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# 'To be occupied with God': John Stott on Worship

**John Stott, the most influential evangelical Anglican of the twentieth century, wrote much on worship but it is one of the more neglected aspects of his theology. Ian Randall here identifies and explores such important themes in John Stott's work as worship that comes from the whole person, worship shaped by scripture, and Trinitarian worship, as well as Stott's discussions on forms of worship. He provides an accessible and comprehensive introduction to Stott's thinking and to central features of wider traditional Anglican evangelical worship.**

Writing in 1967 in one of his key books of that period, *Our Guilty Silence*, John Stott set out a two-fold vocation of the church: 'to be occupied with God and with the world'. He wished to convey in this simple statement what he saw as the most significant priorities for the Christian community as it fulfilled God's purpose. Although later he would enlarge considerably on the church's vocation, these twin *foci* have remained crucial for John Stott: 'God has constituted his church', he argued, 'to be a worshipping and witnessing community'.<sup>1</sup>

Much more attention has been given to what John Stott has had to say about the witness of the church than about what he has said about its worship. Yet he has always seen these two elements as inextricably bound together. Authentic worship has been at the heart of his concern. 'True religion', he suggested in 1973, '...fosters a worship which is essentially "spiritual", arising from the heart, but which expresses itself through public, corporate services'. Such worship, he insisted, 'issues in moral behaviour. Otherwise...it is actually an abomination to the Lord.'<sup>2</sup> Worship is a critical arena in which Christian discipleship is formed and John Stott has been concerned to explore the question: What kind of worship is acceptable to God? This study explores some of the major areas of his thinking.<sup>3</sup>

## Heart worship

An important study of worship is found in John Stott's *Christ the Controversialist*.<sup>4</sup> Here the first and basic characteristic of true worship is described by him as 'heart-worship'. Typically, as he outlined the characteristics of heart worship, the first point he emphasized was that in such worship the mind of the worshipper is fully

1 Stott 1967: 59.

2 Stott 1973: 88.

3 I am most grateful to John Stott for his encouragement in my development of this material, which may at some point form part

of a larger study. I am also indebted to Timothy Dudley-Smith's work, especially Dudley-Smith 1995, which is a rich resource.

4 Stott 1970, chapter 6.

involved. The 'heart' in the Bible is, he stated, a term often associated with the intellect. Referring to the record of the conversion of Lydia (Acts 16:14), he pointed out that what is recorded by Luke – 'The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul' – actually meant that God opened Lydia's 'understanding'. So, John Stott continued, 'heart-worship is rational worship. To love God with all our heart involves loving Him with all our mind.'<sup>5</sup>

A further New Testament example used by John Stott in this discussion of rational worship was the woman from Samaria who met Jesus at Jacob's well. Jesus said to her that the time was coming when true worshippers would worship the Father 'in truth'. (John 4:22,23). Samaritan worship, John Stott commented, was 'lip-worship', rather than heart-worship, which he described as 'the intelligent adoration of the mind'. But perfect worship, he noted, would only be offered in heaven, when believers would see God face to face.<sup>6</sup> He quoted at this point the prolific eighteenth-century evangelical hymn-writer, John Newton, author of 'Amazing Grace':

Weak is the effort of my heart,  
And cold my warmest thought;  
But when I see Thee as Thou art,  
I'll praise Thee as I ought.

It might seem from this that John Stott emphasized rational worship to the exclusion of the emotions. It could also be argued that such a determined focus on the priority of the mind was something of a departure from older evangelical tradition. What did John Newton mean when he spoke about his 'warmest thought' being 'cold'? He was arguably not referring primarily to the rational aspect of his consciousness, but to a more holistic relationship with God. Certainly John Stott developed an approach to worship and the spiritual life which paid more attention to the role of the mind than did that of Eric Nash, who, through the camps he ran (the 'Bash' camps) had been instrumental in John Stott's early evangelical commitment.<sup>7</sup>

