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RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND UNDERSTANDING



The Example of Bulgaria and the Story of Faithful Coexistence

in partnership with



**RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND UNDERSTANDING:
THE EXAMPLE OF BULGARIA AND THE STORY
OF FAITHFUL COEXISTENCE**

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10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

THE PRIME MINISTER

I am delighted to have this opportunity to join with my Bulgarian colleague and counterpart, Sergei Stanishev, in welcoming the first inter-religious conference in London of Christian, Muslim and Jewish leaders of the United Kingdom and Bulgaria.

I am proud that Britain is a country of many faiths and many cultures and that this diversity is seen by the overwhelming majority of decent people as one of our country's strengths.

Following Bulgaria's recent accession into the European Union, its historic and contemporary contribution to inter-religious understanding, harmony and cohabitation is to be highly commended. I have no doubt that this conference will be the first of many which bring together the faith communities of our two countries, based on mutual respect and understanding and working for the common good.

I would like to thank all those who have made this worthy initiative possible including HE The Ambassador and the Embassy of the Republic of Bulgaria in London, Mr Anthony Bailey, and the conference's supporters - the Sacred Military Constantinian Order of St George and the Three Faith Forum.

Tony Blair



REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

THE PRIME MINISTER

I join with the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, MP, in welcoming the implementation of the project "Religious Tolerance and understanding: the example of Bulgaria and the story of Faithful Coexistence". Bulgaria is a country with well established traditions of religious and ethnic tolerance. For centuries, people of different ethnic origin and religious views have lived, and continue to live together in peace is what is today the Republic of Bulgaria. The reason for this is the mutual recognition of the right of every person to self-determine and to freely profess their own beliefs.

When we look back into the history of the Bulgarian people, we will find many examples of tolerance. It is enough to remind all of us of the fact that our land is situated on the border between the two largest religious communities in the world – the Christian and Islamic one, and there were never religious wars or conflicts of beliefs here. Our country is proud of the salvation of its Jewish people from the Nazi genocide through the united efforts of the entire Bulgarian people and with the intermediation and the activity of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Neither holocaust of the Jews, nor of the Roma people occurred in Bulgarian soil. Here also the Armenian exiles found their second homeland.

On our comparatively small territory many ethnic groups live in harmony: Bulgarians, Turks, Jews, Armenians, Roma, and others. Today, throughout Bulgaria, Muslims contribute to the restoration and construction of Orthodox houses of prayer and conversely – Christians help Muslims. All this testifies to the spiritual wisdom and maturity of the Bulgarian people, built up through the centuries by people of different ethnic background and with different religious beliefs.

We are convinced that with their ethno-religious experience, proven tolerance and respect for diversity, the Bulgarian people contribute to the peaceful cohabitation and co-operation in a united Europe.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sergei Stanishev', written in a cursive style.

SERGEI STANISHEV

INTRODUCTION BY ANTHONY BAILEY, KCSS,

Bulgaria has emerged as one of the European Union's newest members and yet it is one of the continent's oldest nation states. Lying at the heart of the Balkans, in the south-east corner of Europe, it is surrounded by neighbours: Greece and Turkey lie to its south, Romania to its north; while Macedonia and Serbia sit on its western flank. These days the country of almost 8 million is changing fast and Britain, much like Bulgaria, is experiencing a greater economic, political, cultural, tourism exchange between other than ever before. For decades suffocated by the Ottomans, the Nazis and Soviets, after a series of crippling wars early in the twentieth century, Bulgaria in the 21st century has once again come of age.



Among its many gifts to contemporary Europe is a history of largely trouble-free religious coexistence between its churches and faiths. Bulgaria is one of the heartlands of Orthodox Christianity, its autocephalous (self governing) Patriarchate virtually coterminous with the borders of the Bulgarian nation, and 80 per cent of Bulgarians are loyal to Orthodoxy. Yet one of the legacies of the Ottoman domination is a sizeable – around 10 per cent Muslim population, under the authority of the Grand Mufti. Its other minorities also play an important role in Bulgarian

religious life: its Catholics, both Latin and Eastern-rite, are especially strong in the Nikopol area; its Protestants have been influential statesmen and owners of widely-read newspapers; while the country's Jewish population – made up of Romaniotes, Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities – has contributed many Bulgarian authors and statesman.

Bulgaria's diverse religious population is not new: as the following pages relate, each of the nation's faiths has deep roots in Bulgaria, beginning with the Christian communities founded by the apostles of Jesus as documented in the Bible. As contemporary Europe grapples with the implications of religious diversity - a relative novelty in western European nations – it could do much worse and learn a lot by casting its eyes towards the Balkans and the Black Sea. The remarkable degree of co-operation and fellow-feeling that exist among today's different faiths in that country is the product of Bulgaria's history: of the common defence of shared transcendental values in the face of the threats of war and totalitarian persecution. The story of each of those faiths is also the story of the other faiths: of the Christians and Muslims sheltering Jews from Nazi persecution, of the Catholic welfare agencies caring for

people of all faiths and none, of Muslims struggling for the human rights of all peoples, of Orthodox and Protestants together founding the Bulgarian Bible Society, of young Bulgarians of all faiths joining the National Day of Jewish Culture, and so on.

It is sometimes assumed that maintaining a firm faith identity and tolerance of other faiths are in contradiction. The example of Bulgaria shows otherwise. Each of the faith traditions described in the following pages are proud of their history, tradition, and distinctive spirituality, and have clung to them, often to the point of martyrdom, in the face of sometimes overwhelming provocation. Yet totalitarianism, which set out to push faith to the margins, and to strengthen its control by dividing Bulgaria's faiths from each other, has passed away; and Bulgaria today is free, faithful and tolerant. It faces many challenges; but the challenges are being faced by the faiths together, their habit of co-operation as firm as its mountains. It is, above all, this shining example that Bulgaria now offers to the free Europe in which it has begun to play a prominent part.

The hosting of this conference and the interchange between British and Bulgarian Christian, Muslim and Jewish leaders is therefore very timely and I believe long overdue. Bulgaria's recent accession to the European Union of nations will do doubt result, deservedly so, in its inter-religious success story being better known and appreciated. I am also convinced that many will wish to learn more of the unique characteristics and long history of the Bulgarian faith communities and the unity which exists between them.

I would like to thank both the British and Bulgarian Prime Ministers and the British faith leaders for their own interest and personal support, the authors of this book and its editor Dr Austen Ivereigh, The Reverend Canon Flora Winfield, Mr Simon Keyes, Miss Branimira Nacheva, Dr Stoimen Velez and all others involved with this publication.

I would also like to thank the partners of the wider initiative for making this event and publication possible including the Sacred Military Constantinian Order of Saint George, the Embassy of the Republic of Bulgaria, Eligo International, St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace and the Three Faith Forum.

THE BULGARIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Sitting on the crossroads of Europe and Asia, and bridging the warm lands of the Mediterranean with the cold North, the history of Bulgaria's Christianity is as old as the Gospels themselves.

1. The early Church

It begins in the middle of the first century of the Christian era, when the Apostles Paul and Andrew came to the Balkan Peninsula to establish the first Christian communities in Europe. As recounted in the Acts of the Apostles (16:9-18:18), some 50-60 years after Christ's death and Resurrection the Apostle Paul and his closest disciples founded church communities in Macedonia (the towns of Philippi, Thessalonika and Berea), Achaia (Athens and Corinth) and Ilyria. An ancient legend, referred to by the Blessed Theodorite, recalls Paul's preaching tour in Thrace; another describes the Apostle reaching the lands of the town of Nicopolis ad Nestum, close to the modern town of Gotse Delchev, in 65 AD.

There are further stories found in the writings of Origen of the Apostle Andrew undertaking a mission to Scythia which passed through the coastlands of the Black Sea. St. Dorotheus of Tyre in the fourth century testifies that St. Andrew toured round the seaboard lands of Bithinia, Pontus and Thrace, preached to the Sciths, went down to the south sea coast of the Crimean Peninsula, and suffered martyrdom in Patra. This was testified, too, by St. Epiphanius of Cyprus († 403) and other writers of that period.

In the second half of the first century the disciples of the Apostle Andrew founded church communities in the central region of the Peninsula. Several disciples of the Apostle were given the role of bishops: Erm was put in charge of Philipopolis, Carpus was made a bishop of Veria (2 Tim. 4:13), while Ampliatius became a bishop of Odessus and of Heracleia (Irracli) (Rom. 16:8) in Tharce.

The Black Sea towns of Debelt, close to the modern town of Bourgas, as well as Anchialus (Pommorie), were known as leading bishop centres in the second century. Bishop Ellius Publius Julius (ca. 190) of Debelt and Bishop Sottas of Anchialus fought against the Montanist heresy. To the North of Odessus, along the Black Sea coastland towns, there were likewise Christian communities of that period where the populations were mostly Greek.

In the third century many other towns such as Martsianopolis (nowadays Devnia, the district of Varna), Durrostorum (Silistra) in Lower Moesia, Tomi (North East of modern Kjustendja) in Scythia Minor (South Dobrudhza), all became significant Christian centres. According to Tertullian († 223), in the early third century Christianity had spread to the Getae, Daci, Sarmat and Scythe tribes living along the Danube (*Adversus Iudeos*, vol. 6, 610-611), something which is also recorded in a good number of historical hagiographic records, martyrology writings, and council acts. By 313 AD - close to the end of the early age of the Church - Christianity was firmly established in the Balkans, assisted by improvements in roads, communication and trade, and the widespread knowledge of Greek and Latin.

Following the issue of the Mediolan Edict (313) Christianity became the dominant religion, consolidating its presence in all districts of the Balkan Peninsula and among the Thracians thanks to St. Nikita of Remessia (316-414) who baptised the Getae, Scythe and Bessae tribes.

An orderly church organization had already been established by the end of the fourth century in the territory that is now Bulgaria; the bishop centres grew in number, and their dignitaries took an active part in church life. Bishops in charge of Serdica, Philipopolis, Naisus (Nish), Sirmium, Singidunum, Tomi, Martsianopolis, Trayanopolis, Maronia, and others took part in the local and the ecumenical councils between the fourth and the sixth centuries. The town of Serdica had assumed great importance in church life and a great local council was convened there in support of the Nicean Council. The council of Sardicia played an important role in overcoming the Arians and in consolidating church unification.

An important next step in the consolidation of the Church in the Balkans was the establishment of the First Ustiniana Archbishopry in 535. Many provinces had been involved in this diocese, which included the districts of Mediterranean and Coastal Dacia, Prebalitania, Dardania, Second Macedonia, First (Upper) Moesia and Panonia. But after the centre of the Archbishopric fell victim to a Barbarian invasion it came under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan of Sardicia, and the new Archbishopric had a major role in the mission of Christianisation.

Organised Christian communities headed by bishops existed in most of the major towns and villages on the eve of the Slav and proto-Bulgarian incursion into the South of the Danube. The so called Epiphanian or Pseudoepiphanian List provides valuable insights into church structures and organisation in the sixth and early seventh centuries. The list shows the organisation of the area into eparchies: each eparchal diocese covered almost all of the territory of a single province, and took the administrative name of the area: hence the Eparchy of Europe, the Eparchy of Thrace, and the Eparchy of Hemmimont; there were archbishoprics in the Eparchies of Moesia, Scithia, Europe, Rhodope and Thrace. The list provides important information about the ecclesiastical arrangements in the territory of Bulgaria on the eve of the establishment of the first Bulgarian state.

The Church, supported by the Byzantine state authorities, had a privileged status. It grew quickly, mounting successful evangelisation missions among the new settlers.

2. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church in the Middle Ages

This expansion was curtailed, however, by the incursions of the Slavs and Proto-Bulgarians into the Balkan lands in the sixth and seventh centuries. Although they inflicted considerable damage and created obstacles for the missionaries, they did not hinder the Church's development. Byzantine writers testify to the many contacts which the Eastern Empire had with the new settlers - the Slavs and Proto-Bulgarians - as well as with the conquerors with the Christianised native population. The Christian religion infiltrated the population of the Bulgarian Slavs as early as the sixth and seventh centuries. Christianity gradually penetrated the proto-Bulgarians.

After the establishment of the first Bulgarian state Christianity infiltrated even into the Khan's ninth-century court. The local population of the Christianised Bulgarian Slavs,

the steady contacts with Byzantium, the exchange of prisoners of war, the use of the Greek language and many other factors paved the way for the mission of Christianisation in the First Bulgarian State. After the adoption of the Christian faith by St. Prince Boris (865), Christianity became the state's official religion. Boris favoured an enlightened and zealous clergy as well as an autocephalous Church, governed by a Patriarch, which would be in a position to meet the needs of the time: to assist the unification of the people and to promote the cultural advancement of the state, to strengthen the new social order and the sovereignty and prestige of Bulgaria.

In 869-870 an ecclesiastical council was held in Constantinople to discuss the tensions which had arisen between Rome and Constantinople on dogmatic matters. In the very last days of the council Bulgarian envoys demanded a ruling on the future jurisdiction of the Bulgarian Church. Thus on 4 March 870 the Council decided to found an autonomous Bulgarian Archbishopric with full internal autonomy under the jurisdiction of the Constantinople Patriarchate. The conditions were soon ripe for its recognition as autocephalous.

Under the Tsar Simeon (893-927) Bulgaria became one of the greatest countries in Europe as well as a powerful authority in the region. Tsar Simeon demanded recognition of his royal title and acknowledgement of the Patriarchal dignity of the Bulgarian Church. Byzantium rejected his demand, fearing the increased power of the Bulgarian state. Tsar Simeon convened a bishops' council to elect an Archbishop and proclaim him Patriarch. The Patriarch duly crowned Simeon as Tsar. But the proclamation would not be officially recognised by the Byzantines until 927, under Simeon's son Peter (927-970).

East Bulgaria was conquered by Byzantium in 971, and its capital city, Preslav, the national and cultural centre, was moved to the west. The town of Ohrid was proclaimed as the settlement of the Bulgarian Patriarchate which it continued to be until the last days of the Bulgarian kingdom in 1018. After the destruction of the First Bulgarian State, the Bulgarian autocephalous Church preserved its independence in the statute of the Archbishopric of Ohrid.

