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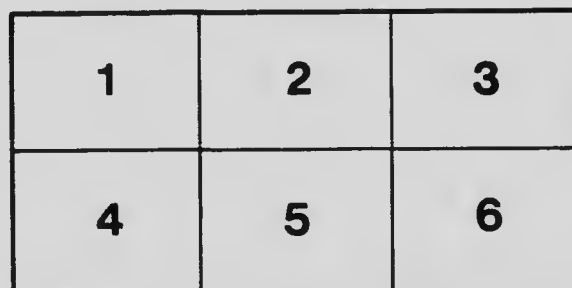
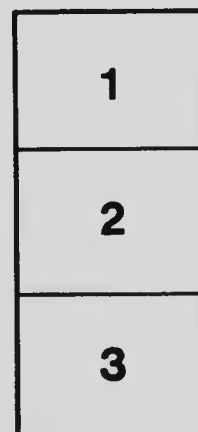
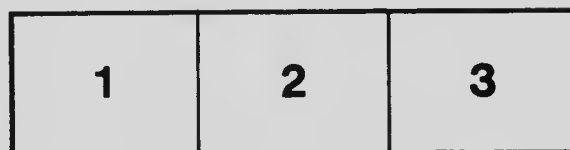
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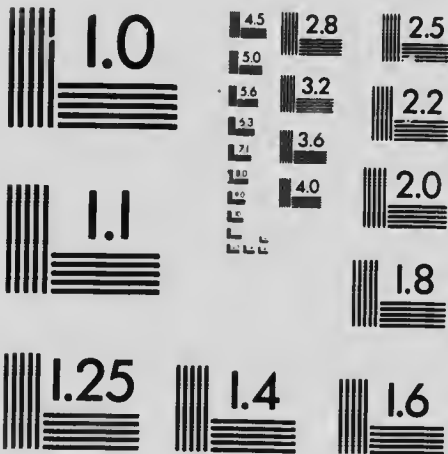
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"Contending for the Faith"

A Sermon Preached by

The Lord Bishop of Fredericton

In the Chapel of

Bishop's College, Lennoxville, Que.

... At the ...

Annual Commemoration Service

June 23rd, 1910.



M 35
F 27

“CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH.”

ST. JUDE 3.

“Beloved, when I was giving all diligence to write unto you of our common Salvation, I was constrained to write unto you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith, which was once for all delivered unto the saints.”

When one looks out upon the world's religious life, and marks the divergent, and, unhappily, diverging views of truth, that are everywhere apparent, this saying of the Apostle comes to us with almost the insistent force of a personal appeal. For if in the first century there was need of such an exhortation as this of the Apostle Jude, then how much more must there be need to-day! If within thirty-five years of our Lord's Ascension, the objective body of Christian truth was in danger of mutilation and denial, then how much more real and pressing must that danger be to-day! No doubt it is true that, in the great body of believers, there is being evidenced a deepened desire for corporate re-union; but it is quite open to question whether, in many directions, that desire means much more than a spirit of impatience with the present policy of economic waste. However that may be, it seems to me quite clear that, more than ever urgently, there is coming to the Church this old-time challenge to “contend earnestly for the faith, which was once for all delivered unto the saints.” And when I say so, I am not at all thinking of the effect upon the Church of the so-called Higher Criticism. No doubt there has been a real danger in that movement, but, upon its destructive side, it would seem to have largely spent its force; and, generally speaking, its outcome has been to strengthen rather than to weaken the foundations of the faith. I think that so much, at least, may safely be said. To assume,—as some have seemed to assume,—that Holy Scripture will not stand the test of scientific scrutiny is to dishonour the confessed convictions of the Church. Always must it be remembered that the lamp of truth is the handmaid of religion. Always must it be admitted that every great scholar, whatever the particular field of his investigation, is God's conscious or unconscious servant; so that there is absolutely no triumph of truth ascertained in any one of its various departments that does not make for the ultimate triumph of the whole. In the strength of that conviction, we can await with quiet confidence every critical examination of the Bible. But when I say that the Church must hear and accept this challenge to “contend earnestly for the faith, which was once for all delivered unto the saints,” I am not thinking of the critical attacks that have been made in recent years upon the Bible. Not that at all. I am thinking rather of the way in which many men are coming to belittle the truth as the great constructive factor in the development of human life and human

