

**Lesson 22 The “Christian”
Middle Ages: The Paulicians and
the Silver Line of Truth**

Review of the Pilgrim Church Concept

- State church forcibly suppressed those who would not yield to their demands.
- There were always some who held to the teachings of the apostles and not the Roman Church.
- The writings and true histories of these believers have been suppressed.
- Names were given to them by their enemies that they never claimed for themselves.

Standard View of the Paulicians

- “Heretical Sects” is the title of Chapter 12 in Volume 4 of Philip Schaff’s esteemed *History of the Christian Church*. Schaff devotes an entire section of this chapter to discussing the “heretical beliefs” of the Paulicians.
 - See quotes in notes.
- It is important to notice the following aspects of Schaff’s thinking:
 - He judges who is heretical and who is not based on where they stand in light of Catholic orthodoxy.
 - He considers the Catholic Church “historic Christianity.”
 - He proves Braodbent’s point that dissenting groups were labeled by their opponents (i.e., Gnostic, Manichean, dualistic, Marcionite) with names they had not chosen from themselves.

Standard View of the Paulicians

- Schaff goes on to state, “The doctrines and practices of the Paulicians are known to us only from the reports of the orthodox opponents (those with an agenda against them) and a few fragments of the epistles of Sergius. They were a strange mixture of dualism, demiurgism, docetism, mysticism and pseudo-Paulinism, and resemble in many respects the Gnostic system of Marcion.” (Schaff, 576)
- So the only reason why we should consider the Paulicians heretics is because they disagree with Catholic Orthodoxy. Furthermore, the only proof we have according to Schaff is the testimony of Catholics with whom the Paulicians disagreed.

Standard View of the Paulicians

- Kenneth Scott Latourette comments on the Paulicians in a section of his *A History of Christianity: Beginnings to 1500* under the title “Minority Movements Branded as Heretical by the Orthodox.” (299)
 - “They called themselves simply Christians and the designation Paulician was given them by their enemies.” (Latourette, 299)
- Jonathan Hill, author of *Zondervan Handbook to the History of Christianity* discusses the Paulicians in a section labeled “New Heresies.” While Hill admits that the Paulicians remain poorly understood he does not hesitate from repeating the party line regarding these saints calling them Manicheans, Gnostic, and Nestorian. (Hill, 150)

Standard View of the Paulicians

- Andrew Miller agrees with Broadbent. Miller states the following regarding the Paulicians, “The doctrines, character, and history of the Paulicians have been subjects of great controversy; but they have not been allowed to speak for themselves to posterity. Their writings were carefully destroyed by the Catholics, and they are known to us only through the reports of bitter enemies who branded them as heretics. . .” (Miller, 353)

Who Were the Paulicians?

- “From the time of Mani the churches of believers who called themselves Christians, thus distinguishing themselves from others whom they called “Romans,” had always been accused of being Manicheans, though they declared that they were not and complained of the injustice of attributing to them doctrines they did not hold.” (Braodbent, 65)
- The name Paulician was frequently given to these churches. “The persecutions to which they were subjected and the systematic destruction of their literature hide from us all but occasional glimpses into their history, though what remains is sufficient to show that there were in those wide regions of Asia Minor, Armenia, around Mount Ararat and beyond the Euphrates, churches . . . who kept the teaching of the apostles—received from Christ and contained in the Scriptures—in an unbroken testimony from the first.” (Braodbent, 66)

The Region in Paul's Day

Acts 18:23



Byzantine Empire



Who Were the Paulicians?

- In 653, after the Muslim conquest of Syria, an Armenian deacon returning from captivity amongst the Muslims became the guest of a man named Constantine in the village of Mananalis near Samosata. (Miller, 353-354)
- In response to Constantine's hospitality, the deacon gave him a manuscript containing the four gospels and the epistles of Paul. Rumors abound regarding Constantine's religious background i.e., trained Gnostic, Manichean, member of the established Greek church. However, upon studying the manuscript, Constantine renounced his religious past and set about restoring apostolic Christianity. (Miller, 354)
- Constantine changed his name to Silvanus (after Paul's companion) and began preaching for nearly thirty years in a place called Cibossa, Armenia. Silvanus had many converts from amongst the Catholics as well as the Zoroastrian religion. Over time his group became sizeable enough to attract the attention of the Emperor and an edict was issued in 684 AD against Constantine and the Paulician congregations. (Miller, 355)

Who Were the Paulicians?

