

ORTHODOX SUBCULTURES AND THE SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION OF BULGARIA (LATE 1980S – MID. 1990S)

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Abstract: *The paper studies the social change at the beginning of the transitional period in Bulgaria through the subcultures of Orthodox reformers. Using theoretical perspectives of Weberian sociology of religion and of theory of subcultures and both historical and social anthropological methodology, the Committee for the Protection of Religious Rights, Freedom of Conscience and Spiritual Values (1986-1988) and the 'Salvation' Christian Union (1990-1995) are analyzed as charismatic communities which public appearance was of political and of religious subcultures. Their establishment and activities were strongly influenced by the Polish political transformation and by some East European charismatic communities and their leaders.*

Keywords: *social change, charismatic community, Max Weber, Orthodox subculture, dissident movements*

Introduction

Methodology. The present paper is devoted to the problem of the relationship between religiosity and social action focusing on subcultures of Orthodox reformers, which were established as a political formation in the mid.1980s but in the mid.1990s gradually transformed itself into a religious one. The Committee for the Protection of Religious Rights, Freedom of Conscience and Spiritual Values (1986-1988) and the 'Salvation' Christian Union (1990-1995) are particularly studied trying to check the hypothesis that religious communities in Bulgaria can be seen as active agents of social change in the period of transition from a totalitarian to a democratic society¹.

The conclusions of the present study are made using both approaches of social history and of religious anthropology. It is based on various traditional sources (act materials, periodicals, memoirs, audio and visual documents) and on content analysis of 5 semi-standardized interviews, conducted in 2022-2023 face-to-face with still living former active figures of the two formations.

¹ Znepolski 2020.

THE CHURCH AND OTHERNESS

Theoretical framework. Primarily the paper uses the Weberian social action theory that recognizes four types of social action: '*traditional*', based on habit; '*affectional*', based on emotions; '*value-rational*', determined by beliefs and values and focusing on action; and '*goal-instrumental*', subservient to reason and the thought of results². According to Weber, social actions take place as social relationships within social system institutions (clan, marriage, state, church, guild etc.), and in social communities, where people are gathering voluntarily and on the ground of attitudes ('*friendship*', '*love*', '*piety*', '*fidelity to contract*', '*sense of patriotism*')³. In the public space, as well in the religious field, Weber distinguishes '*domination*', which is legitimized through obedience to tradition (traditional), acceptance based on extraordinary gifts and qualities (charismatic), and respect for modern law and state (rational-legal)⁴. He finds a direct connection between social action and four types of religiosity, emphasizing the '*religions of salvation*', in which the main figures are the prophets with extraordinary personal qualities (charisma), obviously acting goal-instrumentally. According to Weber charismatic authority is revolutionary in nature⁵; it has reformatory potential in order to change the world and '*life-orders*'⁶.

Theory of subcultures is the second theoretical tool. It characterizes them as social groups, part of larger cultural communities, distinguished by: autonomy, self-identity (a set of beliefs, interests, values, clothing, style, artefacts and behavioral markers), a specific space ('*stage*' for action). They constructed their own authenticity emphasizing difference from the dominant culture and have potential for social resistance⁷. Subcultures are generally theorized as operating in networks, as heterogeneous in composition and often disintegrating, and as often aiming for social change⁸.

Political and sociocultural context. The main subjects of the study are subcultures emanating from the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC). In the second half of the 20th century it was proclaimed as independent Patriarchate (1953) but since 1948 it fell into complete dependence by the Russian Orthodox Church and into encapsulation during the Cold War, regardless of ties with the World Council of Churches. Its internal problems were also numerous. In

² Weber 1978a, pp. 24–26, 37, 49; Weber 1978c, p. 28–29.

³ Weber 1978c, pp. 30–31.

⁴ Weber 1978a, pp. 215–216.

⁵ Weber 1978a, pp. 1111–1116.

⁶ Weber 1978a, pp. 241–254.

⁷ Johnson&Snow 1998, p. 474; Hodkinson 2002, pp. 30–31; Williams 2007; Frith 1996, 109; Irwin 1977; Wills 1977.

⁸ Haenfler 2006; Thornton 1996.

the period of 1940s-1980s, the communist regime deprived of right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion all religious denominations, following the Soviet model, and involved atheist policy⁹.