One of the greatest achievements of the Bulgarian Church in the Middle Ages was the creation, preservation and recognition of the native Bulgarian tongue, which became the official language both of the Church and the State. The building of churches and monasteries promoted the development of Bulgarian art and culture. In the tenth century the first Bulgarian state reached the summit of its development. The Church bolstered the consolidation of the central power of the state, brought about the national, religious and spiritual unity and contributed to the cultural flourishing of the people and the homeland. It also produced a number of saints, the most honoured of whom is St. John of Rila, recognised as the country's national protector.

St. John of Rila was born in the village of Skrin and lived in the late ninth century. A shepherd in his youth, he was attracted to the spiritual life from an early age. After the death of his parents he decided to move away from worldly life. Initially, he went to a monastery close to his village where he spent a short period of time as a lay brother before becoming a monk. Later he withdrew to the nearby mountain uplands, but was chased away by bandit attacks. He took refuge in a cave until he was driven away from that, too; then he moved towards the upper reaches of the river of Struma, near

the Vitosha mountain. After years of wandering he took his final refuge in the wilderness of the Rila mountains.

The hermit's fame spread throughout Bulgaria. He was first glorified by the local people living in the mountain area, but word gradually reached the capital and the palace. A group of new hermits settled around him and became his disciples. But in 941 he decided to live in full solitude, appointing Gregorius as their abbot. St. John of Rila died in 946.

The Church celebrates the assumption of the Saint of Rila each year on 18 August. Years later, probably in 980, the relics of St. John of Rila were brought to Sredets and placed in a small church dedicated to Saint Luke the Evangelist (October 19th). During the rule of emperor Andronick Comninus (1183-1185), the King of Hungary, Bella, removed the relics of the saint, but brought them back several years later (1187). In 1195 the relics of St. John of Rila were moved to the town of Turnovo and there they had been kept until 1469 when they were brought to the Rila monastery (July 1st) where they have remained since.

Church independence was restored after the restoration of the Bulgarian state in 1185. An independent archbishopric was first established in Turnovo (1186). Soon afterwards steps were taken for its recognition according to the canonical order of the time and for raising it to the rank of a Patriarchate. The Bulgarian King Kaloyan (1203-1204) had established good relations with the Pope, for mainly political purposes; the first Archbishop of Turnovo, Vassily, was proclaimed Primate by Pope Innocent III. The conditions were thus created for the recognition of Bulgaria's autocephalous status and for the elevation of the Archbishopric of Turnovo to a Patriarchate.

In 1235 an important church Council was convened in the town of Lampsakos, presided over by Patriarch Germanos II of Constantinople. Many Greek and Bulgarian church dignitaries, abbots of monasteries and monks from Mount Athos, took part. The council confirmed the patriarchal dignity of the Bulgarian Church with the general consent of the four Eastern Patriarchs, thus ranking it fifth in the diptychs of the Holy Orthodox Church (in the Pentarchy). With distinguished primates at its head, the Church was well organised: it had a large diocese and was particularly active in its work.

The Turnovo literary and educational school was established under the wing of the Bulgarian Patriarchate, leading to the flowering of literature, architecture, painting, and especially theology. The Turnovo School produced outstanding men of learning and enlightenment -- St. Theodosy of Turnovo, St. Patriarch Euthymy and a host of other eminent scholars. Of these, the greatest writer and scholar -- an exemplary clergyman and ardent patriot -- was Patriarch Euthymy of Turnovo (d. 1404).

The Patriarchate of Turnovo gained great prestige in eastern Christendom both because of the figures of high authority who headed the Bulgarian Patriarchate and because of the importance of the Bulgarian state. Turnovo had become the greatest Orthodox see; the Bulgarian *literati* proudly described it as the "third Rome".

After Turnovo fell under the Ottomans in 1393 Patriarch Euthymy was sent into exile and the autocephalous church organisation was destroyed again. The Bulgarian

diocese was subordinated to the Constantinople (Tsarigrad) Patriarchate. The other Bulgarian religious centre - Ohrid - managed to survive a few centuries longer (until 1767), as a stronghold of faith and piety, and of national spirit and independence.

3. Under the Ottoman yoke

At the end of the 14th century the Bulgarian people lost their political and spiritual independence, a double subjugation which hampered their cultural and political development. The suppression, the exploitation and the atrocities committed by the Ottomans compelled thousand of Bulgarians to emigrate to Wallachia, Moldavia, Russia, Serbia and Austria. Many were converted to Islam by force, banned from their home and killed by the Ottoman oppressors.

In the 16th and 17th centuries many Bulgarians from the districts of Lovech, Teteven, Svishtov, Nikopol and Turnovo were also converted to Islam. The region of Northeast Bulgaria, which in the 16th century was still Bulgarian, became after the 17th century distinctly Mohammedan through colonisation and forced conversions. During the 17th century many Bulgarians from the Southwest region of Bulgaria suffered a similar fate.

Islamisation did not spare the Christian sanctuaries and monuments. Many churches in various parts of the country were ruined or turned into mosques. But the Ottomans at the same time made the Bulgarian Church subordinate to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which pursued a policy of assimilation: the leading Bulgarian clergy were replaced by Greeks, who held church services in the Greek language of which the Bulgarian population was completely ignorant. The Ottoman conquerors granted extensive civic and judicial rights to the Patriarch of Constantinople. He became a high-ranking officer of the Sultan and the head of all Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire. Civic and judicial functions were also granted to the diocesan metropolitans, mostly of Greek origin, who imposed on the Bulgarian population heavy taxes which they collected by force with the help of the local authorities.

Bulgarians were forbidden by the Ottomans to follow openly and in freedom their Christian faith, and to build new churches. The ordination of priests and the establishment of spiritual schools for the training of priests were placed under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Metropolitans and bishops were by law restricted to the Greek clergy. Many villages were left without a single pastor, allowing for the spread of superstitions and heathen legends.

Forcible conversion to the Muslim religion was common practice in the 16th and 17th centuries. During this hard time the Church proved to be the staunchest defender of the faith of the ancestors, the guardian of the spirit of the nation and the main propagator of patriotism. Many eminent Bulgarians died violent deaths; the Church raised them to the glory of holy martyrdom. Stunning are the feats of St. Georgi of Sofia (+1515), St. Nikolay of Sofia (+1515), Bishop Vissarion of Smolen (+1670), St. Damaskin of Gabrovo (+1771), St. Zlata of Muglen (+1795), St. John the Bulgarian (+1814), St. Ignaty of Stara Zagora (+1814), Rev. Ignatius of Stara Zagora (+1814), St. Onouphry of Gabrovo (+1818) and of many others.

A few monasteries enjoyed spiritual freedom. They proved to be the greatest stronghold of the national consciousness and spiritual identity. In their churches

Bulgarians were offered divine services in their mother tongue and were preached to in Bulgarian. Cell schools were opened in the monasteries and in their local convents where Bulgarian children were taught how to read and write. Scattered all over the Bulgarian lands, the monasteries satisfied the religious demands of the people in the place in the absence of the parishes and priests. They preserved Christian and national consciousness, propagated piety and carried out literary and education activities. This was true especially of the monasteries of Zograph and of Hilendar on Mt. Athos, as well as of the Rila Monastery, the Monastery of Transfiguration and the Monasteries of Troyan, Etropole, Dryanovo and Cherepish; this was also the activity of the Kouklen Monastery near Assenovgrad, the Monasteries of Lessnovo, Glozhene, Dragalevtsi and many others. Itinerant monks (*taxidiotēs*) toured the country, opening cell schools where they taught illiterate people how to read and write in Bulgarian.

For five centuries the conquerors directed their attacks against the Orthodox Christian faith of the subjugated population with the aim of assimilating them. By clinging to the faith of their ancestors, Bulgarians were able to preserve their nationality. The Bulgarian people, linked in destiny and historic mission with the other Balkan nations, made a considerable contribution towards halting the Islamic invasion of Western Europe. That is why the special part played by the Bulgarian people in this respect has an all-European and hence a world-wide cultural and historic and spiritual significance.

4. The Bulgarian Exarchate

In 1870, by means of a *firmans* (decree) of the Sultan, the Ottoman government restored the Bulgarian Patriarchate under the name of "Bulgarian Exarchate". Included in its diocese were all Bulgarian regions. In this way, ironically, the conquerors officially recognised the Bulgarian nation before the world did, and authoritatively determined its ethnic boundaries. The Bulgarian Church had contributed greatly to the international juridical recognition of this nation before the world and consolidated it ethnically, spiritually, culturally, historically, territorially and, to a certain degree, also politically.

The Bulgarian Exarchate defined the ethnic boundaries of the Bulgarian people. Until 1913 it governed quite a number of dioceses, in Northern and Southern Bulgaria, in Macedonia and Adrianople Thrace. In Macedonia and in the Adrianople Region alone the Bulgarian Exarchate had more than seven dioceses with prelates and eight more with acting chairmen in charge, with 38 vicariates, 1,218 parishes and churches, 1,212 parish priests, 64 monasteries and 202 chapels, as well as 1,373 schools with 2,266 teachers and 78,854 pupils.

After World War I, by virtue of the peace treaties, the Bulgarian Exarchate was deprived of its dioceses in Macedonia and Aegean Thrace. As early as 1913 the Exarch Joseph I transferred his offices from Istanbul to Sofia. After his death (1915) the Church was for long time unable to elect his successor. After 9 September 1944, Bulgaria suffered more upheaval after the Fatherland Front wrested power and placed the country under Communist dictatorship. On the 21 January 1945, Metropolitan Stephan of Sofia was elected to be the new Exarch and the schism (imposed by the Constantinople Patriarchate in 1872) was lifted on 22 February 1945.

But Bulgaria was now under Communism, which inculcated an official atheism in the schools and sought to destroy the prestige of the Church.

In 1944 – 1948 religion instruction at schools was outlawed, civic marriages were the only marriages recognised by the state, all church property was taken away and, after the adoption of the new constitution in 1947, the Church was disestablished. The Communist state openly aimed at abolishing the Church by discrediting it both at home and abroad. On 22 June 1950, by an act of decree of the Political Bureau of the Central committee of the Bulgarian communist party, the Theology Department was separated from the Sofia University and turned into a Theological Academy under the auspices of the Holy Synod. The St. John of Rila ecclesiastic college of Sofia was moved from Sofia to Cherepish, and The Holy Brothers Cyril and Methodius Ecclesiastic College of Plovdiv was closed down. In spite of these years of harsh trials the Bulgarian clerks stucked firmly to their faith and continued their Christian mission with great devotion.

5. Restoration of the Bulgarian Patriarchate

That same year, 1950, the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church decided to convene a Council of the Church and the People with the aim of restoring the patriarchal dignity of the Church and to elect a Patriarch.

On the 8 May, 1953, the Third Council of the Church and the People was convened in Sofia, and resolved to restore the patriarchal status of the Bulgarian Church. Metropolitan Cyrill of Plovdiv was elected as Patriarch of Bulgaria and Metropolitan of Sofia. The enthronement took place on 10 May 1953 in the St. Alexander Nevsky Memorial Church and Patriarchal Cathedral in the presence of representatives of the Orthodox Churches and the Bulgarian Government, of many culture activists, foreign delegations and a numerous congregation. The newly-restored Bulgarian Patriarchate was recognised by all Orthodox Churches.

After the death of Patriarch Cyrill (March 7, 1971), the Holy Synod – at the Council of the Church and the People for the Election of a Patriarch, convened on July 4, 1971 - unanimously elected Metropolitan Maxim of Lovech as Patriarch of Bulgaria and Metropolitan of Sofia. In spite of the great hardship and the numerous obstacles during the last two decades the Bulgarian Orthodox Church succeeded in preserving its high prestige, supporting the unity of all Orthodox Christians in the country.

Nowadays there are two ecclesiastic colleges under the authority of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church: one in Sofia and the other one in Plovdiv. Together with the four faculties of Theology, they provide training and education for the specialists of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

The Bulgarians are proud to consider ourselves one of the founders of Christianity in Europe, and eager to pursue the work for which we are well placed – to help Europe recover its unity.

6. The Basic Principles of our faith

The Orthodox faith is little known to the people of Western Europe, who are much more familiar with the Roman Catholic and the Protestant traditions. So it is worth explaining a little of who we are and what we believe.

The Orthodox Church is a Church of inward tradition rather than one of an outward prestige (as are Catholics) or one of a personal religious practice (as it is characteristic of the Protestants). The great priority of inward tradition lies in the power of spiritual experience as well as in the continuity of the spiritual journey, which incorporates every new generation into the spiritual experience of the previous generations stretching back to the Holy Apostles. It is by the power of the tradition that we can share the experience of the Apostles, the martyrs, the saints and of all people belonging to the Christian world. Traditional learning goes beyond the individual one, and it means that a man exists not just as an individual but rather as a part of the Body of Christ, or of the spiritual constitution involving all his brothers in Christ.

The Orthodox faith is first and foremost an orthodox way of living rather than an orthodox way of learning. Orthodoxy is not a doctrine, nor an outward institution or a well surfaced pattern of existence, but a mode of spiritual life, spiritual experience.

Orthodoxy is not monotheism of an abstract type but a triadic one: the spiritual life, experience and path of existence bear reflection of the Holy Trinity. The starting line of the Holy service is: "Blessed be the Kingdom of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit". The Orthodox reality sets out the essential reality of the Holy Spirit which naturally works upon the created world. This is why the Orthodox Church has firmly rejected the *filioque* doctrine.

The Orthodox faith is basically liturgical. It brings its teaching to the people not by preaching to or instructing them but by means of the liturgy which represents the archetype of eternal life. The liturgy conveys its message by the saints' lives and inspires people to honour them.

Freedom is a typical aspect of the Orthodox faith. The Church is a blessed unity of love and freedom. The Orthodox mind considers the Church as an ontological division; this means that it is not just a type of institution and organisation nor simply a community of believers, but a spiritual constitution, the mysterious Body of Christ.

The eschatological consciousness, finally, is a substantial aspect of the Orthodox faith. The Orthodox Church is unrivalled in keeping unchanged the initial Christian eschatology as well as the idea of the anticipation of the Second Coming of Christ and the Resurrection which is to come. This eschatological consciousness means not an aspiration towards the material world but towards Heaven and towards eternal existence, the Kingdom of God.

7. The co-operation of the religious communities of Bulgaria

- I. According to the Constitution and the Religions Act, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and all religious communities in the country are equal in the eyes of the law.

