EDITORIAL: The importance of coffee breaks...

Working at home during the Covid-19 pandemic is now a normal thing for most of us. For theologians there is always enough work at home: studying, reading, writing... There never seem to be enough hours in a day! I often have to remind myself to take breaks, to stretch my back, walk around a bit and... make a coffee (or tea). Nothing unusual, this is our ordinary daily life. However, at our John Stott symposium on April 19, when we commemorated Stott’s legacy, some coffee breaks suddenly turned out to be important historical events. Professor Henri Blocher, who has been involved in FEET from the start, reminded us that it was during a coffee break in Mexico City that Stott discussed with other European theologians his plans to found FEET. This is how important coffee breaks can be! It’s what we miss in this time of Zoom meetings: talking informally during coffee breaks and meals together with other theologians; for example, at a FEET conference. Many good ideas were born from meeting others in an informal way. Those are the times when we get to know more about other people’s research and can ask them questions. We can gain information about a book someone is writing, a subject they are specialized in, and so on. At least, that’s how it has often worked for me. This newsletter contains three of the contributions to the event on April 19: from Chris Wright, who worked with John Stott and knew him very well, and from Tatiana Kopaleishvili, who praises Stott’s contribution to the life of students over many decades and from Pavel Černý who was in contact with John Stott for thirty years and considers him as his teacher and mentor. You also find important information about our peer-reviewed European Journal of Theology and about our next Conference in 2022, God willing. Let us pray for each other and we hope to meet in person in Prague next year. I’m looking forward to the coffee breaks...!

Hetty Lalleman, editor
On Wednesday 17th March we heard the tragic news that Dr Corneliu Constantineanu, one of the most creative and productive evangelical theologians in Romania, had died after a short battle with Covid-19. Some of you may well have known him. Corneliu embodied in one person three great passions, which not only inspired and characterised John Stott, but also are integrated together within the ministries of the Langham Partnership, which John Stott founded and for which I have been working these past twenty years:

- As a Langham Scholar, Corneliu was committed to high quality academic scholarship and teaching for the sake of the church. He made a major contribution to theological education at seminary and university levels in his own country and within wider Europe.
- And, like John Stott, Corneliu was a writer – of many articles, books and edited volumes. Most recently he was the general editor of the Central and Eastern European Bible Commentary project of Langham Literature – from which he will be hugely missed.
- And again like John Stott, Corneliu believed in the power of biblical preaching, preaching that is faithful, clear and relevant to local people. So he pioneered the work of Langham Preaching in Romania and chaired its national committee.

Theology, writing, and biblical preaching in the service of the church. Those things not only characterised our late brother Corneliu, they were also major motivations for John Stott’s part in the foundation of FEET.

As early as 1970 Stott had written to a number of evangelical church leaders in Europe, in which he said that ‘with the growing unity of Europe, there is both a need and a desire to strengthen ties between evangelicals in churches which owe their origin to the Reformation.’ And then, after the massive impetus of the Lausanne Congress in 1974, a conference of European Evangelical Theologians was convened in 1977, out of which FEET was formed, with John Stott as a member of its Advisory Council.

John’s love for Europe and strong interest in the varied fortunes of evangelical churches there is perhaps not surprising. He studied French and German as an undergraduate in Cambridge while Europe was convulsed during the Second World War, and quite often brought French idioms or phrases into his conversation and teaching. And like many evangelicals in Britain, he had a particular concern for Christians ‘behind the Iron Curtain’, as we used to refer to Eastern European countries in the post-war Communist bloc. So through FEET and other connections, in the 1980s he managed to visit and speak to small groups of believers and theological institutions in Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, as they still were. And after things opened up more in the 1990s he sought to encourage these institutions as they emerged from the communist era, with visits to Prague, Odessa, Osijek and Budapest. Meanwhile a significant number of theologians from those countries benefited from his Langham Scholars programme – like Corneliu, and Pavel Černý, and many others. And indeed, one might say that the whole continent of Europe, from Portugal to Greece, from Scandinavia to the Balkans, has been blessed by the ministry and advocacy of John Stott.

