

Bulgarian Reflections on Religion and Clergy in the Age of Modernity: The Case of Ivan Seliminski

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Introduction

The aim of this article is to show how the religious reassessment and criticism against the church that had ensued from Western Europe as a result of the ideas of modernity was adopted by the Balkan intelligentsia. This is illustrated through the case study of one Bulgarian intellectual, Ivan Seliminski. An issue of prime importance that was fought by the Bulgarians within the context of their national movement was their ecclesiastical emancipation from the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Directly after the Crimean War (1853-1856) Bulgarian national leadership demanded the creation of an independent church on a national basis.¹ This endeavor may be considered as a kind of church reformation because of the anticlerical manifestations addressed against the high clergy.² The ecclesiastical authorities in Bulgarian lands, usually of Greek origin and culture, were discredited on account of accusations of corruption, incompetence to respond to their spiritual duties, financial misappropriation and exploitation of their flock.³ This hostility was largely related to Bulgarian national differentiation from the Greeks⁴ and the concomitant efforts for ecclesiastical self-administration, which

¹ For the Bulgarian ecclesiastical issue see: Petar Nikov, *Vazrazhdane na Balgarskiiia Narod. Carkovno-Nacionalni Borbi i Postizheniia*, Sofia: Akademichno Izdatelstvo 'Prof. Marin Drinov', 2008; Zina Markova, *Balgarskoto Carkovno-Nacionalno Dvizhenie do Krimskata Voina*, in *Izbrani Sachineniia*, Volume I, Sofia: Akademichno Izdatelstvo 'Prof. Marin Drinov', 2007; Vera Boneva, *Balgarskoto Carkovnonacionalno Dvizhenie 1856-1870*, Sofia: Za Bukvite, 2010.

² Eleonora Naxidou, Traditional Aspects of Modernity in the Nineteenth-Century Balkans: The Ecclesiastical Dimensions of the Bulgarian National Movement, in Maria Baramova, Plamen Mitev, Ivan Parvev, Vania Racheva (ed.), *Power and Influence in South-Eastern Europe 16th-19th centuries*, Berlin: LIT, 2013, p. 432.

³ Ibidem, pp. 432-437; Nikolai Genchev, *Balgarsko Vazrazhdane*, Sofia: Iztok Zapad, 1991, pp. 215 ff.

⁴ Up until the 1830s, the Bulgarians together with the Greeks belonged to the unified Orthodox community which is usually called the Rum millet. In line with Ottoman administration, this included all Orthodox subjects in the Empire, irrespective of ethnic, linguistic, cultural or other

was seen as an essential move towards political liberation from Ottoman sovereignty. The crux of the matter was, therefore, mainly motivated by national/political expediencies and not religious concerns. After all, Bulgarians were not discontent with their religious conviction and never called for a revision of the Orthodox dogma. In this framework, Ivan Seliminski, a doctor, teacher and national activist of the Bulgarian diaspora, added another dimension to the abovementioned critiques by associating them with Western anticlericalism. He viewed the role of the clergy as detrimental to society and considered the Greek hierarchy (usually called the Phanariots) in this capacity as an indicative example.

Having attended the renowned Greek school of Kydonies in Asia Minor, Ivan Seliminski (Sliven 1799 - Bucharest 1867)⁵ was one of the Greek-speaking Bulgarian intellectuals who had to contend with the critical dividing line between a sense of patriotism and national consciousness and somehow balance the two before the latter eventually prevailed.⁶ When the Greek War of independence broke out in 1821 Seliminski fled to the Peloponnese for fear of Turkish reprisals against Greek/Christian populations in the area. There is a possibility that for a short period of time he fought on the side of the Greek rebels,⁷ before moving on

