

## THE EFFECT OF COMMUNISM ON THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES IN BULGARIA

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The five hundred years of Turkish dominion shaped the submissive side of the Bulgarian character and stirred up the instinct of self-preservation, but the most dominant was fear of the oppressors and fear of losing national identity. Endurance and submissiveness grew to such extreme proportions that they became a way of life. The events after the liberation from the Turks strengthened the suspicious side of the nation towards foreigners, foreign influences and foreign interference. The terror accompanying the first five or six years of consolidation of Communist power stirred up and deepened the fear of those in power and the instinct of self-preservation.

### Stages of the Communist Takeover

As a direct result of the Anglo-American strategic planning of World War II, Bulgaria was left in the hands of the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> The invasion of the Red Army was followed by a coup d'état. However, the consolidation of Communist power was achieved gradually, accompanied by terror.

The first stage (1944-1945) saw the eradication of any possible anti-Communist and anti-Government opposition. A decree established so-called "people's courts" for the trial of "war criminals." It sentenced not only Nazi collaborators but many prominent Bulgarians. This eliminated a great part of the national leadership. It is believed the number of executions was between 7,000 and 11,000.<sup>2</sup> This was the severest purge in a country where there were few "war criminals" and genuine "war crimes" by western standards were almost non-existent.<sup>3</sup>

During the second stage the non-Communist and non-conformist allies were attacked. A dozen fake trials were held throughout 1946. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church was required to be truly a "people's democratic church."<sup>4</sup> By the fall of 1946 all opponents within the Government appara-

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<sup>1</sup> R. L. Wolff, *The Balkans in Our Time* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1974), 249-267; and M. Boll, ed., *The American Military Mission in the Allied Control Commission for Bulgaria 1944-1947: History and Transcripts* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985).

<sup>2</sup> M. Semov, *Bulgarinut i Vlastta (Narodopsihologija, II)* (Varna: Slavena, 1995), 152.

<sup>3</sup> L. A. D. Dellin, ed., *Bulgaria* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1957) 121, and Wolff, 293.

<sup>4</sup> "An argument concerning the issue of separating the Church from the State, 9.10.1944," Central Archives of the Republic of Bulgaria [CARB], B4 F.88 OP.1 A.E.243: 4; and G. Dimitrov, "The Role and the Tasks of the Bulgarian Church," speech May 26, 1946, trans. Todorova, from the file BU 4/4: Law & Religion, Archives of the Keston Institute, U.K (AKI). See also, T. Beeson, *Discretion and Valour: Religious Conditions in Russia and Eastern Europe* (London, Fontana, 1982), 292; S. Raikin, "The Communists and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, 1944-1948: The Rise and Fall of Exarch Stefan," *Religion in Communist Lands* 3: 281-292.

tus were eliminated.

The third stage (1947-1948) saw the eradication of the legal opposition, identified with the Agrarian Union. A day after the ratification of the peace treaty by the United States Senate, the leader of the Agrarian Union, Nikola Petkov, was arrested, tried on false charges of conspiracy and high treason, and executed. That dissolved all active opposition. The 1947 Constitution and the official proclamation of Bulgaria as a “people’s democracy” created the legal framework for Communist domination in the form of Stalinism. The essence of Stalinism in politics was the concentration of power, which was justified in the name of the perfect society. To ensure the functioning of this system terror was used.<sup>5</sup>

The main target in the fourth stage was Western influence. Political, educational, information, religious, and ethnic institutions with foreign ties were destroyed or put under full governmental control. Foreign schools were closed in 1948, including the Methodist School for girls in Lovech.<sup>6</sup> In March, 1949, fifteen leading Protestant pastors were convicted on false charges of espionage. A second trial behind closed doors followed few months later. Open attacks against the US diplomatic representatives and of five Bulgarians employed by the US Legation followed on charges of espionage and sabotage. In February, 1949, the Government revoked the credentials of the Apostolic Delegate, followed in September, 1952, by a trial of forty leading Catholic priests and laymen on charges of espionage. Thus the Communists aimed to eliminate the religious organizations as potential political rivals and to isolate the country from Western influence.

A purge within the Communist Party followed. The conflict was between the “Moscovite” and the “home” communists. Many leading “home” communists were tried, sentenced and eliminated. Thus by June, 1950, twenty percent of the Party members were expelled from the Party.<sup>7</sup>

The terror of these first six years stirred up and deepened the basic features of the nation’s character: fear of those in power and the instinct of self-preservation. The numerous show trials proved that nobody was safe. People realized that the courts were not interested in justice and truth, but in eliminating opponents at any cost. Nobody could rely on a proper legal defense because all attorneys, by definition, were bound to take the interest

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<sup>5</sup> G. Schopfflin, ed., *The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* (New York: Oxford; Facts on File Publ., 1986), 3-4.

<sup>6</sup> Decision of Politburo of CC of BCP from 14.7.1948, concerning the closure of the foreign schools, A2 F.1 OP.6 A.E.516; Decision of Politburo of CC of BCP from 9.11.1950, concerning the expropriation of properties belonging to the closed religious branches, foreign schools, etc., A4 F.1 OP.6 A.E.1117; Decision of the Secretariate of CC of BCP from 15.4.1950 concerning the liquidation of bookshops, libraries and institutions supported by imperialist countries, A23 F.1 OP.8 A.E.1465; A report from 27.1.1950 by the commission for the liquidation of bookshops, libraries and institutions supported by imperialist countries, A137 F.214 OP.1 A.E.369, Central Archives of the Bulgarian Communist Party (CABCP).

<sup>7</sup> Dellin, 127.

of the state as their point of departure.<sup>8</sup> The broad and loose formulation of the penal clauses allowed varying interpretations, denying any certainty.<sup>9</sup> An eloquent testimony of this total fear was demonstrated during elections: for forty-five years the Communist Party won each election with a majority of 99.98%.

With the seizing of complete power the Communists also obtained unlimited economic and ideological control. Ideological control was achieved by the separation of Church and State, the passing of the Law on Religions in 1949, and by the 1949 Constitution which provided control of family, church, education, art, science, and health. Thus all human activity was legally under Government guidance and control. Communist ideology was elevated as a state doctrine and everyone was told what to believe, what to think, what books to read and what films to watch.<sup>10</sup> People were constantly exposed to brainwashing propaganda.<sup>11</sup> The writing of a new History textbook was ordered. The text was to be approved by the Central Committee of the Party.<sup>12</sup> It was to prove that Socialism and Communism were inevitable stages in the development of society.

### **The Effect of Communism on the Church Structure and Organization**

Soviet era communism did not tolerate any political rivalries because their mere existence would undermine the legitimacy of the national Communist parties as the only force able to bring progress to the nations. Religion was seen as a potential and very influential political rival. So from

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<sup>8</sup> V. Gsovski and K Grzybowski, *Government, Law and Courts in the Soviet Union and Easter Europe*, Vol. 1, Atlantic Books (London: Stevens & Sons, 1959), 665.

<sup>9</sup> V. Gsovski and K Grzybowski, *Government, Law and Courts in the Soviet Union and Easter Europe*, Vol. 2, Atlantic Books (London: Stevens & Sons, 1959), 987-990.

<sup>10</sup> An opinion concerning the reorganization of the publishing work in Bulgaria, 15.3.1948, A54 F.1 OP.15 A.E.290; A suggestion by the manager of the Propaganda Department to the Secretariate of CC of BCP concerning the taking off of one's hat while passing by G. Dimitrov's mausoleum, 21.11.1949-5.12.1949, A55 F.1 OP.15 A.E.334; A plan for the public propaganda of Marxism-Leninism during 1949, A56 F.1 OP.15 A.E.340; Minutes of the meeting of the Secretariate of CC of BCP, 2.4.1969, concerning publishing of political literature, international relationships of organizations whose activities are monitored by the Propaganda Department, etc., A84 F.1 OP.36 A.E.450; Minutes of the manager's meeting of the Propaganda Department, 20.11.1969, concerning the import of foreign films, etc., A100 F.1 OP.40 A.E.164; Issues of the fight against the bourgeois ideology and the ideological sabotage of imperialism. 28.3.1969, A103 F.1 OP.40 A.E.258, CABCP.

