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## THE BULGARIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE HOLOCAUST: ADDRESSING COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

Pavel Stefanov

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“Nations exhibit toward Jews the same hatred which, I suppose, flour feels toward yeast because it does not give it peace”. This maxim by an anonymous philosopher quoted by Emile Cioran in his miscellany titled “Tears and Saints” (Paris, 2002) hardly applies to the Bulgarian people and their relations with Jews. Unlike their unruly Balkan neighbours, Bulgarians never showed any lasting or deeply embedded chauvinism and racism toward this minority.<sup>1</sup> The presence of Jews in the Balkan peninsula predates Christianity. Occasional persecutions such as those in the Bulgarian capital of Turnovo in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century were provoked by mass hysteria following the outbreak of the Black Death epidemic. Occasional verbal attacks during and after the liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman domination in 1878 were clearly inspired by Russian anti-Semitic rhetoric but failed to have a lasting impact. The tradition of toleration that existed in Bulgaria was shown by the acceptance of Armenian refugees from Turkish persecution after 1894 and by the peaceful relations that long prevailed in some parts of the country between Bulgarians and ethnic Turks. According to the 1934 census, Jews in Bulgaria numbered 48,398 persons which amounted to barely 0.80% of the country’s total population.<sup>2</sup> They were mostly poor, hard-working, loyal citizens who avoided dabbling in politics.

Since during the five centuries of Ottoman bondage Bulgaria lost its aristocracy, after its liberation it was governed by representatives of the Saxe-Koburg-Gotha dynasty. Tsar Ferdinand (1861-1948) who dreamt of conquering Constantinople sided with Germany and

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<sup>1</sup> P. Stefanov, “Bulgarians and Jews throughout history,” *Religion in Eastern Europe*, XXII, 6 (2002), December, pp. 1-11.

<sup>2</sup>F. Chary, “Bulgaria,” in D. S. Wyman (ed.), *The World Reacts to the Holocaust* (Baltimore and London, 1996), p. 261, table I.

Austro-Hungary. His brinkmanship led to the two disasters of 1913 when the country had to wage war simultaneously against all its neighbours, and of 1918 against the Entente states. As a result large ethnic territories in Macedonia and Thrace were lost. Twice, in 1923 and 1934, the democratically elected governments were overthrown by coups and authoritarian regimes were established. The 1930s were a period of stable economic development.

During the reign of Ferdinand's son Boris III (1894-1943) feelings of revenge gained momentum in September 1940 when due to the German mediation Romania ceded to Bulgaria the fertile plains of Southern Dobrudja taken over in 1918. On the other hand, even before after the Wannsee Conference of 20<sup>th</sup> January 1942, Germany began to exert an increasing economic and political pressure on the Bulgarian authorities to start persecuting its Jews. In his pathological hatred toward Jews Hitler once notoriously claimed that they were a race but not a human one. In 1939 all Bulgarian Jews who were foreign citizens were forced to leave the country. On 24<sup>th</sup> December 1940 the Bulgarian National Assembly adopted the disgraceful Defense of the Nation Act (promulgated on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1941), modeled on the Nuremberg laws. It initiated a state-organized persecution of Jews and various secret societies such as freemasons. Intermarriages were contracted only illegally, a ban was imposed on practicing certain professions and an extraordinary tax of 20% on all Jewish property was levied. Jews had to wear Davidic badges, to respect curfews, to buy food from particular shops, to avoid public areas and even to stop discussing political and social matters. From 1942 on six or seven months a year the men, starting from pre-recruit age up to 50-55 years old, were sent to "labor camps." Food was hardly enough and as could be expected during a war, of very poor quality. Among the warders, most of them retired officers and sergeants, there were downright sadists, but also regular Bulgarians, who made every effort to alleviate the plight of the Jews.

On 1<sup>st</sup> March 1941 Bulgaria signed the Axis pact with Germany, Italy and Japan but never sent any forces to the Russian front or declared war on the Soviet Union in spite of threats by Hitler. On the whole, Bulgaria's military involvement in World War II boiled down to the occupation of Vardar Macedonia and Aegian Thrace in Northern Greece. Owing to Tzar Boris III and the Bulgarian governments, no hostilities were waged on Bulgarian territory and the country was never occupied by the Wehrmacht.

