

“Sharks smelling blood.”

The Danville News

Robert John Andrews

August 19, 2021

“Fine Young Cannibals”

Word Count: 750

Some Bible passages got early Christians in hot water. One passage quotes Jesus saying, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.” Take this literally, take it out of context, and no wonder Christians were maligned, arrested, boycotted, assaulted by Romans who charged Christians with cannibalism. Rumors spread like wildfire around the Roman Empire. Further allegations targeted Christians as traitors – they said Jesus was Lord instead of the Roman Emperor. Christians were incestuous – they regarded each other as brothers and sisters. Christians were atheists – they rejected society’s approved and official gods. And yes, they sacrificed babies, drank their blood, ate their flesh as part of worship. Imagine if Christianity’s opponents back then were armed with Facebook and Twitter.

A fellow nick-named Justin Martyr tried to explain to the Emperor that the Lord’s Supper is a symbolic meal -- Christians eat what Jesus is -- but damage was done. Once folks swallow lies and rumors, it’s nearly impossible to wick out the poison.

This same allegation of cannibalism surfaced again in the Middle Ages, this time with Christians accusing Jews of murdering Christian children on Passover for blood to make matzoh. This lie has a name: blood libel. The poet Chaucer publicized this odious belief when the Prioress tells her hateful Canterbury Tale. For centuries Christians terrorized and massacred Jews. Nothing new under the sun.

Pause for a moment this coming August 24. Remember the anniversary of the Saint Bartholomew Day’s massacre, when conspiracy theories excited angry mobs of Roman Catholics, giving excuse for them to rampage throughout Paris and murder 3,000 Protestant Huguenots on the first day, likely 7,000 more throughout France over the next four days. In six weeks of bloodbath, 30,000 Huguenots were killed. We Protest-tants returned the favor, with a vengeance.

These examples of the lethal folly of an angry and mistaken humanity shouldn’t surprise us. I keep a stone on my desk, a stone an elder who visited Germany brought back from Dachau, the concentration camp where 32,000 documented deaths took place of Jews, political prisoners, homosexuals, and those considered enemies of the state. It took less than a decade for Christian churches in the 1930’s to remove the crosses from their sanctuaries and replace them with swastikas, all because of this toxic brew of ignorance, lies, looking to be offended, and petty ambitions justifying actions as pious or patriotic.

We get angry and we sin. Eating toxins, we become the madding crowd. If deceivers smear the Capitol police for their bravery to preserve democracy, we know what they’re eating. If false teachers call insurrectionists patriots, If social media nonsense scares people into believing vaccinations are oppressive or tries to usurp a legitimate election, if manipulative leaders endanger children to score political points and patronage, if false prophets cry out for you to obey blindly the swindling falsehoods they tell you or mandate you conform to their cause or views or attitudes, if those who profess Christianity embrace QAnon’s evil and its ilk, we know what they’re eating. Masks. The horror! The horror!

A colleague worried recently: "Where is all this anger coming?" Why get angry? Simple: because we love something other than God, truth, our neighbor, or ourselves. Often it's our pride, our expectations, a selfish individualism, along with us fearing that our sense of what is right and what we think we deserve is threatened. Our idols. How easy then to justify anger as righteous. Frantic baboons. Sharks smelling blood. The difference? Humans have choice.

The problem is that anger is a symptom, a signal. What's the source? Why do we get mad? The issue isn't the feeling, it is how we express the anger that matters. "Be angry, but sin not," the Bible tells me so.

An eye for an eye, tooth for tooth, the saying goes, leaves an implacable world toothless and blind. No wonder Christians heed a Jesus who preached the Sermon on the Mount to perfect the inadequate law of the Old Testament by replacing it with the more responsible way of grace. We have become snap-quick to be offended and condemn. Redemption is better. I don't have to approve of you. I don't have to acquiesce or comply when your policies are wrong. I don't have to be silent when you are inhumane, uncivil, violent, criminally unconstitutional. I don't even have to like you. I do have to love you.

Don't tell me the madness can't happen here. It already is.