

Campus Crusade for Christ, Some Thoughts

by Stuart Olyott

September 1968.

Stuart Olyott was at that time the Pastor at Belvidere Road Church Liverpool, since then he has been the Pastoral Director of the Evangelical Movement of Wales at the Evangelical Theological college of Wales.

Dear Christian Student,

Campus Crusade for Christ is mushrooming, and has begun to work in Great Britain. Every active Christian student at University is certain to meet up with this movement sooner or later, and it is only proper that he should know something about it as soon as possible.

The movement stems from the United States of America, and its founder, president and executive director is the 46-year-old Dr William R. Bright. As a student leader at North Western State College in Oklahoma he passed his days of study as an agnostic, who was never faced by the claims of Christ. After graduating he entered business in Los Angeles, and eventually came to Christ by means of the young-adult class taught by the late Miss Henrietta Mears in Hollywood's First Presbyterian Church; it was here that his fiancé, Vignette Zachary, was also converted.

After marriage, Dr Bright continued in business, but also attended classes at Fuller Theological Seminary. (He had already done some study at Princeton Seminary). But the burden of reaching students for Christ lay heavy on his heart, and he left the classes, and spent a great deal of time contacting local students. Luncheon sessions, personal conferences and other methods saw a number of these students won for Christ; including several prominent sportsmen and student body presidents.

Campus Crusade is the extension and expansion of Dr Bright's original vision.

Basis and Aims

In a word, Campus Crusade is an unusually ambitious effort to evangelise students, both in North America and elsewhere.

It takes a very conservative position with regard to the Scriptures and the Atonement, and its staff members sign a conservative statement of faith, though it de-emphasises the importance of creedal affirmations among students. However, because of its great emphasis on getting decisions, it has a rather negative attitude to anything other than direct evangelism.

The stress is on evangelism, and the balance that should exist between evangelism and teaching is often upset. They are very keen to train their converts in their own methods of evangelism, often to the almost total neglect of other aspects of the Christian's life.

Campus Crusade lays great emphasis on the use of certain methods in evangelism, and its staff are trained to use them. They believe that 'the average person, if properly approached, is ready to commit his life to Christ'. And so the 'proper approach' occupies a great deal of their thinking.

They often talk of having 'a philosophy and a technique' suitable to the particular needs of students. One often gets the impression that they regard method as more of a key to evangelistic fruit than the actual message. This impression still remains even when they officially refute it by saying 'the Spirit-filled man who had good methods would be more fruitful than the Spirit-filled man who had not'.

Rapid Growth

The movement was founded in 1951, but it was not until ten years later that it began the extraordinary rate of growth that characterises it at the present time. By 1965 it had a full-time staff of 451, and was working in twelve countries. Today, just three years later its full-time staff numbers 1,200, working in thirty-seven countries. By 1976, Dr Bright envisages that the staff will add up to 10,000, and that every country in the globe — including Communist China — will have Campus Crusade working in it.

The Staff

What are these staff-workers like? For the most part they are delightful Christian people who are keen evangelists.

They continue the clean, deodorised, well-groomed 'All-American boy' image, but that is caused by their culture, not their organisation.

By British standards they are generally somewhat uninstructed, with very little doctrinal training, and only a poor ability to answer questions.

They are our brothers and sisters in Christ, and on a personal level we will not find it hard to have fellowship with them. But working with them in the task of evangelism is a rather different matter. They are incredibly committed to, and well drilled in, their own methodology, and are unhappy about working with those who are not trained by them. At the same time they assert that they are very keen to work with the local churches. Nearly all the staff-members have academic degrees, and some have several. None of them are conscientious objectors, nor is there anybody among them with Pentecostalist views. Campus Crusade places at least two staff-members in each university where they are working. Initially these are American, but they plan eventually to replace them with trained nationals. In Britain at the moment they have 40 such staff-members, working in about ten universities — mostly the ones that are more residential.

