

A History of the Baptists

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CHAPTER IV THE PAULICIAN AND BOGOMIL CHURCHES

IT is to be regretted that most of the information concerning the Paulicians comes through their enemies. The sources are twofold. The first source is that of the Greek writers, Photius (*Adv. recentiores Manichaeans*. Hamburg 1772) and Petros Sikeliotis (*Historia Manichaeorum qui Pauliciani*. Ingolstadt, 1604), which has long been known and was used by Gibbon in the preparation of the brilliant fifty-fourth chapter of his history. Not much has been added from that source since. The accounts are deeply prejudiced, and although Gibbon suspected the malice and poison of these writers, and laid bare much of the malignity expressed by them, he was at times misled in the facts. He did not have the completeness of information which was necessary for a full delineation of their history.

The second source of information in regard to the Paulicians is Armenian in its origin and has recently been brought to light and illustrated. There was an old book of the Paulicians called the "Key of Truth," mentioned by Gregory Magistos, in the eleventh century. Fortunately, Mr. Fred C. Conybeare, M, A., formerly Fellow of University College, Oxford, was much interested in affairs in Armenia. He was a second time in that country, in 1891, in quest of documents illustrative of the history of the Paulicians. He fell upon a copy of the "Key of Truth" in the Library of the Holy Synod at Edjmiatzin. He received a copy of it in 1893; and the text with an English translation was printed by Mr. Conybeare in 1898. He also accompanied the text with important data received from Armenian histories and from other sources. As may be judged this is not only a new but a very important source of information. The Paulicians are at length permitted to plead, in a measure, for themselves. We are able, therefore, practically to reconstruct the Paulician history.

The Paulician churches were of apostolic origin, and were planted in Armenia in the first century. "Through Antioch and Palmyra the faith must have spread into Mesopotamia and Persia; and in those regions become the basis of the faith as it is spread in the Taurus mountains as far as Ararat. This was the primitive form of Christianity. The churches in the Taurus range of mountains formed a huge recess or circular dam into which flowed the early Paulician faith to be caught and maintained for centuries, as it were, a backwater from the main for centuries" (Bury's edition of Gibbon's History,

VI. 543). The earliest center of Christianity in Armenia was at Taron, which was the constant home and base of operations of the Paulicians.

They claimed that they were of apostolic origin. "The Key of Truth" says:

Let us then submit humbly to the holy church universal. and follow their works who acted with one mind and one faith and taught us. For still do we receive in the only proper season the holy and precious mystery of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the Heavenly Father:—to-wit, in the season of repentance and of faith. As we learned from the Lord of the universal and apostolic church, so do we proceed: and we establish in perfect faith those who (till then) have not holy baptism (Margin, That Is to say, the Latins, Greeks and Armenians, who are not baptized); nay, nor have tasted of the body or drunk of the holy blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore according to the Word of the Lord, we must first bring them into the faith, induce them to repent, and give it (Margin, Baptism) unto them (pp.76,77).

Upon this point Adeney says: "Therefore, it is quite arguable that they should be regarded as representing the survival of a most primitive type of Christianity" (Adeney, *The Greek and Eastern Churches*, 217). He further says: "Ancient Oriental Baptists, these people were in many respects Protestants before Protestantism" (Adeney, *The Greek and Eastern Churches*, 219).

The Paulicians did not recognize persons of other communions as belonging to the churches. "We do not belong to these," they said. "They have long ago broken connection with the church and have been excluded." Such is the testimony of Gregory Magistos, A. D., 1058, whose history is one of the chief sources of information.

We can only lightly touch upon a few events connected with their history. The story of the conversion of Constantine, A. D. 660, is interesting. This young Armenian sheltered a Christian deacon who was flying from Mohammedan persecutions. In return for his kindness he received a copy of the New Testament. "These books became the measure of his studies and the rule of his faith; and the Catholics, who disputed his interpretation, acknowledged that his text was genuine and sincere. But he attached himself with peculiar devotion to the writings and character of Paul and the name of Paulicians is derived by their enemies from some unknown leader; but I am confident that they gloried in their affinity to the apostle to the Gentiles" (Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, V.386).

