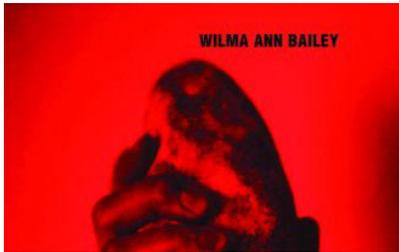
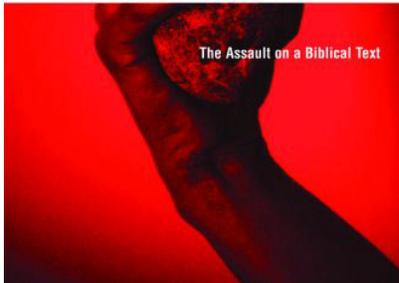


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**“YOU SHALL NOT KILL” OR
“YOU SHALL NOT MURDER”?**



Bailey, Wilma Ann

***“You Shall Not Kill” or “You Shall Not Murder”?:
The Assault on a Biblical Text***

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Bailey has done the laity a service by her investigations into the sixth commandment. This short work is packed with relevant material into the nature of the prohibition against murder. The thesis of Bailey’s work is that over the years Protestant translations of the Hebrew Bible have mistranslated רצח. She contends that the prohibition of Exod 20:13 should read “You shall not kill” rather than “You shall not murder.”

The book is divided into six short chapters with two equally short appendices. Chapter 1, “You Shall Not Kill,” is devoted to explaining Bailey’s thesis. She builds her case by examining the *legal* difference between “to kill” and “to murder.” Sources adduced include the *Oxford English Dictionary* and various state legal statutes to differentiate between רצח and הרג. At the heart of Bailey’s thesis is that רצח should not be considered a parallel to the English word “murder” because the latter is a legal term (6). Bailey then undertakes a “brief” study of the semantic range of רצח. Here Bailey appears uncomfortable with the theological import of “cities of refuge” (and the rationale behind them) as well as capital case law (e.g., Exod 21). In attempting to bolster her defense Bailey summarizes both “pro-killing and anti-killing traditions” in the Bible. (20). The appeal of Bailey is clear: one should abide only by the “higher ethical principles” than the so-called “killing traditions” associated with the Hebrew Bible. However, when one

examines the ethical import of what she describes as “killing traditions,” one cannot help but notice that Yahweh gives rationale behind the taking of life. In the Hebrew Bible Yahweh at times does use fallen humanity to carry out his judgments (both symbolically by active prophecy and literally by war or capital punishment). Bailey would have one believe that Yahweh did not sanction the “conquest” of Canaan as depicted in Joshua and Judges. Yet would it not have fit the ancient Near Eastern paradigm better for the Israelites to settle peacefully with their Canaanite neighbors (e.g., Alt and Noth’s theses) than to go to war? An issue that Bailey does not address is an absolute prohibition against killing. Bailey argues forcefully that the sixth commandment is a general prohibition against “killing,” yet this broad term hides her motive. For instance, does a prohibition against “killing” extend to the flora and fauna as well as humanity? We are not told in this study.

The subsequent two chapters survey most Protestant traditions and their interpretation of Exod 20:13. Bailey notes that the King James Version had the word “kill” in the sixth commandment, but in reality a good majority of Protestants actually read it as “murder.” The impetus, according to Bailey, for the move away from “kill” to “murder” was the shifting social norms through the 1960s–1990s. Singled out due to the size of the convention are Southern Baptist attitudes in the choice of words. Bailey paints a picture of Southern Baptists as being antiwar especially in the decade before World War II. What Bailey fails to note is that most denominations were against war of any sort. As a nation America had just been through World War I, and no one had the stomach for any other large conflict. America and the rest of the world (with the exception of Nazi Germany and their allies) wanted no more armed aggression. Bailey argues that during the second half of the twentieth century, especially during the Vietnam War, Southern Baptists radically shifted their stance on armed conflict, particularly with regard to their theological interpretation of Exod 20:13. In this chapter Bailey also surveys African American Baptists and various branches of the Pentecostal movement. Apparently Bailey takes this time to survey the various smaller denominations to serve as a buttress for her argument. Invariably each denomination that Bailey examines is either antiwar/killing or radically antiwar/killing. Bailey closes the chapter by arguing that the shift in terminology came about because of “an argument that רצח applied to only unlawful killings, the close connection (in the United States) between evangelicalism and militarism, a theology that firmly believes in an afterlife, placing belief above practice, and the mainstreaming of the evangelical community” (44). Bailey’s presuppositions are interesting, to say the least; unfortunately, she does not build her case exegetically but rather via supposed vital points of theological exegesis. For instance, her excursus on the interpretation of Gen 9:6 and Rom 13 are cursory at best. This work would be far more valuable if Bailey had devoted

a significant amount of time to textual exegesis in light of her pacifistic hermeneutical leanings.

