

**Alfred Olwa — Address at Moore College
Graduation 2013:**

**‘Contend earnestly for the faith once
delivered for all’ (Jude 3)**

12th March 2013: Address by The Rev'd Canon Dr. Alfred Obwa

I. Greetings and Commendation

1. **I bring Christian love and greetings** from your brothers and sisters in Christ at Uganda Christian University, in particular my Vice Chancellor, the Rev'd Canon Dr. John Senyonyi. We at Uganda Christian University continue to thank you for how Moore College under your watch, has increasingly been put on the map: by your brains, by your labour, by your love, and, by the grace of God. Your labour in the Lord will not be in vain.
2. **And, we warmly congratulate your new principal,** Dr. Mark Thompson, upon his recent appointment and with great excitement we look forward to a continued partnership in the gospel under his watch.

II. Appreciation: Moore College Supporters

3. **Let me thank the supporters of Moore College.** Were it not for you I would not be standing here today. It is on record that I am the first Ugandan to benefit from the joint scholarship by Uganda Christian University, Sydney diocese, Langham UK (and Langham Australia Branch), the Federal CMS Australia (and the NSW CMS), and Moore College, for a PhD.

III. Congratulations!

4. **To all who have graduated tonight,** please receive my warm congratulations! Your hard work has paid off — well done. And, indeed to **all the family members and friends** who have stood by them and supported them to enable them to achieve these results, to you too I say: receive my commendation: well done.

IV. What is my message?

5. Coming from Uganda Christian University in Africa to speak at the prestigious Moore College Graduation, **I ask myself: what is so important that I want to impart to you in this special season in the history of the College? Why do I consider this season to be special?**
6. This is a special season in the life of the College, the life of the diocese of Sydney, and in particular the life of all those who have graduated tonight.

And, indeed, in the life of Uganda Christian University. In case you have not yet caught the sense that it is a special season, let me remind you of four aspects of this season:

7. Firstly, this is the season when **the 12th Principal of Moore College**, Dr. John Woodhouse, is retiring honourably from a ministry well-done. If this was Africa, where children, especially the last born of a father is highly cherished, then all those who have graduated tonight would be sure of one thing: John, their father, would be melting with joy and emotions of great love. That would make this graduation very special and the season as well. And, all the invited guests to that function are very special guests.
8. Secondly, this is the season when **the 11th Archbishop of Sydney diocese**, the Most Rev'd Dr. Peter Jensen, a man of God whom we in Africa has known to be notoriously supportive of the College, a rare gesture in other parts of the Anglican Communion is retiring, honourably from a ministry well-done. To graduate in the presence of such a spiritually and theologically tall servant of God, makes your graduation special and the season as well.
9. Thirdly, this is the season when **a new pope** is being expected. And, fourthly this is the year when **my theological College in Uganda is celebrating 100 years of producing ministers of the Gospel**. Because I have studied for four years with you at College, we have rubbed the gospel in one another's path of faith, the life of the Church in Uganda, Uganda Christian University and the life of Sydney diocese and the College, now flow through one heart beat: we are partners in the gospel.
10. Put these four reasons together, none of the previous graduations of Moore College can beat your graduation: it is a special graduation in a special season. So what is my message on this special occasion?
11. The main point of my message to the graduates, and I suppose to all of us, which is also the main point of the letter of Jude is in verse 3, namely, *it is the responsibility of everyone who has been called and loved by God and kept by Jesus Christ (Verse 1), to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Verse 3)*. As I project into the future of your respective ministries, I do so with a sense of great anticipation that you will heed what God is saying through the letter of Jude.
12. In your daily experience of ministry in Australia today, you do well to remember that (a) there is a faith **once for all** delivered to the saints; (b) this faith is **worth contending** for — it is **worth guarding** — it is

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worth defending; and where necessary it is **worth dying for**; (c) but also this faith is **frequently threatened** from within the church; and for that matter (d) every authentic believer **must contend for the faith**. In a nutshell this is my message to you.

