

**MARIO MARINOV**

**TRADITIONAL AND NEW RELIGIONS IN BULGARIA**

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# **INTRODUCTION**

Religion is most often discussed in terms of beliefs, theology, and piety. The transcendental is usually taking over everyday life and less emphasis is put on the practical sides of religions. Eastern religions are more transcendental and looking into “the other world” than into the practicalities of the world “here and now”. The same is definitely valid about the Bulgarian Orthodox church which is the major traditional religion in the Bulgarian lands. Religion is deeply social in its essence and it provides people with the possibility to live together and build social links among themselves.

During the years of the Communist regime in Bulgaria religion was neglected by social scientists as a secondary phenomenon which was fading away. There was also no systematic presentation of the existing religious communities in the country to the outside world. Few attempts have been done to describe churches and religions in Bulgaria (Stoyanov, 1975; Tsarkovnoistoricheski, 1980) in order to create an image of the country as possessing a certain degree of religious freedom. This was the official interpretation according to the existing constitution and legal order but few real religious freedoms were practiced by the ordinary people. At the same time authors in the West (Raikin, 1989; Irwin 1989) draw attention to the limitations imposed on religion behind the Iron Curtain though on the other hand they could make their analysis indirectly without a first-hand experience of the real life in Bulgaria. Religious communities themselves experienced great limitations of religious freedom but on the other hand religion was perceived as a primary source of social cohesion creating the fabric of social life among believers and their peers.

At the same time the Western sociology of religion was dominated by the secularization thesis which emphasized the diminishing social significance of religious beliefs, religious practices, and traditional religious institutions. The existing

social status of established churches which experienced religious freedom but had no big impact on the overall functioning of West European societies provided no primary interest in the developments of religions in Eastern Europe. In such a situation there was also no big demand of information about religious practices in Eastern Europe. Among the East European nations Bulgaria was regarded as more distant, too closely associated with Eastern influences, including its long time history connected with the Byzantine Empire, and later the Ottoman Empire, as well as its close historical ties with Russia.

Catholic countries in Central Europe were regarded by the Western audience as closer to their mentality in both historical terms and denominational presence.

In this sense there was no big demand of information about religious communities in Bulgaria.

A lot has changed since the 1990s. The fall of the Iron curtain enhanced cooperation and ties between East and West European nations. The religious revival in Eastern Europe created enormous challenges to Western societies and they themselves had to rediscover their own interest in religion. East European migrants in the West, as well as Western religious missionaries coming to Eastern Europe needed information which had been absent for a long time. The open borders created possibilities for mutual exchange of cultural and religious practices. Traditionally in the United Kingdom, for example, people knew much more about Indian religions, Islam, and new religious movements coming with the immigration waves to their country than about Eastern Orthodox Christianity in Bulgaria and Romania.

The entry of Bulgaria into the European Union is another milestone in the development of interest in religious communities and practices in Bulgaria. Bulgarians who used the freedom to move to Western Europe, as well as West

European pensioners, religious missionaries, and business people who came to Bulgaria need more information about the rich history of the country in order to be able to understand specific religious practices and cultural differences. In academic terms, Sociology of religion began to question the validity of the secularization thesis which was obvious that it did not explain developments in the Muslim world, the rise of Pentecostalism, and conservative trends within many established religions. One peculiar characteristic of religious communities in Bulgaria was that they did not have the limitations on religious freedom anymore but yet secularization in its Western appearance became a greater challenge for the believers. The free practice of religion was no longer a big problem but there was also no “external enemy” to mobilize believers and tie them together. Migration and globalization posed new dilemmas to the preservation of identities. The rationalism typical for Western religious communities was something new to Bulgarian religious communities who had existed for a long time in a hostile conservative environment which itself enhanced their own conservatism. New interactions took place which required a greater emphasis on the sociological rather than theological study of religion.

Religion can help us explain both complexities in social life and everyday dilemmas such as explanation of meanings of existing problems like contemporary fundamentalism and religiously motivated terrorism. Current forms of religious communities have evolved through history and that is why we should learn it. The historical presence of Orthodox Christianity in Bulgaria makes it traditional and monopolistic in terms of religious identity. This is not the case of Bulgarian Orthodox Christians living in Western countries where Orthodox Christianity is a minority religion and mobilizes compatriots around certain values and identity.

The approach of this book is to study the Bulgarian specific features of the religious communities and to avoid generalizations. Orthodox Christianity can have many different features in Greece, Russia, and Romania, which are not to be found in Bulgaria. The strong secularity of Bulgarian society influences the Orthodox Church and it has different specific features unlike the much stronger Orthodox Christianity in Russia and Romania for example.

Islam in Bulgaria is different from the same religion practiced in Turkey, the Arab countries and Western Europe. In Bulgaria it has the characteristics of an identity of previously dominant minorities who have become disadvantaged minorities after Bulgaria's liberation from Ottoman rule.

Bulgarian Evangelical Protestants also differ from the respective Protestant communities in other countries. The long history of segregation has made Protestants strongly sharing communities able to resist discrimination.

The book puts a strong influence on the Bulgarian Orthodox church and examines its historical developments, leadership, worship and holy places. Then it puts emphasis on holidays, dress and food which are specific identity markers. Rituals and social life become important to strengthen the community of Orthodox Christians and they always have their political and cultural implications. Specific attention is paid to controversial issues in the contemporary development of the church. Its cultural impact has left numerous artifacts and has shaped the overall Bulgarian culture.

The same approach has been applied to the other existing religious communities in Bulgaria, though they have been covered with much less detail.

A personality has been chosen as an example of a human being who has had an impact on the perception of religion and Bulgaria as a whole: father Dobri Dobrev.





## Map of Bulgaria

Source: <http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/bulgaria-political-map.htm>

Traditionally Orthodox Christian but highly secular Bulgaria is a country situated in southeastern Europe. It borders Romania on the north, Greece and Turkey on the south, the Black Sea on the east, and Serbia and Macedonia on the west. Its total area is 110,994 square kilometers.

The population of Bulgaria is 7,364,570 inhabitants according to the Census of 2011.

If we compare the data of this Census to the previous Census 2001 we will observe several trends.

Ten years earlier the overall population of the Republic of Bulgaria has been 7,928,901 (Census 2001). The first impression is that the country is in a process of depopulation which has been the irreversible process since 1990.

In 2011 the numbers who responded to the optional Census question about religion (the term “creed” is used in the Bulgarian official statistics) is 5,758,301.

Out of them we can have the following distribution:

Eastern Orthodox 4,374,135 (**59.4 percent**)

Muslim 577,139 (**7.8 percent**)

Protestant 64, 476 (**0.9 percent**)  
Catholic 48, 945 (**0.7 percent**)  
Other (including Armenian Apostolic Orthodox,  
Jewish, and White Brotherhood): 11,444 (**0.2 percent**)  
None 272, 264 (**3.4 percent**)  
No self-identification 409, 898 (**5.6 percent**)  
**No response: 1.6 million (22 percent)**

If we follow the debates over this distribution we will see that there are disputes whether a percentage from those who responded or from the general population should be used. It is for the first time that so big non response rate to this optional question is present in a Census. The present data analyses in Bulgaria prefer to use the percentage from those who responded.

It is possible to calculate percentages using the 5.7 million who responded.

But the CIA World Factbook uses the entire population figure to calculate the percentages. This way actually makes more sense and seems like the more common way to interpret such statistics. It is a very big percentage of the population - 1.6 million who did not respond.

For the first time the Census in Bulgaria has the same guidelines as in all European Union countries and the question about religion (“creed”) is optional and confidential. The very definition of “creed” in the Census 2011 has been changed in order to be identical with all EU countries. Until 2001 “creed” in the Census was defined as a tradition within which one has been born, no matter whether s/he is a believer or not. In 2011 it is defined as “belonging to a certain group formed historically and characterized by the practicing of certain religious rituals”([http://www.nsi.bg/census2011/PDOCS2/karta\\_Census2011 Inst rukcia.pdf](http://www.nsi.bg/census2011/PDOCS2/karta_Census2011_Instrukcia.pdf)).

According to the instruction for the Census 2011, the people should define their religion themselves. If they cannot identify themselves, they should be classified as “No self-identification”. It is also possible to answer that one has no religion and be classified as “None”.

The religion of children should be defined as the religion of their parents. If the parents declare different religions they should be asked to mutually agree on the religion of their children.

The non-response rate also has to do with the presence of anomie (E. Durkheim) – a state of society where laws and norms exist but they do not function properly – a situation present in most post-communist countries. It is a tendency that many people do not vote or do not participate in any voluntary activities. In all social surveys there is a big non-response rate. The Census is the only survey which is obligatory but there are respondents who refuse to participate. The optional questions are a good excuse not to be answered.

Many of the non-respondents should be non-believers or “nominal Orthodox-Christians”, as well as “nominal Muslims”. But a close look at the data from previous censuses suggests that there are also Orthodox Christians who have not responded in the last Census – probably dissatisfied with the state of affairs in the Orthodox church – this is an issue to be studied further.

The previous Census in 2001 had the following distribution:

POPULATION 7,928,901  
EASTERN ORTHODOX 82.6 percent  
MUSLIM 12.2 percent  
ROMAN CATHOLIC 0.6 percent  
PROTESTANT 0.5 percent  
OTHER 4.1 percent

If we calculate the 2011 data only from those 5.7 million who responded, the percentages of the Orthodox Christians and Muslims would be higher. The interesting tendency is that despite of the optional question about religion it is visible that the Protestant community is growing and that between 2001 and 2011 it has become larger than the Roman Catholic population.

Another conclusion from the Census results is that there is a clear secularization tendency in Bulgarian society. Despite that the number of people who respond that they have no religion (3.4 percent) is not so high, the sum of respondents who do not respond, do not have self-identification, and do not have religion is more than 30 percent of the whole population. A possible conclusion is that religion is not a strong mobilizing factor in Bulgarian society.

The Balkan region has always been a crossroads of different cultures and civilizations. Ancient local religions, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism have been present there. Christianity left the greatest impact on Bulgarian culture and identity, dating back to the missionary work of Saint Paul in the first century CE. The Bulgarian state was founded in 681 CE, and Christianity was accepted as a state religion in the ninth century. The influence of the neighboring Byzantine Empire (fourth through fifteenth centuries) is a crucial factor for the understanding of Bulgarian medieval culture and politics, though for certain periods the Bulgarian kingdom showed its own glory. Bulgaria was conquered by the Ottoman empire in 1396 and remained under Ottoman rule until 1878, when modern Bulgaria became an autonomous principality. The fully independent Kingdom of Bulgaria was declared in 1908. The period of Communist rule (1944-89) limited the free practice of religions. After 1989 there was a religious revival, though Bulgarian society remains highly secular.

Today the different religions in Bulgaria co-exist in neighborhood without strict areas of separation. Nearly 60 percent of Bulgaria's population identifies as Eastern Orthodox. The modern Bulgarian state had proclaimed Orthodox Christianity as the country's dominant religion, and adherents of the faith can be found throughout the country. The five centuries of Ottoman domination left a significant Muslim population in Bulgaria. Estimated at just under 8 percent of the population, Muslims live primarily in Southern Bulgaria (the Rhodope Mountains), and in the country's northeast. Protestants are widely dispersed. Catholics live mostly in South-Central and North-Central Bulgaria. Jews were the third biggest religious group until 1946, but currently make up only a fraction of a percent of the population. Bulgarian Jews live primarily in Sofia, other big cities, or along the Black Sea. Other religions include Armenian Apostolic Christianity, the distinctive Bulgarian White Brotherhood, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and the Baha'i faith. In the 2011 census, 1.6 million Bulgarians (22 percent of the population) did not respond when asked an optional question about religious affiliation. It is not known how many of those who did not respond profess no religion, or simply preferred not to answer the optional question. Secularity is the most notable religious trend in Bulgaria.

The Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (1991) declares the division of religious institutions and the state. It recognizes the equality under the law of all citizens without “any constraints on the rights and privileges, based on race, nationality, ethnos, sex, origin, religion, education, personal or social status, or property status, convictions, political affiliations” (art. 6, paragraph 5).

Freedom of conscience, thought, and religion, as well as freedom of religious and atheistic beliefs, are also proclaimed. The state is obliged to maintain tolerance and respect among all religious communities and among all believers and atheists. Eastern Orthodox Christianity is acknowledged in the constitution as the country’s traditional religion. This does not provide any privileged legal position, though the Law on Religions (2002), which gives preferential treatment to the Orthodox Church, has raised some controversies. The law was passed by the parliament on December 20, 2002 and it was supported strongly by the then ruling party NDSV (National Movement Simeon the Second) and it provided a legal framework for this article of the Constitution (Bogomilova 2005: 216-218).

The Law asserts “the right of each person to freedom of consciousness and religion, as well as equality before the law, regardless of religious affiliation and conviction”. And “supports mutual understanding, tolerance and respect with regard to freedom of consciousness and religion”.

The Law on Religion (also called Denominations Act) establishes that the right to religious freedom is fundamental, absolute, subjective, personal, and inviolable. Religious freedom gives every person the right to freely form their religious beliefs and to choose, change or worship – respectively practice freely his or her religion – individually or collectively, in public or in private, through religious worship,

education, rites or rituals. The Law stipulates that no one shall be persecuted and no one's rights shall be restricted on the grounds of religious belief.

Confessions are described as free and equal under the law, separate from the state. Faith based discrimination is inadmissible and the state should not interfere in the internal affairs of religious communities and institutions. The law prescribes particular rights with regard to religious freedom: to create and maintain religious communities and institutions, to establish and maintain places of worship or religious assembly; to create and maintain charitable and humanitarian institutions; to write, publish and disseminate religious publications; to give and receive religious instruction; to create and maintain appropriate institutions for teaching in abiding by legal requirements; the parents and legal guardians have the right to provide religious education to their children according to their personal convictions.

If we compare the 2002 Law on Religion to the previous Law on Religious Confessions of 1949, the 2002 Law emphasizes much more strongly the religious rights and liberties of citizens and the equality under the law of the separate religious communities (Bogomilova 2005: 217-232).

But we should take into consideration the specific conditions of transition in Bulgarian society where the laws have very good provisions but they do not work in practice. Legal principles are dependent on the status of the political system and the judiciary.

In practice the authorities keep the law with regard to the Bulgarian Orthodox church but tend to discriminate within certain limits minority religious groups.

The U.S. State Department's 2012 International Religious Freedom Report notes that there have been complaints of discrimination and harassment based on religion. Muslim leaders, for example, reported that imams and muftis

were singled out for questioning by Bulgarian security forces, while both Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims reported difficulties in obtaining building permits for houses of worship. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints (Mormons) also complained of discrimination by local government officials.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2012&dliid=208298>

See more at:

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

Further according to the Law on Religion, religious communities may establish houses of ritual, worship, or divine service for the purpose of holding public religious rites and services in a building of their own or leased, can organize public activities outside the houses of worship and also maintain cemetery parks. This right is practiced within certain limits in some municipalities where local councils have adopted regional rules to limit religious and religious-educational activities only on the premises of the religious organizations and not outside in public.

In the past before the adoption of the current law there have been cases when non-traditional religious communities, among them mostly Evangelical churches and new religious movements, have been denied registration and this have prevented them from functioning legally. The right to assembly has been respected but without registration it was impossible to hire staff, to buy or rent premises on behalf of the religious organization, to sign contracts. In the 1990s non-traditional religious groups used to register under the Law on Persons and the Family as non-for-profit associations. In 1994 the authorities initiated a change in this law which made it impossible for religious groups registered only under the Law on Persons and the Family to perform religious and religious-



educational activities. The situation was used by the government to deny registration to a number of Evangelical churches and new religious movements who were considered dangerous at that time and had experienced strong media attacks.

In the middle of the 1990s there were many false and exaggerated media reports which portrayed non-traditional religions as “evil cults and sects” and formed negative attitudes in the public opinion. At that time new religious movements were still a very new and unknown phenomenon to the general public. The lack of knowledge was an additional reason for the suspicions against minority religions.

Further according to the Law on Religions registered religious denominations are able to establish medical, social, and educational institutions. Under certain conditions, observing the Law of National Education, the registered religious denominations may open secondary and higher schools while observing the respective legal regulations. A practical problem which appears with graduates of religious schools is that they have difficulties in continuing their education at a further level. In order to enroll in a civil school or university one should possess a degree from an institution registered under the Law of National Education, and this is not the case with religious schools which are registered under the Law on Religions.

As legal entities religious denominations should be able to own property – both real estate and movable property, including the right to use profits such as rent, dividends, etc. The state and local communities can yield the right of use of state and municipal property to religious institutions and their local divisions as well as support them by subsidies provided by the state and municipal budget (Bogomilova 2005: 219).

Registered religious denominations can produce and sell items connected with their religious services, rituals, and

rites. Legal entities for non-profit purposes can be created for supporting and popularizing a confession which has the status of a legal entity.

The distribution of state subsidies for registered denominations should be carried out through the State Budget Act, though the overall poor economic situation in Bulgaria does not provide sufficient funding for the proper functioning of the religious communities. In 2015 the state budget has allocated 4 500 000 Bulgarian Leva (equal to 2 300 813 Euro) for the overall subsidies of all registered religious communities in Bulgaria. It includes the subsidies for Bulgarian Orthodox Christian communities outside Bulgaria, renovations and building of churches and monasteries of the Bulgarian Orthodox church, renovations and building of prayer centers of the Muslim religion in Bulgaria, of the Catholic church in Bulgaria, of synagogues of the Jewish community, churches of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox church, for supporting other registered religious communities, for the renovation of religious buildings with national significance, publishing religious literature, and for the creation of a register of temples, prayer centers, and monasteries in Bulgaria (Durzhaven vestnik, No. 107 (izvanreden), 24.12.2014 - p. 81).

The law also arranges the acquiring of a status of legal entity and the registration of a religious denomination which should be carried out by the Municipal Court of Sofia. The Council of Ministers and its administrative division – the Directorate of Religious Denominations is carrying out the state policy towards religions by expert conclusions in connection with the registration of religious groups, examines signals and complaints about unlawful religious activities, handles requests for residing in Bulgaria of foreign religious officials.

The law has been criticized because the legal registration is a condition for exercising rights. The greatest

shortcoming of this law was its intervention in the internal affairs of the Bulgarian Orthodox church which until then was in a situation of schism, which is discussed later in “Controversial issues”. The law gave exclusive support to one of the two rival synods within the Bulgarian Orthodox church. The schism had its beginning in 1992 when the Directorate of Religious Denominations at the Council of Ministers issued a statement that the election of the Bulgarian Patriarch was illegitimate. A long period of schism followed and the 2002 law pretended that it solved it. But a new period of legal cases followed and it also questioned the objectivity of the Law on Religions of 2002. The problem will be discussed further in “Controversial issues”.

In the period 2000-2015 Bulgaria has received ten sentences from the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg with regard to limitations of religious rights and freedoms (<http://hpberov.blogspot.bg/2015/02/9.html>). If we compare the relative liberal provisions in the Law on Religions with the number of sentences it is evident that an anomic feature is present in the Bulgarian judicial system. The provisions of the Constitution and the respective laws are in line with the international norms and regulations but the implementation of legal provisions in practice does not conform with the spirit of the laws. Moreover, the membership of Bulgaria in the European Union has not changed the intensity of legal decisions against the limitations of religious freedom in Bulgaria. In addition we can only acknowledge the fact that apart from this there are many voices expressed in media, including those of senior state officials, that the law is very liberal and it should be changed in order that the state would have more possibilities to limit rights and intervene in order to counteract activities of non-traditional religious communities.

## **Chapter 1. Traditional Religion in Bulgaria: Orthodox Christianity**

Christianity began spreading in Bulgarian lands in the first century CE with the missionary work of Saint Paul. Episcopal centers date back to the second century. Historical sources indicate that the roots of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church should be sought in Christian communities and churches in the Balkans among the local population and organized Christian missions among various new settlers in the Balkans. In the areas which later formed the Bulgarian state there has been an organized church life since 33 CE. Christianity met with greater success after its adoption as an equal religion in the Roman Empire in the fourth century. In 4-6 centuries the Constantinople Patriarchate initiated missionary activities which had relative success. The church organization gradually strengthened and increased the number of Episcopal centers, clergy, churches and monasteries. Christianity pervaded even in mountainous areas.

The first Bulgarian state on the Balkans was founded in 681 CE by Khan Asparuh. He belonged to the Dulo dynasty of the Great Bulgaria which existed earlier in a different location: to the north of the Black sea. The early Bulgarians were a horse riding tribe who had changed their locations over time in Asia and Eastern Europe.