In *Christ the Controversialist*, however, John Stott followed his analysis of worship that involves the mind with an examination of what he termed 'spiritual worship'. Referring once more to the meeting between the woman from Samaria and Jesus, he now focussed on worship 'in spirit'. He commented: 'In essence the worship pleasing to God is inward, not outward, the praise of the heart not the lips, spiritual not ceremonial'. Such worship, John Stott continued, was possible only through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and he suggested frequent use of words drawn from an ancient confession of the Church, noting that scriptures such as Ephesians 2:18 and Romans 8 (for example), as well as prayers used in communal worship, show the part played in true worship by the Spirit:

Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord.<sup>8</sup>

The third characteristic of heart worship, he noted, was moral worship. The conscience of the worshipper is involved. 'This is why', said John Stott, 'most forms

5 Stott 1970: 162.

6 Stott 1970: 162-5.

7 Dudley-Smith 1999, part of the two-volume definitive biography, deals with John Stott's early formation.

8 Stott 1970: 165-9.

of public worship are introduced by an act of penitence and confession'. He linked this with the way in which biblical authors – for example Old Testament prophets such as Amos and Isaiah – were adamant that worship without morality was displeasing to God. 'The claim to mystical experience without moral obedience', he pronounced, 'is a lie and a delusion.' If hymns and prayers exist in isolation from life, they are, he insisted, 'merely lip-worship'. Returning to his theme of heart worship, he argued that singing hymns and offering prayers, when this is done in authentic ways, 'express more even than the praise of the mind and the spirit; they set forth in concentrated form the devotion of our whole life.'<sup>9</sup> In this way John Stott bound together what he saw as the three vital ingredients of worship if it was to be acceptable to God: rational worship, spiritual worship and moral worship.

Writing two decades later, however, John Stott recognized that there was more to be said about how the whole of a person's being was caught up in worship. In his influential book *The Contemporary Christian* (1992) he took up the topic of the place of emotion in worship, something that had not figured significantly in *Christ the Controversialist*. Having said that his readers would suspect him of not being an emotional person – he acknowledged that he was an Englishman who had been brought up on the philosophy of the 'stiff upper lip' – he explained what he had discovered as a Christian. He had learned that Jesus was 'no tight-lipped, unemotional ascetic', and that emotion has an essential place in humanness and so in Christian discipleship. Specifically in relation to public worship, he argued that each occasion of worship is one in which worshippers meet 'in the presence of God and of the whole company of heaven' and are 'transported...into eternal, unseen reality.' This was not something that was a matter of the truth alone, or even spirit and truth. 'We are', he said, 'moved by the glories of which we speak and sing, and we bow down before God in humble and joyful worship.'<sup>10</sup> More significance was now being attached by John Stott to appropriate emotion in worship.

John Stott was also acutely aware in the 1990s of the way the wider religious atmosphere in the Western world had changed since the 1970s and how that changed atmosphere related to the church's witness. There had been what he called a quest for transcendence, with philosophies such as Marxism and materialism losing ground and a concurrent rise of new movements of spirituality such as the New Age. His view was that the Christian reaction to this phenomenon needed to be one of sympathy. He then linked this with worship, making the following probing observation:

This quest for transcendence is a challenge to the quality of the church's public worship. Does it offer what people are craving – the element of mystery, the 'sense of the numinous', in biblical language 'the fear of God', in modern language 'transcendence'? My answer to my own question is 'Not often'. The church is not always conspicuous for the profound reality of its worship. In particular we who call ourselves 'evangelical' do not know much how to worship. Evangelism is our speciality, not worship.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps it could be argued that the spiritual seeking that was going on in society exhibited a number of strains, not only a quest for transcendence. But as John Stott

9 Stott 1970: 169-71.  
10 Stott 1992: 120-2.

11 Stott 1992: 227.

thought about these seekers he felt that it was a tragedy that men and women who were looking for the experience of transcendence were not turning to the church, 'in whose worship services', as he put it, 'true transcendence should always be experienced, and a close encounter with the living God enjoyed'.<sup>12</sup> Expectation of such a close encounter was in tune with John Stott's own commitment to 'heart worship'.

