

July 2004

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In autumn 1953 I went up to King's College, Cambridge, at the age of 17. Cambridge was totally different from anything I had known before. Both King's College and Eton had been founded by Henry VI, so many Etonians went to King's. Recently the man who was Senior Tutor when I went up wrote about how in those years there was only one undergraduate who came from a working-class background. With a shock, I recognised myself. Those around me must have been shaken at times by my ways, but in their upper-class politeness they rarely showed it.

Freshers (freshmen, new undergraduates) arrive a few days early. They are invited to numerous sherry parties with senior fellows. At one of these I had the temerity to ask a fellow guest, 'Are you a freshman too?' It turned out that he was a research fellow who had just become the first person in the world to isolate ACTH (adreno-cortico trophic hormone). He took my question very well, and conversed charmingly with me, telling me how his work had gone. The end of the process was freeze-drying, which left a product so light that when you carved out a lump with a spatula you had to chase it around in the air.

During that week freshers are also bombarded with information from the hundreds of clubs seeking new members. I was invited to a tea in College held by CICCUC (Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union, pronounced 'kick-you'). I remember nothing about this meeting other than the delicious Chelsea buns, but I promised to go along to the Fresher's Sermon on my first Sunday in Cambridge.

That sermon I do remember. The Rev. O. K. De Berry spoke on Luke 15, the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost (prodigal) son. I realised why it seemed there was a brick wall between me and God. I was lost. My sin had made a barrier between us. But God had sent his Son to pay the penalty for my sin. That night in my College room I asked the Lord Jesus to come into my heart. The wall disappeared, and I could pray. I had become a Christian.

As a Minor Scholar my rooms that first year were in College - but only just. To get to my staircase you had to pass through a tunnel under a lane adjoining King's and come up at the other side. This place was known as 'the Drain'. My bedroom overlooked one of the smaller quadrangles of College on the other side of the lane. One of the rooms I looked onto belonged to E. M. Forster, the world-famous author and writer of *Passage to India*. I could see him put on his braces each morning.

Natural Sciences, requiring three experimental subjects, was no sinecure. We did not have time to spend hours in the Copper Kettle (the coffee shop on King's Parade), as many other students did. We had lectures every morning (including Saturday) and practicals every afternoon. In Physiology, the sarcastic German supervisor for histology expressed his hope that we would not slope off early once again. We called him 'Herr Follicle'.

I became increasingly involved with CICCUC. There were Bible studies once a week in College, Saturday evening Bible studies which filled the Union debating chamber, and the Sunday evening evangelistic service. Then every lunchtime there was the Daily Prayer Meeting (DPM) in the Henry Martyn Hall from 1.30 to 1.50. There was just time for a quick lunch, then the DPM, then scurrying off by bike to the afternoon practical.

King's wanted to encourage students to buy books. If we bought £12-worth, they would give us £3 back. I took my stack of books to the Assistant Tutor, Noel Annan (later to become Lord Annan, originator of the Annan Report on the BBC and also Vice-chancellor of London University). To say the least, he was not enthusiastic about Christianity. Some of my books were by George Dempster, recording his work as a Methodist minister. They were works like *Finding men for Christ*, *Touched by a Loving Hand* and so on. He took a look at the titles and said 'Very interesting!' But I got my £3.

From time to time CICCUC would hold missionary breakfasts. We would all assemble at the café, be served breakfast, and whilst we ate it someone (usually a missionary) would speak on a missionary subject. It would be over in time for a dash by bike to the 9.00 lecture.

At the start of my second year the speaker at a missionary breakfast was Basil Atkinson, a librarian at the University Library who gave much support to CICCUC. He told of missionaries who had spoken in one isolated African village. One boy listened avidly to every word they said. When they left, they felt he knew a great deal about Christianity, though perhaps not enough to become a Christian. Some time later they returned to this village and asked for the boy. They were told he had died shortly before. All the time he was dying he was saying, 'Why don't the Jesus men come? Why won't the Jesus men come?'

I remember Basil's words exactly. 'You are the Jesus men. Isn't it wonderful to be called by his name? Why don't you go?' At that moment I knew that I had to.