The existing state of art maintains that social change during Bulgarian transition was driven by two political subcultures, obtaining specific ideology, cultural codes, symbols, 'space' of action and '*realms of memory*'¹⁰. The first, of '*former communists*', included remnants of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) and of former nomenclature, which resisted the rapid reforms. The second, of '*anti-communists*', was consisted of members and sympathizers in the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), who insisted on the radical destruction of the totalitarian system¹¹. The research paradigm rarely mentions Orthodox religious figures as participants of '*anti-communists*' subculture¹². However, some of them were connected with dissident circles and, trying to reform the BOC from within, became active agents of social transformation. So far, their activity has been studied mainly biographically, as dissident structures (1988-1989) or from the perspective of the church schism (1992–2004)¹³.

**Charismatic Religious Community as Political Subculture:
the Committee for the Protection of Religious Rights,
Freedom of Conscience and Spiritual Values (1988–1990) and
the '*Salvation*' Christian Union (1990–1992)**

The Committee for the Protection of Religious Rights, Freedom of Conscience and Spiritual Values was established in Veliko Tarnovo on October 19th, 1988. Since then, it had drawn symbolic capital from both religious and political sources. The founders had chosen the holiday of St. John of Rila, but also the anniversary of the murder of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko (1947–1984) – chaplain of the '*Solidarity*' Syndicate¹⁴. In the following years this charismatic clergyman from the Roman Catholic Church became the '*role model*' followed by the leader of the Committee. Its members wanted to look like the '*Solidarity*'

⁹ Kalkandzhieva 1997; Metodiev 2010; Denev 2012; Znepolski 2020; Merdjanova 2022; Nazarska 2022.

¹⁰ Nora 1989.

¹¹ For both of them see Daynov 2000; Pastarmadzhiev 2013, pp. 167–175; Tepavicharov 2018; Karakachanov 2020, pp. 69–78.

¹² This is done only with regard to Muslims. See Gruev & Kalyonski 2008.

¹³ Христова 2005; Kalkandzhieva 2012.

¹⁴ He was killed by the Polish State Security because of accusations that slanders and plots against the government and is in contact with the enemies of the country, such as Pope John Paul II.

THE CHURCH AND OTHERNESS

movement – the Popieluszko's charismatic community, especially in asserting their own identity as human rights defenders and dissidents¹⁵.

The initiator of the Committee was Hieromonk (Father) Christopher (Sabev) – an 42 years old Orthodox junior clergyman from Veliko Tarnovo, who was motivated for social action¹⁶ by own religious and political views. He was physicist, graduated at the Sofia University and specialized in Moscow (1975-1977), where he became closely acquainted with the Soviet human rights movement of Prof. Sakharov. A radio ecologist by profession, Sabev became active after the Chernobyl accident (1986). He possesses a strong personal charisma: highly religious, phyto-therapist, miracle-worker, and with a defiant character¹⁷. During his studies at the Sofia Academy of Theology (1980-1985), he communicated with his professors and fellow students with oppositional views and formed his '*revolutionary*' attitude towards the world¹⁸. At this time a '*circle of supporters*' was formed around him, recognizing his charisma and giving him trust and personal devotion.

In the next two years the Committee seemed to be charismatic community, united on an emotional basis more by Father Christopher's charisma than by the mutual interests. Members, who were personally verified, known and faithful to the leader, were young people with diverse professions¹⁹. Initially they constructed their religious collective identity in the Veliko Tarnovo Diocese and subsequently added political elements and expanded their '*space*' to all the country and even '*exported*' their ideas abroad through the means of Western radio broadcasts.

The program of the Committee borrowed some political ideas from German Christian-Democratic Party, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Helsinki Accords²⁰, combining them with religious ones (for the study of religion in secondary and higher schools, for the return of the congregational beginning in the management of the BOC and for the restoration of the Julian calendar)²¹. The organization expanded its social base and made its own homogenization as a political subculture, accepting similar religious

¹⁵ Sabev 1994, pp. 23–31.

¹⁶ Weber 1978c, 13.

¹⁷ Simeonov 1996, p. 639.

¹⁸ Nikolchev 2014, pp. 138–39; Metodiev 2011. Sabev was influenced by Blagoy Topuzliev (1946–2010) – a parish priest, who served a 5-year sentence for anti-communist activity, and a founder of the Independent Society for the Protection of Human Rights in Plovdiv (1988).

¹⁹ Simeonov 1996, pp. 640–641.

²⁰ PACS.

²¹ Sabev 1994, pp. 23–34; Църковен вестник 1989a, 1989b. Cf. Kunicki 2021.

formations which were acting on political ground as the '*Christian Unity*' Orthodox Movement, the '*Sons of Light*' Hesychast Brotherhood, the Protestant Church of God and Bulgarian Muslims, who at that time were subjected to repressions by the communist regime²².

