

Revelation 11:3-6. Retrospective View Of The Two Witnesses – Part II



This is the continuation of [The Last Prophecy: An Abridgment of Elliott's Horae Apocalypticae.](#)

Middle Age History Of The Joint Lines, A.D. 1000-1200.

[3] ¶ And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.

[4] These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.

[5] And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed.

[6] These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will. (Rev 11:3-6)

THERE WERE NOT WANTING during the eleventh and twelfth centuries eminent Christian teachers to bear witness to the truth, some of whom appeared publicly as professed confessors for Christ before the several Councils of Orleans, Arles, Toulouse, Oxford and London. With respect to some of these, their Paulikian origin is undoubted, being decisively marked; in regard of all it is very possible. Most probably the Paulikians, migrating from the East, intermingled with similar reputed heretics of native Western growth, the descendants of those who had adopted the views of Claude and others already mentioned. Some distinct notices of them will be interesting, it being remembered that they are wholly derived from the reports of their enemies.

Of those who witnessed before the Council of Orleans in A.D. 1022, the heresy, it is said, originated from a woman of Italy, who exerted such singular influence as to seduce not only simple persons, but even the more learned of the clergy to her opinions. During a temporary sojourn at Orleans she corrupted two canons of high repute, who, in their turn, endeavored with zeal to propagate the new creed. The report of these things having reached the ears of a certain knight of Rouen named Arefaste, he, with the sanction of the king and clergy, went to Orleans, feigned himself a disciple, and was admitted among the community, the better to betray it. The instructions he

received from them were based upon the words of God's own book, the Bible. They taught him, amongst other novelties, that baptism had no sacramental efficacy to wash away sin, – that the word of the priests could not convert the elements into Christ's body and blood, – that prayers to saints and martyrs were vain, and all attempts to purchase heaven by merit were superfluous. "How then," asked Arefaste, "can I be saved?" They told him that it was in their power to point him to a way whereby he would be cleansed from every spot of sin, revealed by the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures; whereby also he would be spiritually enlightened, have fellowship with God, and never know want again.

Information of these things being given by the false knight, a Council was convened, and the two canons summoned before it. Confronted with Arefaste, they confessed their faith; while ten or twelve other clergy eagerly pressed forward to declare their accordance with them. Neither arguments nor threats of a torturing death could induce recantation. They asserted their confident belief that sooner or later all the world would acknowledge the truth of their doctrine. Their final answer to the Council is full of life and character: – "Ye may say these things to those whose taste is earthly, and who believe the figments of men. But to us, who savor nothing but what we have learned from God, ye speak in vain. Put therefore an end to your words. Do with us even as you wish. Even now we see our King reigning in the heavenly places, who with his right hand is conducting us to immortal triumphs and heavenly joy." On this, after insults and violence from the people, – and specially from the Queen herself, who was present, and with a stick struck out the eye of one of these martyrs, formerly her own confessor, – they were stripped of their clerical vestments and burnt at the stake. From twelve to fourteen suffered; two only recanted. At the same time the corpse of another canon, who had died three years before in the same heresy, was by the bishop's order exhumed, and, in token of indignity, cast in the highway.

Before the Council of Arras in A.D. 1025 certain illiterate persons were brought and examined. They stated themselves to be the followers of one Gundulph from Italy, who had instructed them in the precepts of the Gospels and Apostles. When questioned respecting the established religion, they declared themselves opposed to the efficacy of sacraments and penances to atone for sin, to the doctrine of purgatory, and the use of masses for the dead; that they disapproved of the adoration of images, relics, saint-worship, altars, incense, bell-tinkling, and chanting – in short, of the priesthood, doctrine, and discipline of the Romish Church. "Our rule of life," they said, "is to renounce the world, to restrain the lusts of the flesh, to injure none, to show love to all." Whatever were their sentiments, these simple people failed of being witnesses for Christ, as, either from ignorance or fear, they signed, it is said, a confession of faith drawn up by the Bishop of Arras, and were dismissed in peace. Others holding similar doctrines were condemned at the Council of Charroux in A.D. 1028, and that of Rheims, A.D. 1049.