differences, under a common ecclesiastical organization headed by the Patriarchate of Constantinople. See: Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, vol. 1, New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1982; Paraskevas Konortas, From Ta'ife to Millet: Ottoman Terms for the Ottoman Greek Orthodox Community, in Dimitri Gondicas and Charles Issawi (ed.), *Ottoman Greeks in the Age of Nationalism: Politics, Economy, and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, Princeton, New Jersey: The Darwin Press, 1999, pp. 169-179. The breakup was brought about by the prevalence of national ideology and the formation of national identities, which rendered the previous model unviable and led to differentiation within the population on the basis of national rather than religious criteria. See: Demetrios Stamatopoulos, From Millets to Minorities in the 19th Century Ottoman Empire: An Ambiguous Modernization, *Citizenship in Historical Perspective* in S. Ellis, G. Halfdanarson & A. K. Isaacs (eds.), Piza, Piza University Press, 2006, pp. 253-273.

⁵ Mihail Arnaudov, *Seliminski. Zhivot, Delo, Idei*, Sofia: BAN, 1938; Cvetan Kristanov, Stoian Maslev and Ivan Penakov, *Dr Ivan Seliminski kato Uchitel, Lekar i Obshtestvenik*, Sofia: BAN, 1962.

⁶ Eleonora Naxidou, Mia 'Valkaniki' Ekdohi tou Philellinismou: I Periptosi tou Ivan Seliminski (A 'Balkan' Version of Philhellenism: The Case of Ivan Seliminski), *Praktika tou Diethnous Epistimonikou Sinedriou 'To Endiapheron gia tin Ellada kai tous Ellines'* (*Proceedings of the International Conference 'The Interest in Greece and Greeks'*, Athens: Irodotos, 2014, pp. 277-298.

⁷ It is widely accepted by Bulgarian historians that Seliminski fought in the Greek War of Independence. However, Maslev expressed doubts due to the lack of substantial evidence. For the issue see: Stoian Maslev, D-r Iv. Seliminski i Grackoto Vastanie ot 1821 g., *Izvestiia na Darzhavna Biblioteka 'Vasil Kolarov' za 1957-1958 g*, Sofia 1959, p. 339; Naxidou, Mia Valkaniki, pp. 285 ff;

to Europe and then to Sliven, Plovdiv, and various towns with Bulgarian communities in the Principalities where he earned his living as a teacher of the Greek language. In the 1840s he studied in the Medical School in Athens, where he was decorated for his participation to the Greek revolution by the Greek government. He continued his medical studies in Italy and then practiced medicine in Walachia and Bessarabia, where he sought a protagonist role in the national pursuits of the Bulgarian emigrants. Besides his memoirs, Seliminski also wrote various essays on the ecclesiastical issue, as well as on philosophical/ethical/social and medical topics.⁸

Seliminski's ideas about religion and the church are presented mainly in the following studies on which the current analysis is based: *Proizhod na Religiite (The Origins of Religions)*, *Religiia i Politikata (Religion and Politics)*, *Duhovnishkoto Saslovie i negoviiat Proizhod (Priesthood and their Origins)*, *Religiata, Duhovenstvo i Carkovniat ni Vapros (Religion, Priesthood and our Ecclesiastical Issue)*,⁹ and *Balgarskiat Carkoven Vapros (The Bulgarian Ecclesiastical Issue)*.¹⁰ His views developed mostly under the influence of two trends.¹¹ (i) The principles of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution due to which the dominant position of traditional values and institutions, such as religious belief and ecclesiastical organization, were not only challenged but undermined¹² and (ii) the adverse attitudes of the Bulgarians against their high clergy.

⁸ Seliminski wrote in Greek. A large part of his archive was published in Bulgarian translation (without the original Greek text) in 14 volumes during the period 1904-1931 by P. Chilev (volumes I-VI) and Elisabeta Pazheva (volumes VII-XIV). In addition, a selection of Seliminski's essays was published in the volume: Dr Ivan Seliminski, *Izbrani Sachineniia*, ed. Nikolai Kochev, Sofia: Hauka i Izkustvo, 1979. Both editions have been criticized for the poor quality of the translation, though.

