

THOU SHALT NOT KILL

It has been said that the difference between man and other animals is that other animals must kill each other in order to live while men can provide for themselves without swallowing or chewing up one another. This statement is not exactly true, for few animals practice the art of consuming the members of their own species. Lions do not usually eat up lions. They eat up smaller animals. Whales do not usually digest other whales, they inhale other smaller fish. Few are the lower animals who will like the shark, eat not only other members of their own species, but who will eat their own intestines when they are exposed. Most animals are quite humane where their own species is concerned. They are only murderers where they are related to OTHER species of live beings.

It would seem to me that men are no more moral than most other animals when it comes to murdering. For while we usually try to avoid killing each other, we nevertheless find it easy to kill all kinds of fish including the biggest of them like the whale. We take great glee in bagging a lion or an elephant. We think that cows are born to decorate our dinner plates in cooked form. For us the gobbling of a turkey ~~is/put/~~ ~~d/sweet/dall/vp/dlyder~~ calls to mind a gleaming hatchet and a certain dish which goes with cranberry sauce. Of course, there are some animals we do not kill, like the cat or the dog, These animals we merely make our slaves. or the horse.

The greatest sin of man, however, is that he is really the shark of his own species. He not only kills animals smaller than himself and other than himself, man also turns upon his own species from time to time, and even destroys himself on occasion. I am not speaking now of the social doctrine of justified capital punishment, wherein a person who has killed another person is himself sentenced to death by society. This type of killing, the punishment of the hardened criminal, can perhaps be accepted on moral grounds. I say, perhaps, because there are many people who believe that ~~even capital punishment~~ two murders do not make right one. At least 2 nations in the world have outlawed capital punishment. It is possible, however, to make out a case justifying capital punishment, and when we speak of the ~~first~~ commandment "THOU SHALT NOT MURDER", it is to be interpreted as permitting the exercise of capital punishment.

Since the ancient Hebrews did not have a strong centralized govt., and since they did not have well-guarded and well-kept penitentiaries, they felt that a person guilty of premeditated murder must inevitably be put to death. In the context of their society, then, the commandment ~~is~~ must be interpreted as referring to matters other than capital punishment.

Did the Biblical Hebrews believe that war

In the context of the ancient society, the command meant specifically that no man ~~must~~ be permitted to lie in wait for his neighbor; no man ~~must~~ be permitted to strike another man with such force or with such an instrument which might possibly put a person to death.

If this be true, we might all ask, why ^{about} war? War is a mass situation, where two groups of men lie in wait for each other, with the avowed purpose of destroying each other. Does the commandment outlaw war? The answer is the same as we first gave to the question on capital punishment. The Biblical Society rejected the ~~moral~~ concept of an aggressive war, but justified defensive war; that is to say, they ~~held~~ ^{agreed} that those who first murdered, ~~must~~ themselves be destroyed. A wrong, according to the ancient semitics, had to be punished. According to the story of Cain and Able, the very earth itself cried out for the avenging of the blood of Able.

Yet with its strange foreshadowing of higher ethical concepts, the Biblical story of Cain and Able tells us that God did not destroy the murderer Cain, he merely caused him to suffer. Cain did not receive the sentence of capital punishment. And after the development of the Hebrew monarchy under David and Solomon, there arose a new attitude towards war and punishment as magnificently expressed by the Literary Prophets.

וְהָיָה חֶרֶב לְכָל הָאָרֶץ וְכָל הָאָרֶץ תִּשְׁלַח חֶרֶב says the Prophet Isaiah, "Behold the days come, sayeth the Lord, when men shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their swords into pruning-hooks". The Prophets went beyond Moses and those who originally framed the 10 commandments. The Prophets claimed that war as a means of solving international disputes was outdated, whether it was an offensive or a defensive war. We know that the Prophet Jeremiah was thrown into prison for preaching among his countrymen the vanity of oppressing the Babylonians with force of arms.