- “The execution of the decree was entrusted to an officer of the imperial court, named Simeon. He had orders to put the teacher to death, and to distribute his followers among the clergy and in monasteries, with a view to their being reclaimed.” (Miller 355)
- “Simeon placed Constantine—the chief object of the priests’ revenge before a large number of his companions, and commanded them to stone him. They refused, and, instead of obeying, all dropped the stones with which they had been armed, excepting one young man; and Constantine was killed by a stone from the hand of that heartless youth-his own adopted son Justus.” (Miller, 355)
- Meanwhile, Simeon was so affected by the testimony of what he witnessed that after talking the Paulicians he converted to their faith. After spending three years at the imperial court, Simeon left his earthly position returned to Cibossa under the name Titus and became the successor of Sylvanus. (Miller, 355)

Who Were the Paulicians?

- Five years after the martyrdom of Constantine, Justus betrayed the Paulicians again. He went to the bishop of Colonia, and reported the revival and spread of the so-called heresy. The bishop communicated his information to the Emperor Justinian II., and, in consequence, Simeon, and a large number of his followers were burnt to death in one large funeral pile. (Miller, 355)
- Justinian would not succeed in wiping out the memory of the Paulicians. Influenced by the blood of the martyrs and a new succession of teachers congregations arose from their ashes spread over all the adjacent regions. (Miller, 355)

Who Were the Paulicians?

- The Paulicians as well as similar groups rejected the use of icons and images in their worship. They received a bit of reprieve from their persecution under the reign of Leo the Isaurian who in 726 issued the first edict against the worship of images. He followed this by a campaign of forcible destruction of images and the persecution of those who held them. (Broadbent, 69)
- “The iconoclastic movement brought a respite to the persecuted brethren of Asia Minor, but when (AD 842), under the Empress Theodora, the supporters of images had triumphed, it was determined to exterminate the “heretics” who had so consistently and powerfully proclaimed that images, pictures, and relics were valueless, and had maintained a spiritual worship and the priesthood of all believers.” (Broadbent, 72)

Who Were the Paulicians?

- “Systematic slaughter, beheading, burning, drowning, began afresh under the Empress Theodora’s orders and continued for many years. But it failed to shake the steadfastness of the believers. It was claimed that between the years 842 and 867, the zeal of Theodora and her inquisitors had brought about the death of 100,000 persons.” (Broadbent, 74)
- Broadbent and Ruckman both report that many Paulicians politically and militarily aligned themselves with the Muslims due to the ferocity of the persecutions against them by the established church. (Broadbent, 77; Ruckman, 303)