⁹ These 4 essays are included in: *Biblioteka Dr Iv. Seliminski, Volume XII*, ed. Elisabeta Pazheva, Sofia, Ministerstvoto na Narodnoto Prosveshenie.

¹⁰ *Biblioteka Dr Iv. Seliminski, Volume X*, ed. Elisabeta Pazheva, Sofia, Darzhavna Pechatnica, 1929.

¹¹ For the influences on Seliminski's ideology see: Yura Konstantinova, Myths and Pragmatism in the Political Ideology of Dr Ivan Seliminski, in P. M. Kitromilides & Anna Tabaki ed., *Greek-Bulgarian Relations in the Age of National Identity Formation*, Athens, Institute for Neohellenic Research, 2010, 163-179.

¹² With the prevalence of rationalism the political influence of the church diminished and the essence of religious faith was seriously questioned. The triumph of reason and the development of a scientific way of thinking were followed by a complete reassessment of the context of the Holy Scriptures. Their divine and eternal truths based on revelation, miracles and prophecy were

It is obvious that Seliminski's engagement in such themes was largely due to his lively interest in the outcome of the Bulgarian ecclesiastical dispute. In his statements, he aimed to show that the clergy were responsible for the Bulgarian loss of national life, as well as the five centuries of Bulgarian subjugation to Turkish enslavement and absolute illiteracy.¹³ He explained that his work was based on historical facts, having applied the method of cause and effect to validate his assertions.¹⁴

In this context the present article examines how Seliminski perceives the background of the Bulgarian ecclesiastical situation, demonstrating his views on the following interrelated issues: the birth and necessity of religions, the emergence of the clergy and their role in society, the behavior of the high priests in the Bulgarian lands, and his suggestion for an appropriate solution to the ecclesiastical problem.

Origins and necessity of Religions

Seliminski agrees with the view that religions emerged in ancient times and their origins are related to meteorology and astronomy, in other words to human attempts to understand nature and the continuous changes in the environment.¹⁵ He states in his writing that being in the early stages of their intellectual development, primitive men were able to comprehend what was taking place in their surroundings through the use of their imagination. They deified natural phenomena and attributed them human qualities and needs.¹⁶ Through this imaginary interpretation of natural forces idolatry originated.¹⁷ With the emergence of new ideas and aspirations through human mental and moral

subjected to thorough examination and were either rejected as completely inconsistent with the new scientific world-view or re-interpreted in order to conform to the new principles. Apart from the hostile stance against religion, expressed mainly by Voltaire and the Deists on the one hand, and the attempts to elaborate a reasonable version of Christianity on the other, new vigorous reformist religious movements emerged in the West, such as Methodism, Jansenism and Pietism as well as the 'Great Awakening' in the North American colonies. Naxidou, *Traditional Aspects*, pp. 425-426. See also: Gerald R. Cragg, *The Church and the Age of Reason 1648-1789*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1960; Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment*, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

¹³ *Biblioteka Dr Iv. Seliminski*, XII, p. 24.

¹⁴ *Biblioteka Dr Iv. Seliminski*, XII, p. 25.

¹⁵ *Biblioteka*, XII, p. 3.

¹⁶ *Biblioteka*, XII, p. 45.

¹⁷ *Biblioteka*, XII, p. 30.

evolution, pagan beliefs were abandoned by societies. Seliminski goes on to say that the first instigator of moral change was Moses who, with the Ten Commandments, gave the Hebrews new political and moral rules. Later, Jesus summarized these rules into one moral doctrine: *love thy neighbor as yourself*. The Christian Church was founded on Jesus' instructions which were based on four principles: *God is love; the significance of religion is that people alleviate the misery of widows and orphans, and stay pure; priests teach the Word of God both through their preaching and their behavior; and Man is the temple of God*. Seliminski believes, however, that the Word of God had never been fully applied, because of the pagan and Jewish customs and practices that had survived. Responsibility for this failure lay primarily with the clergy, this being the reason that prevented the formation of a virtuous Christian society.¹⁸

