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The Primitive Christians

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Karl Barth wurde am 10. Mai 1886 in Basel geboren. Sein Vater war Professor der Theologie in Bern. Er studierte von 1904 bis 1908 Theologie in Bern, Berlin, Tübingen und Marburg. Von 1908 bis 1909 war er Hilfsarbeiter an der Zeitschrift „Christliche Welt“ in Marburg, dann Hilfsgeistlicher an der reformierten Gemeinde in Genf. Von 1911 bis 1921 war er Pfarrer in Safenwil im Kanton Aargau. 1919 erschien die erste Auflage seines aufsehen erregenden Kommentars zum Römerbrief. Er wurde darauf Honorarprofessor für reformierte Theologie in Göttingen, einige Jahre später ordentlicher Professor in Münster, und seit einigen Jahren ist er in Bonn tätig.

Von seinen Schriften sind in diesem Aufsatz benutzt worden: „Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie“, seine Auslegung der Briefe Pauli an die Römer und an die Philipper, *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, „Anselms Beweis von der Existenz Gottes“, „Die kirchliche Dogmatik“, 1. Band: Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes. Von den Schriften seiner Freunde sind zu nennen: Ed. Thurneisen: „Das Wort Gottes und die Kirche.“ F. Gogarten: „Glaube und Offenbarung“, „Die religiöse Entscheidung“, „Illusionen, Glaube und Wirklichkeit“, „Die Schuld der Kirche gegen die Welt“, „Politische Ethik“.

Bremen, Deutschland.

B. K e m n e r.

The Primitive Christians.

(Concluded.)

III.

Christian scholars cannot dispense with the study of "classical" antiquity. I know few academic habits as wrong as that of calling every Greek and Roman writer a "classic." As if elegance of form could be a counterweight to much of pagan content! Now Christianity confronted, overcame, absorbed, and finally destroyed classical paganism, although it labored for centuries, up to Constantine's Edict of Milan (313 A. D.), under the hardship of being a *religio illicita*, under the Roman Law. Was there persecution of the Christians before the persecution of Nero, 64 A. D.? James, the brother of John, was executed in Jerusalem 44 A. D. (Zahn). About Pentecost, 58 A. D., the Roman authorities at Jerusalem saved Paul of Tarsus from the fury of the Jews. We refer once more to 1 Pet. 4, 12 ff. The Christians to whom Peter wrote were of the *Diaspora*, in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire (Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, "Asia," — the Roman province called so by the Romans, with Ephesus as capital, — and Bithynia). Now, these Christian converts were suffering severe persecution when Peter wrote — persecution for what? For having a non-pagan religion? By no means. The orthodox Jews were safe and unharmed in their religion and worship, as guaranteed by edicts of Caesar, Augustus, and Agrippa. The Jews did not worship Isis, Osiris, Anubis, Zeus, Athena, Apollo, Diana (not even at Ephesus), nor Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitol, and they suffered

no persecution whatever for their abstention. Now, why were the Christians to whom Peter wrote (before 64 A. D.) subject to persecution? It seems clear that the new "Christians" (Messiah-believers) were maligned as *disloyal* to the Roman government. That is why Peter avows his loyalty in these words (chap. 2, 13 ff.): "Subject yourselves [be obedient] to every human institution on account of the Lord, to the emperor as supreme authority or to proconsuls sent by him," etc. Now, why did the Christians suffer persecution? Indirectly it was stirred up by the orthodox Jews, but directly inflicted by the Roman officials in these eastern provinces. *Πόρνοις* (I, 4, 2) is a severe term. The Jews said: "These Christians are not loyal, they worship a ruler of their own, called 'Messiah,' or 'Christ'; no Roman official should permit this." This obloquy against the "Messiah-believers" was, I think, widely spread before the great fire at Rome, 64 A. D., and brought the Christians and their religion into the very focus of the empire's interest. Even about 180 A. D. we read in the *Octavius* of Minucius Felix, c. 28: "*quasi Christiani monstra colerent, infantes vorarent, convivia incesta miscerent.*" And the pagan interlocutor says of Christ, the Crucified (c. 9, 4): "*et qui hominem summo supplicio pro facinore punitum et crucis ligna feralia eorum caerimonia fabulatur, congruentia perditis sceleratisque tribuit altaria, ut id colant quod merentur.*" Now, Paul, writing to Rome, about 58 A. D. (Zahn), intimates nothing whatever of such a hostile attitude of the secular government towards the Christians there, who clearly were vastly more numerous than those greeted by name in chap. 16. In the cosmopolitan capital on the Tiber countless "religions" were freely practised, especially that of Isis and Osiris. Seneca could write scornfully of the very worship practised in the temple of the Capitoline Jupiter. Of the Jews he said (cited by Augustine from Seneca, *Dialogus de Superstitione*): "*cum interim usque eo sceleratissimae gentis consuetudo convaluerit, ut per OMNES IAM TERRAS recepta sit: victi victoribus leges dederunt.*" (*De Civitate Dei*, VI, 11.) Like Peter in the East, Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome that they should be loyal to the government. Nero ruled when Paul wrote this appeal: *Πᾶσα ψυχὴ ἐξουσίαις ὑπερχούσαις ὑποτασσέσθω*, Rom. 13, 1 (Peter used both these last two terms).