Staff-members receive their training at Arrowhead Springs, in The San Bernardino Mountains, California. This is a 136-room edifice which was previously a more than plush luxury hotel. The impressive, six-storey building, set in an 1,800-acre site, is now used by Campus Crusade for administrative offices and a training centre. The purchase of this property has occasioned a great deal of criticism from some quarters, while elsewhere it has been described as 'the envy of the evangelical world'. Dr Bright has never ruled out the possibility that it might one day be used as a university site, but contends that at the moment the property is being used well in training young men and women for the task of world-wide evangelism.

Staff-led

Unlike the Evangelical student bodies with which we are more familiar (I.V.F. and related bodies), Campus Crusade for Christ is led by the staff that we have mentioned. It is true that they have student committees, and that there is an increasing measure of student participation; as we shall see. But it is the two or more staff-members at each university who direct the work.

To begin with they direct the entire programme, take most of the meetings, and do most of the evangelism. Interested students sit and watch, and in earlier days there were complaints of the lack of creativity which resulted.

Increasing Student Participation

But today the movement is growing so fast that staff-members have found it quite impossible to do everything, and the movement is becoming increasingly student-run. In the summer of 1967 Campus Crusade therefore had over 8,000 students go to Arrowhead Springs to receive training in student participation. 'We gave the students the authority to start their own ministries on their campuses if they stayed in touch with the district staff team. the team is there to advise and support'.

This has meant that where the movement has become established, many staff-members have ceased to be resident, but travel in teams over a given area, and remaining available to the students within that vicinity. But Dr Bright continues to emphasise staff control, and has repeatedly denied that Campus Crusade is now becoming similar to IVCF, and providing unnecessary competition.

But more of this in a minute. The movement believes that this increased responsibility by the students has been nothing but healthy, and has considerably raised the 'quality of student discipleship' as well as the numbers of both members, and decisions for Christ. One Campus Crusade group, in the University of Texas, grew from 60 to 200 in the single academic year following the increased part given to the students to play. Campus Crusade looks on the trend with favour — 'Student mobilisation is the key in our day to a widespread evangelistic impact. It will not lower the standards or dull the edge of the ministry. Students are capable not only of reaching others for Christ but also of running a ministry' (Jon Buell, central Texas director).

Relationship with Christian Unions etc.

A segment of American evangelicalism has always regarded Campus Crusade as an unnecessary competitor with the much older IVCF. But Dr Bright and the chief of the IVCF have remained warm friends, giving no clue of any competitive spirit. The original position was for them to say that the need of students was so great, and the numbers of them increasing so rapidly, that neither organisation was likely to muster enough resources to do the job.

But in fact it has not been as uncomplicated as that, as there has been a certain amount of overlap, and not an entire absence of tension. In January 1968, Dr Bright, the leaders of the IVCF in both the USA and Canada, and the president of the Navigators, all met in Denver. It was the first time that the leaders of the four great student movements of North America had ever got together.

That difficulty has been experienced was made clear by the press release which said they had been considering ways in which they could 'complement one another' and which announced that a further meeting was planned.

As far as Britain is concerned, Campus Crusade have made it quite clear that their plans are to create their own student groups as fully-recognised university societies, alongside and distinct from the C.U.S.

On arrival in Britain, their representatives met leaders of the IVF and related bodies, and on a separate occasion, members of the IVF Council. The British leaders tried to persuade them to direct their energies to areas of the world where there is little or no student witness. However, the decision to start work in Britain had already been made.

They were then urged not to divide the evangelical student witness within the universities and colleges, but to seek to work in some other way, such as through local churches, which would avoid causing a division.

But Campus Crusade has held to its determination to form its own groups as soon as possible. They have said that they, will not try and draw people away from the C.U.s, but will concentrate on unconverted students, and such Christians who are not already committed to other religious societies.

They point out that they have met those who are already dissatisfied with the C.U.s, and prefer their approach. They intend that their work shall complement, and not detract from existing Christian student work.