What was the attitude of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church which included most Bulgarians to the official anti-Semitic onslaught? A fact which has not attracted academic

attention so far is that Bulgarian clerics began opposing Nazi ideology as early as the 1930s. The future Patriarch Kiril, born of a poor Albanian family, was an anarchist in his youth and studied in Berlin under the renowned German theologian Adolf Harnack defended in 1928 a dissertation on Marcion. This 2<sup>nd</sup> century Gnostic postulated the existence of two gods, an evil god of the Old Testament and a good god of the New Testament. There is no doubt that Kiril's thesis depended on Harnack's popular book on the same topic (1870). The latter may have been read by Hitler only to confirm his perverse views of the Jews while it strengthened Kiril's conviction in the closeness and continuity between Jews and Christians. Of his dissertation only the introduction has been published.<sup>3</sup> Other ecclesiastical writers who rejected even more resolutely Nazi ideology and practice were Fr. Kliment of the Rila monastery and the senior priest in Sofia Athanas Madjarov.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, there were students returning from German universities and White Russian émigrés who spread anti-Semitic propaganda in Bulgaria without much success.<sup>5</sup>

On 15 November 1940 the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian church, made up of 11 bishops and headed by the Sofia Metropolitan Stefan, sent a special memorandum to the Bulgarian Prime Minister Bogdan Filov with a copy to the Speaker of the Bulgarian Parliament. The bishops protested against the discrimination and persecution of the Jews and asked for converted Jews to be treated equally with Bulgarian Christians. They claimed that it contradicts Christian ethics to exclude a minority from society and practically to outlaw it. After the passing of the Law by the Bulgarian Parliament and its signing by King Boris III in January 1941, Metropolitan Stefan continued to speak out against the persecution of the Jews.<sup>6</sup> On 3 April 1941 the Holy Synod complained about the clauses of the Defense of the Nation Act that forbade marriages between Bulgarian and converted Jews. This restriction clearly contradicted the Statute of the church which did not stipulate any particular ethnic provenance as a pre-requisite for baptism. Bishops felt that the autonomy of the Bulgarian church was in peril.

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<sup>3</sup> Kiril, Metropolitan of Plovdiv, *Tsurkvata i synogogata prez purvite tri veka* [The Church and the Synagogue during the First Three Centuries] (Sofia, 1934).

<sup>4</sup> K. Rilets, *Novoezichesko dvizhenie v Germania* [New Pagan Movement in Germany] (Sofia, 1936); A. Madjarov, "Religioznata voina v Germania," [The Religious War in Germany] *Pravoslavenmissioner* V, 7-10 (1936).

<sup>5</sup> L. S. Dawidowicz, Excerpts from *The War against the Jews: 1933-1945*, <http://www.centropa.org/reports.asp?rep=HR&ID=6708&TypeID=36658>.

<sup>6</sup> T. Subev, "The Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the Jewish Question during the Second World War," in D. Kosev (ed.), *Bulgaria Past and Present: Studies on History, Literature, Economics, Sociology, Folklore, Music & Linguistics. Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Bulgarian Studies Held at Druzhsba, Varna – June 13-17, 1978* (Sofia, 1982), pp. 262-263.

A month earlier the German Ambassador in Bulgaria Beckerle reported to the Nazi authorities about Stefan's actions against the official Bulgarian anti-Jewish policy. In a later report to his superiors, Beckerle sent the German translation of an announcement by the minute Bulgarian Fascist Party, dated July 1943, which called for the killing of Stefan "the sooner the better!"<sup>7</sup>

On 26 August 1942 the government created a Commissariat for Jewish Affairs at the Foreign and Health Ministry. Its task was to take measures in order to implement the Defense of the Nation Act. The Jewish organizations were disbanded and all aspects of Jewish life were put under the control of the Commissariat. The German-trained and strongly anti-Semitic jurist Alexander Belev was appointed head of this notorious organization in September 1942. He was infuriated when another request to the government to strike down the Defense of the Nation Act or at least to alleviate it was sent by the Synod on 10 December 1942. On 22 February 1943 Belev and the Gestapo representative in Bulgaria SS-Hauptsturmfuehrer Theodore Dennecker negotiated an agreement for the deportation of 20 000 Bulgarian Jews to extermination camps in Poland. Under the false pretext of resettling to the interior of Bulgaria, 11 386 Jews from Aegian Thrace and Macedonia were rounded up and dispatched to Poland. They were not Bulgarian citizens and the regions where they lived were controlled by the Germans. The initial plan of Belev envisaged completing the number by arresting 8 560 Jews from mainland Bulgaria. When this plan failed, he advanced another, two-fold one of either sending all Bulgarian Jews abroad to death, or to labor camps in the local countryside.