## Worship and the Word

John Stott has spoken on many occasions about preaching as something that has a 'central place' in public worship. In 1982, in *The Bible: Book for Today*, he gave as a basic reason for this the need of the church constantly to be hearing the Word of God. His views reflected a long evangelical tradition regarding the crucial role of preaching within worship. Whereas for other Christian traditions the Eucharist might be central to worship, for evangelicals preaching has had the central place. This is not to say that John Stott has neglected the Eucharist.<sup>13</sup> But his priority in worship has been evident. 'Preaching', John Stott averred in 1982, 'is not an intrusion into it [worship] but rather indispensable to it. For the worship of God is always a response to God'.<sup>14</sup> Preaching is, within the evangelical tradition in particular, a declaration of the reality of God and of the possibility of knowing him.

In the same year John Stott's *magnum opus* on the subject of preaching, *I Believe in Preaching*, was published. In that volume he argued at considerably greater length that 'Word and worship belong indissolubly to each other'. All worship is, as he characteristically expressed it, an 'intelligent and loving response to the revelation of God'. And because it is the adoration of the Name of the Lord, acceptable worship, he stated, 'is impossible without preaching'. Biblical preaching is making known his Name – the name of God – and worship is praising that Name. In true worship, preaching and praise belong together, and John Stott suggested that it was their 'unnatural divorce' that accounted for what he saw as the low level of much contemporary worship.<sup>15</sup>

Although John Stott approached the question of preaching in worship from within the evangelical tradition, he showed in his analysis that preaching had been a crucial element in worship across the centuries, not only since the rise of evangelicalism. In the first chapter of *I Believe in Preaching* he traced what he called 'the glory of preaching' – from the New Testament era, through the church fathers and the medieval friars (Franciscans and Dominicans), to the Reformers, the Puritans, leading evangelicals such as John Wesley and George Whitefield, and more recent preachers. From the early church period he took the example of Tertullian, a North African theologian, who spoke of Christians assembling 'to read our sacred writings... With the sacred words we nourish our faith, we animate our hope, we make our confidence more steadfast, and no less by inculcation of God's precepts we confirm good habits.'<sup>16</sup> From the fourth century he cited John

12 Stott 1992: 228-9.

13 His writing in this area warrants separate treatment. The Eucharist has been more central to evangelical practice than has sometimes been thought – see Randall 2005, chapter 4.

14 Stott 1982a: 57.

15 Stott 1982b: 82.

16 Tertullian, Chapter XXXIX, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. III, p. 46, cited in Stott 1982b: 19.

Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople, the great preacher of the Eastern Church. Not surprisingly, Stott particularly highlighted Protestant leaders of the sixteenth century, notably Martin Luther, John Calvin and Hugh Latimer. He quoted Calvin: 'Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard', Calvin said, 'and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a Church of God exists.'<sup>17</sup> Worship was the crucial evidence of the true church from the New Testament onwards.

But John Stott's thinking about preaching in worship was more significantly influenced by post-Reformation preachers such as the seventeenth-century Puritan, Richard Baxter of Kidderminster, with his strong convictions about teaching the Word of God as set out in his book *The Reformed Pastor* (1656). Among nineteenth-century preachers, John Stott found an important exemplar in Charles Simeon, Vicar for fifty-four years of Holy Trinity Church, Cambridge. Simeon made an enormous contribution to the growth of evangelicalism in the Church of England. John Stott quoted Simeon's statement that ministers were ambassadors for God and that if they preached what was founded on Scripture their words should be received as the word of God himself.<sup>18</sup> Twentieth-century preachers such as Martyn Lloyd-Jones, at Westminster Chapel, London, were quoted.<sup>19</sup> Yet John Stott did not confine his study to those with whom, as an evangelical, he naturally sympathized. He included among his galaxy of preachers John Henry Newman, the most powerful figure in the nineteenth-century Anglo-Catholic revival. John Stott's purpose was to show that '(t)he Christian consensus down the centuries has been to magnify the importance of preaching'.<sup>20</sup>

In subsequent chapters of *I Believe in Preaching* John Stott dealt with such issues as contemporary objections to preaching, the theological foundations of preaching, the importance of study, and the inner dimensions of the preacher's life. It is clear that for John Stott the proper context for preaching is the worshipping community. The preacher does not exercise an authentic ministry in isolation from the church. He writes, with passion, that...

