

Catholics in Bulgaria

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Although Bulgaria's Catholics now form one of the smallest Catholic national communities, numbering about seventy thousand,¹ Bulgaria might have been a Catholic nation. Tsar Boris, baptised in 864 AD, approached both the Patriarch of Constantinople and the Pope, and at first leant towards Rome,² but finally chose Orthodoxy in 870. This decision was consolidated by the far-sighted mission work of St Clement, Bishop of Ochrid, then the capital of Bulgaria. Clement's use of the Slavonic liturgy and Bible texts of Sts Cyril and Methodius, and his invention of the so-called "Cyrillic" script, ensured for Bulgarian Orthodoxy the autocephalous status sought by their Tsars, and became instrumental in shaping the language and identity of the Bulgarian nation. Although affected by the long years of Turkish rule — from 1392 to 1878 — Bulgaria preserved her identity and culture.

Catholic influence was almost non-existent until the Counter-Reformation.³ Hearing of Catholics working in the iron mines northwest of Sofia, Rome sent Franciscan missionaries from 1595 onwards. They proved extremely successful, particularly among the Paulicians, descendants of medieval Bogomil heretics. By 1601 a bishopric was established at Sofia; by 1644 it had increased to two archbishoprics, and a further diocese, Nikopolis, was set up in 1649. Three of their bishops played a leading part in national life.⁴ Then in 1688 there was an insurrection against the Turks which failed, with tragic results. Almost all the Catholic clergy were massacred,⁵ and large numbers of the laity killed, enslaved or exiled. Only tiny groups survived here and there.

Rebuilding of the Modern Catholic Church of Bulgaria

From the mid-eighteenth century onwards small groups of mission priests arrived from Italy and gradually rebuilt a Catholic Church. By the mid-nineteenth century the shape of today's Church had emerged, with the large diocese of Nikopolis to the north of the Balkan Mountains, sloping down to the Danube (entrusted at that time to the Passionists), and the

Apostolic Vicariate of Sofia-Plovdiv (entrusted to Capuchins). This was a period of great national resurgence, with Catholics working alongside the Orthodox majority for national independence. There was another struggle, too, within the Orthodox Church, for independence from the domination of the Greek hierarchy. In 1860 a group of Orthodox clergy and laity⁶ petitioned the Pope, Pius IX, to accept them as Catholics on condition that they could retain their Bulgarian language, services, rites and customs. On 14 April 1861 the Pope consecrated Archbishop John Sokolski as head of the new Eastern-rite Church. The Russians were assisting the Bulgarians in their fight against Turkish rule;⁷ fearing that other Orthodox might join the new Church, they lured Sokolski aboard a ship and sent him into lifelong confinement in a Kiev monastery. It was a hard blow, but the Church survived, though mostly among Bulgarians living abroad.⁸

After the First World War, they were expelled from Turkey, Greece and Macedonia, and took refuge in the new Bulgaria. In 1925, the Vatican, deeply concerned, sent Angelo Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII, to be Apostolic Nuncio and reorganise their church life. He formed the Eastern-rite Exarchate of Sofia, with Cyril Kurtev as Exarch, a post he was still occupying (after various interruptions) at his death in 1971.

Roncalli remained in Sofia until 1934. His presence proved to be providential for Catholics for the years ahead. He promoted friendship and intercommunication between the Catholics of the two rites, with the result that the sharp rivalry often found elsewhere in Eastern Europe between Latin and Eastern-rite Catholics is scarcely to be found in Bulgaria. He also built up, in those pre-ecumenical days, close friendship and understanding with the Orthodox, an understanding that survives to this day.⁹ Moreover his warm personality created universal affection,¹⁰ even among the men who were to become Bulgaria's Communist rulers, and the Church has benefited from that in small but significant ways.

