

The Paulicians

What Were They?

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Introduction

Church history is an intriguing and contentious subject, and has generated a great amount of debate, especially within the last two centuries or so. Most presentations on the subject follow the typical “Roman Catholic” presentation – the “Church” was built on Peter (who was the first pope), the only true Church that can claim apostolic succession is that in Rome, and any groups that existed outside and apart from Catholicism (and Eastern Orthodoxy, after the Great Schism of 1054) until the time of the Protestant Reformation (itself treated as a schismatic event) were necessarily heretical and not truly “Christian.” This is the historical approach that is uniformly taught by Roman Catholic scholars, as well as most Protestants.

On the other hand, many Baptist scholars and historians since the early 19th century have emphasized the existence of the various “out-groups” in church history, finding in them the characteristic of modern-day Baptists and pointing to them as examples of baptistic groups which, despite not bearing the specific name “Baptist,” nevertheless were part of the remnant of faith which God promised would exist throughout the Church Age.

Such is the case with the group I will be discussing in this essay – the Paulicians. The Paulicians were a group that existed in Armenia and nearby areas between the 7th and 10th centuries, when they were finally driven and/or deported out of the area by the Byzantines. The nature of this group, as with many other medieval “out-groups,” is disputed. Typically, Catholic and Protestant scholarship about them tries to cast them as a Gnostic group – dualistic, docetistic, Marcionite, or Manichaeian – holding to a multitude of strange doctrines, and rejecting the Old Testament, as well as rejecting certain New Testament books. For example, the Catholic Encyclopedia states about the Paulicians,

“A dualistic heretical sect, derived originally from Manichaeism....The cardinal point of the Paulician heresy is a distinction between the God who made and governs the material world and the God of heaven who created souls, who alone should be adored. They thought all matter bad. It seems therefore obvious to count them as one of the many neo-Manichaeian sects, in spite of their own denial and that of modern writers....But there is a strong Marcionite element too. They rejected the Old Testament; there was no Incarnation, Christ was an angel sent into the world by God, his real mother was the heavenly Jerusalem. His work consisted only in his teaching; to believe in him saves men from judgment. The true baptism and Eucharist consist in hearing his word, as in John 4:10.”¹

Likewise Philip Schaff, a Protestant, casts aspersions upon the orthodoxy of the Paulicians, declaring,

“The Paulicians are the most important sect in our period. They were confined to the territory of the Eastern church. They flourished in Armenia, where Christianity came in conflict with Parsism and was mixed with dualistic ideas. They probably inherited some traditions of the Manichaeians and Marcionites.”²

¹ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, [online article](#) about the Paulicians.

² P. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. IV, found online [here](#).

Schaff continues, expounding upon their dualism, docetism, contempt for matter, their rejection of the Old Testament and the Epistles of Peter, their rejection of Peter as a “false apostle,” and other general Gnostic tendencies.³

On the other hand, Baptist writers have rejected these attributions to the Paulicians, and have pointed to them as a prominent Eastern baptistic group, noted for such doctrines as their rejection of paedobaptism (infant baptism), their rejection of ecclesiastical hierarchy, their opposition to the worship of idols and icons, and their emphasis on salvation by faith through grace. For example, John T. Christian states,

“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.”⁴

Adeney, most likely not intending to be derogatory towards them, went so far as to say,

“Ancient Oriental Baptists, these people were in many respects Protestants before Protestantism.”⁵

So who are right about the Paulicians? Were they Gnostics, or were they a true remnant of primitive Christianity?

A Matter of Sources

Secular scholarship has found itself similarly divided on the question. This is because the evidences available to us about the Paulicians are divergent. We need to understand that the information about the Paulicians that we have comes from two general types of data sets:

1) From polemical Greek and other medieval sources. These were typically hostile, as well as being second- or third-hand in their knowledge of the Paulicians, their practice, and their

³ Ibid.

