

INSIDE STORY: The life of John Stott

Roger Steer

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John Stott towers over the history of twentieth century evangelicalism, and remains a man of enormous influence through his writings, his preaching and his personal leadership. Roger Steer has written an accessible account of John Stott's life.

The biographer's first challenge is to reckon with the sheer number of people who are significant in the story—and in whose stories John Stott is significant. The Table of Contents helpfully doubles as a timeline as we follow the subject through his early steps in life and then as a Christian into his emergence as a leader. From the moment Stott hits his stride, the pace of the book is fairly breathless. If this were a stage play rather than a book, then it could be set on a moving stage so that a long succession of leading Christians may efficiently be shuffled on stage left, be introduced, and then slide off to stage-right.

Perhaps life around John Stott was really like that. As the book continues it is with some relief that the train of visitors subsides and more of the man's personal passions emerge: the certainty that life for Christ is the only and best way to live; his personal discipline and holiness; his passion for preaching; his gifts coupled with humility and sense of humour. The middle section manages not to leave the reader intimidated; the final section manages to leave the reader inspired. John Stott is also a prolific author and Steer does a good job of summarising the major works and the contexts from which they sprang. This is a good introduction to John Stott's life and writings given the space available, but we get little chance to reflect on his inner thoughts. We discover that he was criticised by people who did not work as hard to understand his position as he did to understand theirs. But there is no clear engagement with his evangelical critics' views, and the struggles he faced are mentioned but hardly analysed: tensions with his father about war service; differences with evangelicals over Billy Graham's mission and methods; divergence with Martyn Lloyd-Jones; differences between the 'narrow' and 'broad' views of evangelism in the Lausanne process; disputes over conditional immortality. We also hear little of the theological currents at each stage, again for lack of space.

The fact of John Stott's birdwatching is of course mentioned: the passion of it does not quite come across. (And there is a 'quest for the snowy owl'). Those who did not live through these times personally will do well by reading a biography of Stott, and Steer's life is an excellent introduction, much shorter than Timothy Dudley-Smith's two volumes. It will help us begin to appreciate the influence of Stott's writings in shaping evangelicalism today in Britain and beyond. And readers of any age should be inspired by Stott's example, humbled by his godliness, and stimulated to serve his Master.

ED MOLL
Wembdon, Bridgwater

John Stott is the leading evangelical churchman of the twentieth century. In this engaging story of this remarkable life, Roger Sheer takes readers from Stott's lifelong association with the parish church of All Souls in London to every continent on the planet. Here is the book that tells why he is, as "Time" magazine noted in 2005, one of the hundred most influential people in the world. Did you know. . . John Stott's father stood strongly against his desire to be ordained in the Church of England and his pacifist leanings during World War II? . . . John Stott once go He lives in bandages and in pain, has a feeding tube, a breathing tube, and has lost his eyesight. Tripp has never spoken a word, yet he has touched countless lives around the world by his will to fight through this disease. My little boy is my hero and has taught me more in two years than I've learned my entire life. I know God has big things in store for him - whether it's here or in heaven. THE JUDGES SAID: It's not hard to see why Courtney Roth's story got 46,962 votes online! Here is a portrait of extraordinary perseverance and grace in the face of challenges most of us never encounter. In the engaging story of this remarkable life, Roger Steer takes you from John Stott's lifelong association with the parish church of All Souls in London to every continent on the planet. The account of Stott's ministry strikingly parallels the record of the rise of evangelical Christianity during the same years.Â Bash became virtually a surrogate father to John. But there's a further twist to the story. Some years later, having studied the Bible in more depth and been introduced to the idea of the just war, John resigned his membership of the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship. He no longer believed that the pacifist position was the only possible one for a Christian.