This era following Bulgarian independence from the Turk was a time of consolidation for the Catholic Church and, unknown to it, of preparation for the time of trial. It was a Church flourishing at all levels. Impressive churches were built and, of greater long-term value, it produced priests and religious of exceptional calibre, academically, morally and spiritually. No other national Catholic community provided such a high proportion of candidates for the priesthood. Not only did it have five seminaries, but most priests went on to study abroad for doctorates and thus gained a solid European culture, sound theological training and fluency in other languages. Most of the Orthodox clergy, on the contrary, had little more than primary education before they went to seminary.

At the outbreak of the Second World War there were approximately one hundred and fifty churches and two hundred priests (fifty of them

Eastern-rite), a few dozen teaching brothers and several hundred nuns belonging to ten congregations. Through its schools and libraries, its two large hospitals in Sofia and Plovdiv, and its orphanages and old people's homes, the Catholic Church of Bulgaria was making a social, educational and cultural contribution out of all proportion to its size, less than one percent of the population.

Conditions after the Communist takeover

After the war the Church was able to carry on relatively unhampered at first, but as the Communists, backed by the Soviets, gradually took over the government, the situation altered. The first sign was the ban on religious education in schools, although the new ruler, Georgi Dimitrov, expressed gratitude and esteem towards the Catholic Church and avoided mention of the Vatican in his attacks on "reactionary" powers. Plans were being laid, as in other Eastern-bloc countries at this time, to turn Catholic Churches into national ones, isolated from the Vatican and subordinated to the Party. Early in 1949 the Vatican representative, Don Francesco Galloni, while in Rome, was quietly requested by the Bulgarian legation there not to return.¹¹

A new, comprehensive law was passed on 1 March 1949, signalling an all-out attack on church life. The new Statute on the Catholic Church was wholly unacceptable to the bishops. All expatriate clergy and religious were expelled, which affected the Latin-rite Church much more than the Eastern-rite, and all social and educational institutions closed. In spring 1953 all church property, including presbyteries, was confiscated.

By this time all the churches were undergoing fierce persecution.¹² One source claims that there were one hundred and twenty arrests of Catholic clergy and laity.¹³ In September and October 1952 twenty-six priests, two sisters and eleven layfolk were accused of a wide range of crimes including espionage; four were condemned to death. Foremost among them was Dr Eugene Bossilkov, Bishop of Nikopolis, generally regarded as the most energetic of the bishops and the one who could have been the focus of resistance.¹⁴ The sentences were never published. Bossilkov was in fact shot a few days after the trial, on 3 October, but the Vatican had his name on the "Anuario Pontificio" until 1975 when they at last learnt of his death twenty-three years earlier.¹⁵ This demonstrates the extreme isolation of the Church. The other two bishops fared no better. Mgr John Garafulov's body had been found in a villa on the outskirts of Sofia in 1951, while the head of the Vicariate of Sofia-Plovdiv, Mgr John Romanov (74) was sentenced to twenty years' hard labour and died in a prison cell three months later.¹⁶ Other clergy received sentences of between eleven and twenty years. Bulgarian public opinion was stunned. News of the trials led Pope Pius XII to protest at the "wave of terror". To avoid a bad press the government clamped down on reporting, all subse-

quent trials were in secret and it is now impossible to discover exactly what happened.

In view of the treatment of Eastern-rite Churches in the USSR, Romania and Czechoslovakia, it is surprising that no attempt was made in Bulgaria to absorb it into the national Orthodox Church. One reason may have been its numerical insignificance (between ten and fifteen thousand members); another, that it had originated relatively recently as a patriotic national church, was well integrated in the community (far more Bulgarians joined the Eastern-rite religious orders in preference to Latin-rite ones) and was regarded with less suspicion, being less dependent on foreign personnel. Much-needed pastoral continuity has resulted from there having been only two Exarchs since 1952. Garafulov was succeeded by his predecessor Cyril Kurtev, a close friend of Roncalli's, who had retired in 1942 on the grounds of ill-health. His retirement seems to have given him new strength for, despite being arrested briefly in 1956 and interrogated to pressurise him into compromise, he remained firm, became the pillar of the Church and died aged eighty in 1971, deeply loved by his people.¹⁷ From 1963 he was allowed a co-adjutor, 47-year-old Methodius Stratiev, who was consecrated in 1965. Because he had endured fourteen hard years in prison, and was a gentle and simple person, the government thought he would be pliable, but they were mistaken. Bulgarian Catholics regard him as a worthy successor of Kurtev; he has provided forward-looking and quietly uncompromising spiritual leadership.