We know also that the Prophets opposed the harsh punishing of those who had committed major crimes. Said the Prophets, Do not permit your neighbor to be wronged; do not follow him in his doing wrong; and do not hasten to punish him when he has done wrong. It would seem that there is ~~not greater/prd~~ ^{no more} better practical attitude towards life than this-1) first, - Do everything possible to prevent a wrong from being committed; 2) Do not follow the crowds in committing evil; 3) Have mercy upon and show understanding to those who have done wrong. ~~That is to say -~~ ^{punish in measure - but don't destroy the person wrong - just}

This new attitude of the Prophets towards the use of punishment and force, is not the attitude of the Pacifist. The Prophets did not say that ~~there is no conceivable situation in which war as a defense was not justified.~~ ^{say peace at any time} But they did say that adult nations must operate without the use of arms. The Prophets did not say that ~~the wrong must not be punished;~~ ^{let the criminal go free} they did say that a man must be taught to do rightly, and he must be led to the right way. He must be punished but not destroyed,

but with understanding & w/ faith in his repentance

Each new age bring with it a different interpretation of the command, THOU SHALT NOT KILL. The Mohammedans expressed believed in the 10 commandments, yet when their faith was sweeping across Asia and Africa, they did not hesitate to kill those who refused to accept the faith. The Christians express belief in the 10 commandments, yet the Bishop of Spain, did not hesitate to cut off tens of thousands of Jewish heads in the 15th century, and the Crusaders thought less of a live Jew than they did of a chicken.

The Jews under Jashua did not hesitate to invade Jericho and the other cities of Canaan, destroying a few Canaanites in the process. Yet in later days, we find the Prophets arguing against the possible gains even from defensive warfare in some situations. Today in ^{the} world dominated by Judae-Christians concepts, we find an astonishing number of minister calling for an offensive war; we find an amazing number of cabinet members urging the dropping of just a few atomic bombs. When ~~but~~ these pious Christian gentlemen speak of turning the other cheek, what they mean is turning the cheek of other peoples inside out with a sharp cleaver.

If we want to understand this commandment or any of the commandments, we must first come to know that these were ^{originally} basic ~~rules/laws~~ requirements for a stable and a peaceful society. Murder was prohibited simply because society could not be ordered and meaningful if people went around ^{clubbing} ~~taking~~ swinging at each other. A man with an arrow in his back could not sow seed and make shoes. Stealing was prohibited because a stable accounting of property is one of the minimum necessities for constructive living.

We who wish a stable and meaningful society in our own day would do well to bear in mind the reasons ^{behind} the early development of the 10 commandments. If we want to live lives ^{in the absence of fear} where our sons can plan their futures without ^{the threat of} ~~being conscripted~~ into the army, we must set up a decalogue for our own day. We must insist as the Prophets insisted that INTERNATIONAL DISPUTES be settled over the conference table. We must deflate our own leaders who claim that the big stick is the prerequisite to all int. understanding, just as the Prophets pointed the finger at the Jewish kings of their own day who allied themselves with the military and the land barons. With the military budget climbing by the billions, with taxes ~~increasing~~ tightening around our necks, we look in vain for a clearing of the int. storm clouds. Instead we are told that with all our billions spent we are losing the air war in a land ~~ten~~ five thousand miles from our shores. More and more and more cry those who believe that man must feast upon man in order to survive. Some of us are getting a little tired of this ^{bill of fare} ~~bill of~~ fare which is being served to us. It looks too much like murder-slightly done over. It becomes meaningless to us ~~whichever~~ ^{unaware} who is doing the killing, we only know that we have been sucked into

after all a man is not a chicken.

a whirlwind process which has no ending; which mounts ever higher in intensity; and ^{which} calls for less and less thinking on our part; ~~more and more~~ ^{we take the} ~~perfective action;~~ ^{summarizing man.} kill or be killed; kill, kill, kill-until we ~~are~~ ourselves have destroyed whatever was in us that was worthwhile, and like the shark we gnaw at our own intestines even while we die.

It is clear that we must

^{find} a new meaning for the ~~first~~ ^{sixth} commandment in our own day. If we have the courage to resist the surging current of our times, it may be that we shall form the highest interpretation of the commandment, and ~~thus~~ ~~make~~ ~~all~~ ~~the~~ ~~suffering~~ ~~and~~ ~~the~~ ~~murders~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~past~~ ~~ten~~ ~~years~~ It has happened before, that out of ~~evil~~ the most despicable evil has been born the greatest good. Perhaps we shall be the mid-wife, and not the grave-digger.

The ~~subject~~ ^{problem} lies before us as it lay before Moses & the Prophets & the Rabbis. - The question - How to defuse the ~~6th~~ commandments woven into the fabric of the world -

What did God mean when He wrote upon the tablet of the human heart לֹא תִּרְצַח - Thou shalt not kill!