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The Nazarenes among the Serbs: Proselytism and/or Dissent?

Were it not for a couple of German speaking apprentices from Budapest, travelling to Zurich in mid-19th century, the revivalist and dissenting preaching of Swiss Calvinist minister Samuel Heinrich Fröhlich would have remained a footnote in local religious history or remain solely in memory of handful of congregations that followed him after his suspension.¹ But his followers in Hungary, the so-called Nazarenes, turned into the fastest spreading and most remarkable religious movement in the Hungarian half of the Habsburg Empire and eventually in the newly independent, ethnically and religiously homogenous kingdom of Serbia. Their success was explained by socio-economic conditions of deprivation of urban proletariat and landless peasantry and the failure of “big” churches to address the issues of Empire’s numerous ethnic and linguistic minorities. My own study looked at length at the reasons why the Orthodox Serbs became proportionally the most numerous converts illuminating particular confessional proclivities of the Orthodox Serbs in Hungary and Serbia to abandon their Church and religion of their forefathers.² Some of these reasons are illuminated in the essay below which looks at how the Serbian Church or rather its clergy and episcopate (both in back then autonomous Karlovci and Belgrade Metropolitanate) responded to what they perceived as the Nazarene threat. Thus, this is not a study about the Nazarenes but on the Serbian Church in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when it underwent major changes whose consequences are still felt. Based on the Church press and archival material it focuses on the long lasting influence that Nazarenes had both institutionally and on religious practice of the

1 For more on the Nazarenes’ origin, beliefs and expansion see Karoly Eotvos, *The Nazarenes* (Fort Scott, Ks: Secam, 1997); Hermann Ruegger, *Aufzeichnung über Entstehung und Bekenntnis der Gemeinschaft Evangelisch Taufgesinnter*, (Zurich, Verlag ETG 1948); Perry A. Klopfenstein, *Marching to Zion: A History of the Apostolic Christian Church of America, 1847–1982* (Fort Scott, Ks: Secam 1984); Garfield Adler, *Der Tauf- und Kirchefrage in Leben und Lehre des Samuel Heinrich Fröhlich, VDM, von Brugg 1803–1857* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1976); Bernard Ott, *Missionarische Gemeinde werden* (Uster: Verlag ETG, 1996) as well as Peter Brock’s studies on Nazarene pacifism: “The Nonresistance of the Hungarian Nazarenes to 1914”, *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 54/1 (1980), pp 53–63; “Some materials on Nazarene Conscientious Objectors in Nineteenth Century Hungary”, *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 57/1 (1983), pp. 64–72; and “Pacifist Witness in dualist Hungary“ in Peter Brock, Nigel Young (eds.), *Studies in Peace History* (York: William Session, 1991), pp. 59–71.

2 Bojan Aleksov, *Religious Dissent between the Modern and the National. Nazarenes in Hungary and Serbia 1850-1914* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006).

faithful. Finally, it hints at how the Nazarene expansion was eventually stalled with the emergence of the grassroots religious movement of *Bogomoljci*.

Reactions to Nazarene Expansion

The 1872 article of Luka Grbanović in the church journal *Pravoslavlje* (Orthodoxy), which was among the first to report about the Nazarenes in a Serbian language newspaper, was full of praise for the Nazarenes' charity, modesty, friendliness, naturalness and decency. Especially noted were their respect for elderly and parents, and strict adherence to the commandments.³ By the 1880s however, the situation had changed and the numerous conversions of Orthodox Serbs to Nazarenes provoked a unanimous hostility.⁴ The initial backlash was in the form of mocking and jokes used abundantly by both clerical and lay writers but soon the jokes ceased and in panic Nazarenes were compared to a cholera epidemic. The vice president of the Consistorium of the Srem diocese (lower governing body), the famous historian rev. Ilarion Ruvarac, urged the Metropolitanate to use its authority with the Croatian government to cease the toleration of Nazarenes by local authorities in Srem.⁵ The archpriest of Veliki Bečkerek in central Banat, Ljubomir Panić, in a letter to his superior Georgije, the bishop of Temišvar in 1882, described the situation as alarming and warned that the Nazarenes spread in many villages under his guardianship such as Elemir, Taraš and Kumane. Panić asked for additional measures both secret and public to be undertaken from bishops and the patriarch claiming that the Nazarenes were a "sect equally dangerous to the faith and to the Serbian nationality."⁶ Yet the Metropolitanate and bishops neither responded to this appeal nor introduced any special measures on the territory of their spiritual jurisdiction leaving local priests to deal with the "heresy" on their own. In 1885, thirteen Orthodox priests from Pančevo archpresbytery in the South Banat held a special meeting in the village of Crepaja to consult how to prevent what they termed "the Nazarene heresy that threatens to destroy Orthodox Christianity as an all-destructive

3 Luka Grbanović, "Nazorejci nova sekta među Srbima i Hrvatima" in *Pravoslavlje*, 1872, pp. 279–284

4 See "Kako su postali Nazareni" in *Javor*, 1882/9–10, and a series of articles "O Nazarenstvu" in *Glas Istine*, 1887–1889. *Glas naroda*

5 Archive of the Karlovci Metropolitane - AMK, Fond A, 1881 – 108.

6 AMK, Fond A 1882 – 167.

hurricane”. They addressed the Holy Synod to appeal to State authorities for the ban of the Nazarene heresy and demanded a more active role from bishops, who were asked to teach priests how to preach and advise the people, to introduce religious education and regularly visit their flock. To such a desperate appeal, the bishops replied formally that they were not in charge of the ban and as for the rest they were already doing all that “their church ranks order.”⁷ Most parish priests and other observers characterised the religious fervour of the Nazarenes as madness, a clear inability to understand the true reasons for conversion. Such a reaction and the lack of any early action by hierarchy only further contributed to already widespread anticlericalism among the Serbian intellectuals and dissatisfaction of the lower clergy with their superiors. With its hands tied by imperial or government control, the hierarchy of the Serbian Metropolitanate in Hungary faced objective obstacles in fulfilling its role. Nevertheless, their passivity was seen as yet another proof of their being removed from the simple flock, so that they could not even foresee that it was possible to choose a religion according to one’s personal conviction. The leadership of the Church regarded the Orthodox faith as something innate, inseparable from Serbian people and something that secured them a privileged status, even though these times were long gone. The parish clergy, being closer to the people and in a less privileged position, decided to take the initiative on its own like the aforementioned meeting in the village of Crepaja in 1885 and brought up many other issues. One of the most active priests in Banat, Jovan Malušev, wrote the first lengthy exposition and criticism of Nazarene beliefs in 1887 in the church journal *Glas istine* (The Voice of the truth). The first sermons against the Nazarenes also date from mid-1880s. The sermons delivered by priests and circulated in the church press usually pointed to the Nazarene “delusions” and clear disassociation from the beliefs of the Orthodox Christians, such as the rejection of sacraments, especially baptism of children, the rejection of priests, apostolic succession, icons, crosses, decoration of churches, etc. These sermons, however, were dull, dignified and devoid of any connection to everyday life and needs. Their abstract moralism, distrust of emotion and enthusiasm

7 AMK, Fond A 1886 – 538.

could have little appeal to the common folk. They never dealt with concrete reasons for conversions nor with the concrete situation in a given village although they were most often delivered by priests in villages with large Nazarene followings.⁸ Instead typical sermons were formal theological recitations, most often not original but translations of the sermons delivered against the Shtundists (Baptists) in Russia, previously published in Russian theological journals. Often in the style of “jeremiads” the sermons bewailed lax beliefs and loose behaviour of the people and relied on biblical examples and theological arguments, which may have had solid theological reasoning, but lacked practical appeal to those seeking solace, community, solidarity and a getaway from vices, sins and the miseries of everyday life.⁹

Still, the Serbian priests are hardly to blame for delivering poor sermons. They were never taught how to address the flock or to compose a sermon. Priests had barely ever preached in Serbian churches before and pastoral theology was not existent in its educational establishments. No wonder that Russian sermons were the only source and inspiration Serbian priests could turn to. One illustration of the lack of pastoral care among the Serbian clergy is the testimony of Mihajlo I. Pupin, famous scientist and the leading representative of the Serbian immigrants in America at the time. Pupin wrote that over 100,000 and maybe 150,000 Serbian workers in America were suffering without pastoral, and cultural care of their clergy:

If you believe that a missionary is a common Serbian priest, [he wrote] who doesn't know anything but to read prayers and hold ancient and halfdead sermon which neither he nor his listeners could understand, than you are wrong... We need enlighteners, who will raise faith, national consciousness and the level of education of our people.¹⁰

8 Ivan Tešić (priest in T. Hidoš), “Beseda o sv. Iliji o nazarenima” in *Glas istine*, 1885/15, pp. 113–115, Grigorije Nikolić (priest in Irig), “Propoved protiv nazarena”, in *Srpski Sion*, 1901/33, pp. 559–561, Ilija Kojić (priest in Subotinac), “Propoved o sv. Hrišćanskoj crkvi. Protiv nazarenstva” in *Vesnik srpske crkve*, 1905/6, pp. 559–564 and Grigorije Nikolić, “Pouka protiv nazarenstva” in *Vesnik srpske crkve*, 1913/6–7, pp. 625–627.

