



Baylor University

The U.S. Foreign Relations with The Bulgarian Protestant  
Churches(1950s)

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## *Introduction*

Bulgarian - Western Church relations until the past decade could be described as almost identical with Bulgarian - Protestant relations. Toward the last half of the 19th century, missionary societies in America and Britain, and later in Germany, considered the Turkish province of Bulgaria as an important mission field.

Missionaries were sent out by Methodist, Congregationalist, Baptist, Pentecostalist and Adventist Churches, which joined efforts with evangelical minded Bulgarians to establish scattered Churches. Two schools were opened, the Bible translated into Bulgarian, a weekly newspaper established, and an active program of lay education, evangelism and service undertaken. From their origin, Bulgarian Evangelical Churches have had close ties and have received assistance from sister Churches in the East, have sent their leaders to the West to be trained, and have followed ecclesiastical and theological patterns of the West. "Protestant" and "American" to many Bulgarians in the past fifty years was almost synonymous.<sup>1</sup>

## *The Economy, Social Conditions and Political Life*

In Bulgaria the officially recognized religion according to Article 37 of the Constitution from 1876 is the Orthodox faith. The Church and the nation were however quite as closely connected.<sup>2</sup> The Church was often the last refuge of national life, and more than once started wars of liberation (Greece, Bulgaria). A deep national gratitude towards the Orthodox church leaves in the hearts of the Eastern nations.

Nevertheless, the church came nearly such a control during the communist regime, that the Church became a national institution, entirely

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<sup>1</sup> Tobias, Robert - Communist-Christian Encounter in East Europe. School of Religion Press, Indianapolis, USA, 1956.

<sup>2</sup> Keller, Adolf - Church and State on The European Continent. The Epworth Press; London; p.238.

dependent on the State. This bond between State and Church existed in several Orthodox countries under different political conditions.

Actually, many Westerners paid little attention to Bulgaria until the assassination of Pope John Paul II by a Turk who was apparently employ of the Bulgarian secret police. The Republic of Bulgaria occupies an area a little smaller than that of England in the Eastern Balkans, sharing frontiers with Romania, Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey and bounded to the east by the Black Sea.

Economically, Bulgaria has long been considered one of the more successful of the Eastern European states. Industrial production has risen steadily in the post-war period, full employment is claimed. Recently, a variety of factors, including management inefficiency, insufficiency of fuel and energy supplies, have combined to raise serious questions about the country's continuing economic health.<sup>3</sup> During the period of the communism, Bulgaria was sometimes even reffer to as "the USSR' sixteenth republic. Elsewhere, in recent years, allegations of participation in the plot to assassinate Pope John Paul II and of the country's involvement in drug-trafficking and international terrorism have contributed to injure Bulgaria's reputation abroad. In many ways for the Western society it remains a mysterious and enigmatic land.

Professor Todor Sabev, a Bulgarian theologian and Deputy General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, has spoken of 'six million' baptized members of the Orthodox Church - not all of these were believers. The relatively small non-Orthodox Christian Churches in the country tend to be seen as distinctly 'foreign' bodies, if not extensions of 'Western imperialism'.<sup>4</sup>

The Committee for the Affairs of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the Religious Cults exercises control over all church activities, including meetings, processions, publications, budgets and theological training. Religious faith was represented by the authorities as irrelevant and outdated, known church-goers can face discrimination at their work.

In the Prologue of his book The Truth that Killed, Bulgarian writer Georgy Markov, who was lately killed himself, wrote:

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<sup>3</sup> Walters, Philip - World Christianity: Eastern Europe, MARC, California, p.274.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., The Status of Christianity, p.277.

This desire compels me to tell what I know, exactly as it was, so that people the world over will understand that Bulgaria is not merely a beautiful tourist country, exporting tomatoes and grapes, a sovereign republic without sovereignty, a popular democracy without democracy, a lifeless social existence numbed by heavy-handed police methods...The Bulgaria I want to describe is a land... where gestures and words have many dimensions, where everything is accompanied by its negation, where strength and weakness, love and hatred, wisdom and stupidity, courage and fear go together - denying and confirming each other. Under the apparent calm of the Bulgarian sea there runs the strong constant current of conflicts which echo the most important questions of our time and embrace everything: philosophy, politics, morality, religion. When I make involuntary comparisons between the life of a normal citizen in the West and the life of the normal Bulgaria, the difference seems so great that the life of the Westerner could be represented by a child's simple drawing whereas in the life of Bulgarian reality is inextricably mixed with the symbolic and the abstract in a quite bewildering way. While the citizen in the West is constantly striving to acquire ever more, our main instinct is to preserve what we have...While those in the West know the many nuances of the seven colors of the rainbow, we are past masters at recognizing the two colors of conflict - black and white - in all their shading..."<sup>5</sup>

