Once Again on Dualism in the Bosnian Church

Franjo Rački published his book Bogomili i patareni 150 years ago. Since then, there has been unceasing debate over the Bosnian Church, its organization, liturgical practice and dogmas. One of F. Rački’s most frequently disputed theses concerns the genealogical connection between Balkan neo-Manichean heresies and the teachings of the Bosnian dissidents – particularly the question as to the direct influence of Bulgarian and Byzantine Bogomilism on the cosmology, dogmatics and social doctrine of the Bosnian Christians, or “patarenes”, as Rački called them. Further below, I will consecutively use the terms “Christians”, “Bosnian Christians”, and “Bosnian Church”, with variants “Bosnian dissidents/heterodox”. All these designations have been used in the more recent studies that oppose the terminological “Latinization”, which is not only outdated but also suggests a certain ideological bias. The term “Bogomils”, occurring in the older literature, I find likewise imprecise: despite the obvious influence exercised by Balkan Bogomilism on religious life in medieval Bosnia and Herzegovina, the doctrine, ecclesiastical organization and liturgical practice of Bosnian Christians differed in some respects from the doctrine of Bulgarian and Byzantine neo-Manichean communities.

* This article has been written under the research project financed by the National Science Centre (Poland). Decision number: DEC-2016/22/M/HS3/00212 (Dualist Heresies in the History of South-East Europe, 9th–15th century).


This article aims to demonstrate that Balkan Bogomilism did indeed exercise direct influence on the Bosnian Church, but that this does not imply the latter was sensu stricto Bogomil in character. The refusal of some scholars to acknowledge the presence of certain dualist elements in the doctrine of the Bosnian heterodox is often marked by religious and ideological bias connected with political attitudes that have nothing to do with scientific discourse but rather concern the ethnic and national identity (or lack of such identity) of the Bosniaks and their religion, language and culture. Here I would quote the opinion of Piotr Wróbel, a scholar well versed in Bosnian history:

The history of the Bosnian Manicheans, the Ottoman conquest of Bosnia, and the subsequent Islamization are important elements of the construction of a national identity of the Bosnian Muslims, that is, of the so-called Bosniaks. These events in the distant Middle Ages acquire surprisingly great importance in a present-day perspective. As such, they become the object of what has recently been designated by the resonant but rather enigmatic term “historical politics” (German – Geschichtspolitik)

The resistance against the thesis of Bogomil influence unites different scholars from ex-Yugoslavia regardless of their ethnic, ideological or religious affiliation, and is an element of their shared Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav Geschichtspolitik. In other words, Yugoslav, and especially post-Yugoslav, historians are divided internally (as Serbs, Croatians, Bosnians), but they are all united against the disadvantageous concept of an external, in this case Bulgarian, influence, supported not only by Bulgarian but also by Western scholars, and more recently by researchers from Bosnia-Herzegovina, influenced by “the classical Bulgarian perspective on medieval heresies”4. According to the deniers of the term Bogomilism, the Bosnian Church, when “pressed between” the Bulgarian (Bogomil-based) and the Western (Cathar-based) interpretation of medieval dualism, loses its identity.

* * *

Analyzing the dogmatics and ecclesiology of the Bosnian Church is a particularly difficult task. The Latin sources are tendentious and often ascribe to the Bosnian Christians features typical of the West European dualists. Few domestic,

---

Bosnian-Slavic sources contain theological information. From a methodological viewpoint, the naturally correct scientific reflex would demand seeking some direct influence or parallels between the doctrine of the Bosnian Christians and other medieval heterodox doctrines.

The lack of Slavic sources is partially compensated for by the discovery made by the Russian Slavist Mikhail N. Speranski, who published in 1902 the marginal glosses to the so-called Srećković Gospel, a Cyrillic monument from the 14th century (which was destroyed during the bombardment of Belgrade in 1941). In his article, he defined the manuscript as a “bosnischen Evangelium” and published the marginalia that had been added later (in the 15th–16th centuries), which according to him, testified that the manuscript had been for some time in a dualist environment. Since then and to this day, disputes have continued pro and contra the neo-Manichean, Bogomil content of the marginal glosses. The most ardent supporter of the view that they hold a concealed Bogomil message was Alexandar Solovjev, who further developed F. Rački’s thesis as to the moderate dualism of the Bosnian “patarenes”. Among the more recent defenders of the view as to the text’s heterodox content is Sima Ćirković, while its opponents include Dragoljub Dragojlović. Lejla Nakš also argued against the supposed Bogomil content of the marginalia.

