

EASTERN DUALISTIC HERESIES: THE CHALLENGE OF BOGOMILISM*

Bogomilism represents a spiritual manifestation, with a dualistic nature, of a religious expression, and a social and philosophical orientation. The beginnings of Bogomilism are connected with the period from the mid-10th century and its dynamic of alternating expansion and decline, adjusting the method of existence to the current social and political conditions, allowed it to survive on the historical scene until 15th century when the last impulses of its existence were realized.

The appearance of Bogomilism in Macedonia was primarily determined by the specific socio-political and economic conditions characteristic for the medieval period; however, its spiritual source should be searched for in the conditions created by the activities of St Clement and Naum of Ohrid.¹

Namely, during the period of second half of 9 c., after their return from Moravia in Macedonia, the Christianity, as an official religion, was being proclaimed by Greek priests with a religious service in Greek and under the direct jurisdiction of Constantinople.² With the intention of resisting the Byzantine religious and cultural domination, the Bulgarian Tchar Boris sent Clement to the South-western parts of Macedonia so as to pacify his compatriots and simultaneously spread Christianity in the folk Slavonic language. The teaching activity of Clement of Ohrid resulted in the creation of Ohrid Literary School where traditions established with the activities of St Cyril and Methodius were being cherished in its authentic form. In an ambience such as that, an ambience of heightened feudalism and an evident presence of teaching ideas, specific spiritual preconditions for expansion of

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¹ D. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*. London 1971, 103-104; M. Agnold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni*. Cambridge, 1995.

² И. Велев, *Изворните идеи на моравската мисија на св. Кирил и св. Методиј во дејноста на св. Климент и св. Наум Охридски*. Кирилometодиевската традиција и континуитет. Скопје 1997, 11-20.

bogomil–heretic doctrine to be created.³ It certainly wasn't a matter of direct connection between the activity of St Clement and the latter Bogomil movement, but more of an immediate influence which represents one of the preconditions for its appearance. Namely, as a man with diverse erudition St Clement was acquainted with the appearance of apocryphal texts in Byzantine literature, and even used some of the texts, enriching his preaching and edifying word without, of course, trying to exhibit any kind of heresy. Thus, in his work "*A Sermon for Pasha*" there are multiple references about the motif for Christ's descending in the hell while the "*Words of Praise for the Archangels Michael and Gavril*" talks about the fall of Lucifer and the victory of arhistratig Michael, topics characteristic for the apocrypha, and later reflected in the folklore.⁴ The ideological platform of Clement's activity consisted of including a larger number of students in the educational process in Slavonic language. That way literacy was available for a wider social class without any aspirations to be treated as a privilege of the class with a higher social status. According to the data from the *Life of St. Clement*, their immediate engagement in the Ohrid Literary School resulted in a body of 3,500 students with theological and generally literary education. Most of them probably continued their activities as devoted servants of the official church, but there were also those that while broadening their theological and ideological conceptions tried to find a new spiritual expression. It testifies that the educational process in the Ohrid Literary School was not limited only to a passive adoption of Christian dogmas, but that it indirectly influenced the possibility of creating critical relationship in their exegesis. In that respect, the education by itself did not represent heresy, but it encouraged scepticism which evolved to a constructive criticism, especially when it came to interpreting the gospel contents. So, through the literacy as an expression of passive resistance, the need to develop an alternative way of thinking that would contradict the monopoly of the official Christian dogmatics was imposed. These are the conditions that also identify the appearance of Bogomil heresy which directs the thought towards the secular processes of universal problems of the time and in the scientific literature is justifiably defined as an early anticipation of European humanism. The main preacher and ideological creator of Bogomilism was the priest Bogomil, for whom it is believed to have been a priest educated within the Orthodox Church. He was a man who, for his time, showed reformatory tendencies regarding many religious and social issues. The idea of Bogomilism as a new

³ Y. Stoyanov, *The Hidden Tradition in Europe*. Arcana 1994, 132-133; M. Barber, *The Cathars. Dualist Heretics in Languedoc in the High Middle Ages*. Longman, 2000, . 15.

