

REDEEMER

R E P O R T

MAY 2012

JOHN STOTT AND CARING FOR GOD'S CREATION

BY JOHN ELWOOD

This article is reprinted by permission from a post on the website of The Creation Care Coalition. The website is currently a work in progress, but you can visit it for more information at www.creationcarecoalition.com. Thanks also to Ann-Marie and Jonathan Keller (full disclosure—daughter-in-law and son) for bringing this article to my attention. John Stott has been a hero and mentor of mine since my earliest days as a believer, and I am grateful that he tackled the problem of “selective discipleship” in his last years of life. — Tim Keller

On a fine summer morning last July the mail carrier brought me my copy of John Stott's valedictory work, *The Radical Disciple: Some Neglected Aspects of our Calling*. Within hours of receiving it, I heard the news that Stott had died.

We knew, followed and cherished John Stott for many reasons. Londoners knew him as the beloved rector of All Souls Church. Around the world, he taught Christians and seekers with his writings: more than 50 books in many languages, including *Basic Christianity*, *The Cross of Christ* and *The Living Church*. He was the chief architect of *The Lausanne Covenant*, a document that has come to define evangelical theology and practice throughout the modern world.

And his voice was heard far beyond the Christian church. In 2004, the *New York Times* wrote: “If evangelicals could elect a pope, Stott is the person they would likely choose.” The follow-

ing year, *Time Magazine* ranked Stott among the 100 most influential people in the world.

But in the last years of his life, Stott grew concerned about “selective discipleship” among his contemporaries—“choosing those areas in which commitment suits us and staying away from those areas in which it will be costly” is how he described it. “But because Jesus is Lord, we have no right to pick and choose the areas in which we will submit to his authority.”

And so at age 88, he penned his final work, by hand, focusing on eight areas that Christians often neglect as a way of avoiding costly—or radical—discipleship. They range from “Christlikeness” to “Simplicity” and even to “Death.” But they include one that gets almost no airtime in contemporary American evangelical dialogue: “Creation Care.”

For Stott, care for the creation has nothing to do with *deification* of nature. On the other hand, it

entirely rejects *exploitation* of the earth. Rather, it focuses on *cooperation with God* in conserving and nurturing the creation. “[God] has deliberately humbled himself to make a divine-human partnership necessary,” he wrote. “He planted a garden, but then put Adam in it ‘to work it and take care of it’ (Genesis 2:15).”

And what are the key areas today for those who follow Christ to cooperate with God in tending his creation? Stott listed four crucial trends that must be addressed:

- Accelerating world population growth, threatening mass starvation for humanity at a time “when approximately one-fifth of them lack the basic necessities for survival.”
- Depletion of the earth's resources, from wanton deforestation and habitat destruction to degradation of oceans and exploitation of fossil fuels.

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CALLED TO CARRY ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

BY KRIS JACOB, DEACON

One of the things that has really hit home for me during my time serving with the Diaconate has been the importance of carrying one another's burdens. Galatians 6:2, which says that we are fulfilling the law of Christ in doing so, reinforces how seriously we are to take this edict. My experience has taught me that in order to be able to carry another's burdens, I have to be rooted in the Word, able to really understand the other person's context, and then be able to allow others to speak into my life as willingly as I extend support to another.

I am now very keenly aware that my best intentions and best efforts will not cause others to make meaningful changes unless their hearts have been transformed. That is why it's so important to continually be brought back to the fact that only God is able to change people's hearts, but that he may use us as the instrument to effect that change.

Without God, I feel frustrated that my efforts only translate into temporary fixes and I am anxious, feeling as though responsibility for improving the situation falls squarely on my shoulders. With God, I am at peace in the knowledge that God gives us guidelines for how to serve and if we are faithful to them and him, he will use our efforts toward the restoration of lives (even when that is not immediately apparent).

Before I can shoulder someone's burden, I also have to discern what it is they're carrying. Financial concerns, strong emotions, and frayed relationships often point to a deeper issue. Something I've found to be tremendously effective while serving with the Diaconate has been rather simple: Give someone an outlet to be heard. So often, people I've served as a deacon have shared that what they've most appreciated about my Diaconate partner and me—as a team work-

... People Are Not Projects To Be Managed.

ing with someone who has approached the Diaconate for assistance—is just providing a safe space for them to share.