### THE PROTESTANT DENOMINATIONS

The American Congregational Church and the American Methodist Church had missionaries in the country from about the middle of the last century; they divided their activities geographically, with the Congregationalist influential in the South and the Methodists in the North.(This division survives today.) The Baptist movement in Bulgaria, initiated by German members who came into the country from Russia, began a little later. They were followed by the Adventists, whose adherents first settled in Bulgaria in 1891. The Pentecostal Church became established in 1921 and it is now the largest Protestant denomination.

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<sup>5</sup> Markov, Georgi - The Truth That Killed, Ticknor & Fields, New York, 1984.



The ties between Bulgarian nationalism and the Orthodox Church were and continue to be, strong. According to Stefanka Petrova,<sup>6</sup> a Bulgarian Orthodox theologian:

The Orthodox Church in Bulgaria took a stand against the activity of the Protestant missions, accusing them of tending to alienate the Bulgarians from their own people and the faith of their fathers.... As they regarded at that time, in the second half of the 19th century, their nation bound together by their Orthodox religion. To become a Protestant and remain a Bulgarian seemed an impossible thing.

After World War I, Protestants in Bulgaria reported a dramatic rise in opportunities for various kinds of missionary work.. The educational institutions existed through the financial support and missionary teachers from the United States. Some Protestants had a greater ecumenical vision of working with the Orthodox and other Christians. From 1925 to 1940 YMCA operated on a multid denominational basis.<sup>7</sup>

Some communication was established between Congregationalist and Methodist missionary agencies, but the last two American Methodist missionaries were forced to leave in 1948, while the last Congregationalist missionary was tolerated until 1950. These two churches were regarded by the communists as "progressive" and more stable than the Baptists and Pentacostalists.<sup>8</sup>

During the previous regime, the Protestants, like other Christians in the country, were subjected to the violent repression. Protestants, being minority communities, were selected as an example of what would happen to others should they not comply with the communists govmmment's wishes. Some pastors were shot and a number of the Church leaders were given long terms of imprisonment. The authorities are particularly sensitive to East-West church contracts. Some of those arrested simply disappeared and were never seen again. In 1979, five leading Pentecostals were imprisoned, having been found guilty of receiving currency or literature from the West. As recently as 1984, a Pentecostal imprisoned was severely beaten by the guards when he insisted on celebrating Christmas in goal.

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<sup>6</sup> In Ramet's Protestantism and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia, Duke University Press, Durham & London, p.212.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

When, early in 1946, religious education in schools was abolished, prayers in school forbidden, and dialectical materialism declared the only basis of true education, at the time even worship was to be under observation by Government agents, and pastors "approved" by the Ministry of Cults, the Churches protested publicly. In April of the same year, civil marriage was made compulsory and Church property was taken without compensation.

Prime Minister at the time Dimitrov, an atheistic Communist, called in 1946 for separation of Church and State. He insisted that the Church must cooperate with the forces of the "progress", which he called the forces of "truth, justice and nationalism".<sup>12</sup>

### "50s" and the Trial Against the Protestant Pastors (February - March 1949, Sofia)

Free Church pastors began to be charged by the Fatherland Front (Communist Mass Organization) with **espionage** and **reaction**. Pentacostalist pastors were arrested and beaten as traitors. Communists agitators visited pastors in their homes and with threats insisted that they become members of the Party. In August 1948, **thirteen Free Church leaders were imprisoned**, teachers were ordered not to teach the Christian virtues love, forgiveness and humanity as they were weak, but to instill hatred and revenge.

In November 1948, thirty Free Church pastors were put in prison and their wives and families pressed to sign incriminating statements.<sup>13</sup> In 1949, fifteen of them were charged with espionage, plotting to bring down the Government, and dealing in the black money market. Thirteen were sentenced savagely after pleading guilty, four were condemned to life imprisonment.

