

John Robert Walmsley Stott: A Personal Tributeⁱ

John Stott's ministry was Christ-centred, Biblical, prayerful, personal, gracious, strategic, unifying, multiplying, world-engaging and international.

Imagine a cadet in the early 1970's tramping the hills of Singleton in New South Wales to share pocket-sized tracts with another lone Christian during a rough and bawdy camp. That cadet was me, those little tracts were *Becoming a Christian* and *Being a Christian*,ⁱⁱ and that other cadet went on to be a senior community leader. For many, our first encounter with John Stott was through his extraordinarily extensive literature ministry. It's hard for us now to imagine just how little evangelical literature was available 50 years ago. Stott's *Basic Christianity* soon became a classic, translated into many languages. It robustly gives a defence of the faith in the face of modern criticism, while winningly commending it. The book is simultaneously an apologetic and an evangelistic work, as well as being a comprehensive foundation for discipleship. It was exactly what I needed at University.ⁱⁱⁱ

Others know John Stott through a conference, such as a Church Missionary Society Summer School, an Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students Annual Conference, or a convention at Mount Tambourine, Katoomba or Belgrave Heights. As a young Christian I was taken to hear his studies on Ephesians. They left an indelible impression on me. Stott set a high standard of Biblical exposition which engaged with contemporary issues. I can still remember Stott saying how he prayed daily "that he would be filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18b), and how he regularly set aside time for prayer on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly cycle. He was a clear and succinct preacher and teacher, characterised by his pithy and memorable headlines and outlines. His expositions were studded with many an eloquent turn of phrase. Illustrations were drawn from a wide spectrum. These often included references to etymology and word use in a range of ancient literature. Without being unduly prescriptive, his application was characterised by disciplined theological reflection. He argued that the preacher was to have the Bible in one hand, and the newspaper in the other, and that the sermon needed to express the interaction.^{iv} Indeed, one exercise he gave preachers was to think through a theological response to the newspaper headlines each day.

John Chapman considers Stott's greatest contribution to the Australian church was this modelling of expository preaching and the subsequent training it occasioned, in a range of contexts.^v Chapman reports that following a Church Missionary Society Summer School in the late 1960's or early 1970's, Dudley Foord and he instituted the College of Preachers, where groups of 10 clergy were trained at the residential conference centre, Gilbulla, in expository preaching.^{vi} One cannot assess the profound effect Stott's exemplary preaching has thus had on Christian life in Australia and beyond. At the time the authority, infallibility and unity of the Scriptures was doubted by many churchmen, especially those in the academy. Biblical faith was regarded as fundamentalist, naive, uneducated and sentimental. Stott demonstrated that evangelical faith was intellectually credible, historically rooted, coherent and compelling, with major implications for the transformation of every aspect of the individual and society.^{vii} I was privileged to attend a Diocese of Sydney clergy conference where Stott modelled such exposition. It was hosted at my old school, where there were extensive grounds. After speaking, Stott would relax by searching out Australian birdlife at the end of an enormous telescope, with yours truly "providing security" at a distance.

This brings me to a side of Stott which, on reflection, is frankly amazing, given his heavy and wide-ranging public ministries and responsibilities. Stott was wonderfully personable and gracious. This was both his character, but also a ministry strategy. Whenever our paths crossed, at a conference or an airport, he would always ask after my ministry, with an encyclopaedic memory and prayerful interest. He was the mentor of mentors: a 20th Century Simeon, whether with trainee clergy in the United Kingdom, with University students across the world, or with post-graduate theological students from the global south. This is now reflected in the ministry of Langham Partnership and in the intensive mentoring work that so characterises the ministries of the various International Fellowship of Evangelical Students groups today.^{viii}

Stott's commitment to the development of character in Christian leaders was plainly evident in every aspect of his ministry. Almost 30 years since its publication, *I Believe in Preaching*^{ix} is still a favourite with Ridley preaching classes, partly because it has substantial chapters on the integrity and humility of the minister of the word.

