

The Communists and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, 1944-48: The Rise and Fall of Exarch Stefan

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For a long time before the communist takeover in Bulgaria on 9 September 1944, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the Communist Party had been in a state of open hostility. The Bulgarian communists held firmly to the Marxist view that religion is the opium of the people. They carried on agitation at every level to discredit religion and the Church. Intellectuals were told that to hold any religious beliefs is to regress to superstition. For the peasants and working classes, the priest was reduced to an object of ridicule for his laziness and immorality, illustrated with many degrading stories. This campaign, waged largely by young men who had received some education in provincial towns, was conducted primarily in village taverns and on street corners where peasant youth congregated in the absence of any other social outlets, and was highly successful. To this challenge the Church could not find an adequate response. The mutually exclusive philosophical positions of Church and communism deprived both Church and Party of any point of contact. They remained total strangers, completely opposed to each other. The Communist Party never tried to infiltrate the Church or to create its own following there. Unlike the Orthodox Church in Yugoslavia, where numerous priests found themselves in the partisan groups of Marshal Tito, the Bulgarian Church was conspicuously absent from the "Fatherland Front" organised by the communists as a front to take over the country in 1944. The Church was part of the political and social order in the country, and was dependent upon this order for its survival. It was a part of the system which the communists were seeking to destroy. The battle line was down at parish level, where the priest found himself alone. The Church had no social message to offer and no political programme of its own to challenge the authoritarianism of the governments of Tsar Boris or the socialism preached by the communists. Several semi-official fascist groups were fighting the communist ideology, and although their partial or complete identification with the system meant that they could not rival the appeal which the communists had with the masses, many a churchman, in the absence of other support, succumbed to the

temptation to accept the help of these groups in combatting communism. The results of such alliances were negligible as far as winning young people away from communism was concerned, and only put the Church itself into even greater jeopardy. The village priests who adopted this method of opposing the communists later lost their lives as “fascists”.

After the communists came to power, reprisals against the Church were not long delayed. Even before the *coup* of 9 September and the invasion of the Soviet Army numerous village priests had been dragged out of their homes and murdered in the fields by partisan guerrillas as enemies of the people, and the number of such executions increased after that date. The village priests who had been active in opposing the Communist Party locally were the first to be marked down for murder. No-one has ever made a study to find out how many of them suffered this fate, but even if the number was not large, it was still enough to intimidate the clergy. Numerous priests ended up in so-called Labour-Education camps where they were subjected to intimidation and humiliation. At higher levels of the church administration, three archimandrites (the *Protosingels** of the Sofia, Ruse and Vidin dioceses, Irinei, Naum and Paladi) are known to have been murdered without trial. Irinei had translated a book entitled *Christianity and Communism* by a Romanian author. Naum had been a prominent leader of a nationalist youth organisation. Within a month or so of taking power, the communists arrested and jailed the Metropolitan of Plovdiv, the future Patriarch of Bulgaria, Kiril (elected with Communist support in 1953), and the Metropolitan of Vratsa, Paisi. They were released some time in the spring of 1945. Stories were later circulated that they had been tortured and humiliated.¹ Three high-ranking clergymen were brought to trial for war crimes: Archimandrite Iosif, Archimandrite Nikolai and Archimandrite Stefan, Protosingel of the former diocese of Skopje in Macedonia when the latter had been under Bulgarian occupation. They served three years in jail, but after their rehabilitation occupied high positions in the Church. Iosif became Director of the Department of Cultural Affairs of the Synod and eventually Metropolitan of the Bulgarian diocese in New York. Nikolai, elevated to the rank of Bishop, became Rector of the Theological Academy in Sofia.

