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## THE PAULICIAN HERESY: CONTRADICTION OF NATIONAL AND UNIVERSAL

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### **Abstract**

*Historical events always become the object of reinterpretation. The history of the Paulician heresy, which was widespread in medieval Armenia and Byzantium, is no exception. In this article, I will address the attempt to reinterpret the history of the Paulicians from a national-conservative position made by Karlen Mirumian. Analyzing his account of events and comparing it with the Soviet interpretation and a more detailed examination of the Paulician doctrine leads to interesting implications for understanding the specificity of the national discourse. The paper will compare the approaches to the interpretation of the role of the Paulicians in history given by Karlen Mirumyan and the Soviet author Hrant Bartikyan. Mirumyan's approach raises quite a few questions regarding methodology, especially his retrospective application of the framework of nationalist ideas to the feudal era. Besides, a more detailed study of the Paulician doctrine, conducted by Nina Garsoïan, shows us that the doctrine described by Mirumyan repeats the anti-Paulician propaganda of Byzantine authors, which has little in common with reality. All this allows us to move on to the peculiarities of Armenian nationalist ideology, which, when confronted with the Paulician phenomenon, reveals a surprising unity with the imperial discourse it is meant to oppose. That's why I turn to the ideas of the contemporary French philosopher Alain Badiou, who proposed the concept of three discourses - the discourse of homogenization, the discourse of exclusion, and the discourse of universalism. My assumption is that the Byzantine imperial discourse corresponds to the first, the nationalist discourse to the*

*second, and the Paulician doctrine to the third, the universal discourse, against which the other two discourses merge.*

**Keywords:** Paulician heresy, Alain Badiou, universalism, anti-feudal movement, nationalism.

### **Contradiction of National and Social**

With the emergence of the modern Republic of Armenia, scholars began to reevaluate the ideological heritage of the Soviet Union. The history of the Paulician movement was no exception (Jaloyan, 2012). The Paulician heresy is known as one of the numerous heresies flourishing in the early medieval age, the Paulicians were particularly active in the Byzantine Empire and Armenia. The accepted sources for the study of the Paulician movement were Greek sources, but in the 1950s many Armenian sources were published in the USSR, which shed light on the early period of the Paulician movement and provide several alternative facts unknown to the Greek authors. Based on Armenian sources, the Soviet scholar Hrant Bartikyan concludes that the Paulician movement was an anti-feudal national liberation social movement (1959, p. 143). It is the position of the Paulician as a national liberation movement that the author from modern Armenia Karlen Mirumyan disputes.

The dispute between the two authors will be the subject of my review. The purpose of the article, however, is not to reveal on which side the historical truth lies, but to better understand the ideological attitudes of Mirumyan and the broader national-conservative interpretation of Armenian history. The history of the Paulicians proves to be an excellent example for this purpose, since the Paulician movement remains a rather poorly studied historical phenomenon, the sources about which are few, contradictory, and, with a single exception, written by the political opponents of the Paulicians. The more obscure and contradictory the history of the Paulicians, the clearer the

framework of the ideological machine behind the interpretation becomes.

Mirumyan's treatment will serve as good material for this purpose since he does not shy away from direct ideological assessments and, as it seems to me, reflects well the popularity of contemporary Armenia nationalist ideology. I take as a basis the chapter “The Paulician Heresy and its Ideology” from Mirumyan's 2021 book “Armenian Political Thought: Formation and Stages of Development” (2021, pp. 263-296). This chapter synthesizes Mirumyan's previous articles on this topic, for example, the article “Towards a Reassessment of the Paulician Movement” is almost entirely included in this chapter (1998, pp. 169-180), besides, the format of the manual on the history of Armenian political thought disposes to more generalization and articulation of conclusions.

The methodological basis of Mirumyan's interpretation is the idea of the existence of an autonomous national being as a special dimension of reality (2021, p. 266). Mirumyan accuses his predecessors in the studies of Paulicianism of subordinating or identifying the national and the social. But history is such, Mirumyan writes, that the opposite often happens, and the social must be subordinated to the national (2021, p. 265). One such case, Mirumyan believes, is Armenia of the VIII-IX centuries, as Armenians did not have statehood at that time. In the absence of a state, according to Mirumyan, there is no society either, since the state is a political form of organization of society, so one can only speak of a nation (2021, p. 284). One can immediately identify a logical error in this idea, if the state is the political form of organization of society, it does not mean that society has no other forms of organization, and it cannot be said that the state is the only form of political organization. Mirumyan himself builds his argument around the importance of the church and the nakharar system (Armenian feudal nobility) as political institutions. What Mirumyan does is replace the word society with the word nation because he believes that society exists only as an epiphenomenon

of the state, while the nation exists as a lingual and religious community.