The pairing of Stott's rigorous Biblical mind with *his* humble and gracious character meant that he was used by God to bring together Christians from all over the world for cooperation in mission. This is an under-acknowledged and little known aspect of his ministry. Stott had a substantial role in crafting *The Lausanne Covenant* at the original Lausanne Congress in 1974.^x This provided a theological basis for joint mission which the ecumenical movement plainly failed to achieve. The covenant prioritised core issues, such as the uniqueness of Christ and the authority of the Scriptures, while naming and bounding secondary issues.^{xi} Out of the 1989 Lausanne Conference in Manila, the Australian Lausanne Emerging Leaders in Evangelism network and conference was instituted. This developed into Arrow Leadership Australia, an interdenominational training program for emerging leaders. In a similar way, Stott's work has brought together evangelicals in the Anglican Communion. He has provided them with resources and modelled a means of making a positive contribution for renewal and reform. Indeed, this very magazine and the organisation it represents probably wouldn't exist if it were not for John Stott!

As I've reflected on John Stott's influence on my life, I've realised how indebted I am to him, through his writing, teaching, ministry strategies and personal style.^{xii} Many of his commitments and priorities are my commitments and priorities. Future generations may not realise the source of their heritage and commitment to Biblical authority and exposition; to Biblically-founded and motivated engagement with the world; to mentoring and personal work; and to strategic ministry in universities and nations. Whether they are an ex-Hindu student worker in India; a Burmese Langham Scholar at Ridley Melbourne; a Sudanese pastor reading the *African Biblical Commentary*; or trainers at a Preaching Workshop in Papua New Guinea, all these friends are deeply indebted to Stott. This monumental legacy is in many ways unsung and taken for granted. My hunch is that that's the way Stott would want it. Praise God!

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ⁱ An abridged version of this tribute was initially given at the John Stott Memorial Service held at St Andrew's Anglican Church, South Brisbane on the 21st August 2011, organised by the Queensland Branch of the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion.

ⁱⁱ *Becoming a Christian*, Inter-Varsity, London, 1950; *Being a Christian*, IVF, London, 1957.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Basic Christianity*, Inter-Varsity, London, 1958. Interestingly, John Arnold advises that the content of *Basic Christianity* is based on university addresses, including those given at the famous Sydney University mission, "What Think Ye of Christ?" in 1958. It was during this mission that Stott lost his voice before the last address. Arnold states that Stott "croaked the gospel that night". Nonetheless, the response was so significant Stott later remarked that on subsequent visits to Australia he never failed to meet someone converted that night, a clear testimony to the power of God in proclamation.

^{iv} This is reflected in the title of the American edition of *I Believe in Preaching*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1980, which is *Between Two Worlds*.

^v John Chapman, *My Critique of Current Preaching*, Compact Disc Recording, Croydon, NSW: Sydney Missionary and Bible College Graduates' Preaching Conference, 2006. See also Chapman's comments at the John Stott Memorial Service, St Andrew's Anglican Cathedral, Sydney, 28 August, 2011, www.sydneyanglicans.net.

^{vi} Personal conversation, 29 August 2011.

^{vii} See, for example, *Your Mind Matters*, Inter-Varsity, London, 1972; *Christ the Controversialist*, Inter-Varsity, London, 1973; *Issues Facing Christians Today*, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, Basingstoke, 1984; and *The Radical Disciple*, IVP, Downers Grove, 2010.

^{viii} In Stott's tradition, this ministry of mentoring was generally described as "personal work". Stott's emphasis on expository Bible Study, both in public and private ministry, coupled with the process and personal ministry strategies of various American groups, such as Navigators and Lay Institute for Evangelism (Student Life), was a powerful fusion. It created a style of discipleship in University ministry that churches have been unable to replicate.

^{ix} *Op.cit.*

^x *The Lausanne Covenant*, World Wide, Minneapolis, 1975. Stott served as Chairman of the Drafting Committee for the Lausanne Covenant, adopted at the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in 1974. The covenant serves as a theological basis for the Lausanne movement, including subsequent Congresses in Manila (1989) and Cape Town (2010). It has also been adopted by many other ministries for similar purposes.

^{xi} More generally, however, it is only fair to note that many have challenged Stott's position on annihilationism, and have considered him unclear on the priority and foundational nature of the gospel in relation to social concern.

^{xii} Incidentally, Stott's rare Biblical affirmation of the gift of singleness (1 Cor 7:7) and his example of positively using this gift for the extension of the kingdom has also been personally pastorally significant.