⁴ J.T. Christian, *A History of the Baptists*, Chap. IV, found online [here](#), drawing upon Allix, *The Ecclesiastical History of the Ancient Churches of Piedmont*.

⁵ W.F. Adeney, *The Greek and Eastern Churches*, p. 219.

doctrines. These include such Byzantine Greek haeresiologists as Photius, Peter of Sicily, and Gregory Magistros. These sources typically present the Paulicians in the Gnostic/dualistic light.

2) Armenian sources, which were generally much less polemical and much more near to hand. Indeed, the primary Armenian source that we have is a tractate called *The Key of Truth* (KoT), a document which purports to be a manual of faith and practice for the Paulicians – and hence would qualify as a primary document. These documents present a very different picture of the Paulicians from that given by the Greek polemicists and the scholars who rely upon them.

So, on one hand, you have scholars such as Runciman who follow the Catholic/Protestant line of thought because they are relying upon the Greek reports,

“Moreover, while it is just possible to doubt whether the Thonraki were Dualists, the Dualism of the Paulicians is unquestionable. Not only are the Greek authorities positive on the subject, but even the Arabs agreed; to Masoudi, who must have known them, the Paulicians stood half-way between the Christians and the Zoroastrians; and there are reasons for believing that Paulician Dualism was as fundamental as Marcion's and Mani's....”⁶

On the other hand, however, it has been noted by Armenianists that not only were the Greek sources wrong, but the typical reliance upon them by many scholars is, more often than not, due to the fact that the Armenian sources are much less accessible and hence are “harder” to use. Garsoian notes,

“The Armenian sources relating to the Paulician heresy consist of a sizeable body of documents covering the entire span of the medieval period. With the exception of Ter Mkrttschian, Conybeare, and contemporary Russian writers concerned with the Paulicians, scholars have given no more than perfunctory attention to these texts. Even the most recent western scholars, although they acknowledge the existence of this material, rely almost exclusively on the traditional Byzantine sources for the formulation of their theories. The discovery of the Armenian sources has created the basic problem of Paulician scholarship because the Armenian evidence has seemed to contradict the Greek sources on the fundamental points of the character of Paulician dogma as well as the origin and history of the sect. The tendency of western scholars, therefore, has been to reject or disregard the Armenian material whenever it could not be brought into agreement with the Greek authorities.”⁷

In other words, many Western scholars have used preconceived biases against the Armenian evidence to “filter” out any data that doesn’t accord with the Greek sources. This results in the fundamental discord found between the two camps.

The Armenian evidence is undeniably superior to the Greek. As Garsoian further notes, this body of evidence consists of authentic Armenian documentation, while the Greek first-hand

⁶ S. Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee: A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy*, p. 58.

⁷ N.A. Garsoian, *The Paulician Heresy: A Study of the Origin and Development of Paulicianism in Armenia and the Eastern Provinces of the Byzantine Empire*, p. 80

evidences for the Paulicians have perished, and we have to rely upon reconstruction from Greek polemical literature. Further, the Armenian documentation consists of official and authenticated first-hand statements, while the Byzantine material is based on questionable literary texts.⁸

The “crown jewel” of the evidence is undeniably the Key of Truth. In 1893, Frederick Conybeare, one of the most prominent Western scholars of Armenian history in modern times, obtained a copy of a manuscript of the Key from a repository in Edjmiatzin, in Armenia. Though this manuscript itself dated to the middle part of the 18th century, on the grounds of form and textual criticisms, Conybeare dated the origination of the text to the 8th-9th centuries. We should note that this is in general supported by the evidence from Gregory Magistros, called “the Duke of Mesopotamia” by Conybeare, who mentioned the book in the 11th century.⁹ Some scholars have tried to adduce a later date for the Key. Runciman tries to provide a later date, and states that none of the Paulician books have survived, yet strangely notes that the later Thonraki (a group in Armenia very similar to the Paulicians) used the Key of Truth, and that they got the book from the Paulicians.¹⁰ Regardless, Armenianists in the main accept Conybeare’s dating of the Key. Garsoian is again representative of this view when she states,

