government, but accepts its status and prefers to live quietly in Greece rather than attempt to unite with poverty-stricken Bulgaria or Macedonia.

Since 1989 demands that Greece recognise that Macedonians exist who are not Greek from an ethnic or a religious point of view have surfaced in the 'Rainbow Movement' which includes some slavophone priests who focus on restoration of a Macedonian Church, recognition of the Macedonian language and bilingual signs rather than full minority rights and who actively supported Pimen. One, Nikodim Carknija, had been under pressure from his own church since the 1980s, having even been briefly dismissed from the church in 1981 for speaking out against the notoriously nationalist Greek bishop of Florina, where visitors find that the atmosphere is tense and people unusually uncommunicative.[2] Carknija was dismissed again in 1990 but reinstated in 1996. As priest of the village of Sveti Afanasi Fr Carknija prayed for Pimen during his Slav liturgy and

used the old name of the diocese, 'Moglena', until the local police intervened. He was forced to give up and move into Macedonia to carry on his ministry without harassment.[3] (Gstrein, 1997; Poulton, 2000, p. 171).

Pimen had supported the Macedonian Orthodox Church and three schismatic priests concelebrated in Skopje cathedral at Easter 1998. In the same year the Macedonian Orthodox church leadership mounted a fruitless campaign for the return of the archbishop of Okhrid's crown from the Bulgarian National History Museum, arguing that the archbishopric had never been Bulgarian. However, after the declaration of cooperation between Prime Minister Ivan Kostov and his Macedonian counterpart Ljubco Georgievski on 22 February 1999 had put the hitherto strained relations between the two countries on a new footing, hobnobbing with Macedonians was no longer confined to the schismatics. In May Metropolitan Neofit of Dorostol-Cherven and Bishop Ioan, abbot of Rila monastery, accompanied Kostov to the shrine in the crypt of Saints Cyril and Methodius in San Clemente in Rome, the traditional centre for Bulgarian pilgrims. Kostov and Georgievski laid wreaths there together, in the company of Macedonian metropolitans Timofei and Stefan, who pleaded for parts of the relics of St Cyril (Standart, 1999a).

After the death of octogenarian Macedonian Archbishop Mikhail in July 1999, predictably no representatives of local Orthodox churches were present at the enthronement of his successor, Metropolitan Stefan (Stojan Veljanovski) in Okhrid on 10 October, but two schismatic metropolitans were; possibly emboldened by Bulgarian government recognition of Macedonia on 19 September 1999 and building on friendly contacts made in San Clemente, Neofit and Metropolitan Kalinik of Vratsa broke new and controversial ground by concelebrating a liturgy in Vratsa with Macedonian metropolitans Petar and Timofei and Bishop Jovan. When challenged on Bulgarian television Neofit claimed that this did not imply any recognition of Macedonian autocephaly by his church. Maksim, obviously annoyed, declared the Vratsa liturgy anti-canonical and stated that he would have opposed it had he known about it. His office quashed Macedonian press reports that the Holy Synod, discussing the issue, had recognised the autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. The concelebration was also strongly condemned by Bartholomaios, who held that the Macedonian Church should have referred to him to define its status.

Further confusion ensued the following summer when Metropolitan Stefan denied that the Bulgarian state and church had ever had any presence in the region; but he also conceded that Maksim was the only Orthodox patriarch who interceded with the ecumenical patriarch for the recognition of the Macedonian Church, thus contradicting press reports that the Holy Synod thought that recognition should come first from the Serbian 'mother' church. *Standart*, which covered the issue, commented that Stefan's statement might put a stop to the Holy Synod's shuttle diplomacy (Standart, 1999b).

As ecclesiastically illiterate Macedonian politicians started to manipulate disputants in the schism for their own ends there were unbecoming disruptive scenes in Macedonia on Christmas Eve 1999 reminiscent of the early days of the schism. Although the dispute with the Serbian Orthodox Church rumbled on and in 2002 a Macedonian bishop, Jovan of Veles and Povardarje, who had very friendly relations with the Greek Church, broke ranks and decided to accept the authority of Serbian Orthodox patriarch Pavle, close Bulgarian involvement in Macedonian affairs ceased (Bojarovski, 2002, pp. 13–14).

The Situation of the Macedonian Minority within Bulgaria and its Ecclesiastical Repercussions

Further complications were caused by the presence of a Macedonian minority within Bulgaria itself. No recent census figures are available; the last possibly reliable one is 187,789 in 1956! (Poulton, 2000, p. 148). Although most live in the south-west Pirin

region there are also groups in many cities, especially Sofia, where huge numbers of Macedonians fled after the failure of the Ilinden rising against Ottoman domination in 1903. Under Todor Zhivkov's one-nation policy, their existence was denied (as was that of the Turks and Pomaks). Even with the advent of democracy they were still regarded as a Yugoslav 'Trojan Horse', prey to possible annexation first by Serbia and then by the new independent state of Macedonia. The February 1990 coalition government maintained that there was no Macedonian question since all Macedonians were Bulgarians. Although this posed no problem for the majority of Macedonians who espoused Macedonian consciousness as part of a wider Bulgarian one, it did pose one for nationalist separatist organisations which were at first persecuted and only gradually earned acceptance as political parties. The controversial and widely opposed United Macedonian Organisation (*Obedinena Makedonska Organizatsiya – Ilinden*), named 'Ilinden' after the uprising, represented the moderate wing of the Bulgarian Macedonians. Its charter in 1990 stated that it would not attempt to violate Bulgaria's national integrity and would uphold freedom for all religions. It was ruled a constitutional political party in August 1999. However, it had its extremist wing under Iordan Kostadinov, among whose demands for fulfilment of separatist claims was autocephaly for the Orthodox Church in Pirin Macedonia. According to Bulgarian observers, Kostadinov's real aim was not just separation but unification with the Okhrid Patriarchate (Poulton, 2000, pp. 152–7). Pirin Macedonia was a stronghold of the schismatics, though they lost considerable ground there during 1999. In a complex case the Sofia Appellate Court ruled on 28 April that because Ilinden was conducting religious and religious-educational activities it needed to ask for permission from the government under Article 133A of the Persons and Family Act (*Zakon za litsata i semeistvoto*). This decision was confirmed by the Supreme Court on 12 October (BHC Report, 2000, pp. 9–10). This decision implied the emergence of yet another schismatic Orthodox Church in Bulgaria, though Ilinden is a small organisation with not much more than 1000 members and its church was probably still a theoretical construct.[4] Its peaceful assemblies, including its annual gatherings at Rozhen Monastery to commemorate the death of its hero Jane Sandanski were broken up by police until 22 April 2001, when Ilinden members were at last granted a permit and managed to celebrate the anniversary without being stopped by police. However, the two priests invited were not allowed to conduct the memorial service and amplifiers were banned, while *Trud* and *24 Chasa* printed allegations that the Macedonians wanted to see Bulgarians dead. Alarmed, Ilinden carried its protests to the European Court of Human Rights (Obektiv, 2001b, p. 2).

Since the other leading Macedonian party (with 56 branches scattered throughout the country), the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (IMRO) (*Vatreshna Makedonska Revolyutsionna Organizastiya (VMRO)*), has as its main objective countering pan-Serbian and pan-Greek ambitions at the expense of the Macedonian Bulgarians, it has been more acceptable to recent Bulgarian governments; its Assembly members even joined the UDF coalition. Most members are descended from Macedonian refugees to Bulgaria and are extremely hostile to Ilinden and to organisations they rate as non-Bulgarian (Poulton, 2000, pp. 160–2). From the standpoint of religious freedom IMRO has played a very negative role, at both national and local levels. As we shall see later, IMRO members are often the chief instigators of discriminatory legislation against religious minorities and even of violence. IMRO's draft for the proposed new Law on Confessions was the most restrictive and IMRO played a key role in trying to enforce draconian and illegal restrictions on minority denominations in municipalities (see the sections below on religious minorities and the draft law).

Montenegro

The schismatics were also involved in the far smaller-scale schism in Montenegro, which had begun in 1993. On 15 March 1998 in St Paraskeva, Sofia, Pimen and seven bishops, assisted by four priests, consecrated as a bishop its leader, the self-proclaimed metropolitan Mihailo (Dedeic), a priest with a chequered background, including suspension by the Orthodox Church of America. In an official statement the self-styled Montenegrin Orthodox Church claimed that Pimen was patriarch, that the consecration was supported by the Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and that these facts provided the legal basis for Mihailo's episcopal status (Bjelajac, 2000a). After May 1998 the attempt by the new Montenegrin government under Milo Djukanovic to wrest the small republic from Belgrade's grip provided extra motivation for the breakaway church group to follow suit, though the government represented only just over half of the Montenegrin population and Metropolitan Amfilohije claimed he had all but three of its 650 parishes firmly under Serbian Orthodox control (SOP, 1999c, p. 20). Mihailo considered his church autocephalous and a successor to the Macedonian Church, which was absorbed by the Serbian Patriarchate in 1920. In 2000 he had 11 priests but claimed that 30 more were interested (Corley, 2000). At Easter the Montenegrin situation was for a time potentially explosive and the schismatics steered clear of trying to forge closer links with Mihailo. The demise of Pimen may also have contributed to a lessening of schismatic interest over the borders.

Istanbul

According to agreements reached in 1945 the Bulgarian church in Istanbul comes within the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. However, Pimen put feelers out even there and obtained the support both of the priest of the Bulgarian 'Iron' church, Konstantin Kostov, and of his parish president, Bozhidar Chipov, who went as far as to denounce the metropolitan of Laodicea (who has jurisdiction over the part of Istanbul in which the church is located) to the Turkish authorities on the grounds that he infringed their religious liberties by attending their Easter vigil in 1996. As a result the unfortunate metropolitan was sentenced to five months in prison, unconditionally, though a protracted appeal saved him from serving his term. By 1997 the parish was clearly split between adherents of Maksim and Pimen.[5] The head of the Board for Religious Affairs, Lyubomir Mladenov, visited Istanbul for discussions with Bartholomaios in January 1999, during which the patriarch stressed that he had no wish to hellenise Bulgarians. Bartholomaios advised Maksim to leave the parish in his hands but insisted his name be mentioned during the liturgy. He promised that it would start functioning again for occasional services and that he would ensure the restoration of the Bulgarian church in Adrianople. Unfortunately, the parish issue remained unresolved as a result of pressure from an ultranationalist group within the congregation, which was not attached to either synod but was later, in 2003, to attempt to arraign the ecumenical patriarch himself.

The Bulgarian Orthodox Church Leaves the WCC

Orthodox churches that were increasingly uneasy about the WCC's theology, and what they regarded as other member churches' overall lack of understanding of the Orthodox theological standpoint, held a consultation at Thessalonika under Bartholomaios from 29 April to 3 May 1998, primarily to discuss their policy towards the forthcoming WCC General Assembly at Harare (Zimbabwe) in December. The Georgian Orthodox Church had already withdrawn in May the previous year and on 9 April the Holy Synod decided

that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church would follow suit, though it sent two representatives to Thessalonika (Trud, 1998). Its action almost certainly reflected the opinion of the majority of its members, who, although they might have had cordial relationships with members of other traditional religious communities in their home country, Muslims included, had barely been exposed to the new climate of acceptance of pluralism among religions. The abruptness of the decision to withdraw gave the pan-Orthodox consultation yet another topic for its agenda.