character, so that looseness of thought in matters of belief is almost the most striking characteristic of the age in which we live. Certainly, it is becoming every day more common to hear men,—and not irreligious men,—speak lightly of Christian doctrines as though they were simply human in their origin, instead of being the gift of God in Jesus Christ. More and more, it seems to me, men are setting aside as insignificant and small truths upon which Jesus Christ and His apostles laid the most solemn and insistent stress. That is really the most disquieting thing about the world's religious life to-day,—not the denial of fundamental doctrines, though that, of course, is serious enough,—but an attitude towards them of sheer indifference,—the seeming assumption that their acceptance or rejection does not really matter. I seem to see something of that assumption everywhere. It is evidenced in the popular impatience with what are called doctrinal sermons. It is manifested in the easy and shifting standards of undenominational religion. It stands naked and unashamed in countless arguments for Christian union,—arguments in which purely economic considerations are conceded the place of chief importance. Everywhere one sees this spirit of indifference. That is the real point of danger. It is not that men do not know the truth, but rather that, knowing it, they are letting themselves think of it as something that is really not worth while, as something that does not matter. Thus it happens that the Christian world is coming to mistake looseness of belief for liberality of thought, and to make a mixed medley of undefined odds and ends of doctrine do duty for the clear, coherent conception of the truth that belongs only to the rational and reverend acceptance of the Catholic Creeds. I do not know how else one can account for the extraordinary multiplication of sects and schisms in the Church,—a disintegrating process that time seems powerless to check, and which is more and more making the faith of our common Christianity little less than a caricature of that which was once for all delivered unto the saints. I have heard it said that schism is only an organized eccentricity, but even that definition does it too much honour, for everywhere in the Church to-day there are a multitude of schisms that lack even the poor merit of being organized. But, as a matter of fact, there can be no apology for schism, and that is what the Protestant Church to-day fails so utterly to realize. For a man to make it his boast,—and only too often it is heard,—that to him all denominations are alike, argues not breadth of sympathy as he assumes but shallowness of thought. If the saying is in any sense true, and not simply an excuse for systematic shortcomings in the direction of religious duty,—often that is all it implies,—then it means at least these three things :—It indicates first of all an absolute failure to recognize that “the Divine purpose of visible unity among Christians” is “a fact of revelation”, it means, secondly, that the apologist for undenominationalism has failed to find for himself anywhere a real religious home; and it points, in the third place, to the speaker's sheer inability to understand that there must be “clear intellectual conceptions as the basis of strong, consistent, and effective feeling.” Much to-day is being made of the

duty of toleration as the characteristic temper of the religious life ; and no one would deny that the new moral emphasis is a true one. Yet there is at least some danger of becoming so wide awake to the value of every other man's opinion as to fail to form any strong intellectual convictions for oneself. Let it not be forgotten that a man's moral character is the crystallization of his thought, and unless that thought is clear, and true, and strong, then his character cannot in any real sense be clear, and true, and strong. The mind is not something that a man has,—something to which he stands related as the owner to the owned ; it is something that he is,—it is himself. Because thought is the only basis of being, therefore every man is what he thinks. Thus it is literally true to say that new learning brings with it a new life. A man's belief is that by which he lives. Inevitably and indubitably that is true. It is thought that makes life. It is ideas that create and colour character, and, thus, faith is the real dynamic of life, so that necessarily every man lives up to the level of his creed. If his life is mean and meagre, is it not as we sometimes say, in spite of the faith which he holds, but because of it. He is simply living at the low level of his thought. We only really believe that in which we believe most of all ; and that which we believe most of all we necessarily translate into the terms of daily life. Faith, then, is the character-forming factor in human experience. Hence the vast importance of clear intellectual conceptions as the basis and beginning of the religious life.

