
The Mentality of Murder

Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer (I Jn. 3:15).

The world's first murder grew out of a religious controversy. The basic facts of the story are so familiar that we need not recount them in detail. Suffice it to say that:

1. Cain loved God.
2. Cain did not love his brother.

This simple observation provides us with insight into one of the most serious problems ever dealt with upon the pages of human history.

Cain tried to please God without the benefit of humanitarian concern. He built his altar and went through the rituals of his religion, but he did not love his brother. He was deeply disturbed when God did not respect his offering, and he apparently blamed Abel more than himself for his difficulty.

The Scriptures remark, "And Cain talked with Abel" The fact that this conversation was a prelude to murder lends weight to the assumption that it was a heated religious controversy. On this point Adam Clarke remarks in his commentary on Genesis:

It is here supposed that the first murder committed in the world was the consequence of a religious dispute; however, this may have been, millions since have been sacrificed to prejudice, bigotry and intolerance. Here, certainly, originated the many-headed monster,

religious persecution; the spirit of the wicked one in his followers impels them to afflict and destroy all those who are partakers of the Spirit of God. Every persecutor is a legitimate son of the old murderer. This is the first triumph of Satan; it is not merely a death that he has introduced, but a violent one, as the first-fruits of sin. It is not the death of an ordinary person, but of the most holy man then in being; it is not brought about by the providence of God, or by a gradual failure and destruction of the earthly fabric, but by a violent separation of body and soul; it is not done by a common enemy, from whom nothing better could be expected, but by the hand of a brother, and for no other reason but because the object of his envy was more righteous than himself. . . (p. 60).

There are many aspects of this story that are too elusive to warrant dogmatism. Did Cain feel destined to be the "seed of woman" who would crush the serpent's head? Did his bloodless offering indicate that he had no awareness of sin? Did he murder his brother in a fit of carnal jealousy or in a "righteous" attempt to preserve his sacred prerogatives as the firstborn in the family? I presume that even the statement in Hebrews 11:4 regarding the faith of Abel will be subjected by some to various interpretations.

But there can be no misunderstanding about the necessity of love!

For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning that we should love one another. Not as Cain who was of that wicked one and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous (I Jn. 3:11-12).

Jesus seemed to make an association between the death of Abel and the religious martyrdom of other righteous men.

Wherefore, behold I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify, and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things will come upon this generation (Matt. 23:34-36).

It is sobering to realize that religious men can have a mentality of murder. Jesus Himself was crucified by religious men. Jesus was crucified by students of the Scriptures, and even more significant — the death of Jesus was directly attributable to strong religious convictions.

The Jews said to Pilate: "We have a *law*, and by our law he ought to die . . ." (Jn. 19:7).

The High Priest said: ". . . it is expedient for us, that one man

should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not" (Jn. 11:50).

The murderers of Jesus were undeniably religious. They paid their tithes, they uttered their prayers — they were diligent in their duties at the temple — *but they did not love humanity!*

They devoured widows' houses and for a pretense made long prayers. They ignored their parents under the ruse of being super-religious. They placed more value upon a regulation than upon a person. *Like Cain of old they made the fatal mistake of trying to love God without loving humanity!*

Jesus once predicted that His disciples would be put to death in a fervor of religious devotion. He said:

They shall put you out of the synagogue: Yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service (Jn. 16:2).

Someone has observed that there is but a short step between being willing to die for a cause and being willing to kill for it. How aptly this principle is illustrated in the life of Paul. Note these remarks by Paul and consider their direct association with his zeal for God:

I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was *zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prison both men and women. As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem for to be punished (Acts 22:3-5).*

The disciples of Jesus had little to fear from the publicans, the harlots — but much to fear from an overly religious man like Paul.

I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which things I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities . . . (Acts 26:9).

Lest you think this course of action inconsistent with his religious convictions, let me remind you that in spite of the blood

letting and torture Paul declared; "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1).

The cure for this murderous mentality came with the process of conversion when the *Love* of Christ constrained him so that he could no longer look at a man from a human point of view (II Cor. 5:14-21). The Spirit of Jesus does not incite us to murder our fellow men.

The mentality of murder is not the exclusive property of any particular religious party or sect. It is a commodity within the grasp of anyone who is capable of hate. It is not something uncommon or rare, but it is everywhere around us . . . and perhaps even within us. One of its most hellish characteristics is that it frequently rears its ugly head under the guise of "doing God a service." However, no matter how it appears *it is always wrong! It is diametrically opposed to the teachings of Jesus!*

The sermon on the Mount pronounces a blessing upon the meek

the merciful

and the pure in heart.