13. When we say that there is a faith once for all delivered to the saints, what do we mean? While I was studying at Moore College in the last four years, it became clearer to me than ever before, that in Seminaries and Churches today it is fashionable to speak of many theologies in the Old Testament or even many theologies in the New Testament. Scholars love to stress the diversity of viewpoints between the Old Testament and the New Testament writers. They also talk about the difficulty of bringing them all into a single coherent understanding of reality.
14. For sure my friends the faculty at College has done a great job of equipping you to recognize that there is indeed some diversity from one inspired writer to another. But tonight I plead with you graduates of Moore College to continue to be a new generation of priests and Christians, called by God in this season — this hour — graduates who work hard at the implications of Jude 3: 'to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.'
15. Whatever diversity there is in the way we view this faith, the emphasis here falls on unity. There is an apostolic faith. We should not add to it or take from it. It has been once for all delivered to the saints.
16. Last week, I was in Nairobi, Kenya, attending a meeting of Gafcon II Theological Commission. Our very own, my dear brother Mark Thompson was there. From the testimonies and some documents that were shared by some members of the commission, regarding what is happening in their part of the world — the Anglican Communion, it was heart breaking for members of the Commission to hear how some people within the Anglican Communion continue to teach a false gospel; they remove parts of the Bible, they sugar coat the gospel, and they seem to be adding their own things to the Bible.
17. No! The gospel is the gospel: it is simple and authentic. It lays the same demand on Africans, the same demands on Americans, the same demands on the Britons, and the same demands on the Aouzis. The faith once delivered for all put the same claim upon everyone, everywhere, in God's world.

18. Today you go out into the world to the ministry of contending for the faith. Contending for the faith once delivered to all is not open to **cultural adjustments** — it is not open to *polygamy* which is rampant in Africa; it is not open to *homosexuality* which existed in Africa before the coming of Christianity. But the African culture never deliberately promoted it unlike today when there is a deliberate move to systematically promote it by some from outside Africa.
19. **Whatever** culture: Christians must actively guard the faith; we are to actively contend for the faith. We guard it because there *is* truth worth contending for. That is perhaps hard especially for your relativistic culture to understand.
20. Living in Sydney for four years, I sense that you might be able to imagine dying for people, but hardly any ministers of the gospel in Australia today, I suspect would consider any *truths* so precious to die for! I am not calling on you to die for the gospel's sake but when it becomes necessary you know one thing: God through the book of Jude told us to guard it. In guarding it, it may become necessary to die for it.
21. The Christian faith that we cherish so dearly in Uganda was planted in 1877 by the CMS missionaries from England. We are only 136 years in contending for the faith once delivered for all. Unlike your church in Australia, I once heard from a very reliable source that although your church is slightly older than ours, you have in a period of more than 100 years produced only one martyr but Uganda has produced several! It is not a matter of boasting or competition in producing martyrs for the church.
22. I am not in any way calling for the graduates to go out into the world and become martyrs since they graduates of a special season. My point in comparing the two churches is this: in the first 10 years of planting the church in Uganda, it produced the Uganda Martyrs. They were burned alive because they stood by a truth — the truth that they would not serve the king in areas that does not please King Jesus (namely, they would not give in to the young king Mwanga's homosexual demand). The first three page boys were murdered and on the same day 40 new converts trusted Jesus and asked to be baptised by the missionaries. They died and the church begun! For the sake of truth they endured the agonizing pain of being burnt alive.
23. And at the close of the centenary of Christianity in Uganda, our beloved and courageous Archbishop Janani Luwum sealed the centenary with his own

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blood when a muslim president, Idi Amin murdered him. (For details, read Bishop Festo Kivengere's little book: *I Love Idi Amin*)

24. The blood of the martyrs in Uganda is a powerful testimony that the faith once for all delivered to the saints is worth contending for. There is evidence of this right here in verse 3. Jude says that what he is really writing about is *our common salvation*. 'Since I am eager to write about our common salvation, it is necessary to urge you to contend for the faith.'

25. Make no mistake to miss out on contending for the faith. When the faith is clearly at stake, our salvation is clearly at stake. If the truth is lost, salvation is lost. The Uganda martyrs like the Apostles of Jesus were willing to die for the sake of the faith because they cared about preserving the message of salvation — they cared about people and about the glory of God.