Christian Knights Kill their Unarmed Enemies



Bogomils, "Beloved of God"-
Link to the Paulicians

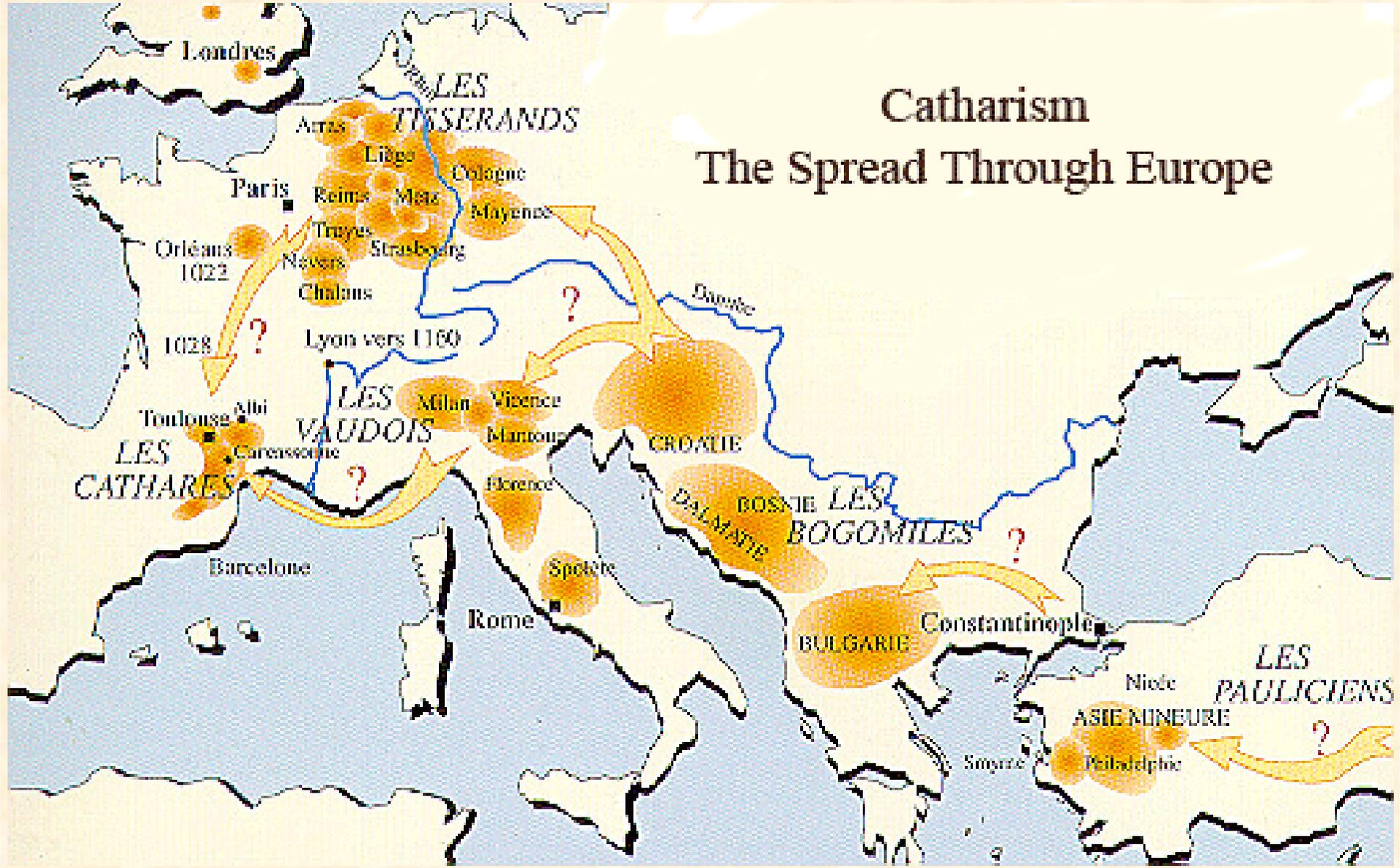


Who Were the Paulicians?

- Under severe persecution many Paulicians migrated across the Bosphorus Strait into Bulgaria and the Balkan mountains and from thence into northern Italy, Yugoslavia where they produced Christians called Waldenses and Albigenses. (Ruckman, 304)
- In Volume III of his legendary *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* Edward Gibbon states the following regarding the Paulicians:
 - See notes for Gibbon quotes
- Spanning a period of time from about 600 AD until the 14th century with a few lingering into the 18th century Gibbon considered the Paulicians the first reformers who scattered over the West the seeds of the reformation. (Gibbon, 302)

Catharism

The Spread Through Europe



What Did the Paulicians Believe?

- Once again Schaff articulates the standard party line regarding the Paulicians.
 - Dualism was their fundamental principle. The good God created the spiritual world; the bad God created the sensual world. The former is worshiped by the Paulicians, i.e., the true Christians, the latter by the “Romans” or Catholics.
 - Contempt for matter. The body is the seat of evil desire, and is itself impure.
 - Docetism. Christ descended from heaven in an ethereal body, passed through the womb of Mary as through a channel, suffered in appearance, but not in reality, and began the process of redemption of the spirit from the chains of matter.
 - The Virgin Mary was not the “mother of God”
 - They rejected the Old Testament and the Epistles of Peter. They regarded Peter as a false prophet, because he denied his master, preached Judaism rather than Christianity, was the enemy of Paul (Gal. 2:11) and the pillar of the Catholic hierarchy. . . At a later period, however, they seem to have confined themselves, like Marcion, to the writing of Paul and Luke. . . (Schaff, 577)

What Did the Paulicians Believe?

- Now here comes the real reason why Catholics and Roman Catholic sympathizing Protestants like Schaff consider the Paulicians heretics.
 - “They rejected the priesthood, the sacraments, the worship of the saints, the sign of the cross, and all externals in religion. **Baptism means only the baptism of the Spirit**; the communion with the body and blood of Jesus Christ is only a communion with the word and doctrine.” (Schaff, 577)
- In Volume III of Neander’s *Church History* we learn the following regarding the beliefs of the Paulicians.
 - “Indeed, they went so far on this side as to wholly reject the outward celebration of the sacraments. **They maintained that it was by no means Christ’s intention to institute the baptism by water as a perpetual ordinance, but by baptism he meant only the baptism of the Spirit. . .**” (Neander, 263)
 - “**As they rejected outward baptism**, so they seem also to have rejected altogether the outward celebration of the Lord’s Supper; probably understanding the Lord’s supper spiritually and symbolically of the communion with Christ, as the bread of life that came down from heaven.” (Neander, 589)

What Did the Paulicians Believe?