What is attracting attention here is the retrospective use of the concept of nation. One of the most respected historians of nationalism, Eric Hobsbawm, places the emergence of the nation and nationalism in the 18th century (1992, p. 5). This is quite logical, given that the idea of the state as the embodiment of the will of the nation is only possible if we are dealing with a modern centralized state, not a feudal state, where feudal lords in no way claim to politically represent the will of the people, they are based on their inherited traditional power. Identities at that period, on the other hand, are more often based on religious affiliation. The attempt to introduce the nation as something older than it is, however, is part of nationalism, and this should not surprise us - it is convincingly demonstrated in the book co-authored by the Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2012).

All this is already a strong enough blow to Mirumyan's positions since his methodological foundations are questionable, but as I have already written, the question of refuting Mirumyan's interpretation of the history of the Pavlican movement is not important. It is more interesting to understand the ideological foundations of the author, so the retrospective nature of Mirumian's view should not deter us, since ideology, even when talking about the past, is talking about the present. But I've spent too long writing about Mirumian instead of writing about the Paulicians. There is an episode in their history that is the key to Mirumian's reinterpretation of positions of Soviet history, expressed by Hrant Bartikyan.

Both of them emphasize the events that took place in 748 AD when the Armenian nakharar Grigor Mamikonyan raised an anti-Arab rebellion. The revolt took place on the background of internal contradictions in the Arab Caliphate and with the help of the Byzantine emperor Constantine V. Constantine was one of the iconoclast emperors and, accordingly, was favorably disposed to

the Paulicians, who also shared this doctrine. The emperor was even accused of Paulicianism himself. Referring to the medieval Armenian historian Łewond, Bartikyan reconstructs the events of the revolt as follows: the army of Armenian nakharars by agreement with Emperor Constantine went to Pontus to start the revolt, there they were joined by some, as Łewond calls them, “sons of sin”. Bartikian identifies them with the Paulicians (1959, p. 141). But then the unity of the rebels is broken, Łewond writes that the “sons of sin”, who knew neither the fear of God, nor fear of princes, nor respect for elders, committed a great robbery (Łewond, 1982, p. 102).

Bartikyan interprets this event as a contradiction between the anti-feudal-minded Paulicians and the nakharars. The Paulicians wanted to eradicate the feudal system and the nakharars were afraid of this. As a result, Prince Ashot Bagratuni left the rebel army, saying that it was better to pay taxes to the Arabs, but to continue to own “his property, gardens, forests and lands” (Łewond, 1982, p.101). Bartikian writes that the Armenian feudal lords wanted independence from the Arabs but were afraid of the uprising of the broad masses of people, especially the Paulicians, who would turn the uprising into a class war against them. Accordingly, it was a reasonable decision for the nakharars to stop the uprising and reassert their submission to the Caliphate rather than to win independence at the cost of their property and status (1959, p. 143). The Paulicians were thus, according to Bartikian, a national liberation force.

Mirumyan agrees that the course of events was generally such as Bartikyan described. That the “sons of sin” were indeed the Paulicians and that contradiction with them stimulated the Armenian princes to abandon the idea of revolt. He introduces only one amendment to the chain of events themselves - Bartikian believed that the Paulicians supported the anti-Arab revolt because of social reasons: The Caliphate raised taxes, while the Paulicians, who were mostly farmers and herders, could not bear the burden of taxes (1959, p. 142). Mirumyan, however, believes

that the Paulicians were among the rebels because they were instructed by the Byzantine emperor allied to them (2021, p. 278). It is important for him to prove that the Paulicians acted as an instrument of someone else's will, sometimes the Caliphate, sometimes the Empire.

And, of course, Mirumyan interprets the outcome of the uprising quite differently. He accuses the Paulicians of disrupting the unity of the rebels but does not agree that this was caused by the class struggle. What exactly motivated the Paulicians, however, is not explained, only the fact that the Paulicians were interested in robbery and violence and that is why there was disorder in the ranks of the rebels. Mirumyan considers Ashot Bagratuni's decision to leave the rebels as a wise decision of a good ruler who had to take care of his people. Bagratuni allegedly realized that the uprising had no more chances of success, and therefore "his action cannot be seen as treason neither to the cause of the uprising nor to the national interests" (Mirumyan, 2021, p. 278).