It was in A.D. 1045 that the celebrated BERENGER first excited attention by opposing the Romish doctrine of transubstantiation. He was a man of brilliant talent, learned, pious, and eloquent, esteemed by the clergy and venerated by

the people. His opinions were condemned by different Councils, and he was deprived of his benefice. Still, however, professing and promulgating his doctrine, he was summoned in A.D. 1055 to another Council at Tours, where the famous Hildebrand attended as Papal Legate, at which he seems to have retracted. The retraction, in terms more or less dubious, was repeated a second and third time in the course of the thirty years following – not from conviction, but under the influence of fear. In every case he reasserted the same doctrine after quitting the Council, employed poor scholars to disseminate it through France, and died in 1088, a penitent and in sorrow – not, as it has been said, on account of his heresy, but on account of his retractions.

From notices in the history of Aquitaine, and in that of Treves, we hear of like doctrines prevalent in A.D. 1101.

In A.D. 1126 PETER DE BRUIS was burnt to death near Toulouse, and “so passed,” says his charitable historian, “from temporal to eternal fire.” The account is given by the Abbot of Clugny. The charges brought against him are much the same as those previously laid against others, viz., the inutility of sacraments without personal faith, and the unscriptural nature of most of the prevailing and established practices of the Church of Rome. After his death his opinions were propagated by one named HENRY, an Italian by birth. With flowing eloquence, and admitted sanctity and benevolence, this man went through Provence and Languedoc preaching everywhere – the WHITFIELD of his age and country. So great was his success, that when the noted Bernard was called in to stem it, he found, to adopt his own words, “the churches without people, the people without priests, the priests without reverence; churches reckoned but as synagogues; the sacraments not held sacred; pilgrimages, invocation of the saints, oblations for the dead, and festival days neglected; infants being unbaptized precluded from salvation, and men unshrived dying in their sins.” Bernard was successful in restoring the Romish faith. Henry was seized and convicted, and soon after died; whether by a natural death or by the flames, is a point disputed.

The year of his death, A.D. 1147, was signalized by the burning of other heretics also at Cologne. The inferior members of the sect had declared that, if their teachers failed to make good their cause, they would return to the Catholic Church. Accordingly two of these teachers maintained their heresy before the assembly from the words of Scripture so successfully, that the greater part continued steadfast. Three days afterwards these faithful confessors were brought to the stake. “And what is most wonderful,” writes Evervinus to St. Bernard, “they entered to the stake and bare the torment of the fire, not only with patience but with joy and gladness. Holy Father, I wish your explanation how these members of the devil could with such courage and constancy persist in their heresy, as is scarcely to be found in the most religious of the faith of Christ.” These witnesses, it is clear, were all a part of the same great family of Paulikian origin, afterwards known as the Cathari. Continuing to abound in the neighborhood of Cologne up to the year 1160, they were persecuted without mercy by those who were unable to reply to their Scriptural arguments, and endured death with a martyr’s constancy.

The account given by William of Newbury of the Publikani condemned by the

Council of Oxford, A.D. 1160, is to this effect: "About the same time certain vagrants came into England of the class called Publikani, in number about thirty. They entered the country peaceably; their object however being the propagation of their pestilent heresy. One Gem-rd was looked up to as leader: the others, both men and women, were illiterate rustics, of Teutonic origin. They could not long be hidden. Being foreigners, they were seized and kept in custody. The king, unwilling to punish them without trial, ordered a Council to assemble at Oxford. Being brought before it, they answered rightly indeed concerning the substance of the Heavenly Physician, but perversely concerning the remedies whereby he deigns to heal man's moral infirmity, i.e., the divine sacraments; expressing detestation of holy baptism, the eucharist, marriage; and wickedly derogating from the Catholic unity to which these divine assistances attach... When urged to retract, do penance, etc., and be united to the Mother Church, they rejected the advice, applying to themselves our Lord's words, 'Blessed are they who suffer persecution for righteousness' sake, since theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' Then, the bishops having pronounced them heretics, they were branded on their foreheads, beaten with rods (their garments being cut down to their girdles), and whipped out of the city. Nevertheless they went with light steps, rejoicing; their teacher at their head singing, 'Blessed' shall ye be when men hate you.' After which, through the inclemency of the weather, they perished wretchedly."