Acting illegally, members and supporters of the Committee were united by figure of Father Christopher – a spiritual leader with charisma of the type '*inner-worldly asceticism*', working through social action to transform the world according to God's will²³. He did all his best to legalize the society through public litany processions, water consecrations and liturgies, had been demanding its registration although the bans and punishments, the several investigations by the State Security, the censorship of correspondence and the arrest for about 50 days²⁴. Since the end of 1988, the Committee had expanded its subcultural '*space*' as coordinated with other human rights formations (the Independent Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the '*Podkrepa*' Independent Trade Union)²⁵.

In the fall of 1989, Father Christopher had appeared as a charismatic political and religious leader. On October 26th, at the time of the Ecoforum under the auspices of the Conference on Security and Cooperation held in Sofia, he performed a mass both on the occasion of the St. Dimiter feast day and in memory of victims of natural disasters²⁶. According the clergyman such liturgy practice was strongly influenced by the so-called Masses for the Homeland, performed by Father Jerzy Popiełuszko, which brought him great popularity, gathered thousands of participants and strengthened their confessional-national identity.

In the following 1990, the charismatic community took part in a huge number of political actions and events, proving its nature as a political subculture. Guiding by the leader, members of the Committee participated in the first authorized mass march in the country of the '*Ecoglasnost*' dissidents, organized on November 3rd 1989 in Sofia – the day of Father Popiełuszko's burial in 1984, turned into a half-million-strong demonstration of Polish patriotism and a prominent Catholic identity (Fig.1-2).

²² Държавна 2014, 1142; Cf. Mollov 2006; Altanov 2011. Since 1972, the communist regime has pursued a policy of assimilation towards Muslims in the country. See Gruev & Kalyonski 2008.

²³ Weber 1978a, „pp. 541–544, 546–547, 551,553.

²⁴ Sabev 1994, pp. 24–31,33; PACS; Народно дело 1992; Doynov 1999, p. 196, 202, 224.

²⁵ Sabev 1994, pp. 32–34.

²⁶ The largest of was the Chernobyl accident.

THE CHURCH AND OTHERNESS



Fig.1. Father Christopher and Solomon Passy at the 'Ecoglasnost' action, Sofia, October 1989 (PACS, with permission)



Fig.2. Father Christopher and priests of the Committee at first march of opposition, Sofia, November 3rd, 1989 (photo of BTA, in: PACS, with permission)

At the first free rally of the opposition forces in Sofia on November 18th, 1989 Father Christopher gave a speech which was understood as a political call for a peaceful transition without confrontation and bloodshed²⁷. There, for the first time, he publicly displayed the sign of victory, which later became a 'trademark' for him and his organization, but was also taken as a sign of 'anti-communists' subculture. It was borrowed from the 'political choreography' of 'Solidarity', where it was introduced by Father Popieluszko herself through the church blessing gesture²⁸ (Fig. 3-4).



Fig.3. Father Christopher at the first free meeting of opposition, November 18th, 1989 (PACS, with permission)



Fig.4. Father Jerzy Popieluszko with the 'Solidarity' supporters, May 1983 (Museum of St. Jerzy Popieluszko, <https://museumfr-popieluszko.com/>)

²⁷ CSA, coll. 1466, inv. 2, file 10, f. 1-3; Събев 1994, pp. 39–40.

²⁸ Sochaczewski 2015.

THE CHURCH AND OTHERNESS

On December 7th, 1989, the UDF was established as a coalition of 10 dissident organizations, which were joined in 1990 by 6 more restored or newly formed parties. At least until 2000 this union represented the main political force, insisting on the de-communization of the state and the democratization of the Bulgarian society²⁹. Its adherents form a specific subcultural identity based on anti-communism in various aspects³⁰. The Committee, which became one of its founders, ensured the connection of the political formation with the religious sphere (Fig.5-6).



Fig.5. Father Christopher at the first free meeting of opposition, November 18th, 1989 (PACS, with permission)

²⁹ Daynov 2000.

³⁰ Tepavicharov 2018; Karakachanov 2020, pp. 69–78.