9 Compare to the similar descriptions of the poor state of faith and moral written in North America more than a century earlier and collected in J. M. Bumsted, ed., *The Great Awakening* (Waltham, Mass.: Blaisdell, 1970), here pp. 17–19.

10 Quoted from New York's *Srbobran* in “Misija srpske crkve u Americi” [The Mission of the Serbian Church in America] in *Vesnik srpske crkve*, 1913/6–7, p. 641.

Putting the blame only on priests because of their poor education and lack of pastoral concern was short sighted. In their defence, some priests pointed to the ecclesiastical structure of the Orthodox Church, restrictions in the legal framework under which they were obliged to operate and social and political forces, which were beyond their control. This was evident since the Nazarenes appeared even in parishes with very active priests, and sometimes there were none in the villages without a priest. Preaching about the causes of Nazarene successes among the Serbs, rev. Jovan Vučković, dean of the cathedral church of the Serbian Metropolitanate in Karlovci in the 1880s, described it as only one of four misfortunes that plagued the Serbian Church. While Nazarenes abandoned the Serbian Church believing that their faith is closer to the Gospel, the others disassociated themselves opting for secular and scientific values and views. The third group for Vučković were those that reckon themselves as belonging to the Church but paid no respect to what it preached and demanded. The fourth group were apathetic and acted as if the Church did not exist.¹¹ In this and other statements, it is possible to extract that the priests used this dramatic phenomenon, as the appearance of Nazarenes was perceived, to promote their own agenda both in relation to the church hierarchy and the secular intelligentsia. Their demands were most clearly spelled out at the so-called priests' assemblies.

From the late 1880s and on their own initiative Serbian priests began to organize assemblies to discuss the conversion of their believers to Nazarenes, determine its reasons and propose measures to prevent it. The first big assembly attended by clergy of all other major confessions took place again in the village of Crepaja in Banat in the summer of 1887.¹² Together with their guests Serbian priests reached a common stand condemning Nazarenes for: 1) abuse of the Gospel, 2) disrespect of laws, 3) accepting criminals in their ranks 4) indifference and enmity towards priests and other churches. They decided to petition the Hungarian Parliament and the Ministry of Religion and Education for strict application of all laws and orders

11 Jovan Vučković, "Propovjed u drugu nedjelju velikog posta o uzrocima nazarenskog otpadanja od Crkve" [Sermon in the second week of the Fast about the reasons of the Nazarene falling away from the Church] in *Srpski Sion*, 1886/10, p. 153.

12 Long report by rev. Dušan Radulović, the minute taker of the Assembly, "O Nazarenstvu" in *Hrišćanski vesnik*, X/1-4 (1888). There were fourteen Serbian Orthodox priests, six Lutheran, two Calvinist and one Catholic in attendance, all from South Banat.

concerning the Nazarenes, especially concerning the education of their children until adulthood. The discussion was more interesting and dissonant than common conclusions, especially the speech of Lutheran priest Georg Schwalm from Pančevo, who was later the author of many works and source of information on the Nazarenes. Schwalm warned his colleagues about poor pastoral care, the rising gap between clergy and people, and the aggressive, belligerent attitude of some priests against other denominations, especially sects. Instead Schwalm recommended:

Light up candles, let the sunshine in, let there be more light in you and around you, so night, so darkness, even the Nazarene one will disappear without a trace.¹³

A Calvinist priest from Pančevo, István Fa, also declared against any persecution of Nazarenes and for freedom of conscience. On the other hand, a Serbian priest, the author of the report published about the conference, asked for severe measures and gave the example of Srem, which was under Croatian authority in matters of religion and education. There, as we have already seen, forced baptism was common occurrence and local authorities often dispersed Nazarene assemblies and arrested members. Soon after this interconfessional conference, an anonymous Serbian priest from the Vršac bishopric wrote against taking a common stand with priests of other confessions and against proposals that were raised of the need for interconfessional associations of priests to equip priests with necessary tools to fight the Nazarenes. He claimed nothing could be done without order and support from the bishop.¹⁴ Furthermore, he criticized the fact that a German Lutheran priest presided over the conference initiated by Serbian priests.

As for the situation in Srem and other areas under Croatian local authorities a lively polemic arose on the pages of the Croatian *Narodne novine* and the Serbian *Srbobran*, both published in Zagreb. The Croatian author criticized the extremely inimical Serbian reaction to the Nazarenes, infuriating the Serbian newspaper, which deemed this accusation cynical.¹⁵ The painful truth was that the Croatian

13 Ibid, p. 43.

14 "Budimo iskreni!" [Let's be Sincere] in *Glas istine*, 20, 1887, pp. 306–308.

15 The debate is referred to in Maksim Vujić, "Prikaz 'Nazarenstvo, njegova istorija i suština' " [Review of 'Nazarenism, Its History and Bases'] in *Srpski Sion*, 1895/9, p. 139 and Vladimir Dimitrijević, "Obred pri krštenju i još neki drugi običaji Nazarenski " [Baptism Ritual and other Nazarene Customs] in *Srpski Sion*, 1894/48, p. 754. Croatian author stressed the good

Catholics were generally resistant to conversion. That there were relatively few converts among the Catholics shows that the Catholic Church in Hungary and Croatia, as in the rest of the continent, was more successful in shielding their faithful from proselytism of other confession and secular indifference. The Catholic ‘devotional revolution’ starting in the middle of the nineteenth century managed to maintain the church as a focus of social as well as religious identity, adopting an emotional, almost missionary approach especially visible in the Marian cult, pilgrimages and the growth of new religious orders. The so-called Ultramontane Catholicism combined a highly dogmatic theology with an emotional piety and by appropriating some forms of the older folk religion and creating a range of institutions and outlets aimed to relieve the faithful and dominate everyday life.¹⁶ Social focus was maintained through a well-established Catholic school system and a network of other organizations not to mention the scale of social changes introduced after the encyclical *Rerum novarum* in 1891.¹⁷ In Hungary too, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church succeeded in improving its political role and the status of its clergy and bishops threatened by their pro-Austrian stance during the Revolution of 1848, through a series of Marian apparitions, mass pilgrimages, processions, rosary campaigns and indulgences that renewed traditional piety.¹⁸

On the other hand, reactions of Serbian priests hardly went beyond advocating harsher measures against the converts and asking assistance from the state. At the first assembly of priests in Serbia dedicated to the Nazarene in 1890, rev. Đoka Jovanović demanded that the state expel them in order to prevent their proselytism.¹⁹ The inadequate response by the Serbian Church leadership to the spread of the Nazarenes in its first decades might be compared to another not directly related affair that undermined the Church at the same time.

intentions and piety of Nazarenes while Dimitrijević, the chief Serbian polemicist, insisted they were “pest on people’s body.”

16 Hugh Mcleod, *Religion and the people in Western Europe* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 47–53.

17 For Catholic social policy in 19th century see Wolfgang Altgeld, *Katholizismus, Protestantismus, Judentum über religiös begründeten Gegensätze und nationalreligiöse Ideen in der Geschichte des deutschen Nationalismus* (Mainz, 1992) and Gianfranco Poggi, *Catholic Action in Italy. The Sociology of a Sponsored Organisation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967).

18 See Alice Freifeld, *Nationalism and the Crowd in Liberal Hungary, 1848–1914* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2000), pp. 138–142 and 265–6.

19 Report in *Vesnik Srpske crkve*, 1890, pp. 740–743; Similar was in Srem, see Stevan Šimić, “Poruka braći sveštenicima” [Message to Brothers, Priests] in *Srpski Sion*, 1895/5, pp. 121–122; “Zapisnik” in *Srpski Sion*, 1894/16, pp. 248–24.

Archmandrite Vaso Pelagić publicly rejected his monastic title in the liberal journal of the Hungarian Serbs, *Zastava*, on April 17 (29) 1873, and became the most famous dissenter and anticlerical activist. Serbian Patriarch in Hungary German Anđelić banned all of Pelagić's books while Metropolitan Mihailo of Belgrade conducted a protracted struggle against Pelagić and finally had him incarcerated in an asylum for the insane in 1893. Over three thousand people in Belgrade protested his incarceration demanding that the Metropolitan himself be sent to the madhouse instead.²⁰ The Serbian Metropolitan eventually defrocked Pelagić in the Belgrade cathedral on February 2, 1895, where he was dragged by policemen, had his monastic robe first put on him and then ripped off while his hair and beard were shaved in a manner that the liberal press compared to the Inquisition.²¹ Before that however, during thirty years of his revolutionary life and lengthy prison terms Pelagić managed to publish scores of books, pedagogic treatises and books aimed at the enlightenment of the people, which brought him the still unextinguished fame of the people's teacher'.²² Though his anticlericalist and socialist writings are tendentious, utopian and theoretically shallow, their popular style exerted a major influence on simple folk.

