# JOHN R. W. STOTT ON SOCIAL ACTION

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*The place of social concerns in missions has become an important issue in evangelicalism within the past decade. In the last year, one of the leading spokesmen for including social action as an equal partner with evangelism in missions has been John Stott. The salient points of Stott's arguments and his use of Scripture are examined and found to be wanting. Furthermore, the emphasis seen in Stott's recent writings illustrates a trend in the thinking of many evangelicals which is cause for concern.*

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THE battle lines in the present debate over the Bible include the foundational issues of epistemology and authority. The authority of Scripture is also the battle line for another battle—the battle for world evangelization. The authority of Scripture is acquiesced to and even claimed, but its authority is rendered void by faulty hermeneutics and unbiblical emphases.

At the forefront of this battle is one of Evangelicalism's favorite sons, John R. W. Stott, Rector Emeritus of All Souls Church in London and also an honorary chaplain to the Queen of England. There is some suspicion, however, that Stott is not a true friend to biblical evangelicalism.

The present paper is a selective review of John Stott's articles in the "Cornerstone" column of *Christianity Today* from September 21, 1979 to May 23, 1980.[1] Two themes are preeminent in this period of

[1]John R. W. Stott, "Peacemaking is a Management Responsibility" (Sept. 21, 1979) 36-37; "The Biblical Scope of the Christian Mission" (Jan. 4, 1980) 34-35; "Calling for Peacemakers in a Nuclear Age, Part I" (Feb. 8, 1980) 44-45; "Calling for Peacemakers in a Nuclear Age, Part II" (March 7, 1980) 44-45; "Economic Equality Among Nations: A Christian Concern?" (May 2, 1980) 36-37; "The Just Demands of Economic Inequality" (May 23, 1980) 30-31. Hereinafter the date of the magazine will be used for note citation.

writing: The Christian as a peacemaker and the need for Christian concern for universal opportunity for economic equality.

A proper and full evaluation of Stott would require an in-depth study of all of his publications in chronological order, especially from 1966 to the present, a period of shifting from his original position on missions to his present emphasis on social action. This study, however is not within the scope of the present review.

## AN INTRODUCTION TO STOTT'S ASSERTIONS

The purpose of this section is to give an overview of Stott's assertions in the articles cited in the introduction. Several aspects of these articles will be dealt with in more detail in the following sections of this review.

### *Initial background*

The articles presently under consideration take on more meaning when viewed in reference to Stott's controversy with Arthur Johnston of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Johnston published *The Battle for World Evangelism* in 1978. In this work he surveyed the history of modern evangelism, particularly in light of the ecumenical movement. He pointed out how Lausanne is slipping dangerously in the same direction. He also presented some severe criticisms of Stott and his shift from evangelism only to evangelism and social action as equal partners in world mission. Johnston went so far as to declare that "Stott has dethroned evangelism as the only historical aim of mission."[2]

Stott responded to Johnston in his "Cornerstone" Column in *Christianity Today*.

> Brother Art, you say that I have "dethroned evangelism as the only historical aim of mission"; I would prefer to say that I have attempted to "enthrone love as the essential historical motivation for mission."[3]

The emphasis of Stott's post-Johnston writing would lead one to conclude that there is really only room for one master on the throne, namely, "love" as evidenced by social action.

Stott has not always expressed himself for a dual mission. He describes his own journey in mission thinking from Berlin in 1966 to the publication of *Christian Mission in the Modern World* in 1975.

[2]Arthur Johnston, *The Battle for World Evangelism* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1978) 303.

[3]Stott, 1/4/80, 35.

After exposing the biblical teaching for the great commission, Stott remarks,

> The cumulative emphasis seems clear. It is placed on preaching witnessing and making disciples, and many deduce from this that the mission of the church, according to the specification of the risen Lord, is exclusively a preaching, converting and teaching mission. Indeed, I confess that I myself argued this at the World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin in 1966, when attempting to expound the three major versions of the Great Commission.
>
> Today, however, I would express myself differently. It is not just that the commission includes a duty to teach converts everything Jesus had previously commanded (Matthew 28.20), and that social responsibility is among the things which Jesus commanded. I now see more clearly that not only the consequences of the commission but the actual commission itself must be understood to include social as well as evangelistic responsibility, unless we are to be guilty of distorting the words of Jesus.[4]

Stott proceeds, immediately after making the above point, to redefine Christian mission. He asserts that the Johannine commission constitutes the real key to mission. He explains John's view of mission in relation to Jesus' statement that "as the Father hath sent me, so send I you" (John 17:18; 20:21). In answer to the question "in what sense was the Son sent," he reduces the Father's commission to the Son to one of service. Jesus was sent to serve and likewise we are sent to serve.[5]

Stott's view of service, however, is social, not redemptive. While it was within the mission of Christ to be both a servant and a Savior (Mark 10:45), we are only able to be servants since "we are not saviors."[6] He insists that we are to serve as Jesus served: "he fed hungry mouths and washed dirty feet, he healed the sick, comforted the sad and even restored the dead to life."[7]

Stott's observations are only partially true. Jesus did serve, but his service was redemption oriented, *not* service oriented. He was the Suffering Servant of Jehovah and all of his acts of service were designed to magnify his redemptive mission. They were not designed to draw attention to themselves as acts of service but to draw attention to the Servant as the promised Messiah. Jesus' response to the disciples of John the Baptist makes this quite clear (cf. Matt 11:2-6).