“In any case, there is no reason on doctrinal grounds to doubt Conybeare's identification or dating of the Key of Truth. Consequently, the information given by the Key on the dogma and ritual of the heretics must be considered as a source of major importance since it has not been distorted by the enemies of the sect, and the evidence of the Key of Truth may not be disregarded by any serious study of Paulicianism.”¹¹

So, seeing that the Key of Truth should be accepted as a genuine source document for the beliefs and practices of the Paulicians of medieval Armenia, what does this important document say about them?

Were the Paulicians Gnostics?

First of all, we need to understand that the Key is completely at odds with the inferior Greek sources that try to claim that the Paulicians were “Manicheans” and attributed a number of other errors to them. From the Key itself, the various claims of Gnostic doctrines are refuted.

Dualism – Dualism refers to the general Gnostic belief that man’s true nature is purely spiritual, and that physical matter was created by the Demiurge or some other evil being to “trap” human souls in the prison-houses of physical bodies. Many dualistic groups, especially those like the Manicheans who drew their doctrine from the Zoroastrianism of Persia, believed that the good God and the evil god were more or less on equal terms in the battle of good versus evil. While the Greek polemicists pointed to supposed Paulician dualism, and therefore applied the term “Manichean” to them, Conybeare states,

⁸ Ibid., p. 81.

⁹ See *The Key of Truth: A Manual of the Paulician Church in Armenia*, Ed. F.C. Conybeare, p. vi.

¹⁰ Runciman, op. cit., p. 46.

¹¹ Garsoian, op. cit., p.110.

“Nevertheless, there are ascribed to the Paulicians in both sets of sources opinions of which we find little or no hint in the Key. First among these is a Manichean dualism according to which the visible universe was created by the devil.

“Now firstly the Key, p. 48, asserts just the contrary. In it Satan is indeed frequently alluded to as the adversary of God himself, and the latter is usually characterized as the heavenly God or God in heaven. But there is no indication that the Paulicians went beyond the well-marked dualism of the New Testament itself, according to which (John xii. 31 and xiv. 30) Satan is the ruler of this world, or even as Paul expressed it (2 Cor. iv. 4), ‘the god of this world.’”¹²

Hence, while the Paulicians certainly accepted the Biblical truth of Satan’s adversarial stance towards God (which, as stated, the New Testament clearly teaches), there is nothing to suggest that he was viewed as the *equal* of God. Likewise, there is no trace of the dualism which posits that the God of the Old Testament is evil for creating the physical universe – indeed, the God whom the Paulicians served (and therefore believed to be good) is clearly said¹³ to have been responsible for the physical world around us – a physical world which is nowhere condemned as evil, in and of itself.

Docetism - This is an ancient error that denied the true corporality of Jesus Christ. Instead, to docetists, Jesus was a spirit-being only who just took on the “illusion” of having a physical body, and consequently, who only “appeared” to die on the cross. This heresy was connected somewhat with dualism through the idea that matter is evil and spirit is good – hence, Jesus (who was good) existed only as a spirit being. Conybeare notes about this,

“There is no trace of Docetism in the Key, nor any denial of the real character of the Passion. Christ’s sufferings indeed are declared to have been insupportable [ed. note: i.e. real and unbearable].”¹⁴

Indeed, as Conybeare states (though he admitted this to be inferential, and said the idea comes from the emphasis on adult baptism among this group), if there is any heresy to which the Paulicians might have been guilty, it was dynamic *adoptionism*. This adoptionism was a heresy that stated that Jesus was born a man like any other, though perhaps sinless, and was “adopted” by God to be the Messiah at Jesus’ baptism. This would be completely the opposite of the docetism ascribed to the Paulicians in that it would **demand** that Christ have had a literal, corporeal body. More will be said later to deal with the supposed “adoptionism” of the Paulicians, but suffice it to say for now that if the beliefs of the Paulicians are being confused by some with adoptionism, then there can be no credible case made for the Paulicians being docetists. Indeed, the great lengths to which the Key of Truth goes to establish Christ as the New Adam and to which it speaks of His body would seem to positively rule out any idea that they were docetists on the part of anyone who’d actually read the Key.