Only in the 1890s, the protracted debates on anti-Nazarene assemblies eventually resulted in a degree of self-criticism among the lower clergy. Speaking at yet another priests' assembly in Srem in 1899, rev. Aranicki described the poor religious state of people, who worshipped only mechanically, rarely attended church services and were ignorant of basic postulates of their faith. He blamed priests for neglecting their role, especially in performing church services, delivering sermons or interpreting the Gospel.²³ Nevertheless, he excused them because of their poor pay, which forced many to work on their plot of land in order to feed their families. Without guaranteed pensions in their old age or in case of their deaths their

20 Risto Besarović, *Vaso Pelagić* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1969) pp.180–181. and Slavko Mićanović, "Predgovor" (Foreword) to Vaso Pelagić, *Izabrana djela I-III* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1971),

21 Besarović, *Vaso Pelagić*, pp.142–155 and Stevan M. Veselinović, "Najnoviji akt crkvene degredacije (raščinjenja)" [The most recent Act of Defrocking] in *Vesnik srpske crkve*, 1894/V, pp. 509–535, which is the Church apology of the act, also published as a separate booklet.

22 Vaso Pelagić, *Narodni učitelj* [Teacher of the People] was from 1879 until 1894 published in four editions in circulation of 18 000, while all his other books and booklets reached the circulation of 212 000 before his death, which made his probably the most widely read Serbian writer. See Besarović, *Vaso Pelagić*, p. 190.

23 Simeon Aranici, "O uzrocima širenju nazarenstva i o sredstvima protiv istoga" [On the Reasons of the Nazarene Spread and Means to Combat it] in *Srpski Sion*, 25, 18.6.1900. p. 401.

families were sentenced to famine, Aranicki argued.²⁴ Furthermore, the practice of the distribution of parishes through competitions and unequal pay of priests established by lay governed autonomy are pointed out as discriminatory. Last but not least rev. Aranicki singled out the criticism of clergy in newspapers and by Serbian political parties as destructive for their image. Rev. Milan Popadić believed the cause lay in poor education and lack of compulsory religious education.²⁵ He also condemned disorderly priests for not preaching in churches and not holding regular services, which reduced churches to the state of being deaf or dumb. But the foremost reason according to Popadić was the abandonment of confession before communion, which was the old Christian practice of consoling suffering souls, establishing close ties between the faithful and the clergy, and keeping the flock contained.²⁶ Finally, a regular correspondent in the church press, rev. Petrović from Nadalj, gravely affected by the conversion of his believers to Nazarenes, insisted that paying regular parish dues in addition to fees for every religious service (baptism, wedding, funeral, etc) was also an important reason for the enmity Serbs felt toward their church and its priests and proposed the sale or use of church and communal land as a source of church financing.²⁷ While pronouncing certain criticism of the clergy, the first large wave of reactions brought up at numerous priests' assemblies and in regular tractates written by priests in the church press until the 1890s remained overwhelmingly apologetic and mostly blamed others for the massive conversion of Serbs to Nazarenes. The most disparaging terms were used to denounce the role of the intelligentsia, the influence coming from the West or the liberal laws adopted in Hungary and Croatia. The intelligentsia, civil servants, the press were all reprimanded for alleged anticlericalism, stressing the detrimental influence they had on the simple folk.²⁸ The agrarian crisis was also high on the agenda but its nature and workings were not clearly articulated. The general topoi were laments at the dissolution of extended families or customary overspending. Idealizing earlier times,

24 Ibid, p. 402.

25 Milan Popadić, "O uzrocima širenja nazarenstva" [On the Reasons of the Nazarene Spread] in *Srpski Sion*, 1900/10, p. 156–159.

26 Milan Popadić, "O uzrocima širenja nazarenstva" in *Srpski Sion*, 1900/11, p. 177–180. As already stressed, there is no historical evidence that confession was indeed practiced by the Orthodox Serbs, how it looked like and what effect it had.

27 Dušan Petrović, "O nazarenima u Nadalju" in *Srpski Sion*, 5, 15.3.1906., p. 145.

28 Milan Popadić, "O uzrocima širenja nazarenstva" in *Srpski Sion*, 1900/13, p. 206–209.

contemporary social and economic difficulties were barely ever connected to the rising competition brought about by money economy, industrialization of agriculture and new means of production and investment. Modernity was thus reduced to vices coming from the West and destroying the traditional idyll. Such a reductionist approach explains the inability of the clergy to keep pace with the changes in society and react accordingly. Exceptional was the enthusiasm about agricultural cooperatives in which many saw the revival of traditional agrarian society. Drawing on the example of Serbia, where the great majority of Orthodox priests took an active role in establishing cooperatives at the end of the nineteenth century, some Serbian priests in Hungary demanded in vain from their Metropolitanate similar initiatives and recommendation.²⁹ The reason for different stand towards cooperatives among the clergy of the same church lay in their different social position. The only monetary income of the poor and marginalized clergy in Serbia consisted of emoluments paid for such rites as baptism and marriage. Neglected by both the state and Church hierarchy they shared a lot with the peasants and joined them in their support for political forces, which saw cooperatives as a tool for preventing or at least the slowing down the advent of modernization.³⁰ In Hungary however, the inherited wealth of the Church still secured the wellbeing of most priests, whose economic and political interests differed significantly from those of the peasants and thus the lack of wider enthusiasm for the initiative in setting up cooperatives.

Whatever their undertakings were, Serbian priests could hardly find a common language with secular intellectuals. Concerning the reasons and responsibility for the spread of Nazarenes and the strategies to prevent it, the church press, with *Srpski Sion* as its most representative example, was in full-blown conflict with *Zastava*, *Srbobran*, *Branik* and other newspapers, that were close to the Serbian Liberal and later the Serbian Radical Party in Hungary. Insults and accusations filled the columns of both newspapers, and church editors did not hesitate to indulge in the most blatant disputes and accusations.³¹ The editor of

29 Milan Popadić, "O uzrocima širenja nazarenstva" in *Srpski Sion*, 1900/15, p. 241.

30 Inspired by Russian narodniki the supporters of the Radical party in Serbia fiercely opposed state bureaucracy and industrialization advocating instead local autonomy and agricultural cooperatives.

31 E.g. "Srbobranovo džilitanje" [Srbobran's Twaddle] in *Srpski Sion*, 1901/40. p. 676 or the polemic against *Zastava* in *Srpski Sion*, 6. 22.3.1906., p. 186.

Srpski Sion, a member of the upper echelons of the priestly hierarchy, also rejected the criticism of clerical apathy voiced by the most vociferous adversary of the Nazarenes among priests, young and enthusiastic rev. Dimitrijević. Similar divisions existed in Serbia. The Belgrade newspaper *Štampa*, for example, claimed that priests, because of the way they were, had the least right to be angry because of the expansion of the Nazarenes.³² Secular newspapers on the other hand usually paid no attention to the assemblies organized by priests to debate the spread of the Nazarenes and when mentioned they were criticized for having no effect. The most far-reaching demand put forward by priests on their assemblies was the need to establish an association of priests, independent of the bishop's authority, which could combat the Nazarenes.³³ The clergy claimed that without their association and collective rights their hands were tied in the anti-Nazarene struggle and they were not able to take any measures. Bishops constantly opposed such associations as unnecessary and contradicting church canons and Orthodox tradition, rightfully fearing that these actions were aimed at reducing episcopal power. After laymen succeeded in gaining control of finances and other non-confessional matters in the Serbian Church, this initiative, concomitant with the Calvinist idea that the church ought to be governed by ministers, threatened to remove the authority of the bishops even in confessional matters.³⁴

As the 1890s saw the tremendous growth of the Nazarenes the reactions on behalf of the Serbian Church became more vehement. For many observers it was no doubt that the spiritual torpor or 'sick state' of their Church, as described by journalist Himmel, was one of the chief reasons for the vulnerability of the Orthodox to conversions by Nazarenes.³⁵ In his Christmas message of 1893, the Serbian Patriarch Georgije (Branković) for the first time appealed to all priests, intellectuals, newspapers, teachers, clerks and "all sons of their Orthodox Church" to use every occasion to combat the Nazarene "contagious disease". Party divisions, he proclaimed, should cease in the face of this epidemic that threatens "to deny our name, seize our

32 *Štampa*, 68, 9.3.1905, quoted in *Vesnik srpske crkve*, 1905/3, p. 368.

33 Milan Popadić, "O uzrocima širenja nazarenstva" in *Srpski Sion*, 1900/15, p. 240.

34 For similar debates in Greece at that time see C. A. Frazee, *The Orthodox Church and the Independence of Greece* (Athens: Damos, 1987), pp. 185–187.