The Latin-rite Catholics suffered much more from state interference in their leadership. Mgr Bogdan Dobranov, the present Bishop of Sofia-Plovdiv, was secretly consecrated as its Apostolic Administrator in 1959. Since he was young and active, a first-rate administrator who knew exactly what the Church's legal rights were,¹⁸ the government decided that he was too strong and prevented him from functioning. It supported the older and more timid Mgr Simon Kokov,¹⁹ a Capuchin, born in 1898, playing on a certain mutual personal animosity between them. Kokov was actually administering Sofia-Plovdiv, and the Vatican finally regularised his position in 1965. He did invaluable service to his Church, in translating the services into excellent Bulgarian after Vatican II, but he suffered a stroke in 1974 and became a pitiful figure wandering helplessly round the streets of Plovdiv, until he died in January 1975. Throughout this period Nikopolis had been kept vacant. Thus by 1975 there was only one bishop recognised by the State, namely the Exarch, Stratiev.

A Church intended to die

After the wholesale arrests and imprisonments of the early fifties only a skeleton church remained.²⁰ Only the very elderly clergy had escaped interrogations, prison and exile. When the government announced an

amnesty in 1964 many clergy had died. In 1970 there were only seventy-two priests;²¹ by the late seventies only fifty remained,²² forty or so of whom were over sixty years old, while a further seven in their fifties were the "younger" clergy. The health of most had been undermined by long years in prison, and they, along with those dispersed nuns who came together to re-establish communities after the amnesty, had to live in deplorably damp and unhealthy conditions in crypts, sacristies, bell-towers, church choirs or shacks.²³ The priests could barely survive on rock-bottom stipends and nuns had to take whatever jobs they could find (in doing so, however, they built up useful contacts).²⁴ This poverty could have been alleviated had the Church chosen, like Orthodox Jews and Muslims, to receive a state subsidy, but, like the Protestant Churches, it wanted to preserve what independence it could. The poverty was accentuated by the state policy of imposing almost insurmountable difficulties in receiving relief from abroad.²⁵

No seminaries had been allowed to reopen, though seven ex-seminarians who still wanted to become priests were ordained. For about twenty-five years these were the only ordinations officially permitted; the priesthood, and with it the Church, seemed to be dying out. This was deliberate government policy and they had set the date of its death as 1975, the year, ironically, when relations with the Vatican were renewed. In common with all Bulgarian Churches, church-going had dropped dramatically through the post-war persecution, falling even lower than in any other Warsaw-Pact country.²⁶ Church life seemed to be stagnating. Fear of losing jobs or jeopardising careers took its toll, as it still does.

The usual methods of apostolate were forbidden; religious instruction of minors strictly prohibited. No new religious literature was available, and the Bible had not been printed in Bulgaria since 1925.

Information about this period is very sparse, even though Bulgaria unexpectedly opened up to mass tourism in 1969. Tourists, however, were at first mainly directed to the Black Sea resorts, and the few who were interested in religion found it almost impossible to get information from Christians who had often spent years in prison and who, because of police surveillance and the presence of informers even within their own congregations, were very reluctant to confide in strangers.²⁷ The general impression was one of a Catholic Church paralysed by fear, and depressed by ghetto conditions and poverty.

There was, however, another side to the picture. There were well-attended Catholic churches, particularly in the traditionally Catholic villages around Plovdiv, where there were even some young people in church. The seaside resorts of Varna and Burgas had full churches in summer, largely thanks to Catholic tourists from other parts of Eastern Europe. Some have expressed surprise that the church in Varna, previously so well attended that crowds of worshippers overflowed into the

street outside, has been closed since about 1970. It is reported that as many as sixty local families protested, in vain. The church in Burgas, which has only a very small local congregation, is still open.