The third chapter is a survey of “mainline denominational” interpretation of Exod 20:13 (i.e., Presbyterian Church U.S.A.; the Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the American Baptists, United Methodists, the Christian Church [Disciples of Christ], and the United Church of Christ). Bailey notes that these denominations were well entrenched in the government, education, and the military. It was these denominations that were responsible for producing both the RSV and the NRSV in the 1950s and 1980s, respectively. Curiously, the RSV translates רצח as “kill,” whereas the NRSV translates it “murder.” Much like the other Protestant denominations surveyed, the mainline churches actually read “murder” in the place of “kill” in Exod 20:13. Evidently this was a practice reflected early on in many of the commentaries put out by mainline publishing houses. Bailey further surveys both the catechisms and the social gospel movement in relation to her thesis. Likewise, she briefly notes the differing sources in Exod 20 and 21. She rightly points out that critical scholarship often sees two separate sources in Exod 20–21. However, she neglects to note that, while critical scholarship sees different sources present, they also work with the text in the current canonical form (e.g., Childs). One cannot build a case for denying capital punishment simply because it stems from a different source. The proximity of Exod 21 to 20 must mitigate any type of source-critical argument against accepting capital punishment as normative for the ancient Israelites. While Bailey briefly touches on the topic of “just war,” she does not explore or interact with this particularly important theory.

One of the most interesting chapters in this short treatise is her fourth chapter entitled “The Sixth Commandment in Judaism.” Textual traditions, the place of Torah in Judaism, and Jewish interpretation of רצח are all examined in this chapter. Bailey readily admits that among English versions of the Tanak as early as 1917 the sixth commandment was translated as “You shall not murder.” A brief survey of רצח, קטל, and φονεύσεις illuminates for Bailey that Exod 20:13 did not always mean only “murder” in the Jewish tradition. Yet Bailey does not explore why the preponderance of evidence points to the fact that within the Jewish tradition most interpreted the commandment in the very way against which she is arguing. Likewise, it would have been helpful at this juncture to note the broad range of the semantic domain of רצח. For example it would have been helpful to see רצח compared not to just קטל but also to מות, גבה, הרג, שחט, and טבח. In this way one would have a clearer hermeneutical grid from which to work lexically.

The fifth chapter surveys the Roman Catholic interpretation of Exod 20:13, the fifth commandment in this tradition. It should come as no surprise that the Catholic Church has kept the fifth commandment as “You shall not kill.” Bailey buttresses her argument

by appealing to the early church fathers concerning Christian pacifism. Her contention is that the majority of the nonmilitary were pacifists and that a good number of the military shared this view. Interestingly, Bailey gives only a very short paragraph on the church doctrine of “just war” formulated by Augustine. She implies that the reason for the development of just-war theory was to allow the state to go to war and for the Catholic Church to rid itself of troublesome people (73). This facile understanding of just-war theory fails to recognize the struggle early exegetes had with texts from the Hebrew Bible. Likewise, it fails to take into account the *Weltanschauung* from which Augustine developed this fundamental doctrine. Bailey tersely surveys the major authoritative translations for the Catholic Church (e.g., Douay, *Jerusalem Bible*, *New Jerusalem Bible*, and the *New American Bible*) regarding Exod 20:13. A quick review of the catechisms and major Catholic voices attuned to the pacifistic views are also presented.

The sixth chapter is a contextualization of impetus that drives Bailey’s understanding of pacifism. Bailey contends that she “does not live in an ivory tower” (79). She strives to let the reader know that her theology is incorporated with her daily praxis. For Bailey, pacifism is the rubric through which she reads the textual peculiarities of this thorny problem. This chapter simply is an eloquent waxing of why she has brought her thesis to print. The author includes a helpful appendix of Bible translations: either “to kill” or “to murder.” The translations are Protestant, Roman Catholic or Jewish. Lastly, the second appendix is a study of רצח and the meanings appended to the word.

In light of the usage of רצח and its semantic domain I believe that Bailey’s thesis is far from secure. She has not undertaken the necessary steps to rule out the positive uses for the English connotation of “murder.” Likewise, she has not undertaken the exegesis of Exod 21 in relationship to 20 in the broader scheme of state-sanctioned killing in the Pentateuch or the Deuteronomistic History. Make no mistake, Bailey does present a persuasive case for pacifistic understanding of Exod 20:13. However, it seems to me that this thesis is based more upon Yoderian ethics than tight biblical exegesis.