After the formation of the Bulgarian state along the Danube river in 681 CE the different ethnic groups who populated these lands – Bulgarians, Slavs, and others had each their own pagan religions and were not united. The invasions of Slavic tribes and Bulgarians in the 6-7 centuries in the Balkan Peninsula and the wars of the newly formed Bulgarian state (681) with the Byzantine Empire inflicted significant damages in urban planning. A number of fortresses, cities, temples and monasteries were destroyed. This led to a decrease in the local Christian population and disorder in eparchial organization. All this adversely affected the mission of Christianization. There is historical data about prolonged

contact of Slavs and Bulgarians with the Byzantine Empire and the local population in the Balkan lands. A number of cases suggest peaceful settlement and even military alliance between traditional opponents, peaceful relations, commercial and other relations, mutual exchange of prisoners, imposing Byzantine domination of the new settlers in the Bulgarian lands, colonization, demographic change. Byzantine influence permeated into the young Bulgarian state - especially during the dynastic struggles among military and tribal aristocracy (761-777 AD). These data suggest that in the period 6-8 centuries there were ways and opportunities for penetration of Christianity among the new settlers in the Balkans. From the diocesan lists and acts of church councils, archaeological findings and other sources it was evident that a large number of cities and dioceses remained after the settlement of Slavs and Bulgarians south of the Danube. The conquest of the Balkans and the formation of the Bulgarian state did not have disastrous consequences for outgoing local population and its material and spiritual culture. Between the new settlers and the Christianized Thracian-Illyrian local population there was mutual penetration and influence both in everyday life, in social and economic life, in culture, language, and religious views.

In the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century new lands were included in the territory of Bulgaria with a significant number of Christian populations. Tens of thousands of Byzantine prisoners fell in captivity, including some prominent clerics. They were the ones to introduce Christian teaching among many Bulgarians. Christianity was spread in the Bulgarian state by Greek prisoners of war and clergy.

Despite persecution by the Bulgarian authorities, Christianity began to penetrate even in Khan royal circle. During the Khan Krum's wars with the Byzantium (811-814) many prominent Byzantines fell in captivity, including a

person called Kinam. The latter was drawn as an educator in the Khan Palace where he started promoting his Christian beliefs. The spread of Christianity and its penetration in the Khan Palace created the impression of growing Byzantine influence, which threatened the state interests. So Khan Omurtag (815-832) exhibited open intolerance towards the foreign religion and started a persecution of Christianity in Bulgaria. Byzantine sources attest to the martyrdom of Bishop Manuil of Adrianopol and the Nicene Bishop Leo, the warlords Joan and Leontius, of the Presbyter Parod and other 337 Christians whose names remain unknown. The Palace educator Kinam was thrown in prison, and survived only because of the intercession of Khan's son Enravota.

The son of Khan Omurtag – Khan Malamir (831-836) - showed some tolerance toward Christians, but he was too hard against his own brother Enravota who perceived the new faith from his educator Kinam. The Bulgarian Church celebrated the memory of Enravota under the name of Warrior as the first Bulgarian martyr of the new Christian faith.

Following a successful policy Khan Presiyan (836-852) managed to join a significant part of Macedonia, at that time densely populated by Slavs. So the relative share of the Christian population increased. Perhaps Khan Presiyan's attitude towards Christians was tolerant because his politics was aimed at attracting more Byzantine Slavs to the Bulgarian state.

The territorial expansion in the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century put the Bulgarian state in more direct contact with the Christian world, not only to the south but also in the northwest. The visionary statesman Khan Boris (852-889) complied with this circumstance and decided to introduce Christianity as the official religion. He predicted that the ethno-religious unity in the country could take place only by a similar religion of the two ethnic groups (Bulgarians and Slavs).

Initially Boris provided the conversion to Christianity to be performed by the Western (Roman) Church. In 862 a union was established between Khan Boris and King Ludwig the German, which regulated the adoption of Christianity. The Byzantium on its side organized a coalition of Great Moravia, Croatia and Serbia against Bulgaria in order to destroy this union and interrupt further rapprochement. Over 863 Bulgarian troops were defeated and Khan Boris concluded a peace treaty with the Byzantium, but under a definite condition: Bulgarian envoys to be baptized in Constantinople and after that the ruler and all the people to be baptized. Along with the baptized envoys a Byzantine spiritual mission also came to the Bulgarian capital Pliska. The speed of the events did not give the time to Khan Boris to prepare his people to his fateful decision. So his conversion to Christianity and that of his family was not neither public nor official but secretly during the night. The Baptist of the ruler was the Byzantine emperor Mihail III himself, represented by delegation (not present personally). So Khan Boris was baptized under the name Mihail and became a Prince. These events relate to the autumn of 864.

In 864, after a period of famine and war, Prince Boris I accepted Christianity as a state religion. The massive conversion of the Bulgarian people began in the spring of 865. Somewhere this was done with enthusiasm but elsewhere – with violence. This act was followed by the revolts of boyars (pagan nobles) in 865-66. As Prince Boris-Mihail had expected some of his senior boyars saw in the act of conversion to Christianity a threat to Bulgaria's interests. They publicly accused him that he gave his people a "bad law" and rebelled against him. Aided by his faithful collaborators, Boris managed to prevent rebellion and punished severely 52 of the most prominent leaders together with their families. These revolts



were suppressed, and the insurgent boyars and their families were killed.

Along with the imposition of Christianity the pagan organization was destroyed - the pagan temples were destroyed or converted into churches, pagan shrines were destroyed and the construction of Christian shrines began in their places. Boris faced the serious problem of rapid construction and arrangement of distinct state church that would prevent the spread of other religions in the country. The settlement of an independent Bulgarian church with the rank of Patriarchate also had according to the Prince another advantage – to limit the possibility of extending the Byzantine political influence whose agents were the clerics sent from Constantinople.

The aspirations of Boris were not understood in the Byzantine capital. Defenders of the pentarchy (the idea of the primacy of the five archbishops (respectively – Patriarchs) of the five largest ancient departments in the Church: Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Rome and Constantinople) did not allow even the possibility Bulgaria to have an autonomous church, let alone self-Patriarchate. That is why Bulgaria restored political union with the Germans and started looking for the protection of the Roman Church. In the summer of 865 a Bulgarian delegation went to Rome and presented to the Pope Nicholas I a list of 115 questions covering the settlement of ecclesiastical and religious life, traditions and customs of the Bulgarians, whose roots lead to distant pagan past. In the autumn of 865 a special Papal delegation brought "The answers of Pope Nicholas to the Bulgarians questions" (*Responsa papae Nikolai Primi ad consulta Bulgarorum*). These responses were an extremely important document which revealed the most pressing problems of newly Christianized Bulgarian society. However, to one of the main issues – about an independent Bulgarian church, headed by a Patriarch, the Pope replied that he could not take a position until they learned from their

messengers about the status of Christian preaching and the existing structure of the Church in Bulgaria.

The relations with the Western Church actually meant an expulsion of the Byzantine clergy and introducing papal missionaries in Bulgaria. Prince Boris approved bishop Formosa and requested the Pope to approve him as a Bulgarian archbishop. But the new Pope Adrian II refused to do so under the pretext that Formosa had his own diocese in Italy. The latter was recently recalled and replaced. Boris then requested Deacon Martin or some Cardinal suitable for a Bulgarian archbishop, but this was refused again. Instead, other clergy was sent whom Boris refused to accept and renewed his request for bishop Formosa. The Pope categorically replied that he would select and designate himself the future Bulgarian spiritual leader.

The fruitless negotiations with Rome made Boris look to Constantinople again. From the very beginning of the negotiations it became clear that this time Byzantium was much more accommodating and willing to concessions. At that time in its capital there was a church council (869/870), which discussed controversial issues between the Byzantine and Roman churches. A Bulgarian delegation led by eminent dignitary Peter arrived in Constantinople. It was invited to the closing session together with the German delegation (February 28, 870). Three days after the closing of the council Emperor Basil I convened in the palace on March 4, 870 an extraordinary meeting at which participated representatives of Pope Adrian II, of the Eastern patriarchates, and the Bulgarian delegation. Surprisingly for the papal legates a discussion began about the jurisdiction of the Bulgarian church from which it became clear that the lands of the Bulgarian state earlier belonged to the diocese of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. A decision followed immediately that Bulgaria will receive its archbishopric under Constantinople, despite the

objections of the papal legates. So the foundations of the Bulgarian local Orthodox Church were laid and it was closely associated with the Orthodox East. Chronologically, it was the eighth in a row in the community of Eastern Christian churches in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

Prince Boris I negotiated with the Pope about a possible adoption of Western Christianity (Roman Catholicism), but he committed to Constantinople (the Eastern church) in 870, and that year is considered the starting date of the Bulgarian church.

Initially the Bulgarian Church was an autonomous archbishopric under the ultimate jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Constantinople. Its primate had the rank of archbishop who was elected by the Bulgarian bishops and approved by the patriarch. Probably firstly the diocesan bishops in the country were originally chosen by Constantinople. Diocesan centers were Pliska, Preslav, Morava, Ohrid, Bregalnica, Provat, Debelt, and Belgrade. Earlier dioceses of Sredets, Philipopolis, Drustur, Bdin, Skopje, Nish, and others also did not interrupt their existence.

Missionary work continued until the tenth century. During this era there were major developments in Bulgarian Christianity, including the invention of the Glagolitic alphabet in the ninth century by Saints Cyril and Methodius (a later version of this alphabet is the Cyrillic alphabet, which serves many countries). Saints Cyril and Methodius also translated the major Christian books into Old Bulgarian.

To prepare Bulgarian writers Boris I sent many young Bulgarians (including his son Simeon) to study in Constantinople. In 886 he accepted in the capital Pliska disciples of Saints Cyril and Methodius - Kliment, Naum and Angelarius who had been expelled from Great Moravia.

The work of Saints Cyril and Methodius continued with their disciples, Gorazd, Laurentius, Kliment, Naum, and

Angelarius who were welcomed to Bulgaria and shaped the cultural foundations of Bulgarian Christianity. They made a plan for a broader educational and cultural activity. So they created the Preslav and Ohrid literary schools. The prince sent many prominent Bulgarians to monasteries in order to engage in literary activities; among them his brother Doks and his son Tudor Doksov. In 889 Prince Boris I left the throne to his son Vladimir and withdrew to a monastery to closely monitor the activities of scholars. In 893 he took off Vladimir from the throne and even left him blind because of his attempts to restore paganism. Then Boris actively participated in the first ecclesiastical and national council in Preslav (893), which introduced the Slavonic language in the liturgy. He also replaced the Byzantine clergy with Bulgarian in the face of the talented disciples of St. Cyril and Methodius. He considered the notable place which should be given to the Bulgarian archbishop at ceremonies in Constantinople, and other matters.

The military and political conflicts between Bulgaria and Byzantium during the reign of King Simeon (893-927) did not bring complete disorder and breaking up of church relations but rather helped strengthen the Bulgarian independence. The large rise of Bulgaria in political and cultural terms and the existing close relationship between church and state constantly strengthened the international prestige of the Bulgarian Church.

After the successful battle at Aheloy River (August 20, 917) Prince Simeon proclaimed himself "king of Bulgarians and Byzantines." According to the understanding the situation of that time the Church had to meet the high dignity of the Bulgarian state. Inside the Byzantium there existed a theory of a close relationship between the kingdom and patriarchy ("*Imperium sine patriarcha non stare*" - "Kingdom without a patriarch should not exist"). Under this rule, reflected in many monuments from the Middle Ages in 919 the Church-People's

Assembly officially proclaimed the church's independence and status of the Bulgarian archbishop received the title of Patriarch. In October 927 a Bulgarian-Byzantine peace treaty was signed under the terms of which the title of "basileus" was acknowledged to King Peter I, who entered into kinship with the Byzantine imperial palace. Damyan in Drustur was proclaimed a Patriarch and Bulgaria was honored as autocephalous.

The Bulgarian Autocephalous Church with the rank of Patriarchate ranked sixth among the most authoritative ancient patriarchates of the Orthodox East. Main religious centers, Metropolitan centers at that time were in North Bulgaria - Pliska, Preslav, Dorostol (Drustur) - successor to Marcianopol Diocese in the Province of Lower Misia, Bdin (Vidin), Moravsk (Morava), successor of the bishop in the town of Margus; in South Bulgaria - Philipopol, Serdika (Sredets) Bregalnitsa, Ohrid, Prespa and others.

Between 927 and 1018 there were 9 Bulgarian patriarchs whose turn it is still unclear: Damyan, Leontiy, Dimitar, Sergiy, Grigoriy, German, Nikolay, Philip and David. Their headquarters was the capital Preslav, as well Dorostol (today Silistra).

The military and political circumstances in the second half of the 10th century reflected crucially on the first Bulgarian Patriarchate. When the Kievan Prince Svyatoslav entered in northeastern Bulgaria (968-969), the patriarchal throne moved to Dorostol and after the invasion of the Byzantine Emperor Joan I Tzimischi (971) - in Sredets (today Sofia), which became the capital of the western Bulgarian State headed by Samuil (997-1014). Because for strategic reasons the capital moved successively into the southwestern Bulgarian lands, along with it also moved the Bulgarian Patriarch, while in the late 10th century he settled in the town of Ohrid. Here Bulgarian patriarchs were Philip and David.

After Bulgaria was conquered by the Byzantine Empire in 1018, the Byzantine Emperor Basil II preserved the independence of the Bulgarian Church under the name Ohrid Archbishopric. Its Primate received the title of "Archbishop of all Bulgaria". Subordinate dioceses were listed in a special certificates issued by Basil II (respectively in 1019, 1020 and 1025). It covered the area in the Byzantine Empire Macedonia (excluding Thessaloniki and its southeastern share), the regions of Morava, Timok, Nishava, Srem, Belgrade, Sredets, Kyustendil, Vidin, South and Central Albania, Epirus (without its southern parts) all over Serbia and northern Thessaly. Later, during the successors of Basil II, a number of changes occurred in the Diocese as it reduced in the benefit of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Meanwhile Ohrid Archbishopric was subject to Hellenization – the senior clergy was filled mostly with Greek-Byzantine clergy and they introduced Greek as a liturgical and administrative language.

During the Byzantine rule (1018-1185) the Bulgarian church existed as the Ohrid archbishopric.

In 1186 after the restoration of the Bulgarian state the brothers Assen and Petar rejected the spiritual authority of the Ohrid Archbishopric and the Patriarchate of Constantinople and established a new religious center in the capital Tarnovo. This was the Autocephalous Tarnovo Archbishopric headed by Archbishop Vasilij.

As a result of negotiations between Tzar Kaloyan (1197-1207) and the Roman Curia in the autumn of 1204 the Bulgarian ruler was recognized the title "king" and the right to mint coins; and Vasilij was given the title "Archbishop of Tarnovo and Primate of all Bulgaria and Wallachia." According to the Pope the title "Primate" is the equivalent of the patriarch. In early November 1204 a solemn coronation of King Kaloyan and Primate Vasilij took place. While recognizing the primacy of the pope, practically Bulgarian

church retained its independence. The Union was a great diplomatic success for Tsar Kaloyan, because in this way Bulgaria received international recognition.

For diplomatic reasons Tsar Kaloyan in 1204 settled a union with the Pope and formally proclaimed Bulgaria a Catholic country.

The Bulgarian Orthodox patriarchate was restored in 1235. The official and canonical recognition of the patriarchy of the Bulgarian Orthodox church took place in 1235 during the reign of Ivan Asen II of the great church council in the town Lampsak of the Dardanelles, Asia Minor, with the consent of the Nicene Patriarch German II and the other four eastern patriarchs. The Bulgarian cleric Yoakim I was proclaimed as the first Patriarch of Tarnovo. The diocese of the Tarnovo Patriarchate varied depending on the limits of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom (1186-1396). It was the largest during the time of Tsar Ivan Asen II (1218-1241), when it covered 14 parishes plus Tarnovo diocese and the diocese of Ohrid Archbishopric. There were 10 Metropolitan centers (Preslav, Cherven, Lovech, Sredets, Ovech, Drustur, Vidin, Serres, Philippi and Mesemvria) and 4 bishoprics (Branichevo of Belgrade, Nish and Velbazhd). In the 14th century the scope of the Tarnovo diocese sharply reduced: its Western dioceses were connected to the Serbian Archbishopric (from 1346 elevated to the rank Patriarchate) and Varna, Vidin and southern dioceses - to the Constantinople Patriarchate.

The organization of the Tarnovo Patriarchate followed the tradition of the first (or Preslav) Patriarchate. At the head stood the patriarch who participated in church senate (Boyar Council); sometimes he acted as a regent and had his own office. An important part in the management of the patriarchate had the synod involving bishops (metropolitans and bishops), and sometimes representatives of the secular authorities. It examined the trials against heretics, disputes over property and

other issues of spiritual and secular nature concerning the Church. When electing a new patriarch the synod proposed three candidates, one of which was approved by the monarch - a testament to the intervention of secular power in the life of the Church. Patriarchy is always conducive to policy of the state – a departure from it was followed by strict sanctions. So during the reign of Teodor Svetoslav in 1300 Patriarch Ioakim III was cast of the so called "Skull rock" of Tsarevets for treason. Secular government fully supported the struggle of the church against heresy and summoned anti-heretical councils (1211, 1350, 1360). The dominant religious and philosophical doctrine in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in the 14th century was Hesychasm. Its prominent followers were St. Teodosiy Tarnovski and St. Patriarch Evtimiy Tarnovski.

A remarkably case was the last Tarnovo patriarch St. Evtimiy. Highly educated cleric involved in literary activities, he laid the foundations of the Tarnovo Literary School, whose seat was the St. Trinity monastery near Tarnovo. In 1375 he was elected patriarch and developed a broad spiritual and administrative, social and cultural activity. St. Evtimiy undertook an important language reform. He revised the old translations, collated them with Greek originals and made new translations of liturgical and other theological books. He also paid great attention to the accuracy of the translation, because he believed that mistakes lead to heretical delusions. The literary work of St. Evtimiy is voluminous and varied – legends, eulogies, messages and so on.

After the fall of Tarnovo under Ottoman rule (17 July 1393) St. Evtimiy was expelled from the Tsarevets hill, where was the patriarchate. Later, he was exiled in the Bachkovo monastery and died there on April 4, 1404. One year after the conquest of Tarnovo by the Ottoman Turks the Constantinople Patriarchate using the distress directly interfered in the administration of the Tarnovo Patriarchate. In August 1394 the



Patriarch of Constantinople Anthony IV (1389-1390; 1391-1397) and his Synod issued document (synodal decision), which declared their interest in the vacant throne. In fact this document gave mandate to Mavrovlah Bishop Jeremiah: "to go with God's help in the holy church of Tarnovo and have permission there to provide all things...". In 1395 Jeremiah was already in Tarnovo.

We learn that by August 1401 Jeremiah still managed the Tarnovo diocese. It is not known for his successor, but in the second decade of the 15th century (about 1416) the Tarnovo Patriarchate was fully subordinated to the Constantinople Patriarchate. So the dioceses of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church came under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Ohrid Archbishopric and Ipek (Serbian) Patriarchate. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the relative independence of the autonomous Ipek Patriarchate (1766) and the Ohrid Archbishopric (1767) was removed. So all Bulgarian lands transferred under the spiritual authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

During Ottoman rule (1396-1878) Christianity in the Bulgarian lands was under the jurisdiction of the Constantinople patriarchate. In the Ottoman Empire people were divided along religious rather than along national lines and all Orthodox Christians in the empire (including Greeks, Serbians, Bulgarians, etc.) were treated as an integral community of Orthodox Christians. This led to a greater Greek influence among Bulgarians than before – during the times of the independent Second Bulgarian Kingdom until the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

In the Ottoman period Orthodox monasteries had their own monastery schools, where Bulgarian identity was preserved.

With the rise of the national idea in the Renaissance period (18-19 centuries) rejection of the dependence on the

Constantinople Patriarchate became one of the main issues of the Bulgarian national revolution. Bulgarian clergy reserved the awareness, lifestyle and morals of its people, tempered its will, and strengthened their moral strength to fight against the oppressors. The struggle for church independence started from the 1820s and continued even after the Liberation (1878) among the Bulgarians in Macedonia and Eastern Thrace. It took place in three stages and was held in very specific and concrete terms. The first phase run from 1824 to the Crimean War (1853-1856) as a movement to expel the Greek bishops and their replacement with Bulgarian, but also to eliminate the Greek language of worship. First residents of Vratsa under the direction of Dimitraki Hadzhitoshev attempted in 1824 to remove Bishop Methodius (1813-1828) and replace him with a Bulgarian. The action, however, proved unsuccessful and ended with a death sentence for Hadzhitoshev.