I think it runs counter to the mindset so many of us New Yorkers possess, where we want to analyze the problem, determine an end goal, and then come up with actionable (and measurable) next steps that can be implemented. While not necessarily a bad framework, people are not projects to be managed. I have found that it takes some investing in getting to know an individual—their beliefs and goals, hopes and dreams, values and desires—before I can figure out how to help carry their burden. And if

I am successful in doing that, I've found it's amazing how empowering that space can be to give the individual the room to figure out for themselves what they need to do next. This is not an easy task, but we have a model to look to: God who came to live amongst us, who understands our weaknesses and every one of our struggles.

Finally, when requesting the privilege of being able to speak into the lives of others, I constantly remind myself that no real relationship is a one-way channel. Something that I've tried to put into practice based on the advice of more seasoned deacons and deaconesses is to not just pray for someone who asks for prayer. Rather, pray *with* someone who requests it.

While it's not appropriate in a Diaconate context for me to shift the focus to me, I do try to be open and vulnerable about challenges in my own life because I'm not someone who has it all together. I'm a broken person serving another broken person purely by the grace of God. As such, I seek out and maintain a core group of relationships (my wife, my fellowship group, and the Diaconate staff and members) who lovingly speak the truth into my life, enabling me to walk and not grow weary, helping to carry my burdens as I seek also to carry the burdens of others.

REDEEMER REPORT

Kathy Keller
Heather Klein

HUNTER COLLEGE AUDITORIUM
East 69TH (Between Park & Lexington)
services at 10:30AM & 6:00PM

W83RD MINISTRY CENTER
150 W. 83rd Street (between Columbus & Amsterdam)
services at 9:15AM, 11:15AM, and 5:00PM & 7:00PM

The Redeemer Report is a publication of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

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YOUTH LEADERS IN SPACE

BY DAVID PLANT AND BIJAN MIRTOLOOI

A few years ago one of our youth leaders remarked that working with middle and high school kids is a lot like being Alan Shepard, the first American in space. He explained: “Shepard’s job was at times exhausting, overwhelming, and loud. But he saw the stars. And more specifically, he saw the light of the stars before it reached us. He saw the stars of our future.”

This is probably the best description we’ve ever come across of what it means to be a youth leader. When you spend quality time around middle and high school kids, exploring with them all manner of Bible, life, and cultural issues, you see their gifts and talents and have a chance to behold the light of the stars of tomorrow. Consider this an invitation to have that experience.

There are at least three reasons why we need you and you need us. First, there is a need that has

not always been there. Only recently could we say, “Youth Ministry has a obvious need for the men of Redeemer to serve and befriend the future men of Redeemer.” Since many first and second-generation Redeemer families have chosen to stay in the City and raise their kids here, we now have over 130 students, and our need for leaders is critical, though many at Redeemer may not even know there is a youth community!

Which leads to the second point. Simply put, few people move to New York City to hang out with high school kids! Therefore, it’s only natural that student ministry isn’t on the radar for most of Redeemer’s congregations as a place to serve. But **with over 100% growth rate each of the last two years**, our students are a vibrant and vital part of our Church and City.

Third, there is a clear benefit.

Taking part in our Youth Community allows you to fulfill the vow all members take during an infant’s baptism to support parents as they “train the child up in righteousness.” At the same time you’re serving the City. Have you considered that most of the native New Yorkers at Redeemer are under age 17? They are a local people group, born within the five-boroughs, sitting in the pew next to you, and they desperately need to see and hear the Gospel through the lives of people other than their parents.

Consider that while most of our students will go away to college, many will also return to New York (or another other global city) to live and work. By investing and serving your church in this area of need you will not only see the starlight of the future, you will prepare it to shine brightly. To learn more, contact youthgroup@redeemer.com.

THE MARRIAGE SEMINAR: A PERSONAL REACTION

BY MIN KIM AND BASIL KIM*

We attended the Marriage, Sex and Singleness conference led by Tim and Kathy Keller at the end of March. It was a unique opportunity to get an honest look into the challenges and realities of both singleness and marriage. It also was a great chance to spend time in fellowship and community with the three congregations of Redeemer while discussing this important topic. Plus, we got engaged. More about that later.

What most stood out to us was how frank, forthright and practical the lessons and discussions were throughout the weekend.

Discarding the rose-colored glasses that we are often told are a requirement of successful relationships, all of the talks and discussions approached the joys and challenges of singleness, relationships and marriage with a realistic but hopeful perspective. With a healthy mix of teaching, honesty and humor Tim and Kathy addressed attendees both collectively and in groups of men and women, respectively.

