

Lessons for Life from the 1960s OICCU

What I learnt from the OICCU in the 1960s and how that has helped me in my life since.

Firstly, let me thank Denis for inviting me to give my testimony at this point. Mulling things over has been quite a moving experience for me.

What immediately springs to mind was that first weekend when I came up in October 1966. Two people from the Oriel CU came to my room and invited me to come with them to church that Sunday. The church was St Ebbe's, the speaker was Michel Green, and his text was: "Choose this day whom you will serve." That changed my life. I chose. That afternoon I devoured twelve chapters of Matthew's Gospel. That evening, one of the students came round again, and went through what must have been a standard Billy Graham procedure, going over the plan of salvation. Despite being brought up in the Methodist church, I had never understood the reason for the cross before. That was the start of 57 years in Christ's service.

What did I learn from the OICCU? If I ticked off all the points, it would probably be the outline of a course in systematic theology. One thing really stands out. The weekly Bible studies in college, the Saturday evening Bible readings, the books I got to read, all contributed towards building in me a Bible-based faith. It was foundational.

My commitment to Christ, my appreciation of the Bible, and thirdly my interest in mission in Europe. Studying German

and French, it was perhaps natural that I should go along to the Europe prayer group, which met in Mansfield. That led to my going for a summer with OM, then a second summer, then a year, then ten years in France helping French churches and the witness of the French IFES. After that, it was France Mission, starting a church in Brittany, then the Baptist Association, pastoring churches in the Paris region. My two books in French ultimately go back to the OICCU.

As I look back on these things, I am mindful of my parents' prayers and very conscious of God's unfathomable sovereignty. And with that in mind, I would like to bring up a point that only recently occurred to me.

Humanly speaking, I was not predestined to go to Oxford. My mother gave up work when she married, my father was a postman, my grandfathers were a milkman and a gardener. I grew up on one of those council estates that were built on the edge of London after the war. What did I have in common with the students from Harrow, the rowers, the people who went to Italy for their holidays or ran an art gallery in London? That group of six to eight students in the Oriel CU provided me with friendship and support, so that I never felt a stranger. I have lost touch with most of them, but John Turl is here today.

What did the OICCU give me? Knowing Christ; trusting the Bible; service in France; lasting friendships.

Thank you.