The largest diocese – Tarnovo also took place in the struggle against the Greek bishops in the late 1830s. Its first Hierarch held the title "Exarch of Bulgaria", reflecting the memory of past greatness and the Tarnovo Patriarchate diocese and its territory covered approximately the Bulgarian Tarnovo Kingdom of the last years of its existence in the 14 century. It was after the events surrounding the overthrow of the Greek bishop in the church of Tarnovo when the issue became a national issue in resolving the participation of all social strata of the Bulgarian Renaissance society. Until the Crimean War the church-national struggle covered all the major settlements and their areas in Central and Northwestern Bulgaria, Northern Thrace, and parts of Macedonia. The brightest representatives of Bulgarian emigrants in Romania, Serbia, Russia and others were attached to the people's movement. Bulgarians living in the Ottoman capital Istanbul also joined. After the Crimean War a Sultan Act of Reform called Hatihumayun was issued in 1856. It gave Bulgarians the basis for legal action that

stimulated the church-national struggle. The Constantinople Bulgarian church community acted as a common Bulgarian leading center as it included Bulgarians from all over Bulgaria. In 1856-1860 all Bulgarian provinces joined the movement against the Greek bishops. Mostly Constantinople Bulgarians were in the center of a series of events that slowly but surely paved the way to win religious independence. The turning point was Easter, April 3, 1860, when in the historic wooden church "St. Stephen" the Bulgarian Bishop Ilarion Makariopolski under the desire of Bulgarian people rejected the dependence on the Ecumenical Constantinople (Greek) Patriarchate and declared an independent Bulgarian church organization. Immediately the population of hundreds of parishes supported the Easter action of Constantinople Bulgarians and also rejected the spiritual authority of the Patriarchate.

In Constantinople a mixed People's Council of Bishops and diocesan representatives from a number of Bulgarian cities, who supported the cause of distinct church was formed. After many ups and downs on 27 February 1870 Sultan Abdul Azis signed a decree on the establishment of an independent Bulgarian church structure in the form of exarchy, semi-dependent of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

An independent Bulgarian exarchate (the domain of an exarch, the leader ranked above a metropolitan and below a patriarch) was created in 1870. This was the result of a long lasting struggle for church independence from the Constantinople Patriarchate and it is considered the first major victory in the struggle for Bulgarian independence.

Thanks to this decree the recovery of Bulgarian church independence lost in the early 15th century became possible. The Constantinople Patriarchate met with hostility this act of the Ottoman administration and announced that it was anti-canonical. But actually in the Sultan's decree of 27 February

1870 is enshrined the draft of the Constantinople Patriarch Gregory VI of 1867 as well as the revised by him draft of a Bulgarian-Greek bilateral committee of 1869. Furthermore, essentially the decree has not violated the historical rights of the Ecumenical Patriarch, or holy canons adopted at the Ecumenical and Local Councils. Four articles of the decree (3, 4, 6 and 7) clearly and explicitly state the placing of the Bulgarian Exarchate in direct connection with the Patriarchate of Constantinople and even some dependence on it. In the spirit of church canons and in harmony with the practice of other churches are made the other points of the sultan's decree.

Only art.10 of the decree created some "difficulties" for adoption by the Constantinople Patriarchate. This article defined precisely the spiritual jurisdiction of the Bulgarian Exarchate, stating only parts of dioceses – only areas where the population is predominantly Bulgarian. For areas with mixed population it was expected to hold a plebiscite under whose jurisdiction to be. In fact, art. 10 of the sultan's decree took away extensive and rich Bulgarian dioceses from the Patriarchate, depriving it from significant financial income and put a firm barrier against Greek influence among the Bulgarian Revival nation. That is why the Patriarchate began vigorous protests to the Ottoman authorities, and when they remained without a result, the Constantinople Patriarchate started thinking of intrigues to impose a schism.

Despite the opposition of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Bulgarian leaders in the church issue in Constantinople moved towards establishing an Exarchal Office. From 23 February to 24 July 1871 in Constantinople took place the first Bulgarian Church-People's Assembly. 50 people took part in it, including 11 clergymen and 39 lay people. There were 37 regular meetings, and it was the 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting of 14 May when the statutes for the management of the Bulgarian Exarchate was finally accepted and signed. It

was then translated into Turkish and handed in to the Ottoman authorities for approval. The council dissolved itself after fruitlessly waiting two months allowed to elect an Exarch.

The election took place on 12 February 1872, Ilarion Lovchanski - the oldest Bulgarian bishop in office until recently in the Constantinople Patriarchate was elected an Exarch. However, at the suggestion of the Ottoman government and after pressure from some political circles he resigned and on February 16 there was held a second election and Exarch Antim, the Vidin Metropolitan was elected.

Irritated by the success of the Bulgarian church activists, the Greek clergy convened on 29 August 1872 a large Greek Church council, which on September 16 the same year proclaimed the Bulgarian church and Bulgarian people as schismatic. Imposition of the schism then did not impress Bulgarian people who rushed to build its own church office, but the schism stayed as a disgraceful stain on the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

After the defeat of the April Uprising of 1876 which prepared freeing the country from Ottoman rule, Exarch Antim himself acted as a valiant patriot. He organized disclosure among European governments of the Ottoman atrocities in the suppression of the uprising and in a personal letter asking the Russian Emperor to intervene with force for the liberation of Bulgaria. This irritated the Ottoman government and it requested his removal, attracting some prominent Constantinople Bulgarians for this purpose. On April 12, 1877 Exarch Antim was deposed from the Exarchate and exiled to Angora (today Ankara). On April 24 the same year an Electoral council in the Exarchate home in Ortakoy district of Istanbul, with the participation of three bishops and 13 lay people elected and proclaimed as new Exarch the young Metropolitan Yosif of Lovech (1840-1915), elected bishop in 1872., i.e., during the operation of the exarchate.

After the Liberation from Ottoman rule (1878) the Bulgarian Exarchate had dioceses in three political areas: the Principality of Bulgaria, whose overlord was the Turkish sultan, Eastern Rumelia - Autonomous Region underneath the direct military and political power of the Sultan (until 1885), and Macedonia and Edirne Thrace remaining in the Ottoman Empire. According to Exarch Yosif the seat of the Exarchate should remain in the capital Istanbul, because there left about half a million Bulgarians within the empire. To preserve the integrity of the Bulgarian Orthodox church, respectively the Bulgarian Exarchate, the Constituent Assembly in Veliko Tarnovo (1879) accepted and wrote in the Tarnovo Constitution of the Principality of Bulgaria (art. 39) that in relation to the church it is "an integral part of the Bulgarian church area" and obey the supreme spiritual authority wherever it is. This confirmed the unity of the Bulgarian nation regardless of political boundaries that divided it. So in terms of the Principality of Bulgaria it actually received two exarchist jurisdictions – internal and external. Basically they were part of an organic whole, and in fact had different forms of government, various development paths and pursued different objectives, but the strategic goal for both remained the same – consolidation of the Bulgarian nation. The financial support of the external exarchy was carried out by the Treasury of the Bulgarian principality. With annual appropriations should be maintained the external Exarch's management in Istanbul, as well as teachers and priests who were under the Exarchal Office.

Exarch Yosif defined his mission as a duty to unite the whole Bulgarian population – in and outside the principality, but especially to acquire "church rights of Macedonia" because there lived many Bulgarians.

The ideal of the Bulgarian spiritual leader and his "great position" to be spiritual pillar of the Bulgarians and "to unite all

Bulgarian dioceses in the arms of Exarchate" were made significant. Until the Balkan War (1912) in the Exarchate diocese seven eparchies were included headed by bishops, and another 8 eparchies in Macedonia and one in Adrianople managed by "exarchist vicars": of Kostur, Lerin (Maglen), Voden, Thessaloniki, Polena (Kilkis), Serres, Melnik, Drama and Edirne. In this vast diocese there were about 1,600 parish churches and chapels, 73 monasteries and 1310 priests (while at the same time there were 1987 temples, 3101 chapels, 104 monasteries and 1992 priests in the Bulgarian principality). Moreover the Exarchate managed to open and maintain in Macedonia and Edirne Thrace 1373 Bulgarian schools, including 13 high schools and 87 secondary schools with a total of 2,266 teachers and 78,854 students. Only 19 from all the teachers were born outside European Turkey. The interesting thing there was that the Exarchal statute from 1871 which managed the Bulgarian Church as Exarchy was not at all approved by the Ottoman government (in this case there was no answer – neither positive nor negative).

Thanks to the care of Yosif, the Exarchate issued its official newspaper for 22 years – “political, scientific, literary and spiritual." The first edition of "Novini" (in 1898 renamed "Vesti") was released on 27 September 1890 and the last – on 9 October 1912. For criticizing the Turkish government the newspaper has repeatedly stopped, but in its place came another one titled "Voice".

Inside the Turkish capital the Exarch built a magnificent iron church "St. Stefan", which was officially inaugurated on September 8, 1898. At his insistence the priestly school from Edirne was moved in 1891 to Istanbul, and gradually grew into full 6-grade Seminary. Since the end of 1897 this seminary acquired its own premises and large park-garden in the district of Şişli became an exemplary elite theological school. Also in the autumn of 1896 the construction of the Bulgarian hospital

in the district of Şişli began. The inauguration ceremony took place on April 25, 1902. By the spring of 1907 the offices of the Exarchate were housed in a large four-storey building in the neighborhood of Ortaköy, and then moved in a gorgeous house with spacious garden in the district of Şişli. Again on the initiative of Exarch Yosif in 1912 in the neighborhood Ferikyoy a large plot was purchased and it became an autonomous Bulgarian cemetery.

After Bulgaria's liberation from the Ottoman Empire in 1878 Orthodox Christianity was proclaimed the dominant religion in Bulgaria according to the Tarnovo Constitution. In the period of the Third Bulgarian Kingdom Orthodox Christianity had a revival and stood firmly as a major religion in Bulgaria.

In the Principality of Bulgaria initially existed the following dioceses: Sofia, Samokov, Kyustendil, Vratsa, Vidin, Lovech, Veliko Tarnovo, Dorostol and Cherven, and Varna and Preslav. After the Unification of the Principality of Bulgaria with Eastern Rumelia in 1885 the dioceses increased by two – Plovdiv and Sliven. A little later (in 1896) the diocese of Stara Zagora was established. After the Balkan War the diocese of Nevrokop was incorporated into Bulgaria. According to the Exarchate statute (1871) several dioceses should be closed after the death of their titular bishops. First Kyustendil was closed after the death of Metropolitan Ilarion in 1884 the diocese was transferred to the Sofia diocese. Secondly the Samokov diocese was closed in 1907 after the death of Metropolitan Dositey. Its diocese was also included at the Sofia eparchy. The Lovech diocese had to be the third to close after the death of its holder Exarch Yosif. But still alive, the Exarch prepared the soil and after his death the diocese was not closed. It exists to this day.

In 1880 and 1881 a bishop's meeting was convened in Sofia with the participation of all the bishops of the



principality. It dealt with the basic question – how, in what rules will be managed the Church in free Bulgaria. A bill was issued called "Exarchal constitution adapted in the principality", based on the Exarchal statute (made and adopted on 14 May 1871 by the Church of the First People-Church Assembly in Constantinople). On 4 February 1883 the Bulgarian head of state Prince Alexander Battenberg approved this church legal document and it entered into force. In 1890 and 1891 it was supplemented, and four years later approved a new statute, which in turn was supplemented in 1897 and 1900. According to the statutes, the Church in the Principality of Bulgaria was governed by Holy Synod composed of all bishops, but in practice only four of them met constantly for a period of four years. There was an agreement with Exarch Yosif to manage the Church in the principality through his exarchist vicar. He should be elected only by the bishops in the principality and personally the Exarch approved him. The Holy Synod was not in session continuously and this continued until 1894. After this year it began functioning regularly and examined all current issues in the management of church affairs.

In his short rule the Bulgarian Prince Alexander Battenberg had no conflicts, no special treatment of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. A different situation experienced Prince Ferdinand Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, who arrived in the principality on 10 August 1887. By origin and upbringing he was a Roman Catholic, advised by his mother - a fervent Roman Catholic (later so was his wife). He came to a completely unknown country in which according to the Tarnovo constitution "dominant religion is the Orthodox Christian denomination of Eastern rite". Moreover, Prime Minister Stefan Stambolov was too much servile to the monarch so that he put the interests of the Church behind and was in constant conflict with its bishops. Even there was a

break up between the government and the church because the church refused to mention the non-Orthodox prince in its worships. Synod members at a meeting on 30 December 1888 under police escort were drawn from Sofia and sent to their constituencies. Only at the end of 1889 Stambolov's government and Ferdinand, on the one hand and Exarch Yosif, on the other, through the active mediation of Bishop Grigoriy of Dorostol-Cherven found their way to smooth the created controversy. Prime Minister met the Exarch's request to convene an extraordinary session of the Holy Synod in Ruse. In June 1890 Synodal members arrived in Ruse and accepted a formula for the mentioning of Prince Ferdinand in worships. In the autumn the Holy Synod met in a regular session in Sofia, and on October 27 bishops presented to the prince. The same day he returned their visit, accompanied by Stefan Stambolov.

So recovered legal relations between Church and state survived only one year. In 1892 a new initiative of Stambolov put the Church against the government. The latter in connection to the engagement of the monarch to Maria Luiza attempted to change art. 38 of the Tarnovo Constitution in the sense that not only the first prince of Bulgaria, but his successor may also be a non-Orthodox. Because in the amendment of Art. 38 of the Constitution the church was ignored the Holy Synod took resistance. But Stambolov started persecuting bishops in the principality, who opposed his policies and actions. Especially persecuted was the Bishop Kliment (Drumev) of Tarnovo who for a single sermon on 14 February 1893 was treated as a national criminal. In the most brutal way he was exiled to Lyaskovski monastery, and a penal process was initiated against him. In July 1893 the Tarnovo Regional Court ordered the bishop to eternal banishment. The Tarnovo Court of Appeal mitigated sentence of two years imprisonment. So Kliment was convicted and exiled to the

Glozhen Monastery - a paradox not only in the church but also in civic history.

The prince, however, quickly oriented himself in the situation, pardoned the exiled bishop and decided to baptize the Crown Prince Boris III in the Orthodox Christian tradition. On 2 February 1896 in the Sofia Cathedral "Sveta Nedelya" personally Exarch Yosif performed the sacrament of anointing over Crown prince in the presence of Prince Golenishev-Kutuzov, a special envoy of the Russian Emperor. This act aimed at not only improved relations between the prince and the Bulgarian clergy, but also proof of winning the favor of Russia.

The two Balkan wars led Bulgaria to the first national catastrophe. After the conclusion of the Bucharest Peace in July 1913 it led to a complete loss of the Exarchal Office within the then European Turkey. Exarchal dioceses of Ohrid, Bitola, Veles, Skopje, Debar remained under the authority of the Serbian Orthodox Church and Thessaloniki – to the diocese of the Church of Greece. Metropolitans of the first five Macedonian dioceses were expelled by the Serbs, and Archimandrite Evlogiy, who was managing the Thessaloniki diocese, was drowned in the sea by the Greeks (in July 1913). Only the Maroni diocese in Western Thrace (with a major center Komotini) remained under Exarchal church authority. The Bulgarian Orthodox church also lost its south Dobrudzha parishes, which passed under the authority of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Both in Serbian and Greek Macedonia and in the Romanian Southern Dobrudzha Bulgarian schools were closed and Exarchal priests and teachers were expelled. Accordingly Bulgarian population was subjected to brutal assimilation.

After the Second Balkan War Exarch Yosif remained with very few church adherents and only in Turkey (mainly in Istanbul, Edirne and Kırklareli). Therefore, as the head of the

Bulgarian church he decided to move the seat of the Exarchate to Sofia. He settled in Istanbul the so called Exarchal substitution which was managed until its closure in 1945 by Bulgarian bishops (the first was Veles Bishop Meletios). The objective of this substitution was to continue to care for the spiritual and physical survival of the Bulgarian Christians in the Ottoman Empire (later the Republic of Turkey). The mission of this Exarchal substitution was to act as a future operational headquarters, which under favorable circumstances should resume again church organization among Bulgarians in Macedonia and Eastern Thrace.

Exarch Yosif spent in Sofia just over a year and a half, often sick, but as always with endeavor to improve the Church Office. After his death on 20 June 1915 a new Exarch as head of the Bulgarian church was not chosen and for 30 years the Church was run by deputy chairmen of the Holy Synod.

Exarch Yosif died in a very complicated political situation – almost a year after the beginning of the First World War when Bulgaria kept neutrality. However, on September 6, 1915 the treaty of alliance with Germany was signed and Bulgaria was linked to the Central Powers. At the end of September 1915 a general mobilization was made and on October 14 followed declaring war on Bulgaria's western neighbors.

With the country's entry into World War One the Bulgarian Exarchate began again to restore its dioceses lost a few years earlier. Once in November 1915 Vardar Macedonia went in Bulgarian hands, there returned the expelled in 1912 exarchist bishops. Some of them died in their dioceses. For example metropolitan Debar Kozma died on 11 January 1916 in Kicevo and was buried in a nearby monastery "Sv. Bogoroditsa Prechista". The Strumitsa Metropolitan Gerasim died on 1 December 1918 in Strumica, where he was buried.

World War I ended with a defeat of Bulgaria in September 1918. Bulgarian Exarchate lost again its Macedonian dioceses. Under the Treaty of Neuilly of 27 November 1919 from the dioceses of the Bulgarian Orthodox church were dropped the most of Strumitsa diocese (Strumitsa, Radovis, Valandovo); border parts of the diocese Sofia (Tsaribrod, Bosilegrad) and Western Thrace, where in 1913 there existed the Maroniy diocese headquartered Komotini. In European Turkey the Exarchate managed to maintain the Edirne diocese, from 1910 until the spring of 1932 it has been managed by Archimandrite Nikodim Atanasov (the same on April 4, 1920 was consecrated a bishop Tiveriopolski). On Turkish territory was structured the temporary Lozengrad diocese, from 1922 to 1925 it was run by Nishavski Bishop Ilarion. Then there was sent the former Skopje Metropolitan Neofit who managed the neighboring diocese of Edirne from 1932 until his death in 1938. Then, for all Orthodox Bulgarians within the European Turkey alone cared an Exarchal substitution. After the death of former Veleshki Bishop Meletios (14 August 1924) exarchist deputies were the former Ohrid Metropolitan Boris (1924-1936), the Glavinitski Bishop Kliment (1936-1942) and Velichki Bishop Andrey (1942-1945).

After the First World War a course for reform in the Church was established in Bulgaria. This course covered not only priests, theologians and laymen, but also bishops. Judging rightly that in the new historical conditions it was necessary to make reforms in the Church, the Holy Synod decided on 6 November 1919 to proceed to amend the statutes of the Exarchate. Therefore it notified the government of Alexander Stamboliyski who welcomed this with satisfaction.

For this purpose the Holy Synod appointed a committee (chaired by the Varna and Preslav Metropolitan Simeon), which had to elaborate a motivated draft amendment to the

Statute Exarchate. However, the new Minister of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations Alexander Stamboliyski was surrounded by a range of theologians (led by Hristo Vargov and Peter Chernyaev, and also by Archimandrite Stefan Abadzhiev) who had no faith in the hierarchs and were suspicious about their initiatives. Therefore Stamboliyski submitted to the National Assembly on 15 September 1920 a bill for amending the Exarchate statutes without inquiring the Holy Synod about it. The law was adopted, established by a royal decree and immediately published. According to Art. 3 of the new law, the Holy Synod was obliged within two months to carry out all the preparatory work and to convene a Church-People's Assembly. This caused discontent among bishops and in December the same year it convened the Council of hierarchs, which produced "a draft amendment to the law on the convening of the Church-People's Assembly."

A sharp conflict appeared between the Holy Synod and the government. The situation was so tense, and even the military prosecutors were entrusted to bring the bishops to court. A coup was prepared in the Church and the members of Holy Synod had to be arrested and removed and in their place a temporary Church leadership had to be installed. With a lot of effort and compromise things calmed down and after holding elections delegates were selected. The second Church- People's Assembly was opened on 6 February 1921 in the metropolitan church "Sveti Sedmochislenitsi". The liturgy was attended by Tsar Boris III. Regular sessions began the next day in the National Assembly. With some interruptions this Council continued its work until 16 February 1922. The interesting thing there was that the Macedonian dioceses were also presented at this Council, as their delegates were priests and lay persons, refugees from Macedonia.

