

# Stott's Impact on Anglican Evangelicalism in Australia<sup>1</sup>

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John R. W. Stott was a well-known evangelist and apologist in the 1950s, undertaking various university missions in England while ministering at All Souls Langham Place, first as a curate (1945–1950) and then as rector from 1950. Stott's first visit to Australia was in 1958, the same year that *Basic Christianity* and *Your Confirmation* were published. These were extremely influential books in Australia, the first for Evangelicals of all denominations and the second for Anglican young people in particular as they prepared for their Confirmation. The latter was the standard text for a generation of confirmees.

The purpose of Stott's visit to Australia was to lead university missions in Melbourne and Sydney. One student present at Sydney University's mission recalls that on one occasion Stott had suffered a bout of laryngitis, disabling the projection of his voice to the gathered throng. Yet, as God's grace is perfected in human weakness, this affliction did not prevent the Spirit's work in drawing many students to Christ.

In 1965, Stott returned to Australia, this time not to lead a university mission but to give the Bible studies at Church Missionary Society (CMS) Summer Schools in Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide, as well as to address the Australian Inter-Varsity Fellowship (now known as AFES) in Coolangatta. Stott's preaching on 2 Corinthians seemed revolutionary as an example of expository preaching. John Chapman stated that this visit

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was a remarkable wake-up call for Evangelicals, especially Anglicans, for empowering ministers to take the text of the Bible seriously and to expound the books of the Bible in a clear and orderly way.<sup>2</sup> This was in contrast to much preaching that was based on a single text, allowing the preacher to wander along various pathways, however well informed by the general teaching of the Bible, but not a clear exposition of the particular text at hand.<sup>3</sup> Stott was to return to CMS Summer Schools in 1971, in 1976, and again in 1986.

Jonathan Holt captures the importance of Stott's 1965 visit and its influence on not only Sydney Anglicans but most Australian Anglican Evangelicals with these words:

In conclusion, the emergence of expository preaching in Sydney Anglican Churches may be attributed to the presence of both a fuel and a spark. When Stott preached at the 1965 CMS Summer School on 2 Corinthians he inspired John Chapman, among others, to emulate his expository style. Preconditions that enabled the adoption of this expository style were a high view of preaching as proclamation of God's saving activity in Jesus, the development of a Biblical Theology framework for preaching, evangelical engagement in scholarly biblical studies, and a continuing propensity to look to England for leadership. The transformation in the style of preaching from a single-verse-as-text to the more systematic *lectio continua* has had a lasting impact in the Anglican parishes in Sydney and beyond them through the Katoomba Christian conventions.<sup>4</sup>

My first experience of hearing Stott preach was at the Katoomba CMS Summer School in 1971. I can still recall, fifty years later, his measured

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Orpwood wrote, "I heard only one of those Bible studies but I was so taken by the way he stuck to the text and stayed with it. He could show you the logic of the argument in the Scriptures. Prior to that I had tended to get an idea from a passage and to leap all over the Bible supporting the idea from other parts so that the people taught knew the 'idea' but not the passage from which it came or how that passage fitted into some overall argument from the Scriptures. It is to John Stott that I owe what ability I have to expound the Bible. He provided a model for expository preaching that I could copy and make my own. I needed time to practise." Michael Orpwood, *Chappo: For the Sake of the Gospel; John Chapman and the Department of Evangelism* (Russell Lea, NSW: Eagleswift, 1995), 158. Orpwood wrongly identifies the CMS Summer School as being 1958, when it was 1965.

<sup>3</sup> Compare Peter Jensen's comments: "The Biblical preaching of my youth would start characteristically from a verse, sometimes taken out of context and used as a starting point for an extended Christian homily with exhortation." Cited by Jonathan Holt, "The Emergence of Expository Preaching in Sydney Anglican Churches," *St Mark's Review* 230 (December 2014): 75.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Holt, "The Emergence of Expository Preaching," 81. The spark to which Holt alludes was Stott; the fuel was an allusion to "preaching as proclamation of God's saving activity in Jesus, the development of a framework of Biblical Theology" fostered by the teaching of Donald Robinson (73).

explanation of the unfolding of the “a little while” and “again a little while” expressions in the Upper Room Discourse of John’s Gospel (John 16:16). As Edmund Clowney, president of Westminster Theological Seminary, would say: “Stott was the master of sermon construction.” With his refined English accent, he would unravel the complexity of a text with ease of organization and in a memorable manner that penetrated the heart and mind with the very words of God.<sup>5</sup> When I heard Stott again at the Urbana InterVarsity Conference in Illinois in 1976, a cartoon was printed in one of the daily bulletins, depicting a student with a Bible under his arm, looking up to the sky, with the caption “I hear God speaking to me in an English accent!”

In 1981, following the success for the first NEAC (National Evangelical Anglican Congress) ten years earlier, Stott was “the star attraction” at the second NEAC held in Melbourne,<sup>6</sup> when he delivered an address on Luke 4 entitled the Nazareth Manifesto. Once again, Stott’s masterful handling of the Lukan account of Jesus’s words in Nazareth made its impact on Anglican Evangelicals in Australia. While there was some criticism of this address in that it promoted social action as the complementary activity of gospel proclamation,<sup>7</sup> Stott saw himself in the Evangelical tradition of William Wilberforce and the eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival that addressed concerns of social action without neglecting the importance of evangelism. This address, in many ways was the fruit of Stott’s significant contribution to the framing of the Lausanne Covenant at the 1974 Lausanne Congress, chaired by Bishop Jack Dain of Sydney.

Much could be said of Stott’s impact on Australia, not least of which being his establishment of the Bible Speaks Today series, which sought to emulate his style of expository preaching; his prodigious writing output that has taught, encouraged, and inspired many generations of Australian Evangelicals; and his many visits to Australia. However, the Evangelical Fellowship of the Anglican Communion (EFAC) owes its very existence, its origin to Stott’s foresight in 1961, when he along with others established the

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<sup>5</sup> Compare Michael Cassidy’s comments after hearing Stott deliver the Payton Lectures at Fuller Theological Seminary in 1961: “I am sure it shaped the thinking about preaching of many of those Fuller Seminary students, as it did me. Many key concepts came into my life in theology at that time such as the critical importance of understanding the *kerygma* as a fixed deposit proclaimed by a herald (*keryx*) who was not at liberty to change the message and substitute it for his own private opinions on this, that and the next.” Letter from Michael Cassidy to Timothy Dudley-Smith, cited in the latter’s *John Stott: A Global Ministry* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 117.

<sup>6</sup> Stuart Piggin and Robert D. Linder, *Attending to the National Soul: Evangelical Christians in Australian History, 1914–2014* (Clayton, VIC: Monash University Publishing, 2020), 422.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 359–62.

EFAC, serving as its honorary secretary for some twenty years. Many Australians, such as Bishop Jack Dain and Bishop Donald Cameron, served on the international executive, as does Bishop Stephen Hale, who currently serves as its chair.

Our Evangelical heritage in Australia owes a great deal to Stott, and it is fitting that we thank God for this impact as we honor his legacy on the centenary of his birth.