Seliminski states that at the same time, religious faith was employed by both Biblical figures as a means to free people from tyranny. Moses liberated the Hebrews from Egyptian oppression and Jesus through the simple indisputable philosophical concept of solidarity instigated liberation from the Roman yoke.¹⁹ He also claims that the Romans officially adopted the new faith only out of fear of the various peoples under their rule unifying against them, and that their underlying intention was to eliminate it. This was why they encouraged dogmatic disputes, whose conflicts led to the formation of heresies. In this way the Romans strengthened their control, while at the same time the Christians were subdued to an even worse yoke, which was not merely physical but also spiritual. Then Mohammed, who was also spurred by political motives, introduced a new faith in order to improve the lives of his people. Declaring war against the infidels in the name of God, many peoples were conquered and the Byzantine Empire destroyed. Western Europeans did not succumb to Muslim domination because they were not divided by heresies,²⁰ even though, they too suffered under the yoke of the monks. Luther, the great church reformer (a Slav) came to teach the true message

¹⁸ *Biblioteka*, XII, pp. 50-51.

¹⁹ *Biblioteka*, XII, pp. 7-8.

²⁰ *Biblioteka*, XII, pp. 9-10.

of the Gospel. In this way his followers surpassed everyone else in piety, virtue and culture.²¹

According to Seliminski, there were other great social reformers in history who wrote laws in order to enhance the moral behavior and establish peace and solidarity among their people, among whom were Confucius for the Chinese, Manu for the Egyptians, as well as Cyril and Methodius for the Bulgarian people. Their common ground was that they all sought social amelioration based on either threats of eternal damnation or the reward of immortality. Despite their special abilities, courage, will, and understanding of the human soul, Seliminski goes on to observe that they all failed in their efforts to radically transform human society. They only managed to achieve some level of, albeit, superficial reform, on the old foundations. In other words, they rebuilt society using new methods but the same old materials, and in so doing merely giving them a somewhat better outward appearance. This, Seliminski claims becomes evident when one compares the old and new versions of the religious faith of various peoples. Even though they seem to have changed, in essence, the aims, ideas, teachings, morals and fanaticism of the clergy have remained intact.²² As regards Christianity, he states that it has embraced all the basic elements of paganism and Judaism, which differ only in name and appearance. The examples he cites include: the Christian God and Satan who are nothing more than the good and evil spirits worshipped by the pagans; heaven is in fact Hades; the birth of the son of the Indian God bears resemblance to the birth of Christ, and so on.²³

Emergence and Role of the Clergy

Seliminski was also concerned with the emergence of the privileged social group which is known by the name of clergy. He claimed that priests could in fact be identified as the ancient witch doctors and augurs since they both had similar roles and duties in human societies. Healers were the first to enjoy a prominent position among peoples in primitive times because they took care of an essential human need, the treatment of illness. When humans became pagans, deifying and

²¹ *Biblioteka*, XII, p. 10.

²² *Biblioteka*, XII, pp. 40-41.

²³ *Biblioteka*, XII, p. 4.

worshiping natural forces and phenomena, these witch doctors were considered capable of communicating with Gods and interpreting their will.²⁴ Having personified nature, people believed that God/the power of creation resembled the ruthless tyrants who now governed them and that God too drew satisfaction from human misery. It was due to such perceptions, Seliminski, explains that the common people fall under the control of the cunning men, who supposedly were the only ones that knew the desires of the Gods and the methods to please them. These men, however, were in fact liars and deceivers. It was through such means that they became masters of people's minds and thoughts, so that no human activity could be accomplished without their consent. Moreover, being regarded as representatives of the power of creation on Earth, they were yielded the right to rule mankind in its name.²⁵