The Church was at a decided disadvantage in this confrontation. The Party was in command of the political system, the ideological agencies, the schools, the media, public organisations and economic resources. The Church had nothing except a national tradition and a ubiquitous physical presence. Perhaps the only reason why the Church was allowed to

*“Archimandrite” is a title of honour conferred upon a “hieromonakh” (senior monk), and is one step below the rank of bishop; “protosingel” is a title given to the first assistant to a metropolitan.

continue to exist was the authorities' perception that the West was concerned for freedom of religion, and at this stage, when Bulgaria had so recently been a belligerent enemy state, belonging to the side which had lost the war, there was every reason to placate rather than provoke public opinion in America and England. The eradication of religion could therefore conveniently be postponed. At the same time, there was no reason why the Party should not give support to forces within the Church which would facilitate its submission. The Party needed only to find suitable church leaders who would cooperate. For its part the Church, in a state of panic and confusion following the communist takeover, sought to elevate to positions of leadership men suitable to the government, who would conduct its affairs safely in these most adverse conditions. Metropolitan Neofit of Vidin resigned as Acting President of the Holy Synod, and was replaced by Metropolitan Stefan of Sofia.²

Stefan was an enigmatic figure. During the inter-war period he was the most cultured and liberal-minded Bulgarian bishop, as well as the most astute church leader. He had been educated in the West and had established strong ties with the leaders of the World Council of Churches. Soviet General Biryuzov, Chairman of the Allied Control Commission in Sofia after World War II, later claimed that Stefan had been recruited by the French and British intelligence services as an agent while studying in Geneva.³ Stefan was out of favour with the royal court, and inclined toward the more liberal political forces in Bulgaria, including the pro-Yugoslav parties: in the 1930s he was accused of having arranged the visit of an impressive delegation of Serbian churchmen to Sofia.⁴ He had had close ties with the political group "Zveno", which after 1944 was a partner of the communists in the "Fatherland Front" government. This same group had been a leading exponent of Bulgarian-Yugoslav reconciliation which was a key policy concern for the new government. Although he was not a communist, and had indeed spoken out against communism on many occasions in the past, the challenges confronting the Church after 9 September 1944 could be handled only by him. None of the other metropolitans could rival his political stature or acumen. He appeared to be the most appropriate choice to lead the Church, and the only man acceptable to Bulgaria's new rulers.

At the same time as Stefan became leader of the Holy Synod, a small group of pro-communist clergy moved to take over the Priests' Union*.

*The Priests' Union had been organised in 1904 under a charter issued by the Holy Synod. Article 27 of the charter provided for annual congresses where the priests were to discuss problems of professional and pastoral concerns. Soon the delegates ventured to criticise governmental and Synodal policies and take stands on issues outside of their jurisdiction. The government protested and the Synod gladly suspended art. 27 and disbanded the Union. In a few years, in 1910, the priests organised an independent Union, without Synodal sanction, and proceeded with their criticisms. After much pressure from the lower clergy, the Synod relented and in 1914 restored art. 27 and reconstituted the Union. Thereafter it became a pliant tool of Synodal policies, until 1944.

They were led by the notorious Georgi Georgiev (Bogdanov), who marched in Sofia on 9 September 1944, brandishing a machine gun, at the head of a small group of communist guerrillas. During the first days of the new regime Georgiev and a few of his followers formed a Provisional Committee, presided over by another priest, D. Kotsaliev, which took over the affairs of the Union.⁵ They called a congress in 1945 which elected Georgiev to the presidency. In 1953, the Union President Ivan Iuliev explained these events: "The Union affairs were taken over by the new leadership not only because of the need to repudiate the past, but also because of the need to respond to the demands of the new times with new people."⁶ The Union never became anything more than a pressure group in the Church. But at this early stage of the communist era, it emerged as a threat to the official church establishment and to its traditional doctrines and practices.