⁴ Г. Василев, *Български богомилски и апокрифни представи в английската средновековна култура*. София, 2001, 240.

spiritual manifestation was probably due to Priest Bogomil's theoretical experience and objective reasoning, but the complete realisation of Bogomilism as a teaching with a distinct conception which concerns theological, philosophical and social aspects was probably the result of many years of team work with his closest associates and followers. Priest Bogomil's pragmatism, in addition to its ideological platform, lies mainly in his ability to coordinate his associates for a complete realization of this teaching. All that is particularly important because of the fact that Bogomilism was not limited only to a theoretical interpretation; on the contrary, it meant more immediate engagement in organizing the life in heretical communities and developing a literary activity in the spirit of Bogomil theology.⁵

The tradition from heretical experiences and philosophical concepts from the past have qualitatively left visible traces on the conception and ideological direction of Bogomilism; at the same time, the attempt to include new contents which would contribute to the authenticity and original articulation of the teaching is an undisputed fact.

The essence of Bogomilism as a movement and as a teaching can be followed and historically reconstructed on the basis of several key postulates, such as the dualism, the specific theological and dogmatic determination, the support of ethical principles within their social life, and finally the political dimension of the teaching the determinants of which rise from the overall social and political processes in medieval times.

The dualist ontology in its most general formulation represents an integral part of the human spirituality which in the process of evolutionary awareness has been facing and experiencing the differentiation between the categories of good and bad. In fact, the dualism represented an actual consequence arising from the human perception of the factual and cruel life on earth as opposed to the visionary model of an ideal life which would be realised in God's heavenly realm. Philosophical orientations and religious concepts were formed on the basis of antagonistic position of primordial principles of good and bad, that is to say of spirit and matter. A more specific religious status in the process of dualistic ontology is acquired by the Iranian dualism, seen through zoroastrism and masdeism, religious and philosophical platforms which existed 17 centuries before Bogomilism appeared. Namely, the universe, according to Zarashutra's teaching, was Ahura Mazda's creation and later the world, in its actual and material manifestation, was corrupted by Ahriman.⁶

⁵ М. Ангеловска-Панова, *Богомилството во духовната култура на Македонија*. Скопје 2004, 71.

⁶ М. Elijade, *Istorija verovanja i religiskih ideja*, II. Beograd 1991, 195; Y. Stoyanov, *The Hidden Tradition in Europe*, 17-18.

When it comes to Bogomil dualism, its assembling character, arising from chronologically older heretic experiences and from the influence of canonical and apocryphal literature, should certainly be taken into account. But the variations of dualism were at the same time largely determined by the actual socio-political and economic conditions in the period between 10th – 15th centuries, as well as by the existing understanding of the principles of good and bad specified through the characters and acts of God and the Devil. In that respect, the Bogomil dualism was able to express a moderate or, at specific times of its constant development, an absolute (that is to say extreme) orientation. In principle, the study of the greater part of the relevant original materials suggests the impression that Bogomils were devotees of moderate dualism which represented a kind of compromise solution between the absolute dualism inherent to Manichaeism and Paulicianism on the one hand, and Christianity on the other. Bogomil moderate dualism was based on the Biblical myth of the Satan whose apostasy from the heavenly Trinity starts the establishment of the principle of good and bad. According to the beliefs of moderate dualists, most illustratively shown in the *Secret Book*, the principle of bad was in an inferior position in relation to the principle of good; in other words it was its creation.⁷ The functioning of the material world relied on the principle of evil, which by itself meant that the matter was being treated as an evil substance containing the kingdom of Satan as an antithesis of the kingdom of light. The antagonistic position of the spirit and the matter represents a philosophical foundation and a supporting point of Bogomil doctrine. This belief brought Bogomils close to Plato's philosophy according to which the matter, identified with desolation and emptiness, contradicts the kingdom of light.⁸ In spite of the evident dominance of moderate dualistic tendencies, the extreme dualism, which in most examples was encouraged by the actual political and social problems within the social system, was also present in Bogomil communities at different times. A typical example of extreme expansion of absolute dualism is detected within the Dragovit's church–heretical community, which is being connected to the traditions of the former Sclavinia with the same name located in the western part of Macedonia, the status of which was, at the time, based on the political and economic freedom.⁹

⁷ Д. Ангелов, *Богомилството*. София 1993, 141.

