

increases their prestige. This is a further, not insignificant impulse for the growth in interest in religion.

This growth in interest in religion during the 1980s, particularly evident amongst the young, intellectuals and city dwellers, may equally reflect a deepening disillusionment with the principles of Marxism-Leninism, and the search for a meaningful alternative ideology. In their search, many looked to Christianity because of its traditional importance both in Slovakia and the Czech lands. But they were also attracted by the moral values — respect for the weak and sick, willingness to sacrifice oneself for others, truth and justice — kept alive by the Christian community. Michaela Freiová, a Czech Catholic activist explains the emergence of religion in these terms:

The totalitarian system consciously and wilfully takes everything from man: it deprives him of God and history, of inherited values and cultural identity . . . freedom. After all this has been taken away there remains some space both in society and in every human soul. And it is this empty space which speaks about God to the young who have been born with their roots already cut off, with their relationships weakened, into the disturbed confusion of remnants and traces of values.

This spiritual vacuum undoubtedly led to a growing awareness in Czechoslovakia that society needed to be reconstructed and that the best basis for this was the Christianity on which European civilisation was built.

Bulgaria

The political demise of Todor Zhivkov on 10 November 1989 came suddenly. Within hours the former Foreign Minister Petur Mladenov had replaced him as leader of the Communist Party, received a congratulatory message from President Gorbachev and declared himself to be a radical reformer and a true partisan of democracy and freedom in Bulgaria. Before his accession, it was rumoured that Mladenov's exposure to constant criticism of Bulgarian policies at international meetings had so frustrated him that he had reached the point of resigning his ministerial post. Whatever his private feelings may have been,

however, he had shown few public signs of being out of step with the collective hard line followed by government colleagues during his eighteen years at the Foreign Ministry. At the time of writing, despite the fact that he has fostered a number of quite far-reaching reformist measures, he is regarded with some suspicion by a significant proportion of the country's population and some informed Bulgarian observers consider that his days may already be numbered.

Under Zhivkov, Bulgarian believers experienced severe restraints and hardships. Despite much lip-service paid to the concepts of

glasnost and *perestroika*, religious freedom, theoretically guaranteed by the constitution and vaunted at regular intervals by party spokesmen, remained largely an empty phrase. Permitted activity was limited almost exclusively to approved forms of worship within the walls of officially-recognised buildings, conducted by approved clergy. Anti-religious propaganda was encouraged and atheist education made compulsory for all. Formal religious instruction of the young was forbidden and the state retained control over virtually every aspect of religious life. Overtly active believers were subject to discrimination in the sphere of education and in their professional life. Dissident clergy could find themselves suspended, dismissed or prosecuted. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the predominant Christian denomination, whose hierarchy was widely regarded as completely subservient to the will of the communist party, received certain limited privileges denied to the smaller, more independently-minded communities. It alone was allowed to run the only two institutions for Christian theological training existing in the country, and no other church was permitted to produce any significant religious literature. Bibles were practically unobtainable, religious programmes were excluded from radio and television, the festivals of Christmas and Easter were officially ignored and religious charitable work was outlawed.

Substantial publicity was given in the western media to the plight of Bulgaria's Muslims, particularly during the summer of 1989, when over 300,000 ethnic Turks emigrated to Turkey. At the instigation of Zhivkov, a violent renewal of the long-standing campaign to assimilate or 'bulgarise' the Turkish minority had begun in 1984. By then, the state's official line was that those claiming

to form the Turkish minority in Bulgaria were simply the descendants of ethnic Bulgarians who had been converted — willingly or unwillingly — to Islam during the five centuries of the 'Turkish yoke'. The forced changing of Islamic names to Bulgarian-sounding ones aroused enormous resentment among the one million-strong Turkish minority, as did the many other efforts made by the state to extinguish all signs of a separate Turkish culture. Although the existence of 'Bulgarian Muslims' was theoretically accepted, many basic religious rights and freedoms were denied to all followers of Islam.