The draft Exarchist statute was democratic in its spirit. It provided the Church-national council as the highest

legislative body. The adopted statutes contained 568 articles in four parts and de facto constituted a detailed and systematic development of the Bulgarian ecclesiastical law. The participation of priests and laity at all levels of church governance was the first principal, while the church hierarchs maintained their dominant importance.

The exarchist statute was adopted by the Church-national council and was approved without any changes or amendments by the Council of Hierarchs in 1922. It was then submitted to and approved by the National Assembly on 24 January 1923. The overthrow of the Alexander Stamboliyski government prevented its final approval and practical implementation. Later, despite the insistence of the Synod hierarchs, the new exarchist statute was no longer brought to the National Assembly. Only a decree-law made some changes to the acting Exarchist statute affecting mainly the issues of full and discounted composition of the Holy Synod, for the selection of the Exarch, etc.

After the Liberation of Bulgaria (1878) the role and importance of the Orthodox Church in Bulgaria gradually reduced and stayed in the background. The cultural and educational role traditionally played by the Church was gradually taken by the new state and administrative institutions which raised the intellect of the Bulgarian people. Moreover, the Bulgarian clergy in general was not enough educated and could not adapt easily to the new conditions. After the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78), there were two incomplete theological schools – in the monastery "St. Peter and Paul" near Lyaskovetz and in Samokov. In 1903 the latter was moved to Sofia and initiated the creation of the Sofia Seminary. The Constantinople Theological Seminary was closed after the Second Balkan War (1913), and from 1915/1916 it continued to operate in Plovdiv. Besides the two seminaries, elementary schools for priests were established (in the Rila, Bachkovo and

Cherepish monasteries), in which the church procedures and practice of the church service were studied. The Faculty of Theology at Sofia University was opened only in 1923.

According to statistical data in 1905 Bulgaria had a total of 1992 priests, of which only two had higher theological education, 309 had a secondary theological education; the majority had general secondary education, and 607 priests had primary or even no primary education. In 1938 the number of priests was 2486, of which 114 had higher theological education, 172 secondary and 600 with incomplete primary or secondary. Insufficiently prepared Bulgarian priests could not act as true spiritual shepherds to unite their parishioners in their church.

With the start of World War II the Bulgarian Orthodox Church once again had the opportunity to regain its lost dioceses. The new territories in Macedonia and the Aegean region had to be governed administratively. In the uneasy and complicated situation in the spring of 1941 the Bulgarian Exarchate quickly oriented itself and started building the structure of ecclesiastical authority and proceeded with its establishment. In fact even on 29 April 1941 the Holy Synod gathered in full in Sofia and in an extraordinary session discussed the canonical measures to restore the authority of the Church in the newly liberated dioceses.

Thus the Holy Synod responded quickly and immediately restored its church administration in its old exarchist dioceses because it had experience and readiness for it. However, the unfortunate end of the war for Bulgaria and the ensuing new national catastrophe became the cause of irreversible loss of the dioceses in Macedonia and Edirne Thrace. And the subsequent lifting of the schism in fact limited the Exarchate diocese only within the national borders.

After the death of Exarch Yosif (20 June 1915) the election of a new Exarch of the Bulgarian Orthodox church



remained unsolved for 30 years. This is mainly due to the volatility among the Bulgarian ruling circles. There were also differences on the question – who should be an Exarch and who should be a Sofia Metropolitan, since according to the canonical order the Exarch should be also a Sofia Metropolitan. Others believed that only an Exarch elected by the whole church could take the Sofia Metropolitan Department. During all those 30 years, when the Bulgarian Orthodox church was deprived of its Primate (in this case Exarch), the ecclesiastical control was exercised by the Holy Synod, the head of which stood a Vicar Chairman elected with a fixed term. From 1915 to 1945 Vicar Chairmen was the following prelates: Parteniy of Sofia (1915-1916) Vasilij of Dorostolo-Cherven (1919-1920), Maxim of Plovdiv (1920-1927), Kliment of Vratsa (1927-1930), Neofit of Vidin (1930-1944), and Stefan of Sofia (1944-1945).

The Communist political change on 9 September 1944 was used by some metropolitans to settle disrupted church affairs. Most active proved to be the Sofia Metropolitan Stefan, who in statements on Radio Sofia in a message to the Russian people argued that Hitlerism was the enemy of all Slavs, but it would be defeated by Russia and its allies - the United States and England. The new government in Bulgaria (the Left coalition Fatherland Front) seeking popularity among the people willingly helped the Church. On October 16, 1944 the Holy Synod accepted the resignation of the Vidin Metropolitan Neofit and a new Vicar Chairman was elected – the Sofia Metropolitan Stefan. Two days later the Holy Synod decided to request that the Bulgarian government would give its consent to the conduct of an election of a new Exarch. Such a right was given, while some changes were adopted to the Exarchist statute in order to assure a wider participation of the clergy and the people in the election of an Exarch. These amendments were approved as a provisionary law and published in the

Official Gazette. Immediately afterwards the Holy Synod came out with Circular № 52 dated 4 January 1945, which set the date of the Exarchate election on 21 January, and meetings in parishes to be held on 14 January. They should each select 7 representatives (3 clerics and 4 laymen) of each diocese, which should arrive in Sofia for the election of an Exarch.

The Exarchal electoral council was held on 21 January 1945 in the old historic church "St. Sofia". 90 present voters with regular powers had to elect an Exarch among three candidates: Stefan of Sofia, Neofit of Vidin, and Mihail of Dorostolo-Cherven. Most votes (84) received the Sofia Metropolitan Stefan and he was elected for the third consecutive Bulgarian Exarch.

Another extremely important religious question was to resolve the schism, which stayed for 73 years over the Bulgarian Orthodox church. This was done with the help of the Russian Orthodox Church, which promised full support to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. For this purpose the Exarchal substitution was moved from Istanbul to Sofia and with a decision of the Holy Synod they sent Metropolitan Boris of Nevrokop and Metropolitan Sofroniy of Tarnovo, who together with Bishop Andrey Velichki were authorized to lead the negotiations and sign the proper documents.

The delegates of the Bulgarian Orthodox church met in Istanbul with the Ecumenical Patriarch and negotiated with the commission of the Patriarchate (composed by Metropolitan Maximos of Halkidon, Germanos of Sardi, and Laodicean Doroteos) in terms of lifting the schism. On February 19, 1945 a "Protocol for the removal of the existing anomaly for years in the body of St. Orthodox Church ..." was signed and on February 22 the same year a special thomos was issued by the Ecumenical Patriarch, which wrote: "We bless the Autonomous structuring and government of the Holy Church of Bulgaria, as we define it, called "Holy Bulgarian Orthodox Autocephalous

Church" and being henceforth recognized our spiritual sister to manage and govern their affairs independently and autocephalous in the order and sovereign rights ...". So in February 1945 the Diocese of the Orthodox Church collapsed only within Bulgaria's state borders, but it did receive recognition of full independence (autocephaly) and it took its place among the family of the Orthodox Autocephalous Churches constituting together the Orthodox Church worldwide.

The church later experienced great limitations during the Communist rule (1944-89).

After the coup d'état of 1944 Communists began persecution of the Christian religion and its institutions on various occasions, but with one goal: pushing religion from public life and possibly its destruction. Electing an Exarch, lifting the schism, and establishing a fully autocephalous status of the Bulgarian Orthodox church on first glimpse were seemingly positive developments, but the subsequent development of the international political climate created conditions for their use against the Church itself. Limiting the church diocese only within the state borders allowed the unlimited intervention of the new government in the affairs of the Church, especially after the signing of the peace treaty in Paris (February 10, 1947). The settlement of the international position of Bulgaria and the recognition of its government untied the hands of the ruling Communist Party to crackdown on legitimate opposition in the summer and autumn of 1947. Soon came the order of the church institutions. With the adoption of a new constitution (December 4, 1947) the Church was de facto separated from the state, but in practice this meant separation conducted through violence from above.

This separation was inherently not a single act but a long process that began immediately after September 9, 1944 and ended with the adoption of the Religious Denominations

Act (February 24, 1949). This law was directed against all religious institutions in Bulgaria. The subordination of the Church to the State was another process which also took place in several stages. The main attack was directed against the property of the church and pursued limiting its financial independence. The imposition of state control over the Bulgarian Orthodox church was also associated with a number of other measures, such as exerting pressure to reduce the number of priests, changing or dismissing clerics thought to be inconvenient for the communist authorities. Measures were also taken in order to restrict the religious activity of more zealous priests and others. There had existed two religious seminaries (Sofia and Plovdiv), a religious school and a Pastoral-theological institute. In 1951 only the Sofia Seminary remained and the Theological Faculty was removed from Sofia University and became a Spiritual Academy sustained by the Holy Synod. All these measures were aimed at depriving the Bulgarian Orthodox church of the well prepared for the future clergy. A turning point in the subordination of the Orthodox Church is the removal of Exarch Stefan. On September 8, 1948 at a meeting of the Holy Synod a farce was played to ask for his resignation and two days later the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Workers' Party (Communists) welcomed the decision about removing Exarch Stefan. He has been forcibly interned in Banya, Karlovo region on November 24, 1948 deprived of the right to free movement, and the right to perform worship.

In the Politburo of the ruling party communists discussed the need for the development of a "new, small, democratic statute" of the Bulgarian Orthodox church. After long disputes on January 3, 1951 the Holy Synod was forced to accept a new statute imposed by the government and to elect the Plovdiv Metropolitan Kiril as the new Vicar Chairman of the Holy Synod. Not surprisingly, in the minutes of the Holy

Synod on that date was entered: "To consider that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church has already approved statute and to start applying it".

The next step both of the government and the Holy Synod was linked to the restoration of the patriarchy of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. On May 8, 1953 the Third Church People's Assembly was officially opened in Sofia. 107 voters have been present there with regular voting power (from the 111 selected). The first day of the Council was spent in solemn speeches, verification of members and determination of the working committees. The next day (May 9) the Council accepted with some minor changes the Statute of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. On May 10, the Council continued to operate as a Patriarchal electoral Council. According to Art. 20 of the Statute the Holy Synod determined by a majority vote on 27 April 1953 three metropolitans as suitable for the position of Patriarch, who were approved by the government. These are Metropolitan Kiril of Plovdiv, Metropolitan Neofit of Vidin, and Metropolitan Kliment of Stara Zagora. On the day of the election out of 107 votes 104 voters gave their vote to the Plovdiv Metropolitan Kiril, Neofit of Vidin - 1 vote, and two ballots were declared invalid. So on 10 May 1953 The Bulgarian Orthodox church was officially proclaimed a Patriarchate and the new Patriarch was elected the Plovdiv Metropolitan Kiril. It appears though indirectly that he was a successor to the Tarnovo Patriarch St. Evtimiy, the last Bulgarian Patriarch until the early Ottoman rule.

In this way, the Bulgarian patriarchate was restored in 1953.

Since the day of its recovery the Bulgarian Patriarchate was recognized by the Antioch, Georgian, Russian, Romanian, Czechoslovak and Polish Orthodox Churches, whose representatives participated in the solemn enthronement of the Bulgarian Patriarch Kiril on 10 May 1953. With a letter of 6

June 1953 the Moscow and All Russia Patriarch Alexiy for the second time on the accepted canonical order, notified that the Russian Orthodox Church recognizes the restored Bulgarian Patriarchate. At the same time the Patriarchate of Antioch with a letter of 10 June 1953 and the Polish Orthodox Church with a letter of 19 June 1953 reported officially that they recognize the Bulgarian Patriarchate and its Primate. At the end of 1954 the same was done by the Alexandrian Patriarchate. In 1955 the Serbian Orthodox Church recognized the Bulgarian Patriarchate and maintained canonical communion with it. Thanks to the mediation of the Antiochian Patriarchate, of the Russian and other sister churches the Constantinople and Ecumenical Patriarchate finally officially recognized the renewed Bulgarian Patriarchate with a congratulatory letter № 552 of 27 July 1961 and established canonical communion with it. In the spring of 1962 the Bulgarian church delegation headed by Patriarch Kiril performed a landmark visit to the Constantinople Ecumenical Patriarchate, to the Eastern patriarchates of Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria and to the Greek Orthodox Church with a visit to Mount Athos. The renewed Bulgarian Patriarchate was then officially recognized by the heads of the Jerusalem Patriarchate and the Greek Church.

For all the clergy after 1944 it is clear that the Bulgarian Orthodox church would be very difficult to develop in the new harsh conditions. So, anyone was trying to hold the position of a status quo and delay as much as possible the destroying of church organization in Bulgaria. Much hope was given to Patriarch Kiril.

In fact, Patriarch Kiril led the Orthodox Church under the direct supervision of the ruling Communist Party. During his patriarchate the Orthodox Church had 11 dioceses, which were headed by metropolitans. In addition to the believers within the country under the jurisdiction of the Bulgarian

Orthodox church were also the Orthodox Bulgarians abroad: in the USA, Canada and Australia they organized a separate (12th) diocese based in New York; Istanbul had a Bulgarian Church vicarage; Hungary and Romania had Bulgarian churches and priests; in 1948 Moscow has created a "Bulgarian Church clergy"; in Austria in 1967 a Bulgarian church community was formed; in Mount Athos, Greece for centuries existed the largest Bulgarian monastery "St. George Zograf".

In Bulgaria itself the Bulgarian Orthodox church had 1785 full-time priests and 200 retired pensioners parish priests, 3720 temples and chapels, 120 monasteries. The training of church personnel took place in the Sofia Seminary "St. Ivan Rilski" (located 100 km outside Sofia, near the Cherepish monastery), and in the Theological Academy in Sofia. The church has its own Synodical Publishing House which annually published only several books distributed through the church bookstore in Sofia and in metropolitan centers in the country; the church had a weekly newspaper "Church newspaper", and the monthly journal "Spiritual culture" - a journal for religion, philosophy, science and art. The Spiritual Academy issued a yearbook, which published papers by its teachers from the academy. In some parish churches (especially in cities) Orthodox Christian brotherhoods existed.

The Bulgarian Patriarchate supported links and communication with other churches. Besides delegations and individual representatives of local Orthodox churches, its guests during the time of Patriarch Kiril were eminent Anglican, Old Catholic and Reformist churches, of the World Council of Churches, and others. The Bulgarian Orthodox church sent delegations not only to Orthodox countries and churches, but almost to all religious forums. Since 1961, the Bulgarian Orthodox church became a member of the World Council of Churches. The Bulgarian church has long had its representatives – pioneers in the ecumenical movement. During

Patriarch Kiril the church made more efforts for the work of ecumenism.

On 7 March 1971 Patriarch Kiril died and according to his last will was buried in Bachkovo monastery. For Vicar Chairman of the Holy Synod was elected the Metropolitan Maxim of Lovech. On 25 June 1971 the Holy Synod selected three candidates for the patriarchal throne - Metropolitan Maxim of Lovech, Metropolitan Paisiy of Vratsa, and Metropolitan Sofroniy of Dorostolo-Cherven. On 4 July 1971 the patriarchal electoral council convened in Sofia with the participation of 101 voters. Metropolitan Maxim of Lovech was elected the next Bulgarian Patriarch with 98 votes, 1 vote for Metropolitan Paisiy of Vratsa and 0 votes for Metropolitan Sofroniy of Dorostolo-Cherven (there have been 2 blank ballots). So on 4 July 1971 Patriarch Maxim was elected, and he also became Metropolitan of Sofia.

Patriarch Maxim headed the Bulgarian Orthodox church for more than 40 years and until the political changes in the country in November 1989 he had to comply with the party and state policy. He was a member of the World Peace Council and Vice-Chairman of the National Committee for Protection of Peace (1971); honorary member of the International Commission at the World Council of Churches; member of the Working Committee of the Christian Peace Conference with headquarters in Prague, and others. For his loyalty to the regime he was awarded the medal "People's Republic of Bulgaria - first degree" (1974).

After the collapse of Communism in 1989, the restored freedom of religion brought many Bulgarians back to the churches. People were free again to give expression to their religious feelings, to perform baptisms, weddings, and funerals according to their tradition. A schism occurred in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church after 1990 with the appearance of two synods, each claiming to be the legitimate representative of the



church (discussed below under CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES). With the acceptance of the Law on Religions (2002) the schism was supposed to be officially over at least nominally under the provision that only one organization could exist legally with the name “Bulgarian Orthodox Church”. As of 2016, many of the priests from the alternative synod had been accepted back into the official synod.

After the death of Patriarch Maxim, in 2013 the Metropolitan Neofit of Ruse was elected the new Bulgarian Patriarch and Metropolitan of Sofia.

Prince Boris I (852-889) accepted Christianity as the state religion and converted Bulgarians to Christianity. He is regarded as the Baptist of Bulgaria.

The first head of the Bulgarian church was Yosif. It is known that the autocephalous status of the Bulgarian Church was formally decided in Constantinople by the Local Council in 870. The fate of this autocephalous status was too short, it lasted until the fall of Preslav under Byzantine rule in 971.

Saint Kliment Ohridski (840-916), one of the prominent disciples of the brothers Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius, was the first Bulgarian bishop. He wrote the first original Bulgarian works, which described the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

The Bulgarian Tsar Simeon I (reigned 893-927) was the author of three collections of Christian works.

Chernorizets Hrabar, a ninth-century monk, wrote *On the Letters*, which gives an alphabetic listing of the major principles of Christianity and also emphasizes the sacred quality of the letters in the Cyrillic alphabet.

In 1211 four "Preslav patriarchs" are mentioned: Leontius, Dimitriy, Sergiy and Grigoriy.

Leontius

Presumably, that was proclaimed patriarch of the council of the Bulgarian bishops after the great victory of Tsar Simeon in Aheloy in 917.

Dimitriy

He was recognized as the patriarch by the Byzantium with the peace treaty of 927 during Tsar Petar. After signing the peace treaty between Bulgarians and Byzantines in 927 in Constantinople, the Byzantine Empire officially recognized royal dignity of Tsar Petar and autocephalous status of the Bulgarian Church, elevated to Patriarchate by Tsar Simeon.

Sergiy, Grigoriy, Damyan

The last of the three was a patriarch when Preslav fell to the Byzantium. In 972 Emperor Yoan Tsimischi destroyed the political and religious independence of the Eastern Bulgarian Kingdom. It is assumed that Patriarch Damyan moved to the still free western part of Bulgaria and settled in Sredets. Therefore, he was the last patriarch of Preslav and the first of Tsar Samuil's Kingdom.

German (or Gavriil)

He was the successor of Patriarch Damyan and head of the Bulgarian church during Tsar Samuil. Permanent military actions forced the western Bulgarian kings to move often the capital city, and thus the seat of the Patriarch. After staying consistently in Voden, Maglen and Prespa, Patriarch German died, probably in Prespa, and after his death the Patriarchate was moved to Ohrid.

Filip

Believed to be the first Bulgarian patriarch, who transferred his residence in Ohrid (around 990).

Nikolay

David

After the fall of Samuil's kingdom under the Byzantine emperor Vasiliy II placed an autocephalous Archbishop of Ohrid at the place of the last Bulgarian Patriarch.

After the restoration of the Bulgarian state in 1186 Primate of the restored Bulgarian church became Vasiliy. He crowned Asen I as a Tsar and consecrated the church "St.

Dimitar" specially built to take the relics of St. Yoan of Rila. Later Patriarch Evtimiy described in the life of St. Yoan the transfer of his relics from Sredets to Tarnovo, and he referred to Vasilij as patriarch. But the Constantinople Patriarchate refused to recognize the restored Bulgarian church because it took away dioceses from its diocese.

After Petar and Asen were killed (1196 and 1197), their younger brother Kaloyan in order to strengthen the international prestige of Bulgaria, turned to Pope Innocent III to recognize the royal dignity, and the Archbishop of Tarnovo be exalted in the rank of patriarch. The papal legate Cardinal Leo anointed Vasilij in Tarnovo with ointment and declared him Primate. According to the Preslav old tradition Vasilij called himself "patriarch of the whole of Bulgaria."

After the deterioration of relations with the Latin Empire of Constantinople Tsar Ivan Asen II turned in 1231 to the Nicene (Constantinople) Patriarch German II with a proposal for the resumption of inter-church relations of the Bulgarian church with the Eastern churches. Primate Vasilij retired to Mount Athos, and gave up his leadership. The Tarnovo church leader became St. Yoakim I.