...the people have not gathered to hear a human being, but to meet with God. They desire like Mary of Bethany to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to his teaching. They are spiritually hungry. The bread they desire is the Word of God...It is this total context which makes preaching unique. For here are God's people assembled in God's presence to hear God's Word from God's minister...What is unique is not an ideal or an atmosphere, but a reality. The living God is present, according to his covenant pledge, in the midst of his worshipping people, and has promised to make himself known to them through his Word and sacrament. Nothing could ever replace this.<sup>21</sup>

From this perspective the spiritual discipline of worship demands much, not only from the preacher but also from the congregation. All are involved in nurturing their discipleship through the Word of God.

Many valuable practical guidelines are offered to preachers in *I Believe in Preaching*. It is one of the finest books on preaching from a contemporary

17 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV, I, 9, p. 1023, cited in Stott 1982b: 25.

18 Simeon 1959, cited in Stott 1982b: 34.

19 See Lloyd-Jones 1971.

20 Stott 1982b: 47.

21 Stott 1982b: 81-2.

practitioner. But, for John Stott, the challenge to be effective as a communicator must be seen as only one aspect of effective preaching. In 1986, in an introduction to sermons by Charles Simeon, he underlined the necessity of the preacher having an authentic devotional life: 'One might single out freshness of spiritual experience as the first indispensable quality of the effective preacher. No amount of homiletical technique can compensate for the absence of a close personal walk with God.'<sup>22</sup> Two years later he pursued the theme of biblical meditation as true wisdom.<sup>23</sup> Taking this further in *The Contemporary Christian*, he painted a vivid picture of those who try to preach but have 'no Scripture to expound'. On the other hand, there are those who enter the pulpit with the confidence that God has spoken and that they have an inspired text in their hands – 'ah!', John Stott exclaimed, 'then our heads begin to swim, our hearts to beat, our blood to flow, our eyes to sparkle with the sheer glory of having God's Word in our hands and on our lips'.<sup>24</sup> The preacher of the Word, and the congregation receiving it, are caught up in this spiritual experience.

### Trinitarian worship

It might seem strange to leave a section on 'Trinitarian worship' until this point in this article. However, in the way in which John Stott outlines heart worship and the place of the word it is clear that only if someone has come into a relationship with God and is attentive to his Word can that person's worship become truly centred on God. Such Trinitarian worship also offers to the Christian a sense of assurance. In a revised edition of one of his early books, *Christian Basics* (re-published in 1991), John Stott wrote: 'God wants his children to be sure that they belong to him, and does not want us to remain in doubt and uncertainty. So much so, that each of the three persons of the Trinity contributes to our assurance. The witness of God the Holy Spirit confirms the word of God the Father concerning the work of God the Son.'<sup>25</sup> The Trinitarian focus in terms of relationship with God is clear and has formed the framework for John Stott's thinking about evangelical theology.<sup>26</sup> He also pursued his Trinitarian case about worship by reference to the Lord's Prayer, in his exposition of the Sermon on the Mount. To use the words of this prayer in personal or corporate devotion was to honour God. In the petitions, John Stott suggested, there is an acknowledgment that, through the Father's creation and providence, daily bread is received, through the Son's atoning death, there is forgiveness, and, through the Spirit's indwelling power, there is deliverance from the evil one.<sup>27</sup>

The God who is worshipped in Christian adoration is the God revealed in Jesus Christ his Son. This has been a recurring note struck by John Stott. In his book *The Authentic Jesus* (1985) he dealt with the uniqueness of Christianity in terms of the uniqueness of Christ. In his treatment of this topic he covered issues of salvation – Christ as the only Saviour – but he also stressed that the ultimate issue was about the attitude of a person's heart towards Jesus. Without detracting from his long-term insistence on proper theological understanding, John Stott argued that what mattered was 'not whether our tongue can subscribe to an orthodox

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22 Introduction to Simeon 1986: 273.