In early March 1943 Metropolitan Stefan went to the Rila monastery and came across a train packed with Jews from Aegian Thrace sent to the Treblinka extermination camp. Devoid of water and food the Jews were crying, wailing and shouting, all in vain. The bishop was utterly shocked. As soon as he arrived at the cloister, Stefan sent a telegram to the Tzar asking for human treatment of the Jews who, he added, must not be sent to Poland. Boris III dryly replied that everything possible within the law would be done. On his way back from the monastery Stefan visited the nearby town of Doupnitsa to conduct a liturgy. The town was empty because all Jews there remained under house arrest waiting for deportation and in sympathy local Bulgarians refused to leave their houses as well. Stefan telephoned the Prime

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<sup>7</sup> V. Toshkova, *Iz dnevnika na Bekerle – pulnomoshten ministur na Tretia reich v Bulgaria* [From the Diary of Beckerle – minister plenipotentiary of the Third Reich in Bulgaria] (Sofia, 1992).

Minister and demanded the immediate lifting of the restrictions. Caught by surprise, the authorities complied. Many joyful Jews filled the church where Stefan officiated.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time the Bulgarian authorities decided to hand over the first group of 800 Jews from Sofia to the Germans. All the preparations had been made and the cattle cars were waiting in the capital's train station. The Head of the Sofia Jewish Community, Abraham Alphasy, requested Metropolitan Stefan's intervention. The bishop immediately went to the Tzar's palace and asked to meet him. Boris III, aware of his request, feigned illness to avoid him, but Stefan refused to leave the palace until he met with the King. The Tzar was forced to receive him and was asked by Stefan to postpone the decision to hand the Jews over to the Germans, or Stefan would instruct all churches and monasteries to open their doors to Jews, and give them a place to hide, thus violating the order of the authorities. The Tzar gave in to Stefan's demands, and after other parties asked the Bulgarian Government to halt the deportation, the decision to deport the 800 Jews was revoked.

During the night of 9 March 1943 police forces arrested the prominent Jews of Bulgaria's second largest city, Plovdiv. Their exact number is unknown but ranged from 497 to 616 although Metropolitan Kiril mentioned 1500-1600 people. He was alerted early in the morning and sent a telegram to the Tzar begging for his mercy toward the Jews. Later Kiril contacted the head of the local police, saying that he intended to end his loyalty towards the state and to act "as he wished". Further testimony claims that he threatened to lie across the railway tracks in order to stop the deportation. When told that his actions had proved successful and that this deportation order had been cancelled, he rushed to the Jewish school which the authorities had turned into a roundup point for the Jews. The officer on guard refused to open the door but Kiril challenged him and jumped over the fence to tell the jubilant Jews the good news.<sup>9</sup>

Due to the prompt public reaction and the resolute intervention of a group of intellectuals, church leaders and politicians, led by the Deputy Speaker of the Bulgarian National Assembly Dimitar Peshev, the Minister of Interior Nikola Gabrovski was forced on 9 March 1943 to cancel the deportation orders for the Jews from several Bulgarian cities. The

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<sup>8</sup> *Minutes of the Full Synod*, Central State Archive, Sofia, stock 1568, inv. 1, doc. 8804. Cf. I. Gezenko, "Deinostta na bulgarskia exarh Stefan za spasiavaneto na bulgarskite evrei prez 1943 godina," [The Activities of the Bulgarian Exarch Stefan for the Salvation of the Bulgarian Jews] *Izvestia na durzhavnite arhivi* 72 (1997), pp. 45-46.