<sup>11</sup> Information from the manager of the Propaganda Department, R. Levi, to the Secretariate of CC of BCP concerning the decontamination of the publishing houses, the bookshops, the schools and the libraries from fascist literature, 10.8.1945, A38 F.1 OP.15 A.E.75; A suggestion by the manager of the Propaganda Department to the Secretariate of CC of BCP concerning the decontamination of the public libraries from reactionary and unscientific literature, magazines and newspapers. A resolution by the Propaganda Secretary of CC of BCP, 30.6.1949 - 18.7.1949, A61 F.1 OP.15 A.E.388, CABCP; A list of the Fascist literature that is to be disposed of, October, 1944, B3 F.1 OP.1 A.E.49, CARB.

<sup>12</sup> A program and suggestion by the manager of the Propaganda Department to Politburo of CC of BCP concerning the approval of authors and editors for the writing a History of Bulgaria, the basic sections and units of the History, 10.10.1949-14.12.1949, A59 F.1 OP.15 A.E.359, CABCP.

the very beginning the Communists set off with the clear goal to eradicate religion and any religious notion by marginalizing and attributing disrepute to the Church. All religious denominations suffered severe repression and administrative sanctions. That finally led to the secularization of society as a whole. The approach towards the various denominations varied depending on their international support and influence within the country. Thus the Catholic Church and the Protestant denominations were subjected to more apparent repression than the Orthodox Church. To achieve an effective impact the regime had to direct its attack at an entire religious organization, keeping the illusion of democracy and religious freedom. The first chosen target was the Evangelical Union and its Supreme Council, which consisted of leaders from all of the Protestant denominations. Thus the Protestant churches were attacked as an institution.<sup>13</sup> Though the Politburo decided to organize four more trials against each denomination without much publicity there was only one more trial.<sup>14</sup> Eight more pastors were sentenced. Nearly all pastors who had received their training abroad were put behind bars.

All denominations had to elect new “suitable” leaders, faithful servants of the Committee. Metodi Markov became superintendent and later, contrary to the Methodist Constitution, Bishop of the Bulgarian Methodist Church.<sup>15</sup> After his resignation and death, the Committee appointed as his successor pastor Ivan Nozharov. Nozharov had recently been expelled from the Congregational Church for immoral behavior. The document proving that he had been on the State Security payroll disappeared from the Methodist archives in the early 1990s soon after its existence was made known. Both leaders caused a lot of damage.

Another direct attack at the church’s organization and structure was in connection with the approval of the denominations’ constitutions. In March, 1947, the Committee for Religious Affairs sent to the Supreme Council of the Evangelical Union a draft regulation of the structure and organization of the Bulgarian Protestant Churches. The chairman of the Union argued that the problem could be solved with the approval of the constitutions of each denomination. Having studied them the Committee was displeased by the fact that there were no provisions made for control by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the financial authorities. The denominations could work

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<sup>13</sup> Decision of the Secretariate of CC of BCP from 2.11.1948, concerning the Pastors Trial. A report concerning the Protestant Churches and the Protestant pastors under arrest. Decree No.29 of the Cabinet forbidding the Church to carry out special religious propaganda among the youth, 17.9.1948, A14 F.1 OP.8 A.E.190; Letters and telegrams concerning the Pastors Trial, February, 1949, A128 F.146 OP.5 A.E.611, CABCP. Cf. J. Kochev, ed., *Protsetsut sreshitu Evangelskite Pastori-Shpioni* (Sofia: Izdanie na Direktsijata na pechata, 1949); H. Kulichev, ed., *Vestiteli na Istinata* ([Sofia?]; Bulgarsko Bibleisko Druzhestvo OOD, 1994), 355-364.

<sup>14</sup> Document A128.

<sup>15</sup> Circular letters of the Methodist Church, 1950, B30 F.165 OP.3 A.E.335, CARB: 8-9; Kulichev, 377.

according to their creeds but were obliged to follow regulations as well.<sup>16</sup> The 1949 Law on Religions demanded all denominations to hand over their constitutions for approval. They did so before January 6, 1949, but an approval or rejection never came. Thus the Protestant denominations were denied the status of legal entities and were left helpless. Their existence was merely tolerated.<sup>17</sup>

Another blow was the restrictions on travel abroad and contacts with the foreign sister churches. In some cases the Committee “intervened” on behalf of the Protestant pastors, but the refusal was imposed by the Militia. Official visits by Western Christians were also restricted. According to the Law on Religions the Churches “could maintain relations with other religious institutions, organizations or official persons whose seats or residences were abroad only with the prior permission of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” which was never granted.

Secure in the Churches’ obedience, in 1968 the Orthodox Church was allowed to become a member of WCC. The regime wanted to exploit any contacts with the Churches from the third-world in order to exert influence.<sup>18</sup> In 1975, for the first time, representatives of the Protestant Churches were allowed to go abroad and participate in denominational conferences.<sup>19</sup> In 1968, “Bishop” Nozharov applied for permission to attend the Methodist conference at Keswick, Great Britain, but it is not known whether permission was granted.<sup>20</sup> Just a select few, usually those faithful to the regime, could obtain permission to travel. Delegates were required to go to the Committee for Religious Affairs for briefing. They were instructed what to say and who

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<sup>16</sup> Correspondence between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Religious Cults and the Supreme Council of the Evangelical Union concerning the organization and leadership of the Bulgarian Protestant Churches, 13.3.1947 - 8.10.1947, C4 F.9 OP.7 A.E.119, Archives of the Bulgarian Ministry for Foreign Affairs [ABMFA].

<sup>17</sup> Information From the Committee for Religious Affairs concerning expropriated properties belonging to the Protestant Churches, February, 1982, C58,c F.10 OP.14 A.E.566, ABMFA.

<sup>18</sup> Information concerning the participation of the Religious Organizations and their activists in the struggle for Peace, 1985, C72 F.10 OP.14 A.E.1502, ABMFA: 8-9. Cf. A report by the Committee for Religious Affairs concerning the international activities of the Churches in Bulgaria, 23.12.1975, C34 F.10 OP.12 A.E.1463; Reports, information and other written materials concerning the organizing and carrying out of a meeting of the Working Committee of the Christian Peace Conference in Sofia, 10.4.1975-14.4.1975. Dates of the file: 8.2.1975-14.7.1975, C37 F.10 OP.12 A.E.1499; A report concerning the activities of the Catholic and Protestant Churches in Bulgaria during 1977, C42 F.10 OP.13 A.E.313; Information concerning the international activities of the Catholic and Protestant Churches in Bulgaria, 16.10.1979, C50 F.10 OP.13 A.E.696, ABMFA.

<sup>19</sup> A report by Tsv. Slavchev, manager of a department in the Committee for Religious Affairs, concerning the participation of Protestant delegates in international Christian events, 28.7.1975, C35 F.10 OP.12 A.E.1479, ABMFA.

<sup>20</sup> A letter from pastor Nozharov to the Committee for Religious Affairs informing them of an invitation from the Keswick Methodist conference and asking permission to attend the conference, 9.5.1968, Central Archives of the Bulgarian Methodist Episcopal Church [CABMEC].

to contact or not. On their return they had to report to the Committee.<sup>21</sup>

Denominations were required to report in detail the visits or any contacts with foreign Christians.<sup>22</sup> On the rare occasions when Western Church representatives were officially allowed to visit the country their activities and visits were closely monitored and controlled by the Committee. They were diverted from their planned route,<sup>23</sup> while being bombarded with propaganda materials.<sup>24</sup>

Church buildings and properties were persistently targeted because they were seen as a means by which denominations could transform their potential influence into an active, aggressive, militant force, securing new converts and combating anti-religious efforts. The attacks continued until the early 1990s.

Church buildings and other properties were expropriated or rented out by local authorities as most appropriate for specific purposes, “for the benefit of the public.” The believers were given twenty-four hours to comply, leaving them no time to appeal. Since the Churches had no legal standing they couldn’t defend their rights in court. Once taken away it was more or less impossible to claim the properties back and the process could last for years.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Decision of Politburo of CC of BCP concerning the appointment of Pasko Kirov as an instructor in the commission of CC of BCP for control of the delegates or people sent abroad, A27 F.1 OP.8 A.E.6542, CABCP; Program of the work of the Committee for Religious Affairs during 1981, 9.2.1981, C53 F.10 OP.14 A.E.327; Information from the Pentecostal Church concerning the international activities of the Pentecostal churches in Bulgaria during 1984, C65 F.10 OP.14 A.E.1180, ABMFA.