23 Stott 1988a.

24 Stott 1992: 210.

25 Stott 1991a: 36.

26 See Stott 2004.

27 Stott 1978: 150.

formulation of the person of Jesus, but whether our knee has bowed before his majesty' and that 'reverence precedes understanding'.<sup>28</sup> He pressed home these points in *The Contemporary Christian*, where he stated that in the story of the beginnings of the church in the New Testament the worship of Christ preceded the church's developed doctrine of Christ. He referred to how Paul linked 'God our Father' and 'our Lord Jesus Christ' as together the object of prayer.<sup>29</sup> It is God in Christ who is to be offered human homage.

The encounter with Christ in worship has always been closely linked by John Stott with witness to the world. In *Our Guilty Silence* he wrote, using language throbbing with feeling: 'We need to hear again Christ's word of peace, and see again his hands and his side. Once we are glad that we have seen the Lord, and once we have clearly recognized him as our crucified and risen Saviour, then nothing and no-one will be able to silence us.'<sup>30</sup> A recurring theme has been what it means to say that 'Jesus is Lord'. Writing in 1977 on 'The Sovereignty of God the Son', he commented that Jesus is Lord 'three times over': as the one who has Godhead in himself, as the one who in his ministry ushered in the kingdom of God, and as the one exalted to the right hand of God.<sup>31</sup> What did this mean for the worshipping community? For Christ to be Lord of the church, he suggested (in a popular book on understanding the Bible), means that before him 'our place is on our faces in the dust', but also means that Christ's victory belongs to the Christian.<sup>32</sup> All of this, for John Stott, is not limited to the experience of worship; it has an integral relationship to discipleship. To say that 'Jesus is Lord', he insisted, 'has far-reaching ramifications. Not only does it express our conviction that he is God and Saviour, but it also indicates our radical commitment to him'.<sup>33</sup>

What about the place of the Holy Spirit in Trinitarian worship? In *Baptism and Fullness* (first published in 1964), John Stott took up the then-controversial issue of the experience of the Holy Spirit. The background was the emergence of the charismatic movement. John Stott's argument was thoroughly Trinitarian. Christian experience was experience of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and the Spirit was a 'reticent Spirit' who did not draw attention to himself but prompted the expression of worship, 'Abba Father'. Also, the Holy Spirit 'glorifies Christ' (John 16:14), turning, as John Stott vividly expressed it, 'the bright beams of his searchlight upon the face of Jesus Christ'. There is no 'experience of the Holy Spirit', in worship or in any other part of the Christian life, which is separate from the experience of the Trinity.<sup>34</sup> John Stott also addressed the idea that was common in some Pentecostal and charismatic circles of 'waiting' in worship for the Spirit to come. Often this meant extended meetings looking for powerful experiences. Writing in 1990, he insisted that the Spirit came at the day of Pentecost and has never left the church. What was needed was for Christians to humble themselves before the Spirit's sovereign authority and to allow him freedom. The marks of the Spirit's presence included biblical teaching and living worship.<sup>35</sup>

In John Stott's thinking, theology and doxology cannot be separated. To worship God is to 'revel adoringly' in who God is in his revealed character. Before this can

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28 Stott 1985: 24.

