men ". They have had a grounding in theology which should enable them to keep abreast of the leaders ; they also have the pastoral experience which keeps them in touch with the world on the frontier. They have been commissioned as " watchmen and stewards of the Lord " ; but as Brunner has said in his book, *Justice and the Social Order*, " Only the man who can look beyond frontiers can be their watchman ".

Evangelical Unions in the Universities

A Symposium

IN the past year much discussion has centred round the function and value of Christian Unions (or Evangelical Unions) in the universities. Three writers have been asked to put forward their views. The first is a senior student who recently graduated with a First Class at one of the older universities. The second is an ordained graduate now in his first parish as an incumbent ; and the third, previously a college chaplain, is now incumbent of a parish in a university city.

I

A Senior Student

The late Professor Rendle Short, who had wide experience of the work of the Christian Unions in the universities over a period of many years, commented a short while ago on their remarkable growth and development throughout this country. Steadily they were becoming the predominant Christian organization, if not numerically, then at least in influence. And the process continues. They can no longer be discounted, but are a prime factor to be reckoned with in any discussion of the religious life in the universities.

Inevitably this raises questions in people's minds. There are many to-day of the older generation who look askance at this movement, because they fail to realize how great have been the changes during the last twenty-five years. Instead of small groups struggling for survival, large and well-organized Christian Unions exist in several universities ; this is especially true of Oxford and Cambridge. The wild methods of the past have been replaced by an altogether saner outlook. Policy is more far-sighted and particularly concerned with the follow-up of converts. Tact and diplomacy are taking the place of the battering-ram technique. Scholarship is not despised but encouraged.

Nevertheless someone may well ask what special advantages membership of a Christian Union is likely to bestow. For my part, I would say that they are threefold. First, it provides an opportunity to join other Christians in a vital, active fellowship. The help derived from meeting together regularly for Bible study and prayer in an informal atmosphere is invaluable. I knew an Anglo-Catholic who, in spite of his background, decided to join the Christian Union after trying out all the religious societies, because there alone he found the fellowship he was seeking. Secondly, the Christian Unions are unashamedly evangelistic.

Sermons and informal meetings are arranged for this purpose, to which members are urged to invite their friends. Personal evangelism is much encouraged. Occasionally missions are held, and these have frequently made a considerable impact. The recent Billy Graham Mission in Cambridge was planned on an unprecedented scale, but it is as yet too early to assess its results. Indeed, I know many people personally who have been won for Christ at the universities by such means. But thirdly—and this is too often overlooked—the Christian Unions endeavour to provide their members with a thorough Biblical instruction in the Faith. Their purpose is not solely to win men, but also to establish them and train them for service. Admittedly, the degree to which these objectives are attained varies from place to place, but I am convinced from my own experience that the benefits derived from membership are of very great value.

Perhaps the one aspect of the Christian Unions which causes most concern is their attitude towards co-operation with other religious bodies. The policy that is adopted springs from their doctrinal basis, which is in fact their very *raison d'être*. If their tenets of the faith, especially concerning the Bible and the Atonement and the Nature of Man, were universally accepted, then the Christian Unions could probably be abolished forthwith. But this is not the case. The conservative position has only been preserved through a strenuous refusal to compromise. There are three important considerations to be taken into account before their attitude is condemned. In the first place, the Christian Unions exist to uphold certain doctrinal beliefs. Can an organization in good faith co-operate with those who do not agree with its fundamental tenets? Though it cannot co-operate officially as a body, yet its individual members are at liberty to act as they please. Again, would not co-operation with such bodies prove extremely misleading to young Christians? What opinion are they to hold, when they hear such diverse teaching? Let them become firmly grounded in the faith before they get involved in controversial issues. Finally, past history has emphatically taught these lessons, and it is instruction not to be forgotten. Of course, this policy is based on the presupposition that their doctrinal position is correct, but this is inevitable. "If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" The difficulty with firmly-held principles is that so often they are tempered not with love but with a hard dogmatism; but the Christian Unions are increasingly aware of this danger. Some people would advocate membership of a more comprehensive organization, such as the Student Christian Movement, but my experience has shown that the threefold advantages cited earlier would thus be in large part forfeited. This is not intended in any derogatory sense, but simply to underline the fact that the practical and evangelistic emphasis of the Christian Unions is often lacking elsewhere and is usually replaced by theoretical discussion.

The members of the Christian Unions are sometimes charged with being narrow and bigoted and obscurantist. If that was once the case, it is rarely so to-day. Membership does not stifle theological thinking. On the contrary, the practice of daily Bible study, which is constantly advocated, is a great incentive to reach a fuller understanding. In the

Christian Unions there is to be found an eagerness to grapple with the problems of the Faith and to discover the answers. Personal evangelism is a constant challenge to a deeper and more reasoned faith. It is a humbling and stimulating experience to have some difficulty thrust in your way by an unbeliever, which you are unable to answer, as I have found on several occasions. It is significant that an ever-increasing number from the Unions are reading Theology. Inevitably there are times of perplexity and confusion, but it is surely unfair to label as obscurantism the assurance of personal experience which says, like the blind man in John 9, " I know ".