- II. Throughout its history the Bulgarian Orthodox Church has always displayed tolerance towards all religious denominations in the country.
- III. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church is not an active member of the World Council of Churches nor the Conference of the European Churches, yet it often joins their general discussions and debates alongside representatives of various religious groups and other Orthodox Churches.
- IV. As is well known, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church gave refuge to 80,000 Armenian exiles after the massacres in Turkey in 1915 and interceded with the Government to open schools and church houses for the Armenian community.
- V. In 1943-45, when the Jews in Europe were being persecuted and massacred, 50,000 Jews were saved from death in Bulgaria thanks to the intercession of the Holy Synod of bishops of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.
- VI. Nowadays, many religious leaders coming on a visit to Bulgaria are welcomed by the Bulgarian Patriarch and the Holy Synod in an atmosphere of mutual respect.
- VII. When the members of other religious groups which have settled in the country throughout the course of history -- such as Roman Catholics, Protestants, Armenians, Jews and Muslims -- hold their official celebrations or solemn ceremonies, the general or local authorities of the Bulgarian Orthodox show them respect.

II THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN BULGARIA

Although the Catholic Church in Bulgaria can be traced back to the early seventh century, the early Catholic communities were lost to the Turkish invasion of the Balkans. The Paulicians remained the core of the earliest, largest and most coherent community of Latin or Western-rite Catholics in Bulgaria. The conversion of several Paulician villages in North Bulgaria started shortly before 1610; the conversion of those in South Bulgaria took place from 1623 onwards.

In 1601 the Catholics of Chiprovtsi asked that Peter Solinat, a Franciscan missionary and subsequently apostolic visitor, be consecrated as the Bishop of Sofia (Serdica). He is the real founding father of the Catholic Church in Bulgaria.

At the beginning of that century the Franciscan mission in Bulgaria was detached from the primacy of the Bosnia mission in 1624 under the second Bishop of Sofia, Iliya Marinov. The episcopal see became the centre of a separate Franciscan territorial and administrative unit, Custodia Bulgaria, that comprised lands from Bulgaria, Wallachia and part of Hungary.

In 1642 the exceptional prestige of the new Bishop of Sofia, Peter Bogdan, led to the elevation of the diocese into an archdiocese. Bishop Bogdan was responsible for significant administrative reforms in the structure of the Catholic Church in the Bulgarian lands which were designed to cope with the Church's expansion. The Archdiocese of Marcianopol with a see in Dorostol (Silistra) was established in 1643 under its first bishop, Marco Bandoulovish. The jurisdiction of the new archbishopric covered Dobroudja, the Northern Black Sea coast, Moldova and the Catholic-populated Nikopol region. The Archbishop of Sofia was in charge of Wallachia, the northwestern and western Bulgarian parts of the previous Diocese of Serdica, and the Paulicians in Plovdiv region.

In 1648 a separate Catholic Diocese of Nikopol was created under its first bishop, Filip Stanislavov. The Catholic diocese of Skopje existed in Macedonia. The Catholic Archdiocese of Ohrid with Archbishop Rafail Levakovich from Croatia was established c. 1650. However, this archdiocese did not exist for a long time; Levakovich died on his way to his see. The second Catholic Archbishop of Ohrid, Andrei Bogdan, was appointed in 1651. In 1655 Francesco Soimirovich became the third and last Archbishop of Ohrid. In 1661 the lands controlled by the Archbishopric of Ohrid were placed under the authority of the Archbishop of Skopje.

The Archbishop of Sofia, Peter Bogdan, strengthened his own archdiocese and headed it till his last day in 1674, highly respected by his loyal followers. Archbishop Stefan Kniazhevich was the fifth Metropolitan of Sofia; he was appointed in 1676. Kniazhevich was prelate at the time of Chiprovtsi uprising in 1688. When the archbishop's see of Chiprovtsi was abolished in the same year, the archbishop joined his flock and crossed the Danube in the flight to Wallachia. He died in 1691 in Sibir, Sedmigrad region, no longer a bishop. A remarkable achievement that outlived Mgr Kniazhevich was the elevation of the Franciscan custodia in the Bulgarian lands into a province in 1677. The Bulgarian Franciscan Province existed for almost a century after the suppression of the Chiprovtsi Uprising and its jurisdiction covered lands in Bulgaria, Wallachia and Transylvania before the province was closed down.

The Catholics in Bulgarian lands under the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Marcianopol were orphaned after the secession of the Catholics of Nikopol region, following which the first Archbishop of Marcianopol, Marco Bandulovich, was recalled in 1650. In 1652 Pope Innocent X placed the Archdiocese of Marcianopol under the authority of the Bishop of Nikopol, Filip Stanislavov. In 1654 Stanislavov was relieved of his office and Peter Parchevich was appointed administrator and apostolic vicar. He became an archbishop in 1656 and left for his archdiocese, but never reached it, becoming embroiled in diplomatic negotiations intended to liberate Bulgaria from the Ottoman rule. These efforts continued in the years to come: in 1662 his endeavours provoked his dismissal, and the Archdiocese of Marcianopol was placed under the authority of Francesco Soimirovich.

In 1668 Parchevich was reinstated and appointed administrator and apostolic vicar of Moldova; he took the residence of the first Archbishop Bandulovich in Bacau. Archbishop Parchevich died in Rome in 1674. His successor was Stefan Taplochai, whom he had nominated. But the chair of the Archbishop of Marcianopol remained vacant till 1709; moreover, he had no contact with the Bulgarians who lived in the archdiocese; authors therefore consider this archdiocese in the Bulgarian lands and the work of his clergy were only “nominal”.

1. Nikopol

The Diocese of Nikopol had its own history in the 17th century. Its first bishop, Filip Stanislavov, was a local Bulgarian who was born in the village of Oresh. He went down in the history of Bulgaria as the author of the first printed Bulgarian book, *Abagar*, which was published in 1651. In 1662, facing accusations for which no evidence was produced, he was replaced by Francesco Soimirovich of Chiprovtsi who before that appointment (in 1655) was the Catholic Archbishop of Ohrid. The second Bishop of Nikopol headed the diocese till 1673 when he died. Mgr Stanislavov was reinstated in 1673 but died a year later.

In 1676 another man who was born in Chiprovtsi, Anton Stefanov, was appointed as the successor of Stanislavov. Stefanov went to Vienna in 1688 for Bulgarian, ecclesiastical and personal affairs and was there during the pogrom of Chiprovtsi and the Catholics in Bulgaria. Return to Bulgaria was out of the question. Bishop Stefanov never returned and died in Venice on 14 December 1692.

The pogrom of Chiprovtsi struck a heavy blow to the Catholic Church in Bulgaria from which it was hard to recover. Though nominally there was no immediate change in the hierarchy and the administrative structure of the Church, it was only two eparchies – that of Nikopol and that of Sofia – that remained as a really steadily working form of the administrative structure of the Church. This structure remained, but for some minor modifications, till the 20th century.

It was only in 1721 that a bishop was appointed again to run the Diocese of Nikopol. Its fourth bishop was Marco Andriashi (Andreashi) of Dubrovnik. As he was appointed Archbishop of Sofia in 1725, the position that he vacated was given to Nikola Stanislavich who was made archbishop in 1728. The Turkish reprisals in 1737 were the reason for the flight of Stanislavich (his residence was in Krajova) and 300 families from the diocese into Banat where in 1739 he was appointed Catholic Bishop of Chanad with a see in Temisvar.

Giovanni (Ivan) Baldasare was appointed after him. However, he could not take his post in the diocese. Anton Bechik (occasionally described as Anton Betsik) became the sixth Bishop of Nikopol (1745-1751).

In 1751 Rome appointed Nicola Pulhesi as the head of the diocese, to be assisted by three missionaries from the Congregation of the Baptists that had been founded in Rome the year before in Rome. This was the beginning of a new effort to renew the activities of the Catholic missions in Bulgaria and to revive the faith after the pogroms at the end of the preceding century. In 1767 Monsignor Pulhesi was appointed Bishop of Dubrovnik; the position that he vacated was taken by Sebastian Canepa of the same order. The latter was consecrated bishop in Constantinople on 12 June 1768. However, the eighth Bishop of Nikopol did not rule for a long time. He died of cold in the village of Oresh in January 1769.

Seven years after his death the episcopal chair was still vacant. In 1776 Pavel Gaidadijski – also known as Douvanliiski or Douvanliata after his native village Douvanlii in the Plovdiv region - was consecrated Bishop of Nikopol. Initially the bishop chose Belene as his see; but later he moved to Rousse and finally to Bucharest. He was the last (ninth) Franciscan Bishop of Nikopol, a pupil of the conventual community which more than any other established the traditions of the Catholic Church in Bulgaria.

As the Franciscan mission was persecuted by the authorities after the Chiprovtsi Uprising it became weaker and weaker; even at the end of the seventeenth century ideas were floated to merge the religious province Bulgaria with the province of Bosnia Argentina as it used to be; however, its independent status was maintained till the end of the 18th century. A decree of Pope Pius VI of 1781 closed down the Bulgarian Franciscan Province and the Diocese of Nikopol was given over to the Congregation of the Passionists. The Franciscans resumed their work in Bulgaria in mid 19th century when the Capuchins were chosen by Rome to be in charge of the Southern Plovdiv-Sofia Diocese.

Blessed by Pope Pius VI, the first Passionists, Fr Francisc Ferreri and Fr Giacomo Sperandio, left for Bulgaria in 1781. In 1782 they settled in the village of Trunchovitsa. The Passionist fathers continue their work to this day.

Bishop Pavel Douvanliata died in Bucharest in 1804, to be replaced by Mgr Francisc Ferreri, who was consecrated in Rome on 1 September 1805. He arrived in his diocese in the beginning of 1806. In 1809 he moved to Wallachia, and in 1812 settled in the Bulgarian Catholic village of Chopla in the vicinity of Bucharest. There he was killed by the plague on 30 November 1813 after catching the disease from the sufferers whom he tended.

Fortunat Erolani, the successor of Bishop Ferreri, became the eleventh Bishop of Nikopol. He was consecrated bishop in Vienna on 17 May 1815, administering the diocese until 1822 when he was transferred to Civit  Castellana in Italy. His successor Josif Molajoni was consecrated bishop in Rome in 1825. The relatively longer period of his office enabled him to pursue a consistent policy: he tried to enforce discipline on the clergy; he fought against the superstition of his flock; he worked hard to improve morals; he built solid churches in the villages of the diocese. First he resided in Bucharest; from 1838 onwards he resided in Belene and survived

the two terrible plague epidemics in 1830 and 1834. In 1847 Molajoni went back to Rome and gave up his bishop office. He died on 17 July 1859.

His successor was Angelo Parsi who was consecrated bishop in Rome in 1848. Under the thirteenth bishop of Nikopol the Catholics were allowed to build churches and between 1852 and 1860 houses of prayer were built in Ludjene, Oresh and Belene and consecrated by Mgr Parsi himself. In keeping with the religious freedoms by virtue of the Hatt-i-Humayun of 1856 the first bells for the diocese were cast in Bucharest – two bells for the village of Belene, one bell for the village of Trunchovitsa and one bell for the village of Ludjene. In 1857 the bishop had another two bells cast in Vienna and gave them as gifts to the village of Oresh. After 14 years of work Monsignor Parsi retreated to his native Civitavecchia in Italy. There he died on 24 February 1863.

Anton-Josif Pluim, a Dutchman by birth, was his successor. He was consecrated in Rome on 19 October 1863 and represented the Diocese of Nikopol at the First Vatican Council. Bishop Pluim was made archbishop by Pope Pius IX who in 1869 sent him to Constantinople to rest. He died there on 17 January 1877.

Ignat Felix Paoli was consecrated the Bishop of Nikopol on 20 August 1870 in Rome. He lived to see Bulgaria regain her independence. The office of that bishop resulted in important changes in the structure of the Catholic Church after the liberation of Bulgaria. In early 1883, Pope Leo XIII and the Holy See changed the status of the Diocese of Nikopol; Wallachia was taken away from the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Nikopol and these lands were given the status of an independent archdiocese. Mgr Paoli, who until then had been Bishop of Nikopol, was appointed as the first Archbishop of Bucharest. Mgr Ippolit Louis Agosto, who arrived in Bulgaria back in 1867 as a missionary of the Order of the Passionists, was consecrated on 3 May 1883 as spiritual head of the Diocese of Nikopol which no longer extended beyond the political borders of the Principality of Bulgaria.

Mgr Ippolit Louis Agosto was involved in large-scale activities in post-liberation Bulgaria: he established a seminary in Rousse, helped build the churches in Varna and in the newly instituted Catholic villages of Dragomirovo, Burdarski Geran, Gostilya and Assenovo; he intervened to have a Catholic cemetery in Rousse and to build a cathedral in Rousse in 1890-1891. He died in Belene on 3 December 1893 at the age of 55.

His friend from his missionary years, Henrich Dulce from Paris, was his successor. He was consecrated bishop in Rome on 24 February 1895. The seventeenth Bishop of Nikopol headed the diocese in the course of 17 years, till 1912 when he returned to his birthplace where he died five years later. His successor, Leonard de Blumbach, had the chair for a short time. He died on 4 April 1915. War and ill-health meant his time as archbishop left few traces.

On 21 May 1915 Damian Teelen, a Dutch by origin, was consecrated bishop in Rome. He arrived in Bulgaria on 5 September. Bishop Teelen had the chair of the Diocese of Nikopol till 6 August 1946 when he died. His office was one of the most productive in the history of the diocese.

Fr Evgenii Bossilkov was appointed as the twentieth apostolic administrator in North Bulgaria after the death of Bishop Teelen. Monsignor Bossilkov was born in the village of Belene in 1900 and consecrated bishop on 27 August 1947. Since Bishop Douvanliiski in late 18th century and early 19th century there had been no other Bulgarian to head the diocese. On 11 November 1952 Mgr Bossilkov was executed by the communist government, which accused him of being involved with a "Catholic espionage organisation in Bulgaria". On 15 March 1998 the Catholic Church, following established procedures, beatified Mgr Bossilkov and thus paid homage to his martyrdom for the sake of the faith.

