

## Religion in Bulgaria after 1989: historical and socio-cultural aspects

### Introduction

Speaking of religion in eastern Europe and especially in the Balkans, and in particular in Bulgaria, the specific socio-cultural characteristics of the region, which are quite different from those of western Europe, should be taken clearly into account. This does not mean that the Balkans are not Europe, nor that the local states are post-Ottoman hybrids between the west and the orient. The Balkans are, indeed, Europe and in it live people who are Europeans in spirit and in self-consciousness, but this is not the well-known western Europe; it is one different, alternative Europe, a Balkan Europe or, in other words, the other Europe. And when meeting one close and yet alien reality, we should not be confused by the similarities between them, nor exaggerate the differences, but to try to comprehend it within the boundaries of its own tradition which had created it in its present state. In this respect should be seen the specific ethnic and religious problems of the Balkans.

On 19 February 1990, the Head of the State of the Republic of Bulgaria and former Minister of Foreign Affairs in the government of Todor Zhivkov – Petar Mladenov – appeared on the occasion of the traditional celebrations at the monument of the national hero, Vasil Levski, accompanied only by two official representatives – Dobry Dzhurov, the military minister from the government of Zhivkov, and Maxim, the Patriarch of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. This was supposed to be interpreted as a sign of the rehabilitation of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and its promotion to the level of a state-representative institution, and also as an act of inviting the Church to take the position in Bulgarian society that it held before the communist regime, i.e. to the position that the Catholic Church has in Spain and Italy and the Orthodox Church in Greece, and the one to which the Russian Orthodox Church had already started to gain access.

However, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church did not succeed in gaining such a position in society. To find out how and why that happened, when 78% of the population of the country define themselves as Orthodox Christians, the historical specifics and the cultural traditions of Bulgarian society need to be analysed in detail.

### Sociological data and some specifics of the religious adjustment in Bulgaria

For better or for worse, the biggest Church, and the one most widely supported by the population in Bulgaria, has been able to gain, as an institution, virtually no political and social influence for itself during the past 12 years, thus leaving it, to a major degree, inert and indifferent. This, of course, saves it from the allegations of religious extremism and fundamentalism which are otherwise so frequently addressed to Orthodox churches – especially to the Serbian one during the wars in Yugoslavia, and also to the Russian and Greek ones. Even so, the inactivity of senior church clergy and the weakness of the Saint Synod as an institution do not deprive the Church itself – at the level of public opinion and consciousness – of influence and a certain role.

We are used to thinking of religion as united with the institution of the church, but in Bulgaria there is one more peculiar phenomenon which has its own historical and cultural origins: religious feeling is mainly one of everyday life connected with moral and cultural adjustments and which, often, is unbound from the senior structures of the Church. The role of this latent ‘religiousness’ should not be belittled; it can also be found in sociological data concerning the religious self-definition of Bulgarians (in most cases, it is based on everyday religious feelings and on the associated cultural inheritance), and it is revealed also as an active social mechanism, for example in the formation of public opinion and the social behaviour of the separate groups.

Bulgaria today is a small country with a population of some six million Orthodox Christians and a minority of just less than one million Muslims. Sociological data relating to the religiousness of Bulgarian citizens show as follows:

**Table 1 – Religious affiliation**

Religion	Total	Bulgarian	Bulgarian-Muslim	Turkish	Roma
Christians	79%	96%	–	–	49%
Muslims	16%	1%	100%	98%	30%
Other	–	–	–	–	–
None	5%	4%	–	2%	21%

In Bulgaria, 79% of the population defines itself as Christian, 16% as Muslim and 5% as atheist.<sup>1</sup> Amongst the Christian population, 86% define themselves as Orthodox and 13% as non-aligned Christians (Table 2):

**Table 2 – Christian affiliation**

Christian church	Total	Bulgarian	Bulgarian Muslim	Turkish	Roma
Eastern Orthodox	86%	87%	–	–	72%
Catholic	*%	*%	–	–	-
Protestant	*%	*%	–	–	4%
Non-aligned	13%	13%	–	–	24%

\* Catholics and Protestants together amount to less than 1%.

Bearing in mind the historical specifics of the religious tradition in Bulgaria, it is obvious that the data can be extremely misleading, as only a small part of the huge percentage of people that call themselves Christians are indeed religious; Orthodoxy is comprehended as a national and cultural identification, the same as with Islam. This can be clarified with the aid of data for the separate ethnic groups in Bulgaria – 96%

1 Survey of EURO 2000 and BBSS Gallup and Balkan British Social Surveys.

of Bulgarians define themselves as Christian and 98% of the Turkish minority define themselves as Muslim. The ethnic connotation of the religious characteristics is obvious. Bulgarian Muslims are only 1% of the population, but this so-called ‘Pomak’ group are 100% Islamic – again, there is a cultural tradition. There are no Turkish-Christians; the 2% of the Turkish population that are not Muslims define themselves as atheist. More peculiar is the situation with the Roma population, which participates simultaneously in three traditions – a traditional Islamicism; a strong Bulgarian cultural influence (those becoming Bulgarian); and the new Roma communal identity – 49% define themselves as Christian (72% of whom are Eastern Orthodox) and 30% as Muslim, while a significant 21% say they are atheist (a fact which is in accordance with unidentified superstitions). The instability of the Roma socio-cultural identity is a reason for the large number of Roma (4%) who are supporters of new cults.

The weak religiousness of the population makes most of the participants in the survey think that the supporters of the different religions in Bulgaria are not fanatics. The data show that around 30% of those questioned consider Turkish people to be religious fanatics (bearing in mind the historical tradition and community adjustments this is a small percentage and, of course, Turkish people themselves do not agree with these kinds of definition), while 11% consider Roma to be fanatics (a quite arbitrary and absurd allegation, although the percentage figure is low). In contrast, less than 1% consider Bulgarians to be fanatics.

In summing up these data, we can point to one clear fact – on local grounds, there is almost no religious fanaticism in Bulgaria. The opinion of the degree to which their groups are considered to be religious fanatics corresponds relatively well to their degree of religiousness – strongest among the Turkish, weaker among Roma, almost non-existent among Bulgarians; this is why it is clear that few consider Bulgarians to be religious fanatics. At the same time, the 16.7% of the Turkish population who declare that they do not want a Muslim for a neighbour can be counterbalanced by the 83.3% who do not declare anything of the sort. As is shown both by the sociological data and historical development thus far, religious tolerance in Bulgaria is quite strong among Christians as well as among Muslims and, as long as there is no extremist outside pressure placed on these communities, it is unlikely that they will be involved in serious contradictions.