In June 1948, the Government by letter to all Church leaders ordered the Churches not to criticize the Government, to support the nationalism, to acknowledge and preach that the State stands above the Church, to support all Government measures. Also Churches supposed to train

<sup>12</sup> Cockburn J. Hutchison- Religious Freedom in Eastern Europe, John Knox Press, Richmond, Virginia, p. 106.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Hungary, Yugoslavia, Roumania, Bulgaria, p. 107.

the students to obey Government orders. All pastors and priests must join the "Fatherland Front" and preach against anti-Communist and anti-Russian activities, they are expected to display even in the churches portraits of Government leaders, and preach love for them.

Lectures on "Scientific (Marxist) Philosophy" and on "The Constitution of the People's Bulgarian Republic" were added to the studies of theological students. In February, 1949, the Law of the Churches was promulgated. It followed the usual pattern of domination, supervision, control to the State of Church leaders, finances, training of clergy, pastoral and other letters and publications, church connections abroad. The establishment of youth organizations is "under the special care of the State". Also it forbade the Churches to open hospitals, orphanages and similar institutions.

The Pastors were charged with making complaints to members of the Allied Control Commission, with the revealing of military, economic and other secrets to agents of foreign Governments, with espionage and efforts to bring down the Government, and with financial dealings in the black market.<sup>14</sup>

Among the agencies, to which it was charged they divulged such secrets, was the World Council of Churches.

In spite of the pleas of Guilty, the charge against the World Council and the evidence supporting it are untrue. Other parties involved (the Governments of Yugoslavia and of the United Kingdom, Cyril Black, Helen Cooper, etc.) have issued denials of the charges. In so far as money was sent by the World Council to help the Bulgarian Churches, the channel was the Government Bank, and material gifts were always made known to the Ministry of Cults as well as to the Churches. Money gifts and material were approved, indeed encouraged, by the Bulgarian Government.

In his book Religious Freedom in Eastern Europe, J. Hutchison Cocburn remembered:

In the autumn of 1947, I spent more than two hours with Minister Dimiter Ilieff discussing the whole range of the World Council's projects of help to the Churches. Having fully acquainted himself with our plans, and the ways and means, and needs and reasons, of the aid, he said that

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 108.



he approved of what we were doing, asked that the World Council increase its efforts for the Bulgarian Churches, and as a mark of approval, told me that, if the gifts were reported to his Ministry, they would enter the country without Government taxation. He called in the official photographer to record our meeting, and I wonder if he ever looks at those photographs, now of grim significance, for in some of them, between Minister Ilieff and me, stands the Rev. Basil Ziapkoff, our interpreter, whom eighteen months later he prosecuted to life imprisonment. So friendly were the relations between us that, later in the year, Ilieff sent me a quite long telegram of good wishes for Christmas.<sup>15</sup>

The pastors "confessed" and in some cases humbled themselves before the judges, pleading for mercy, acknowledging that they had taken the wrong road; one of them said he felt as the prodigal son returning to his father's home; contrition and abasement were the attitudes adopted. The Government accounts emphasize the justice, freedom from pressure (which accused, said was not exercised on them), the fair and impartial treatment of the accused in court, sixteen barristers defending the accused, and assert that the Bulgarian procedure "ranks among the most advanced in the World"; they take credit for not imposing the death penalty. Nevertheless, Ziapkoff as he is remembered and Ziapkoff in court were two different personalities - whatever his faults, he was a patriotic Bulgarian citizen, keen and capable, and a devoted pastor to his people.

To turn him to the personality who appeared in court, confessing to the charges, making emotional and tearful speeches, and when given life imprisonment saying it was a just sentence, could only be accomplished by the use of diabolical pressure, in spite of official denials and even the denials of the accused.

Basil Ziapkoff, was charged with betraying secrets of the Bulgarian peace delegation in Paris to American and British delegates. The trial ended on 5 March with Ziapkoff and three others sentenced to life imprisonment and the rest to the various prison terms.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Cocburn, J. Hutchison - Religious Freedom in Eastern Europe. John Knox Press, Richmond, Virginia

<sup>16</sup> For an account by one of the fifteen pastors - Haralan Popoff, I was a Communist Prisoner. Grand Rapids. Mich. 1966.