At that time the vicar of Great St. Mary's, the University church, was Mervyn Stockwood (later to become bishop of Southwark). At the beginning of my third year I was one of the two Coll. Reps (College Representatives) for CICCUC in King's. When we heard that Mervyn Stockwood was to speak to the Freshers at an SCM (Student Christian Movement) meeting, the two of us decided to go. He gave a survey of the whole Bible in just a few minutes. When questions were invited, in my arrogant youth I told him that one thing I

expected to hear as a major theme of the Bible hadn't come out, namely that Christ died for our sins. Privately afterwards he challenged me to a public debate on the subject, a challenge to which I felt I was not equipped to respond.

CICCU had invited Billy Graham to hold a mission for the University. Meetings were held each night in Great St. Mary's, and the messages went out by landline to many other universities. Members of the CU had to take out invitations to all in College.

I went to invite the Provost of King's, Sir John Sheppard. He told me he had a strong dislike for such meetings where people were led into a preoccupation with their sins. I replied that one should not keep looking at one's sins, but look to the Saviour.

Some time later I was invited to tea by Sir John. The only other guest was a young Etonian. I felt completely out of my depth and wondered why I had been invited out of the blue like that. I remember Sir John telling about the time when the Queen had visited Cambridge. He had been in conversation with the Queen, when the Master of another college had butted in. Could we imagine, he asked, anyone acting like that? Well, I could not imagine speaking to the Queen in the first place. Then, suddenly, he turned to me and said, 'You told me not to keep looking at sins, but to look to the Saviour. I gave you a mark for that.'

Another invitation I took out was for Tam Dalyell, later to become a Member of Parliament, and then Father of the House of Commons (the longest serving MP). His rooms were above the porter's lodge. Old rooms in College had two doors, the outer of which was hardly ever closed in term time. What I did not realise was that closing one's outer door ('sporting one's oak') was a sign that the person within was not to be disturbed. Tam sported his oak because he was giving himself to work, and I annoyed him intensely by hammering on it to invite him to hear Billy Graham.

The ecclesiastical Dean of the College was a very kind man. The story went about that one time he had asked some students to sow flower seeds in his garden. The Dean had charge of King's College Chapel, and used to show visitors round. This included taking them up to the roof. When he was on such a tour he looked down and saw that the flowers spelled out the words, 'B---- the Dean!' He was very amused.

The Dean asked Billy Graham to dine on the high table one night during the Mission. We two Coll. Reps. for CICCU were invited to the sherry party in the Dean's rooms beforehand. Whilst most of us chatted with Billy, I noticed a man in a dog collar who was pinned up in a corner of the room by one of the Fellows, who appeared to be giving him a verbal lashing. When the party broke up, the other Coll. Rep. took me over to the man in the dog collar, saying, 'Colin, I'd like you to meet John Stott.'

Tam Dalyell did come to one of the meetings. In the middle of one of the messages I remember him, from a front seat in the gallery, calling out, 'Oh, surely not, Billy!' It had been possible through the week's mission for people to meet Billy Graham for a chat. I asked Tam whether he would like to do so. He would, so I tried to arrange it. However, the mission was at an end. I went to the hotel where Billy was staying, and was able to see the arrangements for his departure. First, one of the team who was obviously an administrator came down to the lobby and frantically buzzed around tying up all the loose ends. In the end Billy Graham himself sauntered down and thanked everyone for what they had done, especially, I remember, the page boy. He listened to my request, but regretted that he had to leave immediately, as he had an appointment in London with the BBC. So Tam did not get to meet him.

One day after the Mission I was sitting at one of the scrubbed tables in the dining hall, eating my lunch by myself. I was deep in thought until I realised I was being addressed. It was the Dean, smiling and saying hello. I wished I had been more responsive to him before he moved on. Several days later his body was found near the Chapel. He had gone up to the roof, forced himself through a small stone archway and thrown himself down.

With all that was going on around me, and with increasing involvement with the CU, I regret to say that study became increasingly difficult. I did graduate, but only managed a third class honours BA.