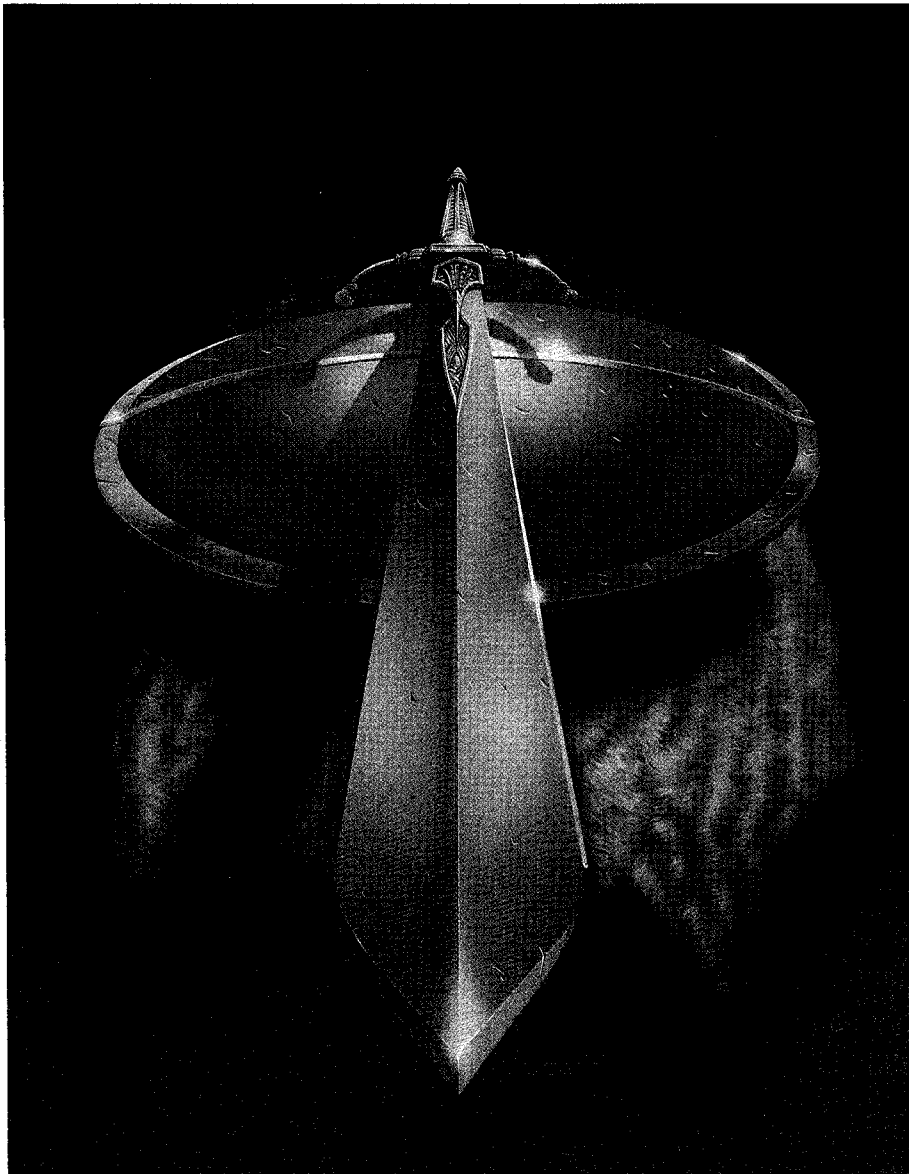


The Lamb's War

Jesus, our commander and our chief, calls us into a spiritual warfare that will profoundly impact the social order on every conceivable level

BY RICHARD J. FOSTER



All who desire to follow Jesus are called into the peaceable war of the Lamb against all principalities and powers. Like any warfare, it is waged on all fronts at once—inward and outward, personal and social, individual and institutional. The perimeter of its concerns embrace three hundred sixty degrees. Inwardly the Lamb of God seeks to conquer all forms of pride, lust, greed, hate, fear, envy, and everything that stands against life in the kingdom of God.

But Jesus, our conquering King, refuses to stop with the private sector of life. All kinds of injustice, oppression, hatred, bigotry, cruelty, tyranny, brutality, and anything else opposed to the way of God are legitimate battlegrounds in this spiritual warfare.

Conquest by suffering

In Revelation 5 the Apostle John is told that the Lion from the tribe of Judah has conquered sin and is worthy to break open the scroll that contains the mystery of human destiny. John turns, expecting to see a majestic Lion but instead of seeing a Lion, he sees a Lamb—a Lamb split from ear to ear on the altar of sacrifice.

It is Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb of God, who has conquered by suffering and to whom all heaven's host prostrate themselves in worship, declaring, "You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood."

In chapter 14 we see this same Lamb atop Mount Zion with all the redeemed gathered around him, and in chapter 17 we are told that the nations "will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will conquer them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings."

Finally, in Revelation 19 this Lamb is described in a strange mixture of metaphors as a conquering king astride a white battle stallion. He wears the royal crown, his eyes are like a flame of fire, and out of his mouth issues the sharp, two-edged sword. This conquering King/suffering Lamb makes war on all who oppose the rule of God.