Another company of Paulikians, denominated Boni Homines, were condemned at the Council of Lomers in A.D. 1165. Their examination and confession but little varied from that of their predecessors; but the general accordance of their doctrines with the evangelical standard of the Scriptures enables us to regard them as a part of this line of faithful witnesses for Jesus, – not abominable heretics.

And now as to the WALDENSES, called by some the Poor Men of Lyons. It has been often stated that they derived their name from Peter Waldo, a Lyonnese merchant, who, about A.D. 1170, having sold all he had and distributed to the poor, became head to certain bands thence called Waldenses. Recent examination however of the earliest and best authorities has proved that the merchant's appellation was not Peter Waldo, but Peter Valdes; which word Valdes is not a proper name, but a designative of country or religion, precisely corresponding to Valdensis. Whence Peter derived this does not appear. It was possibly from the Pays de Vaud, possibly from some religious sectaries already bearing the title. However this may have been, the fact of Peter having himself become in heart and mind a true Bible Christian is indubitable. And what he had learnt himself he resolved to impart to others. So he became a missionary evangelist. In his ministrations he made the Scriptures the sole ground of his teaching, and effected for his followers a translation into their own language. The numbers thus congregated began to attract notice. Persecution followed so severe that Valdes and his disciples were driven from Lyons. But the consequence was the further dissemination of evangelic truth. Anathematized by the Pope, the reformer labored with such success, that, ere the end of the century the Waldenses or Leonists had formed churches of proselytes in Spain and Italy, and throughout France, Flanders, Germany, and Bohemia: in which last country Peter Valdes himself, about the year 1180, is said to have ended his truly apostolic career. After

his death, the Word of God, by the agency of the Waldenses, grew and multiplied. Under different appellations, – as Vaudois in the valleys of Piedmont and Lombardy, – or Albigenses when united to the descendants of the Paulicians near Albi and Toulouse, – or again as Bohemians in the land of Bohemia, – they spread abroad the Gospel. But the sufferings they everywhere endured marked their prophesying as in sackcloth. Yet “neither fire nor sword, nor the most cruel inventions of merciless persecutions, could damp their zeal or entirely ruin their cause.” Along the Rhine the Gospel was accompanied with a powerful effusion of the Holy Spirit, which drew down on this people the vengeance of the enemies of truth. At Bingen thirty-five persons were burned in one fire, and at Mentz eighteen. No less than eighty suffered in like manner at Strasburg. These died praising God, in assurance of a blessed resurrection. In some instances statutes were enacted forbidding under severe penalties the showing any hospitality to a Waldensian. Throughout Europe their doctrines spread and followers multiplied; at one time diffused over Northern Italy, they made Milan their head-quarters; but as the persecution grew fiercer, they drew again towards their Alpine valleys, still constant and faithful to their witness for Christ.

As to the doctrine of the Waldenses, while the inconsistencies of the calumnies brought against them are a sufficient refutation in regard of these, their own’ writings will be the best evidence of their real opinions. Many interesting manuscripts were brought to England by Cromwell’s ambassador in A.D. 1658. Others exist in Geneva. Of these the most remarkable is a poem called “The Noble Lesson,” which in its commencement gives evidence of its date, that it was written somewhere between A.D. 1150 and 1180:–

“Well have a thousand and a hundred years been full accomplished
Since it was written that we are in the last times.”