26. The worst enemies of Christian doctrine are professing Christians who do not hold to the faith once for all delivered to the saints. In his last message to the pastors of the church of Ephesus in Acts 20:29–30, Paul warned them that after his departure, 'fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and *from among your own selves* will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them'.

27. In Jude the reason the church needed to tighten itself to contend for the faith is given in verse 4. 'For admission has been secretly gained by some who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.'

28. So the threat to the faith is coming from among some who are now inside. Paul said it would happen. Jude saw it happening. He saw it as a fulfilment of the apostles' predictions. Verses 17–19: 'But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; they said to you, 'In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions. It is these who set up divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.'

29. These days I have come to like and to read more of how the apostles Peter and Paul have each been contending for the faith in their different contexts. It occurred to me that as many tears as it may have cost Paul, we read in Philippians 3:18: 'As I have always told you before and even with tears again', virtually all his letters have to do with contentions that he was having

with professing Christians.

30. And so my friends, as you reach out into the world, contending for the faith, it should not surprise you if today or in your future ministry much of your contending for the faith will be with professing Christians. Christians who teach and write things, which (at least from our perspective) are contrary to the faith once for all delivered to the saints. The plain New Testament teaching is that the faith will be repeatedly threatened from within.

31. This letter of Jude is not written to a pastor but to 'those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ' (v. 1). The duty to contend for the faith is, therefore, not just the duty of the ordained ministers of the Word, though they do have a special responsibility. It is the duty of every genuine believer.

32. Verses 20–21 tell some of the things we should do to prepare ourselves to contend for the faith. 'But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep, yourselves in the love of God, wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life'.

33. The best thing we can do to become a church that is effective in contending for the faith is to become a church well built on the faith. 'Build yourselves up on your most holy faith'. *Prayer* is an indispensable part of contending for the faith. 'Pray in the Holy Spirit'. Unless we seek the mind of the Holy Spirit in prayer, we will not grow in our grasp of the faith and we will be weak contenders. I hope that your time at College has enabled you to be prayer warriors. The College cannot do the actual praying for you: you either pray in this business of contending for the faith or come back to college at a later stage for a refresher course on prayer.

34. When you have Rectors whose prayer life is weak: you can fear for the prayer life of their churches under their watch. We have seen it in Africa! Where the prayer life of the Rectors are strong, it follows that the prayer life of the churches are also strong. When it comes to the actual contending Jude says: 'And convince some, who doubt; save some, by snatching them out of

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the fire; on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh'.

35. At least **two things** are evident here. One is that contending sometimes involves **an intellectual effort** to change the way a person thinks: 'Convince some, who doubt.' The other is that contending sometimes involves **moral reclamation**: go after them into the mess where their perverse ideas have taken them, and snatch them back to safety even while you hate what they are doing. These two things I am confident that Moore College has ably equipped you to do it.
36. In reality these things always go together: an effort to change the mind; and, an effort to change the morals, bathed in prayer to God. Contending for the faith is never merely an academic exercise. It is never merely mental. In December last year, a dear servant of the Lord, Bishop Peter Tasker, addressed our faculty in Uganda. He boldly warned us as theological educators in Africa today, that our business as theological educators is never primarily an academic exercise detached from the life of the church; ours, he reasoned with us is a fellowship. We need to hear this because the source of all false doctrine is the pride of the man's heart not the weakness of his mind.
37. This is why Jude tells us to grow and pray and stay in the love of God and depend on his mercy before he says anything about how we should contend for the faith. The best argument for the faith is when the saints live it. That is why Peter says 'Be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence' (1 Peter 3:15). The *way* you contend is as important as the content of your arguments. You can win with your logic and smartly lose with your life.
38. Under God, as you go into the world, will you contend for the faith? Will you remain on course for contending for the faith over the years ahead? Beloved of God, nothing: nothing whatsoever: must derail us from being on course for contending earnestly for the faith once delivered for all. The nations of the world need to hear the same gospel. Australia, and my country, Uganda, need to hear the same gospel that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners

39. If we do not contend for the gospel in this season, we must be pitied!

40. And now as you go out into the world to contend for the faith once delivered to all, may God richly bless you; and, may he watch over you now and in the days ahead. Amen.