John Stott: A global ministry by Timothy Dudley-Smith: Two Views

John Woods and Graham Harrison

John Stott: A Global Ministry, by Timothy Dudly-Smith (IVP, 2001) £14.99.

John Woods

A Global Ministry is the second and concluding volume of Timothy Dudley-Smith's (TDS) authorised biography of John Stott (Volume 1 was reviewed in an earlier edition of Foundations.) Written from a sympathetic angle this is a thrilling story of one man's mature and dedicated faithfulness in Christian ministry, a ministry that has had a genuinely global impact.

This volume covers the period from the 1960s up to the present day and it tells of Stott's transition from Rector of All Souls to a more trans-local ministry. Whilst still being based at All Souls he was allowed considerable freedom to travel, teach and write. It is a credit to John Stott under God that All Souls is as healthy and influential church now as it was in the from the 1950s to the early 1970s. Perhaps the word that comes to mind in reading this book is the word—focused. Many times suggestions were made that Stott should become a Bishop or theological college principal, but he refused to be distracted. Stott seems to possess an instinctive sense of what is the most strategic use of his time and gifts in the service of the kingdom. In an age where many are driven by the 'tyranny of the urgent,' this may be a lesson that all Christian leaders could do with learning.

Dudley-Smith relates Stott's strategic work with The National Evangelical Anglican Congress (Celebration 1987), International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship, Tear Fund, London Institute of Contemporary Christianity, Church of England Evangelical Council, The Evangelical Literature Aid Trust and Lausanne. In the latter Stott's considerable skills as a chairman and writer helped in the production of the Lausanne Covenant and its accompanying commentary. TDS deals fully with this process and the way that Stott handled the criticisms of some of the conclusions reached in the Lausanne Covenant. These include an illuminating section on accusations that the statements on scripture fudge on the issue of inerrancy and that the statement on a simple lifestyle was too vague (Ruth Graham's take on this is very interesting—she didn't sign the covenant because of the latter issue!). TDS relates how the motivation for Stott's involvement in the Lausanne project was his desire to see progress in world evangelisation. Evangelism, as is made clear in volume 1 of this biography, has always been a priority in his ministry.

Stott's involvement in all of the above-mentioned groups indicates his desire to invest in people so that they would be equipped to serve Christ effectively in the future. In particular his continued links with the student world shows his desire to shape the minds of future leaders. This same desire is reflected in Stott's impressive literary output. TDS relates the process of producing many books that have stimulated reflection on biblical, theological, ethical and cultural issues. Most evangelical

ministers in the UK will have used books like those contributed to the *Bible Speaks Today* series, *Issues Facing Christians Today* or *Baptism and Fullness*. The last mentioned book is a reminder of the clear yet fair position that Stott took on the Charismatic movement. *A Global Ministry* relates how he had charismatics like Michael Harper on his team at All Souls and how Stott was instrumental in seeking to build bridges on this issue. These bridges included the helpful Church of England Evangelical Council Report *Gospel and Spirit* that was published in the late 1970s. Stott has maintained a critically open stance to those who identify with the charismatic movement. Yet overarching this generous spirit there was a clear affirmation of a largely reformed doctrine of the Spirit.

The biography also reveals something of Stott the man. It reveals that one of the secrets of Stott's insight is his regular intake of chocolate, in particular Smarties—obviously the best kind of brain food! Another insight is that of the HHH or horizontal half-hour. This pause for a snooze at around midday has helped this wake up early stay up late bachelor to achieve a phenomenal amount of work in the life God has given him. There is rather a lot in this book about birds; Stott has been a bird watcher since his boyhood. One of the fringe benefits of his extensive trips around the world was the opportunity to track down rare birds that he had not seen before. The account of the discovery of the Snowy White Owl is one striking example. One can almost imagine Stott taking the same type of approach in tracking down the root of an obscure Greek word in an attempt to discover the meaning of a difficult New Testament text!