<sup>22</sup> Reports concerning visits of WCC representatives to Bulgaria during 1975, February, 1975–2.10.1975, C36 F.10 OP.12 A.E.1491; Document C42; A letter from the leader of the Baptist Church, pastor Chomonev, informing the Committee for Religious Affairs about a letter sent by the World Baptist Union, April, 1962, C48 F.10 OP.13 A.E.687; Letters from the leader of the Baptist Church concerning letters sent to the Church from World Baptist Union, 1962, C49 F.10 OP.13 A.E.688; Document C53; A letter from the leader of the Baptist Church to the Committee for religious Affairs concerning the X-th World Baptist Congress in Brazil, 26.7.-3.8.1960. The letter dates from 21.10.1962, C60 F.10 OP.14 A.E.706; A letter from the leader of the Baptist Church to the Committee for Religious Affairs concerning a request by the Baptist Church in Britain for information regarding the Bulgarian Baptist Church, July, 1962, C62 F.10 OP.14 A.E.723; and Document C65, ABMFA.

<sup>23</sup> Document C42:1.

<sup>24</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Secretariate of CC of BCP from 21.1.1971, concerning radio-propaganda addressed to foreign tourists and visitors in Bulgaria, the selection of students to be sent to study abroad, the continuing fight against the ideological sabotage of imperialism, etc., A87 F.1 OP.36 A.E.1282, CABCP; Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard, 22.1.1968, Pratsch, 1966-1976; Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard, 12.8.1968, Pratsch, 1966-1976, Central Archives of the Central Conference of the United Methodist Episcopal Church in Central and Southern Europe (CACC).

<sup>25</sup> Letters from Protestant Churches to the Committee for Religious Affairs concerning church properties, 1946-1948, B10 F.165 OP.2 A.E.30, CARB:9,10,13,32-36; A statement from the Baptist Church to the Committee for Religious Affairs concerning issues and events affecting the Baptist Church, 23.7.1977, C41 F.10 OP.13 A.E.298, ABMFA.

All denominations were affected.<sup>26</sup> The Methodist Church in Lovech was turned into a factory warehouse,<sup>27</sup> the churches in Varna and Pleven were turned into Puppet Theatres, there were several attempts to take away the church in Russe and the Russe Manse for a picture gallery, the Russe Baptist Church was turned into an atheistic club. If a property was taken away the local authorities were obliged to provide other appropriate places for worship and/or pay compensation. They usually didn't bother. The Law on Religions provided permission to buy new properties and build new churches, but since the Protestant Churches were denied legal status the obtaining of new properties or buildings was in fact impossible.<sup>28</sup> However, they were not prevented from selling their properties if they wished to do so. Thus the Methodist Church lost more than half of its properties and church buildings. The money from the sales either disappeared or was used to cover Nozharov's salary, which exceeded three to five times that of any other pastor or lay worker.<sup>29</sup> In the 1970s, Nozharov in a number of letters to the Committee

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<sup>26</sup> Letters from the Evangelical Union to the Committee for Religious Affairs that have never been replied to: pp.22-23: requesting permission to print 8,000 theological books. 18.3.1948; p.86: informing the Committee about the annual meeting of the Evangelical Union in the village of Hotantsa. 2.4.1947; p.112: a letter from Ja.Ivanov from 20.11.1946 concerning the organizing of a Methodist Regional Conference; pp.46,48,50,53,54,118: properties of the Protestant Churches, etc., B11 F.165 OP.2 A.E.31:46,48,50,53,54,118; Document B10:57-67,93,95,97,100; Correspondence between the Adventist Church and the Committee for Religious Affairs concerning the opening of an Adventist theological school, 1948. Kolarov, 1948, B12 F.165 OP.3 A.E.104:4, 10; Letters from the protestant Churches to the Committee for Religious Affairs concerning church budgets, asking permission for organizing annual conferences and approval of new appointments of pastors. Seven letters of protests, sent by Orthodox priests, concerning the ban of religious education at school,1946, B26 F.165 OP.3 A.E.210: 93-99; Telegrams and complaints by the Pentecostal Church, 1950, B28 F.165 OP.3 A.E.333: 7, CARB; Letters and information from the Evangelical Union to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and religious Cults concerning a meeting of the Protestant Churches in 1949, reports, etc., 2.3.1949 - 27.10.1953, C6 F.9 OP.28 A.E.805, ABMFA.

<sup>27</sup> A letter from pastor Nozharov to the Chairman of the Committee for Religious Affairs concerning church property, 4.9.1965, CABMEC.

<sup>28</sup> Correspondence between the Pentecostal Church and the Committee for Religious Affairs: a list of the personnel of the Pentecostal Church during 1976. A financial report, church properties, etc., March 1976; Information concerning the Religious Organizations and the State, 1.5.1985, ABMFA.

<sup>29</sup> Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard 24.6.1971, Pratsch, 1966-1976; Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard 9.11.1971, Pratsch, 1966-1976: 5; Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard 27.12.1971, Pratsch, 1966-1976, CACC; A letter from pastor Nozharov to the Methodist Church in Pleven concerning the church property in that town, 28.7.1965; A letter from pastor Nozharov, 4.9.1965; A letter from pastor Nozharov to the Chairman of the Committee for Religious Affairs concerning church property, 29.9.1965; A letter from pastor Nozharov to the building company in Botevgrad concerning the church property, 5.8.1966; A letter from pastor Nozharov to the building company in Botevgrad concerning the expropriated church property in that town, 12.12.1966; A letter from pastor Nozharov to the Methodist church in Botevgrad concerning the sale of the property, 20.12.1966; A letter from pastor Nozharov to the Committee for Religious Affairs concerning the salary of the Church employees, 11.7.1968; A letter from pastor Nozharov to the lawyer N. Angelov, demanding the payment of the expropriated church properties in Turnovo. 12.10.1975; A letter from pastor S. Popov to pastor Nozharov concerning the sale of Methodist properties, 6.2.1976; A letter from pastor S. Popov to pastor Nozharov, rebuking him for selling Methodist properties and incorrectly claiming that the Bulgarian Methodist Church is the rightful owners of those properties, 9.2.1976, CABMEC.

complained about not being compensated for years for expropriated Methodist properties or not receiving rents for the properties, already used by local authorities for their own purposes.<sup>30</sup>

Often when Pentecostal churches lost their buildings the congregations were “encouraged” to share a building with the already existing Methodist, Baptist or Congregational churches. Thus the authorities hoped to exploit the differences among the various groups in order to weaken religion in general. On the rare occasions when compensation was paid, the churches received far less money than their properties were worth. And if they were given other properties in exchange the buildings were “smaller and in remote places in order to limit their opportunities for religious impact.”<sup>31</sup> The reason for all attempts in 1982 to expropriate the Shumen Methodist Church was the fact that a new international hotel was being built next to it and, as the Committee pointed out, “it could become a place visited by foreigners staying at the hotel which in itself could stir up and stimulate the church activity.”<sup>32</sup>

By 1982, the Committee had realized that by compensating the denominations with money or alternative properties they would be able to apply their “strategy for limiting the material foundation of the Churches” without causing discontent. When a congregation whose place for worship had been taken away could not name at least twenty-five members, its building was taken away and the Church was compensated with money instead of a

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<sup>30</sup> A letter from pastor Nozharov, 4.9.1965; A letter from pastor Nozharov, 29.9.1965; A letter from pastor Nozharov to the Chairman of the Committee for Religious Affairs concerning church property, 16.12.1965; A letter from a building company from Botevgrad to the Supreme Council of the Bulgarian Methodist Church concerning the expropriation of the Methodist church building in the town of Botevgrad, 21.7.1966; A letter from pastor Nozharov, 5.8.1966; A letter from pastor Nozharov to the Regional People’s Council in Varna, via the Committee for Religious Affairs, concerning the church building in Varna, 22.8.1966; A letter from pastor Nozharov, 12.12.1966; A complaint from pastor Nozharov to the Prosecutor’s Office in Sofia concerning church property in Varna. 7.3.1967; A letter from pastor Nozharov to the Town People’s Council in Shumen concerning the church property in that town, 20.5.1968; A letter from pastor Nozharov, 11.7.1968; A letter from the Methodist Church in Pleven to pastor Nozharov concerning the church property in Pleven, 29.7.1968; A letter from the Regional People’s Council in Gabrovo to the Supreme Council of the Bulgarian Methodist Church concerning the church property in Sevlievo, 1970; Information concerning the expropriated and sold properties of the Bulgarian Methodist Church, 27.10.1971; A letter from pastor Nozharov to the Regional People’s Council in Vidin concerning the payment of the expropriated church property in that town, 22.2.1977; A letter from pastor Nozharov to the Chairman of the Town People’s Council in Vidin concerning the payment of the expropriated church property in that town, 3.6.1977; A letter from the Regional People’s Council in Varna to the Supreme Council of the Bulgarian Methodist Church concerning church property in that town, 26.10.1982; A letter from pastor Nozharov to the Regional People’s Council in Varna concerning church property in Varna. 1.11.1982; A statement by the Regional People’s Council concerning the expropriation of the pastor’s house in Russe, 15.11.198, CABMEC.