29 Stott 1992: 89.

30 Stott 1967: 39.

31 Stott 1977: 21.

32 Stott 1976: iii.

33 Stott 1992: 98.

34 Stott 1975b: 69.

35 Stott 1990: 87.

be done, God must be known. 'He must', John Stott has consistently argued, 'disclose to us who he is before we can offer him what we are in acceptable worship'.<sup>36</sup> Thus a theology which sets out a vision of God as he is, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is a theology through which '(t)he worship of God is evoked, informed and inspired'. This view, expressed in 1994 in *The Message of Romans*, is clearly in line with John Stott's sustained emphasis on proper understanding, but there is an equal emphasis on the fact that there should be 'no theology without doxology'. Indeed he goes so far as to say that there is 'something fundamentally flawed about a purely academic interest in God'. He categorically rejected the idea that God could be studied in a 'cool, critical, detached' way. Authentic worship was heartfelt worship: 'Our place is on our faces before him in adoration.' An Anglican evangelical leader of a century before, Handley Moule, who was Professor of Divinity in Cambridge and then Bishop of Durham, was enlisted in support, with Stott quoting Moule's neatly-phrased warning to 'beware equally of an undevotional theology and of an untheological devotion'.<sup>37</sup>

### Forms of worship

Given John Stott's over-riding concern for worship that is from the heart of the Christian believer, is shaped by scripture, and is Trinitarian, it is not surprising that he has never devoted so much attention to the outward forms of worship. Much of what he has said about worship applies equally to Anglican worship, with its historic liturgical framework, and to more spontaneous Free Church worship. What he wrote on this subject in the late 1960s continued to be his essential position. In the context of a discussion about what it meant to worship 'in spirit and in truth' and to avoid false worship, he said: 'So whatever outward forms we may use in Christian worship (liturgies, processions, drama, ritual, kneeling or raising our arms), we need to ensure that they escape the charge of idolatry by passing the double test of being "in spirit and in truth"'.<sup>38</sup> Yet John Stott has not been indifferent to the use of external forms in worship. In 1973 he wrote about the danger of 'external form without power', but also of the danger of an emphasis on power that could lead the church to 'despise or dispense with proper external forms'. Both form and power, he argued, were essential.<sup>39</sup>

Part of the background to discussions about forms of worship since the 1960s has, as we have noted, been the influence of the charismatic movement, with its emphasis on God's immediate action in worship. In *Baptism and Fullness* John Stott argued that the whole church is a 'charismatic community'. He recognized that the way in which some were speaking of special experiences of the Spirit needed attention. His advice to these Christians was to 'let your experience lead you to worship and praise; but let your exhortation to others be grounded not upon your experiences but upon Scripture'.<sup>40</sup> To an extent he saw the charismatic movement as a protest against domination of the church by the clergy, and he welcomed pleas for the liberation of the whole people of God in worship and service. Spiritual gifts are widely distributed and given, he argued, 'to edify' others. So some gifts used in worship are more valuable than others. John Stott pointed out that Paul urged

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36 Stott 1992: 174.

37 Stott 1994: 311.

38 Stott 1969: 94 & 95.

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39 Stott 1973: 88.

40 Stott 1975b: 74-5.



the Corinthian church to desire earnestly 'the higher gifts' (1 Cor. 12:31), those that 'build up the church' (1 Cor. 14:12). A strong emphasis in the New Testament was on the gift of teaching. This enabled John Stott to stress that 'all over the world today churches are spiritually undernourished owing to the shortage of biblical expositors'.<sup>41</sup> Any form of worship which took away from the priority of preaching was deficient.

This is not to say, however, that John Stott has given such a central place to preaching that other aspects of worship have been marginalized. Certainly his approach to worship means that preaching is prominent. Prayers of intercession have also received his attention. For John Stott, every true prayer is 'a variation on the theme' of subordinating the human will to God's will.<sup>42</sup> In addition, he has commended other elements of worship less associated with the evangelical tradition, such as the use of silence. In 1975, in a book significantly entitled *Balanced Christianity*, he wrote that while some contemporary services were 'too formal, respectable and dull', in others it seemed to be assumed that 'the chief evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit is noise'. Although he did not use the term, such meetings have sometimes been referred to as 'happy-clappy'. John Stott asked if Christians – no doubt he had in mind primarily evangelicals – had forgotten that a dove was as much an emblem of the Holy Spirit as were wind and fire. He continued: 'When he [the Holy Spirit] visits his people in power he sometimes brings quietness, silence, reverence and awe.' At this point worship involves bowing down in wonder.<sup>43</sup>