Before concluding I must add a word on a point that is frequently misunderstood. The Christian Unions are not un-denominational but inter-denominational. They do not despise churchmanship, but rather display that unity of the faith which transcends it. For me, membership was a source of great happiness, an invaluable aid to my spiritual life, and a means of coming to know intimately people from several denominations. Shortcomings there always will be, but I shall always treasure the many good things which I was privileged to receive through membership.

II

A Graduate

In early days at University my religious friends did not directly warn me against the Christian Union, but their whispered suggestions were enough. Then I met one or two C.U. men. Dogmatic, assured and aggressive, they frightened me. Once, I went—under constraint—to a C.U. prayer meeting, the first ever. In great confusion, I decided that " praying aloud " was an unnecessary exercise.

I dodged further attempts to drag me along to a C.U. sermon. Nevertheless, I went—alone. Fearful and bewildered I hardly heard the sermon. The C.U. Mission intrigued me ; so much good publicity. Fear and prejudice compelled me to decline strong encouragement to attend. Nevertheless, I went—alone. The preaching thrilled but scared. Others talked of it as " offensive ", " unscholarly," " bigoted ". All good enough excuses—and so did I.

Personal contact with C.U. men brought greater prejudice. So unloving. Zealous but little more. Then a friend was slighted for refusing to be converted. Antipathy increased. Yet one or two of the C.U. men helped more than any one else. They knew their Bible and used it to great effect. One man hammered once with Jeremiah xvii. 9 ; perhaps this was the initial turning point.

Then there was doctrinal offence. Well do I remember a talk on the Atonement of Christ. Raven, Dodd and Quick were all dismissed ; Denney, Dale and Guillebaud given papal infallibility. The crucial issue was the sin-bearing nature of Christ's death. This aspect was all-important—nothing else about His death really mattered.

Belief and practice of these C.U. men, therefore brought great personal antagonism. Yet these men were so self-sacrificing, so assured and so zealous for the conversion of others—and so successful too. They commanded attention and respect. Yet they really annoyed, because they were always after you.

My personal pilgrimage took me away from the centre of C.U. activity. Work in a parish brought failure. Slaving away to encourage people to love Christ, yet never seeing anyone really changed. A converted layman gave to me another picture. Men and women were changed through him and came to know the Lord. A painful truth came home. Christ can never *use* you, until He *has* you. God's Word hammered again. After a week-end Mission these words came to me: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended and we are not saved" (Jer. viii. 20). I wrote them down, but found that I had written a different version, ending "and *I* am not saved". The point at issue was acceptance and confession of Christ as my own personal Saviour—my sin-bearer. I surrendered, and Christ has been at work ever since.

An interesting thing is this. Since this particular experience I find the fullest expression of the Christian faith—and one that satisfies me most—is in the powerful, assertive, soul-seeking groups like C.U., and not in the groups which formerly had my allegiance. It is in groups like C.U. that the essentials of Christ's teaching and methods are brought to rightful prominence.

It is here that I find the marks of the true Christian Church as expressed in the formularies of the Church of England. Here is the community of "faithful people"—conversion is given prominence—Article XIX. The Bible is given first priority—Article VI. Jesus is proclaimed as the only Saviour—Article XVIII, and as a sin-bearing Saviour—Articles II and XV. Personal acceptance by faith is pressed home—Articles XI and XII. Then when you look at the Bible Church, as in the early chapters of the Acts, there you see similar marks. The assertion of the Good News in Christ; call for personal decision—"repent and be baptized"; conversions; prayers together; community of interest and fervour. A people with assurance, set apart and used by God for the "winning" of others.

So now I find that I am in agreement and in harmony with those I once would have persecuted. Herein I find a lesson for all who bear malice towards C.U. life. Perhaps it is the experience of Christ the Redeemer in the inner man that is not shared. Perhaps the offence, the stumbling-block, is not the life and methods of the C.U. men, but the Gospel which they preach—for they claim like Paul, to "preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumbling-block, and unto Gentiles foolishness". When we submit, and only then, are we able to say with Job, "I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee, wherefore I abhor myself, and repent, in dust and ashes" (Job xlii. 5).

III

A Resident Senior Member (*ordained*)

A Cambridge Divinity Professor preaching at a school in the post-war years was asked in conversation how the religious societies were faring in Cambridge. Moderately, was his opinion, with the one exception of "the incredible C.I.C.C.U.", which was growing fast and thriving. And at present Evangelical Unions are increasing. Amongst many

reasons for this are the wane of liberal theology, the failure of Humanism as a faith to live by, and the widespread spiritual hunger of which Billy Graham is both the result and occasion. The Unions are still "incredible" to many. The recent correspondence in *The Times* on Fundamentalism shows that this growth is not widely welcomed, nor indeed understood. But to sum up the criticisms of dons is notably difficult: *Quot domini tot sententiæ.* If individualists can be found together anywhere it is at the High Table. They differ widely in theology, in Churchmanship and in temperament, and not least on the subject of this paper. However, some criticisms are heard often enough to be called general.