According to Cocburn<sup>17</sup>, "Although the pastors may have done some of the things charged, not all of them were wrong things; indeed, some of the information that they gave to the Allied Commission was not complaint, but information which the Commission, which included Russia, called on Bulgarians to give as a patriotic duty, so that the Commission could with adequate knowledge fulfill its tasks."

The question of what was happening to religious freedom in Bulgaria was taken by the United States and England to the United Nations General Assembly. The Assembly expressed deep concern and established Political Committee on Observance of Human Rights in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania.<sup>18</sup>

Real desires of the Bulgarian Government, with the Process, were:

1. To intimidate Churches that had an activist conception of Church life rather than a mystical and liturgical. Their type of religion required a liberty of judgment over all the realms of human life, a liberty gifted and only limited by God; it also involved the acceptance of God's standards of justice, truth, love of neighbor, humility, and forgiveness, and God's judgment on human faults and failings and God's salvation of men by Jesus Christ. The whole position of the Free Churches seemed to the Government to be dangerous to totalitarian rule, destructive of the people's confidence in their rulers, and proclaiming a way of salvation other than the all-sufficient salvation of Marxist Communism.

2. To break the bonds of all Churches with the West, the pastors belonging to Churches which owed their origin and much of their maintenance to Western Churches.

3. To prevent the Churches from becoming centers of reaction and of opposition to the regime.<sup>19</sup>

It will surprise many that the Bulgarian Government took such drastic action against Churches that commanded the allegiance of only a few thousands of the population of eight-nine millions. The point was to render the Protestant denominations leaderless and to ruin the moral reputation the

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<sup>17</sup> Religious Freedom in Eastern Europe.

<sup>18</sup> Religion and Atheism in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe, p.338.

<sup>19</sup> Religious Freedom in Eastern Europe.



churches had enjoyed, as well as to drive fear into all who attended Protestant services. From that time onward, the Protestant churches were completely neutralized. The denominations' ties with their parent bodies also were radically severed by the Government, so that no visit, correspondence, or financial aid was tolerated for several decades. Most of the explanation would seem to be found in the fact that the four Free Churches - **Congregational, Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostal** - were of Western origin, and that only the first named was self-supporting, the others being dependent on Western support for their combined existence. To have friends in the Western nations is to come under suspicion; and if financial support is accepted from such sources, the suspicion grows and the charge is made that such gifts are recompensed by secret information. This attitude of suspicion is very revealing; it is part of the technique of Communism.

A new pro-communist leadership was foisted on the congregations. Some of the new leaders were nearly or completely unknown and not even been on the clerical registers of their denominations before. This tactic created intense mutual fear, distrust, and deterioration in church life. In many places, the churches were practically destroyed, it is reported that in 1961 Baptist church attendance in Sofia dwindled from 400-500 down to six people., and the equally large Methodist church - to four.

Under communist rule, the Bulgarian Protestants were almost completely isolated from the Western and even from Eastern European churches. The Bulgarian Protestants' only contact with Christians outside the country was by means of sporadic attendance at a few Christian Peace Conference meetings<sup>20</sup>

Before Christmas 1961 Radio Sofia stated: "It is a crime to waste costly time just to keep religious holidays and holy days"<sup>21</sup> And the newspaper *Tschernomorski Front* declared in 1960 that any attempt to influence workers religiously would be considered sabotage.<sup>22</sup>

No reliable statistics exist on church membership. No new publications were allowed; publications were discontinued ( magazine *Zornitsa* ), although much religious literature was usually disseminated in secret. After 1947, the situation rapidly deteriorated; by 1950 all ties with Protestant

<sup>20</sup> Protestantism and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia; p. 217.

<sup>21</sup> Iron Curtain Christians, p.409.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

churches outside of Bulgaria had to be severed, while churches inside the country "experienced their Calvary without the benefit of a resurrection."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

## *Conclusion*

In the time when Christian broadcasts were beamed to Bulgaria, Bulgarian Bible was printed on paper supplied by the United Bible Societies. Bibles were taken also unofficially into Bulgaria by American organizations and concerned individuals.

In the 50s Free Church pastors were accused in espionage and reaction and thirteen leaders were imprisoned. Among the agencies it was charged they divulged military, economic and other secrets, was the World Council of Churches. In so far as money was sent by the World Council to help the Bulgarian Churches, the only channel was the Bulgarian Government Bank.