2. Sofia

The history of the other Catholic diocese (the Diocese of Sofia or of Sofia and Plovdiv, as it came to be called from the early 18th century onwards), after the suppression of the Chiprovtsi Uprising, is as follows:

Archbishop Kniazhevich, who was expelled from the diocese, died in 1691 in Sibir, Sedmigrad region. After him the chair was taken by Pavel Joshih (Joshich), the sixth Bishop of Sofia. During his period in office and also in the time of his successor, Archbishop Marco Andriashi, the administrative center of the diocese was finally established in Plovdiv. It was mentioned above that the Dubrovnik-born Marco Andriashi was the Bishop of Nikopol from 1721 to 1725, before he became the Archbishop of Sofia. Probably he had a final say on ecclesiastical matters in Bulgaria as it was on his judgment that after the death of Bishop Joshih, Fr Mihail Dobromirov - who was until then studying for the priesthood in Fermo-Loretto in Italy - was appointed as administrator of the Southern Diocese. Fr Mihail arrived in 1717 and chose to stay in his native village, Kaluchlii. Archbishop Andriashi was unable to govern his diocese for a long time; because of the wars with Austria in that period, in the late 1720s, Catholic clergymen were persecuted as suspects in collaboration with the western enemies of the Turkish Empire. The archbishop and the lower-ranking clergy were forced to leave and moved to Ragusa (Dalmatia). As a subject of the Empire, Fr Dobromirov was free to go back to the diocese as a suffragan and tend the affairs of the diocese. He was assisted by a priest, Fr Nikola Todorov, who was delegated the power to administer the Paulician villages west of the river Gyopsa (Stryama).

In 1737 Fr Dobromirov had a new assistant, Nikola Boshkovich. During yet another of the Austrian-Turkish Wars, in the spring of 1738, don Nikola wrote to his brethren in Constantinople asking them to pray, as he was doing, for the Lord's blessing on the Austrian arms. The letter was caught by the Turks and on 22 April 1738 Fr Mihail Dobromirov and Fr Boshkovich were beheaded in public in Edirne.

In 1742 the situation in the diocese started to normalise when Nikola Angelli Radovani from Skoder, Albania, was sent to be eighth Bishop of Sofia. Mgr Radovani was the Archbishop of Sofia and the apostolic administrator of the archdiocese in the course of 11 years. On 2 April 1753 he was appointed Archbishop of Durazzo in Albania. Archbishop Benedict Cuceri (or Venedih Ciceri), an Albanian like his predecessor, was the head of the archdiocese till 1759. His resignation worked an important change in the status of the southern Diocese; he was the last archbishop in its history after 1642 and the ninth bishop since its foundation in 1601; after his administration the diocese acquired the status of an episcopal vicariate, and the post

was filled by a succession of apostolic vicars. These were hard times for the Catholics of the southern Diocese in the 18th century. Each bishop chose where the see would be and usually it was in one of the Catholic villages around, most often in Davadjovo.

Mgr Stanislav Douli (or Stanislav Dougli) became the first apostolic vicar in that same year but died shortly after his appointment. Mgr Josif Roverani ran the diocese from 1759 to 1763. From 1765 to 1770 Pavel Douvanliata, who was to become the Bishop of Nikopol, ran the diocese. Mgr Peter Tsarski (or Peter Fibri), a native of Plovdiv, ran the diocese from 1770 to 1784. He was replaced by the apostolic vicar Nikola Tsilvi (or Dzilvi) who remained till 1802. He was succeeded by Andrea Tounov from the village of Seldjikovo (Kaloyanovo), Plovdiv region. Monsignor Tounov governed till 17 May 1835 when he resigned because he was advanced in years. Clergymen who had done important service for the diocese in his day were Fr Peter Arabadjiiski, Fr Josif Arabadjiiski and Fr Yako Yakovski. The fact that the village of Kaluchlii (General Nikolaevo) was the centre of the diocese in the early 19th century indicates the systematic restrictions on the Church in those hard times.

Seeking to change this situation in 1835 Rome entrusted the southern Diocese to the fathers of the Congregation of St. Alphonsus Liguori, better known as the Redemptorists. The Vienna branch of the congregation sent Fr Ivan Fortner (a Czech) to head the apostolic vicariate from the date of the resignation of Mgr Tounov. Fr Fortner was accompanied by Fr Anton Fisher (also a Czech), and Fr Mateja Graf of Moravia. In 1836 Fr Fortner died and the diocese was taken over by the newcomer Fr Ivan Ptacek (another Czech). The return of the vicariate in Plovdiv is to be interpreted as a sign of change for the better during the stay (1836-1840) of the Redemptorists. A reform was launched under the control of Fr Ptacek to introduce the Gregorian calendar that now replaced the Julian calendar which had been used by the Catholic community in the diocese. The ambitious administrator successfully intervened for not working during holidays and introduced the public religious processions on the church feast days.

The Redemptorists remained till 1840. There is one explanation of their short stay and that is the zeal of the bishop and of the brethren – a zeal that was not to be tolerated in the Ottoman Empire. On one occasion the Catholics of Plovdiv and its environs were summoned for labour on a great church feast day. Shocked by this sacrilege and unable to control himself, Fr Ptacek went to the *konak* where the Catholics had already gathered with their carts to await the commands of the *Pasha* of Plovdiv. The story goes that the priest assaulted the guards with the “bravery of an apostle”. The Turks were shocked enough to allow the labourers to go to church before resuming work.

This and other similar incidents led to accusations by the Greek bishop of Plovdiv that the fathers were Austrian spies. The accusations were taken by the Turkish government to Rome, forcing the Holy See to recall the Redemptorists in September 1840. As the diocese was orphaned, the Bishop of Nipopol sent Fr Ludovic Capello, a Passionist, who arrived in Plovdiv on 15 September 1840. Fr Karl Poten arrived shortly after. In the beginning of 1841 it was considered that the latter would be appropriate to become the Bishop of Antivar. The Diocese of Plovdiv was orphaned again. Hence the decision of the Holy See to send a Capuchin mission to Plovdiv – the first Capuchin fathers arrived in Plovdiv on 21 March 1841 - whose presence continues to this day.

Andrea Canova, a native of Garesio at Ormea and a titular bishop of Crona was consecrated bishop on 26 March 1848 with the title of apostolic vicar of Plovdiv and Sofia. His successful administration is to be attributed to his personal merits and relatively long and systematic work in the diocese and to the change in the legislation concerning the religious denominations in Turkey after the Hatt-i-Humayun of 1856. The Cathedral of St. Ludwig was built in Plovdiv during his administration as were the churches in the villages of Baltadji, Davadjovo, Seldjikovo, Hambarli, Kaluchlii and others; he was also the founder of the Catholic education in the diocese. It was at his initiative that the vice-consuls of Austria, France, Great Britain and Russia were based in Plovdiv. The man died on 10 August 1866 and was buried in Plovdiv after 25 years of apostolic work.

His successor Mgr Francesco Reinaudi (Francesco Domenico Reinaudi) from Villafranca, Savoy, was also a Capuchin. He was consecrated bishop in 1868, and administered the diocese in the most dramatic period of Bulgarian history.

Upon his arrival he organized a seminary and a large orphanage that up to the mid-20th century was in the care of Bulgarian tertiary nuns. In 1882 he organised the famous Catholic hospital in Plovdiv. In 1885, at the age of 77, he retired and moved to the village of Kaluchlii. In recognition of his achievements Pope Leo XIII made him archbishop and appointed him the tutelary of the ancient Stavropol Diocese. Mgr Reinaudi died on 24 July 1893 at the age of 85. His successor, Robert Mennini of Trento, took over the diocese in 1885 and remained in the chair till 14 October 1916 when he died. His administration was one of the best ever in the history of the Diocese.

With his successor Bishop Vikenti Peev, after a long time the Sofia Episcopal chair went to a Bulgarian again. Mgr Peev was the apostolic vicar of Sofia and Plovdiv and the Titular Bishop of Lirb. He was born on 11 November 1873 in the village of Baltadjii (Sekirovo, Plovdiv region) and educated in the community of the Capuchin fathers. He was consecrated bishop on 2 March 1913. He became the real successor of Archbishop Mennini on 12 October 1916 and was one of the key figures in the history of the Catholic Church in the interwar period. He died on 2 November 1941.

Bishop Ivan Romanov, the titular bishop of Prizriana, was appointed as his successor. He was born in the village of Baltadjii (Sekirevo) in 1878. He was ordained priest on 21 September 1901 by Bishop Mennini. Till 1905 he was a suffragan at the Western Catholic Church of St. Joseph in Sofia; then for one year he had the same office in the village of Seldjikovo (Kaloyanovo, Plovdiv region). In the summer of 1906 he was appointed the chaplain of Prince Ferdinand and served him till the monarch left Bulgaria. On 24 August 1923 the Pope Pius XI appointed him his chamberlain, an office that continued under the Pope Pius XII. He took the bishop vicariate in Plovdiv after 24-year long service of the church outside his country. He was consecrated in the church which he served first, St. Joseph in Sofia, on 4 October 1942.

His life, like the lives of most Catholic priests in post World War II communist Bulgaria, was tragic. In December 1952 the 72-year old Mgr Ivan Romanov was sentenced to a 12-year term in prison. The interrogation "methods" did not spare him: he shared the martyrdom of Bishop Bossilkov and died on 12 February 1953.

The religious and political emancipation of the Bulgarians in the 19th century Ottoman Empire brought to the fore a group of activists who fought for the Church to be severed from the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and united with Rome. The chief proponent of the cause, Dragan Tsankov, was inspired by his knowledge of Bulgarian medieval history. Between 18 and 30 December 1860 some hundred supporters of this cause visited the Apostolic Delegate in Constantinople, Mgr Paolo Brunoni, to present a petition signed by many Bulgarians asking for apostolic protection. An act of accession to Rome was signed which contained the two major Bulgarian requests: an independent church hierarchy and schools "according to the principles and systems of popular education". Attached to this was the firm insistence that the existing Eastern Church rite should be preserved.

A couple of months later, on 2 April 1861, the archimandrite Josif Sokolski was consecrated archbishop at the Sistine Chapel in Rome and appointed head of the Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite of the Bulgarians. The consecration was performed by the Pope Pius IX in the presence of high-ranking ecclesiastics, influential politicians, diplomats and a delegation of the Bulgarians who had chosen to be Roman Catholics.

These events marked the beginning of the history of the Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite in Bulgaria. Its evolution till mid 20th century can be traced in three periods.

3. The Byzantine-Rite Church

The first period from the early to the mid 1860s was the shortest and the most dramatic. Shortly after the newly instituted church had been created, it was dealt a heavy blow when Archbishop Sokolski was abducted to Russia. The abduction was organised by Russian diplomats who favoured the unity of the Orthodox faith in Turkey and who had collaborators among the Bulgarian community in Constantinople. These developments resulted in the first grave crisis in the history of the Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite in Bulgaria: many of the new believers rejected the union en masse, and for a while it seemed that the split within the church provoked by the abduction of its leader was impossible to bridge.

Following a series of unsuccessful attempts to instate a high prelate, the crisis was overcome with the election and consecration of Rafail Popov as bishop on 1 November 1865. The administration of Mgr Popov could be considered a second period in the history of the Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite till the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) and the First World War (1915-1918). Over that period the secular and political motives for the Bulgarian union with Rome ceased to exist and the foundations of the Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite in Bulgaria were laid.

The Treaty of Berlin (1878) did not affect the Catholic population who remained in the ethnic Bulgarian lands within Turkey. However, the administration of religious affairs from one centre was no longer efficient because of the distances and unsafe roads in the Empire. Concern for the Bulgarian Catholics who were surrounded by Orthodox believers and whose faith was not yet strong led to the division of Macedonia and Thrace in 1883 into two separately administered districts, each with a diocese and a bishop; meanwhile Rome planned to appoint an archbishop to represent the Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite in Constantinople. Mgr Nil Izvorov, who succeeded the

episcopacy of Mgr Popov, was appointed Archbishop of Constantinople and administrator of the united Bulgarians in the district. Mgr Mihail Petkov was appointed Bishop of Hevron and apostolic vicar of the Bulgarians in Thrace and Bulgaria. Mgr Lazar Mladenov was appointed apostolic vicar of Macedonia. The newly appointed bishops of Thrace and Macedonia were the first Catholic bishops who had been educated at high Catholic theological schools and universities. They belonged to a new generation whose faith, education and energy were to be key for the extension of the influence of the Eastern Catholic Church.

The wars and the postwar years were a time of trial, and marked the beginning of the third period in the history of the Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite. The end of that period coincided with the end of the Second World War and the establishment of the communist regime in Bulgaria. What had been achieved in the prewar decades of peace was totally lost and the Eastern Catholic Church had to be reorganised again.

The crisis that hit the Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite was an outcome of the war, which led to the displacement of the Bulgarian Catholic refugees from Thrace and Macedonia who were dispersed among the Orthodox believers in the state of Bulgaria. In addition the future of the church was subjected to serious trials because the Christians and the priests of the eastern and western rite were unable to cohabit and integrate; even the Catholics of the Byzantine rite from Thrace and Macedonia found cohabitation difficult. Up to that point there had been a clear, historically evolved demarcation line between the two rites and contradictions were nonexistent; but after the wars contradictions were strong and painful.

There were great difficulties with respect to the legal status of the Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite in Bulgaria. Diocesan boundaries, the status of the clergy and their citizenship, and other matters had to be reconciled with Bulgarian legislation. The efforts of the Bulgarian Eastern Catholic clergy and the support of Rome helped to resolve the difficulties. In 1921 as a delegate of the Eastern Congregation the Archbishop Isaiah Papadopoulos assisted the administrative reorganisation in the new conditions whereby the three dioceses in Turkey – in Constantinople, Edirne and Thessaloniki – were closed down and one diocese was constituted whose see was Sofia. The construction of the Eastern Catholic Church of the Assumption of the Virgin in Sofia started in 1922 with the support both of Archbishop Papadopolous and Pope Benedict XV; they also backed the construction of a parishioners' home which was to be centre for the integration of the Byzantine Rite Catholics in Bulgaria.

On 25 April 1925, ten days after the assassination in the Church of St. Nedelya, Giuseppe Angello Roncalli, later to be known as the "Bulgarian" Pope John XXIII, arrived in Bulgaria as an apostolic delegate. Mgr Roncalli helped overcome this grave crisis, not least by consecrating a man who over time would unite the Byzantine Rite Catholics. Mgr Kiril Kourtev, one of the most illustrious names in the history of the Bulgarian Catholic Church, was born on 18 July 1891 in the village of Dripchevo (Svilengrad region). On 5 December 1926 in Rome he was consecrated Bishop of Briulitan and Apostolic Exarch of the Byzantine Rite Catholics in Bulgaria.

