

# CONTROVERSY MAY HAVE ITS HOLY USES

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The devil is a master strategist. He varies his attack as skillfully as an experienced general and always has one more trick to use against the one who imagines he is well experienced in the holy war.

But two radically opposite things the devil seeks to destroy us—by our sins and by our virtues.

First, he tempts us to sin. This might be called his conventional device. It worked against Adam and Eve and still works after the passing of the centuries. By means of it millions each year are, as Paul said, drowned in destruction and perdition. One would think the human race would learn to resist the blandishments of its sworn enemy, and it probably would accept that there is an enemy within the gate—the fallen heart is secretly on the side of the devil.

It is, however, Satan's wiliest stratagem to use our virtues against us, and this he often does with astonishing success. By means of temptation to sin he strikes at our personal lives; by working through our virtues he gets at the whole community of believers and unfits it for its own defense.

A parallel to Satan's technique may be seen in the activities of certain subversive political groups who use the Constitution of the United States as a shield while they work to destroy that Constitution. By unctuous pleading for the right of free speech they seek to destroy all freedom of speech. By talking piously about government by law they push our country toward the place where there will be government by dictatorship and all laws will mean what a ruling clique of base, cynical men want them to mean. So diabolical is this method that one can only conclude that those who use it learned it from their father the devil, whose they are and whom they serve.

To capture a city an enemy must first weaken or destroy its resistance, and so it is with the evangelical forces at any given time or place. It is impossible for Satan to storm the citadel of God as long as faithful watchmen stand on the walls to rouse her soldiers to action. The church will never fall as long as she resists. This the devil knows; consequently he uses any stratagem to neutralize her resistance.

Many times in history the Christians in various towns, cities and even whole countries have given up their defenses for reasons wholly evil. Worldliness, sinful pleasures and personal ungodliness have often been the cause of the church's disgraceful surrender to the enemy.

Today, however, Satan's strategy is different. Though he still uses the old methods where he can do so with success, his more effective method is to paralyze our resistance by appealing to our virtues, especially the virtue of charity.

He first creates a maudlin and wholly inaccurate concept of Christ as soft, smiling and tolerant. He reminds us that Christ was "brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth," and suggest that we go and do likewise. Then if we notice his foot in the door and rise to oppose him he appeals to our desires to be Christlike. "You must not practice negative thinking," he tells us. "Jesus said, 'He that is not against Me is for Me.' Also he said 'Judge not,' and how can you be a good Christian and pass adverse judgment on any religious talk or activity? Controversy divides the body of Christ. Love is of God, little children so love everything and all will be well."

Thus speaks the devil, using holy Scripture falsely for his evil purpose; and it is nothing short of tragic how many of God's people are taken in by his sweet talk. This shepherd becomes afraid to use his club and the wolf gets the sheep. The watchman is charmed into believing that there is no danger, and the city falls to the enemy without a shot. So Satan destroys us by appealing to our virtue.

The clever proponents of evil political ideologies are spending millions to make us Americans ashamed to love our country. By the use of all available media of communication they are persuading our people that there is little left worth defending and certainly nothing worth dying for. They are building up in the public mind a picture of an American as a generous, tolerant, smiling chap who loves baseball and babies but is not too much concerned about "fringe" political theories. This synthetic American subscribes to the doctrine of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man and let's go fishing—everything will be all right.

And so in religion, especially among Protestants. Let a man rise to declare the unique Lordship of Jesus Christ and the absolute necessity of obedience to him and he is at once branded as a hatemonger and a divider of men. The devil has brainwashed large numbers of religious leaders so successfully that they are now too timid to resist him. And he, being the kind of devil he is, takes swift advantage of their cowardice to erect altars to baal everywhere.

The Bible is a book of controversy. The Old Testament prophets were men of contention. Our Lord Jesus while on earth was in deadly conflict with the devil. The apostles, the church fathers and the reformers were men of controversy. They fought the devil to the death and kept the torch of truth burning for all succeeding generations.

Is our contribution to history to be the ignoble one of letting the torch go out?