35 See Henrik v. Himmel, "Von den Nazarenern" in *Pester Lloyd*, 4.6.1897, pp. 2–3.

faith, poison our blood, drink our soul and destroy our whole organism.”³⁶ This appeal finally proposed some concrete measures on behalf of the Orthodox Church. Priests were singled out as the most responsible and asked to hold sermons regularly in the church, visit all parishioners, preach on every occasion, intensify control of their parishes and apart from their bishops inform civil authorities of all possible Nazarene agents or cases of proselytism. Priests were further asked to write about converts in their parishes and details on their possible reasons and motivations. The enquiry into the motivations of the Nazarenes’ expansion among Serbs was meant to aid the Church Synod in bringing relevant decisions. The Council of Serbian Schools in Austria-Hungary presided by the Patriarch in 1895, ordered all Serbian schools to treat all Nazarene children as Orthodox if they were baptized Orthodox. In case the Nazarene children refused to make the sign of cross or refused to pray with other children, they were to be failed for that year.³⁷ Not all reaction was smooth. In 1896, the rector of the seminary in Sremski Karlovci, Jovan Vučković, officially demanded that the seminary introduce a special course that would prepare future priests in dealing with the Nazarenes, tentatively entitled ‘polemic against the Nazarenes’. Yet the Patriarch and the Synod of Bishops, who were in charge of school programs, responded bureaucratically and rejected the proposals. They claimed that because the Nazarenes were not a state recognized confession and did not have firmly established principles of faith, any polemic against them would be meaningless.³⁸

In the same year the Serbian press was further galvanized by the news that 108 formerly Orthodox Serbian families in the village of Bavanište in Banat had registered their conversion to the Nazarenes with the local authorities.³⁹ Reports fuelled the panic by what must have been the exaggeration of their numbers, since no evidence was found for this claim. Yet the intensified church response, especially of

36 Jovan Jeremić, “Šta da radimo protiv nazarenstva” [What to do against the Nazarenism] in *Srpski Sion*, 1894/6, 6.2.1894. pp. 83–85.

37 “Odluka Srpskog pravoslavnog narodnog Školskog Saveta u pogledu postupka sa decom nazarenskih roditelja u pravoslavnoj crkvi krštenoj, koja srpsku veroispovednu školu pohađaju” [Decision of the Serbian Orthodox National School Council Concerning the Children of the Nazarene Parents which are Baptized as Orthodox and Attend Serbian Schools] in *Srpski Sion*, 1896/21, p. 341. At the same time the Romanian Metropolitan Miron Roman also personally engaged in the struggle against the Nazarenes and ordered all Romanian parish priests to investigate the possible reasons for people falling into apostasy and becoming Nazarenes so that he could take appropriate measures. See Dimitrijević, *Nazarenstvo*, p. 82.

38 AMK, FA 347/1897.

39 Vladimir Dimitrijević, “8.600 primeraka ‘Harfe Siona!’” [8.600 Copies of Zion’s Harp] in *Srpski Sion*, 1897/18, pp. 290–291.

the higher, usually docile clergy, was prompted not by the decades-long growth of the Nazarenes, but by the decision of Hungarian government to introduce civil registering, civil marriages, freedom of confession and reception of the Jewish faith, which annulled almost all the exclusivity of the ancient privileges granted to the Serbian church. The loss of authority even in matters previously considered religious was the breaking point. Furthermore, the period of the most numerous defections from the Orthodox Church at the turn of the century coincided with the deepest crisis in the functioning of the Serbian Church autonomy paralyzed by the conflicts between the Radical Party led by Jaša Tomić, and the Church hierarchy personified in conservative Patriarch Georgije. Deeply entrenched in their positions, Serbian clerical and secular intellectual elites were only united in their common realisation that the conflict over the autonomy was dragging down the whole people, whose future in Austria-Hungary was seriously questioned.⁴⁰ It was in this period described by the most prominent contemporary Serbian poet, Laza Kostić, as a “steep descent” of the Serbian people that the Nazarenes could who provoked the most far-reaching changes within the Serbian Church whose effects can still be felt.⁴¹

Nazarene Influence

The most commendable influence of the Nazarenes was their introduction of Bible reading. Some of the clergy like Đorđe Mandrović, a parish priest in Dolovo in Banat, or B. Kuzmanović shared this view from early on and proposed the translation of liturgical books in the vernacular.⁴² The Nazarene use of Bibles also motivated secular intellectuals to reiterate their proposals for abandoning artificial Church Slavonic in the Orthodox Church.⁴³ The Church hierarchy, which earlier disapproved of the Bible translation by Karadžić and Daničić, eventually speeded up the process of its own official translation.⁴⁴ Furthermore, influenced by the Nazarenes, some priests and intellectuals also asked for the introduction of choral singing of all faithful in the church.⁴⁵ Even though there was no official approval traditional chanting was gradually standardized,

40 All prerogatives of the autonomy were indeed abolished by Hungarian government on July 11, 1912.

41 Laza Kostić, *O Jovanu Jovanoviću Zmaju* (Sombor, 1902), pp. 5–6.

simplified and popularized and many popular religious songs slipped into less solemn parts of the liturgy.

The conversion to the Nazarenes also contributed a greater awareness by church press of the need to tackle new ideas that were circulating. From 1890s they began to address on regular basis issues such as rationalism, atheism, religious indifference, agnosticism, Tolstoyism, which the rector of the seminary Jovan Vučković denounced and compared to the Nazarenism.⁴⁶ Facing increasing competition on the confessional market, the Church took steps to take over production of all votive items such as icons, in the expectation of raising its income and more importantly of preventing the spread of customs from other confessions.⁴⁷ On the level of pastoral care, the Nazarene “threat” as presented in numerous works by Dimitrijević, for example, provided a key argument in the promotion of his reform agenda, which insisted on the three most important pastoral duties of preaching, catechism and confession. Condemning the way Serbian priests performed these duties Aranicki pointed out:

Take a look at the Roman Catholics and how they perform this rite, how they rush to confession especially to their missionaries – preachers. Thus, it is no surprise that this Christian confession, though the most numerous, has the least converts to Nazarenism. They serve the holy liturgy in foreign – Latin language, but balance this with thorough catechism and zealous preaching.⁴⁸

In order to achieve this Aranicki advocated raising the educational level of Serbian church educational institutions and especially sending more students to foreign theological schools.⁴⁹ A significant role in the subsequent changes was indeed played by graduates of the German language Orthodox Theological Faculty in Czernowitz in

42 Aleksandar Pavlović summarized their grievances in *Odbrana pravoslavne crkve* (Veliki Bečkerek, 1874).

43 J. V. “Nazarenstvo i slovenski jezik u crkvi” [Nazarenism and Slavic Language in the Church] in *Glas istine*, III/5, 1886, is response to a series of articles appearing on that topic in the Serbian Radical Party journal *Zastava*.

44 It took almost full century before it finally accepted the vernacular in liturgy. For similar development in Greece see Victor Roudometof, “Invented Traditions, Symbolic Boundaries, and National Identity in Southeastern Europe: Greece and Serbia in Comparative Historical Perspective (1830–1880)” in *East European Quarterly*, Vol. XXXII/4 (Winter 1998), pp. 429–468, here p. 433.

45 See Vladislav Boberić, “Kako bi trebalo kod nas u crkvi pojatai” [How should we chant in Church] in *Branik*, 1897/149.

46 See rev. Jovan Vučković, “Tolstoj u izdanju ‘Maticе srpske’” [Tolstoy published by ‘Matica srpska’] in *Srpski Sion*, 1892/19 but also L. Bogdanović, “Tolstojevsko učenje o ‘neprotivljenju zlu’ pred sudom engleskih bogoslova” [Tolstoyan Teaching of Nonresistance judged by English Theologians] in *Srpski Sion*, 1894/20, Dušan Jablanović, “O nereligioznosti” [About Nonreligiosity] in *Srpski Sion*, 1893/38, “Mračna pojava u savremenom kolu omladinskom” [Gloomy Phenomenon among our Youth] in *Srpski sion*, 1898/22.

47 See Hieromonk Dositej, “Potreba crkvene industrije” [The Need for Church Industry] in *Srpski Sion* 1894/20.

48 Rev. Simeon Aranicki, “O uzrocima širenju nazarenstva i o sredstvima protiv istoga” in *Srpski Sion*, X/27, (1900), p. 432.

49 Rev. Simeon Aranicki, “O uzrocima širenju nazarenstva i o sredstvima protiv istoga” in *Srpski Sion*, X/28, (1900), p. 451.