To what extent the Bulgarian population is indeed religious can be seen from another table in the same EURO 2000 survey:

**Table 3 – Depth of religious feeling**

<b>You are:</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Bulgarian</b>	<b>Bulgarian-Muslim</b>	<b>Turkish</b>	<b>Gypsy</b>
Deeply religious	12%	9%	29%	28%	15%
Religious to some extent	49%	50%	48%	47%	49%
Mostly unreligious	24%	26%	24%	19%	16%
Entirely unreligious	12%	14%	–	2%	12%
I cannot say	2%	2%	–	4%	8%

In total, only 12% define themselves as deeply religious – exactly the same percentage who define themselves as entirely unreligious, some of whom, nevertheless, had earlier defined themselves as belonging to one or another of the particular religious traditions. It should be borne in mind that declarations like these often do not correspond to the actual truth. Probably half of the Bulgarians who are religious ‘to some extent’ are mostly religious only on an ordinary level, who seldom go to church and whose faith in God is often unsupported by even an elementary theological culture. Even more meaningful are the data from Table 2 which indicate that 13% of Bulgarian citizens define themselves as Christian without pointing to which church they belong.

The main conclusions from the analysis of the data are as follows:

1. the contradictions between religiousness and the level of attachment to Christianity are due to Orthodoxy often not being comprehended as a religion but as a national and cultural identity
2. the declarations of Orthodox faith are, most often, not based even on formal bonds with the institutions of the Orthodox Church, and refer to latent religious adjustments in which presumed faith in God is dressed up in the form of a day-to-day religion drawn from a past oral patriarchal culture and from its beliefs and customs
3. the significant level of religious tolerance and the lack of extremism and fundamentalism are obvious. It is unlikely that this is due to the comprehension of religiousness as a national identity, from which situation originates the most major ethnic conflicts in the Balkans. It is more likely that this is connected to the specifics of ordinary religiousness and their functioning on the level of a non-literary type of culture which does not suggest global plays and ‘Crusades’, but the quiet reproduction of the systems of customs and faiths in relatively isolated communities. Such day-to-day Christianity is not directed towards the outside but the inside of the community.

Certainly the following questions arise:

- what is the role of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in the organisation and the supporting of this rather vague day-to-day Christian religiousness?
- what is the place of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in the socio-cultural adjustments of Bulgarians?
- what is its authority in the field of morality, public opinion and the problems of national importance?

All of this guides us towards a history of the Bulgarian Church.

The contradictory mass of data can confuse any researcher who does not know Bulgarian history and culture and the adjustments of the Bulgarian population well enough. To clarify the condition of religion in Bulgaria, a pure sociological approach is evidently insufficient. More light on the problem can probably be shed by a cultural-historical, or cultural-anthropological approach. This is necessary also because of the interrupted state tradition of Bulgarians – their whole community, all their social mechanisms and the traditional non-literary community (rustic and guild-based).

Namely, this is the basis on which grows the contemporary modern Bulgarian community. These facts define the cultural-historical and the social-psychological approach to analysing the data.

### Historical specifics of Christianity in Bulgaria

That 78% of Bulgarian citizens define themselves as Eastern Orthodox Christians, compared to less than 1% for alternative Christian religions, including Catholic and Protestant, may thus be misleading although, in this context, it quickly becomes clear that, in talking about the role of religion in Bulgaria, we understand mainly the Bulgarian Orthodox Church for Bulgarians and the Office of the Mufti for the Turkish minority. However, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church is also quite a peculiar institution (not as a religious doctrine but in terms of its history and its public role), and it has quite a strange destiny without a quick overview of which we would not be able to situate and comprehend its contemporary condition. This requires us to understand it in the context of its own historical traditions. It should be borne in mind that Bulgarian history is an interrupted one, characterised by a shortage of historical memory and a loss of established traditions.

It is claimed that there are three main components in the formation of the Bulgarian ethnos – the Thracians, the Slavs and the proto-Bulgarians.

Christianity spread surprisingly fast during the 1<sup>st</sup> century among the Thracian tribes situated on the territory of today's Bulgaria; to the extent that important church councils were held in Serdica (today's Sofia) and in Philipopol (Plovdiv) in 343 and 344. However, Bulgarian history is not directly connected with these byzantine Thracians (i.e. Christians) and, soon, the whole peninsula was covered by heathen tribes – the Slavs during the V<sup>th</sup> century while, during 681, Byzantium was forced to recognise the heathen state of the Bulgars south of the Danube.<sup>2</sup> Within the country, ruled from the capital city (Pliska or Preslav) and by administrative centres (comitats) lived together different tribes (mostly Slavonic but also Byzantine).

Byzantine analysts connect the religion of the Bulgars with worship of the sun and the moon and of the stars, probably comprehended as immortal divinities – Tangra and his energy ('Orenda') and, for a long period of time, the attitude of the Bulgars towards Christianity remained ambivalent.

Christianity was accepted as the state religion by the Bulgarian *yubigi chanas* Boris and the future king Boris-Mikhail during 865 after a harsh, rebellious struggle with senior clerics and with the heathens. Following a long period of the lobbying of the saintly thrones in Rome and in Constantinople aiming at the greater independence of the Bulgarian Church, the latter became autonomous in 870 and, later, autocephalous before, in 927, becoming recognised as a patriarchy. Welcome from the point of view of the maximisation of the independence of the Bulgarian Church was the appearance of Slav missionaries who carried with them religious texts written in the Slavonic language created by Cyril and Methodius, after their expulsion from their mis-

- 2 Bulgars of *yubigi chanas* Asparuch, expelled from their state in the Caucasus, are a conglomerate of heathen tribes in which the Iranian-Sarmatic urban culture became mixed with the nomadic culture of the horse-riding people.

sions in Morava and Panonia. King Boris I was happy to shelter them – with the official language becoming Slavonic and, soon, the appearance of a cult dedicated to the Bulgarian saints. Thus, the Christian religion became both an ethno-forming and consolidating factor in the multi-ethnic Bulgarian Empire – an important factor in our comprehension of the role of the Bulgarian Church in its own further historical development and, also, of the common socio-cultural adjustments of the Bulgarian people.

