
Contend for the Faith

Earnestly

The Gospel has enjoyed a certain entrenchment in Canada for a number of years. This is one of the easiest countries in the world in which to become a Christian. You can simply walk down the road and buy a Bible at any bookshop at a small cost – a fact which our brethren in Christ in Russia are scarcely able to credit. Our Christian bookstores have some good Christian literature; hundreds of chapels and churches up and down the land are open every week and, although difficult, it is still possible to find a church where the Gospel is boldly and unequivocally preached. Nevertheless there is a smell of battle in the air. It is, I believe, my task amongst others, to share the encouragement that God's Word gives us to persevere in a battle that threatens to rage hotter and more fiercely with every passing month. And the Word of God says just this – in this Epistle of Jude, verse three: "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

There has never been a time when the Church of God was not in the firing line! In the first three centuries after Christ there were as many as ten major persecutions of the Christian Church. The battle has been waged in a myriad of different fields – in the arenas of Imperial Rome, amid the tangle of theological controversy, in the bloodletting of countless revolutions as well as in the sophistication of television confrontation

and modern parliamentary procedure.

The enemy we face in Canada today is a slippery customer, to say the least! He is a very nice fellow, and has enjoyed the benefits and privileges of living in a country where, through the influence of Christ and His Church, honest dealing and decent behaviour have come to be accepted, by and large, as the norm. The enemy we face has basically, deep down, no interest in authentic Biblical Christianity. Yet he will often appeal to the very claims of the Faith that his efforts threaten to destroy, in order to make his point. He will protect himself with texts of Scripture! He will masquerade as protector of humanity and friend of the truth. He will rarely – at present – come out into the open and show himself in his true colours, because that would still be dangerous in a country that likes to think of itself as Christian. **He's very difficult to grab hold of.**

I suggest to you, however, that the pace is undoubtedly quickening. There is a hardening of opinion in this land that has been observable over the past five years. I do not think that our enemy is going to stay sheltered for very much longer under his umbrella of semi-Christian jargon and ethics. The day of open battle may be upon us sooner than we think. And in the battle, which every disciple of Christ is called upon to face, and for which there is no exception for service, St. Jude tells us, first, that

WE ARE CONTENDING FOR SOMETHING HISTORIC

Jude, the writer of this letter, who was probably one of the brothers of our Lord, was writing with a particular situation in mind. He was faced with a group

whom he calls in v. 16 “. . . murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage.” He goes on to say (vs. 17, 18, 19) “But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.”

St. Jude’s urge to the Church of his own day is not without significance for that of our day – “**Contend** for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.” There is something final and unique about the Christian Gospel. Jesus Christ is God’s last word to this planet – there is nothing more to be said to the world. “Christ died once for all” says the Scripture. His work cannot be added to. The Gospel is complete in a single accomplished historical **event**. At certain times of history this faith has become obscured. In the middle ages the light seemed to be dimmed almost to the point of extinction as far as the Continent was concerned. During the French Revolution an attempt was made to stamp out the Faith and to abolish the Christian Sunday. And listen to Bishop Butler, describing the England of the early eighteenth century, before the onset of the evangelical revival – “It has come to be taken for granted that Christianity is not so much a subject for enquiry, but that it is now at length discovered to be fictitious.” Commenting on what he calls “this dark side of the picture”, G.R. Balleine, the historian, describes of that time – “a people coarse, brutal, ignorant, and a church that had forgotten its mission, unspiritual, discredited, useless.”

The Church has never been without conflict, whether it has belonged to the age of teams of oxen, cornfields and primitive hamlets, or hemmed in by built-up housing estates, steel scaffolding and giant super-markets. We're contending, basically, for something historic – the faith of Jesus Christ, once crucified and now risen, the first, the last and the Living One, Who can enter drab lives, demolish the strongholds of aimlessness and purposelessness, and smash the forces of fear and doubt that grip people everywhere.

I was talking to a young professional man a while back. He was afraid. Afraid of failure in his business. "I'm so afraid", he said, "that before I go out on a job I am actually physically sick in the garden – with fear." A news editor asked me what I thought was the main hurdle confronting young people today. I replied without hesitation – "Fear." Now we as Christians, know that the Gospel message when it is preached can dispel fear and other evils that cloud people's lives.

The Canadian Lord's Day Association is not ministering to preserve an outdated relic of a bygone age – but is striving and contending for the historic faith of authentic Christianity in this land, and for the glorification of Almighty God – Who has given us His commandments, imparted to us His Word and sacrificed His Son – so that the sunshine and freedom of the Gospel might come into lives hampered and hindered by the love of pleasure and the love of money. Without the Gospel life is dull and tasteless, whatever your social prominence, gifts or aptitudes. The great scientist, Charles Darwin, wrote a letter more than a hundred years ago, on June 17, 1868, to J.D. Hooker: "I'm glad you were at the Messiah. It is the one thing I

should like to hear again. But I dare say I should find my soul too dried up to appreciate it as in old days. For it is a horrid bore to feel as I constantly do: that I am a withered leaf, for everything except science . . .” An astonishing testimony from a great man. One of England’s recent cricketers and test captains was talking to our boys’ Bible Class in Harold Wood recently, and told of his coming to faith in Christ. He said “Having attempted to fight my own battles for too long with so little success, I have now put my trust in Jesus Christ, and am praying that He will give me the strength that I otherwise lack.”