Mirumyan draws ideological conclusions from this history that in the absence of statehood, the unity of the nation, which is ensured by the efforts of the church and feudal lords, should not be questioned. Emphasizing social differences leads to the loss of unity, which is necessary for the struggle for an independent state. Heretical movements that opposed the church and feudal hierarchies are thus essentially anti-national.

"This is the nature of all revolutionary movements and ideologies, directed, especially at first, precisely at the unconcerned destruction, the collapse of all that exists", he summarizes (Mirumyan, 2021, p. 285).

Here we should return to the problem with Mirumyan's methodology, as it has already been said his application of the concept of nation to the events described is deeply anachronistic. But if we transfer his ideas even to modern times, we still have logical problems. If the unity of the nation is achieved through the actions of those in power, then it turns out that they actually



cannot make a mistake. The goal of the Armenian princes, according to Mirumyan, is to achieve independence, but Ashot Bagratuni, who leaves the rebels, is still right, because he is the representative of the authorities, therefore, he ensures the unity of the nation. That is, even if we accept Mirumyan's methodology about the importance of the unity of the nation and the struggle for independence, we inevitably come to a rather banal, unpleasant and I would even say unseemly conclusion - the ruling class is always right.

The variants of reconstruction of this episode of the history of the Paulicians are rather speculative, as they are based on the interpretation of a few lines from Łewond, nevertheless, Mirumyan pays a lot of attention to them. What he pays little attention to, although talking about heresy is the most important thing, is the doctrine of the Paulicians. He describes it rather crudely and carelessly at the end of his chapter. As will be shown below, does it with critical errors. Inattention to doctrine is an important touch to Mirumian's treatment of the motivation of the Paulicians, but there is also an ideological layer that can only be uncovered when we are more familiar with the doctrine.

### **Heresy of the Land of the Armenians**

First of all, let us present the doctrine of the Paulicians as given by Mirumyan. The philosophical-religious worldview of the Paulicians, unlike the political ideology, could not undergo significant changes, he writes (2021, p. 287), and in some sense, he is certainly even more right than he thought. He considers the Paulicians doctrine to be the product of a blending and reinterpretation of Gnosticism, Manichaeism, and Marcionism, with Manichaeism as its most important foundation (2021, p. 288). According to him, the Paulicians, like the Manichaeans, believed that there are two Gods - the evil demiurge who created matter and the true God - the Heavenly Father. The former created matter, which accordingly lies in evil, the latter resides in the realm of reason and will rule in the future world. Mirumyan

derives the iconoclasm of the Paulicians from their hatred of matter. The Paulicians considered Christ to be neither man nor God, but an angel sent by the Heavenly Father. At the same time, they could call their leaders Christ. The Old Testament was denied by the Paulicians, and according to some testimonies they also denied the Gospel of Luke. They did not recognize church hierarchies, lavish rituals, and, of course, images (2021, pp. 288-294).

Such a description of the Paulician doctrine is presented by Mirumyan. More precisely, he repeats the way the Byzantine authors Photius and Peter of Sicily described the Pavlican doctrine (2021, p. 288). The problem is not even that Photius and Peter of Sicily were opponents of the Paulicians and wrote their texts to expose and debunk the heresy - this is the norm for most sources on the Paulicians; the problem is that for some reason Mirumyan ignores the Armenian sources that inform us about the Paulician doctrine. The reports that we find there strongly diverge from what Byzantine authors write and make us doubt that the presented version is the only correct one.

Nina Garsoïan, an American researcher of Armenian origin, published a detailed study of the Paulicians doctrine back in 1967, based on all available sources, both Byzantine and Armenian, many of which were published by Bartikyan in the same years. There are quite a few contradictions between Armenian and Byzantine sources. Garsoïan carefully analyzes all the sources and tries to understand the doctrine of the Paulicians, what it was in Armenia and Byzantium, and what changes it underwent. The version retold by Mirumyan partly corresponds to what the doctrine of the Paulicians was in Byzantium from the second half of the ninth century (Garsoïan, 1967, p. 185), about 100 years after the events he reconstructs, but of course with several important clarifications. Thus, Peter of Sicily and Photius, as well as other predominantly Byzantine authors did call the Paulicians Manichaeans.