Constantine felt that he was called upon to defend and restore primitive Christianity; being greatly impressed by the writings of Paul, he took the name of one of his followers, Silvanus; and the churches founded by him received names from the primitive congregations. The entire people were called Paulicians from the apostle. These statements of the apostolic simplicity of these devout Christians tell more of the manners, customs and doctrines than volumes of prejudiced accounts left by their enemies. With Paul as their guide, they could not be far removed from the truth of the New Testament.

Professor Wellhausen, in his life of Mohammed (Encyclopedia Britannica, XVI. 571, 9th Edition), gives a most interesting account of the Baptists of the Syro-Babylonian desert. He says they were called Sabians, Baptists, and that they practiced the primitive forms of Christianity. Indeed, "Sabian" is an Arabized word meaning "Baptist" They literally filled with their members Syria, Palestine, and Babylonia (Renan, Life, of Jesus, chap. XII). They were off the line of the main advance of Christianity, and were left untouched in their primitive simplicity. From them Mohammed derived many of his externals. The importance of this must not be undervalued. "It can hardly be wrong to conclude," continues Prof. Willhausen, "that these nameless witnesses of the Gospel, unmentioned in church history, scattered the seed from which sprung the germ of Islam." These Christians were the Paulicians.

This bit of history will account for a fact that heretofore has been hard to understand. The emperors had determined to drive the Paulicians from their dominions. They took refuge "in the Mohammedan dominions generally, where they were tolerated and where their own type of belief never ceased to be accounted orthodox." This we learn from John the Philosopher. The Arabs had since the year 650 successfully challenged the Roman influence in Armenia. The same protection, probably, preserved the Paulician churches through many ages. It is certain that the Paulicians were true to the Arabs, and that the Mohammedans did not fail them in the hour of trial.

The number of the Paulicians constantly increased, and they soon attracted the attention of their enemies. In the year 690 Constantine, their leader, was stoned to death by the command of the emperor; and the successor of Constantine was burned to death. The Empress Theodora instituted a persecution in which one hundred thousand Paulicians in Grecian Armenia are said to have lost their lives.

The Paulicians, in the ninth century, rebelled against their enemies, drove out Michael III, and established in Armenia the, free state of Teprice. This is a well-known site, some seventy miles from Sivas, on the river Chalta. They gave absolute freedom of opinion to all of its inhabitants (Evans, Historical

View of Bosnia, 30). From the capital of this free state, itself called Teprice, went forth a host of missionaries to convert the Slavonic tribes of Bulgaria, Bosnia, and Servia to the Paulician faith. This is positively stated by Sikeliotēs. Great was their success—so great that a large portion of the inhabitants of the free state migrated to what were then independent states beyond the emperor's control. The state of Teprice lasted one hundred and fifty years, when it was overcome by the Saracens. All around them were persecutions for conscience sake—they themselves had lost one hundred thousand members by persecutions in the reign of Theodora—yet here was a shelter offered to every creed and unbeliever alike. This is a striking Baptist peculiarity.

The Baptists have always set up religious liberty when they had opportunity. Conybeare, speaking of the Paulicians, justly remarks:

And one point in their favor must be noticed, and it is this, Their system was, like that of the European Cathars, in its basal idea and conception alien to persecution; for membership in it depended upon baptism, voluntarily sought for, even with tears and supplications, by the faithful and penitent adult. Into such a church there could be no dragooning of the unwilling. On the contrary, the whole purpose of the scrutiny, to which the candidate for baptism was subjected, was to ensure that his heart and intelligence were won, and to guard against the merely outward conformity, which is all that a persecutor can hope to impose. It was one of the worst results of infant baptism, that by making membership in the Christian church mechanical and outward, it made it cheap; and so paved the way of the persecutor (Conybeare, *The Key of Truth*, xli).

In the year 970 the Emperor, John Tzimisces, transferred some of the Paulicians to Thrace and granted them religious liberty; and it is recorded to their credit that they were true to his interests. In the beginning of the eighth century their doctrines were introduced and spread throughout Europe, and their principles soon struck deep into foreign soil.

It was in the country of the Albigenses, in the Southern provinces of France, that the Paulicians were most deeply implanted, and here they kept up a correspondence with their brethren in Armenia. The faith of the Paulicians "lived on in Languedoc and along the Rhine as the submerged Christianity of the Cathars, and, perhaps, also among the Waldenses. In the Reformation this Catharism comes once more to the surface, particularly among the so-called, Anabaptists and Unitarian Christians between whom and the most

primitive church 'The Key of Truth' and the Cathar Ritual of Lyons supply us with the two great connecting links" (Key of Truth, x).