I need not stop to tell you what is the meaning of this faith for which the Apostle exhorts us to contend. Beyond all question, it means to us what it must have meant to the Apostle,—an objective body of truth committed to the Church by Jesus Christ. The faith as not to St. Jude a vague, nebulous system of moral precepts, but a definite "form of teaching", a "pattern of sound words" with which the Church was entrusted, and to which she is bound to hold fast. It is an objective body of religious truth entrusted to the Church by Him who is the Truth, and, therefore, one, whole, and indivisible. The theology of the Epistles is not something, which the writers had created, but something which they had received,—a clear responsibility, a sacred trust.

If all this be true, then it is not difficult to understand the jealous care with which the Church has always guarded her heritage of faith. Nor even is it hard to sympathize, at least a little, with the sometimes seeming harshness of her attitude towards those who have refused to accept her standards, and conform to her requirements. No one would willingly recall the days when heresy was treated as a crime, and punished with the stake and scaffold, but it is well to remember that behind all the cruel intolerance of persecution there was something that is lamentably lacking in the Church to-day,—a magnificently stern sense of responsibility for the safe-keeping of a sacred trust. The horrors of the Inquisition, and the fires of Smithfield, were hideous perversions of that sense of stewardship, but they were none the less perversions of some-

thing that was very real, and for want of which the Church to-day is distinctly poorer. If it is our duty to disseminate the truth of the Gospel all through the world, then it is equally our duty to preserve that truth in its integrity. We are bound to maintain in its fulness, and hand down unimpaired to those who are to follow us, the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. The task is not an easy one, and we may at times be tempted to forsake it in the interests of what the world calls charity; but the Church must ever remember that the stern necessities of truth must not be made subservient to sympathy, nor must the clear outlines of truth be lost sight of in the obscuring charms that belong to personality.

Out of this corporate sense of stern responsibility for truth entrusted came the Church's Creed. It came as a natural and necessary development. The faith received passed by a natural evolutionary process into the faith formally expressed. The process was a self-propagating one. By nothing but the fact that almost from the first beginning there was this formal expression of the faith could it have been kept so harmonious in outline and complete in its content. Always and everywhere, consciously and unconsciously, the Creeds have been the court of appeal in Christian controversy. Read the history of the Church, and what do you find? First one doctrine, and then another, coming into special prominence, but never one to the full and final exclusion of any other. And what has been the secret of adjustment? How has the faith been preserved in its proportion? Largely, I believe, by the regular and reverent recital of the Creed in public worship; so that it is almost true to say that the pew rather than the pulpit has been the real conservator of the faith.

Did time permit, it would be easy to speak of the inspiring power of the Christian Creed. A few moments ago, we stood together, and made our common profession of a common faith. Was that a small thing to do,—an insignificant detail in the rich order of our service? Yet the formal act gathers grandeur as we remember that in the same moment, and in the same simple act, we made our lives the link between the future and the past. And how splendid has been the history of the Creed! Its mutterings were heard first in the secret darkness of the Catacombs. Its challenge was flung forth with defiant faith upon the blood-stained arena of a Roman holiday, and, as in the sweetness of its solace they found had learned to live,—so in the strength of its inspiration, men strength to die. It swept like wintry surges across the mighty empire of the ancient world. It broke in irresistible power upon the shores of pagan Britain. The thunder of its message awoke the sleeping soul of Europe. It was caught up and declaimed in the islands of the Seas. India, China, and Japan, heard and welcomed it until at last the

“.....Church unsleeping,
While earth rolls onward into light,
Through all the world her watch is keeping,
And rests not now by day nor night.”

If you have followed me thus far, you will not wonder when I say that the Church cannot accept, not even always co-operate with, what is called undenominational religion. For undenominationalism means anything at all, it means the elimination of certain truths from the curriculum of Christian teaching, because they are not acceptable to all. But that is just what the Church must refuse, for, if truth is really essential to the development of Christian character, then no smallest part of it can be surrendered without positive loss. I do not forget the plea for such undenominational religion,—“We are not going to teach doctrine; we are going to preach Christ.” That is the claim, and it is no less specious than it is pitiful. For you cannot preach Christ without teaching doctrine. As well talk about building a house without a foundation and a frame-work. Christ is indeed our life, but the foundation and frame-work of character is truth. The Church simply dare not, for the sake of seeming charity, follow the line of least resistance.