Bulgarian - Western Church , Bulgarian - Protestant, Bulgarian - American relations, didn't stop during the Stalinist era. Bulgarian Protestants had few international ecumenical contacts before 1990. What Protestant groups in this part of the world had in common was an avoidance of any political dissent in their respective societies, only in a religious sense were they dissenters by being an exception to the majority churches. However Ecclesiastical and theological patterns of the West were alive on the Balkans even in enormously difficult circumstances.



## APPENDIX 1

### Union of Orthodox Clergy position on New Law, Religious Freedom and EVANGELICAL PASTORS

"...the Bulgarian Orthodox clergy hereby express disgust at the traitorous and criminal activity of the Protestant pastors, who are but docile instruments of the Anglo American Imperialists, and they would gladly see them suitably punished."

## APPENDIX 2

Speech of Beltcho Nikolov before the Communist Congress, Sofia, December, 1948, as it appeared in the organ of the Communist party, Rabotnichesko Delo:

"The time has come to break with religion forever, that for centuries has poisoned and continues to poison the soul of our people. Religion is nothing else but hearth of the black fascist past, under whose cover the work toward new enslavement of the Bulgarian people goes on. It is a shame and disgrace there are some among us, Communists, who have taken Communism to heart, who are weak on the subject of religion. For instance, in the city of Varna comrades ..... attend services regularly, light candles, kneel, pray to God, give money end, instead of being ashamed to be seen, they leave the church elated as if for them religion were something more than Marxism-Leninism. These comrades hit themselves on the chest and proclaim that they are old communists, but for me and for the party they are lost and are more dangerous than all the rest of our enemies. Others, occupying prominent posts in the party, are married and baptize their children in the Church, while the son of an active communist is even a church cantor.

I propose that everyone who attends church services or protects the church be punished at once-be expelled from the party and persecuted more intensely than any other fascist.

For the present time, while the road is lighted by the brilliant and great doctrine of Marxism-Leninism and Dimitrov's regime, religious people are abnormal. The fight against these enemies must be persistent and unmerciful.

There has not been, there is not, and there will not be in the future a greater and more sacred religion than Marxism. Every communist is an enemy of religion-it is in the last days of its existence. Therefore, I appeal to all to fight religion to the point of its destruction. Forward without God and Church. Forward with our glorious Communist party under the wise leadership of comrade Dimitrov."

### *Appendix 3*

#### The Bulgarian Constitution (December 4, 1947)

Citizens are guaranteed freedom of conscience and religion, and of performing religious rites.

The Church is separate from the State.<sup>24</sup>

#### *From Easter outside 'Alexander Nevsky', by Georgy Markov*

...The crowds are milling all around us and moving in the direction of the Cathedral, their mood clearly a happy and festive one. But no sooner have we approached the square in the front of the National Assembly than we see a militia cordon which bars the road to the Cathedral, letting through only very few people who wave white passes. We understand that the Easter service can be attended by invitation only. What on earth are these invitations for?, grumbles an angry woman standing nearby. The militia lieutenant in charge of the cordon smiles and says: "The Patriarch is obviously afraid of the believers!"

In the large crowd that gathers in front of the cordon I recognize two well-known Bulgarian film directors with their wives, a few journalists and some theater producers including Villy Tsankov, whose familiar French beret stands out. The great majority of the people around us are young - between twenty and thirty years old. More than half, perhaps are women. With the swelling of the crowd near the cordon the noise rises in a crescendo. Another high-ranking militia chief, passes by and says in a loud voice: "Citizens, why don't you go home? The religious festival is not for young people! Those who should attend have been invited!" "We want to watch!", someone shouts. "Do you believe in God?" asks the officer and

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<sup>24</sup> Yearbook on Human Rights for 1947, Published by the United Nations, p.62-3.

supplies the answer himself: You don't. So what have you come for? Just to add to the traffic jam. Citizens, let us leave religion to the religious!"<sup>25</sup>

## *Chronicle of Events*

### **Spring, 1941 -**

The Bulgarian Orthodox Church took over the administration of the Orthodox churches of Thrace from the Greek Orthodox Church.