**Table 4 – Comparative development of the Bulgarian Church**

Orthodox country	Official State Christianity	Autonomic Church	Autocephalous Archbishopric	Patriarchy
Bulgaria	865	870		I. 927- 1018 II. 1235-1394 III. 1953
Serbia	879		1219	1346
Russia	988			1589
Romania	XIV century	XIV century	XIV century	1925

The ambitions of the new Bulgarian leader – Tsar Simeon the Great – were huge: to conquer Constantinople and become Bulgarian-Byzantine Emperor. He was not completely successful in these endeavours but he was able to force the Patriarch of Constantinople to crown him alternative ‘Emperor of the Bulgarians and Byzantines’ while he enthroned himself as Bulgarian Patriarch (in 927). At that time, the Bulgarian Church and Ancient Bulgarian literature blossomed (in the ‘Golden Century’), while a huge missionary activity was developed in Illyria – up as far as the Adriatic Sea. In the X<sup>th</sup> century, the Bulgarian Church practically laid down the basis of Slavonic culture and civilisation. After the death of Simeon I, the Bulgarian Empire became the eastern sector of the dividing Christian Church. This is extremely important in defining the character of the Bulgarian Church as Eastern Orthodox, although in a quite specific form.

However, not just the colossal deed of the translation and distribution of Christian texts in Ancient Bulgarian (the country had become an administrative centre after 893) played a role in setting down the specific character of Christianity in Bulgaria. Initially, the Bulgarian Church was unable to liberate itself from its ancient spirit – nobles wore medallions on one side adorned with the sign of Tangra and, on the other, with the face of the Mother of God or, instead, covered their runic spells and talismans with words from the holy writings. This activity concerns state and spiritual officers, so we can only guess what it was like amongst the ordinary population. However, the Bulgarian Church continued to fight for some time these problems of spiritual syncretism, which frequently took, at the level of the ordinary population, the form of inveterate heresies, the most widespread of which was the dualistic Bogumil teaching.<sup>3</sup> The mixture of heathenism and Christianity is another important factor in comprehending the development of Bulgarian religious perception. After the downfall of the Bulgarian medieval Empire, the Church was able to modernise its essential characteristics, which remain valid to this day.

The dramatic history of the Bulgarian Medieval Church continued after the temporary downfall of the Bulgarian Empire under Byzantium at the hand of Emperor Basil II Bulgarophygon (killer of Bulgarians) who, nevertheless, preserved its structures as the independent Bulgarian Ohrid Archbishopric (1018 – 1767). With the restoration of Bulgaria as a country during the XII<sup>th</sup> century, the Church joined Rome for a short time, during the time of the Papacy of Innocent III.<sup>4</sup> However, the downfall of Constantinople during the IV<sup>th</sup> Crusade changed the situation in the region. The Bulgarian Emperor Ivan Asen II who, at that time, was the most powerful and influential ruler in the Balkans, broke with the Roman Church and went afresh to Orthodoxy. The Bulgarian Patriarchy was restored in 1235, and the capital at Trnovo was declared a third Rome.<sup>5</sup>

After the death of Ivan Asen II, the Bulgarian Empire suffered many internecine and other cataclysms connected with the Tatar invasion and the blooming of Serbia. At the time of the next to last Bulgarian medieval Emperor, Ivan Alexander, local culture had its second spiritual and literary blossoming (the ‘Second Golden Century’), connected with one specific event in the life of the Church: under the Hesychastic school of thought, official religion became initially disputable and, soon, was accepted for canonic spiritual study. Thus was formed the next set of specifics that increased the difference of the Bulgarian from the other Orthodox churches.<sup>6</sup> Hesychasm created a complicated system of mystical symbols reflected both in the iconography and in the literature. A campaign for the purity of the Ancient Bulgarian Church language was also started at this time.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, in Trnovo the celebrated Patriarch Eutimios, Grigory Tzambalak and Konstantin Kostenechki worked on the literature and, indeed, undertook colossal activity in writing, restoring, copying and revising the literature of the Church.<sup>8</sup> Later, this was of immense importance in

- 3 The heretic priest Bogumil preached during the X<sup>th</sup> century a Bulgarian variant of Persian Manicheanism that takes his own name. The Bogumil gains were never spread widely but they did turn into a serious problem not only for the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Later, the sect changed and joined the so-called Paulines and, up to the dawn of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, continued to be followed in some Pauline villages. In these, the strongest influence is that of Catholicism in Bulgaria. Parts of these heretic communities later accept Islam. The inheritors of the post-Muslim heretics are the so-called ‘Pomaks’ (or Bulgarian Muslims) in the Rodopi mountains and, also, the Bosnian Muslims.
- 4 During the rule of two monarchs – Emperor Kaloyan and Emperor Boril – Bulgaria remained within the bosom of the Church of Rome; at that time were conducted the only instances of mass persecutions and inquisitions of heretics.
- 5 Some Latin influence can be found in Bulgarian culture from this époque, but there is no substantial influence in later times.
- 6 Hesychasm, a mystical philosophy developed by the monks of Mount Athos, preaches the ability of the soul, through fasting, simple prayer and contemplation, to return to its condition of heavenly bliss that it held before original sin, and to be able to view uncreated heavenly lights (the no-being energies) remaining near God’s nature.
- 7 Texts from the time of Emperor Simeon are accepted as being written in saintly and God-inspired language and should not be distorted, changed or defiled, while the Slav letters themselves are held to have mystic and symbolic content.

the consolidation and preservation of the Bulgarian ethnos (with its own language, specific church (under its Patriarchy) and its own saints and Emperors), reflected both through spiritual rituals and church legends. Indeed, the Bulgarian Patriarchy was the first patriarchy after the leading five, acknowledged as thus by the Orthodox Church (see Table 5). This historical fact, however, unfortunately loses its meaning after the five-century breach in state and church traditions – except, perhaps, as what might have been indicated as an unclear, distant memory inspiring the national renaissance during the XVIII-XIX centuries.

**Table 5 – Hierarchy of Orthodox Patriarchies**

<b>Patriarchies in order of creation</b>	<b>Patriarchies according to their hierarchy today</b>
1. Rome	1. Constantinople
2. Alexandrian	2. Alexandrian
3. Antiochan	3. Antiochan
4. Constantinople	4. Jerusalem
5. Jerusalem	5. Russian
6. Bulgarian	6. Serbian
7. Serbian	7. Georgian
8. Russian	8. Romanian
9. Georgian	9. Bulgarian
10. Romanian	

With the downfall of Trnovo under Ottoman pressure, Eutimios of Trnovo was sent into exile and, after his death, the Bulgarian Church became widowed. The Ottoman authority recognised only Greek clergy as the legal representatives of Christianity in its newly-created Empire. If, up to that point, the Greek Church had not argued over the dignity of the Bulgarian patriarchy, the bishops now denied the existence of a senior Bulgarian clergy, referred to the liturgy in Ancient Bulgarian as barbarian, and systematically destroyed Bulgarian-Slavic books. Gradually, the senior clergy disappeared, deprived of the conditions for existence and expelled from the senior levels of the Church hierarchical organisation. Bulgarian bishops remained only among their congregations – in the villages, in the towns and in the numerous preserved monasteries.

