

Aliens (Fr. Lawrence R. Farley)

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The Church has classically been described by four adjectives: one, holy, catholic and apostolic. If I were looking for a more concise way to sum up these attributes, I would choose one word: alien.

The on-line Oxforddictionary describes “alien” as, “belonging to a foreign country”, “unfamiliar and disturbing or distasteful” and “supposedly from another

world, extraterrestrial” (I imagine this final definition is of more recent vintage, and presupposes the world of Science-Fiction, *E.T.*, *War of the Worlds* and the mother-ship.) I am happy with all of these definitions, for they all describe, in one way or another, the Church of God sojourning in this world. We do indeed belong to a foreign and heavenly country. The World indeed regards us as disturbing and distasteful. And the Kingdom is, by definition, another world.

This alien element in our ecclesiastical existence goes back to our Lord Himself. He said to His disciples, “Because you are not of this world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” (Jn. 15:19). This was no accidental utterance, but is foundational to our identity as Christians, so that the Lord repeated it in His final prayer to the Father before His arrest and crucifixion: “Father...I have given them (the disciples) Your Word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” (Jn. 17:14). To be a disciple of Jesus, therefore, is to be no longer of the world. The world, with its deep-seated and fallen xenophobia, instinctively recognizes this, and reacts with persecution. That accounts for the persecution of the Christians soon after the Day of Pentecost, and in almost all ages of the Church, including our own (Byzantium was a blip), and for what the ever-quotable G.K. Chesterton once described as “the halo of hatred around the Church of God”.

Since we do not (presently) live in a land governed by sharia law, the persecution today is mostly cultural. We do not live in the expectation that armed men will bang on our doors and haul us and our loved ones away to judicial prosecution or mob violence. But those who hold to the Faith are held up to ridicule, denunciation and subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) social ostracism.

There is one way, of course, that we can avoid such unpleasantness: we can soften the Lord’s words, demands and standards so that they are more in line with what the World will accept. In areas of conflict where Christ’s other-worldly ways collide with accepted social norms, we can decide to chill out and stand down (the current flash points in North America are homosexual life-style, the normalization of fornication, women’s ordination, and an appreciation of Islam). We can speak with great sophistication about how complex all these issues are, about the values of diversity. We can find pleasant and articulate proponents of homosexual life-style to speak with, we can interview with appreciation smart and famous feminists, we can dialogue with very nice Muslims. Dialogue is good. I like dialogue; it’s almost as much fun as blogging. But the pleasures of dialogue with pleasant and articulate people must not tempt us to sell out the words of Christ. In our dialogue, we must listen attentively, and then very respectfully offer the

timeless teaching of Christ which the World regards as alien. This might result in a shortened dialogue, and will certainly result in fewer invitations to take part in dialogues in the secular media. But dialogue isn't everything. At the Judgment at the Last Day, there will be very little dialogue.

Our contemporary and urgent task, therefore, is to lovingly and humbly hold to the Faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3) and to be content to be regarded by the World as aliens. Like all aliens, we will pay the price, and be told that we are simplifying complex issues, that we are fundamentalists, that we are intolerant. Our fellow-Christians who have decided to ease up on being aliens will add that we are un-Christ-like, unloving, uncompassionate, driving people from the Church, and generally responsible for the fact that the world is not beating a path to the Church's door. (This ignores that fact that when Christians *did* act more like the world, the world did not beat a path to their door, but ignored them as charmingly irrelevant. That is why the words "church growth" and "the United Church of Canada" are rarely used in the same sentence.) None of this negative reinforcement should count with us. We have been warned in advance by our Lord to expect it. And there are hints that when the Antichrist comes, such negative reinforcement will become more negative yet. Our task, in all ages, remains the same.

By Fr. Lawrence Farley

Many more of Fr. Farley's articles and thoughts can be found on his blog, [Straight from the Heart](#), where this article was originally posted on July 6, 2011. This article was posted here with permission.