Although there is no law forbidding girls becoming nuns, conditions were discouraging. In 1970 police broke into the enclosure of the Carmelite convent to drag out a novice, the daughter of a government official. She was sent away to live under the supervision of a relative, and not left in peace till she agreed to marry.²⁸ To overcome the ban on teaching minors, a carefully devised question-and-answer system was used, not without difficulties. In 1975 an aged Capuchin, Fr Bogdan Giev, came back from prolonged police interrogation about this in great distress and died next day.²⁹

During this period between 1948 and 1975 the Church was not totally cut off from contact with the Vatican. A most unexpected concession was granted when, during the Vatican Council, one bishop was allowed out to attend each session. The reason was a personal one — Pope John XXIII's special connection with Bulgaria. There was even a special mass celebrated in the presence of Bulgarian diplomats by Cyril Kurtev on 17 November 1963 on the occasion of the handing over of the relics of St Cyril.³⁰ These brief visits had a result unforeseen by the government in that it helped to make possible Kokov's modern translations of church services.

By 1975, therefore, although much reduced, the Church was refusing to die out. The government shifted its prediction of demise to 1980.

Renewal of Relations with the Vatican

A turning-point came for Bulgarian Catholics with the visit of Prime Minister Todor Zhivkov to Pope Paul VI on 27 June 1975. The reason for the visit was that the government urgently wanted access to the Vatican's invaluable Bulgarian archives in preparation for the 1300th Anniversary of the Bulgarian Nation in 1981. With a gesture that cost him little (Bulgarian Catholics being of insignificant numbers in his eyes) Zhivkov approved, without negotiation or consultation, the appointment of two new bishops for the vacant Latin-rite dioceses, both papal nominees.³¹ One was Bogdan Dobranov, whose consecration the Sofia Church Office had refused to recognise in 1959, and who now succeeded to his rightful position as Apostolic Vicar of Sofia-Plovdiv. The other was fifty-five-year-old Vasco Seirekov, for Nikopolis: Seirekov was the ideal pastor for his scattered diocese. One of the most caring, dedicated and best-loved priests of the Church, he had no home, but fulfilled an unsparing itinerant ministry, travelling from parish to parish, sleeping in trains or on station platforms, whatever the weather. In just over a year (January 1977) he died from exhaustion after a gruelling Christmas programme.³²

In November 1975 twenty-eight pilgrims were allowed to visit Rome for Holy Year. Between 4 and 8 November 1976, Mgr Agostino Casaroli visited Bulgaria at the invitation of the foreign minister, Peter Mladenov, with whom he had long discussions. His very presence at many churches gave Catholics the feeling that despite the years of isolation they had not been forgotten. No immediate improvements followed his visit; on the question of shortage of priests, he was told that they *could* be sent in from abroad, but it was impossible to provide any accommodation for them.³³ When Pope John Paul II met Mladenov on 14 December 1978, in private, contrary to normal protocol, he emphasised that “the Church is not seeking any privileges, but needs a little *lebensraum* to fulfil its religious mission”, and reminded him that Bulgarian Catholics were “exemplary in carrying out their civic responsibilities”.³⁴ His firm stand had positive, if limited, results, predictable with such a hard-line government. Six months later his wish to raise Sofia-Plovdiv to the status of a bishopric, and to appoint a new bishop for Nikopolis, was granted. Both his candidates were immediately accepted; Dobranov became a full diocesan bishop, and Fr Samuel Dzhundrin (59) became Bishop of Nikopolis. The acceptance of Dzhundrin caused some surprise; he had returned from studying in France in 1948, and in 1952 had been sentenced to twelve years’ imprisonment as a “French spy and counter-revolutionary”.