Fig.6. Father Jerzy Popiełuszko and Lech Wałęsa (Museum of St. Jerzy Popiełuszko, <https://museumfrpopieluszko.com/>)

In the first years of transition period, Father Christopher asserted himself as an invariable participant in political actions like rally-processions together with the Committee of the Repressed Victims, the student protest against Art. 1 of the Constitution on the leadership role of the BCP (December 14th, 1989), the memorial service of Academician Andrei Sakharov, the procession to the Romanian Embassy, where in the midst of the so-called Romanian Revolution, the Father gave an anathema of Nicolae Ceausescu (December 18th-20th, 1989), the reconciliation rally demanding that the government return the given names of Turks renamed by the totalitarian regime etc.³¹

In the period 1990-1992, the charismatic political subculture entered the *'anti-communists'* subculture, still carrying elements of a counterculture against communism and an authentic style that distinguishes it from other political unions. Father Christopher also structured the new festivity of the UDF, which outlined its style in relief and strengthened its autonomy from the subculture of the *'former communists'*: political manifestations of the UDF included prayer or divine service; on every major Christian holiday (Easter, St. George's Day, the day of St. St. Cyril and Methodius, etc.) processions, rallies, concerts and even motorcades were organized, where political slogans *'Never Communism'* and emblems of the UDF and SCU were carried next to the icons and banners; blue

³¹ Sabev 2008.

THE CHURCH AND OTHERNESS

color of the church vestments of the clergy replaced the traditional Orthodox purple color, priests used the gesture of blessing together with the sign of victory, slogans and posters mainly with political implications (Fig.7).



Fig. 7. Father Christopher (Sabev) leading political rally at the Palm Sunday, 1990, Sofia (PACS, with permission)

In January-April 1990, Father Christopher was chosen to participate in the Round Table – one of the most important political mechanisms of the transition, where the ruling BCP negotiated with the opposition from the UDF, and in the following months he was often sought to calm crisis situations, possibly identifying with his idol Jerzy Popiełuszko, who had a similar role during martial law in Poland in 1981–1983³². On February 25th, 1990, the cleric prevented the rallying anti-communists from smashing the Mausoleum of leader Georgi Dimitrov³³, in April he start a process of national reconciliation performing a memorial service for the victims at the Lovetch concentration camp. In August 1990, after the burning of the BCP Headquarters, the cleric did not hesitate to use his authority to stop extremist actions. As vice-chairman for spiritual affairs of the UDF and as chairperson of the Commission on Denominations in the 36th National Assembly, Father Sabev participated in the decision-making of Bulgarian domestic and foreign policy and met a number of foreign political leaders, incl. Pope John Paul II (Fig.8-9).

³² Kalinova&Baeva 2001.

³³ Lupa 2019. Cf. Todorova 2006.



Fig.8-9. Father Christopher meets Pope John Paul II and James Baker, Rome and Sofia, 8-12.02.1990 (CSA, ChP 109, f. 13, 21; right photo of N.Genov)



Fig.8-9. Father Christopher meets Pope John Paul II and James Baker, Rome and Sofia, 8-12.02.1990 (CSA, ChP 109, f. 13, 21; right photo of N.Genov)

THE CHURCH AND OTHERNESS

Charismatic Community as Religious Subculture: the ‘*Salvation*’ Christian Union (1990–1995)

In 1990, Father Christopher renamed his Committee as the ‘*Salvation*’ Christian Union (CCU), gradually turning the charismatic community into religious subculture targeted mainly to the crisis in the BOC and established as a contra-culture within its structure.

In 1991–1995, he expanded the ‘*space*’ of action of subcultural group throughout the country: the 15 sections were located in large and small cities and in villages. In general, registered members were dominated by people of active age (born in 1931–1970): the 1941–1950 cohorts were the most numerous with 29.8%, followed by 1931–1940 (20.2%) and that of 1951–1960 year (16%). Adults born in 1901–1910 (2.1%) and 1911–1920 (4.8%) were minimally represented³⁴. The wider representation of younger people can be explain both sharing ideas of political democratization and wishing to back to Christian values and traditions.

Former members explain their motivations for joining the Union in different ways. According to some, membership in the UDF and generally the desire to change society for the better and more elevated brought them to it³⁵. Raised in families with religious traditions, others believed that the BOC was collaborating with the communists and must be reformed. So, the Union became the desired institution with which to realize their ideas³⁶. Others talked about their personal sympathy for the leader Father Christopher and mainly about his charm and ability to communicate with people. They said that their first impetus was the night vigils, and then enrolling in the Union became a natural step for closer contact with him and his work³⁷. It was this segment of the formation that subsequently became the core for its transformation into a religious subculture based on charismatic community.