There was a suspiciously long delay, six weeks, before an official announcement appeared in *Tsurkoven vestnik* on 1 June, along with the text from the Bishops Council, dated 27 May (Stricker, 1998, p. 5). This read:

> Although the Orthodox Church has participated in the eucumenical movement for a century and has belonged to the WCC for half a century, there has been no satisfactory advance in multilateral theological dialogue between Christians. Just the opposite; the gulf between Orthodox and Protestants has become even wider, because dozens of new sects have proliferated within the Protestant churches. These confuse people's understanding of Orthodoxy, not only here but in all other Orthodox lands. The WCC has diverged considerably from its original aims. On these grounds the Holy Synod, with the full agreement of its members, decided on 9 April to withdraw from the WCC. Other reasons behind our decision ... [include the fact that] in recent years our church has not made any significant contribution to the work of the WCC nor taken part in many conferences, and in fact has more or less cancelled its membership.

Their representative would formally inform the WCC of this decision at Harare in December. A communiqué from the Diocese of Western and Central Europe even went so far as to accuse the established Protestant churches of providing shelter for sects.

This irregular procedure and the delay in publishing a formal announcement prompted Gerd Stricker, head of research at Glaube in der Zweiten Welt, to wonder what game the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was playing. Was it using this threat as a sort of blackmail? Disputes within the church played a significant role in the Georgian Church's withdrawal. The split within the Bulgarian Church went far deeper; the schism had gone on for nearly half a decade, with for the last two years even a rival patriarch. Moreover, the schismatic Synod had not broken apart but had stabilised and even gained support. Stricker reckoned that the Holy Synod might have calculated that it could win new sympathisers and strengthen its position *vis-à-vis* the schismatics by tapping into public hostility to the WCC.

The Holy Synod confirmed its decision on 22 July, but a spokesman emphasised that the church had no intention of severing its eucumenical contacts built up with other Christian organisations. Georges Tsetsis, the ecumenical patriarch's representative in Geneva, pointed out that the Bulgarian Church's reasons for quitting the WCC contradicted the positive attitude of the final Thessalonika document regarding WCC concern for Orthodox interests (SOP, 1998d, pp. 6–7).

Not all sections of the church welcomed the withdrawal. Significantly, 15 parishes and a monastery abroad, with experience of ecumenism at the local level, voiced their disapproval at the General Assembly of the Diocese of Central and Eastern Europe in Paris on 2–4 October. Delegates pointed out that the Bulgarian Church had been involved in interchurch relations since the 1920s and made it clear that they had no intention of withdrawing from local ecumenical ventures unless other Orthodox churches did so. Withdrawal, they maintained, would only weaken Orthodox witness. They addressed a resolution to the Holy Synod to obtain authorisation to continue to live in peace and amity

International and Interfaith Relationships

In line with its withdrawal from the WCC in 1998, the Orthodox Church also left the Conference of European Churches (CEC) at the end of the year.[6] This retreat from European interchurch affairs ran counter to the government's commitment to further integration as well as the pressing needs of Bulgarian society. Despite its relevance to Balkan problems and the participation of major European and financial institutions no Bulgarian delegates attended the Inter-Orthodox Consultation on Development convened by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Luxembourg on 23–26 June 1999 (SOP, 1999e, p. 23). In practice, however, thanks to tactful encouragement from EU-sponsored bodies to enlist full Orthodox participation in the projected enlarged Europe, church withdrawal was not total. In September 1999 Maksim attended the Athens International Colloquium on Orthodoxy and Europe. Some Bulgarians attended the Turin International Conference held in February 2000 on 'Rebuilding a Common European Identity'. A colloquium on 'Orthodoxy in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans – Historical Perspectives and the Present Situation' was 'intended as a response to certain western politicians who would deny the contribution of countries of the Orthodox tradition and build a new iron curtain'.[7]

The Commission for Dialogue between the WCC and Orthodox Churches, set up in an effort to overcome the sort of problems that had led to Bulgaria's withdrawal, and scheduled to last three years, held its first session on 6–8 December 1999 at Morges near Lausanne, with equal representation of Orthodox and non-Orthodox Churches. Its 60 representatives tackled causes of friction and examined possibilities of structural changes that would allow the Orthodox to remain within the WCC. One of the commission's main aims, obviously, was to reintegrate the Bulgarian and Georgian Churches, which had observers present.[8] Attempts to lure the Holy Synod back to the WCC fold continued on the part of outside church representatives. Even Catholics were eager to be involved. Interestingly, during his visit to Bulgaria in November 2000 to commemorate the recently beatified Bishop Eugene Bossilkov, Cardinal Edward Cassidy, head of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, did his utmost to persuade the Holy Synod to bring the church back into the WCC. Though this testified to the cardinal's undoubted enthusiasm for his cause, and to closer networking between the Vatican and the WCC than some might imagine, it left a negative impression on some Orthodox members.

Both Maksim and National Assembly chairman Iordan Sokolov attended millennium jubilee celebrations in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, 4–7 January 2000, where Orthodox primates reiterated their condemnation of inter-Orthodox schisms and appealed to those involved to return to the bosom of the canonical Church. They also expressed pastoral concern for the faithful in their territories exposed to proselytism, and pleaded with the bodies involved to respect their ancient jurisdictions and not sow division among Christians (SOP, 2000b, pp. 1–2; SOP, 2000c, pp. 16–20).

Each year a few young Bulgarians attended the international Orthodox youth movement Syndesmos in various countries.[9] Others travelled abroad privately for meetings such as the annual Taize gathering which brought them into valuable contact with other confessions.[10] Church representatives met Orthodox and Christian Democrat members of the European Parliament in Istanbul in 2000 and in 2001 in Chania in Crete, where members of parliament from Orthodox lands were invited.[11] In a promising interconfessional development Dimitri Kirov, a professor in Veliko Turnovo theological faculty, lectured at an Orthodox and Methodist dialogue in Bristol in July 2000 (SOP, 2000i, p. 20). Bulgarian church representatives were among 20 Orthodox and Protestant participants in Skopje for a CEC meeting in February 2001 to encourage peace and reconciliation in South-Eastern

Europe. This recognised the vital contributions that could also be made by the Roman Catholic Church, the Islamic community and the non-governmental organisations of the region (SOP, 2001b, pp. 11–12). Though not officially representing their church, several young Bulgarian Orthodox academics working in the spheres of philosophy, sociology and law presented papers and made valuable contributions at the conference 'Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Europe' at Leeds University in June 2001, promoted by the universities of Leeds, Nijmegen and Utrecht. There was frank and open discussion about many controversial issues such as relations between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, the identification of certain Orthodox Churches with nationalism, the lack of progress in the ecumenical movement and the need for reform within the Orthodox tradition, including the status of women.

The reason for the Bulgarian Orthodox Church's inconsistent attendance at international conferences stemmed partly from its poverty, according to Bulgarian emigré historian Spas Raikin. He instanced a meeting in Rome in 2000 to which the church could not afford to send delegates (Raikin, 2000). Another factor may have been the church's lack of outstanding scholars and theologians, compared with, for instance, the Orthodox Church in neighbouring Romania, which has a far larger pool of clergy and scholars on which to draw. This is partly a result of historical factors; the Bulgarian Orthodox Church had been in a state of schism from the rest of the Orthodox world between 1872 and 1945, and thus isolated internationally because of its lack of recognition by other Orthodox Churches. Its doubtful canonical status during this period was used as a pretext by various Bulgarian governments to restrict its proper functioning as the major ecclesiastical institution and it started to progress only after the Second World War. By that time it was too late, with communists ready to take over and throttle church life. A graphic inside picture of life in the Plovdiv seminary and the Sofia academy during this period by Spas Raikin in his autobiography *Rebel with a Just Cause* shows the degree of intellectual and moral impoverishment of Bulgarian educational institutions (Raikin, 2001).

Relations Between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches and the Status of the Catholic Church Under the UDF Government

As far as its relations with Bulgaria's religious minorities were concerned, the Orthodox regarded the long-established ones – Catholics, Armenians, Muslims and Jews – with respect though with reserve. The attitude of Bulgarians in general and the government and adminstration in particular towards the Catholic Church was ambiguous. Traditionally Catholics have played a positive role in Bulgarian history and are well accepted and integrated in society. Communist persecution in Bulgaria, unlike that in some other countries, did not implicate the Orthodox Church in suppression of the Eastern-rite Catholic Church and the consequent confiscation of Catholic property, so one major cause of friction between the churches today is completely absent. Yet despite general approval at high levels in the UDF government and, following the government's line, among the schismatics, Catholics still encounter hostility from the Bulgarian Orthodox Church at an official level and at lower levels in the administration. The Holy Synod, more than half of whose members, Patriarch Maksim included, studied theology in Moscow, obsequiously followed Patriarch Aleksi's line, refusing to invite the pope in spite of repeated pressure from postcommunist governments. The other main lobby within the Synod comprised men who had studied in Greece and absorbed the fundamentalist, anti-Catholic atmosphere of the church there (Hamilton, 2002, pp. 26–27).

President Petur Stoyanov, though not a believer, comes from a Plovdiv Catholic family. Only a month after his election, while on an official visit to Rome and to Pope John Paul

II, he expressed his desire for him to visit Bulgaria in his capacity as head of state to help overcome the country's political provincialism. The Orthodox Church remained unconvinced. *Tsurkoven vestnik*, reflecting the Holy Synod's stubborn antagonism towards the Catholic Church, accused the pope of 'fishing for an invitation'. The general popular view was that since Catholics represented only 1 per cent of Bulgaria's population as against 87 per cent Orthodox a papal visit was not justified. But Pimen, ever the opportunist, expressed approval of Stoyanov's invitation (Demokratsiya, 1997a).

On 3 April 1997 Stoyanov officially invited John Paul to come 'when it suited him'. The Vatican tactfully followed its customary policy of awaiting the local church's assent. On 23 May 1997, the anniversary of Saints Cyril and Methodius, the pope received a government delegation that included the schismatic metropolitan of Sofia, Innokenti, but no representative of the canonical church. Emphasising the saints' relevance to tolerance in interchurch relations today, the pope prayed for God's blessing on the worthy Bulgarian people and their new president's efforts to lead them towards a better future. Although he accepted Stoyanov's invitation, he said he preferred to wait until the discord between the synods had been overcome and reconciliation reached amongst believers. He astutely capped the insinuation by the vice-president, Todor Kavaldzhiev, that Patriarch Maksim was associated with the communist past with the remark 'So, too, was I' (Demokratsiya, 1998). Neofit confirmed that though the Holy Synod would not invite the pope, if politicians did the patriarch would receive him. The Synod's distancing attitude followed the same line as that of the Russian, Greek and Serbian Patriarchates. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church's refusal, along with several other national churches, to participate in Orthodox discussions in Istanbul on dialogue with Catholics in December 1997 indicated an isolationist policy, which some Catholics feared implicitly endangered their faith and its followers in Bulgaria (SOP, 1998b, p. 3). Catholics still encounter discrimination in nominations to public positions, according to the bishop of Sofia-Plovdiv, Mgr Georgi Iovchev, who has complained that ten years after the fall of the wall, Catholics were still living on the margins of society. He has pleaded with Western European Catholics 'to support their co-religionists who in addition suffer from degradation due to the economic crisis'. Both dioceses, Plovdiv and Nikopol, are still heavily dependent on help from abroad (APIC, 2000). Even in otherwise respected academic circles feeling against Rome is not uncommon, as the Catholic author of a book on the Capuchins discovered on his return to Shumen from research in Rome. On the Catholic side, accusations of Bulgarian complicity in the assassination attempt on the pope were revived by the Milanese *Corriere della Sera* (Tablet, 1998a, p. 58). However, Rome's beatification of Eugene Bossilkov on 15 March 1998 countered this negative approach. Cardinal Achille Silvestrini, prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, arrived on 27 March for the ceremonies in Ruse, Bossilkov's see. Accompanied by nuncio Blasco Colasso, he conveyed papal greetings to Iordan Sokolov, the chairman of the Assembly, as well as the deputy prime minister Veselin Metodiev and the director of the Board for Religious Affairs, Lyubomir Mladenov, both incidentally assiduous proponents of the schismatic synod. He cited Bulgarians as an indication that 'Eastern Orthodoxy and Catholicism are the lungs of the united body of Christian civilisation, culture and faith, just as blessed Bishop Bossilkov, martyr for the faith, is a bridge between them'. In press interviews he recalled the importance of cooperation with the Orthodox East, citing Tsar Kaloyan's short-lived union with Rome in 1207.[12] Ecumenism was an obligation for all Christians; the Catholic Church respected the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and was aware that it too had had martyrs under communism. The pope had a particular place in his heart for Bulgarians. Although no formal meeting with the Holy Synod had been arranged, he presented Neofit with a papal medal; as metropolitan of Dorostol and Cherven Neofit was present with