¹² Conybeare, op. cit., p. xlv.

¹³ Ibid., p. 114.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. xxxix.

Marcionism / Rejection of the Old Testament - Marcionism was an early and pervasive heresy which, in addition to dualism and other heresies, was distinctive for its complete rejection of the Old Testament as being the work of the “evil demiurgical god of the Jews”. Likewise, they viewed the creation of the physical world as an evil act by the Demiurge (following the logic of the dualistic “spirit = good, physical = bad” dichotomy common to many Gnostic groups). Marcion and his followers rejected the Jews and the revelation given to them in the Hebrew scriptures, and also rejected several New Testament books (Matthew, Mark, John’s books, etc.) which they felt were “too Jewish.” They accepted only Luke’s Gospel, the book of Acts, and the corpus of Paul’s writings.

Far from rejecting the Old Testament, we see that the Key of Truth actually refers to Moses as “the great prophet.”¹⁵ This is something which a Marcionite or someone holding to a similar heresy would definitely **not** say. Indeed, the Old Testament is cited on a few occasions throughout the text of the Key. At one point, the Key even refers to the creation account (specifically found in the Jewish Torah) in a positive light, which would also be antithetical to any Marcionite. Further, this creation account is referred to as being a part of “the inspiration of God” (i.e. scripture),¹⁶ which suggests a reverence for the Old Testament on par with the New.

Conybeare states,

“The Old Testament is not rejected; and although rarely cited, is nevertheless, when it is, called the God-inspired book, Astoudsashountch, which in Armenian answers to our phrase ‘Holy Scripture’ or ‘Bible.’”¹⁷

While perhaps little used, the evidence from the Key itself indicates that the Old Testament was viewed as scripture no less than the New. So why does the Old Testament receive relatively little citation in the Key compared to the New? Probably because the Key is largely a manual of order and ritual for New Testament churches – and the primary places you’ll find material pertaining to that subject are the Pauline epistles and the Book of Acts (which are the most prominent books cited in the Key). You simply don’t find baptism, church organization, etc. in the Old Testament, so why cite it extensively in a book about those topics?

Rejection of the Epistles of Peter/ Peter as a “False Apostle” - In the same vein as above, some Gnostic groups rejected Peter and his epistles on the grounds that they were “too Jewish.”

However, such was not the case with the Paulicians. On at least two occasions, the Key calls Peter a “member of the holy universal and apostolic church” as it cites his epistles¹⁸ – the exact same formula, incidentally, which it uses in referring to John and Paul.

“Their canon included the whole of the New Testament except perhaps the Apocalypse, which is not mentioned or cited...There is no rejection of the Epistles of Peter, nor is any

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 121.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 114.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. xxxvii.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 83, etc.

disrespect shown to that apostle. It is merely affirmed, p. 93, that the Church does not rest on him alone, but on all the apostles, including Paul. In the Election Service, p. 107, the bishop formally confers upon the candidate the ritual name of Peter, in token of the authority to loose and bind now bestowed on him.”¹⁹

So, contrary to the claims of many, we see that the Paulicians held to the entirety of the New Testament, with the possible exception of Revelation. However, two things should be considered which mitigate even this possibility. One, Revelation was not generally accepted into the Armenian canon until around the beginning of the 13th century, nearly four centuries after Conybeare dates the origin of the Key. It is quite possible that the Paulicians simply didn't have access to Bibles and manuscripts that had the book in it, quite regardless of what they would have thought about its canonicity. Two, they accepted other of John's writings, so if they'd had access, they likely would have accepted Revelation as well. Probably, the reason why they didn't cite this book is merely because the actual subjects addressed in the Key don't really need to draw upon Revelation as a source.