Georgiev, joined by the monk Anton Gashtev, and the priest (soon to be ex-priest) Bogomil Bosev, formed a "Committee to Reform the Church". Gashtev was a protégé of Metropolitan Stefan of Sofia. Both came from the village of Shiroka Luka, in the Central Rhodope Mountains. As a student at the Plovdiv Theological Seminary (1937-43), the young man had distinguished himself in philosophy and in leftist political activism. Expelled from the Seminary with a group of six in 1942, he was reinstated after the intervention of Stefan. Subsequently he was ordained as a monk and became Stefan's secretary. He was later sent to the West on a government mission and was alleged to have defected with a substantial sum of money. He was never heard of again. The third member of the "Renewal Committee", Bogomil Bosev, was a former geography teacher at the Plovdiv Theological Seminary. At that time he was implicated as an instigator of a leftist riot in the Seminary and as a sponsor of the Gashtev group mentioned above. Fired from the Seminary staff, he was appointed priest in a village near Plovdiv where he organised a Christian youth group with communist sympathies. After the communist *coup* he left the priesthood and was appointed director of a high school.⁷ Later he published a book on the promotion of atheism in Bulgaria.⁸

This "Committee to Reform the Church" in revivalist fashion was a still-born initiative which found no widespread support in the Church. In 1953 Ivan Iuliev explained: "The idea of changing the fundamental concepts of the Church, of the kind of revivalism which appeared here and there among the priesthood and was promoted by some individuals, had to pass through the Union . . . to be digested and liquidated before penetrating into the Body of the Church as poison."⁹ These comments were made, of course, after the Union had overcome the left-wing radicalism which had characterised it earlier.

On 21 January 1945 Stefan was elevated, with government support, to

the position of Exarch. Ironically, the two arrested Metropolitans, Kiril of Plovdiv, the future Patriarch, and Paisi of Vratsa, the man who was going to topple him four years later, were brought to participate in his staged election. They were discreetly escorted by secret police agents in civilian clothes. For the following four years the Holy Synod and the priesthood were under the control of Stefan and the Priests' Union. In September 1948, in the midst of a flurry of political trials and a bitter campaign aimed at wiping out every trace of political opposition in the country, and two months after the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Cominform, Stefan suddenly resigned.¹⁰

His fall has never been adequately explained. On 15 September 1948 the Synod addressed a circular letter to all diocesan prelates to inform them that on 6 September His Beatitude had submitted his resignation, orally and in writing. On 8 September, the Synod had considered his resignation with concern, and "taking into account the serious health condition of His Beatitude, as well as some important considerations of a purely ecclesiastical nature, had unanimously decided to release him from his duties as Exarch of Bulgaria and Metropolitan of Sofia." On 21 September the Synod published a brief item in *Tsürkoven vestnik* announcing this change in curt, matter-of-fact language. Metropolitan Mikhail of Ruse would serve as Acting President of the Holy Synod and would temporarily be in charge of the Sofia diocese. It was further announced that on 10 September the new leaders of the Synod, Mikhail of Ruse, Paisi of Vratsa, and Clement of Stara Zagora, had visited Dimitar Iliev, the Director of Religious Affairs, and that "the conversations were conducted in a spirit of complete understanding as both sides made statements on sincerity and strengthening of cooperation." On 13 September Minister Iliev also received a delegation from the Priests' Union, led by its President Georgi Georgiev, and including Pavel Grozev and Nikolai Kovachev. The announcement stated that Iliev, "in an hour-long conversation, expressed the positive disposition of the leader and teacher of the Bulgarian people (Georgi Dimitrov) towards the Church and the priests . . ." On the subject of financial subsidy for the Church, the Minister was said to have emphasised strongly that despite the separation of Church and State the latter would continue its financial support of the Church and the priesthood.¹¹

This was not the end of the matter. On 7 October the Synod published the story behind the resignation, under the title of "An Announcement", in *Tsürkoven vestnik*. The reason for this announcement was said to be the "untrue and mischievous rumours" by means of which some people were "deceiving and confusing the public". The Synod proceeded to publish the Minutes of the Synodal session of 8 September. Absent from the meeting were Stefan, who had resigned, and Neofit of Vidin, who had