It is a curious fact that two profane authors, still studied everywhere, tell us much about the primitive Christians, Tacitus and his friend Pliny the Younger. I will now present the report of Tacitus (*Annals*, XV, 41 ff., of 64 A. D.). The great fire occurred July 19—24 of that year, beginning at full moon, when arson would be difficult. Nero was at Antium when the fire began. Tacitus (*Ann.*, XV, 38) says that it was "uncertain whether the fire began accidentally or by criminal design of the emperor" ("*forte an dolo principis incertum*"). It began near the Circus Maximus, where many shops contained inflam-

mable material, and a high wind was blowing. No matter what Nero did to aid the sufferers, the rumor spread that he chanted the fall of Troy (*Ann.*, XV, 39). Rome then had fourteen *regiones*, or wards; four remained untouched, three were swept to the ground, in the other seven only a few buildings remained. Even the temple of Vesta with the "household gods" (*penates*) of the Roman people was destroyed (chap. 41). The Sibylline Books were duly consulted. Vulcan, Ceres, and Proserpina were specially prayed to. Juno's figure was particularly sprinkled with water brought from the sea, married women held all-night services, and still the conviction prevailed that the fire was due to deliberate arson ("*quin iussum incendium crederetur*," XV, 44). "Therefore Nero, to do away the rumor, persecuted as defendants, and visited with the most exquisite penalties, those whom, as they were hated on account of their *shameless practises* (*per flagitia in-risus*) the general public (*vulgus*) called Christians. The author of that name, Christ, during the reign of Tiberius, had been executed by the Procurator Potius Pilate, and the deadly superstition, checked for the moment, again broke out, not only in Judea, the source of that evil, but also in Rome (*per urbem*), whither all abominable and shameful things flow together and are celebrated. Therefore first those who confessed [that they were Christians], then, through their information, a huge multitude was guilty, not so much through the charge of arson as *on account of the hatred of the human race* (*odio generis humani*), and as they were dying, sport was added, so that, covered with the skins of wild beasts, they perished through the mangling of dogs or, nailed to crosses, were set on fire and, when the day was done, were burned to illumine the night. Nero had offered his gardens for this show and was giving a chariot race, even standing on his chariot, mingling with the crowd. Hence pity arose (although towards guilty ones and those who had deserved the severest penalties), as though they were being destroyed not in the public interest, but for the cruelty of a single person."¹⁾

1) An Italian scholar, Carlo Pascal, in 1923 actually asserted that the Christians started the fire. I consulted a special work: Dr. E. Th. Klette, Tuebingen, 1907: *Die Christenkatastrophe unter Nero, nach den Quellen, insbesondere nach Tacitus' Ann. XV, 41 sqq.* He says, p. 117: "*Die von den Juden geschuerte allgemeine Verfehtheit der Christen in sittlicher und religioeser Beziehung, die wir bei Tacitus betont finden und durch welche die Christen fuer Nero zu Opfern empfohlen sein moechten, hat nach spaeterer vielfaeltiger Erfahrung fuer die Auffassung der zu Gericht sitzenden Staatswuerdentraeger ihren zusammenfassenden Ausdruck stets in dem Namen 'Christianus' gefunden.*" Klette also cites from Roman Law, *Paulus, Sententia*, V, 211: "*Qui sacra impia nocturnave obcantarent, defegerint, fecerint faciendave curaverint aut crucibus suffiguntur aut bestiis obiciuntur, vel, si honestiores sunt, capito puniuntur. Magicae artis conscios summo supplicio adfici placuit, id est, bestiis obici, aut crucibus suffigi, ipsi autem magi vivi exuruntur.*"