<sup>31</sup> Information from the Committee for Religious Affairs concerning expropriated properties belonging to the Protestant Churches. Instructions for expropriation and ways for compensation, 8.3.1982, ABMFA.

<sup>32</sup> Information from the Committee for Religious Affairs concerning expropriated properties belonging to the Protestant Churches. The property of the Protestant Church in Varna, 15.10.1980, ABMFA.

property.<sup>33</sup> Because of the constant intimidation, especially on young and intelligent believers, it was not always easy to find twenty-five volunteers to give their names.

The Communists realized that control over the churches' finances and budgets would allow the state to exercise control over the life and activities of every denomination.<sup>34</sup> According to the Law all denominations were required to present their budgets to the Committee for Religious Affairs "for information." The financial activity of the denominations was subject to control by the State financial organs, and any financial help from abroad could be received only with the permission of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, which was never granted.<sup>35</sup>

This allowed the regime to carry out unexpected auditing of prosperous congregations and denominations. Discovering "irregularities" the inspectors imposed severe fines.<sup>36</sup> In the early 1980s, one such "irregularity" was discovered. The monthly donations by church members were listed as "gifts." According to a recently issued law any financial gift given by citizens was to be taxed. Because of the word "gifts" in the financial papers the congregation under inspection was "taxed" an enormous amount of money. Warned about this all denominations changed the wording from "gifts" to "membership fees," avoiding similar traps.

Another easy way of limiting the church's finances was achieved by taxing properties that had been rented out. The congregations were forced to rent out their properties, and then pay taxes on those properties that were higher than the rents.<sup>37</sup> Many unscrupulous people refused to pay the full rent.<sup>38</sup>

Another financial pressure was achieved via the provision of pensions. All denominations were paying the required pension taxes. They were not allowed to organize their own pension funds and the retired workers were legally entitled to state pensions. However, some local Pension Departments argued that the Protestant Churches were not legal entities and refused to give pensions to people who had worked there.<sup>39</sup>

In October, 1944, the Council of Ministers issued a Decree for the "decontamination" of bookshops and libraries from Fascist and unscientific literature.<sup>40</sup> It gave the regime the opportunity to exercise control over the

<sup>33</sup> Information from the Committee for Religious Affairs, 15.10.1980, ABMFA.

<sup>34</sup> An argument, 9.10.1944.

<sup>35</sup> Law on Religious Denominations, Translation of the Law as it is given in "The Church and State Under Communism," Vol.II, 1965, Washington: Committee on the Judiciary, US Senate, 23-26. The Law was issued 1.3.1949. BU 4/4: Law & Religion: AKI; Letters from the protestant Churches to the Committee B26.

<sup>36</sup> Kulichev, 1994, 379-383.

<sup>37</sup> Circular letters of the Methodist Church. 1950, B30, 42-47, 60-62.

<sup>38</sup> Information from the Committee for Religious Affairs, C58, b.

<sup>39</sup> Correspondence among the Pentecostal Church, the Committee for Religious Affairs and the Social Security Department of the Central Council of the Trade Unions concerning pensions to retired Protestant employees, 15.1.1974 - 20.9.1974, C29 F.10 OP.12 A.E.1227, ABMFA.

<sup>40</sup> A list of the Fascist literature, Document B3.

Churches' archives and libraries. In compliance with these instructions congregations started an inventory of their libraries and archives, cleaning them from "harmful" items.<sup>41</sup> At some point local authorities ordered the Churches to hand over their archives to the local Archives Departments for "safe-keeping." Later, in some instances, the documents could not be found, being replaced by other documents.<sup>42</sup> The Law on Religions demanded all denominations to send to the Committee for Religious Affairs (for information) any letters, circulars or publications they had issued. Therefore many pastors avoided writing down in detail or even mentioning the activities undertaken by their congregations. So, not surprisingly, today the central archives of all denominations are just shabby.

The only thing the Protestant Churches were allowed to produce and distribute annually was a limited number of calendars. The media was out of reach. The only officially published books, usually historical, theologically non-controversial and of interest only to the Orthodox clergy, were those published by the Orthodox Publishing House and were distributed by their single bookshop in Sofia. The Bible was never published. The only Bibles, hymnbooks, and theological books available, were those smuggled into the country from abroad or the ones that had survived from before World War II.

### **The Effect of Communism on the Work of the Church**

The Communists saw the susceptibility and impressionability of young minds as a suitable target in their ideological war. The first step in isolating the young people from any other ideological influence was getting rid of religious education at school. This conclusion was reached by the Ministry of Education in the summer of 1945. The 1947 Constitution declared education as "secular, with a democratic and progressive spirit."<sup>43</sup> In September, 1948, the Council of Ministers issued a Decree stating that "the Church should not carry out special religious propaganda among the children."<sup>44</sup> This was legitimized in the 1949 Law on Religions. To prevent even an indirect influence of religion on the young minds the regime in 1948 closed all Foreign Schools.<sup>45</sup> This marked the end of the greatest and brightest achievement of the Protestant and Catholic Churches.

The Communists always saw the separation of the Church from the State and the School as an effective way of "eliminating the basic channel for regeneration of religion."<sup>46</sup> So, additional measures were undertaken. Atheistic education at school was made compulsory. All textbooks were rewritten

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<sup>41</sup> Letters and information from the Evangelical Union, C6.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with D.N. —pastor, G6.

<sup>43</sup> J. F. Triska, ed., *Constitutions of the Communist Party-States* ([Stanford, Calif.]: The Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, 1969), 163.

<sup>44</sup> Decision of the Secretariate of CC of BCP from 2.11.1948, A14: 16.

<sup>45</sup> Decision of Politburo of CC of BCP from 14.7.1948, A2.

<sup>46</sup> B. Asenov, V. Subashki, R. Mudrov and S. Iotov, *Religijata i Mladezhata* (Sofia: Narodna Mladezh, 1987), 72.

as to reflect the new “democratic spirit.”<sup>47</sup> A lot of school activities were planned to coincide with religious festivities. Numerous books on atheism, atheistic upbringing of children, and the atheistic views on religion were published. Personal records were introduced and were handed from one institution to another. Any “religious connections” could lead to disastrous repercussions. Teachers and militiamen made sure that no children or young people would attend church, especially during religious festivities.

The issue of “intensifying the struggle on the ideological front” was a regular item of the agenda of nearly every Communist Party congress.<sup>48</sup> Often a concern was expressed about the “revival among the religious organizations and activists, who were increasing their influence and defiantly were trying to find a place for religion in the developed socialist society, and even in communist society.”<sup>49</sup> The Fifth Congress in December, 1948, paid special attention to the ideological warfare. The Education System was to be drastically improved by reorganizing all schools and universities, their curricula and textbooks, and the selection of the staff. Marxism-Leninism was to become a compulsory subject in all universities. The aim of the Education System was to train “active and conscientious participants in the political leadership of the country and the building of socialism.”<sup>50</sup>

All this was to be achieved by publicly discrediting religion and by atheistic propaganda at all levels. Religion was presented as a distorted reflection of reality which carried with it a false and wicked morality.<sup>51</sup> The only valid, true and progressive views were those held by “scientific atheism.” Atheistic upbringing was the only way of developing the correct values of

<sup>47</sup> Dellin, 198.