Bukovina, where a unique opportunity opened up for Serbian students of theology at the end of nineteenth century.⁵⁰ The Serbian Church Seminary in Sremski Karlovci was also gradually reformed – the period of study and number of courses extended and exam requirements increased.⁵¹ Furthermore, the agitation of Dimitrijević, Aranicki and others inevitably raised the pastoral conscience among their colleagues, but its real effects are hard to measure. Evidently, preaching became more common and priests were helped by numerous books containing sermons, which began to appear. From 1894, the first booklets against the Nazarenes were distributed.⁵² Written in simple and easily understandable language, these booklets copied much of the Nazarene ways. They contained songs similar to the ones in Nazarene hymnal Zion's Harp, short stories and even illustrations of important moments in the life of Christ in a rather baroque fashion. The messages of poems and stories aimed at Orthodox Serbs (and Romanians) were simple and ranged from appeals to attend Sunday liturgy and not work on Sundays up to reminding them of the Ten Commandments or the necessity to hold regular fasts, an important Orthodox tradition that was by and large abandoned by Serbs. Some poems written in traditional Serbian epic decasyllable directly warned on the Nazarene danger like the one appropriately titled "A Warning to the Nazarenes". From 1897, the official journal of Serbian church in Austria-Hungary, *Srpski Sion*, dedicated considerable space to the Nazarenes in every issue.⁵³ Looking to the experience of other churches in Europe the new generation of priests and church authors suggested adopting some of the weapons of the dissenters against dissent. Indefatigable in his struggle against the Nazarenes, rev Dimitrijević however cautioned about establishing any 'societies' or 'brotherhoods' of simple believers, fearing that they would easily turn into *collegia*

50 While Romanians and Ruthenians made up the overwhelming majority of students in Czernowitz, the number of Serbian students grew significantly from the turn of the century. See Emanuel Turczynski, "Die Bedeutung von Czernowitz für die orthodoxe Theologie in Südosteuropa" in *Geschichte der Ost- und Westkirche in ihren wechselseitigen Beziehungen* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrasowitz, 1967), pp. 166–195. In Czernowitz the Orthodox students were imbued with the spirit of the best German universities, where their professors had received their education. Later the graduates carried on this spirit in their pastoral work, though not without resistance. See rev. Vladimir Dimitrijević, "Pravoslavni rumunski bogoslovski fakultet u Černovici" [Orthodox Romanian Theological Faculty in Czernowitz] in *Srpski Sion*, 1893/43, pp. 683–685.

51 Even physical education was introduced for seminarians. Interestingly enough among new courses introduced in Karlovci Seminary was bee-keeping, the segment of agriculture to which the Serbian church dedicated a lot of attention.

52 *Pobožnom narodu o veri. Da se kloni od neverni nazarena i varalica* [To the pious People about the Faith. To stay away from Nazarenes and Cheaters] (Novi Sad: Braće M. Popovića, 1894).

53 It published in sequences articles by Jug Stanikić, "O nazarenima i njihovom učenju" and Simeon Aranicki, "O uzrocima širenju nazarenstva i o sredstvima protiv Istoga".

pietatis or *ecclesiola* (initiated by Pietist preacher Jacob Spener) and plant seeds for even more evil instead of preventing the expansion of the Nazarenes.⁵⁴ Instead he proposed adopting various measures practiced by the Russian church against their dissenters, the Shtundists. This meant a more energetic and even combative role of clergy, not only as priests but as social organizers as well, setting up social activities in order to mobilize their parishioners. In his anti-Nazarene treatises rev. Dimitrijević gave practical advice to priests on how to discuss and counteract Nazarene claims and Biblical interpretations, for example how to treat families where only some members converted. He even advised against ordering any work from Nazarene craftsmen or renting land to Nazarene farmers.⁵⁵ Similarly, Aranicki proposed special publications dedicated to exposing Nazarene errors not only in belief but also in cases of amoral behavior before and after conversion. In this effort, priests were asked to look for information from civil authorities.⁵⁶ Dimitrijević demanded the establishment of associations of priests on a regional level that would regularly meet and coordinate their activities. Those who were specially gifted should be elected as local missionaries to tour the region, hold lectures, instruct other priests, report on the spread of the Nazarenes and establish its causes. For their endeavors, the most active priests should be awarded prizes established for best sermons or essays against the Nazarenes.

Despite his clear insistence on traditional ecclesiastic structures and functions of the Orthodox Church, Dimitrijević's vehement anti-Nazarene pamphlets, which stressed the strict religiosity and morality manifested among the rest in charity and good deeds, reflected features of Protestant churches rather than his own.⁵⁷ He did not lack words to describe what he termed disgraceful religious life of his fellow Serbs – churches were empty, services were unattractive, sextons were charlatans and churchwardens were drunkards. The life of the people outside churches was even more upsetting, since it was dominated by sexual blasphemy, robbery, rapacity, and ruthlessness. Dimitrijević's suggestions echoed the milieu of Czernowitz

54 Vladimir Dimitrijević, "Nazareni ne dremaju" in *Srpski Sion*, 1902/13, pp. 206-208.

55 Dimitrijević, *Nazarenstvo*, pp. 204–221. For more on Shtundists and response by the Russian church see Heather Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution 1905-1929* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

56 Rev. Simeon Aranicki, "O uzrocima širenju nazarenstva i o sredstvima protiv istoga" in *Srpski Sion*, X/28, (1900), p. 450.

57 See for example, Vladimir Dimitrijević, *Pobožni* [The Pious] (Budapest: Srpska štamparija J. Krnjca, 1903), pp. 17–29.

University where he studied and encountered more educated and pious clergy, regular sermons and catechism, an active pastoral role of the clergy, massive church attendance, etc. Nevertheless, the Orthodox Church in the Monarchy for the first time supported popular and cheap journals aimed at common and uneducated people, as part of the anti-Nazarene campaign.⁵⁸ Other popular Serbian religious magazines and booklets also showed that many in the Serbian Church began to slowly adopt the strategies of their adversaries. One of the most prominent authors of these booklets, Rev. Dera, used moralistic Bible interpretations and the direct translation of German pietistic works in order to stress the virtues of saving and mutual solidarity in booklets such as “Help yourself and God will help you” or “The one who works has everything but the one who saves has even more”.⁵⁹ From Protestant books he adopted praises of Benjamin Franklin, whose life and deeds served to enlighten the simple folk. At the same time, the works of the Serbian enlightener Dositej Obradović, a new writer and dissenter Tolstoy were also popularized. Priests were asking the hierarchy to provide funds for free distribution of booklets for the people and proposed that they be distributed in the way already employed by the Bible society, that was despised only couple of decades earlier when it first began its activities among Orthodox Serbs.⁶⁰ A Serbian church journal even published a translation of *Education: Biblical Principles of Christian Education* written by one of the founders of the Adventists, Ellen G. White.⁶¹ With a considerable delay and far less fervor than in some other countries, at the turn of the century Serbian clerics also began to propagate the so-called temperance societies, and abstinence from drinking which was a very tangible, universally recognizable and widely spread sin.⁶² In this campaign drinking and inns were associated with gambling and prostitution and not with a traditional cherished life style, a change aimed among the rest at counteracting the Nazarene claim to moral superiority. Finally, for the first time special books appeared, which

58 For example in the journal *Pravoslavlje*. Its authors were prominent in other efforts discussed here.

59 Đorđe Đera, *Pomozi se sam, pomoć' će ti bog* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1886) and *U radiše svega biše u štedišu jošte više* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1894).

60 Milan Popadić, “O uzrocima širenja nazarenstva” in *Srpski Sion*, 1900/15, p. 241.

61 Bjelajac, “Protestantism in Serbia”, p. 195. The Serbian translation first appeared in sequences in the journal *Bogoslovski glasnik* and later as a book.

62 The campaign against drinking was developed on models adopted from other churches and already existing secular temperance literature. Prominent author of booklets promoting abstinence was Vladimir Milutinović, see Grujić, *Azbučnik*, p. 140.

were aimed at enlightenment of Serbian women and written by authors close to the Church.

Another device was used by one of the most active parish priests, rev. Marković from Inđija, who wrote morality plays, sometimes featuring Nazarenes. He also strove to apply these ideas in his everyday pastoral work. In his exemplary book on his parish, which would set standards for preaching and writing of other Serbian priests, Marković identified laziness, overspending on weddings and funerals, indebtedness, emigration, drunkenness, fashion, litigation... as reasons for the material weakening and backwardness of his parishioners⁶³ He suggested that only strict adherence to traditional village life, attachment to land and landed property could save the people from evil and sickening influences of the city and the slow dying out of the Serbian people. Fashion as an evil was widely perceived and construed. According to *Vesnik Srpske Crkve* fashion embraced “spending on jewelry, silk, velvet, parasols, hats, fans, corsets, fancy collars, creams, white and red make-up, sprucing, beautifying as well as irrational, mindless and foolish spending on weddings, parties, guests, funerals, commemorations, drinking in inns, the so-called spite trials or processes over plot’s borders and all kinds of other costly foolishness and nonsense.”⁶⁴ Other booklets or morality plays criticized Serbian laziness, wastefulness, litigiousness, stealing among family members and most of all unrestrained drinking, even at church fairs, which often ended up in brawls and in some cases even murders. Though very detailed and persuasive, these descriptions of changes in traditional behavior did not make a clear connection with the vicissitudes of a money economy, competition and encounter with other people, mainly colonized Germans, the establishment of a judicial system over customary law and the emergence of industry and mechanized agriculture. Not being able to detect true causes of distress of the Serbian traditional society, Marković and many others who followed his lead could not offer

63 Rev. Radoslav Marković, *Pravoslavna srpska parohija u Inđiji krajem 1900 godine* (Sr. Karlovci, 1901), pp. 26–35. His example was followed by other priests, which reported in special booklets on their villages and their pastoral efforts such as Dobrivoje Nikolić in Srpski Krstur, Vitomir Teofanović in Čurug, Jovan Kozobarić in Ilok, Simeon Aranicki in Stara Pazova. See Rev. Maksim Vujić, *Pravoslavna srpska parohija u Dobrici krajem 1901 godine* (Sr. Karlovci, 1902) and Rev. Dobrivoj Nikolić, *Pravoslavna srpska parohija u Srpskom krsturu krajem 1908 godine* (T. Kanjiža, 1909). Jovan Ž. Buta, *Naše Selo ili događaji, slike i prilike u selu sirotinjeci* [Our Village or Events in the Poormen’s Village] (Sremski Karlovci, 1906) is of the same style although it describes an imaginary but supposedly typical village.

