

Albigenses

by William Cathcart

William Cathcart's sermon on the Albigenses explores their origins, beliefs, and historical significance within Christianity.

Scripture: Matthew 28:19, Acts 17:11, Ephesians 6:17, Colossians 3:16, 2 Timothy 3:16

Topics: "Church History", "Biblical Living"

Description

William Cathcart delves into the history of the Albigenses, also known as Cathari, Paulicians, and other names, tracing their origins back to Armenia and their spread across Europe, facing persecution and maintaining a strong adherence to the New Testament. The Albigenses were known for their modest and blameless lifestyles, rejecting wealth and living by labor, as well as their emphasis on teaching and circulating the Scriptures in the common language. Despite being labeled as heretics by the Church of Rome, they held firm to their beliefs, including their rejection of infant baptism and their unwavering commitment to the Word of God.

Transcript

Cathcart wrote: The Albigenses received this name from the town of Albi, in France. in and around which many of them lived. The Albigenses were called Cathari, Paterines, Publicans, Paulicians, Good Men, Bogomiles, and they were known by other names. They were not Waldenses. They were Paulicians, either directly from the East, or converted through the instrumentality of those who came from the earlier homes of that people.

The Paulicians were summoned into existence by the Spirit of God about A.D. 660 Their founder was named Constantine. The reading of a New Testament, left him by a stranger, brought him to the Saviour. lie soon gathered a church, and hiis converts speedily collected othor8. Armenia was the scene of his labors. They were denounced as Manicheans, thoughthey justly denied the charge. They increased rapidly, and in process of time persecution scattered them. In the ninth century many of them were in Thrace, Bulgaria and Bosnia; and, later still, they became very numerous in these new fields, especially in Bosnia.* Indeed, such a host had they become that in 1238 Coloman, the brother of the king of Hungary entered Bosnia to destroy the heretics. Gregory IX. congratulated him upon his success, but lived to learn that the Bogomiles were still a multitude. A second crusade led to further butchery, but the blood of martyrs was still the seed of the church, and they continued a powerful body until the conquest of their country by the Turks, in 1463. There was direct communication between these Bogomiles and the

Albigenses in France. Matthew Paris++ tells us that the heretic Albigenses in the provinces of Bulgaria, Croatia, and Dalmatia elected Bartholomew as their pope, that Albigenses came to him from all quarters for information on doubtful matters, and that he had a vicar who was born in Carcassone, and who lived near Thoulouse.

At an early period the Paulicians entered Italy and established powerful communities, especially in Milan. They spread over France, Germany, and other countries. In the eleventh century they were to be found in almost every quarter of Europe. St. Bernard, in the twelfth century, says of them, "If you interrogate them about their faith nothing can be more Christian. If you examine into their conversation nothing can be more blameless, and what they say they confirm by their deeds. As for what regards life and manners, they attack no one, they circumvent no one, they defraud no one."

Reinerius Saceho belonged to the Cathari (not the Waldenses, he was never a member of that community) for seventeen years. He was afterwards a Romish inquisitor, and he describes his old friends and the Waldenses, in 1254, in these words:

"Heretics are distinguished by their manners and their words, for they are sedate and modest in their manners. They have no pride in clothes, for they wear such as are neither costly nor mean. They do not carry on business in order to avoid falsehoods, oaths, and frauds, but only live by labor as workmen. Their teachers also are shoemakers and weavers. They do not multiply riches, but are content with what is necessary, and they are chaste, especially the Leonists. They are also temperate in meat and drink. They do not go to taverns, dances, or other vanities."

The Leonists were the followers of Peter Waldo, of Lyons, the Waldenses, as distinguished from his own old sect, the Albigenses. Reinerius then proceeds to charge these men who shun business to avoid falsehoods with hypocrisy. No body of men could receive a better character than St. Bernard and the inquisitor give these enemies of the Church of Rome, and no community could be more wickedly abused by the same men than these identical heretics. For some centuries the Albigenses figured universally in history as externally the purest and best of men, and secretly as guilty of horrible crimes, such as the pagans charged upon the early Christians.

Reinerius mentions several causes for the spread of heresy. His second is that all the men and women, small and great, day and night, do not cease to learn, and they are continually engaged in teaching what they have acquired themselves. His third cause for the existence and spread of heresy is the translation and circulation of the Old and New Testaments into the vulgar tongue. These they learned themselves and taught to others. Reinerius** was acquainted with a rustic layman who repeated the whole book of Job, and with many who knew perfectly the entire New Testament. He gives an account of many schools of the heretics, the existence of which he learned in the trials of the Inquisition. Assuredly these friends of light and of a Bible circulated everywhere were worthy of the curses and tortures of men like Reinerius and lordly bigots like St. Bernard. In a council held at Thoulouse in 1229 the Scriptures in the language of the people were first prohibited. The Albigenses surviving the horrid massacre of the Pope's murderous crusaders were forbidden to have the "books of the Old or New Testament, unless a Psalter, a Breviary, and a Rosary, and they forbade the translation in the vulgar tongue." No doubt many of the members of the council supposed that the Breviary and Rosary were inspired as well as the Psalter.