<sup>48</sup> A resolution of the 5th congress of BCP, December 1948, A53 F.1 OP.15 A.E.235; A report by the Propaganda department concerning the religious activities and propaganda in Bulgaria. 4.9.1957, A68 F.1 OP.15 A.E.692; Information concerning the fulfillment of the decision of Politburo of CC of BCP about the measures regarding the increase and improvement of the atheistic propaganda in the country, 16.7.1959, A71 F.1 OP.15 A.E.727; Decision of Politburo of CC of BCP from 23.2.1970 concerning the confirmation of the delegation, led by Venelin Kotsev, which was to take part in the meeting in Sofia of the Ideological Secretaries of the Central Committees of the brotherly Communist parties, A85 F.1 OP.36 A.E.819; Minutes of the meeting of the Secretariate of CC of BCP from 21.1.1971, A87; Activities of the propaganda department during 1966. Information concerning the Marxist-Leninist education of the leaders and the Intellectuals, A91 F.1 OP.40 A.E.37; Information concerning the fulfillment of the decisions of the X-th congress of BCP regarding the mass scale political work of the Party. 1970, A102 F.1 OP.40 A.E.212; Issues of the fight against the bourgeois Ideology, A103; Information concerning the fulfillment of the decisions of the X-th congress of BCP and some basic decisions of Politburo and the Secretariate of CC of BCP in respect of the issues of the ideological work. 1970, A104 F.1 OP.40 A.E.280; A report by the Propaganda Department concerning the increasing of the fight against the bourgeois ideology, 3.7.1972, A117 F.1 OP.40 A.E.436; Information concerning the fulfillment of the decision of Politburo of CC of BCP regarding the fight against the ideological sabotage of imperialism, 1972, A118 F.1 OP.40 A.E.438; Information concerning the issues raised at the ideological meeting in the Central Committee of CPSU, June 1972, 24.1.1973, A120 F.1 OP.40 A.E.472, CABCP

<sup>49</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Secretariate of CC of BCP from 21.1.1971, A87: 156.

<sup>50</sup> A resolution of the V-th congress of BCP, December, 1948, A53: 20f; Dellin, 198.

<sup>51</sup> B. Bociurkiw and J. Strong, eds., *Religion and Atheism in the USSR and Eastern Europe* (Toronto: U Toronto P, 1975), 7,11.

the “New people.” Therefore, it had to start from a very early age, in the kindergarten.<sup>52</sup> The success of this methodology depended on the family influence. So, as late as 1986-1987 parents were “advised” never to contradict what their children were taught at school, so that “the young minds would not be confused.”<sup>53</sup> Thus the regime not only prevented the Church from working directly with children but also exercised control over family life.

These tactics were so successful that the regime could boast in the second half of the 1960s that fewer children and young people were attending church and had religious convictions. It was also concluded that the process of overcoming religion was clearly on its way. All Sunday Schools were closed and there was no organized work with young children, but despite constant pressure, most pastors did not “ban” children from attending worship.

A great source of concern for the authorities was the increased number of young people attending Easter and Christmas services. Various measures were undertaken every year to prevent this.<sup>54</sup> The Militia and the Special Forces, often dressed in civilian clothes, were sent outside the churches “to provide safety and order during the services.” Extremely interesting and popular programs were shown on TV. Special trips were organized for the international university students with Christian convictions. The Orthodox Synod was instructed to distribute all tickets for Easter and Christmas services only to elderly believers. Many school headmasters issued decrees about expelling students from school if they were caught in church.<sup>55</sup>

Direct social action was shortly undertaken after World War II when food and clothing parcels from the World Council of Churches became an important source of aid.<sup>56</sup> For a short time the Communist Government allowed it, thus easily obtaining the much needed medications and gaining some desir-

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<sup>52</sup>Information concerning the issues raised at the ideological meeting, A120: 23; K. Galcheva, “Za Ateizum v Preduchilishna Vuzrast,” *Ateistichna Tribuna* 2 (1987): 51-55.

<sup>53</sup> O. Budnaja, V. Garadzha, and I. Galitskaja, *Ateisticheskoe Vospitanie Shkol'nikov* (Moscow: Prosveshtenie, 1986); Galcheva: 51-55.

<sup>54</sup> Information concerning activities in the capital in relation to the anti-religious propaganda and the behavior of the priests, 11.4.1958, A70 F.1 OP.15 A.E.711; Information concerning the Easter festivities, 29.4.1970, A107 F.1 OP.40 A.E.284, CABCP; Interview with E.N. (pastor).

<sup>55</sup> Information concerning the Easter festivities, 29.4.1970, A107: 2.

<sup>56</sup> Forty-five telegrams and resolutions from Orthodox priests and the Orthodox Church and one resolution from the Congregational church in the town of Asenovgrad in support of the policy of the Communist Party and the State, November, 1948, pp.65,95,96; correspondence between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Bulgarian Legation in Rome concerning subscription to the Vatican official newspaper or magazine and information about the attitude and interests of the Vatican towards the Bulgarian Catholics and the attitude and interests of the WCC and the British Anglican Church towards the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. November and December ,1948, B21 F.165 OP.3 A.E.155, CARB.

able points in their favor during elections.<sup>57</sup>

In 1949, the Government closed all church-sponsored hospitals, orphanages and similar institutions for being foreign-run institutions, cutting out the most popular work of the Church among the people and further limiting its influence.<sup>58</sup> The Law on Religions and the 1947 Constitution declared social welfare as exclusive responsibility of the state.<sup>59</sup>

The only place allocated to the Church was in the sphere of worship. Worship was to be limited within the church premises, and could involve only church members. Any outdoor activities were subject to special permission by the Committee for Religious Affairs, which was never granted. These restrictions were a direct attack on mission and evangelism. Religious propaganda was forbidden and anti-religious propaganda was at first recommended, and later legitimized with the 1971 Constitution.<sup>60</sup> There were often attempts to exercise control on the contents of the sermons before they were preached.<sup>61</sup> Since some congregations organized visits to other congregations or religious places, the authorities interfered by forbidding the hire of buses.<sup>62</sup>

Many pastors saw the Church's sacramental and liturgical life as its most significant activity and as the highest good given the circumstances. This limited pastoral care to simply supporting the "Christian remnant," neglecting those who were outside the congregation and withdrawing from the world around.<sup>63</sup>

Fear was the most powerful and effective weapon in the hands of the regime. It was often enough to ensure compliance, so there was no need for further repressive measures. Fearful pastors restricted the life and work of their own congregations. Fearful Christians were easily "persuaded" to be-

<sup>57</sup> Pp.31-206: Letters between the Religious Department and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and National Health and the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church concerning the Protestant Churches, 5.8.1933, 25.10.1934, 12.11.1934, 17.9.1934, 23.11.1934, 15.9.1936, 18.9.1936, 1937, etc., pp. 222-224, 228, 231-232, 240-242, 252, 259; letters concerning the permission given to the Methodist Bishop Paul Garber to visit Bulgaria and a request by the Committee for Religious Affairs to P. Garber to help by providing medications. pp.282-284; two Pentecostal pastors refused permission to leave the country, B9 F.165 OP.2 A.E.29, CARB: 222-224, 228, 231, 232, 240-242.

<sup>58</sup> Decision of Politburo of CC of BCP from 9.11.1950, A4; Philip Walters, ed., *World Christianity: Eastern Europe* (MARC, 1988), 288.

<sup>59</sup> Law on Religious Denominations; Triska, 162f.

<sup>60</sup> *Nasoki za Rabotata na Uchilishteto po Ateistichnoto Vuzpitanie na Uchenitsite* (Sofia: MKNP, 1987), 13, 117; D. Nedjalkov, "Na Sotsialno-Etichni Temi: Takiva Prava Nikoi Ne Vi e Dal," *Chernomorski Front*, No.9660 (Dec. 12, 1978): 4; L. P. Morris, *Eastern Europe Since 1945* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1984), 66.

<sup>61</sup> Kulichev, 393.

<sup>62</sup> Correspondence between the Regional Committee of BCP and the Committee for Religious Affairs concerning the ban on children's and youth's attendance in the Protestant churches, annual registration. A report by Tsv. Tsvetkov, chief specialist in the Committee, 24.1.1980-10.3.1980, C52 F.10 OP.13 A.E.926, ABMFA.