[4]John R. W. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1975) 23.

[5]Ibid., 23, 24

[6]Ibid., 24.

[7]Ibid.

From his limited view of the Johannine commission, Stott builds a structure of social action as "a partner of evangelism."[8] He also appeals to the great commandment to love your neighbor as support for social action.

Stott's concept of the Johannine commission constitutes a move to support his burning desire to wed evangelism and social action as equal in importance. It is the same kind of invalid hermeneutic which he employs in the articles about to be analyzed.

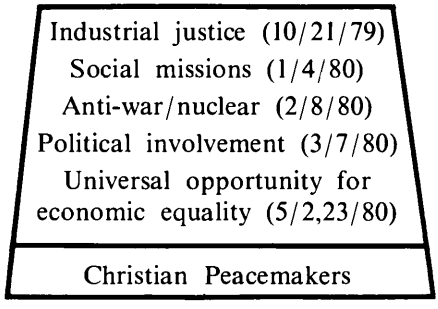
*The "Cornerstone" articles*

The "Cornerstone" articles from September, 1979, to May, 1980, reflect Stott's deepening commitment to evangelical involvement in social action. They also clearly reflect Stott's involvement with Lausanne's call for a simple life style,[9] an aspect of the continuing influence of Lausanne in which Stott is intimately involved.

The industrial problems of Britain during the winter of 1978-79 stimulated Stott to formulate a theology of peacemaking which he extends to various domains. He asserts:

> Social turmoil is of special concern to Christians because we are in the business of right relations. Reconciliation is at the top of our agenda because it is at the heart of our gospel. Jesus is the world's supreme peacemaker, and he tells his followers to be peacemakers too.[10]

Having modified the spiritual concept of reconciliation to include sociopolitical areas and having put these areas at the top of the evangelical agenda, Stott proceeds in his series of articles to balance numerous concepts upon the foundation of his view of a peacemaker. The following chart summarizes the articles.




[8]Ibid., 27.

[9]Cf. International Consultation on Simple Lifestyle publication, "An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle" (March, 1980). Obtain from Unit on Ethics and Society, World Evangelical Fellowship, 300 W. Apsley St., Philadelphia, PA 19144.

[10]Stott, 9/21/79, 36. He does not develop Matt 5:9 theologically until 2/8/80.

Stott evaluates *industrial justice* from the perspective of 1 Kings 12. He sees in this passage the principle of "mutual service arising from mutual respect."[11] His evaluation, however, is strongly in favor of the working class. He lays the whole burden for reconciliation on management by calling for a commitment to (1) abolish discrimination; (2) increase participation; and (3) emphasize cooperation.

Stott says many things which are true and reasonable in the socio-political realm. Our argument is not with his politics and social concerns but (1) with his presentation of these ideas under the guise of biblical authority and (2) with his call to the Christian community to forsake (in emphasis if not in essence) biblical models of evangelism in favor of social models.

For example, management, he says, is obligated by biblical authority to practice profit sharing. "Profit sharing also rests on biblical principle: the laborer is worthy of his hire."[12] We have no problem with Paul, but we have our doubts about this modern interpretation.

He further asserts that

> In the last century Christians opposed slavery because by it humans were dehumanized by being *owned* by others. In this century we should oppose all labor arrangements in which humans are dehumanized by being *used* by others—even if they have signed away their responsibility in a voluntary contract.[13]

These kinds of comments have far reaching ramifications. In regard to profit sharing, one wonders how Stott would explain Jesus' parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt 20:1-16).

Stott's concept of "dehumanizing"[14] is even more alarming in light of the biblical concept of God's ownership, and in light of the apostles' nonresistance to slavery. Does the apostles' silence make them guilty of dehumanizing by omission? Is God culpable of dehumanizing when he exercises his sovereign right of ultimate ownership in consigning humans to hell?