Whatever else the Paulicians might have been, they most definitely were not Gnostics. These should suffice to demonstrate the falsehood of the various “Gnostic” claims made about the Paulicians. They were not Marcionites. They were not dualistic Manicheans. They were not docetists, nor did they reject Peter, his epistles, or the Old Testament.

Were the Paulicians Adoptionists?

But what of the arguments that Conybeare advanced in his commentary on the Key of Truth, that they were adoptionists? If indeed this were true, then whatever else the Paulicians were, they would not be Christians, for the heresy of adoptionism necessarily denies His pre-existent Deity and His place as the Second Person of the Trinity. Both of these are denials of integral doctrines about the Person of Christ, and hence are what the Bible terms “damnable” heresies – those that indicate the lack of true saving faith on the part of the one holding them.

Nevertheless, I am quite unconvinced of his thesis that the Paulicians were adoptionists, for reasons I will elucidate below. One thing I will note is that Conybeare appears to be under the impression that there was an adoptionist under every rock in the early churches - he even seems to suggest at one point that Patrick of Ireland might have been such. He also seemed to believe that the celebration of Christmas on Jan. 6 (still common in Eastern Orthodox countries like Russia) is evidence of the original adoptionism of the Eastern churches, since that is said to be the traditional date of Christ's baptism by John. Only later, Conybeare seems to believe, did Eastern Christendom become Trinitarian, but without, apparently, switching to Dec. 25. Needless to say, I think a lot of his suppositions are greatly overstated. Conybeare does, however, qualify much of his speculation along these lines as inferential.

In reading the Key of Truth, it is not adoptionist in its tenor, despite Conybeare's claims. My reasons for disagreeing with his view that they were adoptionists revolve around the following five reasons:

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. xxxvii, xxxix.

1) In their catechism,²⁰ the Key states that in response to the question “What is Christ,” they cite the apostolic statement “We have believed and know that thou art Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”

It is mighty odd of them to use this particular statement from John's Gospel if they were adoptionists. If Christ were merely a man who was adopted as God's Son at His baptism, then why state that Christ, the Son of God, was "to come into the world"? Christ would have already BEEN in the world, He just wouldn't have been "the Son of God" yet.

Some might argue from this that the Paulicians were still adoptionist on the grounds that while Jesus was in the world, Christ came upon Him at His baptism. Yet, this stands in opposition to the other arguments used to substantiate the adoptionist hypothesis for the Paulicians. The typical argument forwarded for Paulician adoptionism posits that they received their doctrine originally from Paul of Samosata, a 3rd-century bishop of Antioch who was deposed for teaching adoptionism, and from whom the Paulicians are said to have received their name. However, the doctrinal distinctives of Paul of Samosata that are listed by McGiffert in his comment about him²¹ differ from what the Key of Truth says of Paulician doctrine. Paul of Samosata taught that Christ, though a mere man, was filled with divine power from His birth. He also denied the personality of the Holy Spirit, attributing Him instead to be a power of God, akin to reasoning and mind in man. Neither of these doctrines appear in the Key. Indeed, the Key barely mentions the birth of Christ at all, and the Holy Spirit is indicated as having personality.

In the absence of any actual statements in the Key of Truth to the effect that a separate entity – Christ – came upon the mere man – Jesus – it is certainly a stretch to try to “read in” this sort of doctrine. Especially when that doctrine would conflict with the other supposed “adoptionist influence” – Paul of Samosata – from whom the Paulicians supposedly got their doctrine in the first place. No, sorry. Occam’s razor suggests that it is much simpler and more likely that when the Paulicians stated that “Christ the Son of God....came into the world,” that they meant the same thing that other orthodox Christians mean when they cite that verse.