I would express some doubts about the categorical conclusions of supporters and opponents alike of the “Bogomil connection”; to do so, I will comment on two of the marginal glosses (5 and 9 according to the numeration of M.N. Speranski).

Here are the texts:

F. 75, opposite Luke 10: 30–35 (the Parable of the Good Samaritan): Ονь чвькь есть пякиници, а црьльк жилище святыхь, а ерфемь жилище святыхь, а ерфь мирь, а ѣзви грьси, а ерꙴ҇х моиси, а левгить ивань водоносьць, а самарианїнь иѧсь, а олѣи и вино милость бжѣиѣ, а скоть законь, а гостинница црква, а гостинникь петарь, а два пѣнеза вѣра идина.


5 M.N. Speranski, Ein bosnisches Evangelium in der Handschriftensammlung Srećković’s, ASP 24, 1902, p. 172–182. The text of the marginal glosses, a sort of explanation of some Gospel fragments, is on p. 176–178.

6 A. Solovjev, Vjersko učenje bosanske crkve, Zagreb 1948.


The supporters of F. Rački’s hypothesis find in these marginalia some traces of moderate or radical dualism. Aleksandar Solovjev seeks in the expression кнєзъ вєкъ the image of Satan, who has enslaved human souls in the material world he created (moderate dualism). Sima Ćirković also finds some traces of dualism, radical in this case, in the marginal glosses: according to him, the texts in the Srećković Gospel exemplify a radical dualist opposition between the soul (the divine principle) and the body (the material creation of the demiurge). The most categorical opponent of the thesis as to the presence of dualist, Bogomil influences in the doctrine of the Bosnian Christians seems to be D. Dragojlović. In his opinion, the marginal glosses in the Srećković Gospel have a “seeming dualist content”, whereas, the domestic sources convincingly confirm that the Bosnian Christians were not familiar with Cathar or Manichean dualism, but accepted the mystic dualism of the Eastern Church, which was rejected in the works of some mystics of the Eastern Church.

I can partially agree with Dragojlović’s view. Indeed, from the marginal glosses, we cannot draw positive conclusions as to some dualist content – whether moderate or radical. Dualism – the opposing of the celestial to the earthly – is typical for the orthodox Churches as well, especially (here the Belgrade scholar is right again) for monastic communities, whose mysticism was not always acceptable to the official Church. I would add that A. Solovjev (criticized by Dragojlović), who was perhaps the most ardent supporter of the Bogomil theory, contradicts himself. In his analysis of the sources, he correctly points out that there is no trace of a dualist cosmology in the Serbian anti-heretical texts or in the doctrine of the Bosnian Christians; the issues there are mostly related to ritual practices. Why then, in his later work, does he find “sure traces” of a Bogomil cosmogony in the marginalia?

The text of these marginal glosses do not permit such categorical assertions in either direction. In them, we find dualist elements similar to the ecclesiology and theology of the Balkan neo-Manicheans; these elements, however, concern not so much cosmology but rather the concept of the church, the attitude to the sacraments and to the Patristic tradition. In marginal gloss № 5, the Church is likened to an inn, and St. Peter, to an innkeeper (α гостинница црква, а гостинникъ петаръ). In marginal gloss № 9, the јконобва (the housekeeper) is the “elder” of the prince of this world (кнєзъ вєкъ), the debtor is the lawyers, i.e., the clergymen, who по все дни грєхє ṣићαμо чєлємъ и тако гєђє дєє чєћє.

That the official Church and the material temple is a crossroads, a hangout, of unclean forces, is not a new idea in the teachings of Balkan dualists. Cosmas

12 Д. Драгојловић, Крстjани и јеретичка црква босанска…, p. 199.
13 A. Solovjev, Svedočanstva pravoslavnih izvora o bogomilstvu na Balkanu, GIBH 5, 1953, p. 29.