However, a superficial comparison of the doctrine of the Manichaeans with the actions of the Paulicians, which Mirumyan himself describes, already shows us that we are talking about two different movements. Thus, one of the foundations of the Manichaean doctrine was principled non-militancy, they carried their faith exclusively with the help of missionaries, not with the sword. While Paulicians were constantly in different military conflicts and even in a certain period created their state and successfully fought with the Empire. Manichaeism is not characterized by iconoclasm, on the contrary, Mani himself was a skilled artist, and his followers highly valued images because of this. Manichaeans were in favor of rigid asceticism, the Paulicians denied even Lent. Manichaeans believed in the transmigration of souls and, of course, honored their prophet Mani - there is no trace of such a thing in any version of the Paulician doctrine (Garsoïan, 1967, pp. 187-188). Moreover, Manichaeism was punishable by death in Byzantium and this law was confirmed by the iconoclastic emperors, who were in open alliance with the Paulicians. Naturally, Manichaeism was also persecuted in the lands of the Caliphate, where the Paulicians took refuge in different periods.

Based on all available sources, both Byzantine, Armenian, and Arabic, one can draw a clear conclusion that the Paulicians were not Manichaeans and cannot even be said to have been under any serious influence of them. In the history of Armenia there is no evidence of the great popularity of Mani's teachings (Garsoïan, 1967, p. 190), and the Arevordi sect, most like the Manichaeans, was never identified with the Paulicians or Tondracians (Garsoïan, 1967, p. 191). So why did Byzantine authors refer to the Paulicians as Manichaeans? The answer is quite simple - it was a strong insult applied to the iconoclasts. Moreover, the logic of such a name is the opposite of the way Mirumyan explains the iconoclasm of the Paulicians - since the iconoclasts deny the cross, it means they deny matter, therefore they are Manichaeans, but not vice versa (Garsoïan, 1967, p. 203).

Who were the Paulicians if not Manichaeans? As has already been said, the Byzantine part of the heretics after the middle of the ninth century probably, at least no evidence clearly contradicts this and there are though doubtful, but numerous testimonies that confirm, began to follow the dualistic and docetic doctrine. That is the doctrine that there are two Gods, and that Christ was an angel. But this cannot be said about the Armenian part of the Paulicians and then their predecessors Tondrakians. Only one source about the Paulicians, written by themselves - the Key of Truth, has survived to our days. A copy of this source, replicated in 1782, was found by the clergy of the Armenian Church and taken to Echmiadzin in the middle of the 19th century and then published by Frederick Conybeare in 1898. Garosian compares the doctrine outlined in the Key of Truth with the doctrine of the Paulicians and Tondrakians from Armenian sources and finds that they are virtually identical. And that the Armenian doctrine is not at all like the dualistic and docetic doctrine of the Byzantine authors.

The basic tenets of the Armenian doctrine are as follows: the oneness of God, the manhood of Jesus, and his adoption by God at his baptism at the age of 30, in recognition of his righteous life. From this, it is concluded that anyone can be Christ if he lives a righteous life and that is why the Paulicians could name their heresiarchs as such. The rite of baptism was performed by the Paulicians at the age of 30 and they did not baptize infants - this is given a lot of attention in the Key of Truth. The Paulicians recognized both Testaments as sacred scripture, considered themselves to be the bearers of the true apostolic faith, denied any ecclesiastical hierarchy, and considered the church to be the assembly of the congregation rather than an institution or building. As already mentioned, they denied the worship of images and the cross and were opposed to asceticism (Garsoïan, 1967, p. 156). These dogmatic provisions are repeated in most

Armenian authors. The exception is Grigor Magistros, who recounts some elements from Byzantine authors, but this can be explained by the fact that he lived in Constantinople and was under deep Byzantine influence (Garsoïan, 1967, p. 158).

The existence of a dogma completely different from Manichaeism and the claim to apostolic faith raises the question - where did the Paulician movement originate from? The version with Gnostic influence has similar problems as with Manichaeism - inconsistency of doctrines and lack of historical evidence of Gnostic movements in Armenia, which could have influenced the Paulician movement. A popular version is that the Paulicians owe their doctrine, as well as their name, to the Antiochian bishop Paul of Samosata; this concept was advocated, for example, by Conybeare (1898, p. 106). There are several arguments in its favor - the most significant being that Paul of Samosata also held to adoptionist ideas (i.e., that Jesus was adopted by God, not born the Son of God). No direct evidence of this influence, however, has been preserved by history. If this is true, then Paulicianism is much older than is generally believed since Paul of Samosata was active in the third century, and the earliest evidence of the Paulicians dates from the sixth century at the earliest.