2) On numerous occasions, the KoT describes Christ as "the only-born Son." If this is a reasonable translation of the Armenian on the part of Conybeare, then this term would seem to answer to the Greek term *monogenes* - which our English Bibles translate as "only-begotten", etc. *Monogenes* is a term that is intimately tied in with Trinitarian theology and the pre-existence of Jesus Christ as God, and I doubt that it was any less so in the 8th century than it is now.

3) The Paulician methodology of baptism strikes me as quite Trinitarian. For some reason, Conybeare seems to believe that the triple pouring of water over the head of the one being baptized as they kneel in the font indicates the belief that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were completely different beings. Yet, the Key itself indicates that the Elect (analogous to the pastor/bishop) initially pours water over the head of the novice and proclaims his/her baptism "in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit" - singular name there (per Matthew 28:19), which is a widely-understood Trinitarian formula. Immediately before this, the novice is to

²⁰ Ibid., p. 118.

²¹ A.C. McGiffert, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Volume I, The Church History of Eusebius*, Bk. VII, Ch. XXVII, note #2378, found online [here](#).

declare that he or she does "believe, serve, and worship God the Father, and the Son, mediator and intercessor, and the Holy Spirit, the dispenser of grace to us who believe."²² If they "worship" all three in the same contextual circumstances, it stands to reason that all three Persons were felt to be divine, and also equally worthy of contemporaneous worship.

Further, the triple baptism was a hallmark of orthodox, Trinitarian baptism in the early churches. Triple immersive baptism is said to be the standard mode by no less Trinitarian lights than Tertullian,²³ Jerome,²⁴ Basil of Caesaria,²⁵ and Cyril of Jerusalem.²⁶ Even Catholicism (to pick a group which has a vested interest in "proving" that the Paulicians were heretics) practices triple immersion and/or triple pouring for adult converts,²⁷ and the practice is also reportedly common among the Eastern Orthodox groups.

Seeing all this, I question why immersion with triple pouring of water over the head, when done by the Paulicians, suddenly constitutes evidence of their unitarianness and adoptionism.

4) To substantiate his thesis that the Paulicians were adoptionists, Conybeare relies upon his own reconstruction of words at certain key points where they have been effaced from the MS. He reconstructs these words almost always along an adoptionist line, whether or not this necessarily seems to fit the surrounding context. In other words, the primary means of support that he uses for his arguments are actually produced by himself, making his arguments somewhat circular. Likewise, Conybeare seems to operate under a false doctrinal dichotomy whereby infant baptism is associated with "orthodoxy" while adult baptism is associated with "adoptionism." Such, of course, is almost always not the case.

5) Much of the theological argumentation for adoptionist Paulicians rests on their admitted emphasis on the humanity of Jesus and their insistence that it was at His baptism that His authority, high-priesthood, kingship, Lordship over things in heaven and earth, etc. Personally, I think they're misinterpreting Phil. 2:5-11, especially because they seem to have misunderstood the notion of Christ's voluntarily humility (i.e. He didn't resume these things until after His ascension, not His baptism).

Nevertheless, recognizing that Christ's earthly body was a created object isn't necessarily a heretical thing. After all, it's what Scripture teaches (Hebrews 10:5), and the sense of the Greek *katartizo* (prepared) suggests it. Again, the Catholic Catechism itself²⁸ recognizes the finiteness, and therefore createdness, of Christ's earthly body. Much of the Paulician doctrine about Christ's humanity rested on the idea of His being the "Second Adam," a scriptural idea that they may or may not have understood rightly. But it is just their exposition of this doctrine that helps to save them from the charge of adoptionism.

²² Conybeare, op. cit., p. 97.

²³ Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 26.

²⁴ Jerome, *Dialogue Against the Luciferians*, 8.

²⁵ Basil of Caesaria, *Letters* #236, to Amphilocius, 5; *On the Holy Spirit*, 15 and 35.

²⁶ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 20.5.

²⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ppg. 1239.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, ppg. 476.