Seliminski was convinced, that even up until his day, this elite performed ceremonial services, not to appease God to forgive human sins as they claimed, but rather to manipulate and dominate the people.²⁶ The most effectively devious way that this subjugation was carried out was by indoctrinating the people with the belief that if they lived their miserable temporary lives on Earth by following the will of God, the righteous could look forward to the reward of eternal bliss in heaven, whereas the sinful would suffer eternal damnation. Through theology they posed as prophets and the keepers of the key to heaven, the ultimate abode of all humans.²⁷ On the other hand, the temples, which in effect were the first hospitals, were the places where the ill were treated but also where the 'charlatan' priests mediated with God on behalf of the lay people – to fulfill their human longings- at a price. In more modern times monks replaced them in both healing and mediation services.²⁸

Witch doctors, prophets and priests based their power on human ignorance and fear of sin. Considering knowledge as a threat to their authority, they urged people to read the books which they wrote and/or approved of. Any other written work was characterized as being detrimental to the human soul and was strictly

²⁴ *Biblioteka*, XII, pp. 24-30.

²⁵ *Biblioteka*, XII, pp. 45-46.

²⁶ *Biblioteka*, XII, p. 7.

²⁷ *Biblioteka*, XII, pp. 31-32.

²⁸ *Biblioteka*, XII, pp. 34-35.

forbidden. For this reason, they were very much afraid of the development of education, as well as contact and exchange of ideas between peoples with different attitudes, mentality, and way of life, going to great lengths to prevent them.²⁹ Seliminski argued that priesthood, which he referred to as a horrible class, had always oppressed mankind and continued to do so with the methods and activities described above. In accordance with their preaching, God, religion, the clergy and man were the four cornerstones on which human society was founded. They portrayed God/the force of creation, however, as wrathful and as taking pleasure in human misery. Religion, on the other hand, they professed consisted of the proper practices that must be followed in order to appease God and be redeemed. The means by which man could expiate his sins was to give material goods and make financial offerings to the church. The clergy deceived the people by preaching that their wretched life on earth in fact brought them happiness, whereas those who lived in prosperity would suffer eternal misery. Man, they claimed, was a miserable, frightened, sinful creature, who on his deathbed would be called to account for his deeds. It was only the priests that could save a person's soul from damnation in the afterlife.³⁰

Seliminski fervently believed that the clergy was the main culprit for the failure of the Christian religion to reform society. They misinterpreted the basic principles of the Holy Scriptures, concentrating mainly on the material side of the doctrine and neglecting the moral context. Having fallen prey to corrupt priesthood, Christianity became a source of injustice, persecution, internecine conflicts and merciless oppression. Gradually, however, human intellectual development stimulated scientific and technical progress which had the effect of seeing the Gospel in a new light. The true meaning of the Scriptures was sought and contrasted with the preaching of the clergy. Thus, 1,400 years after the advent of Christ, Luther reformed the Christian Church 'cleaning up the infection' and restoring it to its initial form.³¹

Instead of living humbly in accordance with the Word of God, performing religious rituals on behalf of the faithful, they appropriated religion, turning what

²⁹ *Biblioteka*, XII, p. 47.

³⁰ *Biblioteka*, XII, pp. 48-49.

³¹ *Biblioteka*, XII, pp. 51-52.

should have been a vocation and a mission into a profession.³² Hungry for power, they preached falsehoods and heretic teachings, thus dividing the Church.³³ These money grabbing, cheats claimed that God demanded material sacrifices and ordered the people to build luxurious palaces in His name as an indication of their subordination. They taxed and fined people for their sins, they usurped both material and moral goods, and they determined and regulated people's activities, such as diet, marriage and so on. Seliminski states, it was through this scheming that the priests oppressed man's mind and depraved his soul with threats. They kept the laity under tight control in a labyrinth of illusion. The more the people looked to them for spiritual guidance, the more they deceived them with talk of piety, virtue and redemption. They labeled anyone who dared to challenge their authority as impious, atheists or rebels. Well aware that their power rested in people's ignorance, the clergy sought to keep the masses uneducated, intimidating them with curses or reassuring them with vows that supposedly lost or won God's favor. This was also how social exclusion or inclusion was determined by the clergy.³⁴