The strategies of the leadership of the Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite in Bulgaria in the prewar period – proselytism and increase of the number of believers – appeared to be impossible in post World War I Bulgaria. The new policy of the Byzantine Rite Catholic Church focussed on achieving a stable administrative

organisation of the Church within the state, encouraging prayer and service, fostering an active lay apostolate and developing schools. That was the guiding principle of the consolidation of the Church in the post World War I conditions. The results of this policy are being enjoyed today: parishes with educated and respected clergy, the activities of the religious communities like the Eucharistine Sisters and Carmelite Nuns as centers of ascetic experience among the Byzantine Rite Catholics, the maintenance of schools, the establishment of a seminary to train priests for the Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite, support to a Catholic press, as well as the support to the numerous religious, educational, charitable and cultural Catholic societies and initiatives.

But communism turned the history of the Catholic Church in Bulgaria upside down. In 1952 more than 40 people -- high-ranking clergy and priests serving Catholics of both rites -- faced charges as members of an "espionage and conspiracy Catholic organisation". There were four death sentences, many prison terms and confiscation of all the assets of the Catholic Church. The Church was not free to develop.

Catholic doctrine could not tolerate communism and the Fatherland Front government in Bulgaria. The Catholic Church could not exist in an environment in which there was no tolerance and the freedom of the individual was restricted.

An Orthodox Conference took place in Moscow between 8 and 18 July 1948. Greece and the Ecumenical Patriarchate were not invited. The noose around the Catholic Church tightened. A law was passed ordering the confiscation of church possessions in the cities (1948). The Religions Law of 1949 (still in effect) restricts the activities of the Church and prohibits maintaining relations with the Vatican and other states.

Between 29 September and 3 October 1952, 40 Catholics were accused of espionage: Mgr Bossilkov, Kamen Vichev, Pavel Djidjov and Josafat Shishkov were executed on 11 November same year. On 2 December 1952, 10 were accused, and given prison terms between 1 and 20 years. Several men, not condemned to death, were nonetheless killed. In 1953, Decree 88 was passed -- but not published in the State Gazette -- ordering the confiscation of the estates around the churches, leaving in most cases a strip of just 2 metres that was left. Priests had to live in the churches or in basements. In 1963, the last imprisoned priests were released. The Church was no longer persecuted but was closely watched. All kinds of ploys were resorted to in order to hinder activities. Bugging devices were discovered during repair work. Paramilitary clubs were often next door.

The Diocese of Nikopol was orphaned with the incarceration of Bishop Bossilkov in 1952. It was only in 1975 that Todor Zhivkov confirmed the execution when he had an audience with the Pope Paul VI and it was possible then to appoint another bishop. In 1980 the first priests went to Rome to specialise there.

5. Post-1989

This is the last part of our new history of which we are witnesses and in which we are participants. The challenges are many. The Catholic Church remained true to its vocation but was weak. The clergy are advanced in years; the facilities are scanty; the clergy are untrained; the faith is weak; there is not much trust.

Improvements have come gradually. In 1990 men went to study in western seminaries for the first time. The number of people seeking faith began to increase, and members of monastic communities with traditions in the Bulgarian lands began to arrive back, while new communities also entered the country. New religious and cultural organisations were created. Priests were ordained. Consecrations were performed. Reinforcements began to arrive from outside Bulgaria.

Decree 88 of 1953 was repealed in 1992. But nothing has been restituted though assets were confiscated overnight. Confiscations under the City Property Law and the Religions Law have not yet been compensated.

The political, economic and social changes over these years have provoked a tangible economic crisis in the country to which the Catholic Church in Bulgaria has responded with humanitarian aid donated from the Catholic churches in Europe and around the world through Caritas-Bulgaria, a Catholic organisation working in close cooperation with the Church but assisting all alike, whatever their religion or beliefs.

6. The Catholic Church in Bulgaria today

The Bishops Conference of the Catholic Church in Bulgaria is the governing body of the Catholic Church in Bulgaria. It has three bishops: Bishop Petko Hristov of the Diocese of Nikopol; Bishop Georgi Yovchev of the Diocese of Sofia-Plovdiv; and Bishop Hristo Proikov, an Apostolic Exarch, who is currently the Chair of the Conference.

The 1992 census showed that there are just 53,074 Catholics (0.63%) out of a total Bulgarian population of 8,487,417. Orthodox believers number 7,274,592 (85%) and Muslims 1,110,295 (14%). Of these, there are 37,629 Catholics in cities, 14,445 in villages. The population divides into four districts: Plovdiv (25,303), Pleven (9,174), Sofia (4,675), Veliko Turnovo (4,099). They are served by 65 priests, about 90 nuns, and 17 monastic communities.

Among the social challenges facing the community are low birthrates, drug addiction, crime, ignorance, mistrust and poor work habits.

7. Relations between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches

While the Catholic Church maintains its identity, it is open to dialogue at any level with other religious communities or churches. The Orthodox Church in Bulgaria accounts for the majority of believers with 85%, which is strongly to its advantage. This should imply that this must be the institution that comes up with most of the initiatives.

While relations between Orthodox believers and Western-Rite Catholics poses little problem, the Byzantine-Rite Catholics are seen by some Orthodox clergy as an obstacle to the integrity of the Orthodox Church.

While the Catholic Church maintains formal contacts with the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, this does not rule out having contacts with other churches and religious communities. His Holiness Pope John Paul II officially visited Bulgaria in 2003.

III: PROTESTANTS IN BULGARIA

Arriving relatively late on the scene, compared to their Western European and American brethren, Bulgarian Protestants occupy a relatively small but noteworthy place in the life of their country and within the huge and influential family of Protestants around the world.

The new circumstances and factors of our modern times have placed Bulgarian Protestants in an environment that is very different from their previous context. Those circumstances include Bulgaria's entrance into the EU, the fact that it remains part of the large family of countries with democratic systems of government, as well as the continuous challenges of movements and ideas which threaten ethnic, religious and social mutual understanding. The new environment has put the values of ethics, belief, and human dignity of Bulgarian Protestants to the test, so that they may prove their equal rights in the pursuit of perfecting the human soul toward that which is good. Because God has commanded us through His Word: "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience... And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." (Col. 3:12, 14)

Bulgarian Protestantism was born from the work of missionaries and ministers of the British Foreign Bible Society and the American Council of Congregational Churches in Boston. It became its own entity in time, and has turned into a movement with nearly 160 years of history, and has become a firm part of the spiritual, cultural and social life of Bulgaria.

The time of the emergence of Bulgarian evangelicals on the historical scene coincided with the period in the 19th century when Bulgarians lived as subjects of the Ottoman sultan within the bounds of the Ottoman Empire. In actual fact, there was no national Bulgarian Church in existence, although for ten centuries the Bulgarian people had traditionally considered themselves Eastern Orthodox. These factors are extremely important when it comes to evaluating the place of Protestants within Bulgarian society.

The first signs of interest on behalf of the English Bible Society and the American missionaries toward Bulgarians during the Ottoman Empire were noted around the beginning of the 19th century, but those were not as clear. During the 1830s a long-standing partnership was initiated between Bulgarians and the American missionaries, which was at first primarily directed toward a new modern translation of the Bible. Discernible outcomes from the Bulgarians' attraction to Protestantism, the appearance of Bulgarian Protestants and formation of Protestant Communities date from the 1850s, when American missionaries were appointed to work among Bulgarians within the Ottoman Empire.

The Protestant message and Protestant Church slowly but confidently gained ground among the Bulgarian population. Protestantism attracted bright and active Bulgarians, at first in the south of Bulgaria, and subsequently in the northern and south-western Bulgarian lands. Small but steadily growing Protestant communities emerged as agents and partners of foreign missionaries in the effort to evangelise and distribute knowledge. That activity gradually expanded the range of its influence among

Bulgarians and engaged the attention of prominent figures of the Bulgarian national revival, who, regardless of their affiliation with Eastern Orthodoxy, became some of the most active and effective supporters of Protestants as part of the educational efforts of Bulgarians in the 19th century to spread the Word of God.

The fruit of these efforts was the first translation of the Bible into modern Bulgarian as a joint work of Bulgarian educators and church figures (P. Slaveykov, K. Photinov, N. Rilski) and American missionaries (E. Riggs). That translation was funded and encouraged by the American missionaries and was completed with the help of their Bulgarian associates. Printing houses, which were also established and financed by Protestants, enabled the Bible to enter every Bulgarian household allowing the Bible to move out of their narrow use within churches and monasteries. The spread of the Bulgarian Bible in turn fostered the spread of the Bulgarian language culture in the 19th century, furthering the country's modernisation.

The Word of God was spread by Protestants through sermons and brochures which were designed not only to present the Christian teaching according to the way it was interpreted by the Protestants, but in addition to provide useful worldly advice to women, children and men, which would be applicable to their everyday lives. As a result Protestant literature, which was distributed by traveling booksellers, who were also Bulgarian Protestants, became hugely popular among the Eastern Orthodox population. The most influential and serious Protestant publication was the magazine *Zornitsa*, founded in 1864 on the initiative of Elias Riggs and Dr. Long. Among the main contributing authors were Bulgarian educational and church figures. The popularity of that magazine was due to the variety of its content. Although it never broke its relations to Bulgarian Protestant circles and continued publishing articles with religious (Protestant) subject matter, it nevertheless offered a wide spectrum of knowledge and information about the most recent scientific discoveries, about events around the world and within the Ottoman Empire, pages from the past history of Bulgarians, literary works, etc. The magazine reflected on the problems of the national and church struggle in the 1860s for the formation of an independent Bulgarian Church and the Bulgarian Exarchate. *Zornitsa* was the most popular all-Bulgarian magazine, which had a strong impact on the spirit of the age.

1. The Bulgarian Bible Society

A fruit of the work of the American missionaries on the one hand and the pursuit of Bulgarian Protestants in education on the other was the establishment of Protestant schools in Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, and Samokov, as well as educational groups for women, talks on Bible Study, etc. Especially popular among the Bulgarians was the so-called Robert College in Constantinople, founded by Cyrus Hamlin as a small Protestant school (1840) in the Bebek quarters and later enlarged through the support of the philanthropist Christopher Robert (1863), who became patron of the college. Although the college had been intended to serve all subjects of the Empire, Bulgarians dominated the ranks of its students until the end of its existence. Some of the most distinguished political figures in the country after Bulgaria's liberation were among the graduates of Robert College: Konstantin Stoilov, Prime Minister (1894-1899), Konstantin Muraviev, Prime Minister (2-9 September 1944), Todor Ivanchov, Prime Minister (1899-1901), Ivan Evstatiev Geshev, Minister of Finance (1894) and Minister of Foreign Affairs (1911-1914), Mihail Madjarov, Minister in various cabinets, and numerous other professors and industrialists.

During the 1870s the first large Protestant communities were formed in Bansko and Merichleri, where the first Bulgarian Protestant church building was also built. Yavorov, the esteemed Bulgarian poet in his book *Haidouk Longings* has left us a description of that Protestant community: “Evangelical propaganda has played a significant cultural role within that region. Bansko has a population of 4-5 thousand residents, a large part of which are Protestants. They are by all means citizens – granted their large-scale intelligence, household life and outward bearing. There are no illiterates among them, including old people and even women. Their inquisitiveness has long surpassed an interest only in the Bible; they are reading everything and one would find at least several books in every one of their homes...”

During that period Protestant communities were spreading predominantly in towns, especially among the better-off and well-educated. They were less often found in villages – a trend which remains up to the present time.

The high national self-consciousness of Bulgarian Protestants led them to participate in the educational and cultural upheavals of Bulgarians during the period of national revival. Many were active participants in the national liberation movement. On 21 November 1876, in a report to the State Secretary, Hamilton Fish, the American ambassador to the Ottoman Empire wrote that among the individuals who had helped at that time to reveal to the general public the sufferings of the Bulgarians, the most important were Rev. Dr. George Washburn, Principal of Robert College, and Rev. Dr. Albert Long, teacher of Natural History. Likewise a number of liberal ideas by the missionaries clearly had an impact on the discussions of the Church Assembly at the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate. In 1876 the American missionary James Clark was the first outside observer, who had visited the villages which had provided the scene for the April Uprising. He made a list of the damages and victims and organised a campaign for supporting those in need.

With the liberation of the Bulgarians in 1878 and the formation of the new Bulgarian state, a new phase in the history of Bulgarian Protestants dominated by Congregationalists and Methodists began. When liberation came there was a relatively small Protestant community in the country, but one that was sufficiently consolidated and prepared through its experience for the new challenges lying ahead. The solid ground on which the Bulgarian Protestants were standing allowed them to increase the number of their church members and expand the representation of the Protestant Evangelical Churches. The Baptists already had their own churches and later on the Pentecostal Church established a presence among believers in the country. Around 1926 there were approximately 68 Protestant churches. Sunday Schools were established in some of the larger ones among them.

The Lovech High School for Girls and the American College in Sofia were the successors to the Protestant schools that were in existence during the time of the Bulgarian national revival. The tradition of publishing periodical literature was actively continued. Practically all of the larger Evangelical Protestant churches had a magazine of their own. *Zornitsa* continued to be published although not with its previous success and popularity. Some of the other popular periodicals were *Hristijanski Svjat* (“Christian World”), *Evangelist* (Evangelical), *Petdesetni vesti* (“Pentecostal News”) and *Blagovestitel* (“Evangelist”). Although most of the publications were narrowly directed toward evangelical readers, their moral contents were generally relevant and as a result they engaged the wider public interest. A

good example of that was the magazine *Vuzdurzhatel* ("Abstainer"), which appealed to the spirit of the newly emerging 1930s strong temperance movement all over Bulgaria. Bulgarian Protestants played an active and sometimes leading role in that movement.

There were also signs at this time of new organisation structures for Protestants. An Alliance of Evangelical Churches was established, in which the efforts of the Congregational, Methodist, Baptist and Pentecostal Churches united for activities and the obtaining of rights. In 1928 the Union of Evangelical Pentecostal Churches was founded, and there were regular General Assemblies. Through those efforts Bulgarian Protestants managed to establish their own representative bodies before the central and local authorities, with whom they occasionally established contact concerning various issues. The unity among the Bulgarian Evangelical Churches was remarkable and continues until today. One of the significant contributions of Bulgarian Protestants toward the moral growth of the Bulgarian society was their work among various minorities. In this respect there has been success in the evangelization of Bulgarian gypsies. Due to the efforts of Bulgarian Protestants from the Union of Bulgarian Evangelical Baptist Churches and with the initial assistance of the English and American Bible Societies the first New Testament volumes in the Roma language were also published.

