

# THE LAMB'S ARMY IN A STRANGE LAND

Number 4 in a series on "When is the Church fulfilling its mission?"

BY RICHARD J. FOSTER

Only when the Church is providing a *genuine alternative* to the way of the prevailing pagan culture is she fulfilling her mission. We can engage in aggressive evangelism and only fulfill the words of Jesus, "You travel over sea and land to win one convert; and when you have him you make him twice as fit for hell as you are yourselves." (Matthew 23:15 NEB) We can accent a strong social witness and end up nothing more than a religious version of the principalities and powers. We can stress devotion and piety and become "whited sepulchres."

Evangelism, social witness, and devotion all are essential, but they are not enough. Until we *live* an alternative to the world's way, our devotion is idolatry, our social action is organized flesh, our evangelism is for the wrong gods.

## AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE PREVAILING POWER STRUCTURE

The Church is not fulfilling her mission until she says "NO" to the world's games of promotion and authority. We must reject all titles and degrees as designators of status. The reason we do so is because Jesus commanded us to do so: "You are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, for you

have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ." (Matthew 23:8-10 RSV) The modern parallels are obvious—Dr., Professor, Reverend, etc. Human designation does not guarantee the ability, so let us obey Jesus Christ and place our hope only in divine authorization.

We must go beyond verbal gymnastics. We should admit that, in the main, our systems of "recording" are little more than ordination games in another language. We can "approve" rather than "vote" and still resist the Spirit—and also be locked into a form that discriminates against the timid and inarticulate. How easy to reject the language of the power structure and continue to jockey for position!

When the Lamb's people reject the systems of this world and accept the rule of the Lamb alone, then they provide a genuine alternative and so fulfill their mission. To fail to do this will result in baptizing people into another form of manipulation. We are called to a new way. We are called to love one another without qualification. We are called to freely forgive. We are called to receive one another as brothers and sisters!

## AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE PREVAILING IDOLATRY

The Lamb's army must never bow down to the idols of pagan America. The idols are many:

1. *Nationalism*—perhaps the most dangerous of all American idols, precisely because it appears so religious. Always the tendency of nationalism is to confuse theology and government, to give religious respectability to any and all po-

litical acts. In the name of God our nation has slaughtered, napalmed, and destroyed. Watergate is, in part, the result of an uncritical nationalism. The Lamb's people are never to kneel at this altar; the Church is to be a prophetic witness to the State, not a worshiper of the State. We commend the State when just and call it to account when evil. *Never* can we uncritically accept a nation-state, neither ours nor any other—to do so is a form of idolatry.

2. *Racism*—an insidious by-product of nationalism. Racism is the tendency to see "our kind" as somehow better than others. Who is willing to accept as an equal in the righteousness of God anyone who *only* does justice, loves mercy, and walks humbly with his God? (See Micah 6:8.) They somehow seem better if they are like us in ways *other* than these. The Church cannot worship at this altar and be faithful to her mission.

3. *Sexism*—a racism based on sex. There is a foolishness that tries to deny the inferiority of women and still maintain their subordination to men. This attitude is something like this: (a) the woman is in no way inferior to the man, but (b) she is different from him, therefore (c) she is subordinate to him (a non sequitur for sure—difference never necessitates subordination!). To argue for the necessary subordination of a person because she is female is to argue for her inferiority. Submission and mutual subordination is a central ingredient in the Lamb's army, but it is not based on sex! The Church must refuse the idol of sexism if she wants to fulfill her mission.

All these idols and more vie for our allegiance. In order to fulfill our mission

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we must stoutly live God's Word, "You shall have no other gods besides me . . . you shall not bow down to them or serve them." (Exodus 20:3 [margin], 5 RSV)

#### AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE PREVAILING LIFE-STYLE

Contemporary pagan culture is sick. To be well-adjusted in a sick society is really to be sick. A new life-style is needed.

Today's world is possessed with an inordinate passion for things. Its lust for possessions is neurotic—perhaps psychotic. The Church does not fulfill her mission by being a part of this fallenness. The good life is not found in having a bigger chunk of a rotten consumer pie, but in baking a new pie! In this sense TV commercials are often actually pornographic—they declare an absolutely false picture of what constitutes the good life. Provision is necessary for the good life, but obsession for it breeds death. To be in the Lamb's army should call us to seek after simpler, more human ways of living. (For specific ideas see *Beyond the Rat Race* by Art Gish.)

Absolute moral purity should characterize the Lamb's people. Marital fidelity, honesty in all things, and purity of body and mind mark His army. Our world has gone amuck in these areas—we must never conform.

An alternate life-style includes simplicity of speech. Our *yes* should mean *yes* and our *no* should mean *no*. Simple speech involves truthfulness and honesty. Dishonesty complicates. State what is the case and do not go beyond it or try to embellish it or to justify it.

The Lamb of God is calling His people to fulfill their mission. This will certainly involve concerted evangelism, aggressive social witness, and the deepest piety. It will also involve showing forth a new way, living an alternative to the present evil ways. 