All this brings me in close to a question very much at present in our minds,—the question of Christian Union. For the past few years, it has been a constant subject of discussion. Certain great religious bodies have been bending all their energies in the effort to attain some sort of organic union. Overtures have been made both to ourselves, and by ourselves, with the same end in view. The problem played a large part in the last Lambeth Conference, and, since that time, it has been discussed in almost every Diocese in Canada. Well, what has been the outcome of it all? What progress has been made?

We can only attempt to answer that question, of course, from the stand-point of our own experience. Whether the Presbyterians and Methodists will really come together in any real organic union is a question that the future alone can answer. What concerns us to-day is the attitude of our own Church towards the main problem waiting to be solved. What is the Church going to do with it?

Well, as the result of all that has been said and done, this matter at least, has come to pass,—we have reached a clearer conception, I think, of our own true position. There is a wider and a more consistent recognition in the Church of her grave responsibility for the safe-keeping of “the faith once for all delivered unto the saints.” With whatever force other considerations may be urged, the thought of the Church’s stewardship of truth stands first and foremost in her mind. It is readily apparent, of course, that the organic union of Protestant Christianity would mean an immense saving in the expenditure of men and money. In the home field, one man could often do the work of three, and so additional power be applied to the wider work of the world’s evangelization. And that is not in itself a small consideration,—not something that we can afford altogether to ignore. But,—and this is the point I have in view,—any such consideration is, to my mind, and, I think, to the corporate mind of the Church, altogether small and insigni-

ficant, when weighed in the balance against the sense of our tremendous responsibility for the stewardship of truth,—for the keeping intact and beautiful the faith once for all delivered to the saints. A deepened sense of that responsibility seems to me one of the clear gains that have come to us as the outcome of the careful consideration with which this important problem has been met. To some it may seem that the Church has stood aside, and taken no decided action. From one quarter and another the charge may come that the Church has missed a precious opportunity. But,—and this is the only answer we can give,—the truth which we hold, and the trust by which we hold it, are the greatest things of all, and dearer than the praise of men, for liberality must be the consciousness that we have tried to keep the faith.

When we examine our position in the light of our own standards and professions, it seems to me quite clear and perfectly consistent. For what has the Church said about herself? Amidst many other statements, there are these three that stand out distinct and definite,—First, and most familiar, there is the informal saying of the postcommunion prayer that “we are very members incorporate in the mystical body of God’s Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people.” Then, in the second place, there is the formal definition of the 19th Article, that “the visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments are duly administered according to Christ’s ordinance in all things that of necessity are requisite to the same.” And, thirdly, the Homily for Whitsunday tells us that “the Church is a universal congregation of God’s faithful and elect people, built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.”

These are the things that the Church has said about herself, and any project of re-union must be considered in their light. When we come to examine them a little closely, we are impressed with two points,—they include so many, and they exclude so much. Breadth and definiteness,—these are their characteristic marks. No one can read that post-communion statement without rejoicing in its splendid breadth. The “blessed company of all faithful people.”—that, in the deepest sense of all, is the Church of Jesus Christ. There must be breadth. We must never dare to draw the lines so tight as to shut out a single faithful soul. Never, even in thought, must we dare to deny membership in the Church to those who are by Baptism incorporate in the mystical body of God’s Son. And we do rejoice in that truth. In the strength of its conviction, we break down all barriers, and reach out hands of brotherhood to those whose Lord is also ours. To emphasise that fact of brotherhood in separation, to lay all solemn stress upon its splendid meaning, to lose no opportunity of living in its light, to welcome every challenge that it brings us in the sphere of social service, to keep wide open always hand and heart of love,—to that divine task let us set our hands. Breadth is the first characteristic mark in what the Church has said about herself.