But let me return to that letter way back in 1970 that led to the eventual formation of FEET. John’s explicit concern was for the churches of Europe. His desire for stronger and more fruitful cooperation among evangelical theologians was not for the sake of the academy per se, but for the health, maturity and mission of the church. And I think if we are rightly to celebrate his legacy and consider how it should live on within the work of FEET and similar networks, then we must keep that point...
front and centre. It is after all part of the stated Object of FEET, ‘strengthening the work of the Churches’. 

John Stott’s vision for theology (as a scholarly discipline) and for theological education was grounded in a strong ecclesiological and missiological conviction. He was committed to God’s church, and to the mission of God’s church for the sake of God’s world. And theology must serve that agenda if it is to be in line with God’s plan and purpose.

In March 1997 John Stott gave a lecture in Tyndale Theological Seminary in Toronto, entitled ‘The Importance of Theological Education for Christian World Mission’. And in it he shared a view that also undergirded the ministries of Langham Partnership. ‘God’s concern is focused on the maturing of the church, not merely the conversion of individuals… And churches only mature through the faithful teaching of God’s Word.’ And that would only happen if seminaries and theological colleges prepared future pastors for that crucial ministry.

But why does it matter, we might ask, that John Stott had such a high view of theological scholarship and especially the task of theological education? One answer comes from the Cape Town Commitment (Lau sanne 2010) – which although it came out shortly before his death, I know it was read to him and found his complete agreement and approval (for which I was greatly relieved!). Here is what it says on the partnership of theological education and mission:

> The mission of the Church on earth is to serve the mission of God, and the mission of theological education is to strengthen and accompany the mission of the Church. Theological education serves first to train those who lead the Church as pastor-teachers, equipping them to teach the truth of God’s Word with faithfulness, relevance and clarity; and second, to equip all God’s people for the missional task of understanding and relevantly communicating God’s truth in every cultural context… Those of us who lead churches and mission agencies need to acknowledge that theological education is intrinsically missional. Those of us who provide theological education need to ensure that it is intentionally missional, since its place within the academy is not an end in itself, but to serve the mission of the Church in the world. ¹

Teaching is integral to the Great Commission, and teachers are among the gifts of the ascended Christ to his church. The Bible affirms from very early on, and repeatedly in both Testaments, that God’s people need teaching and teachers, and that they are vulnerable and endangered when teachers are either lacking, or false and unfaithful. So the scholarly vocation of theologians and theological educators is vital for reasons that are thoroughly biblical. So here then is the question to be faced by persons and institutions that engage in theological scholarship, writing and teaching – including those who do so throughout Europe and in the FEET community. Are we aiming to produce women and men who, in whatever vocation they have from God in the church and the world, are biblically mission-minded, biblically monotheistic and biblically mature?

I think John Stott would have said Amen to those three objectives, and would continue to hold them up as the vision and raison d’être of our theological task. What is the end product of our work, after all, if not to contribute to the maturity and mission of the church, and thereby to participate effectively in the mission of God in the world? Let me finish with the words of John Stott himself – taken from a document he wrote in 1996 to express his vision for the Langham Partnership, in its efforts to strengthen evangelical theological education, multiply evangelical literature and foster faithful biblical preaching.

> My vision, as I look out over the world, is to see every pulpit in every church occupied by a conscientious, Bible-believing, Bible-studying, Bible-expounding pastor. I see with my mind’s eye multitudes of people in every country world-wide converging on their church every Sunday, hungry for more of God’s Word. I also see every pastor mounting his pulpit with the Word of God in his mind (for he has studied it), in his heart (for he has prayed over it), and on his lips (for he is intent on communicating it).

What a vision! The people assemble with hunger, and the pastor satisfies their hunger with God’s Word! And as he ministers to them week after week, I see people changing under the influence of God’s Word, and so becoming more and more the kind of people God wants them to be, in understanding and obedience, in faith and love, in worship, holiness, unity, service and mission.