According to his biography he had Bulgarian origin and was a renowned ascetic. Initially he was in Athos, then moved with three of his disciples to Cherven (Krasen) on the Danube river, where they cut into the rocks cells with the church "Holy Transfiguration" and devoted to ascetic life. Tsar Ivan Asen II visited the glorified cleric to receive a blessing. With the gold donated by the tsar, Yoakim hired workers and built a large monastery in the rocks, which was called "St. Archangel Michael" and collected many monks. At the suggestion of the tsar, the Council of the Bulgarian bishops elected Archbishop Yoakim of Tarnovo. After the signing of the alliance agreement against the Latins Tsar Ivan Asen II and Yoan Vatatsi in 1235 in Gallipoli and after the wedding, which

Patriarch German II completed between the son of the Nicene emperor and the daughter of the Bulgarian ruler in Lampsak (the opposite Asian side of the Dardanelles) a church council was convened and it proclaimed Yoakim as Patriarch of Tarnovo.

According to his biography, Patriarch Yoakim passed away on January 18, 1246.

Vasiliy II and Yoakim II have been the successors of Patriarch Yoakim.

Ignatiy (1272-1273)

In a note from 1276/77, he was called "the pillar of Orthodox Christianity" because of his contribution to the cancellation of the union with the papal throne on the Balkan Peninsula, which had been established by Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus. The Emperor and the Patriarch of Constantinople officially sacrificed Orthodox Christianity to avoid war with the Kingdom of Naples and Venice and endeavored to impose on the people to accept the union. Then namely Patriarch Ignatiy in Veliko Tarnovo headed the powerful movement against the Byzantine emperor to preserve the purity of Orthodox Christianity and independence of the Bulgarian church.

Makariy

Patriarch Makariy was named a martyr. He lived in the era of the Tatar invasions and internal strife at the time of Ivaylo, Ivan Asen III (1279-1280) and Georgi Terter (1280-1292). He died as a martyr unknown when and how.

Yoakim III

Patriarch Yoakim III was sent in 1283 by tsar Georgi Terter to Constantinople with a mission to Emperor Andronicus Paleologos. The patriarch threatened that he was ready to immediately join the Roman throne. On the other hand, Pope Nicholas IV gave an unsuccessful attempt to attract to union Georgi Terter and Patriarch Yoakim III. In 1300 Tsar

Teodor Svetoslav ordered Patriarch Ioakim III to be thrown from a rock in the river Etar (Yantra) as a traitor to the fatherland. Paisiy Hilendarski decisively rejected the charges against the Bulgarian patriarch that he had betrayed the country and its people to the Tartars, and condemned Teodor Svetoslav. According to Paisiy's "Slav-Bulgarian History" the Tarnovo spiritual head had been a true saint, wrongfully accused and died as a martyr.

Visarion, Dorotey, Roman, Teodosiy I, Yoanikiy I.

Simeon

In 1346 he went with his Synod in Skopje, where he convened a church council and together with the Ohrid Archbishop Nikolay proclaimed Archbishop Yoanikiy II as a Serbian Patriarch, and after that three hierarchs crowned Stefan Dusan as a king, his wife as a queen.

Teodosiy II

At first he has been a monk in the Zograf monastery. He took an active part in two church council (1350- and 1359/1360) convened by the orders of Tsar Ivan Alexander in the capital against heretics and those who defame Christian religious and moral teachings.

It is known that Patriarch Teodosiy II addressed a brief message to the monks of the monastery Zograf in connection with sending manuscripts composed in Tarnovo to Mount Athos.

Yoanikiy II

He was a former abbot of the Tarnovo monastery "St. Forty Martyrs". The Constantinople Patriarch Callistus I with a message of 1355 to some monks and priests in Tarnovo claimed that the Bulgarian bishop in this city was given the right to be called the patriarch only by indulgence, at the request of the Bulgarian king, and that in fact he was not autocephalous and equal with other Orthodox patriarchs, and hence he was within the jurisdiction of Constantinople's

spiritual head. That is why he needed to pay him taxes and mention his name during worship. A schism emerged between the two churches. Callistus I himself reported then that the Tarnovo Patriarchate did not take holy ointment from Constantinople, but rather used the relics of St. Dimitriy, or takes ointment from elsewhere. The process of disunity constantly amplified in parallel with the decline of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom.

St. Teodosiy Tarnovski (1300-1362) was the ideologist of a meditative tradition called Hesychasm.

St. Patriarch Evtimiy Tarnovski personally participated in defending the medieval capital Tarnovo from the Ottoman conquerors. St. Evtimiy was a spiritual leader during the worst times for the Bulgarian people. A testament to the greatness of his spirit and his high courage was the fact that he accepted to lead the patriarchate in a turbulent time when the Ottoman Turks occurred in the Balkans and invaded the lands of the Bulgarian state.

St. Evtimiy received his education most likely in Tarnovo monasteries, which at that time were significant literary centers. Spiritual son of St. Teodosiy Tarnovski, who founded the monastery in Kilifarevo "St. Mary", which was a great hesychastic center.

Evtimiy developed a rich literary activity. He translated the major liturgies and wrote the legends of St. Ivan Rilski, Ilarion Maglensky, Petka Epivatska-Tarnovska, Filoteya Polivotska-Tarnovska, etc.

In 1394, after the fall of the capital Tarnovo, Evtimiy was exiled. His separation with his congregation is described in his biography, written by the Kiev Metropolitan Grigoriy Tsamblak.

It is assumed that the place of exile of this great patriarch was the Bachkovo monastery.

Most major theologians and authors in Bulgaria have also been church and state leaders.

The Orthodox monk Saint Paisiy Hilendarski (1722-73), author of the first Slavic-Bulgarian history, founded the Bulgarian Renaissance, the national cultural revival that took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The Orthodox bishop Sofroniy Vrachanski (1739-1813) is regarded as the founder of the new Bulgarian literature.

One leader who could be regarded the greatest Bulgarian revolutionary of the nineteenth century was Vasil Levski (1837-73), an Orthodox deacon.

Patriarch Neofit (1945- ) was elected in 2013.

Among the most popular Orthodox churches in Bulgaria is the Saint Alexander Nevsky Cathedral (built 1882-1912) in Sofia, the capital city. Bulgaria has many chapels. There are also many monasteries that played a significant role in preserving Christianity during the Ottoman rule; these are usually situated in the mountains. The most significant is the Rila Monastery in southwest Bulgaria, which dates to the tenth century.

A place of worship that became popular at the end of the twentieth century is Krastova gora (Forest of the Cross), a religious center in the Rhodope Mountains, where a part of the Holy Cross is believed to have been present. The complex, which includes a central church and 12 chapels dedicated to Christ's apostles, as well as a store, attracts many pilgrims each year. The site is said to have healing powers and there are many legends about it. Rupite in southwestern Bulgaria is a natural place believed to have healing power. The Church of Saint Petka the Bulgarian, built there in memory of the fortuneteller Vanga (1911-1996), has become a popular destination. Despite the fact that this church was not built according to the Orthodox canon, it attracts many visitors and

tourists mainly due to its association with Vanga. This is an example of popular religion as it is practiced in Bulgaria.



Thousands of people journey to Krastova gora, where part of the Holy Cross is believed to be present. Here, a group of Bulgarians sleep in a chapel after an open-air mass at the site in 2012. Each September, the Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross draws many followers who come seeking miraculous healing for their loved ones or themselves. © DIMITAR DILKOFF /AFP/ GETTY IMAGES.

Bulgarian Orthodox Christians accept the cross as the most important sacred symbol. Icons are regarded as sacred and are often used in rituals and processions. Some churches house holy relics of saints that are kept in special places and are believed to have healing powers. Distinctive relics include those of Saint Ivan Rilski (c. 876-946; also known as Saint John of Rila), kept in the Rila Monastery, which he founded;



and the relics of Archbishop Seraphim, kept in the Russian Orthodox Church in the center of Sofia.

Easter is the most celebrated Orthodox holiday in Bulgaria, because it stresses the heavenly nature of Jesus. As in other Orthodox Christian countries, the date is defined according to the new moon after the vernal equinox. Christmas is celebrated on December 25 (unlike in other Orthodox countries, where it is on January 7).

The celebration of saints' holidays – such as those of Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius (May 11); Saint Constantine and Saint Elena (May 21); Saint Dimitriy (October 27); and Saint Ivan Rilski, the patron saint of Bulgaria (October 19) – is distinctive for Bulgaria. In the Bulgarian Orthodox calendar there are 90 holidays devoted to Bulgarian saints. Certain saints' days are observed as both church and secular holidays. For example, Saint Todor's Day is celebrated by cattlemen; Saint Trifon's Day by vine-growers; Saint George's Day by the military and shepherds; Saint Nicola's Day by fishermen, traders, and bankers; and Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius's Day by teachers, students, and scholars.



*Bulgarian boys play with ritual fireballs during Sirni Zagovezni.*

*Bulgarian families also observe the holiday by asking for forgiveness and eating the sweet dessert of white halva.*  
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Most Orthodox Christians in Bulgaria wear Western-style clothing. The Orthodox clergy wear special church clothes in most public places. The most typical are a cassock made of black cloth, a tunic worn under the cassock, a *kamelaukion* (cylindrical cap), and a skullcap. The deacons wear a *sticharion* (long robe with wide sleeves) and oversleeves (protective or decorative coverings worn over the sleeves), and the monks wear belts over their cassocks.

A distinctive holiday associated with special food is Sirni Zagovezni (the Sunday before Lent), when families gather to ask for forgiveness and the sweet dessert of white halva is eaten. Most feasts are associated with the consumption of special foods. Eggs are painted different colors, and people bake *kozunak* (Easter cakes) for Easter. An uneven number of specially prepared vegetarian dishes are put on the table on Christmas Eve, which marks the last evening of the Advent, and on Christmas Day much meat is consumed. Saint Nicola's Day is marked by the consumption of fish and Saint George's

Day by eating lamb. After a funeral there is often a ritual consumption of food, especially boiled wheat. Some famous brands of Bulgarian wine have been traditionally produced in monasteries, and this is reflected in the names of the wines.

Liturgies and prayers are the most common forms of worship in Bulgarian Orthodox churches. The baptism of a child is one of the sacraments in the Orthodox faith. During this ceremony the child is immersed in water three times. Another ritual connected to a sacrament is the anointing; a person's forehead, chest, eyes, ears, mouth, arms, and feet are anointed with holy oil in the form of a cross in order to consecrate the mind, thoughts, heart, wishes, actions, and behavior. The sacrament of Eucharist is with bread and wine. Since 1989 participation in rituals has become popular, and politicians have used this as a part of their campaigns.

There are no Orthodox rites of passage that are distinctive to Bulgaria. Church weddings have become popular since 1989. During this ceremony crowns are laid on the heads of the couple, they are blessed three times holding lit candles in their hands, and they exchange wedding rings.

Statistics indicate that 76 percent of those who responded to the question about religion in the 2011 census identify as Orthodox Christian, but few people practice the faith. After 1989 many Bulgarians viewed themselves as Orthodox Christian mainly because of the deep connection between Bulgarian national identity and Orthodoxy. Because of its historical position, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church is not active in evangelization, with the exception of Father Boyan Saraev (born in 1956), who has been active in converting Bulgarian-Muslims to Orthodox Christianity. The Holy Synod and Orthodox nongovernmental organizations have Web Sites they use to spread Orthodox Christianity and maintain forums for discussion.

According to statistics from the mid-1990s Orthodox churches in the country are about 4,000 (including 132 in project and 225 under construction); 3300 of them are parish churches, 170 monasteries, 600 chapels built in 2670 settlements (out of 5340 in the whole country). Recent reports indicate that the Bulgarian Orthodox church has 1280 Eastern Orthodox priests, 120 monks and 140 nuns. The Bulgarian Orthodox church supports 2 seminaries (high schools) with a five year training in Sofia and Plovdiv with 400 seminary students. Theology graduates are trained in 4 universities (Sofia, Veliko Tarnovo, Shumen, Plovdiv), where a total of 1,200 students graduate, 50% of whom are women. They are preparing for the priesthood, church officials and teachers of religion. Since the mid-1990s the subject Religion is taught in the primary course of Bulgarian schools as an optional discipline (if the pupils and their parents wish to subscribe) and from the year 2000 it is taught as a “mandatory-elective” subject in primary schools. The Bulgarian Orthodox church and a number of NGOs are making efforts to introduce this subject as mandatory but this cannot be done within the existing legal context.

For Orthodox Christianity in Bulgaria, national issues have always been more important than social justice. Since 1989 the church has been active in the promotion of elective religious education in schools. There are some lay Orthodox nongovernmental organizations, which run hospitals and spread Orthodox culture, but they have limited resources. A distinctive contemporary figure is Father Yoan, who runs a center for homeless, poor, and marginalized people in Novihan, a village in the region of Sofia. Some Orthodox monasteries are active in the treatment of former drug addicts.

Bulgarian Orthodox Christians are expected to treat parents with respect and obedience; this is especially the case in more traditional places. Traditional family values, which are

typical for most Bulgarians, have had an impact on the societal attitude toward state representatives, the military, and leaders in general.

Orthodox Christianity is one of the touchstones of Bulgarian society, which opposes modernization and preserves tradition. Modernization has challenged traditions mainly in the big cities. The church's views on marriage and the family do not differ from those of most other traditional Christian churches. It opposes the newly emerging LGBT movement and has spoken out against Gay Pride celebrations, such as the annual Sofia Pride parade.

Revenues of the Orthodox Church are not openly disclosed, so there is no accurate information about them. But they are formed mainly from the sale of artifacts (candles, icons, books, etc.) and services (payments for various worship), as well as from the rental of real estate owned by the church (large urban property, agricultural land and forests). Believers do not pay church taxes or duties. The Bulgarian Orthodox church is experiencing serious financial difficulties also because of the unfinished process of restitution of church property. Meanwhile enormous financial resources are being absorbed by the process of construction of new and reconstructions of abandoned old temples and monasteries.

Accordingly due to its limited financial resources, the Bulgarian Orthodox church runs too modest educational and social activities. Partly this is due to the misunderstanding that first there must be funds and only then the church should go to meet the real needs of the needy and suffering people.

The state does not support seriously the maintenance of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church or other faiths. It granted small annual grant to repair the churches that are monuments of national culture, but funds are insufficient.

Christianity has played a role in Bulgarian political life since its acceptance as a state religion in the ninth century. It

gave common identity to the different ethnic groups. The Bulgarian National Revival, the struggle for independence from Ottoman rule in the nineteenth century, started with the fight for church independence in the late eighteenth century.

Today the Bulgarian government is secular, and it accepts the church as a symbol of tradition, not as a political factor. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church plays a minor role in contemporary political life. It has supported legislation limiting the function of new religious movements. Orthodox clergymen have been elected as members of parliament, but this has led to a greater political influence on the church rather than a church influence on politics.

The schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church after 1990 was the greatest controversial issue. There appeared two synods, each claiming to be the legitimate representative of the church. The division was not for canonical reasons; rather, it occurred along political lines, with the active interference of the state and the political parties. An alternative synod questioned the legitimacy of Patriarch Maxim's (ruled 1971-2012) election in 1971 under the Communist regime. The government of the Union of Democratic Forces (1991-92) supported the alternative synod, while governments supported by the Bulgarian Socialist party tolerated Patriarch Maxim. The former monarch Simeon Saxecoburggotski (as a child, he had been Tsar Simeon II from 1943 to 1946), who returned and was elected prime minister in 2001, strongly supported Patriarch Maxim. His government took an active role in the acceptance of the new Law on Religions (2002), which granted Patriarch Maxim exclusive legitimacy. Following a dispute over church property between the two synods, police force was used in July 2004 to take the priests from the alternative synod out of their churches. The alternative synod started a court case against the Bulgarian government in the European Court of Human Rights. As of 2014, many of the priests from the alternative synod had

been accepted back into the official synod. Following the death of Patriarch Maxim in 2012, a new patriarch, Neofit, was elected in 2013. The first year in office has shown that Patriarch Neofit has committed himself to be a compromising figure to restore the unity of the church.

Another controversial issue is the alleged links between leading clergymen and representatives of the business elite who donate to the church in exchange for influence and Archont titles (given to lay persons for merits to the church). The practice of giving Archont titles is not typical for the history of the Bulgarian Orthodox church and has spread controversy. The death of Metropolitan Kiril of Varna in 2013 who drowned into the Black sea was discussed in the media in the light of the power struggle within the Holy Synod, but this hypothesis is not proven – the official result from the investigation was that it was a health incident.

Homosexuality remains a controversial issue in Bulgaria. The Orthodox Church holds that homosexuality is a sin and prominent church leaders have condemned homosexuality and attempts to promote gay pride. Ahead of the annual Sofia Pride parade in 2012, Father Evgeni Yanakiev provoked controversy when he made a public statement in which he encouraged Christians to throw stones at homosexuals.

Worship in the the Bulgarian Orthodox church takes place in Church-Slavonic language (Russian version of the Old Bulgarian language). This language is massively not understood by the majority of believers, and that is why in the recent decades the church has gradually switched to modern Bulgarian language. The texts of the Bible are read only in modern Bulgarian language. The church music used in Orthodox liturgy of the Bulgarian Orthodox church is of two types - Byzantine (Eastern monophonic) and polyphonic Russian. Both types of church music are equally accepted by

the Orthodox Christian believers. The Russian type is used in exceptional solemn cases.

The Nestinars, a spiritual community within Orthodox Christianity in Bulgaria, are widely known for dancing barefoot over burning coals while holding icons, which are believed to protect them. The ritual has remained only as a tourist attraction. The production of Bulgarian Orthodox Christian music has a long history and is a crucial part of the work of world-renowned opera singers such as Boris Hristov (1914-93).

Orthodox architecture and iconography in Bulgaria is related more with the neo-Byzantine (mainly Greek) but has its own relatively autonomous development.

A number of Orthodox places of worship in Bulgaria are distinctive pieces of architecture. For instance, the Saint Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia was built in 1882-1912 in a neo-Byzantine style. It is one of the biggest cathedrals in the Balkans. The Rila monastery is also significant; founded during the tenth century, it underwent various renovations and additions over the centuries, resulting in the large complex that exists today. The monastery's main church, built in the nineteenth century, contains a notable carved wooden iconostasis and murals signed by the renowned Zahari Zograf (1810-53) – but painted by many artists.

Bulgarian medieval and Renaissance literature was largely shaped by Orthodox Christian writings. The painting of icons is the most developed part of Bulgarian fine arts, and people from all over the world visit many original icons in the crypt of the Saint Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia.

Father Dobri Dobrev has won recognition in Bulgaria for his selfless commitment to raising funds to support Bulgarian orphanages and restore the nation's monasteries and churches. He was born in Baylovo, Sofia region in 1914. His father was killed in World War I and he was raised by his



mother, who impressed upon him the importance of charity. He lost most of his hearing when a shell exploded near him during a World War II bombing of Sofia. In 2000 he gave away his possessions, embraced an ascetic lifestyle, and devoted himself to raising money for the church. Since that time he has been walking the distance to Sofia each day to collect donations in front of the St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral. As his age has advanced, he has at times had to take the bus, but he continues to make the trip. He is estimated to have donated \$52,000, a large amount by Bulgarian standards, while living only on a small state pension.

Known for his long white beard, homemade clothes, and simple animal skin shoes, Grandpa Dobri, as he is known, has won fans around the globe, and has become the subject of numerous news stories, blog posts, and even a short film. In Bulgaria his popularity has grown to eclipse that of church leaders.



Colorful murals depict teachings from the Bible at the Rila Monastery, one of the most famous Eastern Orthodox monasteries in Bulgaria. © VILEVI /SHUTTER STOCK.COM.

## **Chapter 2. Other Established Religions in Bulgaria**

The majority of Muslims in Bulgaria belong to the Sunni tradition, and their communities are shaped mainly along ethnic lines: Turks, Roma, and Bulgarian-Muslims. There is also a tiny Alevi-Kazalbashi minority (Muslims who profess a heterodox Islam).

The first historical data about Islam in Bulgaria date back to the eighth century CE, when the Arabs besieged Constantinople and Bulgarians fought against them with the Byzantines. The real spread of Islam came after the fourteenth century, when the region became part of the Ottoman Empire. Islam was the dominant religion in Bulgaria during Ottoman rule (fourteenth through nineteenth centuries).

After Bulgaria's liberation from Ottoman rule in 1878, a large Turkish and Muslim minority remained in the country. The Bulgarian Muslim population was, however, reduced by recurrent emigrations after the Russian-Turkish War (1877-78) and during the Balkan Wars (1912-13); there were also waves of emigration in 1930-39, 1950, 1968, and 1978. During the Communist period a campaign was launched in order to Bulgarianize Muslims, first the Bulgarian-Muslims and then the Turks, whose Muslim names were changed by force. In the summer of 1989 the Communist regime initiated a forceful deportation of ethnic Turks. Many of them returned to Bulgaria after the fall of the regime in November 1989.