The Unions are frequently castigated for their dogmatism. That a spiritual man may sometimes have more understanding than his teachers is true, but not more learning. The evangelical freshman may have been warned of the "unsoundness" of the theological faculty, and thus become unteachable, a "real Word of God-er", as the Master of a College described one such. This attitude very naturally the don cannot abide. And indeed it is often the outward sign of an inward pride or of a fear of facing intellectual difficulties. Very few University teachers demand or desire full agreement from their pupils, but they conceive their vocation to be to make them think. Until the religious climate of the universities is more conservative and evangelical this cleavage will remain. The conservative must hold to his beliefs, but with humility, shown chiefly in a readiness to listen and to consider what he hears.

Another criticism is that the Unions have a narrowing effect on men's lives. The University is the natural home of Humanism (whether tinged or not with Christian ethics and ideals), a time of intellectual flowering and adventures of the mind. Every interest is catered for. It is a well-worn (almost outworn) beginning to a Freshmen's Meeting of the Evangelical Unions which says, "You will have been besieged by invitations to join countless clubs, political, æsthetic, athletic, religious or frivolous". It is probably true that the active evangelical limits his choice to about three: the E.U., a sports club and his Faculty Society. He very often needs to be advised (even pushed) to put work before religious activities (to be distinguished here from true religion), and not to neglect the company of his fellows, whether Christians or not. For unless he meets them he cannot bear his Christian witness before them. But when all this has been said and in part admitted, it is true that many senior members admire the Unions' witness, and the selflessness and self-sacrifice of their members. An analysis of academic and other successes would show up the Unions in a favourable light. There is less time-wasting in their circles than in many others.

Probably the chief complaint, at least from the Deans and Chaplains, is of separatism. "They think I'm unsound," one said to the writer. And they did! However, the Unions stand very much better over this than before the war. It is understandably a bitter thing for (say) the Dean of a College to feel that the largest and most active body of Christians in the College is not closely attached to the Chapel life. Nor should this feeling ever have cause to exist. The College Chapel

is the focal point of College Christianity. All professing Christians ought to be " Chapel men ". If the Sacraments are administered in such a way as to deny the Prayer Book teaching there is case to be made for a dignified explanation of one's preference for a local church. But ordinarily the one place where an evangelical ought to and can join the " Christian front " in his College is at the Prayer Book services, based foursquare on the Scriptures as their fount and authority.

A greater difficulty arises when " Chapel Groups " are run, or when Unions are asked to take part in a joint mission. These groups (and one has seen them as undergraduate and as senior member) seem often to defeat their affirmed object of uniting men of different outlooks. They usually underline the fact that serious doctrinal differences do exist and make men harden in their views. They frequently raise the philosophical problems of the Faith, which may be a grave disservice to a man who is young or unsettled in the faith, and who has need to solve his own more personal problems first. They do not take the place of the Bible readings arranged by the Unions, so they claim another precious evening of a man's week. The point about the weaker brother is most pertinent. Those older in the faith might not mind an evening of religious discussion, often speculative and far from the Scriptures. But we should not be prepared by our presence to encourage the attendance of those who are but " babes in Christ " and liable to be " carried about with every wind of doctrine ". There are some who would warn such men against the Unions, or lead them into sacramentalism. And here also is the great difficulty about joint missions. There may be unity over the fundamentals of the Gospel, the Person and Work of Christ (though we may ask how much we should all agree on, say, the Atonement ?). But when a man has been touched or professed conversion or been influenced for good, or re-awakened (and all those terms would be needed in a joint mission), what then ? Shall we agree on the next steps ? How can the Unions, with their evangelical basis, encourage such co-operation ? But there can be, and should be, respect for other Christians and their views, personal friendship, and corporate worship in the Chapel. The only satisfactory answer lies along these lines.

In all the criticisms here discussed, it is admitted that there is an element of truth, and corresponding lessons for the Unions to learn. But still it is true that many envy them their enthusiasm, and many admit they have the best approach to reaching the outsiders. Though they would want to be able to add to the Unions' converting work a superstructure of " fuller Church teaching " !

The words of the Master of a College might be worth recalling, trivial though their subject was. During the war the undergraduates were asked to help wash up. " The other societies (religious) put up notices about it, the Christian Union came and did it." As ever, each generation must learn that with all the rarified spiritual air they breathe, with all the teaching they receive on the fullness of the Spirit, they must not forget St. James's words, " that faith without works is dead ". Among themselves the real dangers are that " soundness " and " keenness " will become shibboleths. To the university at large, and to the world, the test will still be the same, " By their fruits ye shall know them ".