But let us turn to Pliny, the proconsul of Bithynia, and his report to the Emperor Trajan (*Epp.*, X, 96) about 112 A. D., according to Fynes Clinton, *Fasti Romani*, 1844, still the most eminent authority for all scholars. This official letter of Pliny affords the best insight into the awful position of the Christians now available from ancient tradition. We hear of "the shameless practises connected with the name" (*flagitia coherentia nomini*) as something familiar to all. Those who persisted in calling themselves Christians he ordered to be led away to execution. "Those who denied that they were, or had been, Christians, when, at my reciting the formula to them (*praeunte me*), they called upon the gods and worshiped your image, which on that account I had ordered to be brought in with the images of the gods with incense and wine, and besides cursed Christ, none of which it is said those can be forced to do who really are Christians, I thought should be acquitted." . . . "All both worshiped your image and the figures (*simulacra*) of the gods and cursed Christ. They stated that this had been the sum of their guilt or error: that they had been accustomed to meet before daybreak and to recite a chant to Christ in turn (*invicem, antiphony?*) as to a god and pledge themselves by an oath, not to some crime, but not to commit theft or robbery or adultery, not to break their word, not to deny a deposit entrusted to them; having done this, they had been accustomed to withdraw and to meet again for taking food (the *ἀγάπη?*), general, however, and harmless; and this itself they had ceased to do after my edict, by which, according to your order, I had forbidden such clubs" (*hetaerias*, in the quotation from Paulus, *Sententia*, above). "The more necessary I considered it to inquire from two female servants (*ancillis*) who were called *deaconesses* (*ministrae*) what truth there was even by torture. I found nothing but wicked and immoderate superstition. Thereupon postponing the inquiry, I resorted to consulting you. For the matter seemed worthy of consultation, especially on account of the number of those who are in danger. For many, of every age, of every social class, also of both sexes, are called to trial and will be called. For the contagion of that superstition has spread not only through towns, but also through villages and the open country, which, it seems, can be checked and corrected. Certainly it is a fact that the temples, almost deserted, have begun to be attended, and the stated forms of worship (*sacra sollemnia*) long abandoned, are again resorted to, and the pasturing of sacrificial animals has a market, of which until now only a very rare purchaser was found."

IV.

In a way, the persecution of the Christians never ceased after the conflagration of Rome, 64 A. D. To acknowledge the *Name* was enough. Slaves, women, and children were put to the torture to prove the unspeakable charges against the Christians (Justin, *Second Apol-*

ogy, chap. 12), charges that they ate human flesh in their services, practised sexual profligacy in the dark, — while the pagan world recited the legends of Zeus and Ganymede. (Of Hadrian and Antinous and the cult of the latter I will be silent.) Justin was thoroughly familiar with Plato, with Aristotle, with the Stoics. I turn to St. Paul, Rom. 1, 19: *Τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ φανερόν ἐστιν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς*; all men had in their very consciousness an intimation of eternal truth. The term *λόγος ἀπερματικός* occurs in Justin, a term coined by the Stoics, to whom perhaps Justin belonged before he became a Christian; cf. also Justin, *Second Apology*, 14: *διὰ τὸ ἐν τῇ φύσει τῇ τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὸ γνωστικὸν καλοῦ καὶ αἰσχροῦ*. — His general culture is Hellenic; he calls the gospels *τὰ ἀπομνημονεύματα τῶν ἀποστόλων*, quotes from Xenophon Hercules at the parting of the ways, compares Socrates with Christ, cites Plato (*Timaeus*, 28, 1) verbatim (*Second Apology*, 10): *τὸν δὲ πατέρα καὶ δημιουργὸν (creator) πάντων οὐδ' εὐρεῖν ἕξειν οὐδ' εὐρόντα εἰς πάντα εἰπεῖν ἀσφαλές*. Like St. John (1, 1) he consistently calls Christ the *Λόγος*. His critique of Stoicism is keen and true. The Christians were called atheists. (*Second Apology*, 3.)

But let us now take up the main point of this study: the actual services of the Christians, as described by their defender, the former philosopher Justin of Sichem.

First, *Baptism* (*First Apology*, 61). Justin calls it an act of regeneration. "All those who are convinced and believe that the things taught and stated by us are true and who promise that they are able to lead such a life are taught to pray amid fasting for forgiveness of their former sins, we joining in their prayer and their fasting. Then they are led by us to where there is water, and in the mode of regeneration, in which we ourselves were regenerated, they are regenerated; in the name of God the Father and Lord of all and our Savior Jesus Christ they then perform the bath in the water." Justin then cites John 3, 3—5 (in substantial agreement with our text, but not verbatim): "If ye are not born again, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven, and that it is impossible that those who have been born once should enter into the wombs of those who bore them is clear to all." Justin also cites Is. 1, 16—20, almost exactly like the Septuagint, with some slight changes in quotation. Further on he explains the use of the names of the Trinity in connection with the act of baptism: "and in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and in the name of the Holy Ghost, who through the prophets foretold everything concerning Jesus, is the illumined baptized."