In 1930 the Koran was translated into Bulgarian from English. The renowned Bulgarian scholar Tsvetan Teofanov published a direct translation from the Arab original in the 1990s. After 1989 the Muslim community was able to practice its religion freely, to publish, to send students abroad to receive religious education, and to give religious instruction to Muslim children. There are three Muslim high schools and an Islamic Institute in Sofia.

In the 1990s a split occurred in the Muslim community that was similar to the schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox

Church (that is, not along religious but along political lines). The authority of the old chief mufti, who was loyal to the previous Communist regime, was questioned by a new generation of leaders supported by the political party Movement for Rights and Freedoms. A third stream is represented by muftis who received Muslim education in Saudi Arabia. For a certain period of time there were three different chief muftis in Bulgaria, each questioning the other's legitimacy.

The Chief Mufti Office (the official institution of Islam) in Bulgaria is loyal to the state and to the constitutional system and is concerned about preventing the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism in Bulgaria. With the exception of Muslims in some rural areas, the majority of Muslims in Bulgaria are secular and wear Western-style clothing. The practice of Islam is mostly limited to formally participating in prayers and to avoiding the consumption of pork and wine; Muslim Bulgarians, however, consume other alcoholic beverages, though a strict interpretation of the Koran does not allow it. The Turkish ethnic minority has its own folklore traditions, literature, arts, and theater. Notable Muslim architecture includes the old mosques in Haskovo (from 1395) and Stara Zagora (from 1409). In the beginning of the 21st century the wearing of hijabs and burkas by Muslim women has become more common as a result of increased international contacts of the Muslim community with other Muslim countries. A current controversial issue is the court case against 13 Muslim clergymen accused of fundamentalism, but nothing has been proved officially so far. The case has attracted hostile rhetoric from populist nationalist politicians against the wearing of Muslim attire and the potential dangers of Islamization.

Protestants are present in Bulgaria mainly through missionary activities dating back to the seventeenth century and through Bulgarians who received their education abroad.

There are Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, and other churches, but the majority of Bulgarian Protestants are Pentecostals. Protestants suffered severe persecution during the Communist rule. The evangelical churches are highly active in seeking growth, especially among the country's Roma population. After 1989 the Faith Movement gained popularity among the neo-Pentecostal charismatic churches, mainly through the Word of Life Church in Uppsala, Sweden. The movement, based on prosperity theology, the doctrine that God wants the faithful to be wealthy (often with the attendant message that giving to the church will bring material reward), has attracted young people with its emphasis on material well-being. Pentecostalism has grown quickly in post-communist Bulgaria, due in part to the conversion of many Bulgarian Roma, many of whom had felt rejected by the Orthodox Church.

Tinchevism in Bulgaria is the closest religious community to those that originate from the old renewal movements in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe. It is about the early Tinchevism from the time of the very beginning of the Church of God. It takes sincerity to recognize this fact. Sincerity and courage are needed to confirm that even today signs of conscious or unconscious similar influence can be found among the great variety of religious representations. In fact, this gene is in the spirit of the people. What is called atheism of the Bulgarian people is named so only because it does not coincide with the dogmas of the leading church, and to preserve this belief, the Bulgarian chooses between two paths: one is the renunciation of any faith, and the other-Stoyan Tinchev and the predecessor Yoncho Hinkov, the prophet, set out on the path of Bible Christianity.

Roman Catholicism has been present in Bulgaria from the very adoption of Christianity, and it was the dominant religion for short periods in the Middle Ages. Bulgarian

Catholics consist both of Eastern rite Catholics and Western rite Catholics and follow the most common trends of contemporary Roman Catholicism. They received special protection from the pope during the Ottoman rule and experienced suffering during the Communist regime (1944-89). Many Catholic lay organizations have been present in Bulgaria since 1989.

An interesting syncretism in Bulgaria is that the cross and other Christian symbols have sometimes been present in the worship practices of non-Christian adherents, such as Muslims. Krastova gora (Forest of the Cross) and Rupite, mentioned above are also venerated by neo-Pagans and others for their healing power.

Armenian Apostolics and Jews in Bulgaria live mostly in the big cities, and their communities are shaped along ethnic lines. They are usually professionals; many Bulgarian Jews are active in academia and politics.

The White Brotherhood was founded in the early twentieth century by Petar Dunov (1864-1944), who took the spiritual name Beinsa Duno. It is a distinctive Bulgarian spiritual community that has some common elements with theosophy and old Bulgarian Pagan traditions. Dunov was a well-known figure in the country. The Brotherhood was criticized by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and during the Communist regime it was prohibited. After 1989 its activities were reestablished. It has followers in most European countries and in Brazil, Australia, Canada, and the United States.

The Baha'i faith has been active in Bulgaria since 1928. Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons (Latter-day Saints), and other religions also exist in the country, as do new religious movements. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness has been officially registered since 1991, though Krishna devotees had existed in Bulgaria earlier. Other new religious movements include neo-Pagans, the Unification

movement, New Age groups, Sri Chinmoy, Osho, and The Family (formerly Children of God), but their followers are small in number.

### **Chapter 3. New Religions in Bulgaria**



There are at least two serious reasons why the study of new religious movements (NRMs) in Bulgaria is sociologically important.

First, new religious movements are still an unexplored phenomenon in the context of modern Bulgarian society. There are different levels of reality construction on NRMs (Barker, 1995) and the sociological construction of reality is still much less present in the public space than the constructions of reality offered by the media, public administration, human rights defenders, anti-cultists, anti-cultists themselves. NRMs themselves or the parents of NRMs members.

Second, the discourse on NRMs is a problem related to contemporary Bulgarian nationalism. This is one of the reasons why new religious movements are a sensitive problem in modern Bulgaria. The strong interconnectedness between religious and national identity creates the preconditions for considering NRMs as a threat to national identity. Religious and national identity issues are a major area of social conflict related to new religious movements. Family issues are another area.

By mentioning possible methodological guidelines, we will adhere to the approach of the Sociology of religion and avoid the use of theological, historical or philosophical terms and categories.

There are a number of reasons for this, but the emphasis is on addressing social issues that require a sociological approach to them.

Using a sociological approach also requires a distinction between scientific and everyday consciousness. Therefore, one should keep in mind the concepts in the Sociology of religion of traditional religion, church, sect, cult, and new religious movement.

A special attention should be paid to the different use of terms, and in particular to the widespread use of the term "sect"

in the modern Bulgarian press and everyday speech - use different from the scientific term, which covers a much wider range of religious movements.

The term "new religious movement" has a certain meaning in Western literature.

According to Barker:

"The term New Religious Movements (NRMs) is used to cover a diverse collection of organizations, most of which have emerged in their current form since the 1950s and most of which offer some answer to questions of a fundamental religious, spiritual or philosophical nature." (Barker, 1991, p. 9).

In this definition of new religious movements, Barker refers to Wilson. Some of the characteristics of the new religious movements summarized by Brian Wilson in the early 1980s can be read in his definitions:

"exotic origins; a new cultural lifestyle; a level of engagement markedly different from that of traditional church Christianity; charismatic leadership; followers who are mostly young and disproportionately better educated and middle-class; international action and emergence over the last decade and a half." (Barker, 1991, pp.10-11).

When it comes to new religious movements (NRMs), it can always be argued whether they are new or religious. This is especially true in Western societies, where there has been a degree of religious freedom.

In Central and Eastern Europe, and in Bulgaria in particular, the situation is different, as the suppression of religions in the past has prevented many non-traditional

religious communities from establishing their legitimate structures earlier.

From this point of view, most of them are really a new social phenomenon in the post-communist period of development. The other question - whether they are really religious - is much more complicated. These societies are characterized by a no lower degree of secularization than the West, and the emergence of new religious movements coincided with the general opening of these societies to more freedom in all spheres of society.

The emergence of pluralism in political organizations coincided with the emergence of pluralism in religious organizations, and for many Eastern Europeans the main differences between the two processes were not so obvious. Especially in a highly politicized and politically polarized society such as the Bulgarian society from 1989-1991, when most non-political organizations (including women's, youth, cultural, professional and other organizations) had to identify in the discourse "communist - or - democratic".

In order not to change the topic, it is emphasized that apart from politics, the restoration of religious freedom also coincided with the emergence of phenomena such as pornography, freedom to travel abroad and the first challenges of the transition to a market economy.

My opinion is that at the very beginning of their existence in Bulgaria, the new religious movements are much more secular in nature than in the later stages of their development, when they became more integrated into their international structures, and when society as a whole began to function normally.

For example, in the later stages, a young future businessman does not need to become a member of a new religious movement in order to establish international contacts through its networks. In addition, a young future scholar does

not need to join a new religious movement in order to be able to travel abroad and use the opportunity to read in good libraries.

After the changes of 1989, many social preconditions for the spread of new religious movements appeared in Bulgaria. Many questions have emerged about future developments and ways to deal with the crisis. The unpredictability of future development spread to many areas of life. Bulgarian society has its own rich traditions and historical experience.

In the last decades before the 1990s however, these traditions in cultural and spiritual life have been strongly influenced by the ruling official atheistic ideology. Any different way of explaining the life world was severely limited to a form inapplicable to change the existing social order.

The situation with religion in the country was limited mainly to participation in rituals, and even this participation was limited to certain social and age groups "safe" for the official ideology. Atheism became the norm for social behavior, and any form of religious empathy was considered deviant from the norm.

At certain stages and in certain places, even the rituals were strictly controlled. The principle of separation of church and state was officially observed, but on the other hand, state interference in the internal affairs of many religious institutions was obvious. This intervention was facilitated by the traditional for Orthodox Christianity supremacy of secular authority over ecclesiastical authority.

The transition to a new type of society has led to certain changes in public life and its main characteristics. One such main feature is the disintegration of the value system. The previous regime had established certain rules for the functioning of society that were no longer applicable. These rules were based mainly on the premise of the leading role of

the state and the Communist Party and their dominance in all spheres of society.

In the new conditions, this was impossible and the main way to maintain order in society became inefficient. The dominant ideology failed, but nothing new came to replace it. From this point of view, the atheism officially imposed by the previous regime was a solid basis for the disintegration of values.

Another characteristic feature of the new society was the problem of free choice and the impossibility of its realization. This problem is especially characteristic of young people, who did not have a model of behavior in the new socio-political order and this created many social problems.

The restoration of many basic religious rights brought many people to the churches, but this was by no means an indicator of religious empathy. However, spirituality received a new development. Regardless of the typical post-communist church attendance as a form of new fashion, or as a symbolic ritual of political affiliation, various religious communities finally had the opportunity to freely express their beliefs and take the first steps toward legitimation.

The peaceful coexistence of different religions and the compromises with the authorities of the largest and most traditional religious community in the country - the Bulgarian Orthodox Church - can be noted as specific features of the Bulgarian situation.

Historical conditions have created preconditions for coexistence of different ethnic groups with specific religious affiliations and this coexistence has been supported in the Bulgarian history by a certain degree of ethnic and religious tolerance.

During the totalitarian regime, many steps were taken to reduce the rights of Catholic and Protestant communities, Muslims and members of other smaller religious groups.

The traditional religion in Bulgarian society - Orthodox Christianity - had to experience great state interference in its internal structures and organization of church life. The development of the problems in this church, characterized by divisions and disputes over legitimacy discussed earlier, is the result of this, as well as of the uninterrupted state intervention in church life during the post-communist period.

All these models of development lead us to the question: who can attract young people? This is a possible argument for explaining the spread of new religious movements and their attempts to gain influence. For them, spirituality is a sphere of struggle for influence among certain social communities.

After the change of political regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, new problems arose related to the complex nature of post-communist societies. Opportunities for free political activity, free travel and expression of ideas, on the one hand, have emerged in combination with higher stress from the challenges of the transition to a market economy, higher unemployment and uncertainty about the future, higher crime and moral debauchery, on the other hand.

New challenges for the future development of these societies have become nationalism, xenophobia, uncontrolled migration and polarization in society.

From this point of view, religious differences began to be seen as a new fundamental division in unstable societies in this part of the world. This consideration was not in itself, but came as a reflection of many complex world problems such as Islamic fundamentalism, the contradictions between different religious doctrines and their political applications.

Attention is paid to the specific state of the issue of the new religious movements in Bulgaria in the period 1993-96, in order to identify possible sources of conflict. There were many at the time who saw new religious movements as a threat. In

1994, amendments to the Law on Persons and the Family were adopted and Article 133-A was introduced, requiring re-registration of religious organizations by the Directorate of Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers. This act provoked the reaction of lawyers and human rights activists. According to them the judiciary was thus neglected and surpassed by the administrative authorities.

In this connection, a conflict arose between the Directorate of Religious Affairs and the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC). At a conference organized by the BHC in January 1995, NRMs were heavily attacked by nationalists, anti-cultist parent committees, politicians and administrators, and received support from human rights activists and only one MRF politician.

It is interesting to trace the arguments of anti-cultists (parent committees, nationalists, politicians and administrators), all of whom use the term "sects", indiscriminately including sects, cults, new religious movements, some Protestant denominations and other "foreign" religions.

According to them:

- new religious movements are dangerous for national security;
- new religious movements create "socially inadequate personalities";
- new religious movements are a form of invasion of other countries;
- new religious movements come to Bulgaria as a result of geopolitical intervention of world powers that want to destroy the unique Bulgarian culture;
- new religious movements stimulate the conscientious objection; some refuse blood transfusions; they want to prepare teachers for kindergartens.

This whole range of arbitrarily collected accusations puts new religious movements, in a sense, in a position of scapegoats for many of the existing problems and tensions in society. Almost as a rule, they are badly treated by media, which are economically dependent on the major financial groups and are often nationalist. The best example in this regard are the publications of the "168 Hours" press group.

If we follow some examples from the newspapers, we can read not only false, but sometimes quite amusing statements: "The British *journalist* Daily Mail won a lawsuit against the Moonies, leaving the impression that the Daily Mail is a man and not a newspaper" (January 18, 1994); the politician Mikhail Nedelchev "sipped" seven glasses of a strong drink prepared by Moonies, giving the impression that it was alcohol, while alcohol is not allowed among the Unificationists "24 Chasa", April 3, 1993. .); we can read about the NRMs' connections with foreign intelligence headquarters; that the "sects" will unite in a political formation tolerated from abroad ("168 Hours", January 31, 1994), etc.

The internal problems of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church prevent it from issuing a reasoned opinion on the new religious movements. Many former NRMs members, frustrated with their experiences within the NRMs, are trying to find salvation in Orthodox Christianity, but the church is not prepared to welcome them. Attempts at reformation within the Bulgarian Orthodox Church have so far no results.

One of the possible sources of social conflicts related to new religious movements is the problem of the relationship between religious and national identity. The Byzantine influence and the model of relations between the church and the state adopted through it can be pointed out as historical preconditions; the fact that Christianity is a major factor in the creation of the Bulgarian nation; the struggle for church



independence and national independence in the nineteenth century.

The issues of marriage and family in the new religious movements are another major area of social conflicts related to the NRMs. I will focus in more detail on this area, which is more specific than the area of religious and national identity and for which I have collected empirical material.

## **Chapter 4. Family Problems in New Religions**

First, let me try to justify a possible theoretical explanation of why I find that the relationship between new religious movements and the family needs to be studied and what I find in common.

Throughout the historical development of the social sciences, there has been a long discourse as to whether they should deal primarily with the individual or primarily with society as a whole. The proposed models vary from deterministic structural-functionalist to purely psychological points of view, depending on the various existing paradigms.

What I want to draw attention here is that the various dimensions that can be placed in a scheme explaining the relationship between the individual, the family, and society must be taken into account. I see this connection as an abstraction that allows us to distinguish between different levels of a situation - different dimensions of representation of interests, ideas, attitudes, and motivations of groups and individuals in a more general scheme.

At the level of personality, I distinguish the individual situation, characterized by different attitudes, motivations, beliefs and patterns of behavior of each individual. The significance of this situation in the more general scheme is different according to the paradigm to which an individual author adheres.

For the purposes of the analysis, the emphasis is not on the individualistic or societal point of view, but on the family situation and the analysis of the various other levels of abstraction between the individual and society, which I call "mediating structures".

But we should also keep in mind that all groups in society are made up of individuals.

At another level of abstraction is the family situation. All the actions of individuals are not directly related to the general social structure, but are mediated by the family.

Individual attitudes and interests are transformed into family attitudes and interests and gain a certain autonomy. This is especially important when studying the traditional family model.

At the last level of abstraction is the social situation, which coincides with society as a whole. It can be said that this level of analysis was dominant for sociology, which in the past presented itself as Marxist in Central and Eastern Europe. This was a logical consequence of the attempts to present the point of view of a certain group having power in society, from the point of view of "society" itself. This is partly the reason why I do not deal too much with this level of the situation, not ruling out the possibility of studying the abstraction "society as a whole".

The three mentioned levels of the situation give only a general scheme for understanding the possible processes - a scheme that the analysis can reach, but not a scheme from which the analysis can start.

In order to "awaken" this scheme, I would prefer to add another dimension of analysis - the dimension of mediating structures in the analysis of phenomena. They do not necessarily appear as another level of the situation, but could be seen as structures that appear in the relationship between the individual and society and reduce the relative influence of the family in these relationships.

In more general terms, the market, the education system, the state mediation through taxes and social policy, political organizations, informal communities in civil society, etc. can be mentioned as mediating structures intervening between the individual and society.

Mediating structures at other levels can also be considered: problems in communication, power relations, norms and patterns of behavior, theoretical postulates, specific material objects. At these levels of analysis, we must pay

attention to whether mediating functions are performed between the individual and society and how this relates to the family.

At this level of abstraction, it can be said that religious institutions, including new religions, also fit into this scheme. They can be seen as mediating structures between the individual and society, which reduce the relative influence of the family between them.

An approach to the problem of the individual and society in relation to religion can be found in Wach's classical book *Sociology of Religion* (Wach, 1947, pp. 9-10), which defines the theoretical expression of religion as "doctrine", the practical expression as "cultus", the sociological expression as "communion", "collective and individual religion".

Wach goes on to point out that Protestantism attaches greater importance to individual and direct responsibility to God than to Eastern Orthodoxy.

He writes that in Methodism this individual responsibility is stronger than in Anglicanism. The types of religious attitudes - mysticism, rationalism, spiritualism tend to be reconstructed in different forms in a separate historical context and determine the assessment of the individual in his relationship with the community (Wach, 1947, p.30).

In Wach's reference to the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, 1908, ed. James Hastings. T. & T. Clark we can read that Greek religion is the religion of a social group such as the family, tribe or state, before it was the religion of the individual. Roman religion is individual in the context of the social idea. It existed only in the interest of the family, the clan, the state. The Japanese is sacred meaning attached to the concept of the family in this system. The individual is absorbed in the common family life, not temporarily, but forever (Wach, 1947, p.31).

The problem that arises from the ideas of mediating structures is to consider the crisis of the modern family as a mediator between the individual and society. On the other hand, the same crisis is observed in the case of the traditional church (specifically in Bulgaria, but not only there).

The answer to the question of the common denominator between these two crises can be given, at least in part, by considering these two social phenomena as mediating structures.

Another problem that arises from this discussion is about the modern individual and the possibility of choice. Here I will consider the problem of choosing a spouse in the individual case of the Unification movement with some empirical indicators.

Taking into account my own research, let me explain how I became interested in the Unification movement. As a student, my research interests were concentrated in the fields of sociology of births, marriages and families, and social demography. In principle, I was interested in the explanation of demographic behavior and trends in belonging to different marriage patterns.

Based on research, it is clear that religion has an important role as a factor in these processes, but then it was not studied as a problem by sociologists who dealt with these problems. In the early spring of 1990, I finished my studies and had several months to write my thesis. For a long time I had studied the issues of reproductive behavior and I had enough time to think about them, but I wanted to do more research in practice.

At that time, the transition processes in Bulgaria had begun and along with the penetration of politics in all spheres of life came the restrictions on money to fund research due to the poor economic situation. In such circumstances, the

opportunity for any new kind of research or to learn something new was welcome.

On March 23, a psychologist friend asked me to help him with an English translation of his conversation with a representative of an academy who had come from Britain.

Of course, I went to practice my English and make a new acquaintance. The man was young, talkative, and intelligent, though he said he was not a scientist but was engaged in administrative work. He was a representative of the Professors' World Peace Academy, which he told us was establishing contacts between scientists from all over the world.

We later learned that this academy was part of a network of organizations called the Unification Movement, led by a Korean named Moon. After gathering reliable information, I realized that all organizations in the Unification Movement (about 40 at the time) were subordinated in a very strict hierarchy to the central organization - the Unification Church, known in the media as the "Moonies".

