

Editorial: CSCU - WHY BOTHER?

At our Annual Fellowship Meeting in April of this year, one reality that hit me forcibly is that the CSCU (like many other Christian organisations) is seeing a decline in its numbers. Perhaps you once regularly attended a CU meeting, but have got totally out of that routine, with that time slot now filled with other things. Or you may be passed a copy of **MINISTRY** each time, are sympathetic towards its aims and objectives, but have never actually made it along to a CU meeting yourself. And you may be asking yourself, 'What's in it for me? Why should I sacrifice some of my precious free time within working hours to attend the CU?' These are not unreasonable questions. My mum has related to me how her father used to say, 'There are no conscripts in Christ's service - only volunteers.' I personally don't believe that CU numbers will be raised through nagging, scolding or 'guilt tripping' others into attending CU meetings - but rather through our convincing others just what they miss out on due to *not* attending CU meetings. In this editorial, therefore, I want to consider just why *you* should support and participate in your local CU group.

1. We have a privilege that should be cherished and exercised. There are many countries in the world today where Christians must practise their faith in secret; where sharing your faith, owning a Bible, distributing Christian literature or conversion to Christianity carries a great risk of personal harm or even death. Yet in the UK we have liberties that Christians in other parts of the world do not have. Is it not a good thing therefore that we take advantage of such privileges, and in so doing help to maintain the freedoms which are coveted by many believers overseas, who are much less fortunate than us?

2. There is a witness that can be made. Each time you report to a reception desk or leave your workstation to attend a CU meeting, a simple message is sent out - that Jesus Christ *is* really important to you, and that your faith truly matters. You may not even express this in so many words, but the message is transmitted nonetheless. And often a person's attendance at a CU meeting may prompt a work colleague to ask just what the CU is and does, and so provide a valuable opening to share a little about your faith – at a time when such opportunities can be harder and harder to come by.

3. There is great benefit in establishing and maintaining good habits. Habits are your greatest helper or heaviest burden; they push you onward or drag you down. Give Satan an inch and he'll take a mile! Isn't it vital therefore to cultivate good habits? Upon my discharge following a period of treatment for a knee injury a physiotherapist told me the best advice she could give me was to keep my leg active. I would go on to establish the habit of a weekly gym workout. With this being something I had never done before, the early days were a bit of a struggle, and some weeks I feel less than enthusiastic or the body is slower to respond to the exercise. Yet I have discovered that this weekly workout for my heart and tune-up for my muscles has very real health benefits. Good habits help carve out a brighter future, being equally beneficial in the spiritual realm, as you exercise your spiritual gifts and begin to invest time and energy in activities that sharpen

and strengthen you spiritually (Rom 12:6-8). The CSCU is surely one such forum in which you can do these things. God will say things to you in the company of His people that He won't say anywhere else. The writer of Hebrews wrote this timeless counsel – “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another ...” (Heb 10:24-25). And why is this? –

4. As fellow believers we need each other. A song entitled, “Sometimes you can't make it on your own” topped the UK music charts in 2005 - a sentiment echoing what English poet John Donne had written 380 years earlier: “No man is an island, entire of itself.” The message of both is that human beings do not thrive when isolated from others; we need the love, support, wisdom and help of others. During the working week we spend roughly half our waking hours in the workplace, face many of the same problems and difficulties, so does it not make sense that Christians should join together, and be there for each other's mutual benefit? The Biblical word *fellowship* comes from a Greek word from which we also get the word *coin* – indicating a common currency. Christian fellowship encompasses the thought of something in common, partnership and sharing - of love (a choice to put another's interests before your own comforts), of time, and of talents. God has no children who aren't gifted - we learn that God gives gifts “to every man to profit” (1 Cor 12:7) that Christians may be benefited through working together, so others don't miss out. Just as tree roots intertwine, support and strengthen each other, we can do the same thing for our fellow believers when we put down roots within a local group.

5. Attendance at a CU meeting is not merely a one way street. We often hear of people who always look on the glass as being half-empty, meaning they tend to look on the gloomy side of things. The negative view of attending the CU is that of sacrificing precious free time and missing out on things which seem much more tempting, preferable or enjoyable. If you feel this way, let me outline just a few of the many positives I have experienced through being an active participant in a CU group: a) *Encouragement and edification*: I have learned things through Bible studies/meditations and what others have shared in CU meetings that sustained me during testing times and spurred me to press on. b) *Reassurance*: simply hearing CU members relate what God has done in their lives has reminded me of God's unfailing love, care, faithfulness and sufficient grace – and at times proved a rebuke to unbelief in my own heart. c) *Comfort and support* - it has been a great mutual blessing to share prayer requests and burdens with fellow CU members, to have the joy of bearing each other up and seeing answers to prayers, and to realise that we don't have to carry those burdens alone. d) *An opportunity for growth and for service*: The inevitable consequence of being asked to bring a short message or lead a Bible study is that it forces you to get into God's word - and such time is never wasted, as your own soul is fed and encouraged as you prepare, and you also have the opportunity to touch the lives of others. Yes, I could have chosen to read a newspaper, surf the net, go shopping or for a walk instead of going to a CU meeting. Yet the reality is, by substituting the CU with these things, I miss out on so much, and miss the opportunity to meet, share fellowship and forge friendships with other Christians - people I might never otherwise get to meet - people who often bless and enrich my life.

In US President, John F. Kennedy's, inaugural address, he made what is quite possibly one of his most famous statements: "My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you - ask what can you do for your country." I'm not going to patronise anyone by paraphrasing these words in relation to the CSCU, but the Bible has much to say on the blessings of unselfish giving. "And let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith". (Gal 6:9-10) "But to do good and to communicate (share fellowship or resources) forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." (Heb 13:16) "The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself." (Prov 11:25) "Who hath first given to him (God), and it shall be recompensed unto him again?" (Rom 11:35) Be encouraged, whatever you do in and for the CSCU does not go unnoticed by God, and He is no man's debtor.

Perhaps as you read this you may actively attend and participate in a local CSCU group. Rest assured, your support is greatly valued and appreciated, not just by your local Representative Member (RM) and other members of your CU group, but also by the central committee. But you may ask, 'Is there anything more I can do to support the CSCU at local level?' Let me suggest three things:

1. Someone has wisely said that prayer is the engine room of the church, and that applies equally to the CSCU, which will stand or fall in relation to the prayers that ascend on its behalf. So there is no better starting point than to suggest that you pray that God would preserve the liberties we currently enjoy; protect, strengthen and enlarge local groups; and provide RMs and the central committee with wisdom, vision, guidance and perseverance.
2. Encourage and support your group leader. Being an RM can feel quite a lonely role at times, and they don't have all the answers. If you have a suggestion for something that your group could or should be doing, let your RM know – most will welcome and appreciate constructive feedback.
3. Tell others about the CSCU. It is a well recognised fact that there are many Christians throughout the Civil Service who do not even know of the CSCU's existence! If your group does not use the notice boards in your building to publicise its meetings, that is one avenue you may wish to investigate. But being proactive on the ground and using personal networking and befriending to let others know of the CSCU's work and witness remain the most effective tools at our disposal.

A leaflet once given out in induction packs stated, "There's a place for YOU in the CSCU." It is very true. We all have different personalities, temperaments, gifts and needs but, as passages like 1 Corinthians 12:14-26 teach, we all have value as individuals in God's sight, and can all be useful and effective in His service. If you don't currently do so, we warmly invite you to our CSCU meetings, where you hopefully will not only be blessed, but bless others also.