Seliminski accused the clergy of all religions to be living off their flock, as though they produced nothing, consumed plenty. They wanted people to be kept at a primitive level of development because it was easier for them to exploit the illiterate and the gullible. Over the course of time, their numbers increased and so did their machinations, wealth and power.³⁵

High Priests in the Bulgarian Lands

Seliminski characterized the Greek high clergy (Phanariots) in the Bulgarian lands as one of the three cruel tyrants of the Bulgarian people, the other two being the Turks and the notables (chorbadzhi) who collaborated with the clergy.³⁶ The Bulgarians had endured the Phanariot yoke since 1767 when the independent Bulgarian Church was subordinated to the Patriarchate of

³² *Biblioteka*, XII, pp. 59-60.

³³ *Biblioteka*, XII, p. 65.

³⁴ *Biblioteka*, XII, pp. 11-12.

³⁵ *Biblioteka*, XII, pp. 41-42.

³⁶ *Biblioteka*, XII, p. 53.

Constantinople.³⁷ More specifically, in the 1760's Patriarch Samuel abolished all three Slavic Churches in the Balkans, namely, the Archbishoprics of Tarnovo, Ohrid and Ipek. This was done with the intention of extending his power over the Slavic peoples in Turkey in order to turn them into victims of the Phanatiots' avarice and the Greek *Great Idea*.³⁸ The Phanatiots divided their flock into two categories: the faithful who enjoyed favorable status and the catechumens who were treated badly, sometimes even as slaves. Only those who were of Greek origin or Hellenized were entitled to belong to the first group, whereas all other nationalities fell into in the second one.³⁹ Using religion as a means to implement their unlawful aspirations, both the Patriarch of Constantinople and the elders (the high clergy constituting the synod of the Patriarchate) committed every possible injustice against the Bulgarian people, imposing a reign of terror. Besides being illiterate and incapable of fulfilling their commitments, they were corrupt and exploited the Bulgarians financially.⁴⁰ Seliminski describes in great detail how seeing the Bulgarian people living in misery gave these remorseless tyrants great satisfaction. Not only did they oppress the laity through curses, excommunication, intrigues and persecution, but also slandered the Bulgarians as a whole to the Turkish authorities and the Great Powers. Through this shameful conduct, they annulled the Bulgarians' justified protests against them.⁴¹

In addition, the Phanariots were against the Bulgarian national movement and employed every conceivable means to quash it.⁴² The Bulgarian language was forbidden in church services, and in schools, being replaced by ancient Greek, which was incomprehensible even to Greeks. Old Bulgarian manuscripts and books were burned; Bulgarian monasteries were taken over or destroyed,⁴³ and the most important educated Bulgarian clergymen were banished.⁴⁴ It was through these devious means that the Bulgarians not only forgot their language and writing system, but also were deprived of their basic human rights. Disputes

³⁷ *Biblioteka*, XII, p. 54.

³⁸ *Biblioteka*, X, pp. 93-94.

³⁹ *Biblioteka*, X, p. 74.

⁴⁰ *Biblioteka*, X, pp. 77-83.

⁴¹ *Biblioteka*, XII, pp. 60-61.

⁴² *Biblioteka*, XII, p. 57.

⁴³ *Biblioteka*, X, pp. 76-77.