TDS writes as a friend and although he does make observations about Stott's weaknesses this is largely a kindly and positive treatment. Yet this being said Stott's contribution to British and world evangelicalism has been massive. The book paints a comprehensive picture of that global impact. It tells us why members of All Souls placed the following inscription on the new pulpit of All Souls:

> Many friends of John Stott combined to give this Pulpit and communion table out of deep gratitude for his dedicated ministry as evangelist, teacher and pastor during 25 years as Rector of All Souls (1950–1975). He taught us to make God's word our rule, God's spirit our teacher and God's glory our supreme concern.

The book gives many reasons why the evangelical community in the UK and beyond should be grateful to God for this godly man with such a fruitful global ministry. It concludes with words of one of his many study assistants who wrote:

> Thank you for your ministry to me ... I feel most blessed to be your friend. Please live forever.

However read a little more cautiously there are issues of concern. These include the now infamous 1966 National Assembly of Evangelicals, the issue of conditional immortality and the debate on homosexuality with Bishop Spong of New York.

Taken in reverse order:

TDS frankly explores the exchanges with Bishop Spong on homosexuality. Stott argued as he does in the book *Issues Facing Christian Today* for a traditional biblical position on homosexuality. The debate was costly and exhausting for Stott but someone needed to take a stand he was well equipped to do it.

It continues however to pose questions about the whole mixed Anglican network.

The need to publicly put a Bishop right on issues of theology and ethics reminds me of the amusing definition of a husband: A husband is someone who stands by you in all the problems you would not have had if you remained single!

The spilling of the beans on the issue of conditional immortality almost had to be dragged out of Stott. In what appears to have been an inadvisable collaboration with the liberal Anglican David Edwards, Edwards makes the shrewd observation that Stott had never really expressed his own views on this issue. Stott's reputation as an evangelical was not enhanced as a result of his views being aired in this way. TDS skilfully navigates the choppy waters that followed in the aftermath of this collaboration. He stresses that Stott's response was an honest yet tentative expression of the way he saw the issue. Reading both volumes of the biography I conclude that it is the kind of response that a man like Stott would make on such a sensitive issue. We may not agree with his tentative conclusion but the reader is invited to understand the man before being too hasty in dismissing him as a heretic!

Before becoming a Christian 1966 meant only one thing—it was the year that England won the World Cup. I still remember the commentators' words: 'They think it's all over ... it is now!' For readers of the *Foundations* 1966 means The National Assembly of Evangelicals meeting in which Martyn Lloyd Jones and John Stott had their famous showdown. As recently as 1996 this journal has devoted a whole issue to the events of 1966. The discussion there is fairly exhaustive.

TDS deals with the incident and takes note of that issue of *Foundations* and of Iain Murray's monumental biography of Lloyd Jones. 1966 is, as TDS writes, 'rooted firmly in the folk memory of many evangelicals, both Anglican and Free Church.' Yet he adds that the impact has left more negative reactions among the BEC constituency than the Anglicans. TDS feels that MLJ's address couched as it was in terms of an 'appeal' missed the mood of the moment and that no clear alternative to belonging to the mixed denominations was presented. It is interesting to note that Iain Murray in his biography of MLJ makes two similar points. Ironically the recently published history of the Evangelical Alliance, *One Body in Christ,* expresses considerable sympathy with MLJ. The history offers the opinion of Robert Amess that 'to blame Lloyd-Jones for personally wrecking the serene waters through which evangelicalism seemed to be sailing at the time of the 1966 Assembly would not be just ... Neither was he directly responsible for what followed.' It also relates the view of Gilbert Kirby who was the General Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance at the time that 'Looking back over a decade, later ... encouraging Lloyd-Jones to put his case had been 'probably one of my biggest mistakes.'

On reflection it may be the case that both MLJ and Stott were set up to fail at the 1966 assembly. It was essentially a no win situation! Stott was part of a denomination that was under pressure. The party line among evangelical Anglicans at the time was that all calls for an evangelical exodus from the Church of England should be resisted. With this in mind and the fact that Stott would be all too aware of the practical implications for many present, we can understand why he felt compelled to speak out. Whether this was the best way to do so is an open question. TDS relates how Stott stands by his actions of 1966 but also shows how he made peace with MLJ. Stott's esteem for MLJ is clear from the warm way he refers to him in his writings.

