

Documents

Message to the Bulgarian People

Exarch Stefan I became head of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in 1945. That year he regularized the Bulgarian Church's international canonical position: through his negotiations the Greek schism, dating from 1872, was lifted and the Bulgarian Exarchate reconciled with the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Because of his struggle for religious freedom and human rights in Bulgaria, he was exiled by the communist authorities in 1949 to the village of Banya (near Karlovo) where in 1952 he wrote the following "Message to the Bulgarian People". He spent the rest of his life in exile and died in Banya in 1957 at the age of 79.

THE BULGARIAN EXARCHATE IN EXILE EPISTLE

To the devout Orthodox Bulgarian people entrusted to our care by our Great Shepherd Jesus Christ.

Sons and daughters of the Church and the People, beloved in the Lord,

As is well-known, the body of Orthodox Christians in the diocese entrusted to us (the Bulgarian Exarchate) consists of over six million Bulgarians or more than three quarters of the total population of the country.

Christian Bulgaria won her freedom, independence and democracy with God's help, through the self-sacrifice of her worthiest children and thanks to the devout troops of the Orthodox Russian Tsar. The virtuous, religious and brave Bulgarian people has a right to enjoy true liberty, independence and de-

mocracy like every other free people under heaven.

At the present time in our unhappy country, before the eyes and conscience of the world, an experiment - reminiscent of the Inquisition - is being perpetrated against the religion and freedom of the Bulgarian people. Atheistic communism has set itself the task of eradicating faith from the Bulgarian's heart by every possible means and of subjecting the holy national Church to communism's political and propagandistic aims.

The communists who yesterday destroyed our cathedral church of Holy King Milutin in the heart of Bulgaria with an infernal machine and took the lives of hundreds of innocent Orthodox Christians, are today violating the freedom of conscience and pastoral service of monasteries and churches, of religious educational institutions and their pupils' Christian societies, of church charities and Christian fraternities. Frenzied atheist propaganda is flooding the towns and villages of our homeland. Faithful sons and daughters of the Church and people are being persecuted.

The wave of indignation, of murmuring and protest is beginning to flood our social and political life. Heavy black, leaden clouds are overwhelming the souls of all honest and right-thinking people. New national martyr-heroes are giving their lives for faith and freedom. We are witnesses to how this paralysed conscience is trying to contend with God's Covenant and commands about peace, truth and goodwill. This satanic

work of godlessness, however, will not succeed because hell itself cannot prevail against the Church of Christ (Matt. 16:18).

Our obligations as your spiritual father require that we share our paternal thoughts on the Christian duty of every true Bulgarian during this time of severe trial. The hour has come when each of us must seek strength within himself to preserve our Church from the interference of communism and atheism in its life, and to prevent any compromise with the servants of Antichrist.

Just as every man is the architect of his own destiny, so every nation writes the pages of its own chronicle. Only that nation has a right to a life of freedom which does not remove the foundation stone of its state structure and spiritual culture.

The Bulgarian Church is the focus of our race and is vitally bound up with the whole life of the nation. She is its beacon, its soul, its strength, its hope and its conscience and preserved the Bulgarian people through all the severest trials in Bulgarian history. In the Church's sacred bosom is the spirit which shields the integrity of our race and kindles our impulse towards faith, liberty and independence, creativity and progress.

The beloved and faithful son of the Bulgarian Church and people, the great Bulgarian statesman Alexander Stamboliyski, was always guided by the clear-sighted thinking of a good statesman: he wanted to preserve complete autonomy for the Church and provide it with every support so that it could continue to be the sacred cradle of spiritual conscience and the cultural backbone of the Bulgarian State.

There are two altars - "The Altar of God" and "The Altar of the Fatherland". No dark power is capable of destroying them in the souls of young or old. The Bulgarian Church recognizes the sufferings of Christ's Apostles upon our national Golgotha and their delight at the resurrection of the Bulgarian State.

We reject the theories of the materialists because they lower spiritual standards and destroy human personality. High ideals are borne only on the golden wings of lofty noble feelings and impulses, purged of all forms of cannibalism. How then can those who in

their minds nurture thoughts of vengeance, malice, envy and destruction be the bearers of high ideals? The progress of materialism has planted in the world enmity instead of peace and malice instead of love.

The Church wants the world to live in harmony of mind, heart and will. One cannot have moral perfection without God's grace and the aid of the Holy Spirit. The Church of Christ is the only institution on earth which deprives Satan of the opportunity to claim human souls.