What a vision indeed! And I think John Stott would have applied it not just to ministries like Langham, but also as the inspiration, even if somewhat more indirectly, for the work of faithful evangelical scholarship that will feed such pastors and those who teach them. May that motivation continue to be part of John Stott’s legacy in the DNA of FEET and all of us sharing this conference.

¹ The Cape Town Commitment II.F.4.
I have spent more than 15 years serving in the International Christian Student ministry, which was formative for my Christian life, career and the worldview. I did not have the privilege to be among those who personally met John Stott. But I had a handful of people who walked alongside of me and supported me with great enthusiasm in the key moments of my life. Only later I discovered that the passion of those people was kindled by personal encounters with John Stott and was a direct outcome of his ministry. Let me give you three short examples:

My dear mentor in IFES back in 2007 encouraged me to start thinking of an academic career and cheered me up during my PhD years. His perseverance till today to support people like me always strikes me. As he told me, it all started through John Stott’s speech at one of the URBANA conferences back in 1976. After this conference my mentor left his career behind and devoted his life to student ministry.

The IFES ministry in Georgia was richly blessed by an elderly couple from the UK, who faithfully, for more than 20 years, supported this ministry in all possible ways. When I asked them how their journey of faithfulness to the student ministry had started, they traced it back to their student years and Bible Study groups which were led by John Stott. This old couple has told me that, even years thereafter, when they met Stott again, he remembered their names, because he kept them in his prayers.

My current post-doctoral project is supported by the Langham Trust. It became possible through my personal encounter with one of the coordinators of the Langham Scholar’s programme, who told me: Once as a young man from the East, I met John Stott, who has encouraged me greatly in my academic endeavour. Even today it makes me endlessly grateful and willing to pass this support on to young people like you.

These examples make me authentically curious to look back at the life of the person, whose legacy lasts for decades and reaches a part of the world which was barely accessible in the time of his active ministry.

John Stott was born into a privileged British background (1921). He was converted as a teenager. He went to Cambridge University (1940–45), where he began his studies in Modern Languages and later changed to Theology. During his Cambridge days his gifting as a pastor and evangelist was already evident. The Christian Union overlooked him for leadership because they believed he needed to concentrate his free time on student mentoring and evangelism.

On ordination Stott became curate and then rector at St Peter Vere Street and All Souls Langham Place. He would retain the latter role for the remainder of his ‘working’ life.

For several years he led missions at Cambridge (which produced his book *Basic Christianity* – one of the most popular Christian books in Eastern Europe) and this was probably the most successful university mission since 1900.

His vision was that people follow their leaders and it was vital, if Christianity was to spread, it needed to be embedded within national and ecclesiastical leaders. He was always strategic in student ministry – intent on raising Christian leaders. This is the core strategy and the main feature of the IFES ministry till now.

Within the UK he was pragmatic. National leaders tended to emerge from within Oxford and Cambridge Universities. So, he regularly visited both places to preach to the students and it was there that he was
especially successful. Marginalised within Anglicanism, he developed a wider ministry that increasingly lay beyond the UK. His vision beyond his country also began with ministry to students and almost always embraced them. As early as 1951, he had spoken at an IFES events for students from France, Belgium, Holland and Switzerland. News of his gifting was transmitted through IFES channels and he became in demand elsewhere.

In an era when international travel was slow, exhausting and expensive, Stott began to travel widely. From November 1956 to March 1957 he visited the USA and Canada conducting missions across the continent from the University of British Columbia to Harvard. The following year he went to Australia for missions in Sydney and Melbourne.

Taking advantage of the ‘novelty’ of an overseas speaker during these years, he continued to make regular trips from the UK and became a ‘star’ Bible teacher among IFES groups worldwide. The emergence of the ‘jet age’ further promoted Stott’s role and he became one of the best-known evangelicals worldwide. His initial work with IFES helped promote his influence as a global leader and assisted the possibility of effectively establishing the Lausanne Congress and FEET.