Further developments included negotiations on statutes for the two Churches, and participation in the nationwide celebration of the anniversary of the Apostles of the Slavs, Cyril and Methodius, in 1981. The latter included a Catholic delegation to Rome for the Bulgarian celebrations there, and also to the Eucharistic Congress at Lourdes. There is no prospect, however, of the reopening of the seminary. As a minor concession, the government allowed two young men, one from each rite, to study for two years in Rome.

The Situation for Catholics Today

The overall picture gives more cause for optimism than it did in the mid-seventies. External factors, like the present Pope’s firm stand on their behalf, have helped. Travel, and the resulting contact with other Catholics within the Eastern bloc, have done something to reduce isolation. The Church has benefited, as have all Bulgarian Churches, from an overall relaxation, from an increased interest in religion among the more thoughtful young, and from a modest religious revival which seems to have originated spontaneously within some Pentecostal Churches in 1977. Materially, church buildings have now been repaired, partly a reflection of Bulgaria’s relative economic prosperity. Catholics are far more assured and confident than they were a decade ago (although

recently there have been repercussions following the accusation of Bulgarian involvement in the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II).

The roots of the renewal lie within the people themselves. Bulgarians have a long tradition of resilience, tenacity and resourcefulness under persecution, going back to Turkish times. No group has demonstrated this better than the Catholics. Numerically, the Church is still small; figures for 1979 give 12 parishes, 12 or 13 priests and less than ten religious for Nikopolis; 14 parishes, 23 priests and 15 religious for Sofia-Plovdiv; 11 parishes, 17 priests and fifty religious for the Eastern-rite Exarchate.³⁵ The encouraging thing is that there are still about seventy thousand Catholics, as atheist-ideologist Professor Mizov admits, after thirty years of intense persecution and pressure;³⁶ this contrasts with the Orthodox and Protestant Churches which have had a sharp decline in numbers.³⁷

The calibre of priests, religious and laity, their devotion and resourcefulness, are very impressive. Not one Catholic priest would collaborate with the government against Rome, and, despite years of imprisonment, destitution and extreme psychological pressure, there have been no firm reports of priests renouncing their vocations. In these respects they are unique in Eastern Europe. There are no "peace priests" and internal church discipline is very strict. Some priests are permitted to take part in high-level ecumenical meetings and to attend peace conferences, but they are not always or automatically given permission to travel abroad, including to Rome.

Their great problem, however, is who is to succeed them. Despite the Bulgarian reputation for longevity their numbers will inevitably drop drastically during the next two decades; by the year 2000 it is estimated that eighty percent will be over eighty. Some time ago three or four lay brothers were ordained priests; one was only just over forty, but another was over seventy. There are now three younger priests; these include the two who have completed their studies in Rome.

The seventy religious, though ageing and therefore more restricted in their apostolate outside the convents, are in good heart, surprisingly well-informed, lively and open to new religious trends. The majority of the laity are elderly or middle-aged, female and poor, but there are some professional people and a number of intelligent young folk who seem to be attracted mainly to larger Eastern-rite churches which have good choirs.

Catechising is the main problem. It can be done legally only during preparation for the sacraments and during mass. There is no other way to teach people. Priests and laity make the fullest possible use of the services, with the laity taking in every word of catechetical sermons and of the invaluable new rites. There are more services than would be considered usual elsewhere; on an ordinary weekday there may be several

sung masses, followed by rosary, stations of the cross and benediction. Services are generally well-attended.

The only church publication allowed is a church calendar. Service texts are cyclostyled. Although some of the twenty-seven thousand Bibles promised in 1980 have now appeared, they are nearly all destined for the Orthodox Church. A new translation of the New Testament and Psalms intended for general use by Orthodox, Catholics and Protestants was made in 1972, but the likelihood of its being published in the near future is remote. The acute shortage of religious literature seems likely to continue.

Catholics may be few in number but they are quietly making a valuable contribution to Christian life in Bulgaria today. They have an open and ecumenical attitude to the Orthodox or Protestants — an unexpected development in a country where fear had long stifled grass-roots ecumenism and where there was every reason for Catholics to retreat into a ghetto.