- 8 Emblematic of the spiritual level of that time and the erudition of the writers is, for example, one passage in a work by Kostenechki, in which he proves the spherical shape of the Earth which he had found in the writings of ancient authors. Unfortunately, all this high spiritual culture and its several-centuries tradition were irretrievably destroyed or taken outside the territory of Bulgaria after the XV<sup>th</sup> century.

After a short period of spiritual gleam<sup>9</sup> in the subsequent continuing decline of the Bulgarian Church, the attack on the Ohrid Archbishopric by French clergy in 1767 deprived it of any centre and any official right to exist.<sup>10</sup> The glorious past of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church remained only a memory in the monasteries which, despite the subsequent tragic decline in the religious culture of the clergy and of the population, had nevertheless once been able to render the Orthodox Christian and Slavic self-definition of Bulgarians as firstly a religious, and then an ethnic, national and spiritual – but not purely religious – landmark, as well as a symbol of pride and the union of the community.

The Bulgarian national renaissance began as a real religious renaissance – initially through sermons written in common language and then through the writing and distribution of the passions of the Bulgarian saints and of the history of the Church and the state (by Paisii Hilendarski), and, ultimately, both translated and original books of sermons and interpretations of Christian Law. This was understood as standing in opposition to the Islam of the ruling Turks. A new public sphere was created at the beginning of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century; in it, Bulgarian everyday Christianity, under the influence of spiritual teachers such as Sophrony Vrachanski and Neophit Hilendarski, was understood by its followers as a more truthful and pure version of Christianity than the one otherwise being taught. The Bulgarian language of the Christian texts was considered derivative of a sincere, modest patriarchal religiousness and different to the rather tainted deeds of the Greek-speaking clergy. For the first time, the Bulgarian people was, indeed, mobilised nationally in the fight for the restoration of the independent Bulgarian Church.<sup>11</sup>

The Bulgarian exarchate was registered by the Sultan in 1870, but was not recognised by Russia and Constantinople – it was declared schismatic. Orthodox Christianity in Bulgaria thereafter turned from a religious factor behind the national liberation movement into a spiritual one – many of the movement's enlightened and revolutionary activists were former and current members of the clergy.

In the liberated kingdom and, later, empire of Bulgaria, Orthodoxy was able to preserve its role in national identification as the official religion. The power and influence of the 'official' Orthodox Church was not only religious, it was patriotic. Bulgarian and Orthodoxy were synonym concepts in texts at the beginning of the XX<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup> Despite the praise for and the wealth of the Church, it was not able to

9 The temporary restoration of the Serbian Patriarchy at the time of the Grand Vizier Mehmed Sokolievich placed Sofia under its jurisdiction and, thus, spiritual life in this field gained temporary progress – many new monasteries and churches were inaugurated, old ones restored and notable literature created.

10 The partial Catholic missionary which had begun in the XVII<sup>th</sup> century, in the Pauline communes, was also wrecked after the unsuccessful rebellion at the centre of Bulgarian Catholicism – Chiprovtsi.

11 Began in 1860 by the clergymen Ilarion Makariopolski, Aksentii Veleshki and Paisii Plovdivski.

12 To such an extent that Pomaks, Paulines and Bulgarian Catholics – and even atheists – were considered non-Bulgarians: Elenkov, Ivan (2001): *The Catholics in Bulgaria*, Sofia.

overcome completely the lack of its long-lost organisational and missionary traditions while, in its parishes, it sought more to preserve the still-extant non-literary culture. This is, perhaps, one reason why the Bulgarian Church has basically not bent to the ideas of extreme nationalists or fundamentalists. Furthermore, one of the main initiators of the saving of Bulgarian Jews during World War II was the Bulgarian Orthodox Church – in the guise of Exarch Stephen and metropolitan bishop Cyril. The moral authority of the clergy was significant but, on the whole, it was not aided by solid theological knowledge. It is typical that some of the clergy retained their positions as rebels – communists, insurgents and anarchists.<sup>13</sup>

The Church was preserved as an institution after 1945 when the communists came into power, despite mockery and repression. During 1945, the schism was finally declared to be over and, in 1953, the Bulgarian Patriarchy was restored.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the first patriarchy to be recognised after the leading five now turned out to be the last of the nine patriarchies existing in the XX<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup>

The stagnation in which the Bulgarian Orthodox Church found itself during the next few years turned out to be fatal for its still weak structures and its unsatisfactory theological preparation. Changes in and nominations to the Saint Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church were made either by the State Council or only with its approval; all the initiatives and nominations that did not receive such approval were rejected. It could also be supposed that the main body of senior clergy, in one way or another, was working for the state security. No matter that the Church was not hindered, it also was not being helped: its employees and their relatives had no right to take any official positions of responsibility, while the population was put through different obstacles in their efforts to visit temples and even in celebrating church festivals. The absurd attempt to hinder the celebration of traditional Christian festivals and to exchange these for professional ones turned out, as a whole, to be a failure – which, perhaps, shows some signs of vitality of Christianity on a day-to-day basis. However, the religious culture of the population seriously declined with the final disintegration of traditional cultural forms and the forced inactivity of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church; weak knowledge in the religious field was forgotten, with Christianity turning entirely into a dying tradition of indefinite common moral adjustments while the number of atheists who alienate themselves even from formal holiday rituals increased.

Turning to the Turkish minority, it was forcibly ‘educated’ in atheism and its religion denounced as superstition. Ultimately, the disastrous ‘renaissance process’ which aimed to turn Bulgarian Muslims into socialist Bulgarians in fact inflamed Muslim religiousness – again in terms of community identification: the religious persecutions of representatives of different ethnoses<sup>16</sup> consolidated themselves as Turkish

13 Priests even played an important role in the outrages against King Ferdinand following 1925 in the church of St. Kral.

14 However, only within the boundaries of the state, i.e. the former schismatic Exarchate lost its wide territories in Macedonia and in Odrin’s Thracia.

15 As we saw in Table 5.

16 Tatars, Gagauz, Khazalbash, Roma, etc.

under the sign of Islam. Despite all of this, even after 1989, since which time world Islam has been seeking methodically to gain back its lost positions among Muslims in Bulgaria, not a small percentage of the local Turkish population remains atheist.

