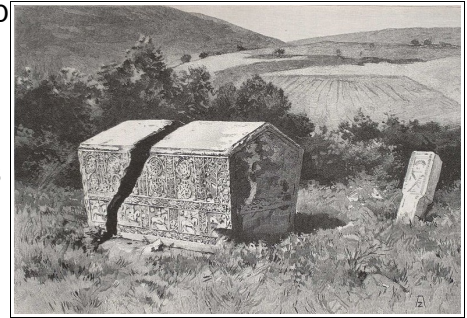


The Bogomils

adapted from E. H. Broadbent's *The Pilgrim Church*

Bosnia-Herzegovina is a little country far away. If you go there you will find beautiful rivers and high mountains. Scattered over the countryside you will see strange carved stones. Sometimes they are very big. Sometimes there are many together. Sometimes there is just one on its own. They are very, very old. They are Bogomil tombstones. Who were the Bogomils? They were people who loved and served Jesus Christ.



Once, long ago, there were many Bogomils in Bosnia. Bosnia had a ruler. He was called the Ban. The most famous Ban of Bosnia was Kulin Ban. The Pope in Rome did not like Bogomils. "You must put crosses in your churches," he said to them, "you must have an altar. You must have priests. I will choose your priests."

"No!" said the Bogomils, "we can worship God in a plain building. We do not need a cross. Jesus has died and has risen again: we do not need an altar. We do not need special priests. All true believers are priests! We can choose our own leaders to help us."

The Pope was angry with Kulin Ban because of the Bogomils. But Kulin Ban did not listen to the pope. He loved the Bogomils. The Prince of Herzegovina helped the Bogomils too. How hard the Bogomils worked on their farms! Bosnia and Herzegovina became prosperous. The Bogomils looked after each other when they were sick or poor. They sent out preachers to tell people the good news about Jesus Christ. A country where the people are like that is happy.

The pope told lies about the Bogomils. "They are wicked," he said. "They say Jesus Christ is not God." Next to Bosnia was another country, Hungary. The pope spoke to the King of Hungary. "Tell the Bosnians to stop being Bogomils." he said. "Tell them you will fight them if they do not!"

The leaders of Bosnia were afraid. Even Kulin Ban was afraid. "We will do as the pope

says," they said.

But the Bogomils were not afraid. "We will carry on," they said, "we will not obey the pope."

Bosnia is in Europe. You can see how big Europe is if you look at a map. Dotted all over Europe there were people who thought like the Bogomils. They were in France. They were in Bohemia. They were in Flanders. They were all over the place. They all sent messages to each other. "Read the Bible!" they said. "Trust in Jesus Christ!" The pope hated them.

At last Kulin Ban died. The pope chose a new Ban. This Ban did what the pope wanted. The Bogomils would not do what he said. They still kept to their plain little churches. They read God's Word for themselves.

The pope spoke to the King of Hungary again. "You must send your army into Bosnia," he said, "and make the Bogomils do as I say."

So there was war between Hungary and Bosnia. The Bosnians chose their own Ban. He was a Bogomil called Ninoslav. For years the war went on. Sometimes Bosnia did well in the fighting. Sometimes Hungary did well. Ninoslav got tired. "I give up!" he said to the pope, "We will do as you say."

Did this make any difference to the Bogomils? No! All the farm land was spoilt by the fighting. Now the soldiers were gone. The little churches began again. How hard the Bogomils worked! Soon the farms were prospering once more.



The pope had big forts built over the land. He gave Bosnia to the King of Hungary. The Bogomils carried on. The pope sent messages all over Europe. "EVERYONE must come and fight against the Bogomils in Bosnia," he said. He sent cruel men to kill and hurt any Bogomils who would not change their ways.

But there was another enemy coming to Europe. Its army was coming nearer and nearer. The fierce Muslims! They were not Bogomils. They would not obey the pope

either. They were cruel and wicked. Hungary had to fight the Muslims. The Muslims were dangerous. Only little Bosnia was between them and the rest of Europe. If the pope destroyed the Bogomils of Bosnia, the Muslims could rush into Europe.

Bosnia was now ruled by Tvrtko, he changed his name from Ban to King. He liked the Bogomils. They were good soldiers. He needed good soldiers. The Muslims came nearer and nearer. The pope did not care. "I will help you against the Muslims," he told the King of Hungary, "but you must fight the Bogomils too." The King of Hungary did what the pope said. He beat the Bosnian army. He killed the Bosnian leaders.

"What can we do?" said the poor Bosnians. "No one will help us. We will ask the Muslims to help us. They could not be worse than the pope!" So the Bogomil Bosnians and the Muslims joined together. They fought the King of Hungary and won.



Now there were long wars with the Muslims. Backwards, and forwards, went the battles. Sometimes the pope's armies won. Then the Bogomils were ill-treated. Those that could ran away to Herzegovina. The Muslims won more and more lands near Bosnia. Still the pope did not stop attacking the Bogomils. But the Bogomils followed Christ even when their kings did not. "Help us!" begged the Bosnian kings. "Yes," said the pope, "I will help you against the Muslims – if you will kill the Bogomils!" At last the Muslims, came against Bosnia yet again. The Bosnian people no longer fought against them. "Surely the Muslims are no worse than the pope!" they said. The Muslim ruler was call the Sultan. The Sultan took over seventy towns and forts in just one week. Now Bosnia was ruled by Muslims. The country was happy and flourishing no longer.

How do we know what the Bogomils believed? All their books and papers were burnt up in wars. The pope's books and papers are still safe and sound. They tell lies about the Bogomils. They say the Bogomils did not worship Jesus Christ as God. But the Bogomils read the Bible. The Bible says Jesus Christ is God. The Bogomils believed the Bible. That is why they would not obey the pope. All over Europe were other people

like them. Many years later came the Reformation. People could worship freely in many places after that. What a wonderful blessing!