64 N.a. “Moda – naše srpsko zlo i propast” in *Vesnik srpske crkve*, 1905/2, pp. 289–292, here p. 280.

appropriate solutions. In Stara Pazova however, where Aranicki served as an Orthodox parish priest, he compared Serbs to Slovaks, praising the majority Slovaks for being diligent, thrifty, sober, rational people and good entrepreneurs. Serbs lack solidarity, self-help, economic cooperation, especially in the area of agricultural cooperatives that Aranicki advocated. He encouraged the development of cultural and educational institutions, reading halls and promoted modernization in other spheres, such as the role women played in family.⁶⁵ Unlike most of his colleagues Aranicki was not satisfied with rhetoric. On the contrary, he was a pioneer in establishing in his parish a Serbian agrarian cooperative, a Serbian craftsmen reading hall, a Serbian Sokol (Falcon) gymnastic society, a charity association of Serbian women, a Serbian Church choir, a funeral society, a firefighters' society and a reading hall. Earlier we saw how the leader of the Serbian radical party Tomić believed that a network of cooperatives, loan agencies, banks, and educational institutions would help build or maintain the Serbian Orthodox faith and national consciousness against Magyarization or the Nazarene threat.⁶⁶ He was naturally motivated by the spread of local credit societies or cooperatives, often organized on Raiffeisen principles, all over Austria and to a lesser extent in Hungary.⁶⁷ Yet wooden ploughs, illiteracy and usury held their redoubts in more remote regions in the South, where cooperatives designed to provide aid in the form of seed, feed, education and expertise to Serbian peasants were so much needed. Although the hierarchy never engaged in this direction, many a priest eventually embraced the idea and began the practice of agricultural or craftsmen cooperatives. Rev. Dimitrijević too launched the appeal "Udružujmo se" (Join the associations!) and even the conservative and clericalist press took an active role in the campaign for the establishment of agricultural cooperatives.⁶⁸ Aranicki suggested priests should not only take part but also take the lead in the founding and managing agricultural cooperatives. In this way, they would expand their economic benefit to the moral and religious

65 See Aranicki, *Pravoslavna srpska parohija u Staroj Pazovi krajem 1911. godine*.

66 Lazar Rakić, *Jaša Tomić (1856–1922)* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1986), p. 242.

67 On the eve of the First World War there were no fewer than 8356 of these in Austria and over 3000 in Hungary. See Robin Okey, *The Habsburg Monarchy c. 1765–1918* (London: Macmillan Press, 2001), p. 243. The first Serbian agricultural cooperative in Croatia was founded only in 1897.

68 Dimitrijević published the article under this title in the journal for peasants *Njive* 2 and elaborated further in his *Zašto se kod nas nazarenstvo širi*, p. 140. See also "Kako i gde se osnivaju zemljoradničke zadruge" in *Srpski Sion*, 1901/42, p. 709.

sphere and become what Tomić described as “good people societies”. But for Aranicki the influence gained in this way would help priests and the newly formed cooperatives in suppressing the existing committees and assemblies of the Serbian Church autonomy, dominated by members of anticlerical political parties, mostly Tomić’s Radicals.⁶⁹ It was only in the interwar period that the Serbian clergy fully embraced the cooperative movement, promoting it for its economic as well as moral aims and asserting that it is their task to foster the welfare of the people.⁷⁰

Religious Movements within the Orthodox Church

After almost forty years of struggle against the Nazarene sect, some church authors bitterly realized that studying and refuting its beliefs was useless. In a series of articles appearing in a church journal in 1902, rev. Milutin Jakšić claimed that the Church, meaning its hierarchy and clergy, was to blame for people embracing the new faith and that only deeds not empty words could alter this process.⁷¹ As it was clear that the Nazarenes were a Protestant sect Jakšić deduced that it had appeared for the same reasons that spurred the Reformation in the sixteenth century among the faithful in the Catholic Church and which were now besetting the Serbian Orthodox. More and more priests realized that their bitter reactions against Nazarenes were neither effective nor legitimate.⁷² At the same time many priests abandoned their attempts to persuade apostates to return to Orthodoxy since it became evident that the Nazarenes were there to stay. One priest proposed to (re)let the seats in churches that the Nazarenes had leased for life prior to their conversion.⁷³ In this way churches could earn more money and people who had no seats could finally get them. Such a proposal would previously have been unthinkable and demonstrates that the Orthodox clergy was getting accustomed to the presence of the Nazarenes. Comparison with reactions to somewhat similar and relatively large religious

69 Rev. Simeon Aranicki, “O uzrocima širenju nazarenstva i o sredstvima protiv istoga” in *Srpski Sion*, X/29, (1900), p. 468.

70 Rev Bogoljub N. Milošević, *Putevi vere* [The Ways of Faith] (Belgrade, 1940), pp. 136–138.

71 See Milutin Jakšić, “Nazarenstvo i svećenstvo” [Nazarenes and Priests] in *Bogoslovski glasnik*. I-II, 1902.

72 See Sutvarskii, “Riječ k pitanju: Je li dobro i korisno pisati o nazarenima i raspravljati njihovo učenje?” [Is it useful to write about the Nazarenes and discuss their Teachings] and Jug Stanikić, “Dve tri na ‘Riječ sabrata Sutvarkoga’ o Nazarenstvu” [Comments on the Article of Sutvarskii] in *Hrišćanski vesnik*, XIX/1 (1902).

73 K., “Šta da radimo sa nazarenskim stolovima u našoj crkvi?” [What to do with Chairs in our Churches that belong to Nazarenes?] in *Pastir dobri*, III/10 (1907), p. 159.

movements appearing in Orthodox Russia is instructive. Two great figures in Russia of that period came to symbolize the polarity of the choices facing Orthodox believers.⁷⁴ Leo Tolstoy's teachings represented a move toward a private, non-mystical, anti-sacramental neo-Protestant like Christianity with a clear rejection of the political order in Russia. Father John of Kronstadt, on the other hand, tried to revivify Orthodoxy from within, seeking a more lively sacramental and more charitable Christianity, bolstering at the same time the old political order. His charismatic figure and religious fervor had much in common with reactions of traditional religiosity facing challenges of modernization in all its forms.⁷⁵ Father John's and others' emotional, personal and supernatural forms of piety, previously discouraged, eventually became widespread and acquired national scale surpassing their traditional small-scale forms. What followed among Serbs, unrelated to any previous action of the clergy, was a development very similar to the one already experienced by the Catholic and Protestant churches – the spontaneous spread of grass-root devotional movements, which attempted to regulate the lives and practices of their members according to more stringent rules. At the same time that the Nazarenes had so steadfastly placed themselves outside the institutional Church framework, a new evangelical oriented movement appeared within the Orthodox Church – later known as the *Bogomoljci* [Godworshippers] movement.⁷⁶ The groups of Bogomoljci actually developed an independent life from the Church, but continued to consider themselves Orthodox. More than a century later, the Serbian Church in its official publications tries to disguise the real origins of Bogomoljci movement, claiming it was authentic and original.⁷⁷ Yet Đoko Slijepčević, the most meticulous Serbian Church historian in the twentieth century, noted long ago that the Nazarene way of life and attitude towards the faith and Church greatly contributed to this movement's taking root. It also attracted large numbers of Nazarenes, as will be discussed below.⁷⁸ The founder of the first 'Pobožni' (Pious), as the first informal groups of the new religious movement were initially called, was Vitomir

74 Nadieszda Kizenko, *A Prodigal Saint* (University Park, Penn: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), p. 283.

75 Ibid, p. 285.

76 Bogomoljci (Bogomolytsy) was variously translated in English as God-worshippers, God-prayers and Devotionalists.

77 See Bogomoljci movement in Šabac-Valjevo Eparchy, <http://www.rastko.org.yu/svecovek/zajednice/index.html>.

78 See Djoko Slijepčević, *Nazareni u Srbiji do 1914. godine* (Belgrade: Jugoistok, 1943).

Maletin (1826–1873), a pious peasant and church sexton in Padej in Banat. His mystical visions, which he described in two booklets, were widely read and attracting a following among peasants in neighboring villages. He is also remembered for leading “disputes” with Nazarenes, which soon became famous among simple folk.⁷⁹ Soon other groups under names such as Bogomoljci and Evangelists appeared. Since there was no coordination or common source, the customs of these groups varied greatly. Their followers reportedly gathered around shrines, sources of ‘holy water’ and even in churches. They sang church hymns, read and interpreted the Bible and recited self-made prayers. Their outward appearance was very ascetic; they fasted often and avoided drinking, smoking and other vices.⁸⁰ One priest gave a detailed description of the everyday life, resembling that of the Nazarenes:

They do not ask for doctor’s assistance in case of disease, nor do they take any medicines. They cry during the service or over evil, but they never cry over the dead, which they consider a sin, since remaining calm is a sign of hope and great faith.