2. Bulgarian Protestants under Totalitarianism (1944-1989) and after

The next phase in the history of the Bulgarian Protestant Evangelical movement is connected to the period of the communist regime in Bulgaria. The beginning of that phase was cruel and tragic. The trials of Bulgarian Protestant pastors (1949) ended with death sentences and prison terms. That was the beginning of a period of prolonged mental cruelty and pressure on believers. All kinds of church Sunday schools were banned. Prohibited were any publishing activities and the distribution of periodicals and Bibles. The State Security agency and the Ministry of Interior Affairs carefully watched the lives and activities of pastors and believers.

Nevertheless, some churches secretly and at great risk managed to publish illegal publications as well as bring into the country religious literature. Much effort was put into encouraging evangelical believers to resist becoming followers of the communist government. The work with young people within the churches continued in the form of small groups. Relationships with foreign Evangelical denominations were also maintained and news of the condition of religious rights in Bulgaria were being shared. Notwithstanding the extremely difficult situation that evangelical churches were put in they continued to increase and by the end of 1989 had multiplied several times above their number in 1944.

After the fall of the communist regime a new phase began in the lives of the Bulgarian Protestants. One of the most important outcomes was the increase in the numbers of believers in the Protestant churches – churches that had already come to be recognized as traditional within Bulgarian society. There was also the resurgence of some churches whose activities had diminished during the period of persecution. Sunday schools were restored and most of the aforementioned periodicals as well.

There was much publishing work going on, not only of periodicals, but also studies of Bulgarian Protestantism undertaken both by Protestant leaders and by professional

academic researchers. The well-developed foundations of Bulgarian education dating back to the period of the Bulgarian national revival in the 18th and 19th centuries allowed Bulgarian Evangelicals to make significant progress after the political changes of the 1990s.

This established tradition of education became the foundation of the Bulgarian Evangelical Theological Institute (BETI), which was founded by resolution from the Council of Ministers in April 1999. The establishment of BETI was the result of a cooperative effort between the Evangelical Methodist Episcopal Church in Bulgaria, the National Alliance of United Churches of God, the Union of Evangelical Pentecostal Churches, the Bulgarian Church of God, the Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches and the Union of Evangelical Congregational Churches in Bulgaria. BETI was established with the objective of providing bachelors and masters level programs in theology for the training of ministers for the Protestant denominations. These programmes are designed to integrate the latest achievements in theology, philosophy, history, pedagogy, sociology and psychology. The subjects offered have an interdisciplinary character and serve to combine contemporary teaching methods and techniques while at the same time maintaining an open atmosphere which respects various religions. They aid in developing the identity of the students on the basis of Christian values through the study of the Bible, its history and interpretation, and through an introduction to the history of the church and various movements, as well as to Christian culture in general. There is increasing cooperation with other Bulgarian universities as Bulgarian teachers within BETI are invited to offer lectures at other institutions of higher learning.

The Protestant community in Bulgaria, during the period after the fall of communism and the ensuing hard economic and social crisis, created ways to support the socially struggling members of society, especially in the larger cities and in the capital Sofia, through so-called social kitchens. These were available to anyone regardless of their religious affiliation. In the period 1991-1996 the Protestant churches organized campaigns for bringing in lifesaving medical supplies and equipment for various hospital units and clinics within the country. In addition Protestants have shown much care for the socially marginalised during the transition period, especially the Bulgarian gypsies. Various initiatives led to the establishment of literacy programs and preparation of textbooks. This contribution to the integration of Roma groups within civil society has been noted by different governmental institutions. It is only one part of the efforts of Bulgarian Protestants to maintain ethnic and civil peace within the country.

As part of the process of adaptation to the new environment the Evangelical Protestant churches of Bulgaria have played an active role in many public initiatives:

- Participation of a Protestant representative in the opening of the “Great Parliament” in Veliko Turnovo (10 July 1990).
- Participation in parliament commissions in relation to discussing religious bills and provision of written position papers.
- Participation in national celebrations and festivities.
- Being granted the right to a public address on national TV during Christian holidays.
- Establishment of professional civil associations by lawyers and legal organisations, medical professionals, journalists, military personnel, etc. These organisations are

dedicated to the study and protection of human and religious rights, as well as training in the spirit of democratic civil society.

- Establishment of organisations for social aid and for working with orphans and those with various disabilities.
- Publication of a non-denominational newspaper (*Evangeliski Vestnik*) in addition to many other Christian periodicals.
- Support for the Bulgarian government's policy toward joining the democratic European Community and NATO. (Participation in the religious representatives' delegation was formed by the Orthodox, Catholic, Jewish, Protestant and Muslim communities under the initiative of NATO in Brussels and including a meeting with NATO representatives and a dedication ceremony for the Bulgarian office in Brussels.)
- Opinions and positions expressed concerning public and moral issues.
- Active work among Christian women, young adults and teenagers through seminars, conferences and camps.
- Continuation of the long-standing tradition of publishing, not only of Bibles, but also of numerous pieces of literature with beneficial moral content.

3. Relations with Other Faiths and Religious Communities

The most recent Bulgarian Constitution declares that while Eastern Orthodoxy is the traditional religion in Bulgaria every citizen is free to his or her own faith and church affiliation. Bulgarian Protestants have always been open to cooperation with all religious churches and communities. This is the result of the training in democratic principles for social interaction based in the views and convictions of the first American missionaries in the 19th century and further strengthened through interaction with their brethren from Western Europe in the 20th century. During certain periods of their existence the Bulgarian believers have been oppressed and restricted, but this has not destroyed their Christian understanding of the need to live in peace with all people. As it says in the Letter to the Romans 12:17-18: "Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." These words remain as relevant today as ever.

The Evangelical Protestant churches themselves are organised according to independently registered denominations, which reflect the historical development of their forms of worship. However, they are all united in their moral and doctrinal stand. Proof of this unity is the Bulgarian Evangelical Alliance (BEA). The BEA serves as the historical successor of the Alliance of Evangelical Churches, which was founded and registered in 1909, but whose work was put to an end by measures of repression in 1948 on behalf of the ruling regime, which had no legal basis or express deed from the Council of Ministers. The BEA is a non-profit organization, which has religious, educational and administrative functions; it works to spread Christian values and to assist the regulation of relations between the various Evangelical churches on the one hand, and between Evangelicals and the state on the other.

The BEA is a partnership between the five founding denominations (the Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches, the Union of Evangelical Congregational Churches, the Union of Evangelical Pentecostal Churches, the Bulgarian Church of God and the Evangelical Methodist Episcopalian Church in Bulgaria). In May 2005 the BEA also

grew to include the Good News Bulgarian Evangelical Church, the Shalom Christ Evangelical Church, the Zion Christian Church and the Bulgarian Church of the Nazarene, as well as another 12 associate members (para-church organizations, working in various fields of Christian living). The BEA is a member of the European Evangelical Alliance and the World Evangelical Alliance. There are also some Bulgarian Evangelical denominations who are not members of the BEA.

Concerning the joint work and relationships with other Christian confessions, the following activities need to be noted:

- The Orthodox and Protestant Christians established the Bulgarian Bible Society 16 years ago. The United Bible Society operates under the combined leadership of the two denominations. Some of the United Bible Society achievements include a new revision of the Protestant translation of the Orthodox Bible, a new translation of the New Testament and work on the Old Testament translation is still in progress. The United Bible Society has published Bibles for children, a Bible Atlas and other Bible Study aids. The BBS aims at improving the quality of the Bulgarian text of the Bible, as well as improving the printing and distribution of the Orthodox and Protestant versions of the Bible.
- There has been a continued effort to establish a relationship between the Catholic and Protestant Church in Bulgaria. Pope John Paul II met with representatives of the main Protestant denominations during his visit to Bulgaria in 2000 to assist in this effort. Some recent examples of this cooperation are the dedication of the Catholic cathedral in Sofia and a joint Christmas concerts in Plovdiv. Catholic and Protestant representatives have also taken part in various forums.
- In regards to the Muslim community in Bulgaria, Bulgarian Protestants have participated in joint discussions on human rights issues. They have also offered and accepted invitations to various religious holidays and special events. The leaders of the Bulgarian Protestant denominations and members of the Supreme Islamic Council in Bulgaria have had consultations and conversations concerning their respective institutes for higher education, regarding their curriculums and methods of training. Both parties have expressed a desire to train their workers toward open dialogue and strengthening religious peace in the country.
- Protestants also took part in the opening of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church on 28 March 2006, when a meeting was held between the leaders of the main religious confessions in the country. The forum was presided over by the bishop of Varna and Veliki Preslav, Kiril, who presides over all meetings at the Holy Synod. The final declaration was an expression of the will of those gathered: "Being leaders and representatives of various faiths in the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as citizens of the country," it said, "we declare our steadfast will to cooperate in the protection and consolidation of religious and ethnic peace, as well as our wholehearted opposition against any attempt at the disruption of that peace." It went on to "repudiate any form of violence and unreservedly reject any appeals, which are directed toward stirring up ethnic hatred and cruelty, as totally incompatible with the principles of believing people". It ended by declaring that "As children of God we are bound never to forget and constantly to preach to all believers that peace is a higher value toward which we are all called by the Almighty."

4. Declaration of faith

1. We believe in one God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. We believe in God as Creator of everything visible and invisible; in His providence, His sovereignty and grace, in His redemption and the Final judgment.
2. We believe in the divine inspiration of the Holy Scripture - the Bible as God's revelation, as the trustworthy and ultimate authority on all issues of faith and salvation.
3. We acknowledge the sinfulness of all and the guilt of the fallen human kind, hence the human becomes object of God's wrath and judgment.
4. We believe in the substitutionary sacrifice of the Son of God who came in the flesh as the only and sufficient basis for the atonement of guilt and the power of sin and its eternal consequences.
5. We believe in the justification of the sinner by God's grace alone, by faith in the crucified and risen from the dead Christ.
6. We believe in the enlightening, renewing, abiding and sanctifying work of God's Holy Spirit.
7. We accept the priesthood of all believers, who constitute the universal church, the body of Christ, who is the head of the Church, which is committed to proclaim His commandment, the Good News to the whole world.
8. We accept the bodily visible coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in power and glory.

IV MUSLIMS IN BULGARIA

There are approximately 1.5 million followers of Islam who have lived in the country for many centuries. The Muslim community has an impact beyond its confines, for example as an issue in relations between Bulgaria and Turkey.

The number of Muslims was large long before Bulgaria gained de facto national autonomy after the San Stefano peace treaty was signed in 3 March 1878 between Russia and the Ottoman Empire. Article 7 of that treaty stipulated that Bulgaria would observe the rights of Muslims, but went into little detail. The international treaty of 13 July 1878 signed in Berlin set out in general terms the rights and freedoms of the minorities in Bulgaria. Article 5 of the Berlin Treaty recognised the presence of religious minorities and gave them the right to establish their public organisations by having an opportunity to be in permanent contact with their religious leaders.

At that time the Muslims' leader in Bulgaria was the sheikh ul-Islam based in Istanbul. According to the requirements of the Berlin treaty the Bulgarian Muslims had an opportunity to establish their organisation in the country and to maintain their connections and relations with sheikh ul-Islam.

The rights of Muslims are mentioned also in the article 42 of the Turnovo constitution of Principedom Bulgaria, which recognised "temporary rules for religious management of the Christians, the Muslims and the Jews". In 1880 the Muslim population chose ten regional muftis with headquarters in the cities where most Muslims live. The mediator between the regional muftis and the Bulgarian government or sheikh ul-Islam used to be the mufti of Sofia, later known as the "grand mufti". In the following 15 years Muslims were governed according to this pattern, until 15 September 1895 when the Prince by means of Decree No 63 approved a "temporary statute for rule of religious works of the Muslims". The decree was not welcomed by Muslims, for it interfered with their right to appoint their own muftis.

Until the autonomy of Bulgaria was declared the Muslim denomination was for 30 years governed under these norms, while retaining at the same time a connection with the sheikh ul-Islam in the Ottoman Empire.

When in 19 April 1909 in Istanbul a contract between the Ottoman government and Bulgaria approving the autonomy of Bulgaria was drawn up, the issue of appointing muftis had to be faced. The Bulgarian and Turkish Governments signed an agreement establishing a General Mufti in the capital, to be elected by the muftis in Bulgaria for a period of five years. However, the muftis' election alone was not enough; the Bulgarian government needed also to secure the approval of the Government of the Ottoman Empire as well as sheikh ul-Islam. By issuing the corresponding decree the sheikh ul-Islam approved the newly elected general mufti and sent him the so called *Murasele-i sheriyye* (Shari'ah message) which recognises the authority of the other muftis in the country. In this way, the Istanbul agreement revoked the authority of the Ministry of External Affairs over the hiring and firing of muftis. Based on these new agreements in 1910 Hodjazade Mehmed Muhiddin was elected to be the Regional Mufti General of Sofia.

At the end of the Balkan Wars on 29 September 1913 between Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire a peace treaty was signed which dealt in greater detail with the

appointment of muftis. It featured two new points: First, the salaries of the general mufti, of the muftis and their deputies as well as of the employees of their departments are paid by the Bulgarian government; secondly, the organisation of the Muslims will be determined according to a statute prepared by the General Mufti.

However, the statute was delayed by the First World War. It did not come into effect until 1919, and was entitled: "A statute for rule and an organisation of the religious institutions of the Muslims in Bulgaria". It consists of 9 sections and 189 articles.

But as before, the implementation of the statute was part from perfect. Different governments began to intervene directly in the internal works of the Muslims. Rather than being elected, the General Mufti continued to be appointed by the Foreign Minister, under whose jurisdiction is the directorate of the religions at this time. This was the case until the Second World War.

The new Constitution adopted on 4 December 1947 following the communist coup guaranteed freedom of religion under article 78, but stressed that the "legal status of the separate religious communities, their financing and mode of government etc. are subject to a special law to be drawn up".

The promised new Religions Law was promulgated on 24 February 1949 by the Grand Parliament. Article 5 of the Law reads: "In their religious organisational structure and in their rites the religions can act according to their canons and statutes, as long as these do not clash with the Government and the rules of good behaviour."