Their doctrine on this regard was pretty simple - the man Christ regained for mankind (as our mediator and intercessor) what the First Adam lost in the garden. Much confusion has been had because some of the things that they said Christ gained at His baptism include that "he was filled with the Godhead," that He entered into fellowship with God the Father, and that He was given kingship over all things in creation.²⁹ Seems pretty adoptionist, right?

Well, the Key elsewhere says that when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, these were just the things that they lost - "the color of light of the Godhead faded from their faces," they lost their kingship over creation, etc.³⁰

Now, I do not think that the Paulicians were teaching that Adam and Eve were originally Deity but lost it when they sinned. Likewise, though the Catholic Catechism definitely *sounds*³¹ like it is saying that Christ came so that we might become divinity, and even gods, I doubt it means this *literally*. In the same sense, I do not think the Key of Truth is saying that Christ the Second Adam "became" God when He received back what Adam the First Adam lost. It is merely explicating the Paulicians' view of the Second Adam restoring what the First Adam lost. Probably not theology we're necessarily used to hearing (though Paul does go into it at some length in various of his epistles), but I don't think it "proves" that they were adoptionists.

Were the Paulicians Baptists?

So, what were the Paulicians then? Were they, as Baptist historians say, a part of the baptistic remnant that remained faithful to the truths of the Word of God? I would certainly say that this is much more true than the Catholic claims about their Gnosticism, and even than Conybeare's circular arguments for their Adoptionism. Many of the things about them that the Greek and Armenian sources *do* agree on suggest that they held to baptistic views about many things. They were iconoclastic – they opposed the use of icons, idols, relics, etc. They were also opposed to the priesthood, to the worship of saints, to the making of the sign of the cross, and the sacraments of Catholicism. They also met in small meeting houses and eschewed large church buildings – though this may have come about because of the constant persecution that they were under.

Also, they practiced full, immersive baptism of adult converts who, at the age of thirty, were considered mature and able to receive it.³² Likewise, they rejected infant baptism, referring to it as "baptizing those who are irrational (or without the word) and communicating the unbelieving."³³ In other words, the Paulicians were firm credobaptists, who only baptized a person who was both capable of understanding saving grace, and professed to be the recipient of such, and showed evidences of it in their life. This, rather than paedobaptism, was the common

²⁹ Conybeare, op. cit., p. 75.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ppg. 460.

³² Conybeare, op. cit., p. 90.

³³ Ibid., p. 76.

practice in the early churches.³⁴ All in all, they appear to have held to a simple, biblical foundation for their faith.

The Paulicians were not completely orthodox in every respect, however. For instance they believed in the doctrine of the universal church, though their practice was of course local. In this respect, they may be analogous to modern fundamental Baptists who believe in a universal church in theory, but conduct themselves in every way as if they were local-church only. Relatedly, they also believed in the principle of apostolic succession, the belief that churches need to be able to trace their “lineage” back to the Apostles in an unbroken line of succession of bishops – an Irenaean error originating in the 2nd century AD. They merely thought that they, rather than the Catholics or the Greeks, had this succession. Depending on how you interpret the phraseology of the Key, they *may* have believed in the perfectability of their pastors/teachers – sort of an early form of the doctrine of entire sanctification. The Paulicians also seem to have believed in transubstantiation in the Lord’s Supper – though they do not appear to have attached to it the sense of “meritorious efficacy” that Catholicism does. Also, as alluded to above, they did have an odd interpretation of the events occurring at Jesus’ baptism, and appear to conflate it with the resumption of glory that Jesus attained in Philippians 2:9-11. Despite all these, they do not appear, by all reasonable accounts from trustworthy sources, to have been damnable heretics, but rather were biblically orthodox and baptistic in the main, with a few exceptions that don’t deal with soteriological or Christological issues.