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Todor Zhivkov had been the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) for some thirty years when Mikhail Gorbachev introduced the notions of *glasnost* and *perestroika* into Soviet politics. Since his accession to power in 1985, the Bulgarian leader had gained the reputation of finding a way to accommodate himself to each new Soviet leader to arrive on the scene, and he appeared to revel in the fact that Bulgaria was widely seen as the Soviet Union's most loyal satellite. Many aspects of Bulgarian domestic and foreign policy had followed, if often belatedly, the models set by Moscow and eventually, in July 1987, at a plenum of the BCP Central Committee, formal approval was given to the essence of the new concepts emanating from the Kremlin. Economic, social and cultural shortcomings were admitted and the term *glasnost* was appropriated by party spokesmen and the state media. Decentralisation of power and self-management were likewise being advocated and 'democratisation' and 'socialist pluralism' were among the phrases officially adopted. There was

even talk of constitutional and legal reform and the overhaul of government and BCP structures. A few genuine projects in the spirit of *perestroika* were implemented in the economic sphere and the latest Vienna international agreements on human rights were given some publicity. However, it now seems clear that Zhivkov and those close to him were never genuinely prepared to accept and put into practice the really fundamental changes implied by the new thinking.

In December 1988, Zhivkov, reporting to a BCP Central Committee plenum on the implementation of the 'July strategy', referred to the need for the 'religious communities' to participate in the restructuring process. However, apart from allowing the appointment in July 1988 of a new Roman Catholic bishop, Georgi Iovchev, to the see of Sofia-Plovdiv (which had lain vacant since 1983), the few concessions made to the Christian churches during this period appear to have been basically cosmetic and granted with some reluctance. Two unregistered Pentecostal pastors, Pavel Ignatov and Toma Spassov, were released early from internal exile and the Congregational pastor Hristo Kulichev had part of his term of internal exile remitted following a deterioration in his health. The Adventist church, previously only tolerated, was officially recognised in 1988 and the Vatican was allowed to send some Eastern-rite service books and Latin-rite lectionaries and missals into Bulgaria.

For decades the state had operated a policy whereby it sought to infiltrate the leaderships of the religious denominations with men who would not challenge party and government policy on religion. The Orthodox hierarchy was consistently compliant, and any voice of dissent raised by the small Protestant communities

was silenced. Catholics of both Latin rite (now numbering about 50,000) and Eastern rite (about 5,000) have succeeded in avoiding both unworthy compromise and open defiance.

Until 1988 there were virtually no organised dissident groups of any kind in Bulgaria. However, possibly encouraged by developments in the USSR and by the increasing tendency world-wide to scrutinise the rights and liberties of citizens, an Independent Association for the Defence of Human Rights in Bulgaria was founded in January 1988. Its membership included some believers of both Christian and Muslim faiths. An application for registration was refused and the authorities set about applying pressure on its adherents. Whereas previously the state would almost certainly have brought charges under various 'catch-all' articles of the penal code, such as those forbidding 'anti-state' activities, the sensitivity of public opinion abroad appears to have persuaded it to adopt different tactics. Leading members, such as the Orthodox priest Fr Blagoy Topuzliev and the Methodist Hristo Svatovski, were first subjected to harassment and then 'persuaded' to leave the country. In what seems to have been a response to the formation of this independent association, an *official* Human Rights Committee was formed in the following June, under the chairmanship of a former BCP Central Committee secretary, Konstantin Tellalov, and with Metropolitan Arsenii of Plovdiv as a vice-chairman. The independent association refused to disband, however, and is still active at the time of writing.

Gradually other independent organisations began to spring up. The Discussion Club for the Support of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* (later

renamed the Club for *Glasnost* and Democracy) was founded in November 1988 by a group of intellectuals concerned with issues facing the country in the spheres of culture, science and education in particular. The independent trade union *Podkrepa* (Support) was formed in February 1989. Its original aim was to defend the interests of scientists, researchers and artists 'against despotism and all attempts at interference by the state and government in their work'. Its scope has since been widened and the movement has become a workers' force to be reckoned with. Small environmental groups, notably the Citizens' Committee for the Ecological Defence of Ruse, founded in March 1988, began to appear, foreshadowing the establishment of the very influential *Ecoglasnost* movement.