government representatives at the televised mass on the stage of Ruse's huge, ornate opera house. Silvestrini highlighted Bossilkov's role as a patron saint for Bulgarians, whether Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant, and hoped that Catholics and Orthodox would enter the third millennium united (CWN, 1998). The local schismatic metropolitan, Archimandrite Gennadi, who had tried unsuccessfully to be received back into the Holy Synod without losing status, did not put in an appearance. On 21 December Pope John Paul, receiving the new ambassador Mgr Svetlozar Dimitrov Raev, emphasised the small Catholic population's right to assemble in churches with their priests and referred to the planned new cathedral in Sofia. He congratulated the government for having abolished the death penalty, a step which he said would promote respect for human life in a land that had seen so many victims of ideologies, Bossilkov included (APIC, 1999). On 14 May 1999 he received the prime minister, Ivan Kostov, together with both Orthodox and Catholic representatives in Rome for the feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius (Osservatore, 2000). The following year it was the foreign minister, Nadezhda Mikhailova, who led the delegation.

The Orthodox Church stifled Romanian Patriarch Teoctist's well-meant attempt at promoting closer relations with Rome during his visit in June 2000. At Stoyanov's reception Teoctist's enthusiastic commendation of the beneficial effects of a papal visit for the Bulgarian Church and nation alike seemed to fall on deaf ears; Maksim merely reaffirmed the Holy Synod's stance. Interestingly, the Passionists, Bossilkov's order, speculated that the Moscow Patriarchate might be at the root of the Holy Synod's negative attitude. Colasso told Stoyanov at the farewell meeting that the pope would come only if invited by the patriarch. Yet when Cardinal Cassidy, on a visit to commemorate Bossilkov's birth, was received by Maksim and Metropolitans Dometian and Gelasi on 23 November, the Holy Synod emphasised that it had dogmatic, canonical and practical reasons for not inviting the pope. Kostov, on the other hand, assured Cassidy of his readiness to issue an official invitation on behalf of the schismatic synod. This was not their first attempt; earlier, under Pimen, the schismatics had tried to jump the gun and had made overtures to Rome. Cassidy took the opportunity to stress that his church had always pursued relations with the Holy Synod, never with the schismatics. He felt that a papal visit at that juncture might encourage the divisions within the church and reinforce the dissidents (Zenit, 2002). His attempt to persuade the Holy Synod to reverse its decision and return to the WCC did not go down well with the Orthodox. There was another opening, nevertheless, as Maksim, keen to negotiate for the return of precious Bulgarian relics from Rome, relented a little a fortnight later and indicated that a visit might just be possible. In a private conversation with the author in July 2001 Cassidy was optimistic that the visit would materialise the following year. He believed relations would improve sigificantly once Maksim had died and a new patriarch had been elected. He blamed a nucleus of militant priests who put pressure on Maksim whenever he appeared to be softening his attitude.[13]

The new nuncio, Mgr Antonio Menini, conveyed greetings from 'the bishop of Rome' to Maksim on his nameday, 21 January 2001, despite the Holy Synod's continuing refusal, expressed in an open letter two days earlier, to countenance issuing an invitation. Meanwhile, however, it was judiciously keeping its lines open, as Metropolitan Galaktion, in Rome at a conference on Bossilkov, gave an assurance that the pope would be received with warmth and respect. Seventy-five Bulgarian intellectuals, begging to differ from official church policy, sent their own open invitation. They paid tribute to John Paul's role in the fall of the Berlin Wall, and in the establishment of new-style relations in inter-Christian and interfaith dialogue; a papal visit would provide evidence of the wisdom of the Bulgarian people and their option for Europe (AFP, 2001; Zenit, 2001). In February

Mgr Josef Hoffmeyer, president of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community, on his way to Istanbul to meet the ecumenical patriarch to discuss issues on which Catholic and Orthodox churches could cooperate, met both Maksim and the chief mufti, Selim Mekhmet. Maksim made clear his church's readiness to participate in the future shaping of Europe while the mufti raised the importance of the issue of religions in a unified Europe (Tablet, 2001, pp. 286–87). This represented a considerable advance on the Orthodox Church's stance in 1997.

Diplomatic niceties aside, not much progress had been made on the ground with regard to the status of the Catholic Church. The Catholic episcopate's hopes of concessions from the UDF government were not realised and they accused Stoyanov of failing to act on promises to encourage the restitution of church property and to ease clergy tax rates (see section 'Property Problems Still Unresolved' below). Catholics also resented official policy continuing in favour of the Orthodox and their monopoly in state schools, even after the extension of access to these by representatives of other faiths as well as the Orthodox in September 1999 and, despite wider provisions, in hospital and prison chaplaincies. There was still no provision for Catholic classes in schools or for Catholic nursery schools, although there were a number of villages around Plovdiv where Catholic predominance would justify them. In precommunist Bulgaria there were four minor seminaries, which the church now had neither sufficient resources nor vocations to reopen. The state did not recognise the diplomas gained by a few boys in Plovdiv who studied at minor seminary level on an extra-curricular basis (Koinova, 1992, p. 27).

With twice as many abortions as live births in Bulgaria, Catholic initiatives to counter moral decay and abortion and to launch a Pro-Life movement in September 1998 in connection with the new law of 1998 on children's rights, which Pro-Lifers did not consider gave protection to the unborn child, nevertheless did not receive the backing they expected from the Orthodox, nor was there any positive press coverage, nor did the Assembly even deign to acknowledge a petition with 16,000 signatures. Indeed their initiative aroused intense public hostility.[14] At government level antagonism was patent in the provision of the second draft of the new Law on Confessions in 2000, which allowed for restrictions to be imposed on any denomination prescribing actions threatening constitutional and legal rights and freedoms such as the right to abortion (Kanev, 2000, p. 13). Catholic initiatives in the defence of the right to life may have aroused the Holy Synod to show its concern in its Christmas message of 2000. Most probably it was motivated by fears that the Bulgarian nation was in terminal decline rather than by respect for the unborn (APIC, 2001).

With a continuing shortage of clergy (only 54 in 2001, aided by 86 nuns) (Annuario, 2001), the church is still heavily dependent on expatriate members of orders, who are forced to apply for and pay heavily for residence permits twice a year. Like the Protestants, Catholics are very active in social, charitable and youth work and run some original projects, including training 20 lay catechists a year, but these receive no government subsidies. In the area of medical care the church is repeatedly denied access (Info, April 1996, April 1997, June 1998, June 1999). Media coverage of Catholics is generally more positive than it is of Evangelicals, though superficial and apt to concentrate on Catholic news outside rather than within the country (Koinova, 1992, p. 21).

Mixed marriages are common, aiding often warm lay relations at a local level, but only a small group of Orthodox priests are prepared to work and maintain relations with Catholics. Neofit speaks positively about relations between his church and Catholics, conceding that this partly stems from lack of Catholic proselytism. Nevertheless suspicion remains among some Orthodox who feel that despite the recommendations of the 1993 Balamand Conference against Catholic proselytism, Orthodox intellectuals are being

targeted. The intellectual journal *Vselena*, for instance, stresses common ground between Catholicism and Orthodoxy while playing down the considerable dogmatic differences. Certainly some professors and academics, most of them nominally Orthodox or unbaptised, have been attracted to the church, in particular the Eastern-rite branch. Some do so to take advantage of various benefits such as scholarships and travel; others are well-intentioned people disorientated by the continuing dissension within the Orthodox Church who look for dialogue to promote spiritual renewal and reconstruction. Even some active Orthodox attend Eastern-rite liturgies because they feel more at home there than in their own churches. The church's lively, relatively young bishops, Eastern-rite Khristo Proikov in Sofia, Iovchev in Plovdiv and Petko Khristov in Nicopoli, are widely respected for their integrity, culture, fluency in foreign languages, tact, courtesy, leadership qualities and respect for other Christians – qualities conspicuous by their absence among several of the Orthodox episcopate. Active parish life and personal relations among priest, congregation and community, almost absent in most Orthodox parishes, provide other attractions to outsiders and in particular to the young.[15]

The return of Simeon as prospective premier and perhaps even tsar put relations between Orthodox and Catholics on an entirely new footing. Historically, to some Orthodox Bulgarians the monarchy had been tainted by its past Catholic connections and might even be seen as an agent of the foreign faith. According to Raikin, Simeon had proved a disappointment to Bulgarians abroad who had looked to him for inspiration and symbolic leadership during the long years of communism. He had avoided committing himself, refrained from condemning the communist regime and isolated himself behind the walls of his palace in Madrid. His own religious inclinations were ambiguous. Reared and domiciled in Roman Catholic Spain, with a Catholic wife Margarita and several of their five children Catholic, during his life in exile (even when his return was mooted), he had never shown any interest in Orthodoxy and had never attended Bulgarian churches in the West, nor had his wife supported any Bulgarian emigre charity work (Raikin, 2001, pp. 452–56, 463–64) His influential older sister Marie Louise, who had revisited Bulgaria before he did, had played down differences between Catholicism and Orthodoxy. Given this background, by the summer of 2001 Orthodox might feel less secure and Catholics more hopeful of a sympathetic ear and a radical improvement in their still unsatisfactory status – as well as a sight of their beloved pope.

Minority Churches: Relations with the Orthodox Church and Discrimination against Them

The arrival of the second UDF government raised the hopes of minority religions, especially in view of the dedicated work of Evangelical churches in obtaining, importing and channelling massive relief supplies during protracted economic and social crises. Indeed, their contribution to this, and their outreach to society as a whole, especially to children (1.3 million of whom have been living below the poverty line), and to society's rejects – even to ethnic minorities including Turks and Roma – was out of all proportion to their numbers.[16] Nevertheless publicity by Evangelicals in the West tends to give a misleading impression that it is only their churches which are providing aid. Orthodox involvement, limited by preoccupation with the schism, was less and much slower off the mark, but it does exist. Unlike Evangelicals, the Orthodox are unable to draw on the continuing generosity of well-funded western churches. Unfortunately, not all the funds from abroad (mostly from the Greek Orthodox Church) have reached the people for whom they were intended. There have been allegations that some have been, and still are being, syphoned off by people with connections with the Holy Synod. For instance, shoppers

have noticed charity relief goods on sale in the profitably sited shop in Varna city centre owned by the brother of Metropolitan Kiril of Varna, whose unsatisfactory conduct has drawn repeated complaints from members of his diocese. Their uncle, the late Khristo Marinchev, was head of the Board for Religious Affairs and a high-ranking security officer under the communists (Stefanov, 2002). Evangelical leaders have striven to reach agreement or even develop a partnership with the Orthodox Church, but the Orthodox isolate themselves, partly because of their jealousy of evangelical successes in para-church activities and mission.