### **Changes after 1989 and hopes of a new religious renaissance**

Initially, it looked likely that, after 10 October 1989, there would be a new religious renaissance in Bulgaria, but these expectations were not justified; the fly-by-night cults faded away fast and their followers remained on the margins. In this sense, the role of religion in Bulgaria should perhaps be sought mainly within the historical tradition or in the socio-cultural adjustments that, to some extent, provide a foundation for hope for the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. However, it is dubious whether it will succeed in managing this new challenge because, instead of stabilising, we are witnessing inactivity, a lack of initiative and religious non-conformity within the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

### **Developments in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church after 1989**

Initially, nostalgic, repressed anti-communists did turn to the church, as did politicians looking for their own 'national' legitimacy for their leadership and patriotism. The anti-communist movement was headed by Father Christopher Sabev, whose actions were, however, more ridiculous and farcical than religious – for example, a blue neon cross on the top of the home of the Party, candlelit vigils, the chasing away of spirits, among which were those of communism. Others who supported the current Church were the monarchists – also from the right-wing. Patriarch Maxim had been invited to important events as a central figure and emblem of national consciousness by the time of Petar Mladenov, although the regard of left-wing forces for questions to do with the Church dates back to the time of religious non-conformity, when the Church was understood by some as being divided into blue (anti-communist) and red (socialist cadres) corners.

Even so, the history of religious non-conformity shows the pitiful and de-personalised condition, overall, of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. In 1995, the State Commission for Religion announced that the election of Patriarch Maxim had been falsified and was thus invalid. A small group of clergy led by Pimen, a metropolitan bishop from Nevrokop, who, at the time, had been hoping to receive the position of Patriarch by rights of seniority, and by Kalinik, from Vratza, who had been a member of the Saint Synod, formed a new synod. No matter whether the election of Maxim was false or not, according to the canon, once he has been enthroned as Patriarch he remains in that position. This is the character of dogma: not the election, but the performed ritual is what matters. Consequently, Maxim is recognised in the Orthodox Churches, although the alternative synod, supported in the main by arrant anti-communists and by opportunist Church reformers, is not giving up.

The theory of the officials and ecumenical groups who had inspired religious non-conformity was their aim of placing their people everywhere and turning the Bulgarian Orthodox Church into their territory. Behind it were visibly pragmatic and pure commercial interests – i.e. the restituted properties of the Church. Politicians, crimi-

nal-gangsters and public activists have started to pull the disunited Bulgarian Orthodox Church everywhere in the direction of their own interests. The participants in this non-conformity literally attack church buildings and end up in fist fights. The whole story of religious non-conformity is so appalling and indecent that the behaviour of the two sides – so essentially un-Christian and, frequently, anti-national and boorish – that it is not worthy of further description.

At the same time, Church activists from both sides have turned to part of the organised criminal underworld: the examples of so-called ‘Brother John’ from the new synod and bishop Genady from the old one are particularly sad. These two do not only reveal their connection with organised criminality but also demonstratively, and even proudly, advertise it. At the same time as the manipulation of the rents of Church properties are bringing in significant amounts of money, the employees and clergy of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church are receiving levels of remuneration that are quite miserable – even to the extent that the clergy have expressed a wish to become employees of the state.

The condition of Bulgarian monasteries, this symbol of the greatness and culture of Bulgaria, is also tragic. Bearing in mind that 86% of Christians in Bulgaria define themselves as Orthodox, while Catholics amount to less than 0.5%, it remains true that the number of monks and nuns in Orthodox monasteries is already lower than that in Catholic ones. Several new churches have been built – but it looks like more mosques are being built. National cultural monuments are becoming ruined because no money can be found for repairs. Not until recently has the Bulgarian Orthodox Church started even timid initiatives to collect resources for orphanages or for the repair of temples. Aid sent to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church usually gets only as far as the ‘clergy’ responsible for dividing it up.

Referring to the Office of the Mufti – this has also lived a life of religious non-conformity. Perhaps partly owing to the presence in the authority structures of the Turkish political party, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, Islam in Bulgaria has not undertaken exceptional initiatives and has limited itself within its own contingent.

### **The turning of religion into popular fashion**

This is another situation that religious life in Bulgaria has experienced since 1989. The spiritual hunger released after 1989 has given birth to new spiritual phenomena – including a large rump of people dealing with the paranormal, who had established their own organisations and institutes, something akin to a national ‘extrasensory net’. Excepting the Slav lexicon (combined probably with non-Slav grammatical and syntactical rules), there currently exists in Bulgaria a tendency towards witchcraft remaining probably from the old Slavs, as well as a widespread faith in the evil eye and in spells and in the means for their breaking. Nowadays, this faith is virtually untouched in its original type not only in the villages where magic is often practised and where, in the churches, the prayer of Kiprian is read regularly for the breaking of spells, but also in the big cities. Simultaneously, there has appeared also contemporary modifications – institutes for paranormal phenomena (Kubrat Tomov), professional unions of ‘extra-sensitive people’, ‘healing’ shows/séances on some TV sta-

tions, etc. Danovist and post-Danovist occults (Vaklush Tolev) declare their pretended origins within the legendary Bogumil (white) confraternity. A national identity is also being sought by occult-oriented minds in the imaginary image and long-disappeared heathen religion of the Bulgars.<sup>17</sup>

At the beginning of the 90s, there also remained a large rump of cults – initially they had caught some young people within their spell but finally, for a variety of reasons, they have found a contingency (around 4%) among Roma. In short summary, the hopes of these groups have been frustrated not as a result of any state or church initiatives but because of the ubiquitous power of public opinion, additionally inflamed by the media. And, evidently, the religious hunger of the Bulgarian people did not turn out to be too strong.

Even so, many Bulgarians have formally returned to the Orthodoxy – perhaps more as a consequence of tradition and popular fashion – but they do visit monasteries and churches, especially on the big feast days, particularly Easter Day, while almost every wedding takes place in church and because, for this purpose, the bride and the groom must have been baptised, baptisms of children remain very popular. On separate occasions, young people do indeed become believing Christians, keen on Orthodox mysticism, and this leads to a definite (‘Orthodox’) geo-political orientation. This ecumenical activity is popular to some extent in the spiritual environment. Some priests have developed activities for the baptism of atheists and Bulgarian-Muslims. However, ultimately, the organisation of the Church is at such a level that everything good starts as the self-initiative of local priests. Weak and imitative are the trends in the renovation and modernisation of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church – no matter if it is electronic church bells, or audiences with the Pope or with the General Mufti.<sup>18</sup> There remain worthy and dignified people within the structures of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church but, unfortunately, their activity is insufficient and, on the whole, they disappear into a common layer of indifference. Ultimately, a weak Church is buttressed by a weak religiousness amongst the population, and *vice versa*. Christianity is being practised as a de-personalised tradition which has lost both its inner religious sense and its basis.