Now we mustn’t be surprised if in our efforts to contend for the historic Faith we meet with opposition. This has always been the case with workers for God. I love the phrase in Nehemiah 4, v. 10, where Nehemiah’s friends have given themselves to rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem in obedience to God. Their complaint comes up in verse 10 “. . . and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall” – a situation that has confronted every worker for God at some time.

The Association has met with an avalanche of rubbish over the years. It’s doing a job which is extremely unpopular, even in Church circles sometimes. It’s a source of continual embarrassment to the opponents of the Lord’s Day, and we must not mind that, provided the truth is always spoken to them in love. It would be surprising if the day came when there was **no** reaction against the Canadian Lord’s Day Association. The Gospel and the truth do have a cutting edge. The Gospel never claims a position of popularity, politically, culturally, or nationally. Except perhaps in times of deep religious revival, the Establishment has,

quite frankly, never approved of the message of the Cross. And in the arena the Christian will find that the weight of opinion is against him rather than with him. A Sunday School teacher was showing a little girl a picture of the early Christians being thrown to the lions in the arena. She hoped the little girl wasn't too frightened by the picture. Not a bit of it! "Look," said the girl, pointing, "there's one poor lion that hasn't got a Christian!" Now that is always the way – people tend to be on the side of the lions! So if we find that popular opinion – or at least official opinion – doesn't always seem to be on our side, remember that this is nothing new; there is much rubbish confronting us. – Relax in the heat of the battle! We're doing what others have done before us, contending for something historic. Secondly –

WE ARE CONTENDING FOR SOMETHING VALUABLE

This is what the Word of God says: "Contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints." Why was it delivered? Because it is a valuable heritage and treasure. We are those with a commission! Christ has told us, "Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature." The **Gospel** which brings freedom and light! The **Gospel** which snaps the shackles of sin! The **Gospel** which brings decent living, high standards and a love of righteousness into society!

How much this nation owes to the impact of the Gospel. The modern Trades Union Movement, for example, was begun by Christian men, concerned for righteousness and justice; the high standards of the

nursing profession today stem from the efforts of a godly woman, one Florence Nightingale; years of single-handed campaigning on the part of one man of God in the teeth of bitter and organized opposition finally resulted in the abolition of the Slave Trade of the West; the compassion of one Bible-believing man of love initiated Dr. Barnardo's Homes for Orphans. The hospitals were begun by Christian believers, not by governments. The Gospel is valuable and can be seen to be valuable!

Does it really **matter** whether Christianity is true? And that the Word of God is binding? And that the Lord's Day is observed? The impression frequently given on so many futile TV discussions about religion is that in the last analysis it really doesn't matter too much. In a discussion on, say, the Resurrection, one can reasonably predict the outcome. Inevitably it will be a draw, with the emphasis thrown slightly on the side of doubt! "Some believe this, others believe that, so we leave it there, for the viewer to make up his own mind, and until the same time next week, Goodnight!" Who really cares about truth?

Everyone, Christian or otherwise, has benefited from the Faith in Canada. An ex-Hindu said to me, "I always used to think that Jesus died only for Christians. Then suddenly I was told that He died for me too!" "The Sabbath" said Jesus, "was made for man" – for **MAN**, you'll notice. Not exclusively for the Jews, or for His own followers, but for man, in general.

There's something about this one day in seven that is written and built into our very creation – something so basic, so divinely given, that if you take it away you can expect things to go wrong. This is the official view, I

understand, of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers in England. In a public statement the Union has said, "The proposal to allow Sunday trading runs counter to experience and public need . . . Because they have to work all day on Saturday, shop workers regard Sunday at home as being particularly precious. The social disadvantages of losing both Saturday and Sunday far outweigh any compensatory arrangements that may be offered. The proposal that shop workers should have a day off in lieu of Sunday is no compensation for the loss of both Saturday and Sunday."

Now are you and I concerned about these things? I can tell you that there are plenty who are not. I can tell you what everybody knows already – that there are powerful interests at work **far more concerned for the making of money than they are for the well-being of their fellow men!** And I can tell you another thing that everybody knows – that there are certain church leaders – I say this in love – so-called church leaders who appear to have no more sense of urgency and dynamic purposeful direction than a blindfolded tortoise.

Others of us happen to be on the firing line – in daily touch with the lives of ordinary people, and our testimony is that the Gospel, when it is proclaimed and shared, is powerful to transform men's lives. Let's see to it, however, that it **is** the Gospel. Even a secular newspaper was complaining recently about the national apathy to religion and said, "One of the reasons for all this is said to be the uncertain theological note that the church is sounding. Many of the old challenges about sin, wrongdoing, repentance and righteousness that used to bring men and women to their knees are

rarely heard. The Bible has been so dissected and analysed by the scholars that its great message of God speaking to man is muffled and muted."