<sup>9</sup> A. Krustev, "Patriarh Kiril I roliata mu za spasenieto na bulgarskite evrei," [Patriarch Kiril and His Role in the Salvation of the Bulgarian Jews] in S. Shivachev (ed.) *Sbornik v chest na Kiril patriarh bulgarski po sluchai 100 godini ot rozhdenieto I 30 godini ot negovata smurt* (Sofia, 2001), pp. 22-23.

trains, which had been waiting to be loaded with Bulgarian Jews and sent to the concentration camps in Poland, did not depart.

On 2 April 1943 Metropolitan Stefan convened a special Holy Synod plenary session to discuss the persecution of the country's converted Jews, as well as all other Jews. At the end of the session the bishops present decided that the Bulgarian church could not subscribe to the racist and un-Christian law. The text of the decision was sent to the Bulgarian Prime Minister with a copy to the Tzar, after which Boris III invited the members of the Synod to the royal palace. At the meeting the head of the state tried to persuade the members of the Holy Synod to support the anti-Jewish policy by applying what he called "the church's love of the Bulgarian nation". However the bishops were adamant as they continued to insist on the cancellation of the restricting decrees against the Jews, and to take converted Jews into special consideration.<sup>10</sup> Within two and half months the Holy Synod convened eight times to discuss the Jewish question, sent at least five letters to the Tzar and the government, met the Premier Filov twice and issued several circulars to the clergy and the believers. The bishops never wavered in their determination to rescue the Jews.

On 21<sup>st</sup> May 1943 the government passed a decree Nr.70 which ordered the Commissariat of Jewish Affairs to resettle all Jews from Sofia to the interior of the country. Thus the Tzar resisted Hitler's demands with the argument that the Jews were needed as a workforce in Bulgaria. When the Sofia Jews received their deportation order, they were stricken by fear that, as in the case of Macedonian and Thracian Jews, they would in fact be sent to the gas chambers in Poland. The two Chief Rabbis Daniel Zion and Asher Hananel met with Metropolitan Stefan and asked him to intervene for the cancellation of the deportation order. Stefan immediately took action and sent a number of messages to the Tzar including a plea to have mercy on the Jews quoting the Gospel: "Do not persecute so that you yourself will not be persecuted. Your measures shall be returned to you. I know, Boris, that from heaven God will keep watch over your actions". At the same time the Ministry of the Interior and the Prime Minister's office informed Metropolitan Stefan that the country would not recognize the church's Jewish baptisms and therefore those citizens were to be considered Jews and eligible for deportation. However Stefan refused to bend.

The broad popular and civil movement in defense of the Jews culminated on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1943, the feast of St. Cyril and Methodius, which is a national holiday in Bulgaria. Most

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<sup>10</sup> *Minutes of the Full Synod*, Central State Archive, stock 1318, inv. 1, doc. 229. Cf. I. Gezenko, op. cit., pp. 46-50.

Sofia Jews gathered in front of the Metropolia and pleaded for Stefan's intervention. With tears in his eyes he tried to contact the Tzar who was, accidentally or otherwise, absent from the capital. Stefan asked Petur Gruev, head of the Tzar's office, to pass on his urgent request for stopping the Jewish manhunt. Later Stefan officiated at the traditional *Te Deum* ritual and in his speech said that the festival was clouded by the outrage committed against the Jews and by the absence of Jewish Youth organizations. After the prayer Metropolitan Stefan talked to the Premier Filov who dismissed his efforts to overthrow the anti-Semitic law. Stefan did not keep silent. He immediately wrote and sent three statements to the Tzar, the government and the Synod. In his response Boris III said that he was not in a position to repeal the law himself. At the same time the Jews of Sofia staged a large demonstration in front of the royal palace brutally dispersed by police. Rabbi Daniel Zion addressed the crowds and encouraged them not to despond because the intercession of Metropolitan Stefan was bound to work out. After these events at the end of May 1943 about 20 000 Jews from Sofia were sent to work-camps in the countryside, where they were assigned heavy labor duties and lived in miserable conditions, but still survived. Bulgaria's Attorney General began an investigation into Stefan's ostensible handing out of certificates of baptism to all people who requested them, and the police raided his office confiscating all Jewish requests for conversions. But the Metropolitan was never sentenced.<sup>11</sup>