17 Except for often-debated scientists such as Petar Dobrev, many pseudo-intellectuals and ordinary people are thinking in this direction, led by the national complex, nationalism and occult aberrations, according to whom Bulgaria is the cradle of the civilisation of the world and everything great is Bulgarian. This proto-Bulgarian nationalism is narrow-minded, speculative and harmless. And talking about Bulgarian skinheads, led by one priest, they are both contemptible and ridiculous, a group of infant hooligans and insignificant criminals.

18 At first sight, the bolder attempts in this direction have been made by the alternative synod in terms of organising conferences and clergy-less concerts in the temples, but it is doubtful whether a real renovation consists of the improper observing of dogma. The new synod has tried to legitimise itself by ‘privatising’ the national hero, Vasil Levski, and canonising him as a saint.

## Socio-cultural religious adjustments

Orthodoxy has played an important role since the Middle Ages as a consolidating factor for Bulgarian nationality. It provides a united administrative and sacred language – Ancient Bulgarian (which is controversial to the Greeks) – as well as literature in its own language and its own saints, by virtue of all of which the Bulgarian ethnos has come into existence. This is namely why Orthodoxy, up to now, has been considered by the population as something initially Bulgarian. In the reality of democracy, Orthodoxy continues to have the role of a consolidating factor for society.

The cultural inheritance of the Middle Ages has been incorporated in a traditional non-literary culture and obeys the same laws. Thus it has acquired an unclear and distorted image in performing some customs and beliefs which are heathen in character, despite a general belief in the spirit of Christianity, which people recognise as being Christian in a specific Bulgarian context.

What is left today from the spiritual greatness of the Bulgarian Middle Ages, following the breaking of the state and clerical traditions, is mainly the blurred, but legendary, memory of past glories and the language of Ancient Bulgarian literature as one factor uniting the nation. We can guess that this left some invisible, but durable, features in the Bulgarian national character – for example, the special emphasis on study, an alert mind, great curiousness and other factors<sup>19</sup> prominent as compulsive forces during the national renaissance (XVIII-XIX centuries) and which continue to be characteristic of contemporary Bulgarians.

As a whole, the knowledge of the glorious state and clerical past was built secondarily by activists in the period of enlightenment during the XIX-XX centuries, without sufficiently deep proofs in the national subconscious; in the first school books, it was placed side-by-side with knowledge of the natural sciences and guides to ‘European’ etiquette and ‘good manners’ in the French style. The strong interest in Christian sermons in the XIX<sup>th</sup> century has also an unbreakable connection with the national striving for liberation and, in practice, does not increase the common religious culture of the population in general terms. At the same time, despite initiatives towards enlightenment, Bulgarian Christianity remains more appropriately the Christianity of popular belief and ritual, in which theological problems are not of interest and the knowledge of people and events in the Holy Bible is weak.<sup>20</sup> According to these indices, Bulgarian common Christianity does not differ entirely from the west European one, the difference being that, in Catholic and Protestant countries, another type of Christian culture – a clerical one, which performs religious educational, organisational, public and political activity – is dominant. The restored Bulgarian Church takes more care in the preservation of traditional everyday Christian rituals and is, to a large extent, a part of everyday Christianity, while its organisational activity is not directed towards religious education but almost entirely towards national emancipation. The Or-

19 This is not the place in which to feed such an uncertain field as the national character with facts that eventually could prove its specifics.

20 Except for some quite moving and touching stories that were, initially, comprehended as exotic tales and additionally enriched by national fantasy.

thodox Church is mainly Bulgarian in character and thus has no pretensions as regards supreme truth and universal comprehension, nor to the complex hierarchical structures and controversial aspirations of the Catholic and Protestant churches. It has preserved its clear modest aims, alien to any kind of religious globalism – i.e. the preservation of the existing beliefs of the people and national emancipation. That the national renaissance began with religion is a fact. But the renaissance itself was not realised in a clerical aspect, only in the national-political and institutional ones.

The attempt of the Church to create, during the period of the third Bulgarian monarchy (1878-1944), a religious structure and a high religious culture in the country as a whole did not succeed. For the population, religion remains at the day-to-day level – as a source of national identification and of the observation of the traditional ritual and moral of a Christian patriarchal community. After 1944, when the traditional culture disintegrated and the Church was deprived of its influence and its ability to develop Orthodox Christianity, it turned to socio-cultural adjustment, combined with pure patriotic connotations and the residual manifestations of past ritual, philosophy and morality. Without a knowledge of this peculiarity, any analysis of sociological data in the religious field loses the essence of the problems it purports to study.

Does all this mean that Christianity in Bulgaria is more of a community and national self-definition movement than a religious phenomenon? Yes and no. In Bulgarian towns and villages, Christian customs are strictly observed and faith is strongly defended, even in the toughest times. The authority of patriarchal morality, comprehended by its believers as Christian, is unbreakable. But this religiousness in general remains within the bosom of traditional culture, which is why it looks ignorant, laicistic and mixed with heathen rituals and beliefs. In total, high religious culture remains a glorious but distant memory, deeply bound up with community identification, and is both poorly understood and highly mythologised. And low culture, the basic one for ordinary people, remains in the field of the spiritually backward, moral adjustment and oral legend.

The historical development and traditions of Bulgarian society, as well as of that of the Bulgarian Church, has been interrupted, and they remain, mainly, at the level of traditional culture. This peculiarity is valid today and, namely, is what defines the socio-cultural adjustments which Bulgarians make towards religion and which can be seen in sociological surveys. These cannot be correctly understood if this historical fact is ignored.

The historically-determined socio-cultural religious adjustments of Bulgarian citizens are clearly outlined in the international values survey conducted by Balkan British Social Surveys (BBSS) and Gallup in 1999. This reported (see Table 6) that active members of religious organisations in Bulgaria amount to just 0.8% of the population, while 2.3% consider themselves non-active members of such organisations. 96.8% consider that they are not members of any religious organisation. Responses to questions on religion, at first sight, run in strong contrast to these data – only 33.1% consider themselves not to be in the bosom of any particular religion, with 52% strongly defining themselves as Orthodox and 12% as Muslim.

**Table 6 – Membership of religious organisations and Church attachment**

Member of religious organisation	Total (%)	Religion	Total (%)
Active	0.8	Orthodox	52.0
Not active	2.3	Muslim	12.0
Non-members	96.8	Not attached to any particular church	33.1

It is notable that 30.5% never go to church – exactly the same proportion as those who go to church on the big religious holidays. 1.5% say they visit a temple more than once a week, 5.7% once a week, 8.7% once a month and 6.8% once a year, while 16.3% say they do so only on rare occasions.