Retrieved from https://czasopisma.uni.lodz.pl/sceranea [31.01.2021]
Presbyter severely condemns such views in the Bogomils: the heretics designated the churches as crossroads: црькви бо распѫтна мьнѧтъ сѫща14; the temples belong to the devil: црькви крьстъі и каси бо жину диаволу прѫдѧлятъ15. The Greek sources also provide many examples of the neo-Manichean negative attitude to the holy temples. Euthymius of Peribleptos writes, “…οἱ τοιοῦτοι Θεὸν ποιητὴν οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς οὐ σέβονται, οὔτε Θεοτόκον, οὔτε τίμιον σταυρόν, οὔτε ἁγίον, οὔτε εἰκόνας, οὔτε θείους ναοὺς, οὔτε ἁγίον βάπτσμα”16. Euthymius Zigabenus specifies that the Bogomils believed the churches were inhabited by demons: “Λέγουσιν ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς ἱεροῖς ναοῖς κατοικεῖν τοὺς δαίμονας διαλαχόντας αὐτοὺς ἀναλόγως τῆς ἑκάστου τάξεως καὶ δυνάμεως”17. In a Greek text of the 14th century, an abridged version of the epistle of Euthymius of Peribleptos, preserved in the Vatican Apostolic Library (Vat. gr. 604), it is even noted that the heretics seemingly built churches, but immediately desecrated them, converting the altar into a latrine18.

Even assuming the words of the Byzantine controversialist were a “monk’s invention” aimed to blacken the adversary, many other sources confirm the negative attitude of the Messalians to material temples19. Hence, we may assume with a considerable degree of certainty that the Bogomils inherited this aversion from their predecessors. The Bosnian Christians adopted these views; this becomes evident from marginal gloss № 5 and from most of the scant archeological data on sacral construction and icon painting in medieval Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The depiction of the official church as an inn, and St. Peter, as an innkeeper (гостинника), is a summary image of the Roman Catholic Church. There is an established view among scholars (J. Šidak, D. Dragojlović) that the members of the Bosnian Church believed themselves to be direct descendants of the Christian communities of the time of the Apostles. This religious exclusiveness precluded rivalry: the dissidents viewed the orthodox Churches as “disloyal” to the tradition, as “tainted” by innovations, as devilish. All the more so when one of these Churches would lay claim to religious leadership over territories inhabited by “true Christians” and would be powerful enough to organize the persecution of dissidents.

---

15 Cosmas Presbyter, p. 48.
18 F. Osti, L’Epistola invettiva…, p. 270.
19 Д. Драгојловић, Богомилство на Балкану и у Малој Азији…, p. 114–115.
Exclusiveness was not a feature of the Bosnian Church alone: every heresy asserts its exceptional status in relation to the dominant religion; this is a natural reaction of dissidents against the repressive ideological and legal pressure exercised by the official ecclesiastic and secular institutions. All medieval neo-Manichean movements condemned the orthodox Churches, accusing them of apostasy from the teachings of Christ and the Apostles. The Bogomils’ desire to claim similarity to the early Christian communities has long been noted and commented on in scholarly literature. Many examples may be adduced in support of these observations. I will cite only two:

In *Sermon against the Bogomils*, Cosmas Presbyter writes,

…покушал са оборити цркву њехин јеш њест врда хрисијанскага и не врелого-ша; …преданьа законо сваки њехин цркву похулвиким, скова си учењна често творатк21.

Euthymius Zigabenus also censures the negative attitude of the Bogomils of Constantinople towards the official Church and its prelates based on their veneration of icons: Τοὺς ἱεραρχας δὲ καὶ τοὺς Πατέρας ὁμοῦ πάντας ἀποδοκιμάζουσιν ώς εἰδωλολάτρας διὰ τὴν τῶν εἰκόνων προσκύνησιν22.

It is hard to draw unambiguous conclusion regarding direct Bogomil influence in the Bosnian Christians’ claim that their community – in contrast with the orthodox Churches – is the true heir to ancient tradition. Other unorthodox doctrines of the early Christian era and neo-Manichean teachings in the Balkans and Western Europe have likewise had such pretensions. But even assuming the similarities are typological rather than a result of direct influence, two other phrases in the marginal glosses refer directly to the Bogomil doctrine: законици иже по все дни грѣхе њупу члѣкомь и тако гюе дш ње члѣвк23.