"Blessed are the peacemakers . . ." said the Prince of Peace, "for they shall be called the children of God." Away with hatred and the desire to retaliate —

"turn the other cheek"

"go the second mile"

"love your enemies"

"bless them that curse you"

"do good to them that hate you"

"pray for them that despitefully use you
and persecute you."

There is no argument against love! And this was to be the cardinal characteristic of the Christian. "*By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another!*"

Whoso hateth his brother is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him (I Jn. 3:15).

Lest anyone should think that the followers of Jesus are somehow immune to the mentality of murder, allow me to briefly review the first century or so following the Protestant Reformation.

Reading these next few pages will require a measure of discipline. No attempt has been made to embellish what happened with a veneer of respectability or reason. What

happened was not reasonable. Those who struggle through the unvarnished truth about "Christian Wars" will find themselves beset by a mixture of incredulity and nausea. In reality the situation was worse than words are able to convey.

Someone has said, "Those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it." Perhaps the shocking truth about "Christian hate" will play some positive role in preventing the "mentality of murder" from dominating your heart.

The majority of the following has been condensed from *A Manual of Church History* by Albert Henry Newman, Vol. II, Philadelphia, The American Baptist Publication Society.

Read . . . and weep!

Peasants War 1524-1525

Hans Muller, experienced warrior and orator, led 1200 peasants to Waldshut on August 24. Here under the great reformer, Balthasar Hubmaier, an "Evangelical Brotherhood" was formed. Believing that the clergy would only perpetuate taxation and oppression, they vowed to destroy all castles, monasteries and everything ecclesiastical.

A fanatical peasant leader named Munzer claimed that the sword of Gideon was in his hand and was said to have hysterically shrieked to his followers:

On, on, on, never mind the wail of the godless. Though they beg in friendly tones, though they cry and whimper like children, pity not. Was it not thus that God commanded his people to slay the Canaanites? On, on, while the fire is hot. Down with the castles and their inmates. God is with you, on, on.

Luther wrote against these murderous and pillaging bands of peasants in language as beserk as that of Munzer: He urged that they be:

crushed, strangled, and stabbed, privately and publicly, by whomsoever can do it, just as one would beat to death a mad dog. The magistracy that falters, commits sin; since it does not satisfy the peasants to belong to the devil themselves, but they constrain many pious people to their wickedness and damnation. Therefore, dear sirs, fire here, save here, stab, smite, strangle them, whoever can. If your death results, very well, you can never attain to a more blessed death.

(It is shocking to realize that such words could come from anyone, but especially a man who had just completed a translation of the Bible.)

Leonard Fries, secretary of the City of Wurzburg, compiled a documentary history describing the deluge of blood. He said:

In the German nation alone more than 100,000 men were overwhelmed and perished in this deluge in less than ten weeks.

Sacking of Rome and Imprisonment of the Pope, 1527

Approximately 11,000 desperate and adventurous Lutherans under Frundsberg crossed the Alps and joined a somewhat smaller Spanish army under the Duke of Bourbon. The army forced its way into the city losing scarcely a hundred men while slaying from four to six thousand. The Pope escaped for a time to the castle of St. Angelo. Some of the cardinals were seized and dragged through the city. Church leaders payed some 15 million ducats ransom to be spared. Churches, including St. Peters, were turned into stables and the Pope became the instrument of the Emperor.

Second War Between the Emperor and the King of France 1527-1529

As Rome was being sacked Henry VIII of England and Francis I of France were forming a military coalition against the Emperor. Henry sought to enlist the good favor of the Pope for he had wanted to divorce his wife, Catherine, who was the Emperor's aunt. The war terminated in 1529 with the Treaty of Cambray, and Henry had secured favorable promises from the Pope regarding his divorce from Catherine, promises which the Pope was unable to keep.

Origin of Protestantism

After the peace of Cambray the Emperor, the Pope and the King of France united their efforts at the Diet of Speier (1529), determined to use drastic measures to restore the strength of the Catholic Church. Thus it was enacted that:

... rebaptizers and rebaptized, all and each, male and female, of intelligent age, be judged and brought from natural life to death, without antecedent inquisition of the spiritual judges.