In Sofia the Orthodox seminary provides lunches for the poor and has converted a house for work with street children. Several churches, including Seven Saints and the two dedicated to St George (one is in schismatic hands) collect clothes for the poor. There have been allegations that the UDF-dominated Sofia municipality subsidises the schismatic St George's soup kitchens in order to popularise the schismatic church. The recently founded *Pokrov* (Protecting Veil of the Mother of God), a nationwide lay Orthodox organisation, aims to get church members more involved in charitable activities, soup kitchens and orphanages. In February 1997 under the caretaker government Georgi Krastev on behalf of the Board for Religious Affairs warmly commended Bulgarian Evangelical Alliance aid, past and present, in difficult circumstances, acknowledged their long-term defence of Christianity, democracy and freedom, and pledged that aid would be exempted from customs dues and safely delivered (BSGN, 1997a, p. 3). On 5 March 1998 President Stoyanov listened sympathetically to their leaders' complaints and promised to press as much as he could for a change in attitude towards them.[17] Despite this, two years later some Evangelicals complained of continuing discouragement by new laws hampering the import of humanitarian aid.

Minority churches may be more widely respected by society as a whole than they were, but there is still sufficient residual distrust among ordinary Bulgarians to ensure that few politicians are prepared to show sympathy for them, because of the risk of possible loss of electoral support. This helps to explain why the Assembly, even up to 2003, had no Evangelical representatives (Nedelchev and Popov, 2002, pp. 8–9). On the cultural and artistic scene, too, they make little impact.

Although during the period 1997–2001 most religious bodies had been registered by the Board for Religious Affairs the process took time. Government and general public alike were particularly wary of Jehovah's Witnesses, especially over their stance on refusal of blood transfusions, and Witnesses had suffered severe local and police persecution. Their legal recognition did not come about until 20 March 1998, and then only after heated altercations at Jehovah's Witnesses headquarters in Brooklyn over whether the children of Bulgarian Witnesses might be allowed the concession of accepting transfusions, as the Ministry of Health demanded as a precondition for registration of the church. (The headquarters eventually agreed to this concession.) By 2001 the Unification Church, Pastor Angel Ralev's International Christian Church in Krichim, the Sofia Church of Christ and the Nazarene Church, some of which had been applying for six years, had still not been registered. Minorities faced continuing open opposition. Denigration in the media and sensational stories including complete fabrications were commonplace. Accused groups had no right to reply to allegations (Obektiv, 2000, p. 5). Some parents were afraid to send their children to Evangelical Sunday schools for fear they would be given drugs there![18]

Protestant church growth at the rate of about 17 per cent per year alarmed the Orthodox, as did the rapid proliferation of their clergy. By the millennium Evangelical clergy apparently outnumbered active Orthodox clergy, 1100 to 750. About a third of these were working in Sofia (Anderson, 2002, pp. 16–17; Nedelchev and Popov, 2002). Pentecostal

churches, the Church of God in particular, had expanded rapidly to 45,000 members in total. The Pentecostal Union, with 35 churches under communism, had 520 by 1999. Several local Orthodox congregations protested against the Evangelical churches. In some cases their objections were understandable, in view of reports that some Scandinavian Word of Life missionaries told Bulgarians that all Orthodox were destined for hell. In 1997 Metropolitan Pankrati of Stara Zagora publicly denounced the construction of church buildings by the officially registered Messiah Church of God there (Dimitrov and Fautre, 1997, p. 12). Kazanluk Baptist church members received a letter from an Orthodox priest aimed at undermining their beliefs.

In March 1997 the director of the Tolerance Foundation, Emil Cohen, complained that a spirit of intolerance, defiance and fear was being promoted against Evangelical churches as if they endangered Bulgarian traditions, and even national security. At that time his foundation feared that religious confrontation might spread outside the Orthodox Church and reach all levels of society (BSGN, 1998a, p. 1).

Determined efforts by Evangelical leaders over the last decade to reach agreement and even develop partnership with the Orthodox Church have met with no response; they have found the Catholic Church far more cooperative in joint charity ventures (Gotz, 1999, pp. 11–13; HRWF, 1998). The Orthodox seem jealous of Evangelical success and their obstruction of some desperately-needed Evangelical projects has been ill-informed and bitter, as in the case of orphanages in Sofia founded by the local Baptist Good Samaritan Foundation and the Evangelical Lyudmil Yatansky when several state homes had closed because of lack of funds. It should be pointed out, however, that Evangelicals themselves are only too aware of divisions and wrangling among different Protestant denominations at local level and of how much need there still is to overcome these. On the other hand, missions appealing to the wider community, to Christians and non-Christians alike, to enlist the support of different churches and of local government, have been effective. In Methodist Aneta Naidenova's nationwide Mission Beyond Frontiers, volunteers from the Orthodox – including seminarians – as well as Catholics and Protestants work together fruitfully. Through imaginative networking this mission helps the handicapped, Roma mothers and orphaned children, provides education, abortion counselling and medical assistance and lobbies against drug use, attracting positive television coverage and generating much good will. James Hopkins, a Scottish Presbyterian aid worker and one-time lecturer at the Evangelical Institute, has reported the gratitude heads of orphanages show when aid is offered, even from Protestants. Much more could be done by Orthodox parishes and especially for the Roma, who understandably take what they can get from Evangelical missions. How far the receipt of aid motivates the conversion of some Roma to Evangelical-style Christianity is a debatable point. There is still virtually no integration of Roma with other churches and Roma students who have attended the new Evangelical Theological Institute go back to work with their own people.

A particularly emotive demonstration was held on 13 May 1997. Brandishing icons and banners proclaiming 'Without Orthodoxy there is no Bulgaria' and 'Sects should leave our country' 60 young Orthodox, backed by theologians and priests, disrupted a major Pentecostal conference led by the American evangelist Ronald Shambak in Sofia's Palace of Culture, hosted by the Bulgarian Church of God. Police had to intervene to safeguard Protestants and dozens of invalids waiting for healing. Maksim read a Holy Synod appeal in Sveta Nedelya Cathedral on 16 May to assembled priests, members of chauvinist nationalist parties, the Slavonic Party, IMRO and the National Radical Party under its priest leader Georgi Gelemov, claiming that the conference was directed against the Orthodox Church. It added, 'Let us not permit our children to be lured into the cosmopolitan chaos of pseudo-teachings for the sake of a mess of pottage.' When a

'bomb' was discovered on the fourth floor of the Palace of Culture the whole building had to be evacuated. The bomb proved a hoax but the media exploited the whole event to throw further suspicion on the unfortunate Pentecostals (Petrova, 1997, pp. 3–4). The Church of God leader Pavel Ignatov, victim of considerable persecution from the communists in the past, apologised to 'all Orthodox who felt offended' for the clash and expressed regret for Shambak's ignorance of their church's key role in Bulgarian history. He added, 'The ill-fated attempt by provocateurs to cause disruption by planting a bomb has helped us understand how pointless it is to pit Evangelicals against Orthodox' (Demokratsiya, 1997b). Similar tactics were repeated the following Easter to disrupt Church of God celebrations attended by 3000 people, though the service went ahead as the American missionary William Martin begged for prayers for the safety of Evangelical Christians (BSGN, 1998a, p. 1).

The common perception by Bulgarians of foreign influence on Evangelicals, which is at the root of their resentment, is all too justified, according to Hopkins. He notes that almost every mission is dominated by American cash and American policy decisions, despite the fact that the Americans often have no conception of local culture. He argues that Bulgarian Evangelicals need to learn not to be completely dependent on them and to study their own national history and what the Orthodox Church represents, of which they seem totally ignorant. He maintains that the Orthodox Church is justified in accusing the Protestants of proselytism and in accusing the Evangelical churches of being foreign churches. 'The Evangelical churches have something very valuable to say, but need to rediscover the Bulgarian face of Jesus.'[19]

The September 1996 Radio and Television Act granted the Orthodox Church preferential treatment in regular television and radio coverage on the major feasts, something denied to other religions (Cohen and Kanev, 1999, p. 249). In 1998 the UDF government's new Radio and Television Act granted the same rights to minority faiths as to the Orthodox. Orthodox attempts at providing televised sermons proved so boring that they were abandoned. There was no consensus within the Holy Synod as to whether to provide liturgy in the vernacular, although few Bulgarians understand Church Slavonic, but at least a commentary was provided for the major feasts. Despite the new provision, in October 2000 the National Radio and Television Council refused to license the first religious station in Bulgaria, *Vyara–Nadezhda* (Faith–Hope), promoted by the United Church of God as a non-denominational outreach. It was offering a stimulating programme '*Glas Nadezhda*' ('Voice of Hope'), but was refused on the pretext that it failed to meet the Council's requirements, despite its endorsement by the Board for Religious Affairs. No proper explanation was given – in violation of the Access to Public Information Act (Obektiv, 2001a, pp. 7–8; BHC Report, 2000). Reliable sources reported that the unofficial position of commission members was that non-Orthodox Christian groups would not be allowed access to radio until the Orthodox Church had a station of its own – despite the fact that the Holy Synod had given no indication of any interest in such a project. Meanwhile licences were routinely issued to commercial radio stations. In 2001 officials in Sofia's Studentsky Grad district and in Nova Zagora refused permission for the screening of a documentary-style life of Christ on the grounds that it violated the tenets of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (IRFR, 2001). Nevertheless, by 2001 attacks in the media on minority religious groups had abated considerably.

Conscientious objectors to military service could be sent to prison until the Alternative Service Act of 1998, which guaranteed conscripts the right to refuse armed military service on religious or moral grounds, though it still fell short of the standards of most European countries, since it stipulated alternative service for two years (over twice as long as regular military service), specified annual quotas for such service, and did not allow

objectors to work in non-profit-making government organisations or join trade unions. It also forbade people doing alternative service to 'conduct religious or atheistic propaganda', a clear breach of religious freedom (BHC Report, 1999, pp. 5–8). Despite unclear procedures a few men, mainly Jehovah's Witnesses, opted for civilian service, but one Witness was still in prison until 1999 (HRWF, 22 December 1998).

By 1998 the government was encouraging Orthodox chaplaincies in prisons but clergy of other denominations found regular access to prisons impeded.

In 1997 the Orthodox Church put pressure on the new government to follow the lead of Macedonia and Russia in introducing discriminatory legislation on religion; the executive director of the Evangelical Alliance, Dr Nikolai Nedelchev, expressed fears that other Balkan governments would soon follow suit (Nedelchev, 1997). On 10–11 April Sofia Orthodox faculty students and youth associations held a seminar under the auspices of vice-president Todor Kavaldzhiev, on the harmful influence of the sects, in particular Pentecostals, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses (TF, 1998). Orthodox influence was patent in a 1998 Interior Ministry and Board for Religious Affairs joint publication designed to help parents and teachers distinguish amongst sects, cults, movements and religious communities, and to judge which were destructive. The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, detecting an intolerance reminiscent of that of communist times, condemned its lack of objectivity and its rejection of pluralism (Metodieva, 1998, p. 9). Despite the Holy Synod's enthusiastic opposition to sects it did little to encourage the publication of religious books by its own church authors or otherwise try to raise the low level of understanding of its ordinary members.