Garsoïan goes even further. Ghazar Parpetsi mentions that in his time there was a “heresy of the land of the Armenians”, which is not named after any heresiarch. Garsoïan identifies it, as well as several references in other authors about the heresy of the “unclean”, with the Paulicians. She also notes that most authors who write about the Paulicians speak of them as something quite ancient, there are no authors who speak of their emergence in recent times. Garsoïan makes the rather bold assumption that the heresy existed from the very moment of Armenia's conversion to Christianity, or rather Armenian Christianity itself was originally what was later called the Paulician heresy.

The fact is that from the very moment of its emergence, Armenian Christianity was under the strong influence of the

Antiochian Syrian Church. The Antiochian Church at that time was the most authoritative in the Christian East. The doctrine of the Antiochian Church was adoptionist, and archaeological findings show that there were no crosses in the ancient Syrian churches. The subsequent history of the development of the Armenian church was a struggle between the Syrian and Byzantine parties, in which the Byzantine party eventually triumphed, and what used to be the Armenian church became known as the Paulician heresy (Garsoïan, 1967, p. 226).

### **The Third Discourse**

Returning to the ideological foundations of Miurumian's interpretation of history and the doctrine of the Paulicians, we can find a strange contradiction. His inattention to doctrine and his emphasis on national interest as the main driving force leads to an unexpected result. His presentation of the Paulician movement generally echoes the imperial discourse. The way he describes the doctrine literally repeats what Byzantine authors wrote to denigrate the Paulicians, and the way he reconstructs their history presents the Paulicians as a force devoid of subjectivity, which was driven only by the will of others and its own unrestraint. If we accept Garsoïan's version of the Paulicians as the bearers of the original version of Armenian Christianity, then events take a very ugly turn.

In this case, it turns out that national-conservative thinker Miurumyan criticizes the Armenian faith from the position of the Byzantine conquerors. How is it that the national ideology, which Miurumian seeks to justify and defend, turns out to be a mirror image of the imperial ideology, which it is meant to oppose? The connection between national ideology and imperial ideology does not seem accidental to me; these discourses formally opposing each other work to supplant the third and, when the third discourse needs to be refuted, these two practically merge into one.

What is the third discourse? Here I turn to the concept of the contemporary French philosopher Alain Badiou. In his book "Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism" he compares the era in which the Apostle Paul lived and acted with the present day and finds that there is a structural opposition that repeats itself. In Paul's time, too, two discourses confronted each other - the discourse of the totality of the law of Greek philosophy and the discourse of Jewish exceptionalism. That is, the discourse that seeks to homogenize the world and the discourse that seeks to defend its exclusivity against it (2003, p. 41).

It was under these circumstances that the Apostle Paul preached Christianity among heretics, which created many conflicts with the Judeo-Christian part of the early Christian church led by the Apostle Peter in Jerusalem. They held the position of the superiority of baptized Jews over baptized Pagans and thus sought to maintain the idea of religious exclusivity (Badiou, 2003, p. 22). The Apostle Paul, on the other hand, countered this with the idea of Christianity as a universal religion. This is most accurately expressed by his famous saying: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus". On this basis Alain Badiou justifies the existence of a third discourse, the discourse of universalism.

In modernity, according to Badiou, the structure of discourses remains unchanged. There is a global homogenizing discourse, the discourse of capital, and there is a discourse of exceptionalism, the struggle for minority rights (2003, p. 11). These discourses are opposed to each other and struggle for recognition. But unwillingly, they work to maintain the existing order of things. The human being is fragmented into an ever-increasing number of identities - national, religious, gender, sexual, and so on. And humans are indeed being oppressed based on identity. The problem is that the process of including the excluded in the homogeneous world of capital on their rights is virtually endless (2003, p. 10). Where the problem of some

identity is locally solved and it acquires full rights on an equal footing with others, there are always problems with other identities. Moreover, it cannot be said that this is a direct and consistent process of liberation because the state of minority rights is subjected to regression also, which can be seen in the example of the rise in popularity of right-wing populism in the West in the last decade. Well, and naturally, the situation of minorities outside the Western world is quite different and often frankly deplorable.