The reformers responded that "Christ was again in the hands of Caiaphas and Pilate." On April 25, 1529, a protestation was made against this decree and Protestantism became a formal reality.

Invasion of the Turks

Immediately after the Diet of Speier and the declaration of war between the Catholics and the Protestants, the followers of Mohammed mustered 150,000 troops, conquered the Hungarian army of Ferdinand and arrived at Vienna on September 26. It was an imposing army with 22,000 camels, oriental pomp and the unmistakable air of religious fanaticism. The invasion of the Mohammedans had a unifying effect on "Christendom" and thousands rallied to defeat the Turks who disbanded on October 14.

Strong Disagreement Among the Protestants

On April 22, 1529 the Protestants vowed a united resistance to all opposition on the basis of the divine word. Unity plans, however, were thwarted by Luther who attributed the teachings of Zwingli to the devil. He denounced the followers of Zwingli as "devils, knaves, heretics, rioters, dissemblers, hypocrites, etc." Chief among the areas of disagreement was the Lord's Supper. Luther insisted that the expression, "This is my body," be taken literally; Zwingli interpreted it symbolically. Luther considered that to unite with people who strive against the sacrament would be "to meet damnation with body and soul." He concluded that the whole of God's army would be destroyed for the sake of one Achan.

First Cappel War 1529

The Cappel wars in Switzerland were distinctly religious and were fought between the Roman Catholics and the followers of Zwingli. Zwingli was more militant than Luther. The burning of a Zwinglian preacher at Schwyz precipitated the confrontation. Conflict was averted through the entreaties of a weeping mediary who pleaded for delay and negotiations.

Second Cappel War 1531

The evangelical zeal of the Zwinglians was seen by the Catholics as a violation of earlier agreements. Evangelical preachers were denounced as cup thieves and soul murderers. The smouldering flames of hatred erupted in October, 1531 and 8,000 Catholics took the offensive. Zwingli could only muster 1500 soldiers. His pitiful army was destroyed and Zwingli was killed. His body was cut to pieces and burned, and his ashes were mingled with those of swine and scattered to the wind.

The Schmalkald War and the Peace of Augsburg 1546-1555

During the years 1532-1546 Lutheranism flourished as never before. The first indication of serious trouble came in 1542 when war broke out between two Saxon houses over the collection of taxes for the Turkish War. At about the same time Duke Henry of Braunschweig sought to punish the city of Goslar for anti-catholic measures and was himself attacked by troops led by the Landgrave of Hesse. The Duke was defeated, and Catholic altars and other sacred objects were stolen or destroyed. It was now evident to Catholic leaders that Protestantism would have to be stopped, and after several years of preparation Duke Henry was again back in the field with an army of 13,500 men (Sept., 1545). A conference in January, 1546 at Regensburg demonstrated again the irreconcilable differences between Protestants and Catholics of that age and by July, 1546 a formal declaration of war was made. The emperor wished the war to be political, but the Pope proclaimed a crusade against the heretics and offered indulgences to all who would participate. The Protestants were summarily defeated, and the Pope was faced with the problem of how to deal with elements of Christendom which denied many aspects of the Catholic faith. While wrestling with this problem storm clouds again appeared upon the horizon, but this time the Pope was at odds with the Emperor. In November, 1551 war again broke out and continued intermittently until the Augsburg Treaty on September 25, 1555. While the treaty offered some hope of peace between Catholics and Lutherans, both still remained adamant against Zwinglians, Calvinists and Anabaptists.

Murders at Geneva

Thus far we have spoken of Lutheranism and Zwinglianism. Now it is time to deal with the teachings of Calvin which had a tendency to draw strength from the followers of both Luther and Zwingli. Calvin began his works at Geneva in 1536. He became so dogmatic and intolerant that he exterminated opposition by force.

No mercy was shown to enemies of the theocracy. New methods of torture were introduced, and the obstinate were given to understand that unless they yielded 'they would end their days in torment'. A system of espionage was introduced to prevent secret transgression. Informers shared in the fines imposed, and the

testimony of children against parents was freely received. During the years 1542-1546, 58 executions occurred and 76 were banished. During the pestilence of 1545, 34 women were burned or quartered on suspicion of spreading the plague by magical means . . . (p. 220).