> Here and there Evangelicals suffered from Orthodox aggression despite local municipal approval. On 21 June 2001 a mob of 30–40 Orthodox believers attacked United Church of God members in Ravnogot (near Plovdiv), despite local authorities' authorisation to show films and hold a concert. Twice the local priest ordered them to leave, and after the concert they were physically assaulted and their equipment damaged. (BSGN, 1999b, p. 1) But more often municipalities took matters into their own hands and enforced drastic restrictions even against groups officially recognised by the Board for Religious Affairs. Harassment, the levying of fines and raids on unwelcome sects continued. In Burgas, Varna and Kyustendil in 1998 police raided private houses, broke up religious gatherings, confiscated literature and beat up participants. From 1999 or 2000 Sofia, Plovdiv, Gorna Oryakhovitsa, Burgas, Stara Zagora and Pleven adopted by-laws granting their local authorities full control over the spiritual life of religious groups, in blatant contradiction of both constitution and international law, unconditionally outlawing religious activities by denominations not duly registered locally and confining their worship, gatherings and conferences to the interior of churches registered by the councils. Distribution of religious literature was limited to churches and licensed specialist bookshops. In Stara Zagora communities were obliged to declare all donations from abroad to the mayor. (BHC Report, 2000, p. 8)

Announcements of healing services required prior firm evidence from health care authorities as to the efficacy of the 'treatment'! In 1999, in response to widespread and often quite genuine concern among Orthodox believers as well as their leaders, Sofia municipality banned the advertising of 'healing' and 'miraculous' methods and the use of manipulative techniques or of 'substances which could lead to a change in human consciousness' and forbade children under 16 years old to take part in any religious activity without written parental consent. This aroused charismatic groups' fears that

forbidding references to miracles and healings even during services might be used as a pretext to ban or interrupt them. The regulation even cited the1949 Law on Confessions, technically still valid, which forbade foreigners to proselytise or conduct services. Although foreign missionaries generally can and do receive permission to proselytise, some have encountered problems obtaining and renewing residence permits, which seem to be subject to the whim of individual authorities. The Law on Foreign Persons (*Zakon za chuzhdentsite*), as amended in May 2001, created further difficulties as it lacked a visa category explicitly covering missionaries or religious workers. Rules for other categories of temporary residence, for instance for self-employed or business people, were tightened to make it more difficult for religious workers to qualify for a visa. Key government institutions have not yet developed procedures to handle their new responsibilites (IRFR, 2001).

In an isolated case, Kotel police banned the activities of the local branch of the White Brotherhood, most of whose followers were Roma, but the real motive may have been discrimination against this most marginalised ethnic minority group. In 2001 the Roma White Brotherhood Church in Lom, following a fruitless case against the Council of Ministers, brought a law suit to the European Court of Human Rights to protest about its continued lack of registration (TF, 2001b). Elsewhere the Brotherhood is tolerated. Also known as the Dunevists, it is a syncretic theosophist faith founded by a breakaway Bulgarian Orthodox priest, previously a Protestant, in the early years of the twentieth century. Persecution of Dunevism by the communists slightly eased during the 1980s, when it provided for intellectuals what the government regarded as an acceptable alternative to Orthodoxy. Bulgarian intellectuals (including even some high- level church representatives), musicians and artists, have a tendency to dabble in theosophy and obscure forms of occultism. Nowadays Dunevism and the Rerikh movement, which are approved by the media, provide an alternative for those whose leanings towards mysticism find no inspiration or home in the current debilitated Orthodox Church. The Dunevists have split, but both groups are registered. The movement has international links and attracts thousands, foreigners as well as Bulgarians, to its annual summer festival conferences at the Rila lakes. It is active in many cities including Shumen and Sofia (where it meets in a forest nearby) and its publications are sold cheaply in bookshops of the *Veven* publishing company, together, interestingly, with Protestant titles.[20] These movements advertise lectures to explain their tenets – unlike the Orthodox, who could do more in this field to counter their proselytism. The Rerikh movement's paraphrases of the Gospel attract nominal Orthodox but its teachings then go on to attack Christianity on fundamental points.

Discrimination in employment also continued during the period covered by this article. A Gabrovo teacher, Tsanka Petrova, a member of the United Church of God, was accused of 'brainwashing' her pupils, but despite winning a suit in June 2000 and compensation for illegal dismissal lost her case against defamatory media coverage and failed to get her job back (BHC Report, 1999, p. 7; Stefanova, 2001, p. 14).

IMRO has spearheaded antisectarian campaigns through mass rallies against Pentecostals and against a Jehovah's Witnesses' congress in Sofia in 1998. In Maritsa in May 2000 a youth group led by local Orthodox priest Konstantin Stoyanov assaulted three members of the interconfessional association 'Christian Unity' which promotes Christian films and education and had the local mayor's approval to show a popular firm on the life of Jesus. Their protests to local police, the president, the premier and the media went unacknowledged (Cohen, 2000). IMRO was responsible for a decision by an ad hoc civic committee formed by the city council in Plovdiv for religious and civic peace prohibiting any religious activities outside appropriate places of worship. The deputy regional

governor Emil Kostadinov admitted to the journal *Obektiv* his reservations about religious literature being put on the same footing as pornography – unless it was sectarian in nature! He argued that the ordinance did not contravene the constitution since the basic law could not enumerate everything in detail.[21] The rector of Plovdiv seminary Bishop Evlogi, the regional mufti and the civic committee staged a protest rally several hundred strong on 16 July against the construction of a new centre for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, although Mormoms were registered officially at both national and municipal level and already had a permit from the municipality.[22] In the end, with the local mayor's support, the building went ahead. Pleven by-laws in addition prohibited minority churches from attracting minors to their activities except with their parents' written consent and forbade them access to schools or children's establishments. They even demanded that groups submit their income and expenditure accounts to municipal scrutiny. Eleven local branches of churches responded by instituting court proceedings and on 8 November 2000 the Evangelical Alliance protested sharply against the by-law on the grounds that it contravened the constitution (BHC Report, 2000, p. 8). In Stara Zagora, Burgas and Septembri IMRO pressurised councils to refuse to register religious communities, which were prohibited in at least one European country, regardless of whether they were centrally registered in Bulgaria, in particular Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, who were also harassed in Pernik in 1999 and in Turgovishte and Plovdiv in 2000. Youths claiming to be IMRO activists jumped on its populist bandwagon in Kotel in 1999, chasing out Lutherans from a house meeting. Mormons in Stara Zagora and Blagoevgrad and the Zion Christian Church in Stara Zagora were also targeted. In Petrich, Jehovah's Witnesses were physically attacked and driven out of the town.[23]

Widespread bugging of various institutions and individuals by the Interior Ministry provided a sinister reminder of communist times. During 2000 a number of believers complained after finding themselves under surveillance. Maria Mindeva, a Dobrich Protestant, reported a visit from a National Security Service official who asked her to cooperate with them 'in the fight against the sects' (BHC Report, 2000, p. 11).

There were slight improvements here and there in relations between the Orthodox and the Catholics on the one hand and Evangelicals on the other. The Orthodox and the Catholic Church each sent a guest speaker to the Second Balkan Evangelical Conference in Sofia (11–13 September 1998) at which the vital peacemaking contribution of the churches was highlighted (G2W, 1999c, p. 4). Significantly Mladenov, who was present, endorsed government recognition of registered Evangelical churches and criticised the press for poor and negligent coverage of their humanitarian contribution (BSGN, 1998b).

Government recognition, on 14 June 1999, of university status for the Bulgarian Evangelical Theological Institute 'Logos' (successor of the seminary dissolved by the communist government in 1948), after eight years of waiting, represented a real breakthrough for the Evangelical Alliance (Frontier, 2001, p. 2). At the same time, according to one of its staff, it facilitated government vetting of these diverse churches by putting them all in one building. (In fact, integration was anything but complete, with different churches still following their separate theological courses.) The government's increasingly affirmative attitude towards Evangelicals contrasted with the official Orthodox line. Sofia University's Department of Theology continued to require from all students Orthodox baptismal certificates and, if married, Orthodox marriage certificates, making it impossible for principled non-Orthodox students to enrol (State Department, 2001).

Some Sofia Orthodox parishes started to stock Evangelical publications from the *Nov Chovek* (New Man) publishing company, because the company's director Roman Papratilov had recruited Orthodox faculty authors and editors and secured an Orthodox 'imprimatur' for various titles it had published.[24] In Varna an Orthodox priest struck up

a warm friendship with local Baptists, attending their Sunday evening services. Several councils were taking a more positive attitude towards Protestants, as in Varna where construction on the new city-centre Methodist church to replace the one confiscated by the communists had been halted from 1995 to 1997; it was opened in 2000. The Bulgarian National Christian Committee, the WCC-backed agency (mentioned earlier) for the development of local church-based social care, with official representatives from Protestant, Catholic and Armenian churches, has some lay Orthodox members, mostly senior academics in good standing with the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, which, however, has remained reluctant to commit itself to membership officially (BSGN, 1999a, p. 4). Orthodox and Catholic churches joined the Bulgarian Evangelical Alliance and Agape Bulgaria in sponsoring 77 showings of Campus Crusade's Jesus film in 10 days in Sofia. There have also been occasional joint lectures for students from 'Logos' and Sofia Orthodox faculty (BSGN, 2000a).

Overall, despite blackspots and tendentious incidents, minority religious groups were generally becoming more acceptable to the majority of Bulgarians, but, as Cohen emphasised in autumn 2001, there was still a very long way to go before true religious freedom was achieved. Many people still decried the observations of human rights groups. Minority churches still encountered obstruction at local level, with the Orthodox Church often colluding with councils to prevent them finding places in which even to worship. This is a serious problem given the economic situation and the fact that only 55 per cent of the1530 Evangelical churches own their buildings. There is no doubt that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, like so many other local Orthodox churches in the former communist world, is still finding it hard to come to terms with pluralism and has stood in its way (Anderson, 2002).

The Jewish Minority

The general perception is that in comparison with some other Central and Eastern European countries antisemitism was hardly a problem in Bulgaria, given the traditional tolerance there, with well-accepted Jewish and Armenian communities and passionate Orthodox defence of Jews within the Bulgarian kingdom during the war; moreover, postwar emigration means that only 3400 (1992 census) of the former 50,000-strong community remain. The first fully fledged Jewish school was opened in 1998, providing Hebrew as well as their regular secular curriculum for its 350 students. Although the Jewish organisation Shalom complained of delays in returning two key lucrative commercial sites in central Sofia and as recently as 2002 the army still barred the return of some of their property, other minority faiths have encountered similar problems in regaining property (BTA, 1998).

The new Bulgarian Constitution of 1991 gave a lead in banning the dissemination of publications inciting antisemitic or racist sentiments. Bulgaria continued to gain international recognition for its protection of almost 48,000 of its own Jewish population from the Nazis and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church leaders basked in the approval their predecessors had earned. Patriarchate delegate Fr Nikolai Chivarov contributed to the Fourth Consultation between the Orthodox Church and Judaism at Ma'aleh Ha Chamisha in Israel on 13–16 December 1998, where the need for continuing dialogue at local level was emphasised and widespread resurgence of antisemitism was condemned (SOP, 1998c, pp. 8–9). During a visit to Bulgaria in April 2001, on the initiative of Valentin Dobrov (Bulgarian ambassador to the UK), Sir Sigmund Sternberg met Maksim and metropolitans Gelasi and Galaktion together with Selim Mekhmet and Iosef Levi, the leaders of the Muslim and Jewish communities, the papal nuncio Mgr Antonio Mennini and – a

perceptive and much-needed precedent – leaders of the Roma community. Sternberg commended Bulgaria's suitability for dialogue because of its excellent interfaith relations, emphasising its potential as a role model of interreligious understanding for its neighbours. An interfaith Trialogue Group was set up which he hoped would become the 34th national constituent of the International Council of Christians and Jews. Mladenov showed interest in the educational side of interfaith work, particularly in reviewing textbook teaching on the Holocaust (Interfaith, 2001). (The report in *Demokratsiya* even referred to Maksim as patriarch, in a striking departure from its normal practice.) A rather flattering film on Bulgaria's part in rescuing Jews had already been shot in Israel, especially emphasising the role of ordinary Bulgarians.