been granted leave. The announcement explained that at the previous meeting of the Synod on 6 September (the minutes of which have never been published) Exarch Stefan “without reason had insultingly deprived Metropolitan Paisi of Vratsa of the right to speak” and had “made derogatory statements directed against the Metropolitan of Vratsa and the entire Holy Synod”. The Minutes continued: “The letter of resignation was read. His Beatitude repudiates all responsibility on his part for the events of 6 September, states that it is impossible for him to carry further the burden as leader of the Church, and is resigning.” The Synod then pointed out that it was Exarch Stefan who had precipitated the arguments. The excuse for the resignation in itself had been insignificant. “It was not a question of differences on principles or issues of substance for the Church”, explained the Synod. The argument was provoked by Stefan over the trivial question of the management of the Chapel of St John of Rila in Constantinople. The Exarch had overreacted and resigned “in a huff and in haste”. The Holy Synod, the explanation continued, had meanwhile learned that on 4 September, at the opening of the extraordinary session of the Synod, Stefan had reported that he had had a meeting with Vasil Kolarov, the Foreign Minister, and Traicho Kostov, the Party Secretary. At this meeting the Party and government leaders had posed some questions to him, and it was for this reason that he had called the emergency session by sending telegrams to the metropolitans to report at once to Sofia. Without stating the government’s questions, Stefan had postponed their discussion until the meeting of the Synod on 6 September. But after the meeting on 4 September, Stefan had met a government official and had told him that the Synod had discussed the government’s proposals in a stormy meeting and that the metropolitans, especially Paisi, had opposed them. Under such conditions, he could not work and would offer his resignation. The Minutes went on to suggest that Stefan might have come to the meeting on 6 September with the intention of precipitating a scandal and using it as an excuse to resign. “This unreasonable and irresponsible attitude of the leader of our Church to his duty,” explained the announcement, “deeply chagrined the Holy Synod.” The Holy Synod received the statement of the Exarch that he could under the circumstances no longer bear the burden of leading the Church “with pain”, and protested that the incident of 6 September had given him no basis for insulting the Holy Synod in this way. The statement proceeded to list the sins of Exarch Stefan:

His Beatitude often treats the metropolitans in a slighting, insulting and rude manner . . . Sometimes he addresses them publicly with extremely offensive nicknames . . . his domineering and dictatorial attitude is worthy of an autocrat.

He does not tolerate opinions different from his own . . . He creates stormy scenes in Synodal sessions and uses threats . . . to impose his decision. Frequently he attempts to influence the members of the Synod by threatening them openly or discreetly with factors outside the Church. He uses slander as a common means of keeping the metropolitans in obedience . . . He has terrorised the metropolitans into accepting his proposals and keeping silent about his arbitrary actions and illegal deeds.

In the interests of his own autocracy, he always ignored the Holy Synod and decides important issues irresponsibly and alone, without even notifying the Holy Synod, as was the case with his recent attempt to obtain the patriarchal dignity.

It is established beyond any doubt that on more than one occasion His Beatitude has expressed dissatisfaction with the metropolitans for their moral independence. All this creates an atmosphere of lack of confidence at the highest level of church government, between the Synod and its president, generating tensions and impossible conditions for teamwork.¹²

This statement was a stinging indictment of Stefan. The entire Synod was behind it, and Stefan was alone. The Holy Synod unanimously decided that it “accepts the resignation of His Beatitude Stefan and relieves him of the office of Bulgarian Exarch; and on the basis of Article 26 of the Exarchal Laws of 1895, as amended in 1945, relieves him also of the office of Metropolitan of Sofia. In the future his title will be: Former Exarch of Bulgaria and Metropolitan of Sofia.”¹³

The revolt of the synodal metropolitans against Stefan succeeded. There is no evidence to prove that it was not a revolt of their own making, and no evidence that it was instigated by government, although a spurious message from Stefan “to the Bulgarian people” delivered on Good Friday 1952 claimed that “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.” No authority for the authenticity of this document, published in 1979, has been indicated.¹⁴ On the other hand, there is every reason to accept the synodal account, which reveals Stefan’s policies of intimidation and humiliation, his dictatorial methods and his arrogance, his opportunism and his political exploitation of the situation. Nevertheless, there are still serious gaps in the story.