Their own Hall and College groups will emerge; and as they are so keen to train their converts in their own methodology, none of these are likely to be fed into the C.U.

In fact, it must be clear by now how impossible co-operation between other bodies and Campus Crusade must be. We have already said that they will not work with those who have not been trained by them.

In any case, a student-run movement could hardly work satisfactorily with one which is staff-directed, however much responsibility the latter gave to its members. And so it is, in North America, that Campus Crusade and the IVCF work separately.

They do not engage in slanging matches, but when there has been adverse public reaction to activities about which other Christian groups have been unhappy, these groups have had to disassociate themselves from Campus Crusade.

But one can disassociate oneself from an activity or a method without disassociating oneself from the essential message preached. We may have to learn to do this.

We must also be careful not to react to Campus Crusade in such a way that we ourselves occupy an extreme position. Their stress on evangelism must not drive us away from evangelism — but rather to a Biblical evangelism, properly balanced with expository and doctrinal teaching. Nor must we react to their methods by retreating into a dead and empty intellectualism.

We shall, of course, seek to have a full and systematic understanding of our most holy faith. We shall also seek to manifest it in the way the Scriptures teach, and the Holy Spirit enables.

Nor must we develop a partisan spirit, and fight just for the name and sake of our particular Christian student group. The spread of the revealed Biblical Gospel; the holiness of those who believe it; the glory of God — these are our first concerns. May nothing move us from such priorities!

Methods

Apart from its basic evangelistic method, which we shall look at shortly, it may be of interest to know that as Campus Crusade has expanded, so have the number of its methods; and it now has a ministry organised into thirteen major divisions.

One is constituted by its 'Institutes for evangelism'. Last year, over 75,000 people in North America went to week-long courses in evangelism at centres all over the country. Sex-lectures have also been used. 'Sex, and the Single Collegian' was the title of a lecture series that drew 2,500 last year. This year, at the Western Kentucky University, the same series was attended by 6,000 students.

Folk songs have also been used, and Campus Crusade has two troupes of 'New Folk' each composed of five men and four women. These tour universities with a folk show that ends with personal testimonies by the performers, a ten-minute gospel appeal, and a prayer of commitment. This idea began last year, and the first troupe played to 100,000 students during the season. The groups charge 160 dollars a day for performances, though some are free, and reckon that 80% of their listeners are students. Pop-songs, spirituals, gospel-songs and sketches, plus the ingredients we have mentioned, are blended and executed in a most professional way.

I mention this, as Campus Crusade spends a lot of time in evangelism that stresses similarity with the world, and all the attractions of the Christian life, rather than the necessary repulsions that must also be preached. Whatever the world is clamouring for at the moment, this is what they seem to offer, with the proviso that the Christian product is better.

The Gospel is a friendly pal, and its message is so geared to the trendy generation. There is a great deal of such talk as — 'Come and discover the thrill of Christian fellowship'; 'Come and make your boast in the Lord'; 'abundant life' etc.

This is all very well, but the essence of the Gospel is the holiness of God; the heinous fact of his broken law; man's corrupt and sinful nature; Jesus Christ as the propitiation for sin; the need for repentance and turning from sin to seek God in Christ; the new Birth, by which a depraved man is brought to faith through the power of the Holy Spirit; progress in sanctification; full assurance; etc., etc., etc. But where are these in the ordinary message propagated by the movement that we are surveying?

Basic Methodology

So much for some of the more recent activities that Campus Crusade has embarked upon. But their basic method or 'approach', in which all their staff are trained, still remains. This is a technique of personal evangelism using a little booklet, the size of a book of stamps, and called Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?

This booklet is very attractively printed, and presents an earnest appeal to the reader. There is no doubt that those who prepared it love the Lord, and truly long for folk to be saved through reading it.

Basically, it contains a plan of salvation, and has many Scripture texts inside it. I shall not quote from it, for it may not be reproduced in whole or in part in any form whatever without written permission from the publisher.