The foundations of the Independent Committee for the Defence of Religious Rights, Freedom of Conscience and Spiritual Values were laid on 19 October 1988 in Veliko Turnovo, a former capital of Bulgaria and still regarded as the country's spiritual centre. The date was chosen in honour of one of Bulgaria's most venerated medieval spiritual leaders, St John of Rila. The Committee was headed by Orthodox hieromonk Hristofor Subev, a 42-year-old Veliko Turnovo priest and former atomic physicist. The other committee members, all belonging to the Orthodox church, consisted of two other clerics, a nun and five lay people. Fr Subev declared that the Committee's intention was to be an independent, non-political organisation of clerics and lay people, concerned with all faiths active in Bulgaria. Its activities would comply strictly with the prescriptions of the Bulgarian Constitution, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Helsinki and Vienna CSCE final agreements, as well as

with the words and spirit of Holy Scripture.

The Committee sought legal recognition and registration on 9 March 1989, the feast of the Forty Holy Martyrs — in symbolic anticipation of a hostile reception on the part of the authorities. It declared that its primary aim was to campaign for an end to the secular and political powers' systematic interference in church affairs and religious life. Secondly, it would aim to promote freedom of conscience by protesting at the discrimination experienced by believers in public and professional life and by striving to obtain the legalisation of religious instruction for the young (on a voluntary basis). The Committee's third aim was to campaign for freedom of religious information. It called for the introduction of religious programmes on Bulgarian radio and television, including the broadcasting of services on major holy days. It proposed that the Bible should be published in a mass edition, available freely to all, and that religious publishing houses be allowed to operate without hindrance. As a fourth, longer-term objective, the Committee called for the full legalisation of religious charitable work, in the form of hospitals, hostels, old people's homes and the like. Its fifth aim was to promote understanding and tolerance among the followers of the different religious faiths in Bulgaria. This meant that the Committee opposed the forcible assimilation of ethnic minorities and would, for example, defend the rights of Muslims to practise their faith freely.

Fr Subev had previously attracted attention to himself when, following what both the state and the Orthodox hierarchy considered to be unacceptable religious activity (such as leading open-air processions with icons, without official authorisation, and

organising religious instruction of children), he was forcibly 'exiled' to Cherepish monastery for two months at the beginning of 1989. Efforts here to make him 'see the error of his ways' were fruitless and it could have come as no surprise to him and his committee to learn in due course that their application for legal registration had been rejected. (The area court deemed that the aims of promoting religious education for children and charitable work were illegal.) At a meeting on 28 March 1989, the Bulgarian Orthodox Holy Synod, headed by Patriarch Maksim, formally condemned the Independent Committee and urged the judicial authorities not to recognise it. It declared that a dissenting committee of this kind was completely inconsistent with the canons and traditions of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, with the Statute of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and with the established order of the ecclesiastical structure in the country. The Synod was reported by the state media as expressing complete disagreement with the 'formulations and theses underlying the matter made public by the self-proclaimed committee'. It called on Orthodox clergy and laity

not to yield to the false and deceitful words of persons who are not vested with directive and executive power in the structure of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and who have not been authorised to serve as evangelical deacons among our people.

To what extent the authorities regarded the formation of a tiny dissident religious rights group as a seriously menacing element in Bulgarian society is a matter for conjecture. Religious activism had been targeted and effectively stifled in the very early days of the communist regime and, for decades, none of the Christian denominations, least of all

the Orthodox, had posed the slightest threat to the political status quo. Nevertheless, it seems significant that, less than a month after the Committee had applied to be registered and just one week after the Synod's condemnatory statement, a meeting took place between Todor Zhivkov and Patriarch Maksim. The head of state expressed his appreciation of the 'highly positive civic attitude' of the Orthodox Church and its help in upholding the 'moral and patriotic unity of the Bulgarian nation'. The Patriarch assured Zhivkov that, fulfilling its mission 'in full compliance with the fundamental principles of Christianity', his church would continue to work for renewal, peace and for the 'enhancement of the authority of the People's Republic of Bulgaria and its further all-round progress'.