They were persecuted by the popes; and all literary and other traces of them, as far as possible, were destroyed. But "the visible assemblies of the Paulicians, of Albigensians, were extirpated by fire and sword; and the bleeding remnant escaped by flight, concealment, or Catholic conformity. In the state, in the church, and even in the cloister, a latent succession was preserved of the disciples of St. Paul; who protested against the tyranny of Rome, and embraced the Bible as the rule of faith, and purified their creed from all the visions of the Gnostic theology" (Gibbon, Decline and Fall of The Roman Empire, V.398).

Many historians, besides Gibbon, such as Muratori and Mosheim, regard the Paulicians as the forerunners of the Albigensians, and, in fact, as the same people. One of the latest of these, already frequently quoted, is Professor Conybeare, one of the highest authorities in the world on Paulician matters. He affirms that the true line of succession is found among Baptists. He says:

The church has always adhered to the idea of spiritual regeneration in baptism, although by baptizing babies it has long ago stultified itself and abandoned the essence of baptism. Indeed the significance of the baptism of Jesus, as it presented itself to St. Paul, and the evangelists was soon lost sight of by the orthodox churches. . . We hear much discussion nowadays of the validity of orders English, Latin, and oriental. The unbiased student of church history cannot but wonder that it has never occurred to any of these controversialists of the Church of England to ask whether they are not, after all, contending for a shadow; whether, in short, they have, say of them, real orders in the primitive sense in which they care to claim possession of them. The various sects of the Middle Ages which, knowing themselves simply as, Christians, retained baptism in its primitive form and significance, steadily refused to recognize as valid the infant baptism of the great orthodox or persecuting churches; and they were certainly in the right, so far as doctrine and tradition count for anything. Needless to say, the great churches have long ago lost genuine baptism, can have no further sacraments, no priesthood, and, strictly speaking, no Christianity. If they would reenter the Pale of Christianity, they must repair, not to Rome or Constantinople, but to some of the obscure circles of Christians, mostly in the East, who have never lost the true continuity of the baptismal sacrament. These are the Paulicians of Armenia, the Bogomil sect round Moscow whose

members call themselves Christ's, the adult Baptists (those who practice adult baptism) among the Syrians of the upper Tigris valley, and perhaps, though not so certainly, the popelikans, the Mennonites, and the great Baptist communities of Europe. This condemnation of the great and called orthodox churches may seem harsh and pedantic, but there is no escape from it, and we place ourselves on the same ground on which they profess to stand. Continuity of baptism was more important in the first centuries of the church than continuity of orders; so important, indeed, that even the baptism of heretics was recognized as valid. If store was set by the unbroken succession of bishops, it was only because one function of the bishop was to watch over the integrity of the initiatory rite of the religion. How badly the bishops of the great churches did their duty, how little, indeed, after the third century they even understood it, is seen in the unchecked growth, from the year 300 A. D. onward, of the abuse of the baptismal rite, resulting before long in its entire forfeiture (Conybaere, *The History of Christmas*. In *The American Journal of Theology*).

Dr. Justin A. Smith, so long the scholarly editor of *The Standard*, Chicago, says of the Paulicians:

The sum of all this is, that whether or not a succession of Baptist churches can, as some think, be traced through the centuries of the Middle Ages down to the time when our denominational history in its strict sense begins, we may at least say that our ancestry goes upward along a line of descent in which, if any where in the world, pure Christianity survived; and that among our Baptist progenitors, in this sense, were men and women who had the conspicuous honor to be maligned by those whom history proves to have been adepts in the two trades of murder and slander (Smith, *Modern Church History*, 227).

One thing is certain, that in Italy, in France, and along the Rhine, the Paulicians and the Albigenses were found in the same territory, and there were no great differences between them in practice and doctrines. Writers go so far as to assert that there was a succession of churches and of interests. It is well attested, that in the middle of the eleventh century they were numerous in Lombardy and Isurbia, but especially in Milan, in Italy; and it is no less certain that they traveled through France, Germany and other countries, and by their sanctity they won large numbers of common people to their way of thinking. In Italy they were called Paternes and Cathari, and in Germany, Gazari. In France they were called Albigenses.