The impact of Lausanne on ‘re-formulating’ evangelicalism so that it addressed contemporary issues in contemporary dress owes much to his earlier networking through his IFES contacts. Through FEET he established a number of contacts in eastern Europe (including Pavel Černý). This led to requests, usually requiring considerable negotiation with the local authorities. In 1980, hosted by the IFES staff worker for eastern Europe, Alex Williams, he visited Yugoslavia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland.

In the 1990s, during which he reached and passed his seventieth birthday, Stott continued to travel widely. During this decade he visited 40 countries. Consistently, he focussed on seminaries and universities undertaking both public evangelistic missions and lectures. During these visits he offered counsel and friendship to many IFES leaders.

In the same decade his attention was increasingly directed toward Central and Eastern Europe as he recognised that the collapse of communism had left a spiritual void with anti-intellectual Christian leaders who had little understanding of biblical Christianity and evangelism. Visits were undertaken in the early 1990s, usually at the invitation of IFES leaders, to Poland, Romania, European and Asian Russia and Ukraine. In 1997 he visited the Baltic States. Later in 1997, invited by Pavel Černý, he visited Prague, Odessa, Osijek and Budapest.

In all these visits, sometimes to only small groups, he concentrated on tackling questions about the authority and interpretation of the Scriptures and on preaching and church life. The emphasis was on equipping leaders for the next generation. When asked: what is it that John Stott uniquely brought to the post-Soviet countries, all leaders agree that it was expository preaching. IFES Eurasia in the 1990s was structurally still part of Europe and many bright students would attend European IFES conferences, where John would be a main expositor. Later these students became a new generation of evangelical leaders of Christian ministries and churches in post-communist countries.

In 1999, now nearly eighty, he gave his vice-Presidential address to the IFES World Assembly of nearly 4000 delegates from 135 countries. Predictably he spoke on ‘Evangelical Essentials’. His popularity was such that he sometimes felt uncomfortable with the acclaim. Before the assembly concluded, he met with some of the leaders to discuss how the impetus of IFES and other ministries could be sustained when he was no longer able to contribute to it.

Discussions took place in the following year. At his prompting, a structure was proposed with an International Director, Council and Regional Co-Ordinators in consultation with the IFES for what became the Langham Partnership.

In his last decade, his interest in student ministry and the equipping of leaders remained undimmed even as his health declined. Reaching eighty, he prayed that the LORD would give him ten more years to complete the agenda he set himself. He died in 2011, aged ninety!

Every single pastor in Eurasia knowingly or unknowingly was and is influenced by John Stott’s ministry. His faithfulness to Scripture, mission, prayer and investing in young leaders left a legacy which still inspires generations and bears eternal fruit for the Kingdom of God.
100 years since the birth and 10 years since the death of John Stott

Dr Pavel Černý (FEET Executive Committee)