The Weber’s typology could be seen in the SCU, bonded through affective ties of simple or extended families, neighbors, friends and colleagues. Its social composition was heterogeneous and structured as a core of Orthodox priests and a periphery of members of various occupations (medical doctors, scientists, lawyers, entrepreneurs, workers, students, housewives and pensioners) and of followers and sympathizers. This brought the formation closer to similar religious movements that arose or were activated in the early 1990s in post-com-

³⁴ CSA, coll. 1466, inv. 2, file 771.

³⁵ Interview with D.A.

³⁶ Interview with A.D.

³⁷ Interview with H.M.

munist countries (e.g. the Catholic '*Radio Marija*' of Father Rydzyk in Poland or the Protestant Nazarenes in Romania and Serbia)³⁸.

Although the total number of CSU members in 1995 was only about 115 people³⁹, Father Christopher managed to mobilize thousands of people from the youth and mature people in the big cities. Open-air silent night vigils, performed in the square in front of the Mausoleum of communist leader Georgi Dimitrov⁴⁰, became a particularly effective means, gathering daily more than 100 thousand people. In his memoirs, Father Christopher describes them as common religious rites, typical for the Orthodox in times of disaster, which were collective prayers for a peaceful transition to democracy^{41,42}. Not widespread in the Orthodoxy, they were drew from the experience of the Polish '*Solidarity*', which introduced liturgies and communions in the factories, and clerics such as Father Popiełuszko gathered thousands of people with sermons on air (Fig.10-11).



Fig. 10-11. Father Christopher (1990) and Father Jerzy Popiełuszko (December 1983) performing sermons on air (PACS, with permission; Museum of St. Jerzy Popiełuszko, <https://museumfrpopieluszko.com/>)

³⁸ Bria 1998; Gog, 2006; Płachecka 2022; Djurić-Milovanović 2022; Alexov 2017.

³⁹ CSA, coll. 1466, inv. 2, file 771, f. 3-5, 14-16, 18, 20-21, 29-29rp.; Събев 1994, 31.

⁴⁰ Sabev 1994, p. 28.

⁴¹ Sabev 1994, pp. 28–29; Lupa 2020.

⁴² Lupa 2020.

THE CHURCH AND OTHERNESS



Fig. 10-11. Father Christopher (1990) and Father Jerzy Popiełuszko (December 1983) performing sermons on air (PACS, with permission; Museum of St. Jerzy Popiełuszko, <https://museumfrpopieluszko.com/>)

For some participants, the evening collective prayers with lit candles were a political act that affirms democracy in a symbolic place, under the windows of the political Headquarters of the former Communist Party, in front of the Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov and in the square, spontaneously renamed '*Democracy*'⁴³. However, most of the praying people were learning to say the '*The Lord's Prayer*' for the first time, were attracted by the reading of St. Scripture and from the performances of a church choir. Some went by accident after work but continued to visit for months, bringing friends and acquaintances, others activated their passive religiosity, sharing that they felt '*stunning and mystical*'⁴⁴. It was the realization of Father Christopher's plan, who needed '*true believers*' and mass sympathizers. Currently, an interviewee says that she had not missed an initiative of the SCU in Sofia, regardless of her own commitments. She recalls with delight her participation in a rally when Father Christopher and deputies of the UDF demanded the resignation of the metropolitans in '*red vestments*'⁴⁵.

In May-June 1992, the SCU initiated the split of the existing Holy Synod and the creation of a new one. Its members and followers seized by force the Headquarters of the BOC in Sofia, the Sofia Theological Seminary and the can-

⁴³ Interview with A.D.; Cf. Sabev 1994, p. 211.

⁴⁴ Interview with E.I.

⁴⁵ Interview with E.I. Cf. 24 часа 1991a; Стандарт 1994.

dle foundry. The reformation ideas of the charismatic leader became an impulse for the action of his charismatic supporters but caused not only internal church schism in the BOC, but also the disintegration of the SCU⁴⁶.

In May 1992, the Alternative Holy Synod elected Father Christopher as a Bishop and included him as a member. Entering this institution, based according to Weber on power, force and centralization, and taking entirely '*goal-instrumental*' actions, the charismatic leader actually tried to transform his Union into congregation. Thus SCU members sharply criticized him for his '*arbitrary actions, authoritarian approaches and decisions*' and insisted on the election of a new leadership⁴⁷ (Fig. 12).