They preach sexual chastity among marriage partners and celibacy. Many refrain from pork, others from meat in general and some fast (without any animal products) constantly.

They are very modest, and do not follow any fashion, nor do the women use any cosmetics. Women cover heads in the Church. Some even come barefoot.

They never participate in feasts. None of them smokes or drinks.

Out of love for Holy Scripture all of them learn to read and write.⁸¹

Another priest reported on the special role of the preacher, who has the right to conduct prayer services, who is their respected leader and whom the others listen and obey, again very similar to that of the Nazarene elder. Sometimes supernatural features were attributed to him, such as the ability to enter someone’s soul and see his or her sins, which they used to force people to confess even sins they didn’t commit. Often the preacher calls upon God as his authority in conducting the prayers and preaching. The author of these

79 I. Beleslijin, in “Pobožni” [The Pious] in *Bogoslovski Glasnik*, 1904, pp. 278–289, believed the founder was originally from Bečej in Bačka.

80 Grujić, *Azbučnik*, pp. 134 and 206.

81 Rev. Drag. Đ. Tufegdžić, “O pokretu ‘bogomoljaca’ u Mačvi” [About Bogomoljci Movement in Mačva] in *Vesnik Srpske Crkve*, Maj 1922, pp. 323–326.

observations located the origins of the religious movement of ‘Pious’ or Bogomoljci in Banat, because of their proximity to the Nazarenes. He also stressed that they shared brochures with religious content, mostly about the transcendental experiences.⁸² Other early reactions to Bogomoljci also shared similar features with those to the Nazarenes. They were described as sinners, petty criminals, etc., who after experiencing inner conversion join their ranks to repent for their sins. At the turn of the century, based on several reports from Western Banat and Bačka, rev. Dimitrijević excoriated the Bogomoljci.⁸³ While admitting that the Bogomoljci radiated the strongest criticism against the religious and moral neglect of the Serbian church and people, Dimitrijević warned that they might soon follow on the Nazarene path and fall away from the Church into sectarianism. The greater danger lay in the fact that the Bogomoljci interpreted the Bible and tried to establish a set of moral norms apart from the Church, which for Dimitrijević should have a monopoly in both.⁸⁴ Some however were more reluctant to condemn or dismiss Bogomoljci. One village priest praised them for showing great respect for the Church though practicing some novel customs. In addition to respect, they were very hardworking, sober, thrifty and exemplary in their behavior. In his village all forty members of the agricultural cooperative were Bogomoljci.⁸⁵ Another priest warned that the exaggerated piety of Bogomoljci might eventually lead to their abandoning of Orthodoxy and more importantly Serbdom.⁸⁶ Their excessive religiosity, emotionality and pilgrimages were harmful, incited laziness and smacked of Catholicism. Instead of the Gospel, this highly positioned priest suggested that the Bogomoljci should read *Privrednik* (Economist) and instead of *Lives of Saints* they should read *Lives of Great Serbs*, which would better equip them for competition in culture and economy which, according to him, was what twentieth century was all about. Explaining the appearance of a new religious movement, rev. Jovan Vučković, the rector of the only

82 Rev. Ž. Marinković, “Još koja reč o Bogomoljcima” [One more Word about Bogomoljci] in *Vesnik Srpske Crkve*, Januar-Februar, 1922, pp. 29–40. Besides the Holy Scripture they use some apocryphs such as *San Prevete Matere Božje, Mati Božja u paklu, Poslanica s neba, Knjiga Sv. Oca Ilije, Čudotvorna sila Sv. Sisoja*.

83 Dimitrijević, *Pobožni*, p. 4.

84 Ibid, p. 29.

85 Quoted in Vučković, “Pobožni ljudi, bogomoljci, ili evangeliste” [Pious People, Bogomoljci or Evangelists] in *Bogoslovski Glasnik*, Vol. II/3, 1903. p. 29.

86 Quoted in ibid, p. 31.

Serbian Seminary in the Monarchy, explained how the Serbian Church historically developed a defensive mentality, which thwarted its development in many aspects. Furthermore, religious indifferentism of the intelligentsia brought about by the Enlightenment was for Vučković one of the chief reasons for the spread of Nazarenism, which in a few years caused more damage to the Serbian church than the centuries of state repression and Roman Catholicism in the Habsburg Monarchy.⁸⁷ In short, Serbian elites showed no interest in defending Orthodoxy and reacted only when they realized the danger of the Nazarenes for the Serbdom.

Eventually, the conscience developed about the need for careful and tactful dealing with religious movements among the people, which is exactly what Vučković advised in the case of Bogomoljci. If there was no reaction from the Church leadership, the clergy itself should get to know the new movement better and take steps in order to put it back in official tracks. Condemning the radical rejection of Bogomoljci Vučković called on the experience of Russian and German priests that the best way for priests to deal with the lay religious movement is to join it.⁸⁸

Eventually, it was the charismatic bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, the most extraordinary personality of the Serbian Church in the twentieth century, who managed to take control and bring the movement back to more acceptable channels of expression.⁸⁹ Bishop Nikolaj symbolizes the tendency which arose among the clergy at the beginning of the century that the Church needed to purify the stagnant atmosphere of the nation and devote herself to her apostolic mission of re-Orthodoxization of the people.⁹⁰ Having studied in the West, young theologian Nikolaj Velimirović returned to Serbia in 1909 and became the staunchest advocate of this need for religious revival.⁹¹

87 Ibid, p. 24.

88 Ibid, p. 40.

89 Dragan Subotić, *Episkop Nikolaj i Pravoslavni bogomoljački pokret* [Bishop Nikolaj and Orthodox Bogomoljački Movement] (Belgrade: Nova Iskra, 1996) is the only study of Bogomoljci movement and the role of Bishop Nikolaj in it but despite a quantity of archival and other evidence to the contrary the author portrays the Bogomoljci as true orthodox believers, who revived the Saintsavaian Orthodoxy against the passivity of the Serbian Church and people.

90 This was the view of the director of the Seminary in Belgrade expressed for English readership in S. M. Veselinovitch, "Religion" in Alfred Stead, ed., *Servia by the Servians* (London: Heinemann, 1909), p. 156.

91 Before the First World War Velimirović was a charismatic preacher and author of countless books and booklets on next to all topics. A bishop and prominent political figure in the interwar period Velimirović was literally banned in post-Second World War Yugoslavia because of his conservative and nationalist stance and associations with right wing political forces, only to be celebrated as Serbia's greatest churchman in nineteen nineties and finally canonized in 2002. For more on Bishop's Nikolaj Velimirović' views and controversies that they arose see Rudolf Chrysostomus Grill, *Serbische Messianismus bei Bischof Velimirović* (Romac, 1993), Thomas Bremer, *Ekklesiiale Struktur und Ekklesiologie in der Serbischen Orthodoxen Kirche im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg: Augustinus Verlag, 1992), pp. 112–160, and Jovan Byford, *Denial and Repression of*

Jaša Tomić, who we saw as the most radical critic of the Serbian church and author of several books on the Nazarenes, altered his complete disappointment with the Serbian Church after meeting Velimirović in 1912, during the First Balkan War.⁹² At the same time the most famous Serbian scholar of the period, Jovan Cvijić, also expressed his belief that the appearance of a personality like Velimirović showed that the Serbian Church was finally on the road to fully engage in its holy and national tasks.⁹³ Velimirović spoke of a Christianity that was alive and changing so that some of its outer forms should be also changed in order to preserve its essence. Furthermore, the future celebrated bishop insisted that Christianity and Serbian nationalism are on the same path. “If I am for Christ, then I have to help my oppressed people liberate themselves.”⁹⁴ Accordingly, Velimirović condemned Nazarene passivity and forbearance, claiming that true Christianity should not accept evil. He also renounced Tolstoy who praised the patience and endurance of the Nazarenes.

There could be no greater challenge and appeal for the revival of faith than the First World War. The aftermath of the Great War, in which Serbs from Serbia and the former Austria-Hungary experienced a demographic and material catastrophe, saw the unprecedented rise of all sorts of religious frenzy, mysticism, spiritism and sectarianism. One of the leaders of the Bogomoljci, Dragoljub Milivojević, future bishop Dionisije, confessed that in his youth he also belonged to millenarian sectarians and only later embraced true Orthodoxy and became active in the movement.⁹⁵ People joined new religious groups in thousands and their numbers would be even higher if the priests didn't forbid people to contact itinerant preachers.⁹⁶ In these circumstances, when the official ranks knew of no other means to deal with such religious outpouring but bans and anathemas, Bishop Velimirović raised his voice against this practice in the appeal entitled

Antisemitism: Post-Communist Remembrance of the Serbian Bishop Nikolaj Velimirovic. (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2008).