The Orthodox periodical *Tsurkoven vestnik* (*Church Herald*) of 12 May 1989 carried an 'address by the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church to the clergy and laity' on its front page. The hierarchy had clearly felt unable simply to ignore Fr Subev and the activities of the Committee. The address described the Orthodox Church as an ancient national institution and recalled its legal status under the existing regime and its contribution to the social life of the country. It affirmed that church-state relations were based on 'the principles of mutual respect, self-government and propriety'. In an obvious reference to the Independent Committee's demand for freedom from political interference in church affairs, the address spoke of 'the constitutionally guaranteed freedom to confess religious faith . . . unregulated by any kind of secular institution'. Ignoring the fact (admitted even in an article in the state-controlled newspaper *Sofia News* at about that time) that Bibles were nowhere to be had in Bulgaria,

and avoiding the issue of the ban on formal religious instruction of the young, it spoke of the Synod's 'planned and systematic publishing of Holy Scriptures' and the 'evangelisation of her spiritual children'. The Synod called for a spirit of obedience to the Orthodox hierarchy and reiterated its unanimous stand against the Independent Committee. The latter, it said, had 'usurped the right to be a protector of the holy Bulgarian Orthodox Church'.

It was during May 1989 that widespread protests and hunger strikes in favour of religious and cultural rights broke out in the ethnic Turkish areas of the country. Armed force was used by the security services to quell demonstrations and there were some deaths. Todor Zhivkov eventually made a broadcast speech in which he blamed foreign radio stations and extremists in the Muslim community for causing the disturbances. He attacked Turkey's 'anti-Bulgarian campaign' and challenged the Ankara government to open Turkey's borders, saying that any Bulgarian Muslims wishing to leave the country could then do so. As is well known, Turkey accepted this challenge. Many 'extremists' and ringleaders of the protests were quickly expelled from Bulgaria and the mass exodus followed, with disastrous consequences for the country's economy.

While both the Supreme Religious Council of Muslims and the Orthodox Synod announced their approval of Zhivkov's fateful speech, Fr Subev was one of a number of human and religious rights supporters to make public declarations of solidarity with the ethnic Turks in their struggle for their rights at this time. He was consequently arrested on 14 June and transferred to Sofia central prison in late July; he was finally freed on 4 September.

About a month after his release and some five weeks before the downfall of Zhivkov, the Independent Committee addressed a petition to the Bulgarian National Assembly calling for a series of radical alterations both to the Constitution and to existing legislation on religion. Very precise references were made to those articles considered to be in need of amendment or deletion and the relevance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Helsinki and Vienna agreements strongly emphasised once again. The document was signed by 240 persons, including Zhelyu Zhelev, a leading intellectual dissident who has since become leader of the main opposition body in Bulgaria.

Following the accession of Petur Mladenov, the Independent Committee has continued to pursue its activities. On 7 December 1989, about 2,500 people took part in a march from the ancient church of St Sofia in the capital to the National Assembly building where petitions for religious freedom bearing some 7,000 signatures were handed in. The marchers in this unprecedented demonstration, led by Fr Subev, carried banners bearing such slogans as 'God is Love', 'God and Bulgaria United', 'A Bible in Every Home' and 'Faith — an alternative to Totalitarianism'. Fr Subev has taken a prominent and outspoken part in other pro-democracy rallies and has been quoted and even interviewed in the national press.