Reinerius gives a catalogue of the doctrines of the Cathari, which corresponds with the list of heresies charged against them for two hundred years before he wrote by popes, bishops, and ecclesiastical

gatherings, the substance of which has no claim upon our credulity, though some of the forms of expression may have been used by certain of these venerable worthies.

Reinerius+++ says that the Cathari had 16 churches, the church of the Albanenses, or of Sansano, of Contorezo, of Bagnolenses, or of Bagnolo, of Vincenza, or of the Marquisate, of Florence, of the Valley of Spoleto, of France, of Thoulouse, of Cahors, of Albi, of Sclavonia, of the Latins at Constantinople, of the Greeks in the same city, of Philadelphia, of Bulgaria, and of Dugranicia. He says, "They all derive their origin from the two last." That is, they are all Paulicians, originally from Armenia. He says that "the churches number 4000 Cathari, of both sexes, in all the world, but believers innumerable." By churches we are to understand communities of the Perfect devoted to ministerial and missionary labor. The Believers in the time of Reinerius were counted by millions.

Upon infant baptism the Albigenses had very decided opinions. A council*** held in Thoulouse in 1119, undoubtedly referring to them, condemns and expels from the church of God those who put on the appearance of religion and condemned the sacrament of the body and the blood of the Lord and the baptism of children.

At a meeting of "archbishops, bishops, and other pious men" at Thoulouse, in 1176, the Albigenses were condemned on various pretexts. Roger De Hoveden, a learned Englishman, who commenced to write his "Annals" in 1189++++, gives a lengthy account of this meeting. He says that Gilbert, bishop of Lyons, by command of the bishop of Albi and his assessors, condemned these persons as heretics; and the third reason, according to Hoveden, given by Gilbert for his sentence was that they would not save children by baptism. He also preserves a Letter of Peter, titular of St. Chrysogonus, Cardinal, Priest, and Legate of the Apostolic See, written in 1178, in which, speaking of the Albigenses, he says. "Others stoutly maintained to their faces that they had heard from them that baptism was of no use to infants."

Collier**** gives the meaning of Hoveden correctly when he represents him as stating, in reference to the Albigenses, "These heretics refused to own infant baptism." Evervinus, in a letter to St. Bernard, speaking evidently of Albigenses, in Cologne, in 1147, and consequently before the conversion of Peter Waldo, says, "They do not believe infant baptism, alleging that place of the gospel, 'Whosoever shall believe and be baptized shall be saved.'" Eckbert, in 1160, in his work against the Cathari, written in thirteen discourses, says in the first, "They say that baptism profits nothing to children who are baptized, for they cannot seek baptism by themselves, because they can make no profession of faith."

The Paulicians received their name because they were specially the disciples of the Apostle Paul. They were established as a denomination by a gift of the Scriptures to their founder, through which he received Christ, became a mighty teacher, and gathered not converts simply, but churches.

At the great trial in Thoulouse in 1176 they (the Albigenses) would not accept anything as an authority but the New Testament. Throughout their wide-spread fields of toil from Armenia to Britain, and from one end of Europe to the other, and throughout the nine hundred years of their heroic sufferings and astonishing successes, they have always shown supreme regard for the Word of God. If these men, coming from the original cradle of our race, journeying through Thrace, Bulgaria, Bosnia, Italy, France, and Germany; and visiting even Britain, were not Baptists, they were very like them.

If all the wicked slanders about them were discarded it would most probably be found that some of them had little in common with us, but that the majority, while redundant and deficient in some things as measured by Baptist doctrines, were substantially on our platform.

This position about the Paulicians of the East is ably defended by Dr. L.P. Brockett in "the Bogomils."

*Evan's Bosnia, pp 36. 37, 42

++Matthew Paris, at A.D. 1223

**Bibliotheca Patrum, tom 4 p. ii, Coll. 746

+++Du Pin's Eccles. Hist., ii. 456. Dublin.

***Du Pin, ii. 392.

++++Annals of Roger De Hoveden, i. 427, 480. London, 1853.

****Collier's Eccles. list., II. 358. London, 1840.

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