Litres of ink has been poured our on 1966, will it ever be clear what went wrong. There were certainly some misunderstandings, both conscious and unconscious. Maybe Stott and the Evangelical Alliance underestimated the impact of MLJ's outline, which they had heard previously being turned into a full-blown and passionate address. Perhaps Lloyd-Jones had underestimated the strength of denominational ties that held some ministers. Why should 1966 give more of a reason to leave denominations than 1910 or 1948 or 1967 or beyond? Some would argue that the events of Keele 1967 and the Growing into Union controversy of 1970 gave even greater reason to consider loyalties. It is difficult for evangelicals who have always been independents to appreciate the complicated links and the pockets of relative independence that there are in Anglican evangelicalism. It has been interesting to observe that the frosty post 1966 relationship between Anglicans and Independents has begun to thaw through initiatives like the Proclamation Trust, Reform and Essentially Evangelical. Nevertheless we are still living with the aftermath of the 1966 dispute.

I highly recommend this book as essential reading for anyone who wants to understand evangelicalism in the latter half of the 20th Century.

John Wood is minister of Lancing Tabernacle, West Sussex

Graham Harrison

The limpid and fluid style of the author is what we have come to expect from one whose expertise as a wordsmith has been demonstrated over many years in the hymns he has written. 'Charming' and 'comprehensive' are the terms that immediately come to mind in seeking to describe it.

Timothy Dudley-Smith is an obvious admirer of John Stott—and who in his right senses would not be! Few men in the modern era can have been so influential over such a long period and in such dire times in Evangelicalism worldwide. But the downside of this is that there is hardly the measure of objectivity that one looks for in a mature biography. Perhaps there is an element of inevitability about this, given that the subject is still living and the author is an old esteemed friend.

There are three areas where this assumes particular significance:

1966 and all that— or 'the Stott/Lloyd-Jones incident' as it is called on p. 70. This reviewer and the author obviously differ in their estimate of the now notorious events of the Evangelical Alliance Assembly in October 1966. Partly this may be due to the fact that we view the issues from different theological or ecclesiastical perspectives—Nonconformist and C of E respectively. Although, as would be expected in the chronology of this volume, the matter is dealt with early on, it does seem to have been handled with an uncalled for brevity (only seven pages). It would be wrong to describe it as having been sidelined, but in view of the considerable anguish occasioned by Lloyd-Jones' address and Stott's uncalled for response, it should have received a more detailed treatment here than it does. It simply will not do to imply that those who have regarded it as a fundamental issue were predictably divisive and thus on the fringes of authentic evangelical life. Nor is it the case that with the advent of the Evangelical Ministry Assembly and the Proclamation Trust wiser counsels have prevailed so that the C of E/Independent division is largely a chronological hiccup. TDS chronicles it

largely as another episode in the multi-faceted story of this remarkable man. In truth, it was virtually a clash of titans, in which the one whom many of us would consider to be the greater restrained himself remarkably in the face of dire provocation.

What exactly Lloyd-Jones was doing is a question never satisfactorily answered by Dudley-Smith. He clearly was not in the business of setting up an evangelical supra-denomination any more than he was calling on all and sundry to leave their 'mixed denominations'. Those who knew him best in subsequent years would testify to his great patience with and deep feeling for the many men who felt trapped in their denominational situations.

Surely what was at the heart not only of that address, but of the wider concern Lloyd-Jones had, was the utter and absolute priority of the Gospel—i.e. it was essentially positive and aimed at the big issue and not an exercise in negative nit-picking by someone lacking in any adequate ecclesiology. From this flowed considerations that inevitably had ecclesiological and disciplinary consequences. What are you to do with heretics when reasoning and patient pleading have already failed? Was (and is) Lloyd-Jones' charge that evangelicals were often content to belong to a 'paper church' rather than to an authentically biblical one, true? Certainly little has happened in the intervening years to suggest that there has been a return to ecclesiastical orthodoxy in any of the so-called main-line denominations.