Not only bishops but priests exerted their influence to save Jews from death as well. Rev. Boris Kharalampiev from Pazardjik helped stop the deportation of the Jewish citizens of his city in the fateful spring of 1943. He is recorded to have said: "Everyone is entitled to his own faith. No one should violate the intimate, spiritual life of another. That's how I think now, that's how I have thought in the past, and if I live any longer, that's how I'll think then."<sup>12</sup>

Despite Metropolitan Stefan's and other public leaders' ignored protests and the Sofia Jews' deportation to the countryside, Alexander Belev's plan failed to reach its second stage, and the Jews were not handed over to the Germans. The deportation of the Jews of Bulgaria was postponed again and again until it was finally cancelled with the sudden and mysterious death of King Boris on 28<sup>th</sup> August 1943, the allied invasion of Italy, and the fear

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<sup>11</sup> V. Mitakov, *Dnevnik na pravosudnia ministur v pravitelstvata na Georgi Kioseivanov I Bogdan Filov* [A Diary of the Minister of Justice in the governments of Georgi Kioseivanov and Bogdan Filov] (Sofia, 2001), p. 725.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in "The Optimists: The Story of the Rescue of the Bulgarian Jews from the Holocaust," <http://www.comforty.com/theoptimists>.



of an invasion of the Balkans. In September 1944, with the Red Army closing in on Bulgaria's borders, the new Bulgarian government declared war on Germany and abolished the Defense of the Nation Act.<sup>13</sup>

It is noteworthy that the Pope's Delegate to Sofia Angelo Roncalli (future Pope John XXIII) also acted in defense of the Bulgarian Jews. In the spring of 1943 Metropolitan Stefan asked Pavel Shaoulev, a converted Jew and a lawyer in Sofia, to translate into French a letter of his to Pope Pius XII. In it he asked the Pope to influence Boris via his spouse Giovanna who was Catholic. Shaoulov delivered the letter to the Delegate Roncalli but when he left the office of the Delegation, he was arrested by secret police and sent to a labor camp. The letter reached its addressee and the Pope obliged.<sup>14</sup>

On 30<sup>th</sup> June 1943 Roncalli wrote a letter to Tzar Boris III from Istanbul which is still kept in the archives of the Vatican, informing him about the deportation and asking him to help the innocent people. Roncalli himself wrote later on the copy he sent to Rome that Bulgaria's Tzar took measures pertaining to this matter, though facing serious problems.<sup>15</sup>

Tzar Boris III was possibly poisoned by Hitler during his last visit to the Fuehrer's headquarters in August 1943. Three years later Metropolitan Stefan who was an Anglo- and Russophile resisted communist efforts to remove religion from state schools and the political scene. He was toppled by the other bishops in September 1948, after which he was arrested without any court sentence and held for nine years in solitary confinement in a private villa until his death in 1957. Metropolitan Kiril was also held for a short period after the communist takeover but managed to reach a compromise with the new authorities and was even elected Patriarch in 1953. Nine years later he visited Israel where the Jews whose life he saved met him like a savior. Kiril became a prolific church historian and died in 1971. Yad Vashem proclaimed both Stefan and Kiril "righteous among the nations" in 2002 but their memorial plates in Jerusalem were removed when leftists protested against the same honor being accorded to Tzar Boris III.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> N. Chivarov, "Die bulgarisch-orthodoxe Kirche und die Rettung der bulgarischen Juden," *Oesterreichische Osthefte* 42,1 (2000), 35-55.

<sup>14</sup> H. Boyadjiev, *Spasiavaneto na bulgarskite evrei prez Vtorata svetovna voyna* [The Saving of the Bulgarian Jews during the Second World War] (Sofia, 1991), pp. 100-101.

<sup>15</sup> "Future Pope Helped King Boris III to Rescue Ethnic Jews," <http://www.standartnews.com/archive/2003/08/26/english/features/index.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> "Bulgarian President Attends Holocaust Commemoration Ceremony," RFE/RL Newline, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2002.