The “lawyers” in question are orthodox priests who, by confessing the faithful and giving them absolution for their sins, bring about the perdition of their souls. Confession is linked to Holy Communion, and since both the Bogomils and the Bosnian Christians rejected the canon of the Eucharist, they also repudiated the sacrament of confession to a priest. Cosmas Presbyter notes that the Bogomils made confessions to one another, and even that women could act as confessors:

21 Cosmas Presbyter, p. 31, 42.
23 Cosmas Presbyter, p. 69.
The Bosnian Christians also rejected this sacrament (and most other sacraments for that matter). For them, a confession made to a priest was a sin leading to the perdition of the divine soul.

A very interesting phrase is, “а левгить Ивань водоносьць”, in which St. John the Baptist is compared to the Hebrew priests (the Levites) and is disparagingly called a “water-bearer”. Bulgarian and Greek anti-Bogomil treatises also emphasize the dualists’ contempt for the Forerunner of Christ; they avoided the designation “Baptist” (Βαπτιστής) or Forerunner (Πρόδρομος), and when they did refer to him as “Forerunner”, they meant of the Antichrist, as indicated in the Sermon against the Bogomils: юдруже предтечѫ Иоана же прѣдътечѫ и зарѭ великаѥго слънца вещьствоуꙗть антихристова предътечѫ нарицѫмꙗ.24 In their view, John is an associate of Satan, and his worst “sin” was to have baptized Jesus with water. In the Epistle of Patriarch Cosmas to the Metropolitan of Larissa, the author anathemizes those who claim John the Baptist belongs to Satan, who are revolted by baptism with water, and perform baptism by merely reciting the Lord’s Prayer:

Τοῖς τὸν βαπτιστὴν Ιωάννην ἐνυβρίζουσι καὶ λέγουσιν ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ Σατανᾶ ἐστι καὶ αὐτὸς καὶ τὸ δὲ ὑδάτος βάπτισμα, καὶ τούτου ὄνομα τὸ δὲ ὑδάτος ἄγιον βάπτισμα ἀποστρεφομένοις καὶ ἁνευ ὑδάτος μετὰ μόνην τὴν ρήσιν τοῦ Πάτερ ἡμῶν ἀνάθεμα.25

In Panoplia dogmatica, it is also underscored that the Bogomils of Constantinople did not accept the sacrament of baptism established, according to the Church tradition, by St. John the Forerunner: Ἐνδοιῇ μὲν παρ’ ἡμῖν βάπτισμα τοῦ Ιωάννου λέγουσιν, ὑς δὲ ὑδάτος ἐπιτελούμενον, τὸ δὲ παρ’ αὐτοῖς τοῦ Χριστοῦ διὰ Πνεῦματος ἵνα τὸν δοκεῖ τελειούμενον.26

These examples indicate that the medieval dualists abhorred St. John the Forerunner, as they connected him to the Old Testament tradition, which they rejected, but especially to the sacrament of baptism, also rejected by them and replaced in the heterodox communities by the so-called “spiritual baptism”, a rite that has been described variously in the Slavic, Greek, and Latin sources, but with an invariable element: the absence of water (and myrrh) in the ritual.

Водоносьць from the Bosnian marginal gloss is absent in the Slavic texts of the classical age. The lexeme водонось f. occurs – in the sense of “bucket”, for instance, in Codex Supr.: ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐστὶ δουλεύει κρατὴρ ἡμῶν καὶ κυνῆς καὶ καρυδίου καὶ κολίνης.27 Водоносьць is a masculine noun, nomina agentis formed with the suffix -ьсъ. The expression Ивань водоносьць literally means, “Ivan, the carrier of a bucket (of water)”. The derogatory nickname indicates that the Bosnian Christians