Stott begins to labor his linking of *social mission* with evangelism in his January 4 article under the domain of holistic missions. God's character, he says, demands "that he is the God of social justice as well as personal salvation."[15] The nature of man demands "that the neighbor we are to love and serve is a physical and social as well as a

[11]Stott, 9/21/79, 36.
[12]Ibid., 37.
[13]Ibid.
[14]He also dehumanized Lazarus in Luke 16; cf. 5/2/80, 37.
[15]Stott, 1/4/80, 34.

spiritual person."[16] The truth or falsehood of these assertions is not the issue. The issue is what constitutes the great commission in its basic biblical statement: evangelism or social justice. Love and service are not absolutes and cannot be judged apart from a truth base; love and service will deteriorate into mere social action if not made subservient to truth. This seems to be the direction in which Stott is going and it is this drift to which we object.

Stott's *anti-war/nuclear* position appeals to Matthew 5:9 for a theological base. He describes the alarming world scene and then asserts that

> It is against this background of horror that we need to hear again the words of Jesus: *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called God's children.* Peacemaking is a divine activity, and we can claim to be authentic children of God only if we seek to do what our heavenly Father is doing. Thus, the basis for peacemaking is theological: it derives from our doctrine of God.[17]

A later section will investigate this use of the seventh beatitude. Meanwhile, this same article contains several theologically suspect statements.

First, Stott equates the concepts of salvation and peacemaking. "For Scripture calls judgment his 'strange work'; his characteristic work, in which he delights, is salvation or peacemaking."[18]

Second, he asserts that Christ's "resort to violence of word and deed was occasional, alien, uncharacteristic; his characteristic was nonviolence; the symbol of his ministry is not the whip but the cross."[19] In response, one wonders what happened to the book of Revelation—when the Son of Man in accord with all prophetic Scripture will demonstrate his violent side. One also is puzzled when Jesus makes statements such as "I came not to send peace but a sword" (Matt 10:34). This is a strange kind of social action from the greatest of all peacemakers. In 1 Corinthians 5, and in many other passages, the Bible clearly teaches the truth that it is sometimes necessary to be a "division-maker" in order to be a preserver of truth.

Stott's discussion of how to inculcate peacemaking in a nuclear age points out the necessity of prayer so that "we might lead a quiet and peaceable life" (1 Tim 2:1-2);[20] however, his recommendations for political activism are cultural and not biblical. In fact, they actually

[16]Ibid.
[17]Stott, 2/8/80, 44.
[18]Ibid.
[19]Ibid.
[20]Stott, 3/7/80, 44.

violate the principle which Paul presents in Timothy in that some of the political activism involved can hardly be labeled as part of a quiet and peaceable life. When Christians are advised to "support *any means* [italics mine] to reduce this confrontation of suspicion and fear" (referring to the bluff tactics of the U.S.A. and Russia), one wonders if this is involved in Paul's prescription for a quiet and peaceable life.

Stott rises to his boldest form when he deals with the *universal economic equality* of the world, and particularly between the Free and the Third Worlds. He sounds a loud and clear note of agreement with West German ex-chancellor Willi Brandt's development report that "the greatest challenge to mankind for the remainder of the century" is to solve the problems of hunger, death in the Third World countries, and illiteracy.[21] These may indeed be top agenda items for politicians and world economists, but they should not be confused with the evangelistic obligation of evangelical Christians. This issue will be the subject of a later section.

*Conclusions*

The directional drift of Stott should be alarming to the biblicist. The above analysis only scratches the surface; every paragraph in Stott's articles needs careful scrutiny.

The following general observations are presented to summarize Stott's writing.

1. There is no mention of biblical salvation from sin as a prerequisite for true peace. Stott would surely deny that he neglects spiritual evangelism and some past publications would tend to support such an affirmation. However, his silence in his present writing along with his strong emphasis on other issues is cause for concern.

2. The theology of man's fall and the concept of depravity are not evident in Stott's thinking. These concepts are absent even when a good opportunity to allude to them presents itself (e.g. 5/23/80, p. 30a).

3. The articles present a one-sided view of the nature of God and reality when the Scriptures clearly indicate duality (e.g. God's attributes are balanced, He is righteous as well as loving).

4. There is an equivocation of spiritual concepts into the domain of the sociopolitical (e.g., reconciliation, 10/21/79, p. 36).

5. There is a lack of a solid grammatical, historical exegesis for theological assertions.

6. No attempt has been made to distinguish between the biblical concepts of truth and love.

[21]Stott, 5/2/80, 36.

These trends signal an initial departure which may pave the way for future deviations.

## THE PEACEMAKER OF MATT 5:9

It has been observed that John Stott launches his plea for social action from his perception of the seventh beatitude. The present chapter will endeavor to explicate the exegetical meaning of Matt 5:9 and to compare this meaning with Stott's view of a peacemaker in order to ascertain if his peacemaker concept fits the biblical model.