A couple of other interesting things we should note about the Paulicians. As a body of churches, they appear to have held to the Received Text or something close to it. In the Key, both Mark 16:9-20 and Acts 8:37 are cited several times.³⁵ Having been originally translated by Mesrob Mashtots in the 5th century, the Armenian Bible was revised in the 6th to bring it more into conformity with the Peshitta. This text-type is similarly seen in a contemporaneous Armenian manuscript, the Etschmiadzin ms. dating to 989 AD, which also has Mark 16:9-20.³⁶ The attests to the antiquity of this Armenian version of the Received Text.

The Key of Truth attributes the book of Hebrews to Paul,³⁷ showing, at least, where they stood on that particular question.

The Paulicians as Part of the Baptist Folkway

So, were the Paulicians part of a remnant of grace existing outside the Catholic/Eastern Orthodox religion during the dark millennium? Yes, they seem to have been. We should understand that God’s Word teaches that Christians will be a remnant in the world. Just as God reserved for Himself a remnant in Old Testament Israel during a time of even the deepest

³⁴ As witnessed to even by such “Catholic-friendly” patristic writers as Tertullian, who stated that baptism should be delayed, and that principally in the case of little children, until they reach a point where they are capable of understanding how to “ask for salvation,” *On Baptism*, 18.4.

³⁵ Conybeare, op. cit., pp. 77,101, 102, 105, etc.

³⁶ As well as a spurious insertion of the words “of Ariston the presbyter” over the verses in a later hand, though this later fact is conveniently omitted by modernistic textual critics.

³⁷ Conybeare, op. cit., p. 80, etc.

apostasy, so also does God call out people unto Himself who serve as His witnesses in this present age. Paul wrote under inspiration,

”Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.” (Romans 11:5)

Jesus Himself told us that those in the world who truly would follow the way of grace, trusting on Him and being born again, would actually be a minority.

”Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide [is] the gate, and broad [is] the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait [is] the gate, and narrow [is] the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matthew 7:13-14)

“Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” (Matthew 7:22-23)

Hence, while “religion” may predominate in, or even control, an area, this does not mean that true Bible Christianity will be the norm. Indeed, based on these, it seems reasonable to conclude that, especially in times such as the Middle Ages when the socio-political system was so thoroughly dominated by apostate religion, the appearance of biblical Christianity would take on the form of these various “out-groups” that cropped up here and there at times throughout this period. The Paulicians do seem to have been one of these groups, and therefore would legitimately form a part of the Baptist folkways that wind their way back to the original churches of the 1st century.

Again, I wish to reiterate that I reject the principle of “apostolic succession,” whether in its Catholic form, or in the form adopted by some Baptists who believe in strict, bishop-to-bishop, church-to-church successionism (i.e. Landmarkism). I believe that what gives a church body “credibility” as a true church is where it stands on the doctrines of the Word of God.

Let me draw a hypothetical situation to illustrate what I mean. Let us say that you had a certain tribal village that had never heard of the name of Christ, and a Bible in their language fell from an airplane and landed in their village. I believe that if they read it and believed on Christ, held to authentic Scriptural doctrine, organized themselves into a local church, and called a pastor, that this local church would be just as legitimate as was the very first one in Jerusalem. The pastor would have just as much scriptural and spiritual authority as Peter himself had when Christ established him as the head of the church in Jerusalem. Any church organized along scriptural New Testament lines, having scriptural New Testament faith, is a true church, regardless of whether it can “trace itself back to the apostles.” Simply by believing the Bible, it has rested itself on the foundation of the apostles, inasmuch as they were the vessels used under inspiration to reveal Christ's words to us.

So, when I point to the Paulicians as part of the “Baptist folkways that wind their way back to the original churches of the 1st century,” I do not mean this successionaly. Rather, I

mean it holistically – God has been at work, throughout this age, working in men’s hearts using His Spirit and His Word. At certain times and in certain areas, salvation and revival have broken out, and these peoples have organized themselves into the polity and followed the doctrines that they found through a plain, literal, and contextual reading of the Bible. The Paulicians were one of these groups, being witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ in Armenia and the surrounding areas during a time of near-universal apostasy.