

Educational Work of the Bulgarian Exarchate

The significant activity and role of the Bulgarian Exarchate during the Ottoman rule and afterwards has been unfortunately denied and profaned not only by its main foe – the Constantinople Greek Patriarchate and by the Greek state authorities, but nowadays also by the official historical “scientists” in Skopje. The spiritual and educational work of the Exarchate is portrayed as “great-Bulgarian” and as been imposed to the Macedonian people. Its main players - geniuses and martyrs of the Bulgarian national and spiritual revival are labeled “Exarchate agents” or their historical image distorted to present them as “heroic fighters against the Bulgarian national spirit”. The gigantic educational work is called “instrument of Bulgarian propaganda”.

These outrageous manipulations and lies have been addressed and answered many times in the past. Here, in Canada and particularly in Toronto it is mandatory for our Macedonian-Bulgarian community to recognize the merits of the Exarchate for our very existence as people, even living in different countries. Its role was instrumental for the establishment more than 100 years ago of our churches and still is to differentiate our community. It is our duty to pay tribute to the work and sacrifices of our ancestors under Ottoman rule, who inspired and supported the Bulgarian Exarchate in the two national struggles: against the Greek spiritual domination and for a national liberation from the Empire. The national spirit and the liberation idea were alive and strong during the subsequent Serbian rule and Yugoslav regime. The generations before us suffered and fought for our freedoms and for the right to defend and cherish the historical truth, for the glory of our mother language and faith, against lies and falsifications of the Bulgarian National Uprising and of its glorious page: the educational work of the Exarchate.

In the next month we will cover this gigantic democratic movement, guided and skillfully directed by the Exarchate.

Vassil Popvassilev

Part 1 – Under Ottoman Rule

With the establishment of the Exarchate, the situation of the Bulgarian schools changed radically. The Ottoman government gave the Exarchate the same privileges in respect to the Bulgarians, which for centuries the Constantinople Greek Patriarchate had enjoyed. Owing to the Exarchate Charter (1871), the Mixed Exarchate Council had the obligation "to found and organize upper and lower schools in all the dioceses of the Exarchate, as well as a Bulgarian school at the Constantinople cloister; to take further care for the improvement and development of the Bulgarian language, literature, the establishment of a Bulgarian printing house and the editing of a Bulgarian newspaper.

The Mixed Council also has the obligation to introduce the best possible scientific and moral books, to engage proper enlightened teachers for these schools, and, in general, to take all measures necessary for the development of education in all Bulgarian dioceses, which should be instrumental towards the intellectual and spiritual advancement of the Bulgarians" (Article 98 of the Exarchate Charter).

Thus, after hard and persevering struggles, the Bulgarian people began to liberate themselves from the tutelage of the Constantinople Patriarchy, not only in respect to questions concerning the church, but also in the field of its culture and education. The Exarchate had become the main organizer and leader of the people's education. Its basic aim was to introduce unity in the organization of the Bulgarian schools, a common program for all schools of a similar level and a general trusteeship over the entire field of education and enlightenment. The Teacher's Councils were also under the auspices of the Exarchate. These councils played the role of "regional legislative bodies on educational problems as well as councilors of the Educational Department with the Exarchate and such of the Mixed Councils in every bishopric."

A Central Board of Education was created in 1874 with the Exarchate, which board assumed care of education in the Exarchate diocese. The Exarchate helped materially certain poorer schools, mainly in Macedonia. The means for this help was collected from the population during church services. Such collections were first produced by the Teachers' Associations in the Melnik, Nevrokop and Drama eparchies, to expand education in the Nevrokop diocese. These teacher's associations petitioned the Exarchate that such means should be collected also from the other eparchies.

The Exarchate had the intention of founding a higher school of learning, in Constantinople, with a theological department, but the events during 1875 and 1876 brought that initiative to naught. With its assistance, however, theological schools were opened at the Monastery of Lyaskovo and in Samokov. The Exarchate also helped many young men and women to be further educated abroad, mainly in Russia.

The importance of the educational activity of the Exarchate, prior to the liberation of the country from Ottoman domination, consisted in the following:

1. After its establishment, the Bulgarian schools were freed from the tutelage of the Greek clergy. These schools were officially recognized by the Ottoman authorities as schools of the Bulgarian people.
2. After the Exarchate was granted the privilege to organize and direct the educational activity of the Bulgarian population within the confines of the Ottoman Empire, an end was put to all attempts of the Turkish authorities to infringe upon the independence of the Bulgarian schools.
3. In its educational activity the Exarchate was guided by enlightened ideas and it contributed greatly towards the national awakening and revival of the Bulgarian people, towards the patriotic education of Bulgarian youth. It was also

- instrumental in the propagation, among the Bulgarians, an increased feeling of love and devotion towards Slavdom and towards the brotherly Russian people.
4. The Exarchate centralized the guidance of the schools, but in respect to their organization and management it followed the opinion and advice of the local teachers and of the people, in the person of the school boards. The Exarchate did not disregard the educational traditions of the Bulgarian National Revival, on the contrary, it adopted them in their entirety and established them in its activity.
 5. It exerted great efforts for the general upsurge of the schools, with a view of their answering the needs of the time.

Materials used:

1. *The Bulgarian Exarchate and Its Services Rendered to the Church and Education.* Sofia, 1960, p. 20.
2. Bulgarian Patriarch Cyril, *Exarch Antim I*, Sofia, 1916, p. 673.
3. Educational Work of the Bulgarian Exarchate, *Dimiter Donchev*, Balkanika, Volume VI, number 2, 1972