### *Greater context of Matthew*

The OT foretold that the King was coming; Matthew tells about his arrival and his program. It is the royal gospel, the gospel of the kingdom. Chaps. 1 and 2 tell us about the King's lineage. Chaps. 3 and 4 verify the King's presence and authority. He is verified by the ministry of the Baptist, consecrated by baptism, and proven true by temptation. He is presented to the Jewish nation in chaps. 5-25 as their predicted messianic king. He is rejected with finality by that same nation in chaps. 26 and 27, yet demonstrates the validity of his ultimate triumph in chap. 28.

It should be obvious, therefore, that Matthew portrays Christ as the theocratic king and that the provenance of this gospel is Jewish. It is in no way a treatise on Roman politics or Greek culture.

### *Immediate context*

Matt 5:9 is nestled in the beatitudes which introduce the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon contains the ethical precepts for kingdom life.

It is an understatement to observe that the Sermon on the Mount has been variously interpreted. It is not the purpose of the present paper to review the various interpretive approaches to the Sermon, but merely to affirm that "its principles are applicable to the children of God today."[22]

The beatitudes stipulate the attitudes which are necessary in the application of the precepts which are presented in 5:17-7:29. They are predications of character (note the equative verbs), not plans for action.

The remaining precepts of the Sermon present behavioral boundaries for those individuals who profess to be members of the kingdom. They are not dealing with world governments but with individuals who are submitted to a theocratic king.

[22]Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1976) 12.

*Matt 5:9*

The concern of this section is to discern the biblical meaning of "peacemakers" (εἰρηνοποιοί).

*Etymology and usage.* Εἰρηνοποιός is a compound adjective comprised of ποιέω ("make") plus ειρήνη ("peace"), and it is used substantivally in Matt 5:9. The noun aspect of this compound is probably the most important for etymological purposes. Εἰρήνη may denote various ideas. It is often the NT equivalent of שָׁלוֹם ("peace"), such as in "greetings and similar expressions, where it has the sense of well-being or salvation."[23] It also reflects "the Rabbinic sphere by its frequent use for concord between men (Acts 7:26; Gal 5:22; Eph 4:3; Jas 3:18; cf. 1 Pet 3:11)."[24] In many biblical contexts, the opposite of שָׁלוֹם is רַע ("evil"). Foerster summarizes by observing:

> As regards the material use of the term in the NT three conceptions call for notice: a. peace as a feeling of peace and rest; b. peace as a state of reconciliation with God; and c. peace as the salvation of the whole man in an ultimate eschatological sense. All three possibilities are present, but the last is the basis. This confirms the link with OT and Rabbinic usage.[25]

Therefore, while εἰρήνη does not have have one simple and fixed meaning, it does have strong OT ties, especially with שָׁלוֹם and its various usages. As with all word studies, one must look to usage to determine meaning.

Strictly speaking, one cannot determine the usage of "peacemaker" in the NT because it is a hapax legomenon. It is, in fact, a rare word throughout Greek literature. "It is rare in secular Gk. (e.g. Xen., 6,3,4; Cornutus 16p. 23,2; Dio Cass., 44,49,2; 72,15,5; Plut., *Mor.* 279b; Pollux, 152; Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 2,192), where it is applied in particular to emperors."[26]

It does not occur in Josephus,[27] the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha,[28] or in Moulton and Milligan's work on the papyri.[29] It only occurs in Prov 10:10 and Isa 27:5 in the LXX. The Proverbs passage

[23]Werner Foerster, "εἰρήνη κ.τ.λ." in *TDNT* 3 (1964) 411.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid., 412.

[26]H. Beck and C. Brown, "Peace," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 2. 782.

[27]Karl H. Rengstorf, ed., *A Complete Concordance to Flavius Josephus* (4 vols.; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973).

[28]On the basis of Christ. Abrah. Wahl, *Clavis Librorum Veteris Testamenti Apocryphorum Philologica* (Graz-Austria: Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, 1972).

[29]James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949).

refers to man's relationship with man and Isaiah has reference to Israel making peace with God.

It does occur with some frequency in the patristics, especially in its verb form.[30] The Fathers use it particularly in relation to divine activity and to the Christian community. The patristic sources, according to Lampe's citations, do not relate the term to worldly political activity but to spiritual and ecclesiastical activity.

In light of this relatively rare use of the term, and in regard to meaning from a biblical perspective, it becomes especially important to search the NT for any clues which may aid our understanding of what constitutes a peacemaker.

In the NT, the verb form is used only in Col 1:20. It refers to Christ's work of spiritual reconciliation "through the blood of his cross" (cf. Acts 10:36; Eph 2:17). Also, ποιέω plus εἰρήνη in syntactical context only occurs twice in the NT. In Eph 2:15 Christ's redemptive work "made peace" in the sense of spiritual reconciliation. In James 3:18 the context associates the term with Christian character and righteousness rather than with social revolution (cf. Eph 4:31, 1 Pet 3:11).