Calvin's most famous murder was that of a Roman Catholic named Michael Servetus. From 1546-1553 Servetus carried on a correspondence with Calvin wherein he greatly irritated the great theologian by harshly criticizing his religious views and by raising difficult questions. At last Calvin sent him a copy of his "Institutes" indicating that they contained a full statement of his views. When Servetus returned this sacred work, he had made many notations of disagreement. Calvin stormed, "There is hardly a page that is not defiled by his vomit."

Though Servetus believed that Jesus was God manifest in the flesh, and though he had unbounded reverence for the Scriptures, he was condemned as a heretic and burned at the stake on October 27, 1553. With rare courage he refused to withdraw his objectionable teachings, and after writhing in the flames for half an hour, cried aloud, "Jesus, thou Son of the eternal God, have compassion upon me," and then gave up the ghost.

The leading reformers of Germany and Switzerland heartily commended Calvin and the Genevan Council for ridding the world of one who was regarded as an arch enemy of the truth.

Huguenot Wars 1560 and Onward

Indicative of the bloodshed in this period is the infamous St. Bartholomew's massacre on the night of August 24, 1572 when 70,000 Protestants were murdered in a single night. There was great rejoicing in Rome, and the Pope sent congratulations to the King and Queen and struck a medal in commemoration of the event. Halley's Bible Handbook indicates that there were 200,000 martyrs before the Edict of Nantes brought the conflict to an end in 1598.

War of Independence In the Netherlands

Since 1536 strong measures were used to stop heresy. These measures were intensified in 1567 by the arrival of the Duke of Alva. Opposition to heresy escalated until Alva called a council and declared that heresy was high treason. This council is also

called "The Council of Blood." Eighteen thousand were executed. The conflict continued intermittently until 1648 when the complete independence of the Protestant Netherlands was recognized.

Thirty Years War 1618-1648

It is obvious from even a brief overview of history that there never was a time of real peace among the "Christian" people of Europe for many generations. By 1618 the assassinations, executions and intrigue again escalated into full scale conflict. The Thirty Years War has been described as one of the most destructive wars in history. Newman observes:

The extent of the destruction of life through the Thirty Years War cannot be estimated. If we take into account the multitudes who died of starvation and exposure, the hundreds of thousands of women and children who were slain in the sacking and destroying of towns and cities, the fearful waste of life that must have been involved in camp-following, the deaths caused by the war would amount to many millions. In Bohemia at the beginning of the war there was a population of two million of whom about eight-tenths were Protestant; at the close of the war there were about 800,000 Catholics and no Protestants. Taking Germany and Austria together, we may safely say that the population was reduced by one half if not by two thirds . . . (p. 410).

An army of 40,000 was said to have had a loathsome camp-following of 140,000. As this miserable coalition moved across the countryside, it destroyed everything within its path. Business and agriculture were virtually non-existent and desolation was everywhere. Many of those who did not die in war were doomed by starvation and disease.

The Peace of Westphalia 1648

With this brief background the Peace of Westphalia can be seen in its proper perspective. Peace had become an expedient. Survival demanded that religious antagonists be willing to live and let live. The desire to proselyte became all but extinct for a blessed interval of time. Europe could no longer afford the luxury of intolerance. It had destroyed nations, made desolate the countryside and decimated humanity. For the survival of civilization there was no alternative but peace. Religious convictions, strong though they were, were overshadowed by the realization that continued conflict was suicide.

Application for Us

One cannot help but wonder if dire circumstances do not again warrant a change in our mentality. The Christian world is rent and torn by incredible strife yet, "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes" (Prov. 16:2). There is not one faction within the framework of Christendom that is immune to the toxins of suspicion and fear. We have been so preoccupied by internal conflict that we have had little energy left for world evangelism. Thus our planet is crawling with some 3 billion souls who have no saving knowledge of Jesus. We are plagued by starvation, disease, hatred and war. The nations of our world march onward toward a nuclear Armageddon and the church can no longer indulge itself in the luxury of hate.

"Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (I Jn. 3:15).

Questions for Discussion — Lesson 6

1. Is there any association between the murder of Abel by Cain and the murder of Jesus by the Jews?
2. How could Paul think he was doing God a service by putting Christians to death?
3. Which side was right in the Peasants' War?
4. What does it mean to be a Protestant?
5. Is there a difference between killing a Mohammedan and killing someone who claims to be a Christian?
6. How is someone who hates his brother a murderer?
7. What do you see in modern Christendom that is like hate?