God's mission

This great end-times vision of the Lamb's war is a straightforward description of the total mission and struggle of the pilgrim people of God. In it we can see a wonderful combination of the transcendent lordship of Jesus with the suffering servant Messiah, of conflict and reconciliation, of crown and cross, of courageous, militant action with compassionate, redeeming love.

In the Lamb's war we have an at-

tack on evil in all its guises, overcoming it with good. There is brotherly love, radical sharing, witness without compromise, and an obedient, disciplined, freely-gathered, martyr people who know in this life the life and power of the kingdom of God. Such people are committed in revolutionary faithfulness to Christ's everlasting rule in an eternal kingdom of peace, not only imminent on the horizon but already coming to birth in our midst.

This is the vision of the conflict of the Lamb. We are called into this army with the Lord Jesus Christ as the commander-in-chief who leads his faithful people through all of history, con-

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quering evil at every turn and establishing a total, new love relationship among all people until the end of the age.

Powerful weapons

The weapons of our warfare are "mighty to the pulling down of strongholds," as Paul puts it (1 Cor. 10:4). But they are not recognizable as weapons by modern society—including most contemporary Christians. They are the weapons of love and peace, of truth and integrity, of prayer and faith.

I have always been moved by the weaponry list which Paul gives in Ephesians 6—truth and righteousness and peace and faith and salvation and the word of God. As you know, Paul uses the metaphor of Roman military garb, but when his metaphor gives out, he keeps on adding weapons, especially prayer: "Pray at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication" (Eph. 6:18).

These weapons and this warfare, Paul tells us, is "not against flesh and

blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). In saying this he does not mean that flesh and blood are unimportant; only that behind the flesh and blood and controlling the flesh and blood are powers and principalities of a spiritual nature. The aim of our attack is to defeat the principalities that control and incarnate themselves in flesh and blood.

Spiritual warfare

This is a spiritual warfare we are engaged in. Our world is "with demons filled," as Martin Luther understood so well. And, if, in our social justice efforts we do not speak to the deep issues of the spirit, we will trade only one form of demonic oppression for another.

For example, when we approach absentee landlords of ghetto apartments, we speak to the principality of avarice that controls them. When we confront political policy makers or corporate executives, we do so with an inward strength born out of prayer and fasting, seeking to defeat the spirits of vested interest and covetousness.

What we so often fail to understand is that these weapons of ours are incredibly powerful—more powerful than B-1 bombers and Trident missile systems and Strategic Defense Initiatives. Powerful, that is, if we will train ourselves to use them effectively. No weapons system is effective unless soldiers are trained in its use.

In Acts 13 we are told of the first missionary venture of Paul on the island of Cyprus. He was having such a good and powerful work that the governor of the island summoned him to speak at the palace.

But the local magician, Elymas by name, didn't like Paul crowding in on his territory, and so he tried to oppose this good work. As you recall, Paul turned to him and, in the power of God, declared, "The hand of the Lord is upon you and you shall be blind

and unable to see the sun for a time" (Acts 13:11). Powerful weapons indeed!

George Fox, a 17th-century British Christian, was once preaching the gospel with great power, when a drunken soldier came up to him, pulled out his sword, and placed it at Fox's throat, demanding that he stop preaching or he would run him through with the sword. Fox looked straight at the man and, in the mighty power of God, said to him, "Hack away, your sword is nothing to me but a straw!"

With that declaration the power of God fell upon that man, and he staggered backwards, fell to the ground and was converted to Christ. Strong weapons of the first order!

No political agenda

Now, when we try to understand the social implications of the gospel of

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Jesus Christ, we run the very great danger of "politicizing" the gospel message. This has been attempted frequently by both Left and Right in all centuries of the Church, including our own—perhaps especially our own.

Let me state as unequivocally as I can that the warfare of the Lamb is not a social or political stance. Its aim is not even to correct societal ills. That is the result, to be sure, but almost never in the way in which we imagine it.

The kingdom of our God and of his Christ is of another reality altogether, and while its effects are to pull down

the kingdoms of this world, it does so only as a consequence of a deeper reality.

Those people who are taken over by a new power to do right, who cannot be bribed or manipulated or flattered, who are brought off of a bondage to others, will bring down (by their very presence and actions) those structures sustained by greed and pride and fear. Those people who have been disciplined in the Lamb's Army so that "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" are part of their deepest habits will attack structural evil with divine authority and without compromise.

People who have experienced deeply that all-inclusive community of loving persons which knows Christ as its prime sustainer and most glorious inhabitant will no longer hanker after the competitive, ego-dominated rat race of contemporary society.

Those people who, as a fixed pattern of life, walk by the great commandment of love of God and neighbor will transform our personal, social, institutional, and political world almost beyond recognition by their simple non-cooperation with the battles, oppression, prejudice, and class strife of modern culture.

Arenas of action

The contemporary battlefronts of the Lamb's War are many and diverse. I mention only a few.

1. The Lamb's people are to provide a genuine alternative to the prevailing power structures. We are to say no to the world's games of promotion and authority. We are to reject all titles and degrees as designators of status. We do so because Jesus commanded us to do so (Matt. 23:8-10).