The NT predominantly uses peace in a spiritual, salvific, and ecclesiastical context (cf., e.g., Rom 5:1; 12:18; 15:13,33; 14:19; 1 Cor 14:33; Eph 4:3; 2 Tim 2:22; Heb 12:14). Deity is referred to as "the God of peace" (Rom 16:20; 2 Cor 13:11) and Christ is the founder of peace (John 16:33; Eph 2:14ff.; Luke 2:14 ASV). There is a distinct absence of political usage. Peace in the NT is related to Deity and to those who have submitted to the Deity. It is not a term for the unsaved man or the secular world.

*Interpretive tradition.* The force of the seventh beatitude has been variously interpretated. Some have viewed it to mean "blessed are those who make this world a better place to live in."[31] It is thus viewed by some as merely a general admonition to peace in any context.

The church fathers have generally stressed the personal aspect of "peace."[32] Augustine saw the peacemaker as first of all spiritual; inward peace was more important to Augustine than outward peace. In fact, ultimate and meaningful peace often demands division.

> Too many expositors look exclusively to that other and lower peace, those especially who prize Christianity mainly for its power for healing

[30]Geoffrey W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961) 421.

[31]William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 109.

[32]Ibid.

> the outward sores of the world, not as that which alone stanches the deep inner wounds of men's souls. Not that the peace of this world is excluded; the Gospel does bring this peace, but only by the way: it is aiming at a higher peace, and one for the sake of which, as being the only true peace, it is willing for a season to forego and sacrifice the other, to be called a troubler, and one who turns the world upside down, to appear to be introducing the sword of division, rather than to be knitting the bands of love.[33]

The meaning of peacemaker has also been viewed from the Rabbinic perspective. "The Jewish Rabbis held that the highest task which a man can perform is to establish *right relationships* between man and man."[34] Hillel is reported as having said: "Be ye of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace."[35] Tasker reflects this position by observing that:

> *The peacemakers* are those who are at peace with God 'the author of peace and lover of concord'; and who show that they are truly *children of God* by striving to use every opportunity open to them to effect reconciliation between others who are at variance.[36]

"Peacemaker" is best understood in light of the use of this term in its conceptual relationship to reconciliation and the total analogy of peace in the NT. Namely, a peacemaker is one who is first of all at peace with God by virtue of the cross of Christ and is also seeking a peaceful relationship with those he comes into contact with, especially those in his immediate Christian community (Gal 6:10).

This assertion seems to be supported in Matt 5:9 itself. The structure of the beatitudes may well be that of synthetic parallelism. "That is to say, the second line of each Beatitude contains mention of a blessing which completes the promise or pronouncement made in the first line."[37] Therefore, a peacemaker is in an intimate way related to the concept "sons of God." It is also helpful to remember that "in Jewish thought, 'son' often bears the meaning 'partaker of the character of,' or the like."[38] A peacemaker, therefore, is one who does the

[33]R. C. Trench, *Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount Drawn from the Writings of St. Augustine* (London: Macmillan, 1869) 169-70.

[34]Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 110.

[35]Willoughby C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925) 41.

[36]R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961) 62.

[37]John Wick Bowman, "Travelling the Christian Way—The Beatitudes," *Review and Expositor* 54 (1957) 379. Cf. Also Matthew Black, "The Beatitudes," *Expository Times* 64 (1952-53) 125-26.

[38]D. A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978) 26.

kind of work that God does, and since he thus reflects the character of God he is identified with the family term "son." He is a peacemaker in the same sense that his Father is. Hendriksen states it in the following way.

> True peace-makers are all those whose Leader is the God of peace (1 Cor. 14:33; Eph. 6:15; 1 Thess. 5:23), who aspire after peace with all men (Rom. 12:18; Heb. 12:14) proclaim the gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15), and pattern their lives after the Prince of Peace (Luke 19:10; John 13:12-15; cf. Matt. 10:8).
>
> This, moreover, is not a peace at any price. It is not brought about by compromise with the truth, under the guise of "love" (?). On the contrary, it is a peace dear to the hearts of all who speak the *truth* in love (Eph. 4:15)[39]

*Stott's peacemaker*

What is the image of the peacemaker which John Stott presents? the reading of his present writing can only leave one with the impression that for Stott a peacemaker is a political activist in the domain of anti-war, anti-nuclear, anti-arms race, U.S. and Russian relationships and all sorts of public, political dialogue.[40] While he does mention prayer and ecclesiastical peacemaking, his clear emphasis on social action reveals where his heart is.

If, for the sake of argument, we should accept Stott's concept of peacemaker, then we should find clear implications in the NT that the apostles were political activists. No such evidence exists.