⁸ Н. Кочев, *Към въпроса на представителите на гностико-дуализма във Византия и на Балканите през IX-XII в. и античната философия*. *Studia Balcanica*, 14. София 1979, 63.

⁹ М. Ангеловска-Панова, *Богомилството во духовната култура на Македонија*. 90-91.

Bogomils expressed an antagonistic attitude towards the canonical teaching of the official church, as well as towards the feudal order in general, through the established theological and dogmatic principles of its religious and dualistic teaching according to which everything created out of matter is identified with diabolism. This determination of the material world further determines the attitude of Bogomils towards external manifestations and attributes of Christian religion, concerning the question of credibility of its cult system. The Bogomil's attack was directed primarily against the church as an institution which, according to their beliefs, had nothing in common with the real Christian eclesia, particularly because of the fact that it derogated from principles established by gospel texts. Bogomils supported the rejection of the church in its institutional meaning with their own interpretation of the Gospel of Mathew (XI, 6) which reads: "And when you pray, enter your chambers and while closing the door pray to your Father." The general impression is that they supported the contents literally pointing out that there is no mention of any kind of any church building whatsoever. The interpretation of the Paul the Apostle syntagma is probably made in accordance with the same principle; in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, he points out: "Don't you know that you are the temple of God and that the spirit of God lives within you? If anyone destroys the temple of God, God shall destroy him, because the temple of God is holy, and so are you."

In their doctrine determination, Bogomils were categorical in their nihilism towards liturgies, icons, the cross, the christening, Eucharist, relics as a source of miracles, the Resurrection, holidays, the Secularity of Virgin Mary, etc. This certainly speaks in favour of the fact that Bogomil theology was not directed directly against Christian principles, but that it was directed against their interpretation, as an ideological substratum in medieval times, by the official church. In that respect, the intervention of Bogomils was more along the lines of reformulating the gossell principles regarding exegesis, but it was also used to serve their interests and doctrine as an unprivileged class.

The social and ethical characteristics of Bogomilism can best be seen within the framework of organisational life, realised in their church-heretical communities. Namely, the existence of an organized life was evident since the earliest phase of Bogomil existentialism which was under a strong influence of the original apostolic Christianity and in accordance with their concept for equality between people, collective ownership and applied communism.¹⁰ Supporting the principles of the original Christianity, Bogomils were against the hierarchical structure based on material goods.

¹⁰ Д. Ангелов, *Философските възгледи на богомилите*. Известия на института за българска история, 3-4. София 1951, 135.

Their definition for hierarchy was connected to the degree of theoretical knowledge in presenting dogmas and practising a strict ascetic way of life which, from current's point of view, implicates the meaning of the term category. Depending on whether these criteria were met, Bogomils were practically divided in three basic categories: students, atheists and perfects, or in the spirit of their own terminology - followers, believers and perfects.¹¹ The progressing from one to the other category was accompanied with a certain preparatory period for confession, spiritual and physical catharsis and constant contemplation, which in the end finished with an appropriate ritual identified as the second or the real baptizing through the Holy Spirit. It should be noted that both the spiritual baptizing, i.e. the change from a follower into a believer, and the elevation in the category perfect were accompanied with an identical ritual. It is probably due to the idea for simplicity and complete democratization of Bogomil organizational life.¹² Hence, follows the logical conclusion that the preparatory period for crossing from one category to the other was of greater importance for Bogomils than the actual ritual, because of the fact that it was then that the three basic principles came to the fore: complete absorption of Bogomil theology, radical asceticism, and an absolute poverty. The process, the aim of which was reaching absolute perfection, was long lasting. According to Euthymius of Akmonia the period of introduction into heretic dogmas lasted one to two years. On the other hand, Euthymius Zigabenus and John Zonara when addressing Priest Basil's activities, the principal preacher of Bogomilism at the end of 11th and the beginning of 12th century, point out that he studied these dogmas for 15 years.¹³ It means that besides the obligatory period which usually lasted one to two years the perfect Bogomils probably spent a great part of their time on their personal improvement as far as absorbing and exegesis of Bogomil occultism is concerned, especially if we have in mind that it is not a static manifestation but a religious and ideological complex manifesting evolution tendencies during its existential impulse.