Despite these high-level affirmations and contacts antisemitism was on the rise and the dawn of the new millennium was to witness an escalation of xenophobic publications. It would be Evangelicals, not the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, which would take the lead in denouncing them.

Religion Returns to Bulgarian Schools – but for Orthodox Only

Bulgaria before 1945 had been the most secularised of Balkan countries and communism had only reinforced this trend. Not until the mid-1930s were priests even allowed access to schools; before then only laypeople were allowed to teach religion. Among Orthodox countries where religion was not persecuted, from the end of the First World War until 1945 Bulgaria had the least hours of religious instruction per week. Religious teaching, then provided by Catholic and Protestant as well as Orthodox schools, was banned in 1945.

A survey in 1996 showed that only 16 per cent of the population claimed a strong faith in God; of these only 12 per cent were Bulgarian, as compared with 47 per cent among Turks and 37 per cent among Pomaks. Those with no religious belief whatever totalled 41 per cent (Gungov, 1998). Though a few state schools in larger cities with anti-communist mayors and a few private schools offered religion as an optional subject, most schools did not. Still under the control of communist-appointed staff, they would not countenance it even in the face of considerable local parental demand.

Immediately after the fall of communism restoring religion to the school curriculum had been hotly debated and proved a divisive issue. Constitutionally schools remained secular. Much of the impetus for restoring religious education came from evangelicals. For proponents of religious education from the nominally Orthodox majority opinion was divided mainly as to whether it should be limited to providing information on world religions or whether it should concentrate on religious instruction which would also equip children morally to cope with new challenges and dangers, including drugs, pornography and the so-called sects. The issue then remained in abeyance for seven years, since the BSP government had no intention whatsoever of acceding to popular demand or to the determined requests from both synods, in complete agreement for once (Broun, 2000, p. 280), or to recommendations from Sofia and Veliko Turnovo theological faculties (Stefanov, 1998, pp. 18–19). The BSP's pretext was that if the Orthodox were guaranteed access to schools, other faiths, Islam especially, would insist on the same rights. One prominent psychologist tellingly compared the situation unfavourably with that at the end of Ottoman domination when churches came to serve as charitable institutions, civil clubs, forums for discussing moral and social problems, and places for the preservation of national popular culture and morals (Tomova, 1997, p. 6). Despite the 1995 rebuttal, Ministry of Education officials eventually became convinced that inculcating moral values in schools might be beneficial.

Enthusiasts here and there had decided to start religious education without official backing but lacked any programmes, textbooks, tools or up-to-date methodology and had to improvise or resort to copying precommunist programmes. There was no coordination between them. When some resorted to textbooks and materials from the Catholics or Protestants, the canonical Orthodox Church made official protests. Two metropolitanates and seminary teacher Ivan Nikolov eventually took the initiative and published textbooks.

In contrast, higher-level religious education had made substantial progress. As well as Sofia University, Veliko Turnovo, Blagoevgrad and Shumen offered theological teaching. Shumen, strategically sited in the north-east as the major Islamic educational centre, also has a good reputation for Orthodox theology, history and archaeology. The Evangelical Faculty at Sofia, recognised in 1999, is well subscribed.[25] In the absence of adequate religious education the church could have established Sunday schools, which the Holy Synod had tried to promote back in 1948 in defiance of the state ban on religious education, but now it was too preoccupied with the schism. Archimandrite Pavel Stefanov, associate professor in church history at Shumen University, was highly critical of its lack of commitment and interest in religious education in its widest sense, and of its failure to issue any guidance on establishing Sunday schools or youth groups, to publish new religious books or to improve the standards of its official periodicals, which he said were at 'an all time low' (Stefanov, 2002). Few parish priests had the time, energy or expertise to start Sunday schools, which were usually left to their wives or female theology students.

In the new UDF government religious education became a priority, probably with the prompting of the schismatic synod, which was made responsible for producing the official manual. Though the government consulted both synods, it stopped short of officially involving the Holy Synod (BTA, 1997).

The first proposal was for a carefully formulated and objective course, reflecting modern approaches and covering the history and content of all major faiths. Religion was to constitute an integral part of civic education. However what materialised was religious instruction, which proved far more divisive and was at first limited to Orthodoxy, to the dismay of the other major groups, Catholics, Evangelical Protestants and Muslims.[26] It was to be optional from the second to the fourth year in elementary state schools for one hour a week, depending on parental consent – a safeguard against attempts by other religious groups to introduce their own faith agenda, as had happened in the early days of freedom when the Unification Church in particular had secured entry to many schools.

The course was to last 146 hours and aimed to bring children to faith.[27] Parents, deprived of religious education under communism, could attend classes. An opinion poll showed that 56 per cent of parents of the 85 per cent who claimed to be Orthodox were in favour (Tomova, 1997, pp. 7–8). In high schools 'world religion' was to be offered as an optional subject along with subjects such as law, politics and philosophy – about which the Orthodox Church, still very traditionalist, had its reservations.[28]

Objections came from the Helsinki Committee, reflecting its secularist viewpoint; they endorsed the complaints of minorities that this policy violated the rights of those children who would be excluded from the classroom and at the same time would be denied alternative religious teaching of their own choice. It accused the Ministry of intending the principle of voluntary withdrawal to soften the blow on other religions and to stifle possible protest that the Constitution did not permit any restriction of rights or privileges based on race, nationality, religion or conviction. It accused advocates of Orthodoxy of exploiting this advantage to push their faith into a dominant position, and noted signs of anti-sectarian hysteria in its wake, as in a petition for a ban on untraditional religions and for compulsory religious instruction in local schools signed by 20,000 citizens of Sliven (Tomova, 1997, p. 6). Some Committee members felt that the schism had caused the

Orthodox Church to forfeit so much respect that it was completely inappropriate to propagate Orthodoxy at the expense of other churches and faiths. The secularist journalist Zhanet Dragova was scathing: 'The teacher's role will consist in re-thinking the present ludicrous role of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in public life; against a background where the Easter celebrations of the opposing synods were shown on television simultaneously it would be very difficult to teach children respect for the Church' (Dragova, 1997, pp. 2–3). In the event, the Committee's predictions and objections seem greatly exaggerated. The normal Bulgarian indifference towards religion prevailed.

In practice, the new subject fell short of the expectations of many of the more educated and sophisticated church members, because of the lack of teachers and their inadequate qualifications.[29] Most of the original batch of keen, well-trained female Orthodox graduates of the early 1990s, failing to secure the approval of the misogynist religious establishment, had been forced to seek work in other fields in order to survive, and were no longer available. A crash course set up by experts from both synods trained 40 graduates from the theological departments of Sofia and Veliko Turnovo, but with the Ministry of Education being pressured also to give qualification to former teachers of communist philosophy, theology students are becoming disaffected, their prospects of getting a job being slim. Less than seven per cent of these genuine theological graduates find employment in teaching. Stefanov comments bitterly (in an e-mail letter to the author),

> This makes our higher theological education redundant. Our students are furious that they have to take 60 exams and learn nine languages while former communists take their jobs after only superficial training. Teachers have to teach at several schools concurrently and are underpaid. Instruction comes last in the day and by then many pupils fall asleep at their desks.

(Exactly the same complaint was made by believers in Hungary under communism where very limited religious education was eventually permitted.) Most teaching is by laypeople; not all priests have been keen to cooperate, many preferring to stick to their own ways of teaching, which have made little impact on children accustomed to a more imaginative approach.

By the school year 2000–01, although not all schools were providing it, 16,732 pupils were being taught religion (Christianity) by 268 teachers in 397 schools. The status of Islam had also been recognised, and the Muslim religion was being taught, perhaps more effectively, in 22 cities with substantial Muslim populations (RFE, 2000). Under pressure from parents, religion was to be offered as an option in the group of obligatory as opposed to non-obligatory subjects in 77 secondary schools, 71 Christian and six Muslim.[30] However, this applied only to the first year and was limited in practice to just 11 schools in some of the bigger cities.

Indicating the dissatisfaction among some Orthodox with what little the system offers, since 1999 a strong grass-roots movement has organised 77 local parish Sunday schools. The initiative came not from the church and Holy Synod – although they eagerly support the movement – but from educated priests and theologians. Convinced that no appropriate moral teaching is available for children, and in order to strengthen their spirituality (and help them find faith, in many cases), and to increase their consciousness of the dangers modern life offers, they have appealed to parents to allow their children to come and be part of the parish. The educationalist Valentin Kozhukharov, head of a Veliko Turnovo Sunday school for six years, reckons that although 70 per cent of the children do not become active church members and only occasionally attend church, they emerge with a clear understanding of basic matters of faith and spiritual life which will enable them 'to

orient themselves better in this delicate sphere of human relations'. Some minority churches – Catholics, Evangelicals and Mormons, for instance – run courses for their own children on their own premises, in homes, clubs, even in schools outside school hours. According to Kozhukharov (2002) only one per cent of schoolchildren receive religious education while 1,700,000 are left bereft of it and indifferent to it. He feels that it concentrates too much on indoctrination and should have a broader remit. The fact that his disillusionment with Bulgaria's provision of religious education and the prospect of more scope and appreciation for his work has led him and his wife to move to Moscow to teach Russian children provides a telling indictment of its inefficacy.

Property Problems Still Unresolved

Twelve years after the collapse of communism, delays over restitution of property confiscated by the communists remained the major grievance for Bulgaria's traditional churches. As long as the two main religious groups, the Orthodox and the Muslims, were kept waiting for their property they remained bereft of a major source of income, impoverished and unable to repair their churches and mosques or pay their clergy a living wage. They were left financially dependent on the state and wide open to manipulation by it. The fact that certain individuals and groups high up in the Orthodox Church, and their cronies and relatives, lived very comfortably, driving around in ostentatious limousines and attending sumptuous banquets, caused a visible and continuing scandal which did little for public confidence in the Orthodox Church or respect for it. The conduct of some of these people reflected past over-close connections with the security services.[31] The gulf between these pseudo-clerics and poverty-stricken parish priests who struggled to keep their families alive remained a continuing sore within the church.

Even the Orthodox Church had still not obtained all its former estates by 2001 (Broun, 2000, p. 282). The continuance of the schism provided the government with a convenient excuse for delaying further restitution, with the pretext that it did not know to which side property should be given. Undeniably, certain interests have been keeping the schism going in order to keep the profits accruing from unreturned property. Spas Raikin believed that secret deals had been made between people renting former church properties under government control and certain officials who took their share of the rents, thus starving the church of its rightful dues (Raikin, 2000). Until its return to the Orthodox Church in 2002 the bishop's palace in Veliko Turnovo had become the headquarters of the notorious mafia-owned VIS firm. In 2002 further light was thrown on abuses when Metropolitan Gavril of Lovech accused Mladenov, as head of the Board for Religious Affairs, of writing letters to many of those renting church property ordering them to pay their rents to the schismatic synod; as a result the schismatics stood to gain the equivalent of half a million US dollars (Duma, 2002).