We were able to ask the questions that we were always afraid to ask, and probably hear words spoken that we would not have expected to hear in a church set-

ting. We also were given insight into the Kellers’ history as a couple from the perspectives of their closest friends. We truly appreciated their willingness to share their struggles and vulnerabilities with us, for while many of us see Rev. Keller preaching on Sundays, we are rarely given the chance to see him with his wife and friends speaking to us in such a personal and intimate manner. Observing the dynamics of their relationship was priceless. Finally, what made the conference even more meaningful (and timely) was that we were able to attend together,
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LOVING CHRIST: WHAT'S RACE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

BY MAY YANG AND PAMELA BROWN-PETERSIDE

On the evening of March 28 over 800 individuals participated in a dynamic conversation on race, where Anthony Bradley, Timothy Keller, and John Piper, addressed the gospel's role in reconciling America's racial divide. Crossway sponsored the event, which was hosted by Redeemer's Grace and Race team.

The impetus for the event was Piper's book, *Bloodlines: Race, Cross and the Christian*, in which the author effectively points to sin—namely, “the problem of exalting ourselves over our maker... and over others”—as being at the root of racism. In his presentation that evening, by emphasizing redemptive grace, Piper challenged evangelicals to root their identity in Christ over their race.

Piper's talk was complemented by Keller's call to acknowledge corporate responsibility and recognize systemic evil as a critical aspect of the problem of racism. Invoking passages in the Old and New testaments, Keller pointed to the notion of corporate responsibility as a central pillar of our faith, and pivotal to the Christian understanding of sin, redemption, and salvation. As such, he reiterat-

ed the need for us each to gain an understanding of racism beyond individual responsibility and conscious intent.

Bradley, an African-American scholar who moderated the discussion, responded to both talks by urging whites to create venues where they listen to non-whites “who communicate the ways in which they have been impacted and affected by race.” Bradley added, “Discussions of race have to be led by people whose perspective is different.” More importantly, he reminded us all that we must frame this discussion around love. We are called by Jesus' own words to love each other the same way that God loves us. So as we grapple with the racism in our hearts and in our congregations, we must honestly ask: do I/we view that group that is racially different from me/us as worthy of being loved?

In discussing the challenges of leading multi-racial congregations, Keller and Piper, both pastor-scholars, exhorted white evangelicals to engage in racial dialogue, despite the potential pitfalls. Bradley invited the audience during the Q and A “to ask deeper and more penetrating ques-

tions” with the caveat that “we cannot talk about racism without talking about white privilege (the ways whites benefit from racist systems just by virtue of being white) and about micro-aggressions.” By micro-aggressions, he referred to everyday situations in which people of color are viewed with suspicion or stereotyped, like the assumption that Bradley is a salesperson in a store because he's wearing a suit and shopping in mid-town during the afternoon. Keller acknowledged white privilege and ways he's benefited from it, but with his characteristic wit he added, “I'm not going to feel sorry for myself because that is a very white thing to do.” Piper admitted that though he knew he'd be criticized for writing this book, but he also felt a need to own his brokenness before God and not live out of a place of racist self-righteousness.

We hope that conversations about race will continue at Redeemer, where over 50 percent of its congregants are Asian or Asian-American. The talk, followed by the Q&A, can be viewed online at: www.desiring-god.org/blog/posts/now-available-race-and-the-christian.

JOHN STOTT... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

- Excessive waste disposal, from thoughtless packaging and mindless consumerism, causing the average Briton to “throw out his or her body weight in rubbish every three months.”
- Climate change, the accumulation of greenhouse gases

that threatens all the world's ecosystems with “the specter of global warming, which may have disastrous consequences on the configuration of the world's geography and weather patterns.”

This last item—climate change—deserves special atten-

tion in Stott's call to discipleship. “Of all the global threats that face our planet, this is the most serious,” he writes. “One cannot help but see that our whole planet is in jeopardy. Crisis is not too dramatic a word to use.”

What should Christians do?

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STORIES OF GOSPEL RENEWAL FROM HOPE FOR NEW YORK CLIENTS

Clients from Hope for New York affiliate organizations shared stories of Gospel restoration and hope at nine Redeemer services over Palm Sunday and Easter. We praise God for the work He is doing through Hope for New York's affiliate organizations, and we are so grateful to those in our church who gave generously and sacrificially to this work through the Easter Sacrificial Offering. A few of the Hope for New York stories are excerpted below.