As an alternative form of religious and ideological belief, Bogomilism also had a dominant influence in cultural processes by being reflected in the spiritual culture of Macedonia, the Balkans and throughout Byzantium and the countries of Western Europe. One of the achievements of this teaching is actually that it went beyond the local character and, in its original or modified form, dispersed on a wider geographical level, reaching the status

¹¹ Д. Ангелов, Б. Примов, Г. Батаклиев, *Богомилството в България, Византия и Западна Европа в извори*. София 1967, 42.

¹² M. Lambert, *The Cathars*. Oxford 1998, 34.

¹³ В. Hamilton, *Christian Dualist Heresies in Byzantine World, 650-1405*. Manchester 1998, 175-178.

of a movement of international importance and character. The identification of Bogomil cultural values and influences can best be seen through literary compositions with an original Bogomil articulation, the apocrypha, the philosophical aspects of the teaching, as well as through folklore. Actually it is about presenting an alternative thinking process that goes beyond the official Christian stereotypes which made it equally attractive not only for the devotees of Bogomilism, but also for the orthodox Christians. The basis of Bogomil literature was laid with its teaching conception, most probably expressed in writing by the priest Bogomil and his closest associates. Presbyter Kozma's familiarity with Bogomil interpretation of dogmas was probably not accidental. Namely, he acquired his knowledge not only through personal contacts with Bogomils who later turned back to Orthodoxy, but also through reading books with an original Bogomil status. The data from later sources are somewhat more general. Euthymius from Akmonia mentions the "Satan epodes" which were read on the occasion of the ritual of holy baptizing, while Euthymius Zigabenus talks about a kind of "Eucharistic prayers". Simeon of Salonica, on the other hand, mentions "prayers and songs worthy of scorn".¹⁴ These prayers probably represented a particular kind of literature, but the sources contain almost nothing about their content more specifically. It is reasonable to assume that the content was available only to the elite group of Bogomil credo-perfects and possibly to the believers, as these prayers were in principle carried out during canonization from one category to another. The evident shortage of these Bogomil works is due to the status of the Bogomil movement as a heretic teaching which most often made them subject to persecution. In any case it is reasonable to assume that the original Bogomil literature expresses two developmental tendencies: the literature which contains the ideological platform of Bogomilism, which was probably supposed to represent a kind of promotive material, and the esoteric literature accompanied by the ritual practise of Bogomils. *The Book of Rituals*, saved in a transcript in Provencal language from 13th century, certainly falls within the original Bogomil literature.¹⁵ On the basis of equivalence in relation to the religious practice, we assume that it is a translation or an adaptation of a Bogomil book of rituals which is not saved in its Slavonic version. The affirmation of the apocrypha, which represent a synonym for unofficial, uncannical contents, appear as a direct consequence of the need of the medieval man for an additional explanation of Biblical, and religious and Christian concepts from

¹⁴ Д. Ангелов, Б. Примов, Г. Батаклисв, *Богомилството в България, Византия и Западна Европа в извори*. 174.

¹⁵ Й. Иванов, *Богомилски книги и легенди* (фототипно издание). София 1970, 115.