### **January, 1944 --**

The Holy Synod refused to confirm the appointment of a regent for the religious training of the crown prince on the grounds that a very strong Orthodox regent was needed to counteract the Roman Catholic influence of the Prince's maternal relatives.

### **June, 1945 --**

The Bulgarian YWCA, YMCA, and SCM, banned during the Nazi occupation were forbidden to be re-established.

### **January, 1946 --**

Premier Dimitrov advocated the separation of Church and State, but called for Church cooperation, "as in Russia, with the forces of progress, truth, justice, and nationalism."

### **April, 1946 --**

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<sup>25</sup> Markov, Georgy - The Truth that Killed, Ticknor & Fields, New York 1984

Some church property was expropriated for government purposes without compensation. Civil marriages became compulsory, but religious ceremonies could be held in addition.

May, 1946 --

Suspicion of the World Council of Churches was increased when Patriarch Alexei stated that the World Council of Churches is primarily Anglo-Saxon and West European and does not truly reflect World Christianity.

June, 1946 --

The Bulgarian Government presented a statement of the Evangelical Churches to Western delegates at the Paris Peace conference which the Evangelicals did not write, hailing religious liberties extended by the New Order in Bulgaria.

In conversation with an Evangelical leader, Premier Dimitrov stated: "We will not persecute the churches, but we do not want to leave nests of reaction. Stick to your spiritual work."

February, 1947 --

Church access to the radio was discontinued.

The Orthodox Holy Synod addressed a memorandum to the government protesting against the proposed separation of Church and State.

May 27, 1947 --

Rev. B. Ziapkoff, President of the Union of Evangelical Churches, expressed gratitude to the government for granting Evangelical Churches equal rights.

February, 1948 --

Pastors were labeled "spies" and saboteurs for destroying the people's confidence in their own strength ( by preaching man's weakness and God's strength ).

A number of provincial pastors were arrested for "traveling without permits"; one was accused of being a traitor.

June 30, 1948 -

The Orthodox journal, *Tserkoven Vestnic*, protested the government's ousting of a school teacher for teaching religious music to a pupil's choir. Some "teachers were ordered not to teach forgiveness, love, kindness, and humility, as these create sheep-mindedness, but to teach revenge and hatred." Some were dismissed with promises of re-instatement if they would renounce their religion.

July, 1948 -

The Ministry of Cults instructed the editor of the Evangelical publication *Zornitza* and the leaders of the Union of Evangelical Churches as to what could be said and printed in church publications.

July - August, 1948 -

Pastors and priests were contacted in their homes by government representatives and to secure their membership in the Fatherland Front. By the end of August, a score of Evangelical pastors were in prison on various charges.

August 3, 1948 -



By an edict from the Presidium, all foreign schools were to be closed as of September 1. Diplomatic missions were permitted to operate, on a reciprocal basis, special schools for their own children under the control of the Ministry of Education.

December, 1948 --

Between 30 and 40 evangelical pastors were in prison, their wives and friends being "questioned" to make accusations and sign statements.

February 12, 1949 --

Dimiter Illieff announced that a number of Protestant ministers were negotiating with the government to form a new "loyal" Evangelical Church council to replace that directed by the imprisoned pastors. Three delegations had visited him to express appreciation that "no obstacle had been placed in the way of the Evangelical Churches."

February 17-20, 1949 --

The Union of Orthodox Priests: "...disgust at the traitorous and criminal activity of the Protestant pastors ... instruments of Anglo-Saxon imperialists ..."

The Administration of the First Evangelical (Congregational) Church: "surprised ... profoundly moved ... and condemn this traitorous activity"

The Council of the Methodist Church, Sofia: "has nothing to do with these pastors ..."

February 17, 1949 --

A church law introduced that included the closing of all churches with headquarters abroad and the state takeover of the property in Bulgaria.

February 25-March 8, 1949 --

Fifteen Protestant pastors plead guilty, and were sentenced to imprisonment and fines ranging up to life.

April 11, 1950 --

Orthodox Archimandrite Kalistrat, former Superior of the Rila Monastery, was serving a fifteen year sentence for "treason and espionage on behalf of the Americans." Archimandrite Kalistrat had asserted in 1946 that there was no conflict between Christianity and Communism, and that Christ was the first Communist.

July, 1950 --

By government order, the Orthodox theological faculty was separated from the University of Sofia, and became a theological academy of the Orthodox Church.

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