There are signs now that the government is hardening its anti-religious policy again. After the 1982 Congress of Communist Youth, the ban on religious instruction of minors was reiterated,³⁸ and it was, significantly, the two Latin-rite Catholic bishops who were specially summoned to Sofia to be informed of this. The Orthodox parish fellowships (*bratsva*) which had sometimes been very active, are reported to have been banned. Christians are still under pressure to inform on fellow church members to the police.

The Bulgarian involvement in the attempted assassination of the Pope has brought unwelcome attention to that country. Probably both the government and the Vatican want the affair played down as much as possible. The Pope wisely does not want to say anything which might jeopardise any of the very limited concessions the Church has only recently gained, and the government is well aware that Catholics have been loyal citizens.

¹*Il Silenzio Della Chiesa Bulgara* by Maria Teresa Carloni, p. 5 (published by the Diocesan Commission for the Church of Silence, Urbana, Pessaro, Italy, by Don Cristoforo Campana — no date given, but between 1977 and 1979). This short book provides the only comprehensive account of the history and present life of the Bulgarian Catholic Church and is written by a person who knows Bulgaria and the people about whom she writes well. This article relies basically on Carloni's material.

²He approached Pope Nicholas in 866, pointing out that his lands lay across the line dividing the eastern from the western Church. Nicholas replied courteously in the "Responsa ad Bulgaras" to a long questionnaire containing such queries as to whether Boris was allowed several wives and whether he could continue to wear trousers. (Information from St Basil's House and from *The Church in the Dark Ages*, Henri Daniel-Rops, Dent, 1959, p. 491.)

³There were Catholics in trading committees connected with Dalmatia. In the fourteenth century, some Franciscan missionaries were martyred by the Bulgars. Carloni, p. 8.

p. 8.

⁴Bishop Filip Stanev was the author of the first printed book in modern Bulgarian, the

Abagar (Rome 1657). Archbishop Bogdan Pakscic was an excellent organiser who travelled widely in what he described enthusiastically as “a most beautiful country, with extensive farmlands, very high mountains, hills, forests and woods”. His accounts are the best source for Bulgarian life at this time. Archbishop Pietro Paskevic travelled round Europe trying to promote a Christian alliance against the Turks. All three died in 1675. Carloni, p. 8.

⁵The diocese of Nikopolis was left with only its bishop and one priest, who died of the plague. Carloni, p. 11.

⁶They were led by the head of the Liberal party, Drayan Dankov, who became Prime Minister when Bulgaria became independent in 1878. Carloni, p. 11.

⁷Two hundred thousand Russians lost their lives fighting for Bulgaria’s independence against the Turks. This helps to explain why Russians were welcomed in Bulgaria after the Second World War.

⁸They had an energetic young leader, Raphael Popov, and were eventually given three diocesan sees, Constantinople, Salonika and Adrianopolis. Carloni, p. 12.

⁹Kurtev’s successor, Methodius Stratiev, has such prestige among the Orthodox that at services, particularly ecumenical ones, he is given the place of honour immediately below the Orthodox Patriarch. Carloni, pp. 38-39.

¹⁰A visitor reports that even today he is still nicknamed “the Bulgarian Pope”. Roncalli is a Bulgarian name and some Catholics emigrated to Italy to escape Turkish oppression.

¹¹*The Bulgarian Church*, Daniel Madden. Columbia: December 1970; *Document of Darkness*, Mitko Mateev. St Catherines, Ontario: Your Neighbour in Need Mission, 1980.

¹²Fortunato Bakalski, editor of the Catholic weekly *Istina* which refused to cooperate with the regime, was arrested in 1948 and tortured to death in 1952, aged forty. Carloni, p. 25, Mateev, p. 98.

¹³Mateev, p. 98.