The network of organizations was used to attract people from different groups to the movement and to use them in church activities. This had led to a lack of understanding of addictive relationships, and many people identified the Unificationists with the variety of academic, student, cultural, business, sports, and many other organizations. Even the church itself was called the "movement" in conversations. Here I also use this expression with the clarifications made above.

At that time the Unificationists were quite unknown in Bulgaria. They had a small group of members, led by a young Austrian missionary, and they had a secret existence. In the West they had existed for a long time and had become extremely unpopular, having created the image of using lies and distortion in order to attract young people, later brainwashing them in different centers throughout the world

and using them as a cheap labor. After 1989 when the changes in Eastern Europe started they decided to establish a new sphere of influence in those countries where far fewer people knew about them. The Moonie movement in each Western European country was required to establish a foundation in one East European country. Britain was responsible for introducing moonism to Bulgaria so, in March 1990, a number of British missionaries came to this country. They were working very hard in order to be able to stay longer in Bulgaria -- the decision regarding each member's residence was taken by their leaders. The leadership of the church in Britain was Japanese and there was a much stronger discipline, obedience and hierarchy than in other countries. The nature of power within the movement gave an unlimited authority to the leaders. In Bulgaria the movement was led by an intelligent young Austrian who was officially first a student and later a tutor at the country's major university. His occupation and milieu of acquaintances had led to the recruitment mainly of students, young academics and teachers to the movement. Furthermore, the British missionaries could attract only English speaking people most of which also belonged to the same categories. In Bulgaria there were more women in the newly established Moonie community than in Britain. This was sufficient motivation for the British missionaries to stay there and to work hard. Their job was to speak to people, to advertise the movement and to invite academics to conferences of P.W.P.A. The people who seemed useful were invited to attend one or two days workshops for introducing the 'Divine principles' - the Moonie theology. My friend, the psychologist also went to such a workshop. Afterwards he described the topics of the lectures to me. There was something about the 'ideal family' which automatically made me interested - the idea of a new research topic appeared. When the British missionary (let me call him John as I have not asked the Moonies for permission



to reproduce their names) reappeared I started asking him a number of questions about his marital status, ambitions for creating a family, girlfriends, etc. Though talkative enough he tended to answer my questions slowly and with reserve. As a sociologist I decided that my approach should be more sophisticated. I asked him many questions about British universities and the character of his 'academy'. At the end of the conversation I was invited to attend a workshop. In this way I visited the Moonies for the first time on April 14. During the first lecture I kept my questions for the end according to my university habit. But to my surprise the lecturer told me that I am a very good listener because I have no questions. I immediately realized that I was in a different milieu and decided to wait and see how things would develop.

In this way the first phase of my participant observation started and my role was 'observer as participant'. I carried on my previous everyday occupation, about once weekly I visited the Moonie centers -- it was possible only with an invitation at the beginning. Dobri also came and we both discussed our impressions. The Moonies were still hesitant about giving information which could have been useful for my research topics and it was obvious that I should not ask directly about it. There existed a rule that you were allowed to come to the centers only with a certain group of people who were at your level of involvement, e.g. beginners. But the knowledge of English and the ability to keep quiet without asking many questions could enable one to move to a higher position. As on April 23 I was invited by John to a sociological conference. He had in fact been invited by the Institute of Sociology during his visit there trying to invite some professor to a recent P.W.P.A. conference. Invitation was for two persons and he took me partly to act as his personal interpreter. As he knew nothing about sociology, Bulgarian was not his only problem. At the

beginning he warned me not to speak about what I had seen in the centers which provided the next indicator that I had fallen into a closed group which was worth studying. During the conference, my acting as his interpreter raised his image as an important figure. On the way home he was offered an official car to drive both of us. The boy who came from a working class family felt really happy and started feeling friendly towards me. The next day I was invited to attend the following P.W.P.A. conference which was held between May 5 - 9 in Czechoslovakia. The days before that I was presented to the national leader of the movement in Bulgaria. That was my first chance to observe a Moonie 'blessed couple' - him and his wife, who is now deceased. Before the conference I had to visit their home more often and could gather more information about the Moonie lifestyle.

Many professors were invited to the conference and I was sharing an apartment with a president's advisor.

In this way I successfully gained access to the Moonies with the advantage that I did not need to prove that I share their beliefs - I was accepted there because they needed my language abilities and connections. I began building concepts about the object I had begun studying. The problem of the 'blessed couples' appeared and I started creating hypotheses for further study. But I did not have enough information about the nature of the movement and the real character of its activities. That was exalted by the limited role of an 'observer as participant'. Though I had collected the first relevant information about the movement and started defining the situation.

At the beginning of June I decided to concentrate more on writing my thesis and to leave the Moonies for a certain period. It was obvious that I could hardly include a new chapter in a thesis about reproductive behavior about the marriage

pattern in a strange religious movement based on my observation of one couple which I had visited once weekly for about a month. But then John started coming more often and to explain to me how useful it would be if I started visiting them again. Each time he came up with new proposals about rock concerts, applications to go to the C.A.R.P. conference in Paris, and in the end suggested joining the fund raising team of the Bulgarian participants which was going to Britain in the summer. Originally I wanted to start writing seriously and so tried to avoid his offers. I started increasingly to feel doubts about the legitimacy of the movement, hearing about extremely serious stories about it in the Western media. But there was another point that made me interested in keeping in touch with them -- John told me that the P.W.P.A. in Britain had good connections with famous sociologists with even a sociologist as its president. Contacts with Western experts used to be something very important for me. At that time the national elections were won by the former communists and as a result of that students in many universities began to occupy buildings. Apart from the political instability that meant that there were fewer possibilities for visiting libraries and serious reading. After speaking to my thesis supervisor about my plans I went to the Moonies and told them that I would join the fund raising team in Britain. I was expecting a difficult summer but at last I would have the chance to establish contacts with British sociologists and also to continue with a deeper phase of my participant observation - as a 'complete participant', which would be a completely new situation for me. I defined a research strategy which would include meeting with sociologists and talking to them about previous research about the Moonies, obtaining and using church statistics about marriages, births and divorces among the 'blessed couples', designing a questionnaire and piloting it among the Moonies. I would also be engaged in a participant observation. With these

optimistic plans I started on a trip which was to offer me many unexpected experiences.

From the first day it was obvious that a completely new concept was needed. None of the planned activities were possible, especially making contacts with sociologists. The first Bulgarians arrived in Britain on July 10 and were immediately transported to C.H. - an estate of the Moonies in Southern England, where, far away from big cities, a seven-day workshop was held. This was an introduction to the way in which one should behave within the Unification church in Britain. Free time was strictly controlled, everyone was individually supervised in order to ignore any possible 'deviation'.

During the workshop and the fund raising which lasted 42 days, I was in the position of a 'complete participant': doing everything exactly like the Moonies did, subordinated to their values and norms of living. I was also in a key position as an interpreter, which gave me access to many private conversations. I was keeping a diary in which I had the time to write only the basic impressions. A difficulty with that appeared during the workshop when everybody was already supposed to write a diary of the new things they had learned each day. The two kinds of diaries were completely different. I tried to attract informants in order to compare my own accounts with the impressions of the others. For recording information I also had a camera which was unfortunately damaged and consequently produced low quality photos.

During the first days I tried to create the image of a hard working person but it did not have any positive effect. The purpose of the fund raising was to change your perception of the world and to make you feel the movement was your only safe haven in the world. I was always tired. It was interesting to

test that empirically: I calculated the mean of all the time I had spent sleeping per night during the 'complete participation' and it appeared to be 5 hours 45 minutes; the minimal time spent sleeping per night had been 4 hours.

I took some unstructured interviews during which I tried to lead the conversation, but most of the Moonies thought that they were the ones to ask questions and you were the 'victim', who was supposed to be brainwashed. It took me much effort to learn some useful information from those interviews. It seemed that the best way to learn more was to be in a passive position and so less noticeable.

To mention 'fieldwork stress' -- in my case it appeared as a reaction to the opposite direction of traffic in Britain -- even at the very end of the 42 days I was not used to it and it aroused great anxiety in me -- the 'dysadaptation syndrome' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983 -- p.101).

After the possible danger of 'going native' was considered I had to change my strategy again and to eliminate 'the insider standpoint' (Bryman, 1988 - p.96-97). I did that by remembering my previous activities and roles, making use of an opportunity to visit the local university. It was very important to keep the point of view of a researcher as opposed to that of a participant. As many of the attending Bulgarians had the same problem of disagreeing with the Moonies, a good way of not 'going native' was to form a community, a kind of a resistance group. This provided a unique possibility for me to use them as informants.

At a certain stage I started feeling fed up with the Moonies. As many conflicts between the two groups appeared they started with promises and proposals: to stay in London and to make use of the libraries, etc. Of course, after having

spent more than a month among them I knew that these were tricks to keep me inside. At that period I was very mobile and succeeded in observing a number of 'blessed couples'. Triangulation was the real approach at that time.

Having 'survived' the phase of 'complete participation' I moved to the role of a 'participant as observer'. That was the period between August 22 - September 1 at the C.A.R.P. conference in Paris. A large group of newcomers arrived -- I could talk to them and to compare their impressions with those of the fund raising team. I noticed the first indicators concerning the difficulty in explaining the situation to outsiders - a crucial point about a participant observation, connected with the problem of finding evidence for your statements. Also - how can you prove your neutrality - that you are not a part of the group you have observed? It also creates psychological difficulties - you are identified by others with a group you want to be distanced from.

After I came back to Bulgaria in September, I started the last phase - as a 'complete observer'. It was a time of collecting and putting the information into order, when I had to think it over and to fill in the missing points. I reconstructed some interviews which I had not managed to write down earlier and I returned to my previous occupation. From then on I received only indirect information about the Moonies and analyzed it from the point of view of my previous experience. In such a role a researcher faces the problem of objectivity -- not to write purposeful conclusions.

The problems of professional ethics within a participant observation depend on the type of research you are doing - covert or overt. In my position I was economically dependent and could not hope to do overt research. The moral side is whether you are acting there as a believer or not. I was assured

by the passive statements given at the beginning. I do not know how the Moonies would explain the moral side of their activities.

In terms of responsibility for the research and possessing the information I have no problems as I took the decision personally. I had not received any funding for this research. A great problem is the impossibility to publish names and personal features as I do not have their permission. It was difficult to reveal these to the general public because of ethical limitations.

With these reservations the presentation of the data would be limited and that could create problems with persuading the readers about my interpretations. Bearing in mind the specific beliefs and values of the Moonies a possible full presentation of my results could lead to persecution against me on a religious base.

Let me summarize the advantages and the limitations of my own participant observation.

The advantages were the depth of involvement in a group which cannot be easily understood by an outsider; the possibility of visiting various centers and comparing them; the possibility of acting as a Moonie and seeing the effects; to follow the development of the situation -- to see how different people change their behavior in different situations; to meet people from different nations and races and to compare them; to learn how to distinguish participation and observation; to triangulate - to define your research methodology very quickly in different situations; as the object is studied earlier (Barker, 1984), there is a possibility to compare the results; developing skills for further researches.

The limitations were that it was not possible to define a sample and to use quantitative methods - there could be a better way of presenting the data, although there are methodological limitations for that; subjectiveness - presenting my own point of view, though I have asked many people about their views; how to persuade the readers that the results are true; problems with regularly recording the field notes, interviews and testimonies; no preliminary information about the object; limitations of time and space; how to prove to the outsiders that I have not 'gone native' when they do not understand the specific features, values and patterns of behavior of the studied group; my own theoretical background - I did not have access to Western style knowledge about sociology of religion.

Possible conclusions about a participant observation among the Moonies could be that it is better if you have independent funding. When you are far away from home you should always be certain of your ability to return. You should know the language and the norms of the country where you are; always keep the rules; keep silent as that can sometimes save you in difficult situations. If you feel that you cannot carry on, you must stop. It is necessary to think carefully before taking decisive steps, to try to stay alone at least once a day, to attract people with similar characteristics on your side, to make friends with them and use them as informants. You must formulate hypotheses but not keep firmly to them; always recognize the situation and change your hypotheses if they do not work.

As for general conclusions about the participant observation I will refer again to Hammersley and Atkinson (1983 - p.95-97) that 'the complete participant' has to act in accordance with existing role expectations; they have limitations of time for research activities; the 'complete observation' is also limited; the 'external' point of view of the



observer and the 'internal' point of view of the participant, who has access to inside information and experience of the world close to the experience of the group; the danger of 'going native'; the complete observer does not 'go native' but fails to understand the perspective of the participants - that could lead to a misunderstanding of the behavior observed.

When I began to study the Unification Church, I had some presumptions that I want to list.

First, I met this religious movement by chance and had the opportunity to study it at a time in my development, when the sociology of religion was not yet my main occupation and had not even become my main interest in the social sciences. I had no prior knowledge of this movement and was not theoretically prepared to study it as a religious movement.

This necessarily led to the restriction that fieldwork preceded the opportunity to familiarize myself with most of the literature on this movement - I had the opportunity to read only one book (Barker, 1984) during my participatory observation, which I described elsewhere (Marinov, 1995).

On the other hand, this restriction gave me the unique opportunity to be free from the tendency to apply ready-made concepts and to try to "fit" social reality into their framework - a problem, in my opinion, central to participant observation.

Another important point in my research is that I had the presumption of the closed nature of this religious movement, which came as a logical consequence of their specific appearance in Bulgaria in 1990.

Although I still find them a closed movement in their specific Bulgarian manifestation, the fact is that there have been studies by scientists with open methods and with official permission from the movement.

My preliminary hypothesis that the movement was not sufficiently studied turned out to be incorrect.

Among the first attempts at a sociological description of the movement were those of John Lofland (Lofland, 1977) and Bromley and Shupe (1979). In both cases, the beginning of the movement in the United States is described using participant observation.

In Britain, this movement was first studied sociologically by Barker in her original book (Barker, 1984), which is the result of many years of participant observation combined with other different quantitative and qualitative methods.

The author checks empirically and argues against the "brainwashing thesis" described by the media in explaining the joining of new members to the movement. Later, a description of the philosophical and theological doctrines and practices of the movement was made by Chryssides (Chryssides 1991).

I will not go into the history, philosophy, and theology of the Unification Church, which can be found in books on the movement in the bibliography, or in publications of the movement itself.

In short, it was created in the early 1950s in Korea by the Reverend Sun Moon Moon (1920-2012), whom his followers believe to be the "Messiah" or "Lord of the Second Coming."

In order to give my account, I should remember that I had entered the structures of the movement through a desire to study the problems of "the blessed couples" and the lifestyle within the movement. My original plan for research methodologies was to use church statistics, survey methodology, etc., exalted with a participant observation. Later on the situation compelled me to use only a participant observation, unstructured interviews and a limited diary (Marinov, 1995). The observation was done in the spring and summer of 1990 and covered a number of the Moonie communities mainly in Britain and Bulgaria, but some

observation was also carried out in France and former Czechoslovakia during my participation in conferences of the Moonie backed P.W.P.A. and C.A.R.P. People from six continents were observed.

I noted, though there were no statistics available, that there were some basic differences between the Moonie converts in Britain and in Bulgaria in terms of gender structure. It was obvious that in Britain there were more men converted and in Bulgaria more women. The bigger amount of the male population in the Moonie communities in the West is also noted by Barker (1984) and Grace (1985). According to Grace, it could be also explained by the acceptance of the Oriental pattern of male domination in society. The presence of more women among the first Bulgarian converts I could explain with the relatively higher expectations for a future successful “blessing” – a notion that was shared by some of the British male missionaries at the very beginning as well. It was obvious for the community that there had been some “couples” formed among them though nothing was openly shown in public.

Another difference between the British and Bulgarian converts which I had pointed out was in terms of social stratification. Most of the Bulgarians were students; there were some young academics and teachers, and some from the working class. Among the students the greatest in number were students of economics. The most of the British missionaries whom I had asked about their background appeared to be from the working or lower middle class. Very few of them had studied at a university level and most of those who had been students had dropped out of university. If we compare my assumptions with the conclusions of Barker about the Moonies in Britain based on some quantitative methods (Barker, 1984) and with the data of Wilson and Dobbelaere about the Moonies in Belgium (Wilson, 1990) it is obvious that my assumptions

were not based on a representative sample. Here comes one of the limitations of the use of a covert participant observation.

**Chapter 5. Business Practices**

The study of quasi-religious corporations is very rare and makes a very little part of the literature in the sociology of religion. One of the few studies known to us is the text of Bromley (Bromley 1991), in which the basic characteristics of quasi-religious corporations have been discussed, emphasizing on the most popular one - Amway.

“Quasi-religious corporates promise to reintegrate work, politics, family, community and religion through the formation of *family*-businesses that are linked together into a tightly-knit social network and legitimated symbolically by appeals to nationalism and transcendent purpose. These hybrid entities mix corporate and social movement organizational forms at the distributor network level, manifesting characteristics that sociologists of religion traditionally refer to as sectarian. There are a substantial number of quasi-religious corporations in the United States, and increasingly in Europe as well. In addition to Amway, the more prominent quasi-religious corporates include Mary Kay Cosmetics (beauty aids), Herbalife (vitamins, food supplement products), A.L. Williams Insurance (term life insurance), Tupperware (food containers), Shaklee (nutritional products) and Nu Skin (cosmetics and nutritional products).” (Bromley 1991: 1).

The greatest part of materials on quasi-religious corporations which are available are reports in media in the USA and the United Kingdom (Henein 1996; Howard 1994; Associated Press 1985; Despite...; Evans; Herbalife...; Carey, Abramson, Cook 1985). What makes an impression in the media reports is the pursuit of sensations and the expressed opinions with values attached to them. This problem refers to the reflection of the topics on new religious movements in general, which has been discussed in the sociological literature about the social construction of reality concerning new religious movements (Barker 1995). The insufficient information about the quasi-religious corporations in general is

transformed into the lack of any information about AquaSource.

AquaSource is interesting for us not only due to the lack of information, but because with the sociological study of “the case of AquaSource” relations between religion and business, spirituality and health, multi-level marketing and network formation could be explained, as well as the specificity of their beliefs which are based on the New Age.

The Klamath Lake has existed for billions of years and is close to the 4317 m high mountain top of Shasta, which is situated in a volcanic region in the state of Oregon in the USA. The place is regarded as one of the energetic centers of the planet where the birds flying to the South have been gathering. It is also regarded as a holy place by the local Native Americans.

Waters from the volcanic mountains are flowing into the lake and they bring deposited mineral sediments, which make the lake an environment for the reproduction of algae and define their specific composition. The Klamath Lake has been discovered by Daryl Kollman who has graduated from Harvard University and has worked as a school teacher. He has studied the Klamath Lake for six years. In 1982 the first blue-green algae have been drawn out, and Daryl and Marta Kollman established the corporation Cell Tech, which according to information in the Internet, in February 1999 has over 100 000 distributors in the USA and Canada (Cell Tech Corporate Web Site). The recent discovery and beginning of exploitation of the lake guarantee the ecological purity of the products. Dr. William Barry, an expert in biology and public health issues, controls the quality of the production (AquaSource #1; AquaSource # 14; AquaSource #21).

AquaSource has been established as a company in June 1994 in the United Kingdom by David Howell and Robert Davidson, both homeopaths. Another leading figure in the

corporation is Arthur Sperling who is responsible for its activities in Bulgaria. The activities of AquaSource are connected with the distribution of blue-green algae products from the Klamath Lake, Oregon, USA. According to information from AquaSource, there exist four companies dealing with Klamath algae, among them Cell Tech and AquaSource (AquaSource # 14; AquaSource #21). In November 1997 AquaSource had two offices in the United Kingdom and Bulgaria, and was also working in Ireland, Iceland, and Saudi Arabia (data from a telephone interview with Mr. Arthur Sperling on 3 November 1997).

In the same interview Mr. Sperling mentioned that the number of distributors in Bulgaria was 1500 persons, and that the total number of both customers and distributors in the United Kingdom and Bulgaria was 9000 persons. In March 1998 one of the leaders of AquaSource in Bulgaria mentioned that in this country approximately 30 000 people earn incomes of more than \$ 500 per month from AquaSource (a quite good income for Bulgaria), and only in his network there are about 5000-6000 distributors. In January 1999 the same leader said that the distributors of only 2-3 persons of his network are about 6500-7000 persons.