“God worked on me from the inside out! I began to understand God's love for me: that I didn't have to live a perfectly righteous life, but I could accept the righteousness that He offered in Christ. My changed life didn't happen overnight. But He started to replace the bitterness with love, the fear with peace, and the desperation with hope.

– *Debra, Former Client (and now staff), Brooklyn Teen Challenge*

“One day, someone called the shelter where I was staying and told me to get in touch with my family. He said the family was planning my funeral. The police had found someone dead of a drug overdose in the Bronx—a Hispanic male, 40–45 years old, 5 feet 4 inches tall. The guy had my ID in his pocket. The body had decomposed. Since my family had not heard from me in months, they thought it was me. They thought I was dead. That was a wake-up call. I felt like God was sending me a message: “That could have been you. You are not exempt from consequences. But you have a chance at something better.”

– *Domingo, Client, Bowery Mission*



“I've heard people say that life really begins when you turn 50. Well, I can genuinely say that's true because, after spending 22 years struggling with a life-controlling addiction to crack cocaine, God has given me another shot at a new life! And how incredible is the timing? Today is Easter—the day that we celebrate God's triumph of life over death in the resurrection of His son Jesus Christ! I really can appreciate this because I've experienced Jesus' victory in my own life.

– *John, Client, The Relief Bus*

“When I walked through the doors of the Women's Center home, I felt freedom for first time in a long time. Through the program at the Bowery Mission Women's Center, Christ has been changing me. I have had my guard up for most of my life, but I am learning how to be secure in Christ, and now I'm learning to open up to others. I have always lacked focus and the ability to complete things, and today I'm learning self-discipline. I want my life to be a blessing by sharing Christ with others. I am learning that God has a bigger purpose for my life than I ever realized. I feel hopeful about what God is doing in my life and what He has in store for me!

– *Eunice, Client, The Bowery Mission Women's Center*

HFNY YOUNG SUPPORTERS SPRING BENEFIT

Celebrate stories of hope at Hope for New York's Spring Benefit on May 10. Join our Young Supporters for food and drinks and learn more about the work Hope for New York is doing to serve the poor and marginalized of New York City. Find out more at hfny.org/hope-for-new-york-2012-spring-benefit/.



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JOHN STOTT... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 4)

Stott offered a short list: Support Christian environmental advocates and ministries; use sustainable forms of energy; switch off unneeded appliances; purchase necessities from companies with ethically-sound environmental policies; join local conservation societies; avoid overconsumption; and recycle as much as possible.

But more important than any list of do's-and-don'ts is Stott's sense that creation care is essential to discipleship, however rarely this is acknowledged in the modern American religious landscape. He quoted his colleague Chris Wright in calling Christians to repentance:

"It seems quite inexplicable to me that there are some Christians who

claim to love and worship God, to be disciples of Jesus, and yet have no concern for the earth that bears his stamp of ownership. They do not care about the abuse of the earth and indeed, by their wasteful and over-consumptive lifestyles, they contribute to it."

Christians who want to follow Stott in "radical discipleship" will do well to remember who it is that owns this planet that we call home. The world as it is reflects and praises God—He who created it. To sully the world is to sully this reflection. To harm the natural world is to disable its ability to praise and reflect God. Therefore, the natural world has enormous significance and value. So the changes and alterations we make to it—and make them we must—

must be done with the utmost respect and care for our environment. "To the Lord your God belong the heavens, the earth and everything in it." (Deuteronomy 10:14)

John Elwood is an advocate for gospel justice and creation care. He serves as a director of Evangelical Environmental Network, works with the Presbyterian-reformed Creation Care Coalition, and publishes the environmental Clothesline Report blog. He is a ruling elder in the Presbyterian Church in America. John and his wife Barbara live in Andover, NJ, where they founded Good Hand Farm, an organic produce co-op serving more than 500 members.

THE MARRIAGE SEMINAR... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 3)

which coincidentally was the day before our engagement. While the conference was not the reason for our engagement, it set a solid

foundation of understanding and insight into the joys, truths and meaning of the covenant of marriage. We are sure these lessons

will prove invaluable in the many years ahead of us both. *No, we aren't married yet, we just happen to have the same last name as singles!