- Even Ruckman a committed Baptist is forced to concede the following:
 - “The real problem was that the Paulicians rejected the Catholic priesthood, the Catholic sacraments, the worship of relics and crosses, **and they thought the “one baptism” of Ephesians 4:5 was the Holy Spirit putting the believer into Christ: they were the Stamites and Bullingerites of their day.** At they worst they were at least five times as Scriptural as any bishop or archbishop in the ruling church.” (Ruckman, 304)

What Did the Paulicians Believe?

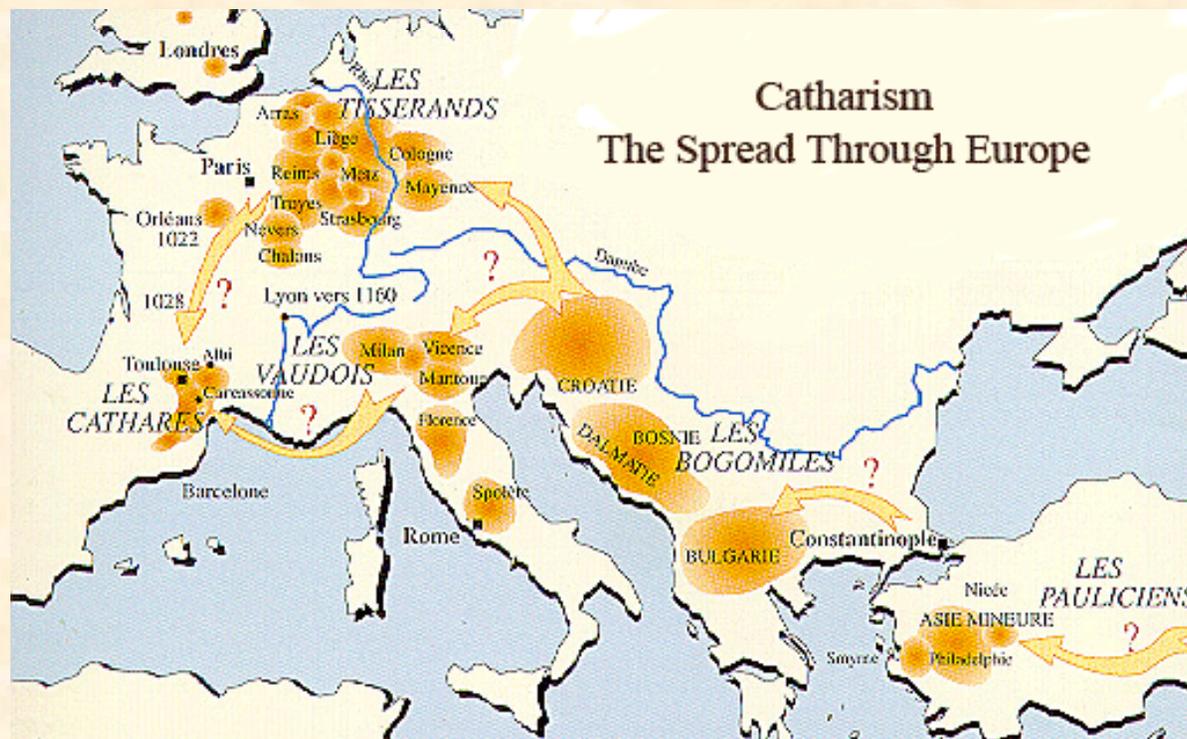
- Gibbon reports that Constantine (Silvanus) attached himself with peculiar devotion to the writings and character of St. Paul. (Gibbon, 302)
- Neander tells us that the Paulicians “gave special weight to the authority of the apostle Paul; and his epistles must have been considered by them as the main sources of the knowledge of Christian doctrines.” (Neander, 268)

Concluding Remarks

- The Paulicians represent a silver vein of truth running through church history all the way back to message, ministry, and writings of Paul. Originating in Asia Minor where Paul began his apostolic ministry. These saints were labeled Paulician because of their affinity for Pauline authority over Catholic claims to be the heirs of St. Peter.
- As with Marcion we need to consider who is calling them heretics and for what reasons. The charge that they reject the gospels and the Old Testament is one of the lies our enemies tell about us.
- Their rejection of all things Catholic, belief in justification by grace through faith, rejection of all forms of water baptism, and stance on Pauline authority lead me to conclude that these saints were our spiritual forbears.

Concluding Remarks

- It is these saints from the east (Syria, Asia Minor, Eastern Europe, and Byzantium) who believed, preached, and died for the true text of the New Testament. The sheer number of copies alone existing in this text line compared with the Western Latin text is proof of the extensive evangelistic and teaching ministry these saints conducted.



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