John Stott has had relatively little to say about sung worship. Perhaps a typical comment was one he made in *Christ the Controversialist*, that 'worship is much more than a matter of singing hymns and saying prayers'.<sup>44</sup> Given the strong evangelical tradition of hymn-singing, for example in Methodism, more attention to hymnody might have been expected in John Stott's writings. Also, some of his close colleagues such as Timothy Dudley-Smith and Michael Baughen are fine hymn-writers. John Stott himself is musical, and has played, at various times in his life, the cello and the piano accordion. During his training for Anglican ministry at Ridley Hall, Cambridge, he would take services in village churches and would sometimes sing, as solo items, hymns such as 'I heard the voice of Jesus say', or 'My song is love unknown'. During his curacy he occasionally sang a solo at Morning or Evening Prayer.<sup>45</sup>

It is not surprising that John Stott, with his desire to articulate a full-orbed evangelical faith should argue for full-orbed worship. In *The Bible: Book for Today* he painted a picture of God giving 'revelations of himself [in scripture] which lead us to worship, promises of salvation which stimulate our faith, and commandments expressing his will which demand our obedience'. Worship, faith and obedience were, taken together, the essential ingredients of Christian discipleship.<sup>46</sup> He has had no truck with superficiality. Speaking to a student conference some years after the Lausanne Congress of 1974, John Stott told his audience that 'the Congress was spoilt for me by one thing only and that was the interminable singing of the word Hallelujah. Do you know that ditty when you sing Hallelujah about twenty

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41 Stott 1975b: 112.

42 Stott 1988b: 188.

43 Stott 1975a: 39.

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44 Stott 1970: 171.

45 Dudley-Smith 1999: 129.

46 Stott 1982a: 74.

times in a crooning voice...?'<sup>47</sup> As he suggested in 1991, services lacking content and form become 'slovenly, mindless, irreverent or dull'. Although he has never been a protagonist on behalf of certain forms of liturgy, Anglican or otherwise, he has advocated churches giving more time and trouble to the preparation of their worship.<sup>48</sup> Since authentic discipleship cannot be slovenly, neither can authentic worship.

## Conclusion

Throughout his ministry John Stott has had a deep concern to foster the kind of worship that comes from the heart. In 1961, referring to the calling of preachers, he insisted that '(t)he preparation of the heart is of far greater importance than the preparation of the sermon'. He questioned whether any preaching could 'ring true' that did not spring from 'conviction born of experience'.<sup>49</sup> This applied to the whole of worship. Any supposed worship that did not come from the heart and did not issue in behaviour consistent with discipleship was, he stated in 1973, 'valueless'.<sup>50</sup> This note – one of passionate concern for a worship that is truly 'occupied with God' – has continued to be sounded by John Stott. As he wrote in an uncompromising passage in *I Believe in Preaching*: 'Our worship is poor because our knowledge of God is poor, and our knowledge of God is poor because our preaching is poor. But when the Word of God is expounded in its fulness, and the congregation begin to glimpse the glory of the living God, they bow down in solemn awe and joyful wonder before his throne.'<sup>51</sup> Such preaching, and therefore such worship, was, at its very core, Trinitarian. 'The Trinitarian statement of a speaking Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and so of a Word of God that is scriptural, incarnate and contemporary', is fundamental to Christian faith.<sup>52</sup> Forms of worship are important as ways of focussing on God, and in the context of many debates about such forms John Stott's vision for public worship has consistently been that at its core there should be 'the proclamation of the Word of God in the power of the Spirit of God'.<sup>53</sup>

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47 Dudley-Smith 2001: 210.

48 Stott 1991b: 124.

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50 Stott 1973: 88.

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