The struggle between these two discourses looks like a kind of linear process of emancipation, in which eventually everyone must be incorporated into the homogeneous world of capital with the corresponding markets created for them. But this is a liberation that in the end never comes. In the end, the struggle between the two discourses does not make it possible to eradicate the problem itself, just some tactical permutations on the field of cultural warfare. The problem with the discourse of exceptionalism turns out not to be that it fights for wrong goals - on the contrary, they are mostly noble - but that this war cannot be won. Badiou therefore proposes a return to the idea of a universalist discourse, which emerges as a superstructure over the struggle of the first two. The discourse of universalism, as we can see from Paul's dictum, denies identity dichotomies. Not in the sense that it does not recognize their existence, but in the sense that they are rendered non-substantive before the universalist idea. In the example of Paul's saying, the existence of different identities is recognized, it is just that in the face of Christ they all appear equal.

Returning to the question of the Paulicians and the struggle of discourses here. Imperial and national discourses repeat the structure of the two discourses of Badiou. Byzantium sought to assimilate the Armenians into the homogeneous order of the Empire, Mirumyan justified all the actions of the Armenian feudal lords by their struggle to preserve the identity and sovereignty of the Armenian nation, i.e. to justify their



exclusivity. As it has already been shown, these discourses, which look like opposing discourses on the issue of the attitude towards the Paulicians, turn out to be identical. This can be explained if we accept the Paulicians heresy as a universalist idea.

There are several arguments in favor of this: Paulicianism was spread both among Armenians and Byzantines, and later influenced the spread of heresies already in the Balkans. That is, there is no restriction on national exclusiveness. The Paulicians, though they were a social anti-feudal movement, nevertheless had supporters among the representatives of the upper classes, and it can also be remembered that Emperor Constantine V himself was accused of Paulicianism. The Paulicians, even though they were a movement primarily defined by religion, were not known for any special manifestations of religious intolerance and were in alliances with both Muslims and Christians. The rejection of church hierarchies and the perception of the church as a community also eliminates internal exclusivity among the Paulicians. Finally, apostolic roots, or at least a claim to the character of apostolic faith, link the Paulicians directly genetically to the early Christian universal idea.

### **Conclusion**

A close look at Mirumyan's attempt to examine the history of the Paulicians from the prism of "national existence" leads us to unexpected conclusions. The national-conservative idea through which Mirumyan attempts to accuse the Paulicians of betrayal loses its grounds when the arguments are examined more closely. Since there is critically little historical evidence about the history of the Paulicians, and even less about the anti-Arab revolt of the Armenian feudal lords and the participation of the Paulicians in it, which is the key episode for Mirumyan's revision of the Soviet legacy, not historical science, plays a crucial role in the question of interpretation, but ideology. Mirumian's interpretation of the event is no more convincing than Hrant Bartikian's, and the

explanation is more complex and obscure. What Bartikyan explained by the understandable discontent of the lower classes with the harsh living conditions and anti-feudal stand, Mirumyan explains through treachery with unclear reasons, but because of the will of the Byzantine emperor. The methodological basis of Mirumyan's consideration of the issue also raises many questions, if the existence of class conflicts throughout history is more or less universally recognized, then the appeal to the ideas of “national existence” in the context of the 8th century looks deeply anachronistic.

But the greater weakness of the national-conservative reading of this history is revealed when we turn to doctrinal issues. With the help of Nina Garsoïan's detailed work on this topic, we can learn that the way Mirumyan describes the Paulician doctrine is a repetition of Byzantine sources that were intended to decry the heretics. The Armenian sources, which Mirumyan ignores, also had such a purpose, but comparing them with Greek sources, the only remaining authentic Paulician source - the “Key of Truth” and references in Arabic sources, allows us to draw a consistent picture of the Armenian Paulician doctrine. Which, as it turns out, has little in common with the idea of the Paulicians as a Manichaean docetic heresy, as Mirumyan tries to present it. Moreover, it turns out that the Paulician faith may in fact be the oldest form of Christianity in the territory of Armenia or, at least, close to it doctrinally. Here we face a paradoxical situation when the author, who reinterprets history from a national-conservative position, turns out to be criticizing the most ancient and traditional form of the Christian religion of Armenians from the position of a colonizing empire.

This is possible, in my opinion, if we consider the Paulician doctrine as a common enemy for both national and imperial discourses. Alain Badiou's concept of the three discourses helps us to understand how this happens. The struggle between imperial and national discourse ultimately leads only to the reproduction of the situation and no final victory can be achieved. The only

way out of the situation is to turn to a universal idea that is indifferent to the identities for which the national discourse fights and seeks to erase the imperial one. Such an idea in this case is the heresy of the Paulicians.

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