the point of view of the current social attitude.¹⁶ Namely, the Bible and the canonical works generally, which were the only works recognised by the church as an official moving force for the cultural and spiritual life, came to be inconsistent with people's aspiration to get a more complete idea about how the world came to be and understand the natural phenomena. In that respect, the apocrypha expressed tendencies which were in principle easy to understand as far as the common man was concerned, who built his theological and moral view of the world on them. Thematically, the apocrypha represent a mixture of pragmatism from Biblical books and legends on which, in fact, rest canonical books, and very often with an emphasis on heretic elements.¹⁷ The term apocrypha, in accordance with the establishment of a set canon of God's literary works, was gradually losing its primary meaning and increasingly identifying with the books in contradiction with the basic Christian dogmatism. Most of the apocrypha that preceded Bogomilism (*The Book of Enoch, Vision of Isaiah, Revelation of Varuh, The Argument between Christ and the Antichrist, etc.*) had an influence on Bogomil cosmogony and eschatology. In fact, priest Bogomil's establishment as an ideologist and the integral realisation of Bogomil ideology was in effect unimaginable without the basic knowledge of the apocryphal literature which, on the other hand, was expressing tendencies close to the beliefs and thoughts of people in the Middle Ages. *The Secret Book* and *Vision of Isaiah* are considered to be amongst the most important apocrypha with an original Bogomil status. A new approach towards writings in the medieval literature was introduced with *The Secret Book*, where canonical motifs are subject to a philosophical opinion and to an additional literary adaptation. As a kind of literature in which one religious system contrasts another, in this case the Bogomil against the official, *The Secret Book* is very close to the *Book of Revelations*.¹⁸ Similar tendencies regarding the content, which has a mythological and apocalyptic character, can also be seen in the apocrypha *The Vision of Isaiah*. The apocrypha in Greek language was well known since the period between 1st and 2nd century, and somewhat later, between 2nd and 3rd century, there was a compilation under the title *The Vision of Isaiah* enriched with data about the Jewish tsar Ezekij. The Slavonic text of *The Vision*, saved in two versions – extensive and short, originated from the above mentioned compilation in Greek language, or, to be more precise, from its second part. The remarkable significance of the apocrypha and its use is witnessed in writing in Bogomil circles. Namely, in a Greek text which

¹⁶ И. Велев, *Македонскиот книжевен XIV век*. Скопје 1996, 293.

¹⁷ *Кирило-Методиевска енциклопедија*, т. I. Софија 1985, 85.

¹⁸ А. Веселовски, *Литературное значение ереси. История ереси*. Москва, 2004, 487.

dates from 12th century, besides the ritual formula practised for converting Bogomils and Massilians to Orthodoxy, it is pointed out that these heretics were using the “shameless and deceiving *Vision of Isaiah* written by them”.¹⁹ The Bogomil aspects in this apocrypha were barely noticeable. This approach was in line with the already established principle in Bogomil literature for presenting heretic tendencies in a discrete manner, subtly and marginally, so that the conclusion about them was due to the interpretation of the text. In that respect, the apocrypha represented a kind of dogmatic and ideological material used for influencing, which circulated not only among Bogomils, but also in Christian circles, especially because of the fact that the essence of the text, amongst other things, also implicates the social aspect of people’s lives. Both *The Secret Book* and *The Vision of Isaiah* had a high rating among devotees of Catharism which speaks in favour of an established cultural cooperation between eastern and western dualists.

There were also philosophical ideas incorporated within Bogomilism, which was in a way conditioned by the dichotomic concept of Bogomilism as well as by the diabolistic conviction. The presence of philosophical elements is also a consequence of the influence of philosophical orientations as Gnosticism, Orphism, Pythagorism and Platonism, the ideas of which were partly incorporated in the doctrines of Bogomilism and Catharism, although not as purely philosophical, but more with a religious connotation.²⁰ As an example, the use of vegetarian diet, besides the religious and dogmatic as well as the ascetic determination, also had a philosophical justification through the metempsychosis and the transmigration of the soul. The philosophical speculations about the immortality and the transmigration of the soul are very subtly presented in Bogomil circles, probably because of the aspiration for the most secret philosophical and dogmatic determinations not to be manifested transparently. The ideas that a man’s soul can bear experiences from a previous life can be found in the works of Euthymius from Akmonia. Addressing the Bogomil myth about the transformation of the soul, the author established that “when a man is furious he is like a snake, a dog, a cat...” Further explanations are in connection with the Devil who, in order to keep the opposed soul in the body, ate all kinds of impure animals and later threw them up in order to keep Adam’s soul in his body.

The presence of philosophical ideas and interpretations in the Bogomil system attracted the attention of representatives of the higher social

¹⁹ Ѓ. Иванов, *Богомилски книги и легенди*, 153; В. Hamilton, *Wisdom from the East. Heresy and Literacy, 1000-1530*, eds. P. Biller and A. Hudson. Cambridge 1994, 56.