⁴⁴ *Biblioteka*, X, pp. 84-85.

among compatriots arose, religious feelings or love for family degenerated, and illiteracy prevailed.⁴⁵

Seliminski also criticized the Phanariots for their teachings. First and foremost, he stated, moral principles should support human needs, otherwise they were nothing more than empty words with no impact at all. No human being, he explained, could be expected to obey religious preaching that did not assist him in his daily needs, even when threatened with hell, and even more so when the preachers, the so-called 'servants of God', lived in opulence. Seliminski was convinced that the Phanariot clergy over the course of many centuries sought to destroy the Bulgarians with such false instructions in the name of 'true faith'.⁴⁶ After all, he concluded, religion existed for the sake of people and not the other way round.⁴⁷

On the whole, Seliminski likened the Phanariots to the Pharisees⁴⁸ declaring that the only way that the Bulgarians could improve their lot was to free themselves from the Greek high clergy once and for all,⁴⁹ and seek independent national church administration.⁵⁰

Finally, in his writings, Seliminski referred to the various ways through which his co-nationals had until then proposed the accomplishment of ecclesiastical emancipation, only to reject each in turn. First of all, he was totally opposed to a definitive rupture with the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Neither did he agree to accession to the Catholic Church, as this would simply mean subordination of the Bulgarian nation to an even more powerful Patriarch. Embracing the Evangelical faith, on the other hand, would require a change in dogma which, should only be considered after the establishment of an independent Bulgarian Church. At that time, Seliminski claimed that the Bulgarian people were not sufficiently developed either intellectually or morally, nor spiritually mature to engage in doctrinal discussions. As he saw it, this would only harm Bulgarian interests. The proposal he, himself, put forward for

⁴⁵ *Biblioteka*, X, pp. 85-86.

⁴⁶ D-r Ivan Seliminski, *Izbrani Sachineniia*, pp. 39-40.

⁴⁷ *Izbrani Sachineniia*, p. 41.

⁴⁸ *Biblioteka*, XII, p. 51.

⁴⁹ *Biblioteka*, XII, p. 57.

⁵⁰ *Biblioteka*, XII, pp. 62-63.

ecclesiastical emancipation from the Phanariots was rather vague; his option was to establish close relations with the European nations in order for the Bulgarians to reach their goal.⁵¹

Conclusions

Making a distinction between religion and the clergy, Seliminski argued that the former was useful for human society, whereas the latter was a group of individuals who had always exploited people and never fulfilled their mission. In this assumption he was obviously influenced by similar Western anticlerical views which he probably came across during his stay in Europe.

More specifically, Seliminski believed in the existence of a unique force of creation/God. In this way, he perceived the various religions as moral/philosophical systems of belief which had been introduced by enlightened humans rather than as God's revelation. For him, they were codes of moral values all based on the same principles, despite their different names and 'wrappings' which served merely to cater to the mentality of people to whom they were addressed. Seliminski was convinced that religious faith was necessary for human progress and prosperity provided that the specific doctrines were observed correctly. However, he rejected the idea that religion had ever had a beneficial role in society mainly because of the pagan elements that had been assimilated and the fact that the essential meaning had been continually distorted by the clergy. For this reason, Seliminski held an adverse stance against clergymen whom as self-appointed representatives of God, he considered to be charlatans. They misinterpreted the essence of religion, and turned their calling into a profession in order to have a privileged position in society. They were solely responsible manipulating the simple, uneducated folk and keeping them in a state of misery and ignorance. Although Luther was the only exception to this, Seliminski was not in favor of Bulgarian adopting the principles of Lutheranism before they had formed their own national church.

The Phanariot clergy of the Bulgarian lands lay at the core of Seliminski's sharp criticism. Not only were they fake apostles who preached morals

⁵¹ *Biblioteka*, XII, pp. 63-67.

detrimental to the nature, needs and happiness of humans; not only were they remorseless tyrants, responsible for the misery, illiteracy and backwardness of the Bulgarian people; but they were also totally opposed to the Bulgarian national awakening. Although Seliminski believed that clerical emancipation from the Phanariots was imperative for the Bulgarians to develop and gain prosperity, he was not able to provide a clear or concise plan for the achievement of this goal.

All in all Seliminski participated in the discussions of the time about the Bulgarian ecclesiastical issue placing it within the context of a broader ideological/theoretical approach concerning religion, the church and the agents involved. His personal contribution consists in his attempt to take a philosophical approach to the predominantly national/political perspective of this most significant of issues for Bulgarians and their national identity.