Furthermore, does it not seem strange that Jesus would make a mere political statement and that Matthew would press it when the early church was the least likely group in the Roman world to bring about political peace? It is also significant that for nearly three hundred years we do not find the church involved in political action. George Lawlor well observes:

> Here is no political congress, no international board, no League of Nations, no religious order, no church embassage, no World Council. It speaks of those whose peace with God is an accomplished fact (Rom. 5:1), who live in peace, if at all possible, with all men (Rom. 12:18), who work to make and keep peace wherever peace is threatened or lost (Rom. 14:17-19), and who are intent upon following their Prince of Peace (1 Peter 2:21).
>
> However, we are not called upon to sacrifice *truth* for peace, and thus make the latter "peace at any price." Such peace is not really

[39]William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973) 278-79.

[40]Cf. especially Stott, 2/8/80 and 3/7/80.

peace, because it forsakes the duty of contending for the faith once for all delivered unto the saints (Jude 3) and abandons principle, conviction, and doctrine. True peacemakers do not cry "Peace!" when there is no peace. They do not preach a spurious peace that covers over sin and does not remove it.[41]

## ECONOMIC EQUALITY?

Stott endeavors to answer the question, "How should Christians react to the growing demand from the Third World for economic justice?"[42] He proposes two biblical principles as a theological answer and offers several practical avenues of expression in obedience to his principles.

### *Stott's two principles*

*The principle of unity.* Stott endeavors to build his principle of unity upon Psa 24:1, Gen 1:28, and the parable of the Good Samaritan. Referring to the Psalm and Genesis passages, Stott asserts that "the whole earth was to be developed by the whole people for the common good; all were to share in its God-given resources."[43]

Even a cursory reading of the cited texts will immediately suggest that Stott's comment constitutes a conceptual leap of great magnitude. For example, Psa 24:1 is a statement of the dependence and ultimate ownership of created kind by the Creator. It does not teach Stott's concept of unity.

Genesis 1:28 merely affirms that man is to wisely control the earth and its creatures for his benefit. It says nothing about political or economic activism. Our larger concern is that on the basis of Christ's finished work, the Christian church has been given a redemptive mandate in the Great Commission of the gospels. Therefore, social action detached from submission to evangelism as outlined in Christ's redemptive mandate constitutes disobedience to the clear teaching of Scripture.

Luke 10:25-37 is also lifted from its biblical context and conveniently inserted into Stott's system. He claims that the major point of this parable is "that true neighbor love ignores racial and national barriers."[44] He culturalizes the parable in order to demand active involvement in Third World problems.

Stott stretches the point of the parable in using it for his purposes. While it does point out that a neighbor is anyone in need,

[41]George L. Lawlor, *Beatitudes Are for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974) 81.
[42]Stott, 5/2/80, 36.
[43]Ibid.
[44]Stott, 5/2/80, 36.

even an enemy (cf. Lev 19:34; Exod 23:4, 5; 2 Kgs 6:8-23), it does not indicate that the Samaritan was in the business of traveling the world in search of such "neighbors." He did what he could to help while fulfilling his own business responsibilities. In the theocratic kingdom the Jews were responsible for strangers in their domain but not for those outside their domain. The parable is not actually designed to define "neighbor" but to encourage being a neighbor when an obvious opportunity presents itself.

Stott's use of his principle of unity well illustrates his hermeneutical practice. He takes a passage which seems to support what he wants to prove and uses it as a launching pad for his own cultural application. He often emphasizes the truth of a passage—e.g., the general concern a Christian should have for his fellow man—without balancing this with the biblical commands regarding other responsibilities and priorities. Medical care, for example, is often important in missions. But its importance is totally subordinate to the essentials of Christ's redemptive mandate. Stott has lost sight of the revealed priorities.

*The principles of equality.* The second principle which Stott presents to justify Christian involvement in procuring Third World economic justice is what he terms the principle of equality. Stott summarizes his point in the following way.

> At present, millions of people made in God's image are unable to develop their human potential because of illiteracy, hunger, poverty, or disease. It is, therefore, a fundamentally Christian quest to seek for all people equality of opportunity in education (universal education is arguably the principal means to social justice), in trade (equal access to the world's markets), and in power sharing (representation on the influential world bodies that determine international economic relations).[45]

Stott claims that 2 Cor 8:8-15 provides Christians with the principle of equality upon which the above conclusion may rest. It is best to allow the author to speak for himself at this point. He asserts that Paul

> grounds his appeal for the poor Judaean churches on the theology of the Incarnation—that is, on the gracious renunciation of Christ, who, though rich became poor so that through his poverty we might become rich (v. 9). It was a renunciation with a view to an equalization. It

[45]Ibid., 37.

should be the same with the Corinthians: "Your abundance at the present time should supply their want . . . that there may be equality" [ellipsis is Stott's].[46]

A few observations concerning 2 Corinthians 8 are in order before evaluating Stott's use of it. First, the unsaved community is not to be read into this context. Paul is encouraging a sort of inter-Christian community credit union. At this time Paul is presenting the need of the Jerusalem Christians, but v 14 also allows for a reversal of need in the future: "that their [Jerusalem saints] abundance also may become a supply for your want." Second, Paul's illustration of Christ's incarnation refers to attitude and position, not economics (cf. Philippians 2).