24 Cosmas Presbyter, p. 34.
rejected the orthodox sacrament of baptism, replacing it with a “spiritual” one similar to the liturgical practices of the Balkan or West European heterodox. Most Catholic polemicists point out that the “spiritual baptism” of Christians was performed in a way similar to the Cathar ritual: without water and by raising the Gospel to the breast of the baptized person. Latin documents clearly show that Rome required rebaptism for the Manicheans forsaking the heresy and passing into the bosom of the Catholic Church. Pope Pius II insisted on this in an epistle to the last king of Bosnia, Stephan Tomašević. Some scholars doubt the reliability of Western sources. Dragoljub Dragojlović believes that “spiritual baptism” was actually a monastic initiation rite, a kind of ordination in which the Gospel was placed on the head of the monk in absolution for his sins. This interpretation diminishes in trustworthiness when we consider not the Latin sources, but the domestic, Slavic-Bosnian, ones. The author of the marginal glosses to the Srećković Gospel stated categorically that confessing to a priest was pernicious for the soul, and the baptism performed by “Ivan the water-carrier” lacked potency for mystic purification of the soul and body. The two marginal glosses clearly indicate that the Bosnian Church, similar in this to other dualist communities, rejected both the orthodox hierarchy and two of the most important sacraments: confession (and, consequently, the Eucharist connected to it) and baptism with water, established, according to tradition, by St. John the Baptist.

I am intentionally not lingering on some phrases in the marginal glosses that might be interpreted as indicating views close to the neo-Manichean dualist cosmology: about Satan as lord of this world (кнезь вѣка), about man’s immortal soul enclosed in the mortal body. These texts allow interpretations both in support of a moderate or radical dualism in the Bosnian Christians’ doctrine (A. Solo- vjev, S. Čirković), and against it (D. Dragojlović). The dualist opposition between good and evil, between matter and spirit, is typical both for the neo-Manichean heresies and for the orthodox Churches. Hence, it would be questionable to look for direct influence of the Bogomil or Cathar doctrines upon this aspect of the Bosnian cosmology. But it would not be questionable as regards the phrases in the marginalia we have interpreted above: very likely, the attitude of the Bosnian Church towards the Patristic tradition (the contempt for St. John the Baptist) and the orthodox sacraments (baptism, confession, Eucharist) followed the models laid down by the Balkan Bogomils. As for the negative attitude towards the official Churches, the similarities may be typological as well, i.e., a common to all dissident movements hostility towards the dominant ecclesiastic organization. The phrase гостинникъ Петаръ, however, testifies to a rejection specifically of the Roman Catholic Church, an attitude reflecting the centuries-long disagreements between the Bosnian Church, the papal power, the hierarchy, and the Catholic missionaries active in these lands.

28 Д. Драгојловић, Крстљани и јеретичка црква босанска…, p. 137.
29 Ibidem, p. 172.
Our analysis of certain particularities of the Bosnian Church’s doctrine, based on the two marginal glosses from the Srećković Gospel, justifies our asserting that the doctrine and liturgical practice of the Church in question differed significantly from those of the orthodox Churches. Though not copying the Bulgarian and Byzantine Bogomil communities, the Bosnian Church was undoubtedly heretical, and the neo-Manichean influences coming from the Eastern Balkans were an integral element of the Bosnian Christians’ faith.

**Bibliography**

**Primary Sources**


**Secondary Literature**


Abstract. The article examines the debate as to the direct influence of Bulgarian and Byzantine Bogomilism upon the doctrine of the Bosnian Church. The author traces some scholarly views pro et contra the presence, in the Bosnian-Slavic sources, of traces of neo-Manichean views on the Church, the Patristic tradition, and the sacraments. In analyzing two marginal glosses in the so-called Srećković Gospel in the context of some anti-Bogomil Slavic and Byzantine texts, the article attempts to establish the importance of Bulgarian and Byzantine Bogomilism for the formation of certain dogmatic and ecclesiological views in the doctrine of the Bosnian Church: the negative attitude towards the orthodox Churches, especially the Roman Catholic Church; the rejection of the sacrament of baptism and of St. John the Baptist; the rejection of the sacrament of confession, and hence, of the Eucharist. These doctrinal particularities of the Bosnian Church warrant the assertion that its teachings and liturgical practice differed significantly from the dogmatics and practice of the Orthodox Churches. Without being a copy of the Bogomil communities, the Bosnian Church was certainly heretical, and neo-Manichean influences from the Eastern Balkans were an integral element of the Bosnian Christians’ faith.

Keywords: Bosnian Church, Bogomilism, dualism