On 22 May 1951 the council of ministers approved a new statute "for a spiritual mechanism and rule of the Muslims in the People's republic of Bulgaria". Article 84 read: "The Turkish Muslims in the People's republic of Bulgaria are able to choose their own General Mufti through appointment by the directors of the Muslim boards. According to the requirements of Article 104 the General Mufti is elected by the muftis for a term of 6 years."

In reality, choosing a major mufti after 9 September 1944 is was a dead letter. The General Mufti that was appointed was in practice the one approved by the Communist Party, and he would remain for far longer than six years. From the first General Mufti, the list is as follows:

- Hodjazade Mehmed Muhiddin (1910-1915),
- Hadji Omer Lutfi, Hafuz Emin Zarifi, Salih Saib, Hafuz Ahmed Cumali, Hodjazade Saadeddin, Suleyman Faik (1919-1928),
- Huseyin Husnu Mollaahmed (1928-1936),
- Abdullah Sidki Devecioglu (1936-1945), Suleyman Omer efendi (1945-1947),
- Akif Osman efendi (1947-1964),
- Hasan Adem efendi (1964-1976),
- Mehmed Topcu / Miron Topciev (1976-1988),
- Nedyo Gendjev / Nedim Gendjev (1988-1992).

After 10 November 1989, when Bulgaria made adopted democratic reforms, the legislative acts, accepted in the last years, again established the rule whereby the regional muftis were be elected by the regional Muslim conferences, and the grand

mufti and the president of the High Muslim council by the National Muslim conference. Nedim Gendjev, who was appointed General Mufti in 1988 according to the directives of the Bulgarian Communist Party, fully supported the "the revival process". But Bulgarian Muslims no longer wanted to be ruled by a person with a suspicious reputation, and took steps to remove him. On 19 September 1992 there was the first democratic national conference of Muslims, which led to the election of Fikri Sali Hasan as General Mufti, who was re-elected. Today's General mufti is Mr. Mustafa Alish, and the chairman of the High Muslim Council is Mr. Basri Pehlivan elected on 20 March 2005. The process has not been assisted by the former General Mufti, Hedim Gendjev, attempting to take back the position, which has caused turmoil among Bulgarian Muslims.

1. The autonomy issue

As can be seen from this brief history, the question of autonomy has been a constant for Bulgarian Muslims.

All laws and statutes recognised the right of the Muslim denomination to exist and gave the General Mufti control over the activities of Muslims in Bulgaria. Among the obligations and rights of the General Mufti are the control and inspection of the muftis, of all Muslim institutions in the country such as mosques and masjids; and of the imams, khatibs and the rest of the staff in them, as well as the Muslim boards.

Since 2 July 1880, when the Ottoman system of *kadiya* (shari'ah courts) was abolished, lawsuits brought by Muslims were transferred to the muftis. In this way the mufti became a sort of shari'ah judge. With small changes, in form of restrictions, this continued till 1938. The General Mufti ruled on marriages and on divorces, on written wills, and on questions of property and inheritance, and directly managed the school boards of Muslim schools.

The muftis also administered the *waqfs* --- charity funds established during the Ottoman period. The *waqfs* in large measure guaranteed the economic independence of Muslims, but Muslims have not widely benefited from them. The "*waqf* issue" has been a serious challenge from 1878 to the present.

The statue approved on 23 May 1919 determined the tasks and the status of the General mufti as follows:

1. To ensure the proper functioning of the religious organisation of the Muslims;
2. To supervise the activity and the development of Muslim charitable institutions;
3. To supervise the muftis and their deputies;
4. To ensure the execution of the shari'ah laws and instructions and to issue fatwas and instructions;
5. To work for the reform and improvement of the work of the madrassahs through the establishment of a uniform syllabus for them. And to work for the establishment of the religious school "Nuvvab" which opened in 1922 in town of Shoumen and becomes a nursery of specialists for the needs of the Muslim denomination – muftis, imams, khatibs, waizes, teachers, cultural workers etc.

2. Muslim governance today

The management body of the Muslim denomination besides the General Mufti is made up of regional muftis representing the regional departments of the denomination. The number of the regional muftis has varied over the years. From the creation of the new Bulgarian state till the Second World War in almost all regions where Muslims lived there were regional and district muftis as well as mufti boards. Before the Balkan wars there were 15 muftis and 20 mufti boards. In 1923 in the towns of Bourgas, Stara Zagora, Plovdiv, Haskovo, Smolyan, Petrich, Pleven, Russe, Sofia, Veliko Turnovo, Shoumen, Varna and Vidin there were 13 regional or district mufti. There were also 33 other mufti boards in the towns of Aytos, Kubrat, Byala, Gorna Djumaya /Blagoevgrad/, Zlatograd, Ardino, Elena, Targovishte, Preslav, Sliven, Karlovo, Karnobat, Ispernih, Kircaali, Kazanluk, Krumovrad, Lovech, Momchilgrad, Nikopol, Nevrokop /Gotse Delchev/, Omurtag, Peshtera, Provadia, Oryahovo, Razgrad, Sevlievo, Pazardjik, Vratsa, Novi Pazar and Svishtov. On the eve of the Second World War some of the mufti boards were given the status of regional mufti, expanding their number to 25, which increased during the war to 40.

After the communists took the power, they started gradually to decrease the number of the muftis. In 1959 they made a concerted effort to crush the muftis, leaving only seven in the whole of Bulgaria, in the towns of Sofia, Plovdiv, Kircaali, Aytos, Shoumen, Razgrad and Dobrich. The other big blow to the denomination to attempt to divide Muslims on an ethnic basis, something which is entirely unacceptable in Islamic law. This led to the creation, for example, of a separate mufti in Velingrad for the Muslims Pomaks.

One of the fruits of the democratic changes was the unification of the Muslim Turks and Pomaks under one mufti. During the first years after democracy muftis were again established in Pleven and Gotse Delchev, and in 2000 there were two more, in Haskovo and Krumovgrad. In 2006 there were 11 regional muftis.

3. Bulgarian Muslims today

Nowadays the Muslim denomination is a huge and harmonious organization consisting of approximately 1,500 Muslim boards and about 1,500 mosques and masjids, in addition to approximately 50 tekkes and turbes, approximately 1,000 imams, and approximately 450 summer Quran courses held in six school centres, three religious high schools, and a High Islamic Institute. There are 11 regional Muslim councils with 5-11 members, 11 regional muftis with several permanent employees – regional mufti, deputy regional mufti, director of *waqfs*, etc. The General Mufti has a team of about 20 people overseeing *waqfs*, education, publishing, administration and finances, etc.

The Muslim denomination has a vital presence in contemporary Bulgarian society, especially in defence of human rights. Muslims make up a large minority -- more than a million Muslims -- who have lived for centuries in Bulgaria with non-Muslims, most of them Orthodox Christians. The General Mufti unites different ethnic groups-- turks, pomaks, roms, etc. - as brothers and sisters in one faith.

The General Mufti works for the rule of justice, virtue, peace and social development. Vital to this end are the Muslim education centres – the Qu’ranic courses offered all year round to ordinary people, as well as the High Islamic Institute which educate religious specialists according to contemporary needs. Islamic education allows Muslim followers to stay loyal to their roots; which in turn make them connected to their customs, which benefit the common good.

4. Principles of Faith

By observing the country’s laws and its own Islamic canons (sheri’ah), the Muslim denomination in Bulgaria unites all Muslims no matter what their ethnic origin. The main principles of the denomination can be summarized in three basic principles: persuasion/belief (*imaan*), worship (*ibadat*), and morality (*ahlaq*). There are six main principles of the faith:

1. Belief in Allah – this includes belief in the existence, uniqueness and the attributes of Allah. Allah exists since before eternity and will exist *ad infinitum*; He is the One and Only, and He is the aim of all wills; He does not need anything or somebody, but all have need of Him; He does not give birth, and He is not born; there is nothing that can be compared to Him; He is the Creator and gives life to every living and non-living being; He is just, merciful, compassionate, patient, severe in punishments, generous in what He offers; He is all-wise, great, and almighty; He sees and hears all that is visible as well as what is hidden.
2. Belief in the angels – this means belief in invisible, God-obedient creatures who have different roles, one of the most important of which is the delivering of a revelation / message for the prophets;
3. Belief in the messengers – the belief in the messengers / prophets of Allah is expressed in the fact that Adem / Adam (peace be upon him) is the first messenger of Allah, and the last is Muhammed (peace be upon him). In the period in between thousands of prophets are sent to give directions to the people toward the faith and the good. That’s why all the prophets are considered equally messengers of Allah, and all are to be believed in without exception.
4. Belief in the books – the Almighty Allah through the angels and the prophets has sent messages to humankind in holy books. The main holy books are the Psalms revealed to David / Davood (peace be upon him), the Torah revealed to Musa / Moses (peace be upon him), the Gospel revealed to Isa / Jesus (peace be upon him), and the Quran revealed to Muhammed (peace be upon him). These are all revelations from God, but with the flow of time the first three have lost their originality, and human thoughts have been allowed to overrun them. There are also messages revealed to prophets like Ibrahim / Abraham, Nuh / Noah etc. The Quran is the last revelation from God, sent to the mankind; it has kept its originality, and will keep giving directions to the believers to the right path.
5. Belief in the Day of Judgement – the belief in the Day of Judgement consists of believing that every human being will be brought back to life after his death, and according to his deeds will be rewarded with delight of Paradise or the punishment of hellish tortures.

6. Belief in determination and fate, and that both good and evil are from Allah – the Almighty Allah with His absolute knowledge, knowing that every human being with his own will act in a definite way, predestines the actions of every human being. The Almighty Allah does not charge the human to make a certain thing, but leaves him to choose. The relativity of the time doesn't apply to Allah, i.e. Allah knows what the human will do, and He predetermines his life. Because of the free choice of the human, expressed by his partial will, he will be rewarded or punished on the Day of Judgement. Good and Evil are created by Allah, but He has wished for the human kindness, which is why He has endowed him with intelligence and lightened his road that with the messages given to the prophets. The human by himself chooses to do good or evil.

The following five are the basic principles of worship:

1. Witness to belief in Allah and His Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon Him).
2. Performing the obligatory prayer (*salat*) five times a day.
3. Obligatory fasting (*sawm*) during the holy month of Ramadan.
4. Giving of the obligatory alms (*zakat*) when the conditions for this are present
5. Performing of the pilgrimage (*hajj*) in the holy places in Mecca.

The basic moral principles can be summarized in nine groups and in the expression "Love towards Creation because of the Creator" or "Respect toward Allah and compassion toward His creatures":

1. Good behaviour to God.
2. Good behaviour of the human to himself.
3. Good behaviour to the family – parents, husband, children.
4. Good behaviour to relatives.
5. Good behaviour to neighbours.
6. Good behaviour to the society in which he lives.
7. Good behaviour to the Muslims.
8. Good behaviour to the whole mankind, no matter of what faith, race etc.
9. Good behaviour to the living creatures and the non living nature.

These basic Islamic principles have become the basis of the institution of the Muslim denomination in Republic of Bulgaria, and in them are grounded the historical, theoretical and practical good relationships of the Muslim community to the other religious communities, denominations and their official representative organizations and institutions.

"...You will certainly find the nearest in friendship to those who believe (to be) those who say: We are Christians; this is because there are priests and monks among them and because they do not behave proudly. And when they hear what has been revealed to the apostle you will see their eyes overflowing with tears on account of the truth that they recognise; they say: Our Lord! we believe, so write us down with the witnesses (of truth)." (Holy Quran, 5:82-83)

"And do not dispute with the followers of the Book (Jews, Christians) except by what is best, except those of them who act unjustly, and say: We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you, and our God and your God is One, and to Him do we submit." (Holy Quran, 29:46-47)

“Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loves those who are just.” (Holy Quran, 60:8-9)

“Those who want to live in peace and mutual cooperation with the Muslims must be protected. Putting them under oppressions and insults is inadmissible.”

“The state is obliged to support every Muslim, as well as every non-Muslim that are subjected to oppression.”

“For the non-Muslims are guaranteed the freedom of their denomination and the security of their property. They will be not forced to accept the faith of the Muslims and their property will not be taken away.”

The Quranic verses and prophet’s thoughts cited above have obligatory character, but are strengthened by longstanding tradition. Peaceful coexistence, dialogue and the tolerance between the followers of different religions in the country are reflected also in the relationships between their managing bodies. The sound tone which the laymen maintain between each other, the lack of tensions and antagonism, automatically reflect on the management bodies of the the different organisations which manage the Muslim denomination.

The institutional authority of the General Mufti of the Muslim denomination strengthens and increases with events -- forums, conferences and festivals – carried out at different levels, with a clearly defined basic goal of the denomination communities of continuing and deepening the good interrelations. The idea of these events is to demonstrate integrity in the common goals, namely - the welfare of the whole civil society, material and the religious prosperity and the stability in the state.

The demonstration of good interrelations of the religious elite influenced the people favourably, so as the nation has always has been influenced by their leaders and guides, imitating their good conduct and tolerance of others.

We, the management of the Muslim denomination and the entire Islamic community are highly sensitive to the need for religious tolerance and the dialogue with the other religions.

Bulgaria is an oasis of tolerance. The tolerance and coexistence between the separate religious and cultural groups is a daily reality.

Here are some concrete examples of the enviable interrelations of the Muslim denomination with other denomination communities:

1. Meeting of teachers and pupils from Muslim religious school with their Christian counterparts;
2. Declaration of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church denouncing the insulting caricatures of the Prophet Muhammed in support of the Muslim denomination;

3. Declaration of the Muslim denomination in support of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox church in connection with the statement of the Christian community on the *The Da Vinci Code* film;
4. Opening of a vault of the Muslim Bali *efendi* in the yard of a Christian church in town of Sofia;
5. Celebrating the day *ashure* bequeathed in tradition by the prophet Noy (Noah) from the three main heavenly religions - Judaism, Christianity, Islam;
6. Organizing a holiday table *Iftaar* during the holy month of Ramadan by the Varna and Veliko-preslavski Metropolitan Kiril;
7. Organising of a conference on "The fasting in the heavenly religions" at which were delivered reports by Muslim and Orthodox theologians.
8. These and many more events, realized by Muslims, Jews, Christians- orthodox, Catholics, Protestants can be mentioned as facts, with which all we are proud of.

In the background of these events are the daily mutual relationships of the ordinary worshippers, the ordinary believers who are never susceptible to vain affectations and do not permit escalation of the tension. The population of the country lives in harmony, with a spirit of tolerance and respect. They together welcome their feasts, sometimes they build their temples together, and together they grieve and have fun.

