

## THE T.S.F. MEMBER AND THE CHRISTIAN UNION

'Should I give time to supporting actively the local Christian Union, or should I fling all my energies into the work and life of my own College?' The question is one which concerns every T.S.F. member whose College is part of, or situated near to, a University. There is much to be said both ways, and there is certainly a strong case for exclusive loyalty to one's College.

There is the time factor. The Evangelical theologian will love his subject (although not necessarily the manner in which it is taught), and will therefore want to apply himself diligently to his studies. 'The absolutely utmost industry in this supreme department of study is simply imperative and indispensable. An unindustrious divinity student should be drummed out of the Hall as soon as he is discovered obtruding himself into it', wrote the great Scottish preacher, Dr. Alexander Whyte. Furthermore, the T.S.F. member will need time to cultivate lasting friendships with his fellow-theologians, some of whom will have but little grasp of basic spiritual truth, and perhaps still less genuine spiritual experience. Such friendships can be a powerful and constant influence upon a man's whole life and ministry when he is beyond the reach of all other direct evangelical influences. Still further claims may be made upon the time of the T.S.F. man; he may be called upon to serve his fellows on the College Committee — usually a position of influence and opportunity; he will want to take an active part in keen debate and healthy discussion, and actively to support such College societies as will edify his spirit and sharpen his mind. There is also the fact that Christian Union Bible studies are often too elementary for the theological student with his intimate knowledge of critical detail and familiarity with the original languages!

There is, however, the other side. By virtue of his specialized training, the theologian has an important contribution to make to the life and witness of the C.U. Moreover, the other C.U. members usually regard him as a senior student and often with a quite unjustified sense of awe, so that his presence in their midst is often in itself an encouragement. But it *can* also be a menace. The theologian who in a general Bible study group begins airing his own doubts and expounding some alarming and ill-digested critical theory is a menace. His own intellectual uncertainty may well be an inevitable phase through which he must pass in the course of his studies and one which can be dispelled by still further study. There *is* always another point of view, but the non-theological student has usually neither the time nor the requisite training to become familiar with it. In such circumstances it is wrong to raise doubts. The contribution of the theologian should be positive and edifying, not negative and destructive. The general Bible study group can therefore be not only enriched by the presence and wise contribution of the T.S.F. member, but can serve to teach him valuable and often much-needed lessons in humility and self-restraint. Moreover, a reverent, if simple, study of the Word can never fail to be spiritually rewarding, and is perhaps especially so to the theological student, trained, as he often is, to adopt the purely critical approach.

One further consideration among others would urge the T.S.F. member to give active support to the local C.U. — the opportunity for evangelism. Many men leave our Colleges and enter upon the Christian ministry with sound theology in their heads but little evangelistic fervour in their hearts. They make the fatal error of regarding their theological training merely as a prelude to evangelism. But if a man is not actively evangelistic as a student there is little likelihood of his being so later. Ordination effects no miraculous change. Theological knowledge, if it is not to become sterile, must always be allowed to capture the heart and fire the imagination and be made practical as it is acquired. The writer has found that theology becomes relevant and

alive in no way better than in conversing about the things of the faith with keen-minded non-Christian students. The open meetings and other activities of the C.U. generally give scope for such contacts.

The words of one ordination vow are pertinent and searching. 'Are not zeal for the glory of God, love to the Lord Jesus Christ, and a desire for the salvation of men, so far as you know your own heart, your great motives and chief inducements to enter the office of the Holy Ministry?' Might not the fellowship of the local C.U. have some part to play in equipping the T.S.F. member the better to express and fulfil these holy desires and aspirations?

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