They were called Bulgarians, particularly in France, because some of them came from Bulgaria, and they were also known by the name of *Boni Homines* (Mosheim, Institutes of Ecclesiastical History, II. 200-202). Their enemies extolled their piety. A succession of them is found through the Middle Ages.

The Paulicians were accused of being Manichaeans, and much prejudice has been excited against them on this account. "The Paulicians," says Adeney, "have been most egregiously libeled of all of the Christian sects" (The Greek and Eastern Churches, 216. New York, 1908). The Roman Catholics have always denounced the teachings of Marcion with singular hostility. It is now clearly known that the Paulicians were not Manichaeans. The Key of Truth settles this matter (p. 18). Modern Armenian scholars do not hesitate to correct this error (Ter Mkittsehain, Die Paulikianer im Byzantinischen in Armenien, Leipzig, 1893). Conybeare has no doubt on the subject.

Turning to the doctrines and practices of the Paulicians we find that they made constant use of the Old and New Testaments. They had no orders in the clergy as distinguished from laymen by their modes of living, their dress, or other things; they had no councils or similar institutions. Their teachers were of equal rank. They strove diligently for the simplicity of the apostolic life. They opposed all image worship which was practiced in the Roman Catholic Church. The miraculous relics were a heap of bones and ashes, destitute of life and of virtue. They held to the orthodox view of the Trinity; and to the human nature and substantial sufferings of the Son of God.

Baptist views prevailed among the Paulicians. They held that men must repent and believe, and then at a mature age ask for baptism, which alone admitted them into the church. "It is evident," observes Mosheim, "they rejected the baptism of infants." They baptized and rebaptized by immersion. They would have been taken for downright Anabaptists (Allix, The Ecclesiastical History of the Ancient Churches of Piedmont. Oxford, 1821).

Something of the opinions of the Paulicians is gathered from a Synod held in Arras, in the year 1025, by Gerard, Bishop of Cambrai and Arras. One Gundulphus, a Paulician, was condemned. He had taught his doctrines in many places. It was found on examination that the Paulicians held:

The law and discipline we have received from our Master will not appear contrary either to the Gospel or apostolic institutions if carefully looked into. This discipline consists in leaving the world, in bridling carnal concupiscence, in providing a livelihood by the

labor of our hands, in hurting nobody, and affording our charity to all who are zealous in the prosecution of this our design.

Concerning baptism they made reply:

But if any man shall say, that some sacrament lies hid in baptism, the force of that is, taken off from three causes: the first is, Because the reprobate life of ministers can afford no saving remedy to the persons to be baptized. The second, Because whatsoever sins are renounced at the font, are afterwards taken up again in life and practice. The third, Because a strange will, a strange faith, and a strange confession do not seem to belong to, or to be of an advantage to a little child, who neither wills nor runs, who knows nothing of faith, and is altogether ignorant of his own good and salvation, in which there can be no desire of regeneration, and from whom no confession of faith can be expected (Allix, *The Ecclesiastical Churches*, 104).

A better answer could not this day be given. There is a Confession of Faith which is attributed to the Paulicians, A. D. 1024, which declares:

In the beginning of Christianity there was no baptizing of children: and their forefathers practiced no such thing and we do from our hearts acknowledge that baptism is a washing which is performed in water, and doth hold out the washing of the soul from sin (Mehrning, *Der heiligen Tauff Historie*, II. 738).

It is possible that the Paulicians were Adoptionists. This is the view of Conybeare (lxxxvii), but his views are often inferential (xiv). He further says: "My Suggestion that the European Cathars were of the Adoptionists origin also rests on mere inference" (xiv).