The status of Rila Monastery, Bulgaria's greatest Orthodox showpiece, which was under UNESCO protection, remained a bone of contention. Deeply venerated for its association with Bulgaria's St Ioan, it has been exploited through being converted into a profitable tourist site with hotels and is regarded rather as a source of income for certain vested interests. Some pilgrims have felt it lacks any detectable spiritual atmosphere. Unlike most other monasteries, which belong to their local diocese and bishop, Rila is directly subordinate to the Holy Synod. According to an experienced church archivist, neither its abbot Ioan nor its handful of ill-educated monks are capable of proper custodianship of the monastic treasures. The exact whereabouts of key documents which were stored in the Archive of Church History is unclear; no copies were ever made of them. The UDF government granted Rila proper legal status and returned some of its property in 1997 but its failure to hand back more than a quarter of the extensive and

highly profitable forests of the Rila mountain led to Orthodox complaints that minority faiths including the Catholics had been given preferential treatment when it came to property restitution. In 1998 Abbot Ioan refused to receive either the president or the Prime Minister as a protest. In the Assembly the BSP opposed total restitution and the procommunist newspaper *Monitor* ran two articles on the issue, presumably in order to foment trouble between the Orthodox Church and the government.

In 1998 Archimandrite Ioan, abbot of Rozhen Monastery, a former close aide of Khristofor Subev (a leading protagonist of the schism, later unmasked as a former security agent), was questioned by the police following a complaint about his abuse of property. Rozhen does not enjoy a good reputation with local people, who allege that its monks have links with the Bulgarian mafia and drive BMWs (Sega, 1998; Whitaker, 2001). There has been much sharp practice on both sides over lucrative property deals, combined, bizarrely, with a lack of care for, and general ignorance of, church documents, which are often stacked in damp or dusty cupboards and in a state of near decay and illegibility, according to the archivist. It was just the same in the old days; in the 1920s the Bulgarian Orthodox Church did not know what it owned or where documents were stored. The second Council of Church and Nation (*Tsurkovo-naroden Subor*) in 1921–22 had discussed the property problem in depth and drawn up a draft statute providing for a mixed commission of laypeople and clergy to manage the church's financial, economic and administrative affairs, but this was never put into effect. The 1997 Council of Church and Nation could have made a similar commission a priority for healing the wounds left by communism, adapting the church to the needs of a democratic society, and putting it on a sound financial footing, but it did not. The present deplorable state of records has made it easy for unscrupulous elements to exploit the situation.

The other churches involved in the restitution process are generally clearer about their records. Land and property provided the main source of income for the precommunist Catholic Church, whose prestigious charitable and educational institutions, mainly run by expatriate orders, had made a significant and widely appreciated contribution to national life but were removed by government decree. Despite the provisions of a special act of December 1992 on restitution of property to the Catholic Church, bureaucratic obstacles had prevented it reclaiming more than a quarter of its property; a decade later, several dozen buildings had still not been returned (HRWF, 1996, p. 31). In Malko Turnovo in 1998 church land was being used by people who paid no rent to the Eastern-rite church and the priest still had to share the presbytery with the municipal authorities. The entire Catholic Church was handicapped in comparison with the Orthodox and Muslim establishment in being deprived of any subsidies (Kalkandzhieva, 1992, p. 147). Reclaimed property would have provided capital to help the community stand on its own feet without having continually to beg for outside aid. Property records have been unearthed for southern but not northern Bulgaria. Although their 60 churches are probably sufficient to serve 70,000 Catholics, many had become completely dilapidated and hardly any new ones have been built – the church opened in 1996 in Plovdiv (where there is a Catholic suburb) being an exception. In Pleven until 2001 they were worshipping in the basement of a tower block, until a young female theology student managed to convince the priest and congregation that Catholics in a free country should be visible and fought to get a building permit, which was eventually granted. The building is dependent on funds from Aid to the Church in Need (Mirror, 2001, p. 2). Catholics have looked enviously and ruefully at the Islamic community's 100 or so new mosques.

The Tolerance Foundation's conference on restitution on 27 July 2001, attended by 40 representatives from almost all religious groups that existed before the communist period, was the first step towards a systematic and combined effort to tackle their problems. They

were addressed by Atanas Krastev, a juridical expert, co-author of the 'Dogan-Mestov' draft for a new Law on Confessions, promoted by the MRF, of October 1999.[32] The Foundation emphasised that restitution is an essential part of citizens' religious rights, noting that despite several general acts for restitution and an act applying to the Catholic Church, restitution was only partial. Almost all former places of worship had been returned, but only that (and not even that for the Muslims).

Though on a smaller scale than Catholics, Protestant churches had run popular schools and institutions, which they had been unable to reclaim and which were still the subject of legal disputes. Even the main football stadium in Plovdiv stood on former church property. Churches complained that delays had considerably restricted property reclamation to furnish sites and income for expansion of charitable outreach and thus left them dependent on state subsidies. In many cases it was impossible for them to prove before a court that their claims were well grounded, because title deeds had frequently been destroyed when confiscation took place. Often it was impossible for present religious organisations to prove they were genuine successors of the juridical persons owning the properties prior to the communist takeover. The problem was due to the procedure by which many were registered in 1990 under the provisions of Article 16 of the Law on Confessions, when there was no mention in their files for registration that they were successors of the religious organisations that existed before the communist coup. Although they could produce witnesses who remembered (or had actually used) the buildings and were ready to testify to their churches' claims, the courts do not accept these as reliable. In some cases churches, hoping to rescue their properties from encroachment by communist authorities, had turned them over to individual persons, but now they were unable to prove that these properties did not belong to the heirs of these private individuals. Added to all these problems was the lack of political will for adopting a new Law on Confessions. Churches had had to fight for their rights piecemeal (Anderson, 2002, p. 19). Almost all Protestant churches had faced obstruction at local level in building or developing the new premises they needed. It was agreed that a new special law on the restitution of property for religious organisations was essential, for under the existing laws justice and satisfactory solutions were impossible. The collapse of the UDF government in July 2001 meant that resolution of the property problem would have to wait until its successor found time to deal with it.

Proposals for a New Law on Confessions

All hopes of proper freedom of religion and improvement in the status of minority faiths were dashed by the proposals for the new Law on Confessions, which reflected successful lobbying from entrenched Orthodox circles from both sides of the schism, as well as from local government officials.

In June 1999 at very short notice the government sent out to the various churches and faith establishments three drafts for comment, one by UDF deputies Pindikov and Khristov representing the government and backed by the Board for Religious Affairs, a fairly similar one by the Bulgarian Socalist Party and one by IMRO, all of which revived the spirit and sometimes even the letter of the draconian 1949 communist law that emasculated the churches.[33] IMRO's paramount objective was the struggle against 'foreign' religions; originally it decreed the new law should restrict official recognition to religions registered back in 1908, the year when Bulgaria proclaimed its independence as a kingdom! Its draft stipulated a trial period for 'new' religions and proof of sufficient membership before they would be allowed to develop their activities (Obektiv, 1999, pp. 5–8). It categorised religions on three levels: the Orthodox, as the national church,

exempt from restriction; groups registered before 1944, which included the older Evangelical churches; and those registered since 1989, which would face multiple handicaps.

Because of postal inadequacies some churches had only a day or two to prepare their positions. In the face of widespread opposition the deadline was dropped. As for the law itself, Evangelicals rated the proposed new draft law even more restrictive than the 1948 law; legal experts confirmed this (BSGN, 2000b). At a Tolerance Foundation conference on 8 July attended by almost 300 activists from almost every religious group, Muslims included, 41 highly critical representatives urged Assembly deputies to adopt instead a law forbidding all discrimination or administrative interference in their internal life.

On 11 October most minorities accepted a short, simple draft prepared for the Helsinki Committee, the Tolerance Foundation and the Bulgarian Human Rights Centre by Plamen Bogoev, former legal adviser to President Zhelyu Zhelev. This affirmed separation of church from state and aimed to guarantee freedom of religious expression (Anderson, 2002, pp. 21–22). A group of Union for National Rescue (UNR) deputies belonging to the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) tabled it at the National Assembly. On 16 November the Commission on Human Rights and Religious Denominations (*Komisiya po pravata na choveka i veroizpovedaniyata*) chaired by Ivan Sungarsky, son of an Orthodox priest, unanimously rejected it.

Again, on 2 February 2000, minorities were shocked when despite the fact that the bill was not on the parliamentary agenda, BSP deputies rushed through a first reading by patently inadequately informed deputies approving in a mere half hour an amalgamation of the three drafts produced in June 1999.[34] Representatives of 19 minorities, including the Catholic Church, the Evangelical Alliance, the Adventists, the Mormons and the Christian Coalition appealed to the president, the premier and the Assembly chairman and launched a comprehensive media campaign at both local and national level to explain and defend their position. The Assembly had failed to consult them; certain articles breached principles of international law already ratified by the Assembly; they were both repressive and ambiguous (Obektiv, 2001a, p. 7).While accepting the 1991 Constitution's affirmation of the Orthodox Church as Bulgaria's traditional church they objected to its being granted extra rights as if it were an established church, since these discriminated against other churches, contravening Decision No. 5 of the Constitutional Department of Justice of 11 June 1992.

Condemnation by a wide range of domestic and international human rights organisations did not seem to bother the government Human Rights Commission, which presented a new consolidated draft that reflected almost all of its predecessors' inadequacies for the bill's second and final reading on 12 October. Commenting, Helsinki Committee president Krasimir Kanev drew attention yet again to the injustice of religious organisations being subject to controls and discrimination that did not apply to any other private bodies, including state control of their finances whether they were state-subsidised or not. Although the bill would enable courts to register denominations, their decisions would be dependent on Board for Religious Affairs approval. They needed Board approval for opening theological institutes and even for their curricula. The Board would be empowered to investigate the 'religious basis' of denominations, because the registration of a new denomination 'on the same religious basis and liturgical practice' as one already registered, or with the same name, would be illegal. Thus, ironically, as Kanev noted, the governing party that had inaugurated the longest schism in Bulgaria's Orthodox history would effectively prohibit the splitting of existing churches. Foreign clergy would need Board approval to participate in local church activities. This was particularly resented by the Catholic Church, which still, after decades of untimely death and attrition under

communism, was largely dependent on expatriate clergy. Consignments of imported humanitarian aid would still have to be cleared by the Board.

Commenting, Cohen pointed out that the legality of organisations for believers would thus depend on the religion's doctrinal content, which cannot be codified by civil laws. This would open the door to complete arbitrariness and to the whim of a bureaucrat in court or a local official.[35] Mayors, too, would be empowered to evaluate the religious basis of a local church and refuse registration even if it belonged to a registered denomination, if they judged that its liturgies and practices did not conform to the statutes of that denomination. They could refuse to register another of the same category, on the grounds that the two differed doctrinally. This retrograde step would artificially limit pluralism. Restrictions could be imposed where local councils determined that public order was endangered or morals threatened, whenever the way of life generally accepted for a specific time and place was violated. This would give them free rein to refuse to register any denomination of whose conduct they disapproved, such as where a mosque was built in a predominantly Christian district whose residents would be disturbed by the muezzin, or conversely, where a church was built in a Muslim district. Churches meeting in public buildings – the only option for many of them – would have to build separate entrances in them so as not to 'poach' unwary citizens (Kanev, 2000, pp. 12–13; Cohen, 2001a, pp. 4–5; TF, 2000b)!

Some of the bill's restrictions complied with international law, but other restrictions not to be found in international law included 'national security', a denomination's (mis)use of 'political ends' and the 'promotion of racial, ethnic or religious confrontation', all of which were concepts that could be abused. Any faith that claimed to be true and unique or prescribed 'actions aimed against constitutionally and legally guaranteed rights and freedoms' could face restriction. Since abortion is legal and widely accepted in Bulgaria, this clause could endanger the freedom of a church that condemned abortion – such as the Catholic Church and some others.