The proverbial and axiomatic atmosphere of tolerance in Bulgaria is even more significant when we keep in mind the political stagnation of the Balkans during the last 10-15 years, which has led to a lot of bloody conflicts, caused by ethno-cultural and religious feuds. Our country not only maintained its domestic and ethno-religious peace, but has also developed its democracy, and given more freedom to its citizens, leading in turn to a greater trust in the state.

In this regard the present climate of tolerance finds a support and is encouraged by the peaceful cohabitation between the religious groups, which shows that Bulgaria can and will be an example for the rest of the countries of the region. The Bulgarian experience can benefit other European countries where the permanent or temporary phenomena of exaltation and extremism, sometimes nationalism, are being monitored.

The future development of religious understanding and cohabitation is promising. The governing bodies of the denomination are facing new challenges and are contributing to their solution. Among these are childhood violence and criminality, drug addiction, alcoholism, prostitution and the general religious atrophy that is oppressing contemporary society. We believe that the common efforts in pursuit of the public welfare will avoid or at least decrease the cultural corrosion, helping to rein in the hedonistic social system which more than ever needs the support of moral guidance.

5. From the Grand Mufti

Allah has created the man with an excellent appearance by giving him a free will in order to be able to choose his life way. This is the main reason for existing differences in the people. However this does not mean that the people have to hate each other. Justice, love and virtue are written into human nature. Man must discover these in himself, to bring them to the fore and to show them to the people.

The fact that the religion is the main source for virtues obliges the religious people to be an example in this aspect. Good deeds are the backbone of positiveness and happiness. We learn this from what the Almighty Allah tells us: "Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in Allah and the Last day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve." (The Cow verse, 2:62).

This verse gives us the chance to understand the justice and the mercy of Allah, as in this world He grants His goods to everybody no matter what their religion, sex, or colour of skin. Muhammed (May the blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) orders: "Love those who are on the earth, in order to love you the One who is in the heavens."

After the holy words of the Prophet of Allah there is nothing else but to practise them in our life, as by doing this we will find happiness in this world, as well as in the hereafter.

V THE JEWISH PEOPLE IN BULGARIA

In the centre of Sofia there are three temples: the Metropolitan Orthodox Church "Sveta Sofia", the Central Synagogue, and the "Banja Bashi" mosque. All three of them are representative, impressive and extremely important for their religions. Not long ago a Catholic church was also built next to them.

For many years the believers have gone to those different temples without making this a reason for strained relations between them. The very fact that they are built in such a close proximity is already a sign of tolerance. How such attitudes have been created, how they have endured the challenges of time, and how Jews have contributed to this coexistence, are amongst the issues worth clarifying.

The *Romanotes* – the Jews that settled within the borders of the Balkan Peninsula during the Roman and later the Byzantine reign (Byzantine Jews) -- lived in the First and the Second Bulgarian States. The Jews in this period are not organised in a specific body. Following the defeat of the Jewish state, the demolition of the Second temple in Jerusalem in the years 66-70 and the dispersal of Jews around the world, Jewish municipalities began to be created. Within the borders of the Bulgarian territories as they exist today, the Jews created "Romanotian" municipalities.

Information about these "Romanotian" municipalities can be gleaned from archaeological monuments. In the second century within the borders of Bulgaria as it exists today the Jewish settlements from that same period are recorded on the stone inscription from the Roman city Eskus (today it is the village of Gigen in Pleven District). According to its text the Jews from Eskus were an impressive society with their own synagogue, headed by the arch-synagogue Josef.

The travel notes of Rabbi Benjamin from Tudela contain important data. This Jewish traveller visited the Balkan territories in the year 1170. He mentions well-organised Jewish municipalities, records their population numbers and their occupations. He also mentions the names of the rabbis that headed the Jewish municipalities. The travel notes of Rabbi Eliezer Alevi from Sultz, Germany about his travel to Egypt are also preserved. He also describes his impressions of the Jews in Provadia.

The spreading of Roman Catholic ideas among the people of Western Europe, and the increasing power of the Catholic Church resulted in the Crusades. The persecution of the Jews in Germany started at the end of the eleventh century, following the First Crusade. In Western Europe attempts were made forcibly to baptise Jews, and in a number of German cities outrages were perpetrated against Jewish homes. Some of the German Jews – Ashkenazis - headed for safety to the Balkans.

From the period of the of the Second Bulgarian State (1185 – 1396) precious notes documents have been preserved which record the presence of the Jews at the times of Tsar Ivan Asen II. Of these the Cornelian Manuscript of Jacob Arofe from Venice is outstanding, but other sources of information include the old Jewish inscription in the surroundings of Pleven (around 1232). It was in this period in Bulgaria and more precisely in Lovetch and the region of Lovetch that some Hungarian Jews settled. The

marriage of Tsar Ivan-Alexander with the Jewish woman Sarah, who accepted the Christian name Teodora, in 1335, is significant.

The decree of the Catholic kings in Spain, Ferdinand and Isabella, from 1492 expelled the Spanish Jews, many of whom headed towards the Balkan peninsula where the Bulgarian territories had also been conquered by the Ottoman Empire. The Spanish Jews are joined by some Portuguese ones and by the beginning of the sixteenth century a compact community of Sephardic Jews (about 100,000) has put down roots there. The Sephardic Jews lived in separate municipalities, outside those of the Romanotes and the Ashkenazis.

There are a number of travel notes of some Europeans with data about the European population in the Ottoman Empire, including the Bulgarian territories. After 1571, within the borders of the Ottoman Empire, the Jews fleeing Venice found shelter. In the middle of the fourteenth century some Jewish people came there from Germany, the Czech Republic and Hungary. The Ashkenazis settled mainly in the cities along the banks of the river Danube.

During these settlement waves in the Bulgarian territories some recognised Jewish clergymen arrived and gathered in the Nikopol Rabbinical Academy. Rabbi Moshe Frank Eshkenazi, later Rabbi of Pleven, is one of the outstanding names. At the beginning of the sixteenth century some Sephardic Jews arrived in Nikopol, amongst them Josef Ben Karo. From 1522 he became a rabbi and a teacher in the *jeshiv* in Nikopol, where he wrote his famous study *Bet Josef*, following it later with *Shulhan Aruh* (the book is published in Venice in 1551). Another book of his, *Sheelot*, is rich in information about the Jews of Nikopol. His personal *Torah - Sefer* is kept in the synagogue in Romania.

Amongst the other famous rabbis from Nikopol are Jomtov Koen, Jakob Nahmias, Josef Mizrahi, Josef Ventura, and Juda Benbasat. At the beginning of the sixteenth century in Nikopol there were six synagogues belonging to the Romanians, the Hungarians, the Jews from Vlashko, the Ashkenazi Jews from Bavaria and two of the Sephardic Jews. In 1730 a charity organisation named Hevra kaddiša was formed as part of the Jewish Municipality in Nikopol. Karo left a synagogue, repaired by prince Ferdinand in 1888. Karo died in Palestine in 1575.

The Jews took an active role in struggle for the national freedom of Bulgaria and in winning back the sovereign part of Bulgaria from the Ottoman invaders. These memories are preserved in a number of monuments and documents: a preserved letter of gratitude from the Bulgarian Exarchate to Davichon Saranga for helping to save from death some Bulgarian revolutionaries after the April Rebellion. There was also the case of Presiado Jako Alfandary, who saved some Bulgarians from exile in Diarbekir; and Moshe Garti from Plovdiv and Rafael Ventura from Rouse, who helped the revolutionary committees in their cities.

During the war between Russia and Turkey many Jews volunteered in the Bulgarian volunteer corps. A special mention should also be made of the actions of the Sofia Rabbi G. Almoznino and his meeting with Osman Pasha for helping to avoid the burning of Sofia. Rafael Moshe Kamhi also took part in the activities of IMRO – as a cashier of the organization. Later the rabbi from Sofia, Almoznino, took part in the work of the Founding Meeting in Turnovo. In East Rumelia six Jews took part in the

work of the First Regional Meeting. Some Jewish volunteers from Vidin (200 people) took part in the war between Serbia and Bulgaria in 1885 and the Jewish Municipality from Rouse with its own resources equipped 600 troopers with horses, ammunitions and provisions for one month. Two Jewish legions were formed – one with 300 and one from Rouse and Varna with 500 shields, headed by David Mizrahi; during the battles for Slivnitsa 125 Jews from this squad died. In addition 40 Jewish women took part in the war as charity nurses.

The Jewish community has made its contribution to all areas of Bulgarian life over the centuries. The artist Jules Paskin from Vidin and the writer Elias Canetti from Rouse, holder of the Nobel prize for literature, as well as many others from the past and the future are world famous.

Many Bulgarian Jews headed to Israel, but as emigrants, not refugees. Many elderly Bulgarian Israelis claim to have two native lands. When they departed from Bulgaria, they sang the hymn "Dear Native Land" before heading towards their new native land of Israel. The Jewish community in Bulgaria had 48,000 members before the war. The sinister list from the conference of "Wansee" marked this number against the name of Bulgaria for destruction. But even after the war the number of the Bulgarian Jews continued to be 48,000. In spite of the pressure for their deportation, in spite of the readiness of the government to apply the politics of Nazi Germany within the old borders of Bulgaria, the Bulgarians themselves did not allow it. It is believed that Tsar Boris III (1918-1943) was poisoned by the Nazis for his efforts to save Bulgaria's Jews. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church, along with many intellectuals, craftsmen, workers, youngsters, politicians, people from various social groups and professions did not succumb to the craziness of the 20th century and together with their Jewish neighbours and friends preserved one of the most precious values of this society - its tolerance. The salvation of the Bulgarian Jews from destruction is one of the brightest pages in the history of tolerance in Bulgaria, reflecting an accumulated wisdom and a public-spirited consciousness.

Of course there have always been some voices seeking to test this extraordinary solidarity by attempting to divide in order to rule. In spite of them, the Jewish community in Bulgaria could be itself, because the ethnic groups and the religions here have always communicated among themselves, benefitting from the freedom to express themselves. During the long periods of peace we shared rituals and holidays with others; in times of crisis we have given and received protection and support from the leaders of the other religious communities. It is especially worth noting that in the years of the Second World War, the Jews from Sofia regularly turned to the Holy Synod for protection. After realizing the imminent danger for the Jews in Bulgaria, the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church undertook their protection and made this its permanent policy. Those contacts have always existed both between the leaders of the religious communities and between the ordinary members of the various congregations.

The ideology of the communist society was a test for all religions by praising the atheism as official state ideology. The arrival of democracy in 1989 allowed each religion to restore its rituals and freedoms. Although a significant number of Bulgarian Jews emigrated to Israel after 1948, and although Jewish society in Bulgaria is a small minority, we are able freely to profess our religion. Bulgarian legislation guarantees the freedom of religions in its constitutional texts and also in the special

laws. There is a special Directorate of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, which implements the state policy of tolerance and understanding. However, the most important thing is that the tradition of tolerance has not been affected by the challenges of the few previous decades and the difficulties of transition. In spite of plentiful political challenges, the major part of Bulgarian society does not succumb to national-populist movements and stands by its historical models of good relations between the religions and the ethnic groups.

The Jewish Spiritual Council and the Jewish Community in Bulgaria developed over the years a number of traditions in order to preserve the sound traditions of our religion. Special attention is paid both to the elderly generations and to the young. During the most important holidays the Central Sofia Synagogue is full of visitors: Jews and guests. The Day of Jewish Culture in Europe is widely publicised and the young generations in Bulgaria are able to acquaint themselves with various elements of the Jewish way of life, holidays and customs. The Central Sofia Synagogue is a great example of the Sephardic tradition. It is a cultural memorial and one of the most beautiful in Europe. It was opened in 1909 in the presence of state dignitaries and of the head of state of that time, Tsar Ferdinand. Since then it has become one of the central sights of the city landscape of the Capital City.

In Sofia an impressive collection of Jewish incunabula is preserved; they are preserved from the vicissitudes of time and are fully accessible in a special reading room of the Central State Archive. Although it is not completely religious in its essence, the fact that both Jewish and Bulgarian children study in the Jewish school in Sofia indicates the degree of established tolerance in Bulgarian society.

Pancho Vladigerov is a long cherished Bulgarian composer; Dora Gabe is a recognized and respected poet in the Bulgarian; Valery Petrov is one of the most respected living authors in fiction and translation in Bulgaria. Bulgarian people think of them solely in terms of their achievements, not in terms of their Jewishness. In spite of the pressure of Nazi Germany - including cold letters to the Bulgarian national radio to complain that it played music of the composer Vladigerov who appears to be Jewish --those actions have only discredited the authors of such an ultimatum.

Our variety is our richness. We have the chance to preserve it and continue this priceless tradition, left to us by our predecessors.

OFFICIAL BULGARIAN FAITH DELEGATION

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Orthodox

- His Eminence Metropolitan Dometian, Bishop of Vidin, - Head of the International Department of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.
- His Grace Bishop Naum - Chief Secretary of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

Roman Catholic

- His Grace The Right Reverend Bishop Georgi Yovchev – Head of the Roman Catholic Dioceses of Sofia & Plovdiv.

Protestant

- Minister Viktor Virchev - Head of the United Protestant Churches of the Republic of Bulgaria.
- Mr Stoiko Petkov - Associate in the Protestant Alliance.

MUSLIM COMMUNITY

- Mr Mustafa Hadzhi - Chief Mufti in the Republic of Bulgaria.
- Mr Hairi Emin - Associate in the Office of the Chief Mufti.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

- Mr Roberto Djerassi- Head of the Jewish Spiritual Council.
- Mrs Lorér Heni- Member of the Council.

OFFICIAL BULGARIAN GOVERNMENT DELEGATION

Department of Ecclesiastical Matters of the Council of Ministers

- Professor Ivan Zhelev - Director of the Department.
- Mr Emil Velinov- State Expert in the Department .

Bulgarian Embassy in the United Kingdom Delegation

- His Excellency Dr Lachezar Matev, Ambassador of the Republic of Bulgaria to the Court of St James's.
- Dr Stoimen Velev - Minister Plenipotentiary, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of the Republic of Bulgaria in the United Kingdom.

BULGARIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

- The Very Reverend Father Simeon Iliev, St Ivan Rilski Bulgarian Orthodox Church, London.