In December 1989, the Independent Committee joined with leading opposition groups, including *Eco-glasnost*, *Podkrepa* and the Club for *Glasnost* and Democracy, to form the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF). Among the aims of this body, as reported by the official Bulgarian news agency BTA (7 December 1989), are: a constitutional guarantee of the equality of non-

believers and believers; a new democratic law relating to the profession of religion; the legislative regulation of free religious activity, with religious denominations independent of the state; the abolition of the Committee for the Affairs of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the Religious Denomination (presently under the Foreign Ministry, with a Deputy Foreign Minister as chairman). On 25 December 1989, the Independent Committee was at last registered and given legal status.

During the same month, it became clear that both the Bulgarian Orthodox hierarchy and the Muslim leadership, headed by Chief Mufti Gendzhev, had very considerably modified the passive, acquiescent stance which they had maintained for decades vis-à-vis the state. Adjusting their attitudes to the new expectations of their constituents and no doubt feeling that they ran little risk in taking advantage of the general climate of reformism, both approached the authorities, seeking increased rights and freedoms. In a document dated 18 December, addressed to Stanko Todorov, chairman of the National Assembly, the Orthodox Synod listed 28 proposals which, it said, would enable it to 'fulfil its ecclesiastical and patriotic duty in the spiritual and moral sphere' and assist the government 'in the wholehearted restructuring and democratisation of our country'. With few exceptions, the proposals made were of primary relevance to the Orthodox and covered such objectives as the return of confiscated church property, permission to build new churches, the establishment of Orthodox social institutions and the salaries of church officials. The more universal reforms called for included the establishment of Christmas and Easter as national holidays and the greater availability of the Bible and other Christian

literature. The document, although affirming that a new Constitution and new legislation should include basic principles guaranteeing full religious freedom, was far less fundamental and comprehensive than the proposals set out by the Independent Committee. However, it did propose that a (long overdue) Assembly of Clergy and Laity (*Tsürkovno-naroden sübor*) should be convened in the autumn of 1990.

Chief Mufti Gendzhev, interviewed by the Bulgarian daily *Trud* complained now of religious discrimination against the Muslim community, admitted the closure of some mosques and other restrictions affecting the followers of Islam. In a television appearance on 26 December 1989, he specified the need for a theological school, a Muslim periodical and other literature. He called for the amendment of existing legislation on religion and, at a meeting with Mladenov two days later, he raised the vexed question of Muslims' being allowed to use their Islamic names. Gendzhev's sentiments now coincided in many respects with those expressed by the Muslims who fled the country during the previous summer, complaining of persecution. They differ radically from the line traditionally followed by the Muslim leadership in Bulgaria and typified in a declaration submitted personally to Zhivkov in October 1989 by Gendzhev himself. This was adopted at a session of the Muslim Supreme Religious Council on 30 August 1989 and, at the time, BTA reported that

on behalf of the Bulgarian Muslim clergy, on behalf of the religious people, and on behalf of himself, Dr Nedyo Gendzhev gave thanks once again for the complete freedom of the Islamic religion provided by the Bulgarian state, and the moral and material support

rendered to the Muslim population.

The prompt agreement by the state to rescind measures taken under Zhivkov and to allow Muslims to choose their own names, use their own language and practise their own religion freely resulted in an upsurge of nationalist and anti-Turkish feeling in Bulgaria during January 1990. This appears to have been fostered by, among others, surviving hard-line Zhivkovist party officials in some provincial ethnic Turkish areas, in an effort to deflect the nation's attention away from the moves being urged to bring about democratic reform generally. Noisy demonstrations were held in a number of places, including Sofia. However, following government assurances that no Turkish enclave would ever be permitted, that Bulgarian would remain the only official language, and it having been made clear that no separatist or autonomist political parties would be allowed to exist, the protests eventually subsided.