To summarise: it appears that the crisis in the Church started with a meeting between Vasil Kolarov (second in rank in the leadership of the Bulgarian Communist Party), Traicho Kostov (next in line in the order of succession at that time), and Exarch Stefan. The leaders of the government and the Party supposedly demanded some important

concessions from the Church, and Stefan had to call the Synod telegraphically for an emergency session. However, he did not report the government demands for discussion at the first meeting on 4 September. He postponed the meeting until 6 September while at the same time informing the government that he had reported the demands and that they had been discussed in a stormy synodal session. Then on 6 September, instead of reporting the government demands, he raised an extraneous question of a frivolous nature — the report of Archimandrite Gorazd, synodal representative in Constantinople, on the management of the Bulgarian chapel there. This provoked a bitter exchange between him and the Metropolitan of Vratsa, Paisi. Stefan offered his resignation and walked out of the meeting. The Synod surmised that the Exarch may have come to the session with the intent of causing a scandal and resigning. The government business remained unattended and the Church ended up without a leader.

What exactly lay behind this crisis? The key element in the entire affair appears at first sight to have been the meeting which Stefan had with Kolarov and Kostov. It has never been revealed what kind of demands were made by the government at this meeting, which necessitated the emergency session of the Synod. Did the government ask for something which Stefan could not deliver on his own? It may be that the answer is to be found in the declaration made by Dimitar Iliev on 20 October before the Congress of the Priests' Union. "Since the resignation of Exarch Stefan," said Mr Iliev, "the relations between government and Church are continuously improving. I have just received a note from the Holy Synod to the effect that it has decided to discontinue the religious education of children and to stop group visits to the Rila Monastery." He continued: "Priests should not be concerned about their salaries. The government will take care of the financial support of the Church."¹⁵ Iliev's statement suggested that there had been deadlock in the negotiations between State and Church and that this deadlock concerned, among other things, the issues of religious education of children and of group visits to the Rila Monastery. Both of these issues were of vital importance to the Church. Religious education of the young was obviously vital to its survival as an institution. The Rila Monastery was a national shrine. It is estimated that in 1946, the 1000th anniversary of its foundation, about one million pilgrims passed through it. Even today, converted into a national museum, the Rila Monastery still attracts over half a million visitors each year.¹⁶

It seems unlikely, however, that either of these issues would in itself have been sufficient reason for Stefan's resignation: by 1948 the Church had suffered much worse experiences, with or without its own consent. The real reason is probably to be found in the fact that the government did not trust Stefan's loyalty. Relations between Stefan and the

government had been strained for quite a long time. As a matter of fact, it is doubtful that there ever existed any degree of confidence or any kind of goodwill toward him on the part of the Communist Party. Nor was there ever any outburst of public enthusiasm for the new regime on the part of the Church. General Biryuzov speculated later in his memoirs that the Church had adopted a policy of “waiting” to see who would eventually govern Bulgaria. It seems that the Soviet occupation authorities held Stefan in deep suspicion. General Biryuzov considered him a “subtle and perfidious politician,” an “enemy of Bulgarian working men, with close ties to the reactionary elements”. “As a rule,” wrote Biryuzov, “he appointed to leading positions in the Exarchate the most reactionary elements and kept as his closest adviser the Russian White Guard émigré, Protopresbyter Shavelsky.” His own deacon was a Cossack captain. Biryuzov claimed that the organ of the Church, *Tsürkoven vestnik*, had on Stefan’s authority often published anti-Soviet and anti-communist articles: “It was obvious that Stefan was not disposed favourably towards us, the Soviet people.” As we have seen, Biryuzov thought that Stefan was involved with the French and British intelligence services. He reminded his readers that Stefan had studied in France, Switzerland and England and held degrees from Oxford University in addition to his degree from the Kiev Theological Academy. Stefan, in Biryuzov’s words, “shrewdly masqueraded as a loyal, highly educated servant of God.” “The head of the Bulgarian Church”, wrote Biryuzov, “was a man with two faces . . . In conversations with us he repeatedly emphasised that ‘All power comes from God. The Fatherland Front is also from God. Therefore we, as God’s servants, are obliged to fight to give it strength.’ . . . “At the same time (Stefan) was involving himself with the opposition to the Government and with the deposed monarchy which was still hoping to return to power.” In support of this assessment of Stefan, Biryuzov recalled that Patriarch Aleksii of the Russian Orthodox Church had expressed himself “shocked at the duplicity and cunning” of the Exarch.¹⁷

