

The Ritual Cannibalism Charge Against Christians

From **Minucius Felix. Octavius**

And now, as wickeder things advance more fruitfully, and abandoned manners creep on day by day, those abominable shrines of an impious assembly are maturing themselves throughout the whole world. Assuredly this confederacy ought to be rooted out and execrated. They know one another by secret marks and insignia, and they love one another almost before they know one another; everywhere also there is mingled among them a certain religion of lust, and they call one another promiscuously brothers and sisters, that even a not unusual debauchery may by the intervention of that sacred name become incestuous: it is thus that their vain and senseless superstition glories in crimes.

Nor, concerning these things, would intelligent report speak of things so great and various, and requiring to be prefaced by an apology, unless truth were at the bottom of it. I hear that they adore the head of an ass, that basest of creatures, consecrated by I know not what silly persuasion, a worthy and appropriate religion for such manners. Some say that they worship the genitals of their pontiff and priest, and adore the nature, as it were, of their common parent. I know not whether these things are false; certainly suspicion is applicable to secret and nocturnal rites; and he who explains their ceremonies by reference to a man punished

by extreme suffering for his wickedness, and to the deadly wood of the cross, appropriates fitting altars for reprobate and wicked men, that they may worship what they deserve.

Now the story about the initiation of young novices is as much to be detested as it is well known. An infant covered over with meal, that it may deceive the unwary, is placed before him who is to be stained with their rites: this infant is slain by the young pupil, who has been urged on as if to harmless blows on the surface of the meal, with dark and secret wounds. Thirstily - O horror! they lick up its blood; eagerly they divide its limbs. By this victim they are pledged together; with this consciousness of wickedness they are covenanted to mutual silence.

From Minucius Felix, Octavius, R. E. Wallis, trans. in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, N. Y.: The Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), Vol. 4, pp. 177-178.

The charge of ritual cannibalism was probably based on confused accounts of the Christian eucharist. Hippolytus of Rome tells us what actually went on at a Christian service. This early eucharistic prayer still used in some churches dates from the beginning of the third century.

Hippolytus. Apostolic Tradition

When one has been consecrated bishop all give him the kiss of peace . . . and the deacons bring him the offering . . . he lays

hands upon it with all the priests and gives thanks, saying, "The Lord be with you." And all answer, "And with your spirit." "Lift up your hearts." "We have lifted them up to the Lord." "Let us give thanks to the Lord." "It is right and just."

And he thus continues, "We give thanks to you O God through your beloved son Jesus Christ whom in these last times you have sent to us as the redeemer and savior and messenger of your will. He is your inseparable Word, through whom you created all things and who was acceptable to you. You sent him from heaven into the Virgin's womb and in her womb he was made man and was manifested your son, born of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin. Fulfilling your will and buying for you a holy people, he stretched forth his hands when he suffered, that by his Passion he might deliver those who believed in you. When he was delivered over to his Passion of his own will, to destroy death, to break the bonds of the devil, to trample upon Hell, to enlighten the just, and to manifest his resurrection, taking bread and giving thanks to you, he said: Take and eat, this is my body which shall be broken for you. And taking likewise the cup, he said: This is my blood which shall be shed for you; when you do this, do it in memory of me.

"Mindful therefore of his death and resurrection, we offer you this bread and cup, giving thanks to you because you have found us worthy to stand before you and serve you. And we beg you to send the Holy Spirit upon the offering of the holy church

and gather into one all who have received it . . . that we may praise and glorify you through your son Jesus Christ, through whom is glory and honor to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, in your holy church both now and forever. Amen."

From H. Achelis, *Die Canones Hippolyti* (Leipzig, 1881), pp. 48-55.

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Pamphlet 268