In an excursus on the name of God, Justin cites Matt. 11, 27 almost verbatim: *Οὐδεις ἔγνω τὸν πατέρα εἰ μὴ ὁ υἱός, οὐδὲ τὸν υἱὸν εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ καὶ οἱς ἂν ἀποκαλύψῃ ὁ υἱός*. (Then follows a digression on Moses and the fiery bush.) Now (chap. 65) Justin takes up the ad-

ministration of the *Lord's Supper*: "And we, after bathing him who has been convinced and enrolled with us, bring him to those who are called brethren, where they are gathered together, having made joint prayer on behalf of ourselves and him who has been illumined and all others everywhere earnestly (*εὐτόνως*) that, having learned the truth, we may be deemed worthy of being found good citizens and guardians, by works also, of the things enjoined, that we may have eternal salvation. We greet one another with a kiss, having ended our prayers. Then there is brought to the pastor (*τῷ προσειῶντι*) of the brethren bread and a drinking-cup of water and mixed wine (*κράματος*), and he, having received it, utters praise and glory to the Father of all through the name of the Son and the Holy Ghost and sends up abundant thanks for having been deemed worthy of these things. When he has completed the prayers and the thank-offering, all the people present utter a blessing, saying, 'Amen.' Amen in the Hebrew tongue means, 'May it come to pass' (*γένοιτο*)! When the pastor has uttered thanks and all the people have spoken a blessing, the men called deacons with us let each of those present share in the blessed bread and wine and water, and they bring it to those who are not present."

Chap. 66: "And this food is called with us *Eucharist*, of which no other one is allowed to partake than he who believes that that is true which is taught by us and who, having been bathed for the remission of sins and regeneration, lives as Christ taught. For not as common bread nor common drink do we take these things, but just as Jesus Christ, having become incarnate through the Word of God, assumed flesh and blood for our salvation, thus also we were taught that the food blessed through the prayer of the Word, by which our flesh and blood are nourished by way of a change (*κατὰ μεταβολήν*), are both the flesh and the blood of Jesus made flesh. For the apostles, in the records made by them, which are called gospels (*εὐαγγέλια*), have handed down that it was thus commanded to them²⁾ that Jesus, having taken bread, having rendered thanks, said: 'Do this for My remembrance; this is My body'; and likewise, having taken the cup and rendered thanks, said: 'This is My blood,' and that He shared [the cup] with them alone." . . .

Chap. 67: "As for the rest, we always remind one another of these things, and those of us who are well to do (*οἱ ἔχοντες*), aid all the remaining ones, and we always associate together (*σύνεσμεν*). And in all our offerings we praise the Creator of all through His Son Jesus Christ and through the Holy Ghost. And on the so-called Day of the Sun a meeting takes place of those who live in cities or in the open country, and the gospels of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as [time] permits. Then, when the reader has ended,

2) Matt. 26, 26 ff.; Mark 14, 22 ff.; Luke 22, 19 ff.

the pastor (*ὁ προεστώς*) delivers a reminding (*νουθεσία*) and exhortation (*πρόκλησις*) for the imitation of these noble [texts]. Then we all jointly rise and utter a prayer. And as we said before, when we have ended our prayer, bread and wine and water are offered, and the pastor sends up prayer and thanks to the extent of his ability, and the people render thanks by uttering the amen, and the distribution and sharing from what has been blessed is made to every one and through the deacons to those who are not present. Of those who are well to do and are willing each according to his purpose gives what he wills, and what is gathered is deposited with the pastor, and he aids the orphans and the widows, and those who are left [at home] from sickness or for any other cause, and to those who are in prison, and to strangers who are sojourning there; and altogether he becomes a caretaker (*κηδεμών*) for those who are in want.

"On the Day of the Sun we all jointly hold our meeting, since it is the first day in which God, having changed darkness and matter [chaos], created the world and Jesus Christ, our Savior, rose from the dead on the same day; for on the day before the Day of Saturn they crucified Him, and on the day after the Day of Saturn, which is the Day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them those things which we have presented to you, too, for your examination."

All this helps us to visualize conditions as they existed in the primitive Christian Church, when, on the foundation laid by Jesus and the apostles, earnest, consecrated followers of our Lord, labored zealously to extend His everlasting kingdom.

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Die chronologische Reihenfolge der Weissagungen im Buche Jeremias'.

Obgleich alle Bücher des Alten Testaments, was die göttliche Eingebung betrifft, auf gleicher Stufe stehen, so unterscheidet man doch mit Recht zwischen verschiedenen Klassen von Büchern und zwischen einzelnen Büchern, sowohl was Wichtigkeit des Inhalts als auch was Schönheit, Erhabenheit und Einfluß gewisser Schriften anlangt. So steht unter den historischen Büchern die Genesis mit Recht obenan, unter den poetischen der Psalter und unter den prophetischen Jesaias. Unmittelbar nach Jesaias aber folgt, wie das auch die Anordnung der großen Propheten von alters her gibt, der Prophet Jeremias.

Der zweite große Prophet des Alten Bundes zieht mit Recht die Aufmerksamkeit vieler Schriftforscher auf sich, da sein Buch so viele Eigentümlichkeiten enthält, die ihm einen besonderen Reiz verleihen, die immer wieder zu neuem Studium anspornen. Wenn man die theo-