But the basic idea is this. The worker sits alongside the student, and goes through the booklet step by step with him, seeking his agreement with each point, until he is intellectually convinced of the truth of the Christian faith. He is then urged to make a decision concerning this.

This may seem most commendable, and we dare not doubt that considerable numbers of people have been converted as a result of these person-to-person conversations.

But it is automatic to the point of being alarming. Agreement with the existence of God is not enough — one is to believe he is rewarder of all them that DILIGENTLY seek him. Agreement with the fact of sin is insufficient — it is CONVICTION of sin that the Holy Spirit brings about. Conversion is not brought about because a man decides for Christ on the mere whim of his will. It is the result of REPENTANCE and FAITH, both of which are created in the heart by the will and free Grace of a Sovereign God, who sees that man, left to his own will, will surely perish.

The apparent success of the method does not justify it, when such truths are given little prominence. There is evidence too that not a few who use the method consider it almost automatic in its results.

To quote a Campus Crusade worker, commenting on this method recently — 'While we find it takes on average 35 minutes to convert a student in the States, over here it takes 2, or even 3 hours'!

Another Booklet

Having such a doctrine of how one enters the Christian life, it is not surprising that they have a second booklet; called Have You Made the Wonderful Discovery of the Spirit Filled Life? Having assumed that the human will is sovereign in getting a man saved, this booklet continues to stress the autonomy of the human will in the process of sanctification. Its aim is to encourage Christians to bear fruit in their lives — this fruit being variously defined as Christian graces or soul-winning success

For both the Spirit Filled Life is needed and Christians are encouraged to receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit by a specific act of faith.

But where, in the whole of God's writ, is there a promise that we can claim such a fulness by such an act? Certainly we have a duty to be filled with the Spirit, and there are degrees of infilling. But that this fulness can be obtained immediately by a definite act of faith we repudiate as being contrary to Scripture.

There is also a lot of talk about 'allowing' the Holy Spirit to do this and that — most of all to fill our life. But where in the Bible does it talk, even once, of 'allowing' the Holy Spirit?

The teaching of the Bible is, that having the Holy Spirit we can realise our need of the Holy Spirit, and so pray for his filling. Certainly we are to pray for this.

But it must be a constant prayer as long as we live, and the answer comes by degrees in the course of life, not immediately and all at once.

The theological undertones that underlie these booklets are the old presuppositions of Wesleyanism, Keswick, and the Higher Life Movement. Students troubled by these views would do well to have a crack at a really stiff but profitable book — B.B. Warfield's Perfectionism which traces the history and tenets of this sort of teaching in a very clear way.

But the need for all is to study the Bible doctrine of REGENERATION, and the continuing activity of the Spirit in the life of the believer, working through the various means of Grace most prominently, the Word.

This Bible teaching, wonderfully stressed in the Gospel of John and the Epistles, is the death-knell to all the 'victorious life' concepts of the above schools.

The lack of a really comprehensive knowledge of the book of Romans is one of the greatest causes of the superficiality and confusion abounding even among well-meaning Evangelicals today.

Conclusion

May I close then by saying that, in my considered opinion, Campus Crusade for Christ is a well-intentioned effort to reach students for Christ, staffed by sincere Christian people. Its zeal is commendable, and one must thank God for many who have been truly converted through its ministry.

Nonetheless I regard it as harmful to the Evangelical testimony amongst students in Britain today, and would not wish to help it on its way. Its message passes over the most prominent features of the revealed Gospel, and its methods are Scripturally questionable. Its teaching on the will of man is perverse, and its doctrine of the higher life erroneous. It can do nothing but add to the appalling superficiality already rampant on the British Christian scene, and not the least amongst students; and will be the cause of further confusion among us.

The duty of Christian students is to ascertain from the Scriptures what the essence of the Gospel is; to present that Gospel to all men, but only in ways that are consistent with its teachings; to commend it always by holy lives, through constant attendance on the revealed means of Grace; and at all times, and in all things, to seek to bring credit, praise and honour to Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.