The second characteristic mark is definiteness. If, on the one hand, we must never dare to draw the line so tight as to shut out a single faithful soul, neither, on the other hand, must we break down walls that were not made with hands. Truth must not be made subservient to liberality. There must be definiteness. It is possible to become so broad as to lose all depth. The river, and not the marsh, is the true symbol of the Church's life. And here against the Church's sayings about herself are quite clear. There has been left no room for any doubt, for the nineteenth Article tells us that in the Church of Christ the pure Word of God must be preached, and the Sacraments duly administered according to Christ's ordinance in all things that of necessity are requisite to the same. Then, as a condition for corporate re-union, either now or in the future, sound doctrine must be indispensable. I do not ignore the answer that is always made to that contention,—Who is to determine the soundness or unsoundness of the doctrine? The teaching of the Bible, someone will reply. But in every large city there are half a hundred sects, all claiming to found their distinctive faith upon the teaching of the Bible. Quite clearly, that canon must not be regarded as conclusive. What remains? The Church. It is indisputably true, of course, that the Bible is the final bar of judgment before which every stated truth must stand, but the Bible came from the Church, and not the Church from the Bible, and the Spirit in the Society is the interpreter of the Spirit in the Book. Therefore, if, when we affirm the condition of sound doctrine, our separated brethren ask us who shall be the arbiter, we can only make the same, simple, straight-forward answer,—“The Church, for

“What the Church holds, that we receive;
What the Saints teach, that we believe.”

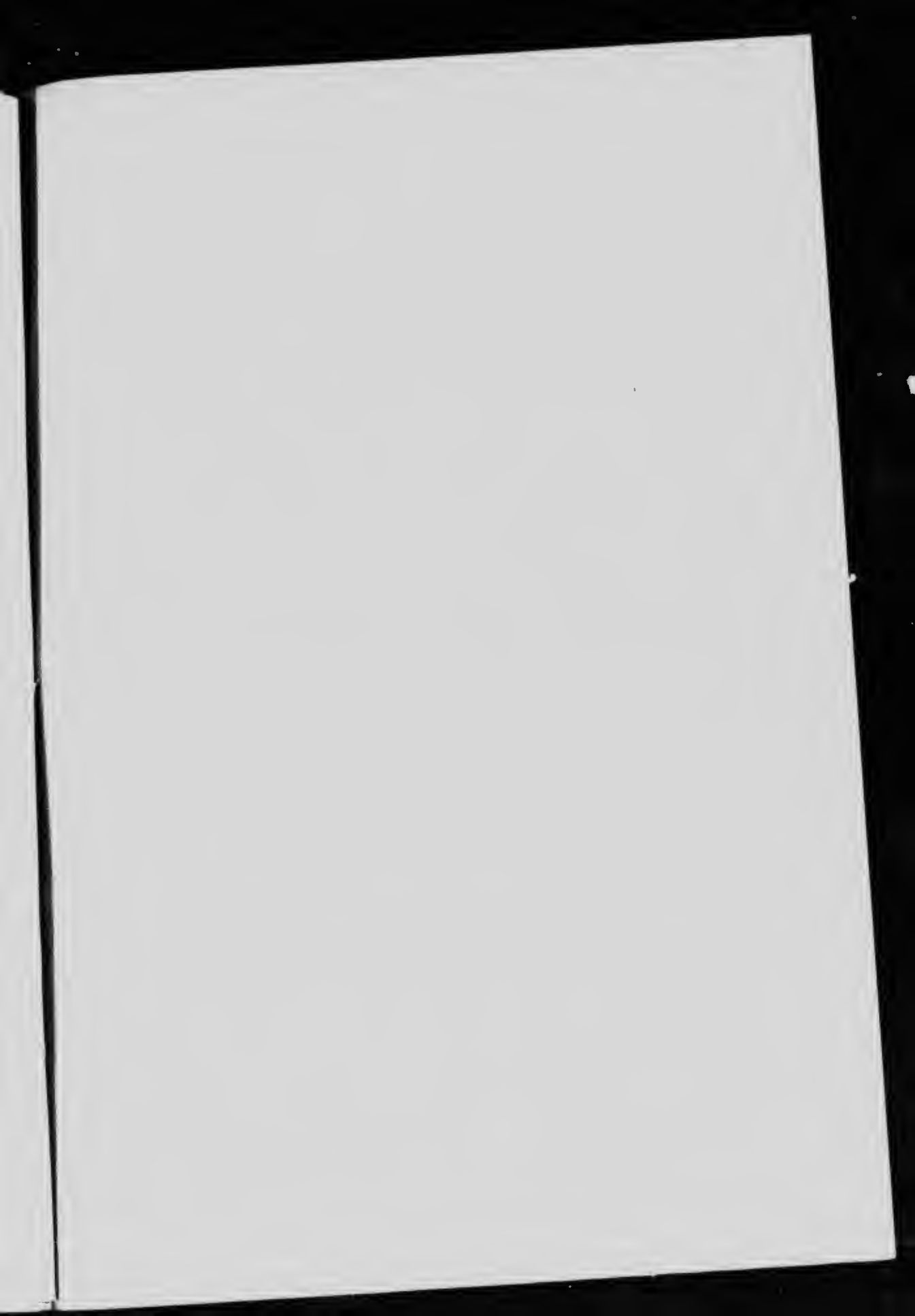
Then, added to the condition of sound doctrine, there is the claim of the Church, distinct and clear, to apostolic character, for the Homily for Whitsunday insists that the Church must be built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets. At this late stage in my sermon, I must not dwell at any length upon that point, yet I cannot refrain from giving expression to what is my own intense conviction, and, I think, yours also, that the Church's apostolic foundation involves at least the historic episcopate. For, even if the justice of Lightfoot's contention be admitted, and the Episcopus or Bishop be accepted as a later development of the Presbyter or Priest, it is still quite clear that such development must have taken place almost at the first beginning; so that before the middle of the second century the three-fold ministry, as we have it now, was well-established. That, in its most moderate form, is the Church's claim to apostolic character. All down the long centuries, we can look at one unbroken line that began upon the mountain side, when Jesus sent forth the Twelve whom He called apostles, and continues even to this day; so that, in the strength of that unbroken continuity we say in the language of the Creed, that we “believe in one Catholic and Apostolic Church.”