One should work very carefully with the numbers quoted, because we think that they are intentionally exaggerated. Our participant observation proved that there really existed a tendency for the growth of the distributors' networks, but the precise number of people engaged in the activities of AquaSource is not constant. A reason for this is the high turnover registered by us among the people attending the meetings, which has not been taken into consideration by the leader in question when he mentioned the numbers. The attendance of meetings is the essence of social life of AquaSource distributors - at these meetings they exchange products, money, and information, establish new contacts, give



consultations to each other, attract new customers. The frequency of attendance of these meetings can be regarded not only as a quantitative indicator, but also as an indicator of their participation in and personal commitment to the activities of the corporation. There also exists a type of distributors who have signed contracts just in order to buy products at a lower price - in fact they do not function as real distributors and do not form their own networks. This fact is also not taken into consideration by the leaders when mentioning the numbers. As a result of our participant observation we can state that these exaggerations are aimed at the attracting of new distributors in order to present the corporation as fast growing, stable and successful.

Bulgaria is the second country in which AquaSource is developing its activities, after the United Kingdom which also covers Ireland. In September 1995 the products of AquaSource were presented in Bulgaria by Mr. Teodor Troev, a journalist who was a correspondent of the Financial Times in Sofia. AquaSource (Bulgaria) Ltd. was established. In 1996 they received a certificate No. 3157/1996 from the Ministry of Healthcare of the Republic of Bulgaria. In November 1997 the only office and distribution center was opened. The owners of AquaSource (Bulgaria) Ltd. are holders from the United Kingdom and Bulgaria. It is a daughter company of AquaSource (UK) Ltd. Mr. Arthur Sperling, responsible for the international development of AquaSource (UK), says:

“In network marketing the international growth of a company is dependent to a great deal on the initiative of distributors. Among our distributors in the UK there were people with excellent contacts in Ireland and in Bulgaria who were in the base of the fast creation and growth of distributors’ networks there, so there is nothing strange in starting our expansion in Europe from these particular countries.” (Authors’ translation).

Here in the AquaSource (Bulgaria) leaflet the following line has been added: “If the interest in Ireland, a country which is close to the British people with its history, culture, and language is easier to be explained, then for Bulgaria - a small country on the reverse side of Europe - there is one more explanation: the AquaSource products correspond to the traditions of the Bulgarian people to look after their health with the help of herbs and natural means, not only with medicines.” (Authors’ translation) (AquaSource #21; AquaSource # 14; AquaSource #23).

Here we should mention that blue-green algae have been cultivated in Bulgaria for years in the locality of Rupite. Prof. Hristo Dilov studied and tried to popularize the algae from this region for forty years.

The AquaSource products are distributed in the form of capsules, powder, and liquid. When they are in the form of powder, it is recommended to take them diluted in pure juice. In their essence they are regarded as food, not as medicines.

AquaSource is now trying to expand its business into other countries. In his interview from 3 November 1997 Sperling mentioned Germany. The AquaSource expansion in the world presupposes the establishment of local companies with local partners who know their markets well. It is expected that Germany will be the biggest market of AquaSource products in Europe. The company is also interested in the markets of Central and Eastern Europe. “After the promising start in Bulgaria our intentions are to look at its neighbor countries Macedonia, Serbia, Romania, Greece, and Turkey where the Bulgarians have many contacts and would like to spread their distributors’ structures”, says Mr. Arthur Sperling. “We have also started investigations in the Czech Republic.” (Authors’ translation) (AquaSource # 14). Bulgaria is a suitable country for the start and development of the activities of AquaSource and other quasi-religious corporations because its

market is still not oversaturated with goods and services. On the other hand, in Bulgaria there are no present widespread multi-level marketing networks which compete each other. Some functionaries of quasi-religious corporations defined Bulgaria in 1997 as a “not upturned virgin soil”.

The belief system of AquaSource is not explicitly stated and is definitely invisible for the everyday-level consciousness. In his telephone interview from November 1997 Sperling did not reply to the question asking to which tradition they belonged. As associated organizations of AquaSource he pointed out the colleges of practical homeopathy in London, Birmingham, and Iceland. When asked to describe briefly the basic beliefs of AquaSource, Sperling mentioned the belief in health food products and in network marketing. A non-sociologist of religion would take this answer into account as an escape from the question. But this is exactly the point where we can find one of the basic characteristics of AquaSource as a quasi-religious corporation. The AquaSource people think of themselves as of “carriers of health and prosperity for all the people on the Earth” (AquaSource #12). They believe that people whom they can help are already chosen and are waiting for the AquaSource people to visit them.

“We feel a part of an everlasting rotation through which the green energy of health and money is being distributed, and we make profit of this without any feelings of guilt or shame.” (Authors’ translation) (AquaSource #12).

They regard their products as a means of reaching perfection - physical, psychological, spiritual, and - last but not least - material perfection. The idea is that the body is being purified physically by the algae, the functioning of the brain and mentality in general is being improved. The additional energy provided by the algae allows a person to deal with his/her health problems, increases creativity, and improves the quality of life in general. The products are recommended to

anybody - not only to people with health problems, but also to healthy people, and especially to pregnant women who require a special care. In this way the child will be able to receive the nutritious elements which are optimum for its development as early as it is still in its mother's womb and will, hence, have better health. The birth of more healthy children will gradually lead to the creation of a new race of "healthy people". After the purification of his/her body and mind a human being is reaching a higher level of sanctity.

During a participant observation in the meetings the Age of Aquarius and the Findhorn foundation were mentioned. This gives evidence to us to see the connection between AquaSource and the New Age movements. In AquaSource the New Age ideas are being accepted from the point of view of their practical relevance to business. The Age of Aquarius is the age of prosperity for AquaSource; a person should receive and use everything which has been given to him/her for the purposes of his/her health and material prosperity. The Findhorn foundation was mentioned in connection with the growing of agricultural crops very far in the North where there were no practical conditions for their growth. But they said, they grew the crops and the basic point was that they did that with a lot of love - it helped the plants to develop.

The cycle of work in AquaSource is from new moon till full moon - at new moon a new cycle begins and then the period is considered good for new initiatives. This is the time when they are most active to include new distributors in the business and place orders for new products. At certain occasions they have waited for the fulfillment of an order until full moon comes. But not all distributors are strictly following these requirements.

A particular place in the business teaching of AquaSource has been given to the Silva method. The works of Jose Silva have been quoted as authoritative references and

some of the basic methods of work are based upon them (AquaSource #11). As additional readings are recommended books by Dale Carnegie, M. Scott Peck, Joseph Krishener, Napoleon Hill.

AquaSource is using meditative techniques for the distributors' training. An emphasis is given to the belief in oneself and to the belief in success. According to them,

“...the pure green energy of health and prosperity flows from the outer space, the Sun, ... , the Klamath Lake, and is materialized in the AFA algae. It runs through our minds and our hearts to all who are in need and comes back to us in the form of money with which we are doing good... We are grateful for the privilege to work with this mighty positive energy” (Authors' translation) (AquaSource #12).

“We are not manipulating people but are helping them” (Authors' translation), says one of the leaders of the corporation in Bulgaria.

Originally they attract people with the statement that algae will improve their health (and their relatives' health), and later - with the material profit from the business offered by AquaSource.

“You are able to earn lots of money if you work hard. Everything is a question of faith...” (Authors' translation), continues the same leader.

First of all they should believe in success.

“It is nice to make profits, but this [the activities within AquaSource] can give a meaning and a new life.” (Authors' translation), says the leader.

We already mentioned how a part of the beliefs of AquaSource (for example, those connected with the lunar cycle) are reflected on their business practices. The relationship between business and religion is mostly visible in this kind of relations. They can be found in the principles of organization of work within the corporation. We should underline, however,

that in the case of AquaSource the business-religion relationship is a more special relationship. The combination of beliefs of the quasi-religious corporations could hardly be defined as “religion” in the strict meaning of this word. The more that not all distributors are guided by the beliefs in their practical activities during the sales. The AquaSource people regard their own activities as a promotion and selling of health and financial prosperity. As quoted above, they do not have any feelings of guilt or shame from the selling of health.

“You should not be embarrassed by the sales. They are something natural. People should come to us, and we should not go to them. In the real sale both sides are gaining profit” (Authors’ translation), calls one of the leaders of AquaSource in Bulgaria.

The *mechanism of sales* has the following points:

1. A presence of common interests.
2. Problems of the customer - the distributor should write them down and express personal interest.
3. A product - the distributor should not speak directly about it. S\he should offer not a product but a decision of the problem.
4. Information needs to be selected - a distributor should not tell the customer everything what s\he knows, or what comes to his\her mind at the moment. S\he should rather select information - “For you personally this means that in this or that particular way your particular problem will be decided”.

Distributors have to set up their priorities - what and where to spend. A distributor needs to have a personal magnetism. S\he should not forget that not the product is being presented but the personality of the distributor. A customer buys because of the charm of the distributor.

The following *rule* exists: “Present yourself in a way that they would like you” (Authors’ translation).

Our observations show that the AquaSource people behave very politely and friendly, though it does not come naturally with some of them, but at least they try to. In case a customer-distributor relationship is not going well, they change the distributor who is in contact with a particular customer with another distributor *from the same network* - this is very important for them.

A law for the sales: “Do not try to sell (*at any price*). Create an interest!” (Authors’ translation).

Not convincing someone with logic, but a created interest can make a person be involved with the idea of healthy algae. The word “must” should not exist. The true perspective to be created in a potential customer and distributor should be: “I want”. A feeling, an emotion, a passionate desire, an enthusiasm should be created.

During our observations on 15 September 1997 we found ourselves in an interesting situation. In less than one hour we could hear two interesting sentences which illustrate the differences between the quasi-religious corporations and the Christian groups based on the prosperity theology. During a meeting of Amway a leading figure of this group in Bulgaria quoted a thought of Paul Getty, according to whom, “It is better if I receive 1% from the efforts of 100 people, instead of doing a certain job 100% with my own efforts” (Authors’ translation). A little bit later, during a business seminar organized by the former Word of Life church<sup>i</sup>, the guest speaker Tor-Bjorn Thorangen from Uppsala, Sweden, a leader of a marketing company, quoted a saying and emphasized the words: “Watch your own work and earn something by yourself, rather than speaking about the others.” (Authors’ translation).

According to us, the difference demonstrated above is not occasional at all. It could be traced in the different doctrines which stand behind Amway and Word of Life respectively - the multi-level marketing (connected to a “cult of

capitalism”) and the prosperity theology (connected to the Protestant ethics<sup>ii</sup>). While the multi-level marketing emphasizes on the communal ties (the individual survives through the network), the prosperity theology insists on the individual efforts together with faith in God for reaching perfection and achieving the desired result. At the same time a certain similarity exists between the two doctrines which have a common notion of prosperity, capitalism, business, and spirituality. In both cases an attractive idea is being presented but one has to pay for it - with money, time, faith, and with a change of one’s own life.

Two basic “accusations” against AquaSource have been heard in Bulgaria. The first one regards their beliefs, and the second one - the way they do their business. The requirements of a healthy lifestyle which leads to a spiritual perfection gives reason to some people to “identify” AquaSource as a “sect” (in the popular usage of this word). The AquaSource’ reply to this is that they are based on a choice of methods in a broader sense and that they are based on scientific analyses and evidence. Our research does not prove that AquaSource could be regarded as a serious alternative to religious affiliation. There have been many occasions when the leaders and distributors in the corporation have expressed positive attitudes to the established religions in the country: during the fasting recommended by the Orthodox church lecturers at the meetings have spoken of the suitability of the algae products for observing the fasting. The least attended meeting observed by us was on the Great Thursday before the Orthodox Easter, which despite of the highly secularized meaning of the Easter holidays in contemporary Bulgaria, shows evidence that AquaSource does not create any serious alternative - both spiritual and physical (the Great Thursday is the day when eggs are being painted and other food is being prepared for the Easter - so most AquaSource people are probably eating not



only algae products). On the other hand, we may say that observed members of the group really manifest some characteristics of followers of new religious movements in general - both individual (like unfamiliarity with traditional religions, social and educational background, etc.) and on the group level (charismatic leaders, displaying features of a cultic milieu in the formation of the network, during meetings and lectures, etc.)

The other “accusation” is that their organization of work is in fact a financial pyramid. The AquaSource’ statement is that this “accusation” is also groundless, because in the case of pyramids one gets nothing in exchange of invested money, while in the case of AquaSource the customer gets a real product with a real value, and a real profit from it. They also say that the profits of the upper levels are not necessarily bigger than those of some of the lower levels. This can be possible because someone from the lower level could develop a bigger network than someone from the upper level. So, at the end everybody may have a profit depending on the invested personal efforts for the development of his/her networks, and his/her profit may not be directly dependent on the profits of the central figures in the corporation.

A significant feature in the appearance of AquaSource is the connection between business and health. Accepting AquaSource is not only a question of accepting a certain way of doing business, but also accepting a certain concept of beliefs which produces a certain lifestyle and an involvement within the community of the network. The significance of the belief system for the distributors is in the promotion of a new healthy way of life and the raising of financial standards.

The way of attracting new distributors to the network is important as it reveals its whole relationships with the greater society.

How far the group is closed in itself or creates openness towards other members of society is connected to sharing health as a problem and as a value. Here comes the connection between health and business.

AquaSource rhetoric is directed towards the promotion of health with the aim of attracting new distributors. But in fact, for the people already attracted to the system, AquaSource is much more a business than a promotion of health. In the same time, people within the system keep to the healthy style of life promoted by AquaSource, and accept the blue-green algae products. They also attract their family members, relatives and friends to accept the algae and to become distributors. They keep to the idea of close relations between dealers and new distributors. In case the new distributor is attracted only through the ideas, not through personal connections, AquaSource core distributors try to create a future friendly relation with her/him.

New distributors are either attracted by the possibility of coping with personal or family members' health problems, or by the possibility of raising additional income. The initial claim is that work within the network should not be an obstacle to the new distributors' main occupation. But with the moving up within the hierarchy of the network, the new distributor is pre-occupied with his/her AquaSource business, and it becomes his/her main source of income. Hence, for those who move to the highest levels of the network AquaSource business becomes their main occupation. We should mention, however, that information about the highest levels of the structure of multi-level marketing was referred to as a company secret and was not provided during the lectures.

In comparison to other quasi-religious corporations in Bulgaria, such as Herbalife and Amway, AquaSource also attracts more women. This means that with regard to the variable gender it has similar results. But with regard to the

variable education there is a difference: AquaSource attracts more intelligent and better educated people who are more likely to accept health as a value.

“When we were getting started there was nobody to teach us, and now - we have doctors, engineers, pharmacutists - the elite of the intelligentsia... Our products are an intelligent food for intelligent people”, says one of the leaders of AquaSource (Authors’ translation).

The better educated distributors are first attracted by the promotion of health, and then see the business opportunities. On the other hand, the less educated distributors tend more to see in AquaSource a source of additional income and they are first attracted by the business opportunities. Later, however, they also start realizing the healthy way of life. The less educated distributors become even more strict in observing the health recommendations of AquaSource.

AquaSource meets certain conditions to expand in Bulgaria due to the bad situation of the country’s healthcare system. It attracts many distributors with medical education and people interested in homeopathy.

The bad economic crisis in Bulgaria is another crucial reason why people tend to become AquaSource distributors in order to raise additional income.

Another reason for their expansion is the specific advertisement requirements of the AquaSource expansion strategy: it is not openly advertised to anyone, but one is more likely to learn about it through personal relations and colleagues.

In conclusion we would like to say that there exists enough evidence to classify AquaSource as a quasi-religious corporation, following Bromley’s description of the basic characteristics of this kind of entities (Bromley 1991). In order to be precise, it should be underlined that in this case we, as sociologists of religion, are imposing our own “definition” on

the group, rather than something coming out of the group itself. The fact that, when speaking to us, the leading figures in the corporation both in Bulgaria and in the United Kingdom have been careful to convince us that they are just a business and have nothing to do with “religion” could be explained with the presence of a lot of biased information about the non-traditional forms of religion in Bulgaria at present which creates bad stereotypes in the wider public about alternative religiosity. On the other hand, the economic crisis and the desire of Bulgarians to reach a higher level of economic prosperity give a much better image of anything referring to “business”. The business-religion relationship is the essence of understanding the case of AquaSource and it is much more a syncretic than a structural relationship. The same is valid about the relationships between business and health, between multi-level marketing and network formation. There are some peculiarities of AquaSource which makes it different from the other quasi-religious corporations present in Bulgaria, and these are the New Age background of its belief system, as well as the higher level of education among its distributors. This also reflects the personal relations among distributors in the network.

So, let us go back to the question of diversity. It is to be found within the huge spectrum of NRMs, which, though very small in numbers, are to be found in Bulgaria. The diversity ranges from the Unification movement and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) – both defined as “world-rejecting” NRMs in the classification of Roy Wallis (Wallis 1984); through the big variety of charismatic neo-Pentecostal churches (“world-accommodating”); to the White Brotherhood, Sri Chinmoy, the Silva method (“world-affirming”), and many quasi-religious corporations. The diversity among the individual movements and their respective members is to be found in several indicators:

1. Former religious affiliation – it can range between former atheists, adherents of traditional churches, spiritual “seekers”, members of other NRMs, etc.

2. Knowledge about religion – here diversity ranges between those who have sought exploration of different traditions and the desire for new knowledge has converted them to a NRM, and those who have had no previous knowledge about religion and find it in a NRM for the first time.

3. Gender – here you can have all three possible types of NRMs: with predominantly female membership, with predominantly male adherents, or with mixed membership.

4. Age – an interesting indicator for religion in Bulgaria in general. Sociological studies suggest a missing middle generation in most traditional religions in the country supporting a picture with flows of very old and very young activists. In most of the new religious movements when they flourished in the beginning of the 1990s the predominant age cohort was the one between 20 and 30 years of age. Now, in 2006 the change over time has shifted this generation in the group between 35 and 45 years of age, but there are many drop outs, as well as few new converts.

5. Social class – studies in the United Kingdom indicate the upper middle class as one of the most affiliated to the formation of NRMs. In Bulgaria children of the intelligentsia and former nomenklatura were among the first leaders of non-traditional religious groups. It is worth noting that “measuring” this indicator is somehow tricky. There is a tendency of the movements themselves to exaggerate the

presence of members of families of political figures or rich families, and to undermine the ordinary members from all walks of life.

6. Ethnic groups – the universalistic globalized point of view of the churches of Pentecostal origin attracts many adherents of minority ethnic groups such as Roma. On the other hand, the White Brotherhood is attractive to its adherents with its emphasis on pan-Slavism, and old Bulgarian pagan traditions. There is also the other extreme – some groups tend to be rather exclusivist in their appeal to membership.

7. Growth – a tendency which I have observed in the period 1990 – 2005 is the decline of “world-rejecting” NRMs and the steady growth of “world-accommodating” groups such as neo-Pentecostals. The other type – the “world-affirming” is still not very popular in terms of membership.

Let us now face the other concept – difference. It is often to be found in new religious movements in Bulgaria in the notion of cutting off from the rest of society. I will use again the Roy Wallis classification (Wallis 1984), where difference is a specific feature of the “world-rejecting” NRMs in their desire to be different from the rest of the world. In Bulgaria “difference” in new religious movements often comes as “data” in the narratives of NRMs adherents when they refer to the established Orthodox church. It was a real challenge for me as a sociologist when I had to interpret an interview with a Bulgarian adherent of the Unification church, during which the interviewee used the expression “our church” for the Bulgarian Orthodox church, and not for the Unification church. Later similar situations appeared while working with supporters of other groups. There is often a strong “we” concept as opposed to the “them” concept. I have found out an implicit “Orthodox

Christian” point of reference in narratives of NRMs adherents. This is to be interpreted within the secularization thesis, where traditional inherited religious identity is perceived as a culture, not as a belief. According to the European Values Studies, Bulgaria is one of the most secular nations of Eastern Europe.

There is also another dimension of difference – the difference “within oneself”. I have come across this dimension while studying narratives of members of Charismatic neo-Pentecostal churches within the Faith movement – the most successful flow among non-traditional religious groups in Bulgaria. When I compared answers to similar questions given within the group context in focus groups, and later by the same interviewees in in-depth interviews to the lone interviewer, I have found out some differences which are to be placed within the so called “inner dialogue hypothesis”. The most significant indicators there proved to be age and the length of involvement in a certain group.

Sociologists have to take into account that the possible sources and the concrete appearances of the conflicts related to NRMs may have completely different interpretations according to the different constructions of reality of the social actors concerned (NRMs themselves, media, government administrators, human rights activists, anti-cultists, nationalists, parents, etc.). It would be a contribution from sociologists to offer an objective and not biased construction of reality about NRMs to society. In the present time, however, very few would be ready to listen to it.

It is difficult to generalize about new religious movements. My argument is that they are an integral part of Bulgarian society and should not be considered a “foreign invasion”, which is quite often the media label attached to them.

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