During the Second World War some Christian bodies were not aware of the full extent of the Holocaust or were afraid to oppose growing totalitarianism. In 1937 Pope Pius XI published his encyclical titled *Mit brennender Sorge*, in which he clearly denounced Nazi ideology. But neither he, nor his successor Pius XII anathematized the lapsed Catholic Hitler and his accessories.<sup>17</sup> Many other churches and clergymen protested but could not stop the German atrocities. They include the Anglican church, a number of Protestant churches, the Romanian Patriarch Nicodim and several of his Metropolitans. In Hungary the Lutheran and Reformed bishops who originally voted in favor of the anti-Semitic laws later rose against the deportation to Poland in which over 400 000 Jews perished. In neutral Sweden the state Lutheran church declared its negative attitude to the removal of Norwegian Jews. In Switzerland reformed Protestants issued passports to Jews wanting to enter the country. In a rare deed of defiance the Danish people, court and church smuggled most of their Jews by boats to Sweden.

The Bulgarian Orthodox church was the only church in occupied Europe which stood up to Hitler and exerted itself to rescue the Jews from the Shoah. Why? First, it must be stressed that notions of racism and nationalism were and still are alien to the Bulgarian ethos and way of life. It is absurd to speak of “racial purity” in a country whose people are a curious mixture of Bulgars from Central Asia, Southern Slavs, Thracians, Greeks, Turks, Gypsies and many others. Although Bulgarians became Orthodox Christians in 865, they have always been tolerant of other religions and sects. Small wonder that this country produced in the 10<sup>th</sup> century one of the greatest heretical movements of the Middle Ages – dualistic Bogomilism. Later it spread to Bosnia, Northern Italy and Southern France where it was crushed by the Roman Catholic church during the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Deprived of churches and monasteries for many centuries by the Turks, Bulgarians were engaged during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in a fierce struggle for religious independence, having strong political overtones, against the Greek Patriarchate of Constantinople. As a result Bulgarians became nominal Christians or even atheists who identified religion with folk tradition and ethnic identity. The intelligentsia which after the liberation in 1878 studied in Western Europe adopted Marxist and Darwinist ideas.

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<sup>17</sup> Ī. Aarons, J. Loftus, *Unholy Trinity: The Vatican, The Nazis and the Swiss Banks* (New York, 1998); M. F. Feldkamp, *Pius XII und Deutschland* (Goettingen, 2000); R. L. Braham (ed.), *The Vatican and the Holocaust: The Catholic Church and the Jews during the Nazi Era* (New York, 2000) (East European Monographs); K. P. Spicer. *Resisting the Third Reich: The Catholic Clergy in Hitler's Berlin* (DeKalb (IL), 2004), etc.

Second, Bulgaria was founded in 681. In its 13 centuries of existence it was for seven centuries under foreign domination under Byzantium (1018-1185) and Ottoman Turkey (1393/6-1878). Bulgarians and their church were never protagonists or collaborators of imperial domination but its victims. They never dreamt of assimilating or, worse, annihilating their minorities whose destiny they shared. The ill-fated attempt, instigated by Moscow, to change by force the identity of Bulgarian Turks in the mid-1980s was an exception which proved the rule.

Third, Jews in Bulgaria were never a sizable part of the general population. Jewish trades and finances enlivened the underdeveloped Bulgarian economy and were considered a boon, not a curse. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century most local Jews have adopted Bulgarian culture, the Bulgarian language and often married Bulgarians, thus becoming nominal Christians. Local Jews were not religious zealots and most of them observed few, if any, religious rituals. No Christian-Jewish polemic existed.

Fourth, the several pro-Nazi movements in war-time Bulgaria were small, exotic and unpopular with the court, the government and the people at large. A notable fact neglected by scholars is that the spring of 1943 saw a spate of executions of eminent pro-Nazis in Sofia who were gunned down by communists, many of them Jews. Guerillas roamed the mountains but they did not touch Tzar Boris III during his frequent trips there. In Bulgaria, largely subservient to the Third Reich, murdering the monarch would have meant the establishment of a right-wing dictatorship which was the last thing that the allies wanted. But beyond any doubt if Boris III had lived long enough to witness the takeover of his country by the Communist party on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1944, he would have been killed very soon. The new government backed by the Red Army staged a massive blood bath in which tens of thousands of people perished, including about 200 priests and monks. Ironically, some of the communist interrogators and executioners were of Jewish extraction.