<sup>63</sup> N. Greinacher and V. Elizondo, "Between Conformity and Rejection: The Difficult Path of the Church in the Second World," in *Churches in Socialist Societies of Eastern Europe*, ed. N. Greinacher and V. Elizondo (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark Ltd., 1982), vii-x.

come informers.<sup>64</sup> The regime did not hesitate to recruit even children. The general uncertainty led to a deeply embedded mistrust and suspicion which to a great extent damaged community life.<sup>65</sup>

Practicing Christians were treated as second class citizens. They suffered restrictions in education, career and social prospects, and exclusion from political power.<sup>66</sup> To prevent people from attending church different compulsory activities were organized on a Sunday or during religious festivities. Sometimes people had to go to work on Sundays.<sup>67</sup> If a pastor died the local authorities often delayed or did not allow a replacement to be sent, thus using the lack of a preacher as a pretext for closing down the church in question.<sup>68</sup> They refused to register new congregations<sup>69</sup> and it was forbidden to worship in an unregistered congregation. Noncompliance could lead to persecution. Life was made very difficult for believers in hopes that on their own volition they would give up their beliefs.

In 1971, at the Tenth Congress, it was announced that Bulgaria was “building the Developed Socialist Society.” It was unacceptable that at such an advanced stage religion was not only in existence but was growing. A decision was made to increase the struggle against the ideological sabotage.<sup>70</sup> In 1970, new rituals were introduced which had to replace the existing Christian ones.<sup>71</sup> The regime saw its failure in the lack of good facilities, professionally trained staff, and highly attractive ceremonies. And all that compared to “the rich tradition of the Church and its rich material

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<sup>64</sup> Decision of Politburo of CC of BCP from 21.7.1948. A report by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Anton Jugov, concerning the Militia and the State Security forces, A3 F.1 OP.6 A.E.520, CABCP; H. Schlossberg, *A Fragrance of Oppression* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), 63.

<sup>65</sup> Semov, 67; Schlossberg, 63; Kulichev, 374f.

<sup>66</sup> Morris, 67f; J. Broun, *Conscience and Captivity: Religion in Eastern Europe* (Washington D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1988), 19.

<sup>67</sup> Letters from the Evangelical Union to the Committee for Religious Affairs, B11: 31f, 35.

<sup>68</sup> A statement from the Baptist Church, C41; A letter from the Pentecostal Church to the Committee for Religious Affairs concerning personnel changes in the Pentecostal Church, 13.8.1980, C51 F.10 OP.13 A.E.907, ABMFA.

<sup>69</sup> Letters from the Pentecostal Church, concerning the registration of new churches, etc. 1968, C18 F.10 OP.11 A.E.620, ABMFA; Program of the work of the Committee for Religious Affairs during 1981, C53.

<sup>70</sup> A report by the Propaganda Department, A117.

<sup>71</sup> Decision of Politburo of CC of BCP from 26.5.1970 and a report concerning an additional paid worker in the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee who should be responsible for development and introduction of the new civil and socialist rituals and traditions, A86 F.1 OP.36 A.E.975; Minutes of the manager’s meeting of the Propaganda Department, 8.2.1971. Reports concerning the introduction of civil rituals; the improving of lecture propaganda; basic trends in the Party education for 1971/72; the tasks of the Clubs for Political Education and the Party Rooms, etc. 28.1.1971 - 8.2.1971, A108 F.1 OP.40 A.E.339; Minutes of the manager’s meeting of the propaganda Department, 2.4.1971, concerning the wider introduction of the new civil rituals, etc., A109 F.1 OP.40 A.E.343; Information from workers in the Propaganda Department, the Regional Committees, the Central Committee of the Comsomol, the Trade Unions and the State Council of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria, concerning the implementation of the decision of the Secretariate of CC of BCP from 11.3.1971 for the introduction of the new civil rituals in the life of the working people, 13.6.1972 – 28.7.1972, A111 F.1 OP.40, A.E.406, CABCP.

foundation!”<sup>72</sup> This led to intensifying the attack for “limiting the material foundation of the church.”<sup>73</sup>

### The Effect of Communism on the Human Element of the Church

To isolate the believers from the larger society and reduce the “damage done by the religious infection” it was necessary to discredit Church leaders. This was achieved by mock trials which were given maximum publicity.<sup>74</sup> All pastors arrested in 1948 were subjected to physical and psychological torture<sup>75</sup> in order to confess and accuse each other of spying on behalf of the West.<sup>76</sup> And in the midst of all that, one could read the speeches of the Prime Minister about the unprecedented freedom enjoyed by the Church. To make the downfall of the Protestant leadership complete, during the trial representatives of the Committee for Religious Affairs visited prominent Protestant believers and congregations “enquiring” whether they would make written statements in favor of the existing religious freedom in Bulgaria and denounce “the espionage activities” of the accused pastors.<sup>77</sup> Afraid of possible closure of churches, some congregations and few believers, together with the leaders of all other religious groups sent letters and telegrams to the Committee and to the United Nations denouncing the accused pastors and praising the great religious freedom they enjoyed.<sup>78</sup> All letters and telegrams were duly published in the leading newspaper. In its deviousness the regime would have gone as far as allowing the re-establishing of the Protestant newspaper *Zornitsa*, if only they could find loyal people to run it and use it to further discredit the Protestant Church leadership.<sup>79</sup> Having

<sup>72</sup> Information from workers in the Propaganda Department, A111; P. Babris, *Silent Churches: Persecution of Religions in the Soviet-Dominated Areas* (Arlington Heights, IL: Research Publishers, 1978), 334.

<sup>73</sup> Information from the Committee for Religious Affairs, C58, b.

<sup>74</sup> Schlossberg, 67f; Wolff, 564.

<sup>75</sup> D. Naumov, *Konvoi* (Sofia: Arges, 1992), 4-7.

<sup>76</sup> See Kochev; Z. Tsvetkov, *Totalitarizmut! Kak Se Sluchi?* (Sofia: Dike, 1991); M. Mateev, *Na slovoto ti upovavakh* (Sofia: ORA-Bulgaria, 1993); H. Popoff, *Iztezavan zaradi viarata si* (Sofia: Dohi Press, 1994).

<sup>77</sup> Letters from the protestant Churches, B26:35-38.

<sup>78</sup> Letters and telegrams concerning the Pastors Trial, A128; 56 letters, telegrams and resolutions from Orthodox priests, theological scholars and theological students, Protestant churches and believers, the Catholic Church, the Muslims, the Jews, the Armenians, etc. condemning the pastors charged during the Pastors Trial, and praising the religious freedom enjoyed by all denominations. February and March 1949, B22 F.165 OP.3 A.E.165; 13 letters and telegrams from Orthodox priests, theological scholars, Protestant churches and believers, the Muslims, the Armenians, the Chief Rabbi, etc., condemning the pastors charged during the Pastors Trial, and praising the religious freedom enjoyed by all denominations. February, 1949, B23 F.165 OP.3 A.E.166; 11 letters and telegrams from Orthodox priests, theological scholars, Protestant churches and believers, the Armenians, etc., condemning the pastors charged during the Pastors Trial, and praising the religious freedom enjoyed by all denominations. February, 1949. 26 telegrams from Orthodox priests, Protestant leaders, the Chief Mufti, the Bulgarian Jews, etc., to the United Nations rebuking the raising of the questions concerning the lack of religious freedom in Bulgaria. The majority of telegrams were sent by the Orthodox Church, April 1949, B25 F.165 OP.3 A.E.209, CARB.

<sup>79</sup> Letters from the protestant Churches, B26:38.

crushed the existing leadership of the Churches the regime started replacing it quite successfully with loyal people, less efficient, more compliant, easily manipulated, morally corrupt and with no leadership skills.<sup>80</sup>

Leadership in Communist society was seen as a totalitarian dictatorship of the Communist Party and the Communist ideology. All decisions were made at the highest possible level with minimal or no input from the people who then were supposed to carry them out. As a result no one was in the habit of decision-making, or trained and tested in it.<sup>81</sup> All leadership, at all levels, was appointed and controlled by the Party's Central Committee. The required skills were "faithfulness to the Communist ideology."<sup>82</sup> The main leadership ability the personnel received was ideological indoctrination.<sup>83</sup> Everyone at lower levels was expected to follow instructions without questioning them. Those who dared to contradict or criticize were declared traitors and reactionaries. For example, in 1951 when the regime prescribed deep plowing, requiring the use of tractors although there were nowhere near enough tractors to go around, the new Minister of Agriculture himself decreed that shallow plowing was "reactionary, harmful, and anti-revolutionary, an act favoring capitalist exploitation, and a blow to mechanization. Even agricultural specialists," he declared, "did not fully realize the anti-state character of shallow plowing. Deep plowing, on the other hand, was

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<sup>80</sup> Circular letters of the Methodist Church, 1950, B30; Letters and information from the Evangelical Union, C6; Correspondence between CC of BCP and the Committee for Religious Affairs concerning letters from Dr. Ivan Georgiev, an Adventist, containing statements regarding the unlawful attitude of the Committee for Religious Affairs towards the registration of the Adventist Church and its leadership, April-July, 1971, C22 F.10 OP.12 A.E.310; Information about the leadership of the Baptist Church, 8.12.1971, C23 F.10 OP.12 A.E.312; A letter from the Pentecostal Church to the Committee for Religious Affairs asking for approval of the new leadership, 22.9.1976, ABMFA; Schlossberg, 66,82-84.