It is written in rhythmical verse, like the Provencal romances of the Troubadours, and sets forth with much simplicity and beauty their Scriptural tenets, – the fall of man by Adam’s sin, and redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ; the cooperation of the three _ Persons of the Trinity in man’s salvation; the spirituality and obligation of the moral law; the duties of prayer, watchfulness, self-denial, unworldliness, humility, and love as “the way of Christ;” – enforced moreover by the prospect of death and approaching judgment; by the narrowness of the way of life and the fewness of those that find it; as also by the hope of glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Besides which, it contains a protest against the Romish system, as one of soul-destroying idolatry; – against masses for the dead, purgatory, the confessional, and the asserted power of priestly absolution; – with a half-expressed suspicion that Popery may be one form of Antichrist. This last point is yet more fully treated in another of their writings, A Treatise on Antichrist, in which they charge the Papal system with the guilt of defrauding God of his worship by rendering it to his creatures; of defrauding Christ by attributing justification and forgiveness to other saviours; and of defrauding the Holy Spirit by the invention of sacramental regeneration and sanctification. The origin of this system they trace to the infancy of the Church in apostolic days; but, now increased to full manhood, they regard it as being sustained by the covetousness of the priesthood. Nevertheless they

regulated the internal government of their own body by the Scriptural precedent of bishops, presbyters, and deacons: they held needless divisions and schism to be a great evil; and that even separation from Rome was only admissible on the principle that what agreed not with the Word of God was to be rejected and avoided.

To these religious views of this remarkable people we have only to add that their practice was unimpeachable, their enemies themselves being judges. Reinerius, a Dominican and Inquisitor-General, speaks thus of their moral character: "They are sedate and modest. They have no pride in clothes. They avoid falsehood, oaths, and frauds. They do not multiply riches, but are content with what is necessary. They are chaste and temperate. They avoid revelry, restrain anger, abstain from levity, and are always at work, learning or teaching."

The Bishop of Cavillon at one time commissioned a monk to go amongst the Waldenses in order to convince them of their errors. But the monk returned in confusion, owning that he had never known in his whole life so much of the Scriptures as he had learned in the few days passed amongst these heretics. One of the confessors of Louis XII. was so struck with the holy character of this people, whom he had visited by the king's order, that he declared, in the hearing of many persons, how he wished he were as good a Christian as the worst inhabitant of that valley. Another writes, "When they sit at table they bless thus, 'He who blest the barley leaves and fishes to his disciples, bless us.' And after table, 'Blessing, and honor, and wisdom, and glory to God for ever;' always holding their hands and eyes lifted to heaven."

Nor are they to be thought of as poor ignorant people. Far from setting aside human learning, the choicest of their young men were sent to Paris for instruction, the better to meet their enemies on their own ground in argument, and to propagate more soundly and efficiently the doctrines of God's Word. As time passed on, God raised up protection for them, by not a few Counts and Barons in Southern France and Lombardy espousing their cause. So was the prophecy fulfilled, "I will give power to my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy;" – albeit, owing to the numbers and hostility of their adversaries, they must needs be in sackcloth.

Thus, as in a former lecture, we showed that there was in the Paulikian sect a line of witnesses for Christ's truth of Eastern origin from the year 653, who testified against the prevailing apostasy; as also that there was a witness-line of Christians in France, Germany, and North Italy of Western origin, who bore their testimony for Christ: moreover, that the oneness of these in spirit was proved by their occasional interminglings, – once as early as the eleventh century, and again more markedly about the end of the twelfth century; at which time, as one body, they obtained the name of Waldenses – so in this lecture we have shown how, united, they continued to bear the marks which Scripture ascribes to the two witnesses, viz., their protestation against the apostasy; their holding the Scriptures as the rule of faith; and their sackcloth clothing, a state of mourning or depression proceeding from their comparative smallness of numbers and their bitter persecution from the Church of Rome.

We may finally mention that a curious illustration of the fact of these Waldenses constituting in part the predicted Apocalyptic witnesses is presented in the circumstance that the heraldic arms of the people, and of their chief town Lucerna (thence also so nominated), was the precise Apocalyptic symbol of a lighted candlestick amid surrounding night, with the motto, "The light shineth in darkness."

Continued in [Revelation 11:7-12. Retrospective View Of The Two Witnesses – Part III](#)

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