All human designations—Dr., Professor, Reverend, etc.—fail to guaran-

We cannot live with God for long without being compelled to care for our neighbor.

tee the ability, and so let us obey Jesus Christ and place our hope in divine authorization alone.

We must, of course, go beyond mere verbal gymnastics. How easy it is to reject the language of the power structure and continue to jockey for position.

But we are called to another way. We are called to love one another without qualification. We are called to forgive freely. We are called to receive one another as brothers and sisters.

Most importantly, our lives are to be characterized by a concern for the poor and the defenseless. We cannot live with God for long without being compelled to care for our neighbor. And, like the good Samaritan, we soon discover that our path leads us to the bleeding and the broken of humanity. As this happens, we become the voice for the voiceless, pleading for the disadvantaged and the dispossessed.

Like Amos, we are compelled to speak truth to those who "oppress the poor, who crush the needy" (Amos 4:1). We, too, are to call for justice to roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream (Amos 5:24).

2. The Lamb's people are to provide a genuine alternative to the prevailing idolatry. It is time to say no to all the "isms" of manipulation, oppression, and prejudice—national-

ism, racism, sexism and more. At the core of all these arrogant and demon-inspired dogmas is the belief that we are better than others simply because of who we are.

Nationalism says we are better than others because of our cultural roots. Racism says we are better than others because of our ethnic stock. Sexism says we are better than others because of our gender.

Who is willing to accept as an equal in the righteousness of God anyone who *only* "does justice, loves mercy and walks humbly with God" (Micah 6:8)? You see, people are always better if they are like us in ways *other* than these.

But among the Lamb's people

many of us are descended. Yes, God accepts even the Scythians.

And we, too, are to receive all people in the grace of God, without qualification, without reservation, without pre-judgment. We are to love enemies as freely as friends. We are to pray for those who hurt and abuse us. We are to break the law of commerce which says, "You scratch my back and I'll scratch your back." We are to break the law of retaliation which says, "You gore my ox and I'll gore your ox." We are to live in a new power that enables us to return love for hatred and in all ways to overcome evil with good.

3. The Lamb's people are to provide a genuine alternative to the pre-

selfishness. Divorce is rampant because of our lust for good feelings.

But Jesus has taught us another way—the way of the cross, the way of the footwashing towel. Esteeming others, encouraging others, serving others is a goal worthy of our highest efforts. We are to experience the many little deaths of going beyond ourselves. And we find this dying to ourselves to be life-giving—a kind of losing of ourselves in order to find ourselves.

4. The Lamb's people are to provide a genuine alternative to the prevailing morality. We are to know and experience the power of God to free us from pride and greed and sexual promiscuity. We are to wait together in the power of God until the good rises up and the evil recedes. We are to be a community where grace and mercy are extended, where our deepest fears and most gnawing temptations can be revealed, where confession and forgiveness and healing prayer can flow freely.

Knowing Christ as our life, we are to pray down our lust for glory, defeat our hankering for status, stamp out our drive for prominence. We are to seek God's rule over our sexual lives so that deep within we long to shun all immorality, all infidelity, all promiscuity.

We seek a simplicity of speech in which our yes means yes and our no means no, where truthfulness and honesty are the distinguishing characteristics of our words. When we live in this way people will know that we truly have come into the "light of the glorious gospel of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4).

Jesus, our commander and our chief, calls us into a spiritual warfare that will profoundly impact the social order on every conceivable level. May we be faithful to his call. ■

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We, too, are to receive all people in the grace of God, without qualification...

there is to be none of this. "There cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all and in all" (Col. 3:11. See also Gal. 3:28). God accepts them all, the Greek as freely as the Jew, says Paul, and, of course, these were shocking words to first-century Jews. Those Greeks, those uncircumcised Greeks—God accepts even them.

But Paul goes further and says that God also receives the barbarian. Who were the barbarians? The barbarians were the uncultured, uncouth Romans. Now, it is one thing to accept the Greeks who at least had good manners, but the Romans were uncivilized barbarians! Does God embrace the outlandish, unpolished, untutored barbarian? Yes, he does, and Paul goes even further. Not only does God welcome the Greeks and the barbarians but also the Scythians. Who were the Scythians? The Scythians were those wild people from the north. Those ferocious, lawless, savages that the first-century Jew could only wonder about and from whom

vailing lifestyle. Modern culture is sick. To be well adjusted in a sick society is to be sick. A new lifestyle is needed.

Passion to possess

Modern people are plagued by the passion to possess. The lust for affluence in contemporary society has become psychotic: it has completely lost touch with reality. Furthermore, our frantic pace only accentuates our sense of being fractured and fragmented. Climb, push, and shove is the language of today.

And we are strained, hurried, breathless. The Lamb of God calls us away from our compulsive extravagance and speaks peace to our frantic spirit. We are to live simply and fully, freed from what William Penn called "cumber." We are to value people more than possessions. We are to seek simpler, more human ways of living.

We are to turn away from the narcissism of the age. People are running amuck today because of this compulsive, excessive self-love. Abortions are rampant because of our lust and