It also seems difficult to credit Dudley-Smith's apologia (partly advanced by Stott himself) for the latter's unchairmanlike riposte to a speaker who had done what he had been asked to do. Dudley-Smith seems to suggest that Stott feared a mass exodus of bright young things from the ranks of the C of E under the spell of Lloyd-Jones' impassioned oratory. He actually quotes evidence (in the subsequent section dealing with Keele) to the contrary. The prevailing spirit among the young Turks was anything but of a secessionist nature. Did L-J have wind of what was in prospect at Keele? In which case, was the Doctor's 'appeal' (if that term can be used without prejudice) something of a now-or-never statement? Certainly Stott need not have panicked in the chair.

The whole issue is still supremely relevant. It had (and has) nothing to do with the alleged aim of establishing the mythical 'pure' church. Rather it demonstrates the importance of conforming our existing ecclesiastical institutions to recognizably biblical standards of belief and discipline.

Appropriately (as well as in the sequence of time) Dudley-Smith turns next to Keele. Here was proof that the attitudes manifested in the Westminster Central Hall clash of October '66 were likely to be set in stone—and that for decades to come. Call it youthful naivety if you will, but there is little indication in Dudley-Smith's account of the measure of distress, not to say pain, experienced by some Nonconformists who had been schooled in IVF circles when we realized that what might have been sauce for the CU goose was certainly not going to be the sauce for the denominational/ ecclesiastical gander! And little evidence has been forthcoming subsequently to show that second thoughts are likely to modify earlier intransigence. When, if ever, should secession be contemplated? Evangelical Anglicanism over the last half century seems to many a nonconformist to bear a remarkable similarity to a series of Maginot lines the fall of each of which (if a change of metaphor is permitted) would be the straw that would break the camel's back! Our Anglican friends must pardon our scepticism, but

some of us wonder whether as long as *disbelief* in the deity of Christ and *repudiation* of the resurrection are not added as articles of faith to the existing XXXIX the subject is even discussible!

Certainly, as Dudley-Smith amply demonstrates, John Stott is someone who practises what he preaches when it comes both to a simple lifestyle and the courageous application of cherished principles despite their unpopularity. But other areas where the biography would have benefited by being transposed from the key of a mildly adulatory chronicle to that of a critical theological assessment are in its treatment of Lausanne and the debate on Conditional Immortality. But in both these areas—at least in the evidence supplied in the book—there is little by way of hard criticism of the positions espoused by Stott. Is evangelicalism really a two-winged bird depending both on the gospel and socio-political involvement? Has evangelicalism been shunted down the road of at least a mildly leftish political agenda as a result? Then, as RC historian Adrian Hastings points out, it was due to Stott that 'the Lausanne Covenant avoided a commitment to the verbal inspiration of Scripture' (p. 219).

Likewise the treatment of Stott's views on Conditional Immortality (long known to the cognoscenti and suspected by a wider audience but only really made public by his dialogue with David Edwards in *Essentials)* never deals incisively with the issues at stake. Indeed the views of FF Bruce are introduced with the effect of shoring up Stott's position without subjecting it to real scrutiny. But then, some will argue, is that ever the job of a biographer? Overall one is left with the impression that Timothy Dudley-Smith has written with a non-judgmental ethos (which from some points of view is good). But might this not at least have been sharpened by a rightly critical evaluation in these controversial areas?

Venturing even tentatively into criticism of such a widely used servant of God will, no doubt, seem churlish to some. But it is at least an arguable proposition that if only in the above-mentioned areas Stott has made some rather fundamental misjudgments that, sadly, continue to be widely influential.

Graham Harrison is Minister of Emmanuel Evangelical Church, Newport

---

Whitefield and the Uncharitable Minister

A minister who had not a large share of that charity which thinketh no evil, being in company with Whitefield, was during the interview very free in his reflections on Wesley and his followers. Finally he expressed a doubt as to Wesley's final salvation, and said to Whitefield, 'When we get to heaven shall we see John Wesley?' 'No, sir,' replied Mr Whitefield, 'I fear not, for he will be so near the eternal throne and we at such a distance we shall hardly get a sight of him.' Old Bigotry blushed in his presence.

Preaching Christ

'Preaching Christ I find to be the best means of winning sinners and building up saints. This, done with a single eye and a disinterested heart, will make its way through all opposition.'

Taken from Rev. JB Wakeley, *Anecdotes of George Whitefield* on *The Works of George Whitefield* CD-ROM published by Quinta Press.