The connection of this view with that of modern Baptists is set forth by Conybeare as follows:

It is therefore a promising field of research to enquire whether the Paulicians were not partially responsible for many sects which at the Reformation made their appearance and exhibit, some more, some less, an affinity to Paulician tenets as set out in the *Kev*. This is not the place to embark on such an inquiry, which would require a separate work. Perhaps the data no longer exists which would enable one to trace the channels of communication. To do so would require in any case a vast amount of research; but it does seem probable that in at least

two of the sects of the age of the Reformation we have a survival of the same ancient form of the Catholic Church which the pages of the Key reveal to us. These two sects are the Anabaptists and the Unitarians, afterwards called Socinians from their great teacher Socinus. From the former are derived the great Baptist churches of England and America, and also the Mennonites of Germany. The arguments of the sixteenth century Baptists against Paedobaptism are the same as we have in the *Key*, and—*what* we might also expect—an Adoptionist view of Christ as a rule went with them in the past; though the modern Baptists, in accepting the current doctrine of the Incarnation, have both obscured their origin and stultified their distinctive observances. From the first ages Adoptionist tenets have as naturally and as indissolubly been associated with adult baptism, as has infant baptism with the pneumatic Christology, according to which Jesus was from his mother's womb and in his cradle filled with the Holy Spirit, a pre-existent Divine being, creator, and controller of the universe (Conybeare, *The Key*, ci, cli).

Whatever may be the final conclusions in the matter, it is certain that the Adoptionist views of the Paulicians accentuated their opposition to infant baptism.

The form of baptism was to dip the subject into the water once, while the Greeks dipped three times. There is much evidence that in Armenia the form of baptism was immersion. Macarius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, A. D. 331 to 335, writing to the Armenians, says that baptism was administered with triple immersion burying in the water of the holy font" (Library of the Mechitarist Fathers of Vienna. MSS. Cod. Arm. No. 100). There is an oration preserved out of the twelfth century ascribed to Isaac Catholicos of Armenia, which gives the practice of the Paulicians. John Otzun, A. D. 718, speaks of the Paulicians descending into the baptistery (Otzun, *Opera*, 25. Venice, 1834). And he further tells how the Mohammedans tried to prevent them from baptizing in the running rivers, for fear that they would bewitch the waters and render them unwholesome.

The constant practice of the Oriental Church was immersion. Rev. Nicholas Bjerring says of its baptism: "Baptism is celebrated sometimes in the church and sometimes in private houses, as needs may be. It is always administered by dipping the infant, or adult, three times" (Bjerring, *The Offices of the Oriental Church*, xii. New York, 1880). And further on in the Liturgy he gives the ceremony of immersion. Thus did the Paulicians practice immersion as the Scriptures indicate.

The Bogomils were a branch of the Cathari, or Paulicians, who dwelt in Thrace. Their name appears to have been derived from one of their leaders in the midst of the tenth century, though others declare that their name comes from a Slavic word which is defined, "Beloved of God." The Bogomils were repeatedly condemned, and often persecuted, but they continued to exist through the Middle Ages, and still existed in the sixteenth century.

Their historians claimed for them the greatest antiquity Dr. L. P. Brockett, who wrote a history of them, says:

Among these (historians of the Bulgarians) I have found, often in unexpected quarters, the most conclusive evidence that these sects were all, during their early history, Baptists, not only in their views on the subjects of baptism and the Lord's Supper, but in their opposition to Pedobaptism, to a church hierarchy, and to the worship of the Virgin Mary and the saints, and in their adherence to church independency and freedom of conscience in religious worship. In short, the conclusion has forced itself upon me that in these Christians of Bosnia, Bulgaria, and Armenia we have an apostolic succession of Christian churches, New Testament churches, and that as early as the twelfth century these churches numbered a converted, believing membership, as large as that of the Baptist churches throughout the world today (Brockett, *The Bogomils of Bulgaria and Bosnia*, 11, 12).

Some Roman Catholic writers have affirmed that the Bogomils did not practice baptism, or observe the Lord's Supper; and, that further, they denied the Old Testament Scriptures. This probably means no more than that they rejected infant baptism, and quoted the New Testament as supreme and authoritative in the matter.

The persecutions of the Bogomils, as of other Paulicians, were continuous and severe. Every effort was made to destroy them. "Yet it was not stamped out," says Conybeare, "but only driven under ground. It still lurked all over Europe, but especially in the Balkans, and along the Rhine. In these hiding places it seemed to have gathered its forces together in secret, in order to emerge once more into daylight when an opportunity presented itself. The opportunity was the European Reformation, in which, especially under the form of Anabaptism and Unitarian opinion, this leaven of the early apostolic church is found freely mingling with and modifying other forms of faith. In engendering this great religious movement, we feel sure that the Bogomils of the Balkan States played a most important part" (*The Key of Truth*, cxcvi).