The imminence of Stefan’s fall became apparent at the beginning of 1948 when a Sofia newspaper printed an article severely criticising a book written by the Exarch under the title *The Gospel and the Social Question*. Shortly after that, another article, containing similar criticisms of Stefan, appeared in the periodical *Filosofska misül*, written by one of the leading intellectuals of the Communist Party, later Bulgarian Ambassador to the United States, Dr Petar Vutov. Stung by this public criticism, Stefan responded with a brief announcement in an obscure church journal, *Tsürkoven sluzhitel*, where he stated: “There is a complete understanding between me and Comrade Georgi Mikhailovich (Georgi Dimitrov) on the issues raised in my book. He will write the introduction to its second part, which will be published shortly.”¹⁸ The second part of the book was

never published, and the introduction by Georgi Dimitrov never saw the light of day.

Biryuzov charges that Stefan was involved with the political opposition, plotting the overthrow of the government. One contemporary rumour had it that Stefan had been offered the position of Prime Minister by the opposition parties, but had turned the offer down.¹⁹ Stefan's name may have been mentioned as the possible head of a new government in the reports of Soviet agents planted in western intelligence organisations dealing with Bulgarian affairs, but even if this were not the case, the Soviet authorities may have been alarmed by Stefan's availability for such contingencies, especially if he had been incriminated in secret discussions with the opposition. If, however, the government had the slightest evidence that Stefan was involved in political opposition, why did they not simply arrest him and put him on trial? The year 1948 saw a number of political trials in Bulgaria.²⁰ Reading through the proceedings of the trials as published in the daily press at the time one is left with the impression that most leading figures in the country were involved in some way in political discussions focussing on the replacement of the communist government. Stefan's name was never mentioned, but the government may have extracted from witnesses some information about Stefan which was never revealed. It may have confronted him with such information, and it may have offered him the choice of leaving his position quietly or of being removed by force. The communist authorities may have hesitated to add to the number of martyrs, and may have offered Stefan the option of quiet retirement. Meanwhile the synodal metropolitans, not suspecting the game, vented against Stefan the feelings they had kept suppressed for so long. The members of the Synod had no political ambitions and unlike Stefan were not under suspicion of being involved with the political opposition, and therefore, although they were conservative and even reactionary in outlook, they were paradoxically more acceptable to the regime as docile servants.

After his resignation, Stefan was under the impression that he was going to be allowed to continue as Metropolitan. On 20 December 1948, he was arrested at his residence, forced against his will into a police van, and escorted under police guard to the village of Banya in the district of Karlovo in southern Bulgaria.²¹ He was interned in a former royal retreat where he remained until his death in 1957. He was allowed no visitors except for relatives, although Patriarch Kiril later paid him a courtesy call. Stefan was in effect under arrest for life, without ever having been put on trial. It is obvious that the government wanted to isolate him from the Church and from public affairs. Stefan was never given a chance to explain himself. He never wrote a letter of explanation to anybody, either in Bulgaria or abroad, and left no comment on the momentous events

which brought about his demise. It is uncharacteristic of a man of such a high position, broad culture, and wide connections to act in such a fashion, and we must assume that he was specifically ordered to remain silent.

¹Spas T. Raikin, *The Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church under the Communist Regime* (report submitted to the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Internal Security as an opening statement in the course of a hearing held on 1 September 1965), p. 7. The Report was based on a "Background Information" document submitted by this author to the World Council of Churches in November 1951. This document was summarised in a special Bulletin of the WCC and circulated among church leaders. Both the "Background Information" and the Bulletin were submitted as exhibits at the said hearing, and their acceptance is confirmed by the record; but they have apparently been destroyed. A recent search for them in the National Archives proved unsuccessful. A summary of the facts stated in the two documents appeared in print, without identification of the source, in Robert Tobias, *Communist-Christian Encounter in East Europe* (Indianapolis, School of Religion Press, 1956), pp. 354-362. A copy of the Report is preserved in the archives of this author.