While, at the time of writing, there is no indication of any significant change in the position of the Catholic Church in Bulgaria resulting from the recent political changes, both Pentecostals and Baptists have met to elect new leaders. Pastor Viktor Viróhev of Burgas now heads the registered Pentecostal Church, while the new president of the Baptist Union is Pastor Iordan Gospodinov from Varna. An 'Initiative Committee', comprising representatives of the Baptist, Congregational, Methodist and Pentecostal churches and the charismatic 'Church of God' met in Sofia on 24 December 1989 and passed a resolution setting out a number of demands. They appealed for a new law on religious freedom, the removal of restrictions on work with young people and permission to import Bibles, hymnals and

Christian literature. The committee also called for the organisation of a new Christian youth association, for permission to print an evangelical newspaper and to set up an Evangelical Alliance of Bulgaria. It joined with other denominations in demanding that Christmas and Easter be celebrated as official holidays.

The government has declared that free, multi-party elections will take place and, at the time of writing, these are expected in June 1990. The opposition UDF would prefer a postponement until November, but will probably have to resign itself to an earlier date. In the meantime, 'round-table' talks have been taking place, involving the government, the Communist and Agrarian parties, delegates from the constituent organisations of the UDF and various other bodies. Fr Hristofor Subev has continued to press the Independent Committee's demands for religious reforms. At the invitation of the government, the Orthodox hierarchy is also represented at the talks and some friction between Fr Subev and the elderly Metropolitan Pimen of Nevrokop has already been reported.

Of all the surviving Communist parties in the 'satellite' countries, the 'reformed' BCP is seen as having the best electoral prospects. It is nevertheless difficult, at this early state in the campaign, with much political manoeuvring already taking place and much more likely to develop, to envisage how the population will ultimately vote. Among other things, the criteria required for the registration of political parties have yet to be clarified. From the religious point of view, an embryo Muslim party, the Movement for the Rights and Freedoms of Turks and Muslims in Bulgaria, claiming 20,000 members and over 100 local branches (in January 1990), may, if allowed to participate, attract a significant pro-

portion of the Islamic vote — although it is not alone in this field. A Christian Democratic Party and a Christian Republican Party have appeared on the electoral scene, alongside the many small parties which have burgeoned in the recent past. Fr Subev has stated that he will not seek election himself, but some of the Independent Committee's ad-

herents may decide to do so. However, none of the parties so far generally regarded as significant opponents of the BCP can be identified as strongly representative of the Christian outlook. Bulgarian believers are likely to find that they have a difficult choice to make.

ROBERT HOARE

Romania

Political change did not come to Romania until the army withdrew its loyalty from President Nicolae Ceausescu. The demonstrations which toppled him were by far the largest to have occurred during 41 years of communist rule. The only previous cases of popular unrest during that time were the strike of the Jiu Valley miners in 1977 and the Brasov riots, in which an estimated 10,000 factory workers participated in 1987. Ceausescu's repression of the Romanian population was so thorough that a spontaneous popular uprising on a national scale was the only possible threat to his hold on power. Throughout his 24 year leadership of the Romanian Communist Party, there had been no serious attempt to oust him within the party, and there were no organisations outside the party challenging its monopoly of power. Despite the lack of organized resistance, the actions of the demonstrators, who faced death by coming onto the streets, showed the intensity and scale of popular anti-government feeling.

Demonstrations which began in Timisoara on the night of 16 Dec-

ember, continued into the next day as troops opened fire on the demonstrators. Eye-witnesses report that, instead of dispersing, the crowd moved towards the source of fire, some baring their chests to the guns. After thousands of demonstrators (the number was later said to be much lower) were believed to have been killed in Timisoara, unrest spread to the nearby towns of Arad and Oradea, Cluj, Brasov and finally the capital, Bucharest, on 21 December.

On 20 December even larger demonstrations, involving 100,000 people, occurred in Timisoara, where the army had been guarding the streets since 18 December. This time the army withdrew and sided with the demonstrators. In Bucharest an officially organised rally in support of President Ceausescu on 22 December turned against him. The crowd in front of the government headquarters began to shout 'Timisoara' and to heckle him. The rally was televised live, and thus encouraged mass demonstrations in the capital. After initial hesitation the army and Securitate fired on the demonstrators, but protests continued. On