

## **John Stott – a personal appreciation by Michael Lawson, Chairman of the Church of England Evangelical Council**

From 1960, John Stott played a key role in founding and chairing the Church of England Evangelical Council. Even in those days he was a leading Evangelical, and had already made a most significant impact for the gospel in his central London ministry at All Souls Langham Place where he had been Rector since 1950, and before that curate since 1945. I am now quite recently privileged to inhabit that same seat as chairman at the CEEC that John once chaired, but our actual personal connection goes back to 1981 when I arrived at All Souls as a curate that Autumn.

I remember at the evening service that October, the occasion of my first ever sermon at the church. I did my best, but unfortunately, the sermon was not especially good. Just before the service, and feeling very nervous, I was horrified to discover that the great John Stott, who I had been told would be abroad was actually present. There he was seated on the bench behind me as I meekly walked up to the famous All Souls pulpit ready to display my youthful homiletical inadequacies.

As I say, the sermon was not brilliant. But John came up to me afterwards, introduced himself most warmly, and said kindly and I believe sincerely, "Let me help you next time. We can meet up."

So in this way John became my mentor, in particular as my sermon coach. He was very good at it, always encouraging, and constructive. I remember one occasion when he'd spent several minutes encouraging me by extolling the virtues of my voice, bearing, and communication, he then added gently and with just a hint of an amused smile, "You didn't really understand the passage, did you!" He was so nice about it, and proceeded in the kindest fashion to explain what I had missed about the text.

I say this because some people may have formed the impression that John Stott was aloof or austere, and so dazzlingly capable that he wasn't interested in ordinary mortals. He was nothing of the sort. Not a bit of it. Though he was one of the most brilliantly capable leaders of the Church of England and beyond. John had a great sense of humour, and was a man capable of enormous warmth and kindness. He was just extremely well focussed on the tasks in hands, and did not let himself get easily distracted. How else would he have achieved the fifty and more books he wrote which have sold in excess of 8 million copies? How else would he have made the many important contributions as a major leader of the worldwide Evangelical movement, as a principal author of the Lausanne Covenant in 1974, as the inspiration behind the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion, the Eclectics group, the major strategic National Evangelical Anglican conferences at Keele and Nottingham, and his passion to help the church and pastors of the developing world?

Much of John's ministry took him abroad to at least twelve African countries, South America, Eastern Europe, the USA and Canada, China, Russia, Korea and Thailand. Of course he loved bird watching, and was an excellent photographer, so he usually took his camera with him. The photography was spectacular, but of course the ministry was always enormously fruitful too.

I knew John Stott to be a man of deep reliance on God. He was very prayerful, and a great example to me and to many of us. Over the years he was wonderfully supported, especially by Frances Whitehead, his utterly outstanding secretary for around 50 years, and by his curates and later his many devoted study assistants. John had a hard and demanding concluding period to his life, and I felt that his death on the 27<sup>th</sup> July was, as we sometimes say, a merciful release. But on that day, when I heard he had gone to heaven to be with the Lord he loved and served with all his devotion and strength, I had the strongest sense of the words of the Lord Jesus waiting to greet him: "Well done my good and faithful servant."