Stott takes 2 Corinthians 3 and universalizes an idea which Paul restricted to the Christian community. Paul recommended a course of action (v 8), while Stott demands that Christians *must* secure equal opportunity for all the underprivileged and oppressed throughout the world.

Stott's application of 2 Corinthians is theologically suspect on several counts. His view of the image of God in man is inadequate when he asserts that millions of people are not allowed to develop the *imago dei* in themselves *because* they lack the opportunity to do so. Image development takes place by confrontation with the spiritual realities of Christ and His Word (cf. Rom 12; 1 Cor 13), not by a bread line. The unsaved, whether hungry or full, have no capacity for image development. Stott seems to blame the environment, both physical and mental, for what should be credited to man's bent for sin. But the environment is bad because man is bad.

Furthermore, Stott has made fundamental what is at best secondary. When he states that equality in education, trade and politics is a fundamental quest of the Christian church[47] without even an allusion to man's spiritual problem, he has left the domain of biblical orthodoxy.

Stott's comment that "universal education is arguably the principal means to social justice"[48] is both naive and alarming. It sounds more like liberal humanism and the philosophy of John Dewey than biblical evangelicalism. It is also impossible to reconcile this theory with the revealed means whereby the coming theocratic king will institute true social justice. Unregenerated sinful man ultimately responds to a rod, not to chalk.

[46]Ibid., 36-37.
[47]Ibid., 37
[48]Ibid.; Stott, 5/23/80, 30.

Therefore, Stott's use of 2 Corinthians 8 is invalid. His transition from whatever truth he has found in this passage to his statements concerning social economic action, supposedly based on this passage, is a leap of gigantic proportions.

Another alarming bit of exegesis by Stott is observed in his reference to Luke 16:19-31.[49] Stott's actual words must be considered here:

> We are all tempted to use the enormous complexity of international economics as an excuse to do nothing. Yet this was the sin of Dives. There is no suggestion that Dives was responsible for the poverty of Lazarus either by robbing or by exploiting him. The reason for Dives's guilt is that he ignored the beggar at his gate and did precisely nothing to relieve his destitution. He acquiesced in a situation of gross economic inequality, which had rendered Lazarus less than fully human and which he could have relieved. The paraiah dogs that licked Lazarus's sores showed more compassion than Dives did. Dives went to hell because of his indifference.[50]

Stott, therefore, interprets the main point of this story (whether real or parabolic is not of concern here, for the main theme remains the same) to be economic in nature. Dives ignored (an argument from silence), either consciously or unconsciously, an opportunity for economic equalization with a two-fold result: Lazarus was rendered less than human and Dives went to hell *because* of his economic indifference.

The greater context of Luke 16 includes the parable of the unrighteous steward (vv 1-13) and a denunciation of Pharisaic self-righteousness (vv 14-17). The point in vv 1-17 is that the Pharisees were unfaithful stewards of God's truth (cf. vv 15-17). They preferred the mammon of unrighteousness as a means of success rather than obedience to God's law.

Jesus introduced the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus immediately after upbraiding the Pharisees. This story contributes a significant punch line to the preceding verses, namely, disregard for the law and the prophets has grave consequences and will receive the ultimate punishment (vv 29-31). As Morris puts it, "there is an indication that the rich man's unpleasant situation was not due to his riches (after all, Abraham had been rich), but to his neglect of Scripture and its teaching."[51]

[49]Stott, 5/2/80, 37.

[50]Ibid.

[51]Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 254.

It is true that worldly goods comprise a part of the contrast throughout this chapter. In fact, Luke's gospel itself uses the rich/poor motif on several occasions (cf. 1:53; 6:20-26; 12:13-21). However, the misuse of money merely serves to connect the character of Dives to the character of the Pharisees (cf. v 14) and to refute the belief that riches alone are a proof of divine blessing.

The point throughout Luke 16 is a point of revealed truth, not earthly economics. When revealed truth is ignored, so are many other areas. In a sense, the Pharisees were handling truth like the rich man was handling his money. Likewise, both Dives and those like him go to hell not because of greed and indifference to the needs of others, but because of the refusal to be a steward of truth.

The principles of unity and equality as presented by Stott are a misrepresentation of the biblical text upon which they are allegedly built.