¹⁴The accusations were backed by “proofs” of contacts with foreign diplomats, collection of information on the attitude of people towards collectivisation, and relations with papal representatives. Yosafat Shishkov, whose age is variously reported as sixty-eight or seventy-four, one of the four priests condemned to death, was said to have started spying in 1912! (Carloni, pp. 24-25; Mateev, p. 98). Dako Tzanov in his unpublished book *The Bloody Danube* records that after brainwashing two nuns admitted to having led debased immoral lives including drunken orgies with several men in their Plovdiv convent. See *Religion in Communist-Dominated Areas* Vol. XIX, 1980, p. 168. (Compare statements made by fourteen out of fifteen leading Protestant pastors in the show trial of 18 February 1948, which caused an international outcry.) Tzanov was a personal friend of Bossilkov, who he described as “highly cultured, kind and generous, a fearless preacher of the truth”.

¹⁵*Eastern Politics of the Vatican*, Hansjakob Stehle. Athens, Ohio: 1980, p. 330.

¹⁶Mateev, p. 98.

¹⁷Carloni says that he is already a legend and a two-volume handwritten biography is in circulation — a tribute in a country where religious *samizdat* seems to be almost unknown. She adds that he was “warm, witty, patient, pious, heroically strong and never off his guard” (pp. 34, 36).

¹⁸He carries a book of canon law in one pocket and the Bulgarian legal code in the other! Carloni, p. 43.

¹⁹Visitors felt that Kokov never really recovered from his experiences in prison and found him embittered and conservative.

²⁰Nikopolis diocese had only ten very elderly priests. Carloni, p. 26.

²¹Madden, *op. cit.*

²²Carloni, p. 47.

²³Madden reported that in Sofia twenty Eastern-rite Eucharistine sisters lived in four damp basement rooms in very cramped conditions in Roncalli’s former residence, while ten Eastern-rite Carmelites lived in tiny cells they had carved out in the choir loft above the chapel. Carloni (p. 42) says that when a West German newspaper published a photograph of Kokov’s Episcopal Palace, one room divided by a curtain, with a bed and washstand on one side and an altar and desk on the other, the Bulgarian government was furious.

²⁴Most went out as cleaners or did embroidery or gave French lessons. About ten elderly Benedictine (Latin-rite) nuns near Shumen, Nikopolis diocese were allowed to continue nursing geriatric patients. As well as the nuns in Sofia, there were about thirty other

Eucharistine nuns scattered in villages and about fifteen Latin-rite Sisters of Charity doing parish work in Plovdiv. Carloni, pp. 52-54.

²⁵ Priests turned down generous offers of donations from foreigners for fear of subsequent harassment and enquiries. Carloni, pp. 51-52.

²⁶ See government claims, 1962.

²⁷ Madden, for instance, tried to talk to a number of priests in 1970, but almost all avoided vouchsafing any information other than the times of masses.

²⁸ Carloni, p. 55.

²⁹ *Narodna Mladezh*, the Komsomol paper, complained during the 1970s that a priest was giving religious instruction under the guise of French lessons.

³⁰ In the crypt of San Clements in Rome there is a specially dedicated Bulgarian chapel.

³¹ Stehle, p. 331.

³² Carloni, pp. 44-45.

³³ Some Bulgarians were very critical. The émigré writer Dr K. Drennikov commented "now the church could die" and added that Casaroli was returning to Rome with "an empty bag".

³⁴ Stehle, *op. cit.*, and "The *Ostpolitik* of the Vatican and the Polish Pope", *RCL* Vol. 8, No. 1, 1980.

³⁵ Figures from an Aid to the Church in Need report, 1979, and Carloni, *op. cit.*

³⁶ As reported by Carloni.

³⁷ Before the war, the Protestant churches were numerically as strong as the Catholics; now they have dropped to about twenty thousand (*Discretion and Valour*, Trevor Beeson, London: Collins, 1982, p. 333). The Orthodox have dropped from an estimated seventy-five percent of the pre-war population to about twenty-five to thirty percent (1979 Academy of Sciences estimate).

³⁸ Glaube in der 2. Welt as reported in *Keston News Service* No. 158, 23 September 1982.

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