

Leadership by Example: John Stott and the Integrated Life

TRANSFORMINGBUSINESS

by Matthew Smith



The starting point of *Transforming Business* (TB) is that Christianity embraces the whole of life, business included. John Stott, a leader of worldwide evangelicalism, who recently died aged 90, was a champion of this perspective. He once wrote: ‘the role of business in the world today is so important that it is essential that Christians become...influential throughout business life.’¹ TB director Peter Heslam, who worked under John Stott’s Presidency of the *London Institute for Contemporary Christianity* (LICC), has invited Matthew Smith, John’s study assistant at that time, to reflect on the man who lived and taught the integrated life.

Following three years spent as John Stott’s study assistant, I began my career as an international economist. John fully approved, giving no sense that I was leaving Christian ministry, sliding from the sacred to the secular, moving from God to Mammon. For John, there were different callings but no hierarchy. When someone told John they felt called to ‘the ministry’, he would try to look innocent, and then ask, ‘what ministry are you talking about?’ When they replied ‘the pastoral ministry’, he’d respond ‘why didn’t you say so, as there are hundreds of ministries!’

For John, God looks for an integrity of lifestyle that’s as much about weekdays as Sundays: “Evangelical Christians...have not been integrated; [we]...exclude certain areas of our life from the lordship of Jesus, whether it be our business life and our work, or our political persuasion.”² His founding of LICC in 1982 and his publication two years later of his *Issues Facing Christians Today*, were designed to challenge this mindset and develop whole-life discipleship. To this end he also held regular meetings for business leaders and other professionals. At the prayer breakfasts the study assistant would be chef!

John identified five aspects of leadership: vision, industry, perseverance, service and discipline. Vision, he writes, is built on dissatisfaction with what *is* and a clear grasp of what *could be*.

Both are quite clear in the public ministry of Jesus. He was indignant over disease and death, and the hunger of the people, for he



John Stott (1921-2011) – an integrated life

▶▶ perceived these things as alien to the purpose of God. Hence his compassion for their victims. Indignation and compassion form a powerful combination. They are indispensable to vision, and therefore to leadership.³

Here we find leadership to be inextricably linked to compassion towards the vulnerable. This reflects John’s advocacy on behalf of three development charities: Tearfund, the Mahalir Aran Trust (based in India) and Armonía (based in Mexico). Saul Cruz, the co-founder of Armonía, recounts how as a youngster he hitchhiked many miles to hear John Stott speak in Mexico City. The conference finished late and as Saul sat on a bench outside, contemplating a night at a bus shelter before his return trip, he was looking down at his dusty shoes when another pair of shoes appeared. John was on his way home with his hosts. After asking Saul about his situation, John insisted he also stayed with his hosts for the night. When Saul rose the next morning, he couldn’t find the dusty shoes he’d been so ashamed of the night before. Eventually he asked his hosts. ‘You’d better ask John’, they replied. It turned out that John had cleaned and polished his shoes! Although it was a small matter to John, this incident had such an impact on Saul that it became a catalyst for his future ministry.

John was a catalyser in many ways. Not only an engaging preacher, a wise pastor, and a prolific writer, he was also a prodigious entrepreneur. Eight years before founding LICC, he founded the Langham Partnership, having observed on his travels that the church in the ‘majority world’ was growing in breadth but not always in depth. Clear biblical teaching was needed, he reasoned, and this meant seminaries should train more pastors to be academically competent. This John termed ‘the Langham Logic’ and he found a generous and tax efficient way to fund the Langham Partnership – his book royalties. Business case approved!

Businesses often grow through acquisition. John was not in the least an acquisitive person – his small flat and wardrobe speak to that. But he did make some shrewd acquisitions,

the earliest being his purchase of ‘The Hookses’, an old Pembrokeshire farm house, which became the scene of 55 years of writing and reflection, for him and for many others. His second key acquisition was the All Souls Clubhouse – a community centre that became an early example of a church plant. Next came the purchase of a home for the elderly, and the training of over 40 members of his congregation as ‘Welfare Visitors’, each of whom visited a designated elderly person living in the parish. John’s theology of divine providence and human endeavour enabled him to grasp such opportunities, despite the risks.



The Hookses

As with most serial entrepreneurs, John passed on leadership to others, allowing him to concentrate on new ventures. This also encouraged the emergence of young leaders, many of whom came from the UCCF and IFES student movements he did so much to support.⁴ Realizing the importance of a good admin team, he appointed Frances Whitehead as his secretary. She remained in post for over 50 years and gave such skilled and unstinting support that he referred to her as the ‘omnicompetent’. The team also included a succession of 14 study assistants between 1979 and 2007, all of whom are forever grateful for the opportunity to spend time with a man who inspired, in word and deed, the integrated life. ■

Notes

- 1 John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (4th edn, 2006), p.241.
- 2 Quoted in Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: A Global Ministry* (2001), p.291
- 3 *Issues*, p.487.
- 4 UCCF stands for ‘Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship’ and IFES for ‘International Fellowship of Evangelical Students’.

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