92 Tomić, *Karlovačka Mitropolija i Hrišćanstvo*, pp. 54–65.

93 Jovan Cvijić in the introduction to Ivan Kosančić, *Novo-pazarški Sandžak i njegov etnički problem*, quoted in “Jedno mišljenje o stanju naše crkve” in *Vesnik srpske crkve*, 1912/1. p. 89.

94 Tomić, *Karlovačka Mitropolija i Hrišćanstvo*, p. 60.

95 Dionisije Milivojevic, *Adventizam u Svetlosti Pravoslavlja* [Adventism in the Light of Orthodoxy] (Kragujevac: Štamparija N.H.Z., 1930), pp. 7–8.

96 Rev. Ž. Marinković, “Još koja reč o Bogomoljcima” in *Vesnik Srpske Crkve*, January-February 1922, pp. 29–40.

“Ne odbacujte ih” (Do not reject them).⁹⁷ Clearly distinguishing them from the Nazarenes, he stressed the spontaneity and originality of Bogomoljci, pleading that they be understood, and corrected if necessary so they do not turn against the Church and join sects. In his message to parish priests Velimirović insisted:

Try to understand the Bogomoljci. Refrain from throwing stones at them, you might easily hit Christ himself. Do not reject them so that they do not reject you.⁹⁸

With the support and advice of Bishop Velimirović various groups of Bogomoljci began from 1920 to organize and structure a single association with headquarters in Kragujevac, which would provide theological training, preparation and official recognition of preachers.⁹⁹ The headquarters were also in charge of printing booklets, sermons and regular journals, with volume of all publications reaching several million examples in the interwar period. Officially, there were five hundred “brotherhoods” or local branches with at least 100,000 members in regions of former Southern Hungary, now known as Vojvodina as well as in Serbia and North Eastern Bosnia. The newly organized movement of Bogomoljci exhibited a kind of evangelical pietism, emphasizing both personal religious experience and corporate activity, accepting typical Protestant tools of church life including mission conferences, special programs for women, revival meetings, emotional singing and a widespread use of the printed word for religious purposes.¹⁰⁰

Bogomoljci also owed its use of vernacular, collective singing and many other aspects of its piety to the Nazarenes. This was welcomed by some priests who opposed long services in archaic Church Slavonic and praised Bogomoljci regular and massive attendance of services and collective singing.¹⁰¹ Yet despite the centralization and efforts of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović some of the Nazarene hymns crept into the song books published by the Bogomoljci movement.¹⁰²

97 Episkop Nikolaj, “Naši ‘Bogomoljci’. Ne odbacujte ih. Jedna napomena sveštenicima” [Our Bogomoljci. Do not reject them. One Advice to Priests] in *Vesnik Srpske Crkve*, March, 1922, pp. 47–50.

98 *Ibid.*, p. 50.

99 Rev. M. Anđelković, “Naš religiozni pokret” [Our Religious Movement] in *Vesnik Srpske Crkve*, March 1922, pp. 53–56.

100 See the report on one of the movement’s strongholds in Bačka in Rev. Vasilije Teofanović, “Čuruški bogomoljci” in *Vesnik*, 1925, pp. 382–384.

101 Rev Vasilije Teofanović, “Kako da približimo narod crkvi?” [How to bring the People closer to the Church] in *Vesnik*, 1926, pp. 69–70.

102 Their first collections of pious songs included Nazarene hymns translated by Zmaj and Rajković, a fact that could not pass unnoticed by old Nazarene foe, Vladimir Dimitrijević. See his “Bogomoljačka književnost” [The Literature of Bogomoljci] in *Vesnik Srpske Crkve*, 1926, pp. 319–327.

Some Bogomoljci villagers continued to subscribe to fatalism and superstition of folk religion and influences of Protestant sects. Their religion was indeed different from the Nazarene but was similarly revivalist and popular and against the official one. The common thread was the pietist insistence that religious dogmas should shape not only the mind but also the heart, emotions and especially morality. Despite Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović's involvement many other bishops remained embarrassed by their excessive enthusiasm, spiritual indisipline, and visions remained mistrustful of their self-organization.¹⁰³ Thus, the majority of Serbian clergy and bishops insisted on strict organization of the Bogomoljci and submission to the existing units of the Church, and demanded the movement cleanse all its unorthodox, anti-Church elements, especially the ones inherited or embraced from the Nazarenes and Adventists.¹⁰⁴

The greatest achievement of Bishop Velimirović was to incite enthusiasm among Bogomoljci for monasticism, which experienced an upsurge in the interwar period, especially with the revival of religious vocation among women, which had died out during the Ottoman period.¹⁰⁵ Besides a religious agenda Bishop Velimirović also had a very clear political agenda with the Bogomoljci, which has not been researched yet. A cursory reading of his speeches reveals how he made use of Bogomoljci religious fervor to express their dissent from secular society in which social disabilities were constantly growing.¹⁰⁶ Most remarkable, however, was Velimirović's introduction of nationalism to thousands of peasants, who frequently congregated at Bogomoljci open-air meetings around great

103 Channeling and formalizing Bogomoljci piety was the favorite topic of the interwar Church press as in Dušan Petrović, "O sredstvima i načinima za jačanje i širenje istočno-pravoslavne vere u našem narodu" in *Vesnik*, 1925, p.108, Rev. V. M. Vidaković, "Osnivanje hrišćanskih zajednica" [Foundation of Christian Communities] in *Vesnik*, 1922, pp. 387–395, Damaskin, "O verskom, zvanom 'bogomoljačkom', pokretu kod nas" [About the so-called Bogomoljci Movement] in *Vesnik*, 1925, pp. 543–549, Rev. St. M. Dimitrijević, "Križa našeg monaštva" [Crisis of our Monasticism] in *Vesnik*, 1926, pp. 370–398. The proposals ranged from organizing pilgrimages of Bogomoljci to Mount Athos to incorporating them in already existing brotherhoods of Saint Sava or recruiting monks among them.

104 In 1922, the Synod of the SOC issued the order 1124 to all priests to investigate the Bogomoljci movement and report to bishops on its development and especially in case of their wrong beliefs. Interesting reports from Bačka diocese are to be found in AV, Fond 405, box 3. For other responses see Rev. Živan Živanović "Reforme u crkvi pravoslavnoj i njihova sudba" [Reforms in the Orthodox Church and their Fate] in *Vesnik*, 1923, pp. 90–95. here, p. 79, Rev. Petar N. Jovanović, "Bogomoljački pokret u zvorničkotuzlanskoj eparhiji" [Bogomoljci Movement in Zvornik-Tuzla Bishopric] in *Put k Bogu* (Tuzla, 1934), "Pirimeri u predavanjima adventista" u *Svetosavlje* Vol V/2, 1936, and *Osnovna pravila i uredba Narodne Hrišćanske Zajednice* [Basic Rules and Regulation of *Narodna Hrišćanska Zajednica*] (Kragujevac: Narodna Hrišćanska Zajednica, 1938).

105 There is no study of the Bogomoljci origins of many Serbian monks and later bishops in the twentieth century. For the revival of female monasticism see Rudolf Prokschi, *Ein neuer Aufbruch bei den Nonnen in der Serbischen Orthodoxen Kirche im 20. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1996).

106 His speeches on Bogomoljci meetings are published in Subotić, *Episkop Nikolaj i Pravoslavni bogomoljački pokret*.

monasteries seeking religious solace. A mass lay religious movement such as the Bogomoljci provided the final argument in the development of populist nationalism branded as *Svetosavlje* in which nation is identified with religion, which crystallized in the interwar period.¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

The Nazarenes attracted many Orthodox Serbs to their ranks at a time when their elites and their Church were deeply divided and challenged by their increasing marginalization caused by Magyarization policies of the Hungarian government and the general effects of the modernization processes. The Karlovci Metropolitanate, fossilized and corrupted through its relation with the state could not respond to such intense religious feelings and practices of the Nazarenes nor could it offer the needed moral and religious solace. It took several decades until its lower clergy began to reach out towards the poor and deprived, addressing their needs by using the experience and methods of Protestant churches or the sister Russian Orthodox Church, which underwent similar challenges some decades earlier. The most remarkable was the reaction on the grassroots level, especially among the peasants, who began to form religious groups in great numbers. These groups of the latter called Bogomoljci used common language and practiced familiar customs, with which the common people could identify. Soon they evolved in a very strong social network with accompanying codes of behavior and socializing. Adopting ecclesiastical and pastoral solutions of other churches and channeling a grassroots religious movement in its own ranks, the Serbian Church also willy-nilly transformed despite its clear resistance to accommodate modernity.

¹⁰⁷ See Klaus Buchenau, "Svetosavlje und Pravoslavljje, Nationales und Universales in der serbischen Orthodoxie", in Martin Schulze Wessel (ed.), *Nationalisierung der Religion und Sakralisierung der Nation im östlichen Europa* (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 2006), pp. 203-232; Maria Falina, "Svetosavlje. A case Study in the nationalization of religion," *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte* 101 (2007), pp. 505–27.