At the present time, when animal passions are stirred up, only the sacrificial ideal of Christ and Golgotha can be a source of regeneration; this comes only through self-sacrifice like that of the saints who cleansed their souls in the fire of faith in the divine ideal for man. [...] Therefore the Christian duty of every true patriot is to make the fatherland into a temple of the Holy Spirit and the Bulgarian people into a godly people. There is only one way to achieve this: the Lord's way, which is Jesus Christ who said: "I am the Way" (John 14:6).

As Bulgarian Exarch and in fulfilment of our episcopal oath, we opposed with all our soul the communist encroachment on ecclesiastical and political freedom, on the holy places of the faith, religious education of our Christian youth and freedom of conscience in Bulgaria. Instead of the plebiscite requested by us for the whole Bulgarian people on the question of their rights and freedoms, we were forcibly exiled at dead of night from our exarchal throne and from our chair of the Sofia metropolitanate, to the village of Banya in the Karlovo district. Six centuries ago the last Bulgarian Patriarch was exiled by the Turkish oppressor to the same area of our homeland.

Our political exile resulted from the Judas-like betrayal of the Church by metropolitans who have allowed the wolf freely to scatter and catch the sheep (John 10:12). The plot behind this betrayal was hatched before the sacred throne in the memorial church of St Alexander Nevsky, by the synodal metropolitans and a representative of the Communist Party, after the visit to Sofia of the then Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Vyshinsky. For this crime and

sacrilege against the Church of Christ, these metropolitans and every bishop who dares to do the same, do not have the right to wear a bishop's crown, and should be prosecuted according to church canons for violation of their episcopal oath and for their acts against the church.

During these fateful times we must all build up our faith and strengthen our spirit with fervent prayer to our all-sufficient God. May God be merciful to us all and enable our nation to emerge whole and unharmed from the trials which it has endured, and confirm its existence in peace and freedom.

Bulgaria waits patiently for Christ's peacemakers to arouse and organize the Christian conscience of the whole world so that it no longer remains indifferent before the tyranny and injustice which separate nations and which lead to conflict and suffering.

Lord, subdue the wrath of these modern-day herodians who pitilessly commit outrages against thy children. Dissipate their dark forces and put them to flight, so that thy children may come in peace from all countries, nations and States, in unity and concord, to do thy will for thy glory and the common good, so that thy Kingdom may come in their hearts and souls, in personal and public life because thou alone art the Way, the Truth and the Life. Apart from thee there is not, nor can there be any life and salvation.

The blessing of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Banya village, Karlovo district

Good Friday, 1952

BULGARIAN EXARCH

✠ STEFAN I

The Polish Roman Catholic Association "Caritas"

The 164th Plenary Conference of the Polish Episcopate, which was held on 15 June 1978, issued a letter to the clergy forbidding them to cooperate with or belong to the Catholic Association "Caritas", or to have anything to do with the Pension Fund for Priests. The letter was signed by the cardinals, archbishops and bishops who attended the Conference. Attached to the letter was an appendix entitled "Some Observations on the History and Activities of the Catholic Association 'Caritas'", which we print here in full.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE HISTORY AND ACTIVITIES OF THE CATHOLIC ASSOCIATION "CARITAS"

1. A careful look at the origins and history of the Catholic Association "Caritas" throws a great deal of light on the activities of this organization. On 23 January 1950, during the period referred to by the state press as "the period of errors and distortions", the state authorities, in violation of the law and using administrative measures, took the Church Association "Caritas"* away from the Church on the pretext that she was misusing it, and forced upon the

Association a Compulsory Council of Management.

The Polish Episcopate, in a letter to the President of the Polish Republic dated 30 January 1950, protested strongly against this unlawful action. The letter had no effect because the removal of "Caritas" from the Church was only one move in a widespread campaign against the Church, undertaken by those in power at that time, with the aim of exerting pressure on the Episcopate, of forcing their hand and of weakening the Church internally.

2. At the head of the Council of Management were people who were appointed by the state authorities — members of the body of so-called "patriotic priests" (formed a short while before the seizure of "Caritas") and activists from lay Catholic organizations, who were used in the campaign against the

* The Church Association "Caritas" should be distinguished from the Catholic Association "Caritas". The former was removed from the control of the Church in 1950 and re-organized by the State as the Catholic Association "Caritas", renamed later the Catholic Association for Aid to the Poor and Needy. *Ed.*