²*Ibid.*, p. 11.

³S. S. Biryuzov, *Sovetsky soldat na Balkanakh* (Moscow: Voennoye izdatel'stvo ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1963), p. 282.

⁴*Stenografski dnevnitsi na XXIII obiknovenno Narodno Subranie* (Sofia: Dürzhavna pečatnitsa, 1934), sessions of: 16 November 1933, pp. 127-28; 17 November 1933, p. 177; 18 November 1933, p. 198.

⁵*Naroden pastir*, Sofia, No. 40/42, 1953.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷Gashev graduated from the Seminary in 1943, two years ahead of this author. Bosev was the author's instructor and close friend.

⁸See *The Church and State under Communism*, a special study prepared by the Law Library of the Library of Congress, Committee of the Judiciary, United States Senate, 89th Congress, First Session (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1965), II, p. 29.

⁹*Naroden pastir*, No. 40/42, 1953.

¹⁰*Tsürkoven vestnik*, Sofia, No. 29/30, 1948.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Tsürkoven vestnik*, No. 31/32, 1948.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴"Message to the Bulgarian People", *Religion in Communist Lands* Vol. 7, No. 2, Summer 1979, pp. 111-18. The document also appeared in Bulgarian in an exile publication as "Bulgarskata ekzarkhiya v zatochenie", *Borba* (Chicago, Bulgarian National Front, ed. Dr George I. Paprikov, November 1979). Neither the style nor the context nor the circumstances of the origins of this document would support its credibility. Its authenticity has been recently challenged in Bulgaria by Boncho Atanasov in an article published in *Ateistichna tribuna* No. 5, 1983, pp. 73-77, under the title "Khameleon i v rasa". It was ignored by the Bulgarians abroad, but it seems to have gained acceptance in the writings of students of Bulgarian affairs. See: Trevor Beeson, *Discretion and Valour: Religious Conditions in Russia and Eastern Europe* (London, Collins Fount Paperbacks, 1982), p. 342; and Wolf Oschlies, "Kirche und Religion in Bulgarien", in Paul Lendvai (ed.), *Religionsfreiheit und Menschenrechte* (Graz, Verlag Styria, 1983), p. 186.

¹⁵Raikin, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁶Savka Lazarova, "Da pishe i v chitankite", *Anteni*, Sofia, XVI, No. 21, 23 May 1984, p. 6.

¹⁷Biryuzov, *op. cit.*, pp. 282-84, 286.

¹⁸Raikin, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

¹⁹This information was confirmed to the author by a leading Bulgarian political figure in exile, still alive. See also Raikin, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

²⁰The political turmoil in Bulgaria, which reached its climax in September 1947 after the trial and execution of opposition leader Nikola Petkov, continued into 1948. Numerous

political trials were held, leading political figures were called to testify, a great many incriminating statements were inadvertently made, and the hysteria caused by the Cominform resolution expelling Marshal Tito threatened to make things worse. The government expelled United States Vice-Consul Ewing, charging him with espionage. Six individuals were executed for espionage. The Diplomatic Corps was falling apart. The Bulgarian Ambassador to London, N. Dolapchiev, and the Ambassador to Belgium, V. Yurukov, both of them leading figures in the group with which Stefan maintained close contacts, defected, as did the Bulgarian Consul General in Ankara, Karageuzov, and the Bulgarian Chargé d'Affaires in Vienna, V. Paskalev. The trial of the leader of the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party, K. Lulchev, was well under way: he had been charged with treason. See *The Official Index to the Times: 1948* (London, The Times Publishing Co., Kraus Reprint, 1968), pp. 148-49. In this atmosphere of paranoiac obsession with treason and subversion, Stefan may very well have been implicated or suspected by the government.

²¹ Raikin, *op. cit.*, p. 19.