<sup>81</sup> P. Drucker, *Managing for the Future* (BCA, 1992), 120f.

<sup>82</sup> Decision of the Secretariate of CC of BCP from 6.10.1951 concerning the appointment of University leadership bodies, A25 F.1 OP.8 A.E.2688; Decision of Politburo of CC of BCP from 20.10.1964, concerning the approval of Krum Dzhivanov's appointment as director of the Research Textile Institute, A29 F.1 OP.8 A.E.6730; Decision of Politburo of CC of BCP from 30.8.1965 concerning the approval of Marko Markov's appointment as a rector of the Technical Institute of higher education in Russe, A30 F.1 OP.8 A.E.7019; Decision of Politburo of CC of BCP from 9.2.1966 concerning the appointment of Minko Atanasov as a director of the Scientific research Institute in Economics and Organization of Mechanical Engineering, A31 F.1 OP.8 A.E.7162; Decision of Politburo of CC of BCP from 21.3.1968 concerning the increase of the number of listed leaders about whom a statistical information is being collected, A77 F.1 OP.36 A.E.75; Minutes of the meeting of the Secretariate of CC of BCP on 22.4.1968 concerning students' grants for studying in the Federal Republic of Germany, the improvement of the ideological work among the intellectuals and students, etc., A78 F.1 OP.36 A.E.115; Minutes of the joined meeting of the Secretariate of CC of BCP and the Bureau of the Council of Ministers, 12.6.1968, concerning military education for students at school, etc., A80 F.1 OP.36 A.E.162, CABCP; Wolff, 526; G. Ionescu, *The Politics of the European Communist States* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967), 60f; W. Echikson, *Lighting the Night* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1990), 88.

<sup>83</sup> Decision of Politburo of CC of BCP concerning the appointment, via the Committee for Science, Art and Culture, of the teachers in Political Economy and Marxism-Leninism, 11.9.1949, A17 F.1 OP.8 A.E.545, CABCP; Activities of the propaganda department during 1966, A91.

socialist.”<sup>84</sup>

Leadership was seen not as a responsibility but as rank and privilege, which gave complete power. So, it was never shared.<sup>85</sup> To secure support many leaders promoted their children or relatives in leadership positions, and would cringe before their bosses.<sup>86</sup>

Only after 1989 was it possible to replace the corrupt Church leadership. Some resigned, others had to be removed. But the new church leadership to a great extent is demonstrating similar features as that of the political and economic leadership. Some see their role as that of a totalitarian dictator, trying to control everything and to impose decisions from above. They do not share leadership and try to surround themselves not so much with competent and gifted workers but with faithful followers, preferably relatives. Once in a leadership position many gain the confidence of a know-it-all and seek no advice. They believe that the moment they take a leadership role, history commences.<sup>87</sup> Any criticism, even if constructive, is treated as a personal attack and the critic quickly falls in disgrace. To keep their positions many are ready to cringe before higher authorities, paying allegiance and respect not to the person but to the office. In 1993, Superintendent Bezlov, who was awarded the 1992 World Methodist Peace Award, died. A local pastor dedicated the entire four pages of the new issue of the Methodist Church newsletter to the newly appointed Superintendent, sparing just few lines for his predecessor.

The two Pastors trials left the Protestant Churches without their most effective, highly qualified and capable pastors. The Law on Religions made sure that such people could not work as clergy. While in prison the pastors were constantly submitted to ideological indoctrination so that they would “realize their mistakes, correct their ways of thinking and become good citizens of the People’s Republic.” Their families had a rough time too, sometimes exiled, denied jobs and food coupons, their children had problems at school and even when sick were denied access to sanatoriums.<sup>88</sup> In the mid-1960s all pastors who had been released from prison found it difficult to find work and make a living given that they were seen as ex-political prisoners. Many had to continue paying heavy fines as part of their sentence.<sup>89</sup> Years later classified as “rehabilitated persons,” some got permission to work in the

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<sup>84</sup> Wolff, 529.

<sup>85</sup> Semov, 59f, 162-164; A. Zinov’ev, *Komunizm kak real’nost’* (Lausanne: L’Age d’Homme, 1981), 64f; Ionescu, 19.

<sup>86</sup> L. Holmes, *The End of Communist Power: Anti-Corruption Campaign and Legitimation Crises* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1993), 97; J. Brown, *Surge to Freedom: The End of Communist Rule in Eastern Europe* (Twickenham: Adamantine Press, 1991), 192.

<sup>87</sup> Semov, 355, 363.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with M.I., a pastor’s wife.; Interview with B.I., a pastor’s son.; Interview with E.P. —a pastor’s wife.

<sup>89</sup> Bulgaria: Current Files “Report on My Trip to Bulgaria 1976” by Irmgard Pratsch:1; Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard 23.10.1958, Pratsch, 1966-1976; Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard 25.6.1965, Pratsch, 1966-1976; Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard 18.11.1974, Pratsch, 1966-1976; Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard 10.3.1976, Pratsch, 1966-1976, CACC.

church, far away from the capital, and others were strictly denied to preach or speak in public.

The 1947 Constitution gave all citizens the right and duty to engage in “socially useful work.”<sup>90</sup> And since the regime treated pastoral work as socially useless those engaged in it were treated with disregard and were denied food coupons.<sup>91</sup> Church buildings were closed down, taken away or forcefully rented out.<sup>92</sup> Sometimes congregations were prevented from meeting for worship and were deprived of their Bibles. Easter and Christmas were declared work days. Often appointments for vacant pastors’ positions or reassigning of pastors were promptly denied, purposefully delayed, permission was never granted nor denied or “The questions raised would be discussed and solved gradually.”<sup>93</sup> And in most cases, as it was customary for the Committee’s dealings with the Churches, the statement, if ever made, was delivered orally.<sup>94</sup>

Every pastor had to be registered and approved by the Committee for Religious Affairs. The registration form required extremely detailed information.<sup>95</sup> The names of the registered pastors were sent, confidentially, to the State Security Department.<sup>96</sup> The names of all job-holders in the congregations had to be submitted as well. Many church members declined taking on any jobs or in some cases did the work but refused to be named as the job-holders. The name of the pastor was given instead, since it was already included in the State Security list. This led either to burdening the pastor with too many jobs and responsibilities, which further enforced the growing notion of no job and leadership sharing, or to changes in the congregations’ perceptions of the pastor’s responsibilities. Even today there are a lot of church members who think that every job in the congregation’s life is a responsibility of their pastor.

Denominations were not forbidden to carry out annual meetings but they were not allowed to do so either.<sup>97</sup> In this way they were deprived from any

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<sup>90</sup> Triska, 162; Dellin, 100.

<sup>91</sup> Letters from the protestant Churches, B26:4; Telegrams and complains by the Pentecostal Church, 1950, B28: 16.

<sup>92</sup> Letters from the protestant Churches, B26: 4, 9, 10, 93, 98, 102, 121, 122; Telegrams and complains by the Pentecostal Church, 1950, B28:7; Correspondence between CC of BCP, C22; A statement from the Baptist Church, C41; Correspondence among the Committee for Religious Affairs, the regional Committee of BCP and the Baptist church in Varna concerning the property of the Baptist Church in Varna, 5.9.1978, 8.9.1978, C43 F.10 OP.13 A.E.484, ABMFA; Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard, 6.12.1963. Pratsch, 1966-1976:2, CACC.

<sup>93</sup> Telegrams and complains by the Pentecostal Church, 1950, B28: 14, 19, 36; A letter from the Union of the Pentecostal Churches, C8; A letter from the Pentecostal Church, C51; Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard, 30.1.1974, 31.1.1974 Pratsch, 1966-1976: 1, CACC.