Fig. 12. Father Christopher as Bishop and as a member of the Alternative Holy Synod, May 1992-June 1993 (PACS, with permission)

Answering them, Bishop Christopher organized a spiritual process against communism, which had to strengthen the religious subculture in its struggle against the pro-communist Holy Synod. In Plovdiv in January 1993, 14 clergymen sentenced the high clergy as guilty of '*national and ecclesiastical treason*', as received positions by illegitimate means, as served communism and '*in favor of obscurantist atheism*', and as developed joint ecumenical activities with the World Council of Churches⁴⁸.

⁴⁶ Cf. Kalkandzieva 2012.

⁴⁷ CSA, coll. 1466, inv. 2, file 771, f. 17.

⁴⁸ CSA, coll.15; file 154, f.58-60rp.

THE CHURCH AND OTHERNESS

Bishop Christopher's religious ideas and practices became a destructive factor in the SCU too. The active members of the SCU were surprised at the sudden establishment in the summer of 1993 of the All-Orthodox Bulgarian Archdiocese in Veliko Tarnovo, which was declared independent by the both Holy Synods⁴⁹ (Fig.13). They did not share many of the goals set forth in her radical platform to '*purify the BOC*': to return the Julian calendar, to dissociate from ecumenical activity and the World Council of Churches, to resist heresies and sects⁵⁰. Today, the leader himself refuses to comment on the collapse of the SCU after his departure for the USA in 1995, where he received political asylum⁵¹.



Fig. 13. Archbishop Christopher and members of the All-Orthodox Bulgarian Archdiocese, V. Tarnovo, 1993 (PACS, with permission)

Disintegrated after the departure of its charismatic leader, the SCU ended its existence. Subsequently, its members chose different ways to preserve their religious identity and desire for active social action. Most oriented themselves towards political parties closest in profile, sharing the ideas of Christian-De-

⁴⁹ Interview with H.M.; 24 chasa, 1993; Демокрация 1993.

⁵⁰ Демокрация 1993.

⁵¹ Conversation with Metropolitan of Sredetz Christopher (Sabev).

mocracy⁵². A few joined other NGOs with a clear religious profile: the Movement for the Renewal of the BOC (1991) and of the Bulgarian Christian Democratic Party – Center⁵³; the lower clergy remained in the Clergy Union, founded in 1989. However, there were not a few members and sympathizers who which flew into the Old-Calendar churches, which continued to criticize the BOC.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the transitional period, which began in the mid-1980s as a result of Perestroika in the USSR and the reform processes in Poland, different political subcultures of a resistant, dissident type, including those with a religious profile, were formed in Bulgaria. The Committee for the Protection of Religious Rights, Freedom of Conscience and Spiritual Values and the '*Salvation*' Christian Union were charismatic communities with a charismatic leader, a core of members and an increasing number of adherents driven by '*goal-instrumental*' motives. Until 1992, they had been working as political subcultures on human rights and freedoms following the model of Polish human rights activists, trade unionists and Catholic clergy, whom they emulated and from whom they drew many ideas and best practices, incl. how to legitimize their political and religious activity. At the beginning of the rapid political changes, the subculture not only retained its political character, but merged into the larger subculture of '*anti-communists*' and became an active agent of social change and civil mobilization.

In the mid. 1990s, the '*Salvation*' Christian Union acquired all the features of a charismatic religious subculture and turned itself to the internal reformism of the BOC. Led by a charismatic leader, it became a movement of Orthodox people from the country's big cities, connecting young, highly educated, politically active anti-communists, incl. senior and junior Orthodox and laymen. It was strongly supported by the political parties and organizations working to dismantle the totalitarian regime.

The charismatic religious communities, formed during the Bulgarian transition, were both political and religious subcultures and were acting as contra-culture towards the BOC. If they be compared with other similar subcultures in the Southeast and the Eastern Europe, some parallels could be done. The Committee used many of political ideas and of visual symbols (signs, colours, gestures, scenography etc.) of the '*Solidarity*' Movement, which was a political subculture. Transformed into the SCU it took some practices by other

⁵² CSA, coll 1466, inv..2, file 154, f. 224-226.

⁵³ CSA, coll 1466, inv..2, file 154, f. 7; Прелом 1993.

THE CHURCH AND OTHERNESS

charismatic movements: the '*Radio Marija*' in Poland, '*The School of the Virgin Mary*' in Poland and Ukraine and of the Nazarenes in Serbia and Romania. In contrast to their creative efforts, the SCU's reforming activities turned out to be destructive to the local BOC⁵⁴.

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⁵⁴ Pollack 2001; Pollack 2004.

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