²⁰ М. Ангеловска-Панова, *Догматско-филозофската оправданост на вегетаријанството во еретичките средини во средниот век*. Филозофија, 9. Скопје 2004, 87-92.

class or, as Ana Komnina mentions, the “wealthy people” and “some high priests”.²¹ A typical example is the Byzantine philosopher John Italus, an intellectual and Michael Pselus’s student, who founded the section of dialectics and history of philosophy.²² His teaching, despite the philosophical dimensions of metempsychosis, the Resurrection and the Last Judgement exegesis, was confronted with the official Christian normative and attempted to introduce rational behaviour in theology. All that contributed Italus’s teaching to be anathematized at the synod held in the year 1082. A similar example is the Patriarch Eustatius Garida of Constantinople who, under the influence of John Italus’s philosophical theology, believed in the metempsychosis of souls and denied the power of icons. On account of his religious beliefs, Eustatius Garida held the position of a Patriarch in Constantinople only for a short time (1081–1084).

And finally, the spiritual and cultural founding traditions of Bogomil teaching also reflected in the folklore. The influence of some aspects of Bogomil ideology was first of all carried out by the apocryphal literature which, with its expression and emotional impulse, showed remarkable similarity with folklore works. A number of Old Testament and New Testament themes which, combined with folklore motifs had a different meaning and significance, were infiltrated into folklore legends through the apocrypha. The receptivity of Bogomil elements in folk literature was chronologically and practically accomplished through a long and complex process determined by a number of factors such as: traditional, socio-economic and cultural, which at the same time impose the typology of this kind of folklore. In that respect, the folklore with Bogomil character is classified according to the following principle: cosmogonical folk literature, folk tales in which Bogomil dogmatism is interpreted from a folklore aspect and a cycle of folk literature about Adam and Eve.

The importance of this kind of folklore is in the fact that the existing conglomerate of ideas is interactively put to work, presenting it in an authentic way and in accordance with the mentality, the socio-political and social conditions. In this context, it often comes to an alteration of the meaning of some Bogomil determinations from the point of view of the folk narrator. From this point of view, the social factor is the most dominant factor. The folk narrator introduced Bogomil elements, but not always with a religious prejudice of encouraging hereticism, but more as a direct consequence of traditionalism, the rational tendencies and, eventually, his

²¹ Annae Comnenae, *Alexiadis libri XV*, ed. J. Schopen, (Bonn, 1839), lib. XV, 9, 358; A. Roach, *The Devil's World, Heresy and Society 1100-1300*. Longman 2005, 63.

²² В. Татакис, *Историја на византиската филозофија*. Скопје 1998, 262.

own survival.²³ We should have in mind that this kind of literature was established in Christian circles where religious and superstitious devotion was obvious, although they had recognized the inconsistencies of the church institution and of the rituals by subjecting it to criticising. The fact that a large part of the folk literature ends didactically in the style of official and Christian norms proves it best.

With its heterogeneous fund of positive and deviant features, controversies concerning progress/regress and rationalism/irrationalism, and seen from an evident time distance, Bogomilism as a universal achievement raises an alternative and reformatory thinking process, which would also be partly implemented in some aspects of European humanism.

Маја АНГЕЛОВСКА-ПАНОВА

ИСТОЧНИТЕ ДУАЛИСТИЧКИ ЕРЕСИ: ПРЕДИЗВИКОТ НА БОГОМИЛСТВОТО

– р е з и м е –

Богомилството како автентично движење со дуалистички карактер на религиско произнесување се појавило во средината на X век во југозападна Македонија. Со интензитет на наизменични подеми и падови богомилството опстојало на историската сцена во континуитет од пет века, што првенствено се должи на наговата способност да се адаптира на актуелните општествено-политички услови.

Независно од религискиот и во определени периоди и од политичкиот статус на учењето, кој во текот на историските процеси пројавувал наизменичен интензитет, богомилството со своите препознатливи изразни форми се одразило и во духовната култура на Македонија, идентификувана преку оригиналните книжевни творби (*Тајната книга, Видение на Исаија и Катарскиот Требник*), апокрифите (*Книга за Енох, Откровение на Варух, Прение на Антихристот со Христос, Детството на Исус, Разумник, Тивериадско Море* и др.) понатаму преку народното творештво и филозофските аспекти, идентификувани во верувањето за метемпсихозата и трансмиграцијата на душите.

²³ Т. Вражиновски, *Народна митологија на Македонците*, т. II. Скопје 1998, 28.