<sup>94</sup> A letter from the Union of the Pentecostal Churches concerning changes among the pastors and a request to move five pastors. 21.9.1961, 30.12.1961, C8 F.10 OP.4 A.E.191, ABMFA.

<sup>95</sup> Registration form for priests and pastors, December 1948, B24 F.165 OP.3 A.E.207, CARB; Letters and information from the Evangelical Union, C6; S. P. Walters, ed., *World Christianity: Eastern Europe* (MARC, 1988), 138.

<sup>96</sup> Letters and information from the Evangelical Union, C6.

<sup>97</sup> Report on My Trip to Bulgaria 1976: 6.

centralized planning and guidance. The Methodist Church was not allowed to carry out its Annual Conferences until 1993. Effective pastors and lay workers were forcefully replaced by the Committee and moved to other places “where they could cause less harm,”<sup>98</sup> or in some cases different “restricting” measures were applied.<sup>99</sup> Active church members were often called for interviews by State Security officers and put under pressure to become informers<sup>100</sup> or could face persecution and even trial on criminal charges.<sup>101</sup> They often had to sacrifice their social status and professional career.

In the 1970s, some retired pastors were denied pensions because they had worked in an organization which had no legal status. The problem was solved in favor of the pastors not simply because they had the legal right but because “the denial of financial support of retired pastors could increase the congregations’ unity, something contrary to the results expected of the restricting measures.”<sup>102</sup>

The greatest damage to ordained and lay work came from the lack of theological training. By law all denominations could open theological schools or send young people abroad for training only with the permission of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, which was never granted.<sup>103</sup> Pastors were not allowed even to participate in correspondence courses available from East Germany (GDR).<sup>104</sup> The only existing seminary was the Orthodox Theological Academy. However, the candidates had to provide an Orthodox baptismal certificate.<sup>105</sup> Often the authorities assumed the right to decide who could attend the seminary. Mediocre candidates were preferred over persons of higher quality or of an uncompromising nature.<sup>106</sup> And since the Academy was an institution for higher education, communist ideological subjects became an integral part of the curriculum. The lack of theological training led to a wide-spread ignorance and naivety among the congregations. This is one of the reasons for the success of the numerous cults that flooded the country after the collapse of Communism.

Few Bulgarians were aware of the missionaries’ activities prior to World War II. In the few articles concerning their work their activities were always portrayed as purposeful attempts of infiltrating American influence and interests to the detriment of the Bulgarian people. With the closing of the foreign schools the missionaries were left with no other option but to leave.

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<sup>98</sup> Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard, 23.10.1958: 2; Schlossberg, 71.

<sup>99</sup> Frau Irmgard, 25.6.1965.

<sup>100</sup> Frau Irmgard, 6.12.1963: 2.

<sup>101</sup> Foreign and Commonwealth Office, A letter from D. Lambert, Eastern European and Soviet Department, to Keston College concerning the trial against the 6 Pentecostals in 1979. 22.11.1979, AKI, from the File BU/PEN; Document F5; S. Todorov, “Iz Zalite na Suda: Ljubov sreshtu Zaplashtane,” *Chernomorski Front*, no. 9891 (Oct. 10, 1979): 4; “News in Brief: Trial of Bulgarian Pentecostals,” *Religion in Communist Lands*, No.3. (1980).

<sup>102</sup> Correspondence among the Pentecostal Church, C29.

<sup>103</sup> Correspondence between the Pentecostal Church, C38.

<sup>104</sup> Bulgaria: Current Files, “Report on My Trip to Bulgaria 1976,” D11: 7.

<sup>105</sup> Circular letters of the Methodist Church, 1950, B30: 34, 36-41.

<sup>106</sup> Broun, 1988:14-21.

Missionary work during Communism could only occur within the context of Christian literature and material relief smuggled in from abroad.<sup>107</sup>

The first missionaries to visit Bulgaria after the fall of the Iron Curtain were the representatives of various cults who took advantage of the spiritual vacuum and people's ignorance. They quickly found followers not only among the searching atheists but also among some believers. Since these groups all declared to be Evangelical Christians, the existing Protestant Churches were by inaccurately associated with these cults and fell under constant attack by the Orthodox Church, nationalistic groups, local authorities, the media and ordinary citizens.<sup>108</sup> The damages caused by the cults made it difficult for real Christian missionaries to obtain visas and work permits.

One of the most damaging effects of Communism was on human personalities. Communist ideology saw people not as individuals but as a collective entity which had to behave according to a set of rules and standards elevated to the status of "true scientific values."<sup>109</sup> Therefore, the regime was determined to re-fashion the values of the entire nation and to mold its perceptions, attitudes and behavior.<sup>110</sup> By using brainwashing and other "re-educational" techniques the totalitarian regime compelled people to repudiate what they held "most sacred," first and foremost God (if they were believers) then their family, friends, the past, "down to the very last drop of personhood that might have assisted them in recreating their personality, their humanity."<sup>111</sup>

Indoctrination was enforced at all levels, even in art and culture. Film directors and writers were expected to affirm the great achievements of the socialist reality and way of life and not to depict the negative side of present-day life.<sup>112</sup> A failure to do so was seen as defection due to foreign influence, mainly Western.<sup>113</sup>

Telling or living the truth was inconceivable.<sup>114</sup> To sustain the rightness of Party policy it became increasingly necessary to declare as real what was

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<sup>107</sup> Bulgaria: Current Files, "Report on My Trip to Bulgaria 1976," D11; Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard, 6.12.1963, D32; Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard, 25.6.1965, D35; Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard, 23.10.1968, Pratsch, 1966-1976, D44; Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard, 28.2.1969, Pratsch, 1966-1976, D45; D50 Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard, 24.2.1971, Pratsch, 1966-1976, D50, CACC; D52 Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard, 9.11.1971, D52; D53 Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard, 27.12.1971, D53; D54 Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard, 12.2.1972, Pratsch, 1966-1976, D54, CACC; Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard, 30.1.1974, D58; Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard, 25.3.1975, Pratsch, 1966-1976, D60; Bulgarien: Frau Irmgard, 7.7.1975, Pratsch, 1966-1976, D61, CACC.

<sup>108</sup> Kulichev, 407-412.

<sup>109</sup> W. Van den Bercken, "Ideology and Atheism in the Soviet Union," *Religion in Communist Lands* 3 (1985): 269f.

<sup>110</sup> Bociurkiw, 151.

<sup>111</sup> C. Galeriu, "A Time of Change: Fundamental Options in the Present Dialogue between Believers and Society," *Religion in Communist Lands* 1-2 (1991): 68.

<sup>112</sup> Information concerning the fulfillment of the decisions, A104; 17.

<sup>113</sup> Minutes of the manager's meeting of the Propaganda Department, A100: 9.

<sup>114</sup> W. Sawatsky, "Truth Telling in Eastern Europe: The Liberation and the Burden," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 4 (1991).

obviously untrue. For their own safety, and sometimes benefit, people had to behave as if they believed, thus living a double life.<sup>115</sup> Double living was especially strongly expressed where religion was concerned. People were entitled to religious freedom only as private individuals and not as social beings.<sup>116</sup> And since religion was a private matter, it was subject to all sorts of limitations. A sense of inferiority and helplessness was imposed on believers. Permission for the few things Churches and Christians were allowed were usually granted not so much because they were within their legal and Constitutional rights but because that little freedom suited best the interests and aims of the authorities.<sup>117</sup>

The collapse of Communism left the nation in a spiritual vacuum and in an identity crisis. The Communist regime had achieved its major aim of eradicating religion, marginalizing and compromising the Church so that for decades the prevailing secularized society looked at the Church, and Christianity, as an institution that had only historical merits for the preservation of national identity whose present day function was that of a ritual place to be visited just at specific times of one's life—christening, marriage and death. This is a tremendous challenge for the Church and it will take time to overcome it.

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<sup>115</sup> R. Hoare, *Voices of Religious Dissent in Bulgaria*, a manuscript, 1990, AKI; P. Mojzes, *Religious Liberty in Eastern Europe and the USSR: Before and After the Great Transformation* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1992), 152; R. Hoare, "Chronicle : Bulgaria," *Religion in Communist Lands* 2 (1990): 172-180.

<sup>116</sup> Nasoki za Rabotata: 115; Greinacher, 30f.

<sup>117</sup> Correspondence among the Pentecostal Church, C29.