47.5% of the population declare that they were brought up in a religious spirit; 52.5% that they were not.

47.9% consider themselves to be religious, while 37.3% consider themselves not to be religious, 9.2% do not know and only 5.5% define themselves as atheist.

59.7% declare a belief in God, while 11.1% are agnostic and 29.9% say that they do not believe in God. The majority of those questioned do not believe in the existence of the soul, or in Eden, hell, the Devil or life after death. It is interesting that most people, however, do believe in the existence of sin, although this might be due to an incorrectly worded, or not well understood, question.

46% believe that religion provides people with harmony and strength.

These comparative data are interesting and confirm our hypothesis of the peculiarity of the Bulgarian religious experience.

**Table 7 – Faith and religious affiliation**

	Total (%)	Orthodox (%)	Muslim (%)	Not attached to a particular church (%)
Religious	47.9%	64.1%	83.3%	8.2%
Non-religious	37.3%	24.4%	10.3%	69.6%
Atheist	5.5%	1.1%	0.8%	4.5%

It is interesting that, for example, 8.2% of those who do not define themselves as belonging to a particular church nevertheless consider themselves to be deeply religious, while 24.4% of those who define themselves as Christians think that they are not religious and 1% even frankly declare themselves atheist.

22% of people who are not involved in a particular church say they believe in God, yet 12.3% of those in the Orthodox faith do not believe in God. Certainly in this context religious education is a powerful influence – 87% of people brought up in a reli-

gious spirit do believe in God and often go to church. In contrast, only 40% of those who were brought up in a non-religious manner believe in God. 26% of the non-religious do believe in God – but then as much as 7% of atheists also say they believe in God. Only 3% of deeply religious people do not believe in God, with 17% saying that they do not know whether or not they so believe. 10% of atheists also say that they believe in the existence of the soul.

Some confusing questions arise: what kind of atheists are they who believe in God and what kind of deeply religious Christians are they who do not believe in God. And who is the more religious - those who claim that they are believers or those who do not know whether they believe or not. Furthermore, the percentage of those interviewed that answer ‘don’t know’ is also too large.

The coincidences between the basic responses of Bulgarians and Turkish people – of Orthodox and Muslim – are also very interesting. Notable, for example, are their comparative answers about visits to place of worship – the majority answer that they visit such places only on the major holidays. This rather strange and absurd picture again leads us to the conclusion that the religiousness of the Bulgarians is, essentially, rather peculiar. This is confirmed by another survey conducted by Gallup and BBSS.<sup>21</sup> According to this, 43% of Bulgarian citizens report that they are religious in their own way:

**Table 8 – Religious feelings, by faith**

	<b>Orthodox</b>	<b>Muslim</b>	<b>No religion</b>	<b>Total</b>
I am religious and follow the prescriptions of the Church	10.0	36.8	–	14.1
I am religious in my own way	49.3	41.9	15.5	45.5
I cannot say whether I am religious	17.5	11.3	24.2	16.5
I am not interested in religion	18.2	8.6	55.7	18.4
I am not religious; the prescriptions of the Church are wrong	0.6	–	4.6	0.7
No answer	1.3	1.5	-	1.3

These data speak well for themselves and, if we borrow their formulation, we can say that Bulgarians are religious in their own way. They are certainly not irreligious, but they are religious namely in a latent traditional fashion which exists most commonly as a socio-cultural adjustment without any clear idea of the nature of the faith. This is the issue that most confuses sociological surveys and means that the figures provide a mosaic of controversial data.

21 Conducted also in 1999 under the title: Consolidation of Democracy.

The conclusion that can be drawn from the data and a cultural-historical analysis is, however, a categorical one: the main part of the population – the Bulgarian – almost entirely defines itself as Eastern-Orthodox primarily in terms of national cultural identification, although one-half of those interviewed declare, within the context of their own understanding, some relative feelings of religiousness. In fact, religion for Bulgarians remains, simultaneously, a distant repercussion of past glories and a live relic of a peasant and guild-based non-literary traditional culture.

The role of religion in society remains potentially important, despite the poor condition of the Church itself. The confidence level in the Church for February 2002 is 48%, and its rating (2%) is the highest of all the institutions, alongside that of the army.<sup>22</sup> The rating of Patriarch Maxim is also positive – at 4%, it is one of eight positive ratings among 20 specific politicians and public figures. These facts are not due to a real influence of the Church in society, but to the hidden religious adjustments of the population. They are more a reflection of some thirst for religion, or a dream of a strong and authoritative Church.

Some of the data illustrated here could confirm the propaganda of the former communist regime that Bulgarians are irreligious – that they are not Christians but heathens or, alternatively, that they are not believers but atheists. However, this allegation is entirely groundless. My research into biographical interviews, undertaken within the Department of History and the Theory of Culture at Sofia University, as well as into the archive of personal diaries from the second half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century at the 'Ivan Hadjiyski' Values and Structures Institute, have once again confirmed my personal observations of the essential unsoundness of popular opinion about the religious indifference of Bulgarians.<sup>23</sup> The turnover of historical development has helped Bulgarian Christianity to turn from the literal into the oral (traditional) and to preserve, thus far, its basic character. This may not be Christianity in the usual meaning of the word – but it is still a Christianity of a type. It has created one specific socio-cultural adjustment of what is – at first sight – the weakly religious Bulgarians, although this may be latent and visible only at the day-to-day level.

### **New challenges facing the Bulgarian Orthodox Church**

Carefully observed, religious adjustments in Bulgaria can be understood in a new way if the role of latent religiousness is not belittled as a social mechanism. This role is not institutionalised and exists mainly in the form of socio-cultural adjustments – and in two specific forms:

22 BBSS-Gallup – Confidence/No Confidence Ratings, 1 February 2002.

23 The oral and written biographical research studied in detail by me include three main periods (1030-47; 1947-89; and 1989-2001) which, although not representative from a sociological point of view, provide the opportunity to take another perspective on the problem. In almost all the texts, examples of latent religious adjustment are numerous, but here is not the place to present and discuss these. Typical of hidden faith is that, most often, it is not declared explicitly by those interviewed, becoming apparent only in the context of the narration, while ostentatious devotion is, often, insufficiently sincere.

1. as a national self-identification
2. at the level of everyday life – as a relic of traditional, non-literary cultural forms (celebrations, customs, morals, outlook on life, etc.).

It is important to consider what is the meaning of this hidden ‘underwater’ religiousness for Bulgarians, on the grounds that it exists only partially in common with the institution of the Church and its religious declarations. There are sufficient examples of socio-cultural adjustment to support the assumption that this formless and unostentatious force is great and whose potential energy, if used, could seriously influence public opinion. What is left to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church is to learn how to use it.