Is that a small thing? Does it matter whether the claim is

right or wrong, whether it is founded upon fact or fancy? Whatever others may affirm, at least there is no doubt in our own minds about the answer to that question. For consider what this apostolic claim involves. If it be asked whether the claim to apostolic succession means the limitation along certain well-defined lines of all saving and sanctifying grace, none of us, I hope, will hesitate to answer, no. We do not deny,—we dare not deny,—we could not deny God's witness to the work which is being done by those who are without what we might call the strictly Catholic Communion. Yet none the less we do believe that the Church's apostolic descent implies the possession of special privilege and special power for the work of God. In the broadest sense, we believe in the Holy Catholic Church,—the blessed company of all faithful people,—the whole family in heaven and earth named of Jesus Christ,—but we believe also in the Catholic Church as working under a divine commission,—a commission not conveyed to her in general terms, but bestowed upon her because of her unbroken and direct descent from the first apostles. I do not think that the Church of England need hesitate to claim that character, nor need she be ashamed to hold and vindicate the view "that a certain aspect of the life and truth of the Church is bound up with its recognition."

To the advocates of organic union, then, this must always be our answer,—We do not fail to recognize the vast importance of the problem; we feel to force of all your economic arguments; we deplore the unhappy fact of our divisions; we pray that God may heal the schisms in His Church; but even for the sake of union there are some things which we cannot do. We cannot surrender one clause of our historic creeds; our sacramental system must not be modified; our historic ministry must remain intact; we refuse to shake the traditions and practice of 2000 years; we will not abandon our episcopacy; we cannot but contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

One word in closing. We are to keep the faith. What shall that mean to us? Not that we shall never change our mind in any detail of interpretation. Not that every truth shall always seem the same for us. Not even that we shall never be what the world may call inconsistent. Nor does the keeping of the faith mean only the refusal to soften the sharp outlines of revealed truth,—the refusal to pare away principle for the sake of peace. It means, further, that we are to make our faith the dynamic of the world's religious life by sending it out into the world to do its work. To open the great treasure-house of faith to a hungry world waiting to be fed, to preach the Gospel to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,—that, on the positive side, it is to keep the faith, which was once for all delivered to the saints.



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