*Stott's practical advice*

Stott begins his May 23 article with a summary statement of his view of economic justice and then launches out into four specific domains with suggestions of how we can seek "equal opportunity for all human beings (through education, medical care, housing, nutrition, and trade) to develop their full, God-given potential. This is the minimum that love and justice should demand."[52]

One might label this article as Stott's missionary call to social action. It begins with a passionate appeal that "God may well be calling more Christian people than hear and respond to his call to give their lives in the service of the poor and powerless, in practical philanthropy or Third World development, in politics, or in economics."[53] He then proceeds with a four-point sermon on how to do social action: with our heart, our head, our mouth, and our pocket.

The reviewer will merely point out a few of the highlights of Stott's sermon.

He appeals first to our emotions by giving a rather narrow interpretation of Matt 9:35-38.

> When Jesus saw the multitudes, hungry and leaderless, he was moved with compassion, and then fed them or taught them or both. It was compassion that aroused and directed his action, and it is compassion that we need most. We have to feel what Jesus felt—the pangs of the hungry, the alienation of the powerless, and the indignities of the wretched of the earth.[54]

[52]Stott, 5/23/80, 30.
[53]Ibid.
[54]Ibid.

Stott has conveniently omitted the *first* item mentioned by Matthew. Jesus went about "teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom." Jesus' compassion was for a world that was spiritually adrift, not for people without a UNICEF program.

This methodology well illustrates Stott's use of the Bible. We do not disagree that we should have compassion for starving people and for those who suffer from social injustice. We are all confronted with worldly inequalities constantly. But how do we attack these problems? How will we change our world? Our only hope is to follow the example of the apostles: be truth tellers in conjunction with the great commission of our Lord.

Why did Paul not fight slavery? Why did he not attack Rome and its many inequalities between the royal and the working class? Because Paul had a greater task to perform and he was a realist concerning the post-lapse world. Jesus did not call Paul or present day Christians to a primary task of changing the world-system, but to evangelize individuals, to teach them all things He commanded, and to recognize that Satan is the "god of this world" and that our only hope for ultimate political correction is Jesus' second advent.

After Stott corrects our heart, he proceeds to work on our heads, We need, he asserts, increased awareness of the Third World needs. The Third World is like Lazarus at the gate and we affluent Christians are acting like Dives. If we are truly aware we will know what trade agreements are in force and how they affect the Third World economy; we will pressure the news media to increase Third World coverage, and we will make pilgrimages to the Third World for personal contact with their needs.

The next logical step, the third point in his sermon, is to be a witness. We should spread the bad news. People are starving and the Christian world is unconcerned. If one should ask, "How, Dr. Stott, can I be a witness?" We would expect the answer, "Engage in political agitation! Join pressure groups! Outdo the humanists in showing concern! Ask informed and embarrassing questions to the right people!"

The final step is an appeal to put our money where our mouths are; "Most of us (for I include myself) ought to give more generously to aid and development, as well as to world evangelization."[55]

We might be encouraged by a glimmer of light when the word "evangelism" is mentioned. However, as we meditate upon the words "as well as," our hope begins to fade. These words place social responsibility on a par-of-equality with evangelism. Yet, after reading

[55]Ibid., 31.

the "Cornerstone" articles, one wonders whether the use of the term "evangelism" is not simply a semantical dressing for the sake of enhancing orthodox appearance.

*A new emphasis*

The correlation of the "Cornerstone" articles on economics with Stott's involvement with the International Consultation on Simple Lifestyle held at Hoddesdon, England, in March, 1980, is quite obvious. Stott notes that his May 23 article was written just prior to ICSL's March meeting.[56] This meeting produced a six-page, single-spaced document on the social concerns (= simple lifestyle) of this Lausanne committee. This statement contains less than half a page on evangelism, and even this statement is permeated with social terminology.

It is impossible to evade the impression that the present burden of John R. W. Stott is more social than evangelistic. Evangelicals should be saddened by the fact that Stott has decided to emphasize social action even more than evangelism. His vigorous role of leadership in evangelical missions over the past several years has gained him a place of prominence and respect in both Europe and America. If his new message is followed, evangelism in the Third World will suffer a devastating blow.

## CONCLUSION

This article constitutes a selective review of some of John R. W. Stott's teaching on social action. The study of his "Cornerstone" articles in *Christianity Today* causes concern for the future of Christian missions. The increasing number of articles in *Christianity Today* and other Christian periodicals dealing with social and economic issues would seem to indicate that this new shift in emphasis is not limited to John Stott.

The allegation of Arthur Johnston that "Stott has dethroned evangelism as the only historical aim for mission"[57] is more evident today than in 1978. The present writings of Stott confirm Johnston's observation beyond question. Unless Stott and the Lausanne trend are checked, the true biblical missionary will become a very small remnant.

[56]Ibid.

[57]Johnston, *The Battle for World Evangelism*, 303.