The condition of religious belief in Bulgaria remains in four main potential forms:

1. faith and devotion which is declared to be Christian and which is thus indeed, and deeply, connected to oral traditional culture and its holidays, superstitions and rituals
2. faith which is religious by its essence but which has been transferred to new objects – for example, communism (faith in the ideal)
3. de-personalised formal faith in which religious rituals are observed as a family (even ‘caste’) tradition but which do not have any other value than community identification
4. traditional morality, as a modified relic of past patriarchal Christian morality, pretending towards justice, mercy, order, patriotism, pure morality and power over public opinion.

The fight between ex-communists and anti-communists during the pre-election struggles in 1990, so typical of all former communist countries in Europe, carried in Bulgaria some quotient of latent quasi-religiousness. Undoubtedly, these first free elections after half a century of authoritarian regimes were the least pragmatic of them all, with the mystic ‘blue’ ideal of the anti-communists being set out in opposition to the ‘red’ ideal (and, later, the ‘social’ ideal). The socio-cultural adjustments of Bulgarian citizens definitely played their role in these. Using another type of analysis, a relic of patriarchal religious adjustment could then have been found in the behaviour of the voters. Over the last twelve years, however, passions have been worn out and are now cooler – yet there are still citizens within the electorate that follow the ‘ideals’ in a religious manner. The scepticism (or, better still, the realism) of Bulgarians quickly returned and, in the place of faith and ideals came pessimism, but the short, wild heat of political passion at the beginning of the changes reminds us of latent ‘quasi-religious’ energy, deprived of its real religious object and turned partly towards politics. This observation cannot be totally valid, but neither is it entirely groundless, especially as regards young people.

With its approach to religion and the role of morality in the adjustments of society, we can partly explain the election of Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and the movement supporting him. Namely the National Movement of Simeon the Second based its election campaign on the so-called ‘new morality’. The former heir to the crown, who had become an icon and not only to anti-communists, took advantage of the legendary glory of his father, Emperor Boris III – one of the most mythologised personalities in Bulgarian history.

Today's Prime Minister, Simeon II, otherwise secretive in all his deeds, is trying constantly to demonstrate Orthodox religiousness. He embraces Maxim, the Bulgarian Patriarch, tolerates the Church and continually demonstrates admiration and respect. Other Bulgarian politicians also like to legitimise their power with reference to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church – Petar Mladenov had done it with Maxim, Petar Stoyanov had tolerated Pimen's alternative synod and, in his swearing-in ceremony, the new President, socialist Georgi Parvanov, took an oath on the Holy Bible and kissed the cross and the hand of the Patriarch.

All of this shows the significant hidden authority of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, without anyone knowing just how great are the real reasons for it. Obviously, this is due to inexplicit socio-cultural religious adjustments without which the high rating of the de-personalised Bulgarian Orthodox Church and of the Patriarch, who looks more like a moving portrait than a real political person, would have appeared absurd. Even the biggest daily paper *Trud*, as well as most of the rest of the media which take a social position, constantly publish and transmit materials about the Church and, even, demonstrate a greater care for it than does the Holy Synod itself.

Namely, in this, thus far, dormant power of community adjustment and of unwritten morality are hidden the relics of the religious energy of past Bulgarian traditional culture. The morality propagandised by public opinion is comprehended as Christian, Orthodox and patriotic. It is just one step away from the Bulgarian Orthodox Church becoming its exponent. Using its latent power, it could turn into a significant and implacable social force. Here is hidden the real meaning of the relics of religiousness in Bulgaria. If the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was in a more aware and organised condition, if it showed at least to some extent some form of public activity, it would easily be able to use and manage this hidden and potent socio-psychological power stemming from cultural adjustments and community identification. It looks like this is not going to happen (perhaps thankfully, bearing in mind the spiritual condition of the present clergy). But nothing in Bulgaria can be predicted; incredible wonders happen frequently, as well as events that surprise and, indeed, panic sociologists.

## Conclusion

The conclusions from the above exposition are clear. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church as an institution does not present as religious in the pure meaning of the term; more likely it appears as a fact in national identification. Weak, inert and, in an absurd way, disorganised, it cannot be a threat to peace on the Balkans but also in no explicit way can it help it. The real 'religiousness' of Bulgarians is buried deeply in socio-cultural adjustments and can reveal itself as a significant force if unlocked. Bulgarian religiousness reveals itself as national identification, as latent religious socio-cultural adjustment and as a re-direction of people's spiritual energy towards new forms – faith in the ideal, in the formation of public opinion and in social behaviour.

It can be directed in different directions – but all of these are within the field of morality. A similar reliance on the adjustment of oral cultural traditions is easy to inflame – but also the euphoria of it easily disappears as this cultural relic is only psychological

and is in no way institutionally cherished; only indirectly does it connect to public structures and mechanisms.

The historical peculiarities of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, proved over a long period of time up to today, show at least two things:

1. that there have been peculiar specifics throughout its entire history of development. It has a glorious history as the patriarch-founder of Slav civilisation and culture. But, thus far, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church has developed its own specificities and differs from the rest of the neighbouring Orthodox Churches, more in the negative sense, being both inert and indifferent to social problems
2. lost traditions. This happened both in the centuries when its factual existence was terminated, as well as in the newest époque when its fragile institutional traditions were undermined during the period of communism.

These are the main reasons for which the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, as an institution, remains today strongly bound up with the socio-cultural latent religious adjustments of Bulgarians. These adjustments provide more support for it than its own structures. The Church itself supports, apathetically, the *status quo* of the day-to-day religiousness of the population, without making any attempt to develop and deepen it. The authority of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in the minds of Bulgarian citizens is significant. But that is due mainly to events connected with the historical development of national Orthodox identification, as well as the latent relics of the patriarchal Christian traditional culture.

In this situation, the future perspectives for the Bulgarian Orthodox Church are linked to its opportunity easily to take the leading position in the formation of public opinion on questions of morality and the national interest, as far as it is able to show the necessary maturity, activity and desire.

Referring to religious tolerance in Bulgaria, both the sociological data and historical development thus far point to this being significant among Christians and Muslims alike. If no extremist outside pressure is placed on these communities, they would not be in danger of confrontation. However, we should continue to consider the laicistic and weak religiousness of the Bulgarian population, the hidden powers of socio-cultural non-literary Orthodox adjustment, and the necessity of community identification – which we have conditionally, throughout this article, called Bulgarian ‘religiousness’. In particular moments, exactly these factors could come to play the main roles in Bulgarian society and Bulgarian politics.