True, and I'm afraid you have only to tune in on some of the TV religious programmes we are subjected to these days to have that statement abundantly confirmed. Christianity – or a form of Christianity – is being discredited in every direction. Of course, you can discredit anything if you look hard enough for a travesty of the real thing. I can take you down to the local park and you can watch a beginner on his first game of tennis – how he fluffs every shot, how every few minutes a ball whizzes into the bushes. And you turn to me and say, "Tennis? You can take that racket down the road to the nearest junkshop for all the interest I can work up for the game." No, if I really want to enthuse you I would take you along to Wimbledon for a look at the Open Lawn Tennis Championships. I'd guide you to the centre court where we could see Yvon Lendl putting down those service aces that have made him famous, or John McEnroe hitting a few of those backhands that have taken him to the top – and I'd make you think again. If I want to enthuse you about Christianity, I'd take you to the most spiritual man that I could find; I'd direct your attention to the Bible. I'd introduce you to the warmest fellowship of believing people that I could find. Above all I would urge you to look at the claims and unique person of Christ Himself.

In our work and witness for God, we're contending for something **valuable** – the real Christianity that you can find if you look hard enough – the Christianity that transforms lives and gives power for living. There's plenty to encourage us. In church after church, where

Christ is being exalted in this land, reports are made of steady increase. I know that's not what the headlines say. The mass media cry is along the lines of "Failure" – but we who are close to the scene know that the Gospel is still the power of God unto salvation, and is still being demonstrated as such. Overseas too. In Java and Sumatra, at present, there is a tremendous revival of the faith taking place. Not merely thousands, but hundreds of thousands are being added to the Church. On a speaking visit to central Tanzania last year, I learned that they have been putting up a new church every thirteen days for the last seven years! There are rugged men of faith there, of all backgrounds and ages. I met one, a pastor of over eighty years of age, who in 1966 had challenged a company of Tanzanian Freedom Fighters who were in the area conducting their exercises on a Sunday. Singlehanded he confronted them. "It is the Lord's Day!" he remonstrated. "Don't dishonour God in this way!" They threw him in jail. Such was the protest from the Christian population, that it took the personal intervention of the country's President to sort out the situation and set that pastor free, and today he is conducting his ministry as vigorously and trenchantly as ever. There are valuable things that are worth contending for. Lastly –

WE ARE CONTENDING FOR SOMETHING IN JEOPARDY

"Contend!" says the apostle, "for the faith which was once delivered to the saints." Now to contend for something means we have to strive for it. Battle is involved. Controversy is inevitable. There will be casualties and there will be risk and danger.

The Bible says – “earnestly contend”. Quite frankly it’s not really fashionable to be in earnest these days – about anything! But Christianity is and always will be a revolutionary faith that demands everything we have – it’s kill or cure. And certainly as far as The Canadian Lord’s Day Association is concerned, the pressure will always be on. “In our country,” said Alice, “you can generally get somewhere if you run very fast.” “A slow sort of country,” said the Queen, “Now here you see it takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place.” How true of our situation! The pressure of competition and opposition will always be there, and will demand everything we have – merely to keep in the same place! In fact, we cannot afford to keep still, we are to be the pace setters for society. We must expect the pressure to be on. The cynic might well ask, “What do you expect to gain by the stand you are making?” Part of our reply is this – “A conscience void of offence. We have done what we ought to have done.” Amid the pressure we can relax with this knowledge.

There will always be evil to contend with. Jesus’ words are timely, “Let both grow together until the harvest” (Matt. 13.30). While the optimist will claim that the world is getting better all the time, and the pessimist will bemoan the increase in evil, the realist will acknowledge that both are true. The good is continuing, and the bad is increasing. The pattern will be maintained until the final showdown – the Harvest towards which we are heading.

Who really has the power? Christ’s words reassure us. “I have the keys of hell and of death” (Rev. 1.18). In virtue of His historic death and resurrection the final monopoly of power is held in safe hands. You may

possibly have played the game Monopoly, and had the experience of seeing the whole board in your opponent's hands – the green lot, the red lot, the brown lot, Boardwalk and Park Place and about fifteen hotels all lined up against you. You, with your miserable mortgaged station and the Water Works! "Give up!" says your opponent. But not likely. As often as not we peg gamely away until the final throw. This is what is happening to the world today. The enemy is playing out the game to its assured outcome. He will not admit the defeat which has already been inflicted on him. This is why we still have a fight on our hands, but the outcome is assured! The Master's words in Matthew 16. 18, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (the Church), remind us that the true picture is not of hell battering at the gates of the Church, but of the militant Church, the invading aggressive Church storming at the gates of hell and smashing through to certain victory in the Name of its victorious Head!

Let us see to it that future generations don't curse us for our laziness and apathy in looking after the trust that is ours today. We're contending for something historic. For something valuable, and for something in jeopardy – the furtherance of the Gospel of Christ in this land, no less.

Contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Rejoice in it yourself. Grasp it; learn it; live it; spread it – and may God give the increase.

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