At a Helsinki Committee and Tolerance Foundation conference on 20 October, 90 people including 60 religious representatives (Krishnaites and Unification Church members among them) demanded drastic revision or a completely fresh draft. Two MRF Assembly members, Akhmed Usein and Lufti Mestan, representing the Turkish minority, and three distinguished foreign consultants were present.[36] The commissions had not even seen fit to discuss Mestan's UNR team's draft. Kanev and Cohen rated the final draft approved by the Assembly as marginally better than its predecessor but probably the worst of its kind in Eastern Europe. In the face of such widespread criticism the draft bill's adoption was postponed and it was sent for expert assessment to the Council of Europe, where Professor L. Christian of Louvain University highlighted inadequacies of scope and method, quite apart from its technical problems.

In 2001, the 'hot potato' (Cohen's words) was passed on to the new National Assembly elected in June that year. The long 'afterlife' of the 1949 Law on Confessions, the unceasing state interference in the dispute between the two synods and the saga of the draft bill proved that the political class, regardless of party differences, thought it knew its citizens' religious needs better than they themselves. Cohen commented acidly that people in Bulgaria deal with criticisms regarding human rights practices only when pressure from abroad becomes intolerable. There had been some improvements under the four years of the 38th National Assembly (1997–2001); the government was moving away from its policy of police pressure against undesirable religious organisations. Gideons and Jehovah's Witnesses, among other previously unacceptable bodies, had been registered. There were no cases during this period of police breaking up religious meetings, or since 1999 of dismissals or deprivation of custody of children for religious reasons. On the

negative side, some municipal authorities had passed restrictive (and strictly illegal) by-laws and counter-intelligence forces had expelled at least ten foreigners on the grounds of 'illegal religious activities' (Cohen, 2001a, pp. 4–5).

As barrister and theologian Peter Petkov emphasises, Balkan Orthodox churches and legislators involved with law on religion need to escape from their intellectual Babylonian exile (*per* G. Florovsky) and enter a process of dialogue and exchange. Potentially they could make a contribution to Europe through a law that genuinely reflected the Orthodox sense of community, based on Orthodox Trinitarian personalism rather than on nationalism (Petkov, 2003, p. 499). But so far there are no signs of any change in the mentality of those promoting religious legislation.

When the new National Assembly opened on 5 July 2001 a young deputy from the victorious National Movement for Simeon II (*Natsionalno dvizhenie Simeon Vtori*), Borislav Tsekov, proposed a fresh draft to give the Bulgarian Orthodox Church direct state recognition and force all other churches to apply for registration through the courts. Only the Holy Synod would be recognised; the schismatics would not be allowed to use the name Bulgarian Orthodox Church or to dispose of the church's property. Tsekov was aiming to solve the problem of the schism in one fell swoop of state interference (Cohen, 2001b, p. 2). His contentious draft nevertheless reflected many of the legally unsatisfactory stipulations of the UDF's rejected bill. Despite this, it was to be passed as the long-awaited postcommunist Law on Confessions in December 2002, and was to be judged by Council of Europe experts as violating the European Convention on Human Rights.

Notes

1. Over the years a number of articles by Janice Broun in *Religion, State & Society* (*RSS*) have covered the schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and related developments. Please see: Janice Broun, 'The schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church', *RSS*, 21, 2, 1993, pp. 207–20; *id.*, 'The schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, part 2: under the socialist government, 1993–97', *RSS*, 28, 3, 2000, pp. 263–89; *id.*, 'The schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, part 3: under the second Union of Democratic Forces government, 1997–2001', *RSS*, 30, 4, 2002, pp. 365–94.
2. According to Dr Spyridon Stefas at Salonika's Institute of Balkan Studies, in conversation with Helena Drysdale, the atmosphere in Greek Macedonia compares unfavourably with that in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) (Drysdale, 2001, pp. 301–3).
3. *Demokratsiya*, 22 September 1999. The paper's comment on the stand of the patriarch showed a lack of grasp of the canonical principles involved. However, back in March 1993, Neofit, then Holy Synod secretary, had quickly countered the pro-Serb Macedonian Bishop Irinej's claim that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church supported its Serbian brethren in the ecclesiastical conflict.
4. Aleksandur Gospodinov in conversation with the author, 2000.
5. Gstrein, 1997, pp. 21–22. This could have had an effect on their losing their last bastion apart from the church, the Bulgarian hospital in the Sisli district, now an Islamic press.
6. 'Austritt aus der KEK', *ENI Bulletin*, 13 October 1999, reported in *Glaube in der 2. Welt*, 11, 1999, p. 4. Ironically the Bulgarian Methodist Church was received into the Conference of European Churches at the same time.
7. SOP, 2000e, p. 15. Interestingly, as a tribute to the conciliatory role of the St Egidio lay community foundation in the Balkans, Maksim as well as Bartolomaios and Teoctist attended the consecration of its guardian Don Vicenzo Paglia as bishop of an Umbrian diocese (Tablet, 2000, p. 496).
8. SOP, 1999d, pp. 9–10. Earlier, co-president Bishop Rolf Koppe of the German Evangelical Church had hinted that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church might soon reconsider its decision to withdraw (SOP, 2000a, pp. 3–4).

9. In July 2001 young Bulgarians attended an international Orthodox youth rally in Sevastopol' under the aegis of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian branch of the International Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Nations (*Tsurkoven vestnik*, 15 July 2001).
10. Eighty young people, mostly Orthodox and Catholic, with one priest, attended the 22nd assembly in Warsaw at Christmas 1999; over 300 with three priests the next year in Barcelona. Bulgarian laypeople joined in an Orthodox procession at the opening of the holy doors of the Roman Basilica of San Paolo Fuori le Mura by Pope John Paul on 18 January 2000 (SOP, 2000g, pp. 4–6).
11. SOP, 2000g, p. 17; SOP, 2001c, p. 14. Metropolitan Ioaniki of Sliven attended the pan-Orthodox colloquium in Jerusalem on the witness of the church in the third millennium (SOP, 2000f, pp. 1–2). Maksim went to Moscow for the opening of the new cathedral of Christ the Saviour in August (SOP, 2000h, pp. 6–8).
12. Catholics, n.d. Mooted from the Roman side by Pope Innocent III in 1199, it was terminated by 1285, though there were continued papal attempts to revive it. Dorostol, the medieval name for Silistra, and Cherven, a nearby fortified city, made up the original see, destroyed by the Turks who founded Ruse.
13. Demokratsiya, 2000; SOP, 2001a, p.14; and Cardinal Cassidy in conversation with the author, 2001.
14. Tablet, 1998b, p. 1552. The only paper that covered the pro-life movement, *24 Chasa*, 1–2 October 1998, argued that since prohibition of abortion did not take root even in such Catholic countries as Poland and Italy there was no way it would take root in Bulgaria.
15. Aleksandur Gospodinov and Daniela Kalkandzhieva, in conversation with the author.
16. Bulgaria's socioeconomic retrogression has been amongst the worst in postcommunist Europe. The crisis has lowered its level of development and standard of living to that of a typical third-world country. According to Plamen Dimitrov, vice-president of Bulgaria's largest trade union, KNSB, 40 per cent of Bulgarians live in extreme poverty (Vassilev, 2003, p. 357, note 23).
17. Stoyanova in particular exercised a beneficial influence in reducing restrictions that had hampered the delivery of aid, according to Peter Barnes, chairman of the Bulgaria Support Group, November 1998.
18. Peter Barnes, chairman of the Bulgaria Support Group, verbal report to the author.
19. James Hopkins, in conversation with the author, September 2002.
20. Information from Aleksandur Gospodinov and Daniela Kalkandzhieva.
21. Stoykova, 2000, p. 13; Cohen, 2000. The ordinance was adopted by 33 councillors with only two abstentions. The Municipal Council also prohibited all public rallies without prior notice, including 'staging religious events, putting up posters, preaching, etc., for the purpose of attracting followers and popularising the respective cult outside ... houses of prayer of religious communities' (Stoykova, 2000, p. 13).
22. Bedrov (2000). Children from the orphanage next door to the proposed site were even dragooned into protesting. IMRO councillor Stoicho Kuzev had threatened 'What the Mormons build during the day we will wreck during the night!' Marchers attacked the Mormons as 'soul-buyers' 'alien to our people', 'impudent and repulsive'. Local IMRO chairman Aleksandur Dolev told *Obektiv* that he would insist on a thorough check of the permit's legality.
23. BHC Report, 1999, p. 7; 2000, p. 9; also Stefanova, 2001. The lawyer Nevena Stefanova commented wryly that obviously Article 6 of the Constitution, which proclaims full equality of all citizens before the law, had not provided any guidance for municipal councillors. She pointed out that under Articles 13 and 37 religious denominations were free and the right to religious belief inalienable. No one was required to register anywhere in order to exercise a religious activity. Believers could practise their faith individually and in community with others without recourse to registration, and collectively with others if they registered as a legal entity. The by-laws used against various groups breached Article 43, which stated that meetings held indoors did not require the permission that houses of prayer or other premises did. The right to free expression of opinion, including verbal expression, was unconditional and not subject to restrictions. Local authorities could not assume a competence that had not been conferred on them by law. Legally their anti-constitutional ordinances were null and void, had no binding force and had been and should be contested under appropriate legal proceedings.

24. BSGN, 1997b, p. 3; information supplied to Mark Elliot by Nikolai Nedelchev, December 2002.
25. Veliko Turnovo hosted an international Orthodox conference on 'Religious Education and Civil Society' in October 1996 together with Syndesmos, in addition to a seminar for would-be teachers (SOP, 1998a, p. 17).
26. Obektiv, 1997, p. 32. According to assistant minister of education Professor Rumen Valchev the only reason children of minorities were not provided for was that Orthodox theologians were the first to respond to the Ministry's appeal to present a tuition programme; he held out the (doubtful) prospect that children of minorities would be able to attend their own classes the following year.
27. Gungov, 1998. The course covered the Bible, church history, liturgy, hagiography, history of religions, dogmatic theology, Christian ethics and apologetics, other Christian churches and Christian art. The official textbook was attractively produced and reasonably brief, using visual material including icons, and appeared likely to hold children's attention, unlike the reprinted and very demanding Orthodox manual commended by the metropolitan of Plovdiv.
28. Gungov, 1998; Kozhukharov, 2002. An MA in religion was to be introduced. Less than 8 per cent of the content of the four basic books now in use provides information about other faiths.
29. An Orthodox mother and scholar told the author that she did not want it for her teenage son.
30. According to an announcement by Krasimir Nikolov, deputy minister of science, education and technology, in *Tsurkoven vestnik*, 1 April 2001
31. Stefanov, 2002. Metropolitans Kiril of Varna and Galaktion of Stara Zagora, keen football fans, allegedly subsidised their favourite clubs.
32. TF, 2001a. Three deputies, two of them vice-chairmen of the Parliamentary Commission on Human Rights, Minorities and Religious Confessions, attended. Krastev and other lawyers present pledged to undertake a draft act, and said that the Foundation would issue a special report.
33. BHC Report, 1999; Bjelajac, 2000b, pp. 17–18, reporting Dr Nikolai Nedelchev.
34. Obektiv, 2001a. At a special press conference the content of the drafts was sharply criticised by American human rights activist Professor William Cole Durham, co-chair of the working group on legislative issues in the OSCE's Advisory Panel on Freedom of Religion or Belief, visiting Bulgaria at the time.
35. Cohen, in a press release of 16 June 2000 and in a telephone conversation with the author.
36. TF, 2000a. The experts included Professor Durham and Ms Karen Lord, counsel for freedom of religion in the USA Helsinki Commission, from the USA, and Lee Boothby, president of the International Association for Freedom of Conscience.

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