From Prague I bring a short reflection on the life and work of John Stott, on the centenary of his death.
To remember and honour John Stott is very meaningful for me. I had the opportunity to be in contact with him for 31 years. We became friends when he was given a visa to visit the former Czechoslovakia in 1980, during the time of Communism. He lectured at a pastors’ conference and preached to the congregation of which I was a pastor.1 At that time, our churches were very strictly controlled by the government and the secret police. In his biography of John Stott, Bishop Timothy Dudley-Smith quotes from Stott’s diary how the Secretary for Church Affairs of the state government arrived in my congregation to welcome John Stott. He greeted him as a visitor from the U.K. and as a Chaplain to the Queen. In his diary Stott recorded the State Secretary’s words: ‘We are honoured to have you visit our community. In the present climate of world affairs, it is important for England and Czechoslovakia to come closer together.’ In his sermon, John Stott pointed out the long-term contacts between our countries which had started with the church reformers John Wycliffe and John Hus.
At that time, we had John Stott for lunch with our family and we went for a walk together. From the pastors’ conference and from this personal meeting I was surprised and deeply touched, realising how close John Stott’s theology and biblical exposition was to our understanding of the Scriptures. I was very much enriched being confronted with modern and contemporary evangelical theology and also by that great, humble and friendly personality of John. From that time on, we stayed in touch through letters, books and later through personal meetings in London, in Prague and at different conferences including FEET in various places.
During the time of totalitarianism, John Stott’s books, sometimes arriving by mail, sometimes smuggled into our country, had a huge impact on me and on other pastors.
For me, as for many people around the globe, John (or Uncle John, which is how he was addressed by younger friends) became a teacher, mentor, preacher, theologian and brother. I have been deeply influenced by his books and Bible commentaries. I like, for example, his Bible commentaries because he doesn’t omit difficult passages and hard sayings. Sometimes you can study huge volumes of Bible commentaries on different books of the Bible, but the authors expound in detail verses which are quite clear, but skip over difficult passages. John Stott doesn’t do that. He wrestled with difficult passages faithfully trying to expound them as much as possible. He always tended to harmonise biblical passages and not to put them against each other. He benefitted much from the deep knowledge of the Bible through his daily Bible reading. It is not just legend, but I saw it when John Stott came to Prague again after the Revolution to lecture at the theological conference and stayed with our family. Every day he got up at 5am, he made a cup of coffee in our kitchen and spent the first two hours of the day reading the Bible, kneeling and praying. It explains why in many public discussions at various conferences and gatherings, he didn’t need any concordance and was so convincing using the Bible. His knowledge of the Holy Scriptures was so deep that he was able to formulate and present his answers with outstanding clarity and accuracy.

As president of the denomination (Church of the Brethren) in the time after the Revolution, I faced many new challenges and important questions. In our situation after the totalitarian system, we were opening our church for cooperation with society and reformulating our statement of faith and our public theology. John Stott was always willing to listen, talk and consult. He helped us to become more missional and to commit ourselves to a church planting programme. It has influenced the growth of our church.

His visits encouraged the establishment of our new Evangelical Theological Seminary and also the renewal of the Evangelical Alliance and the Fellowship of Evangelical Theologians. There are so many influences and the impact of John Stott on our ecumenical context and also world-wide was so important. It has been so challenging and motivating to follow his theology and his vision for the church. He just loved the global church, showing us how we need renewal of our minds and hearts.

He put a lot of emphasis on the human mind. In times when various churches put great emphasis on emotions, he wrote a book *Your Mind Matters striving for Balanced Christianity* which is the title of his other book. I have heard him say that we humans are by nature extremists. That is why we need balanced Christianity which corresponds with the apostolic teaching. He has helped me to read more books and to study the Bible. He spoke often about the necessity for pastors to develop the habit of daily reading theological books and articles.

Another strong emphasis of Stott is linked to the social ministry of the church. John was very sensitive to social problems, poverty, persecution and all kinds of injustice. He helped us to recapture social ministry. For him, mission was evangelism and social action. Having only one of these ministries is not a full biblical concept of mission.

He helped me to become more ecumenical and to try to avoid unnecessary polarisation among different streams of Christianity. I have followed his dialogue with different ecumenical bodies and also with Roman Catholicism. He helped unite people without compromising the Christian faith. John Stott was widely accepted in different parts of the world, but many times he was also deeply wounded when he saw that the Evangelical movement was superficial, divided over non-essentials or leaving the apostolic teaching. That is why his exposition of the Bible and his constant emphasis on preaching was so helpful and very much needed.

I also had the privilege of accompanying John Stott on some of his birdwatching trips. It was wonderful to see his knowledge of different bird species. He tried to convert me to birdwatching. I got my pair of binoculars and tried to study the names and lives of some birds. Probably, it was too late for me. In this attempt John was not fully successful.

The high point of my relationship with John was his counselling. I will never forget the discussions which drew us toward prayer, kneeling together and opening our hearts before the Lord. Those were very precious moments showing how we theologians need fellowship in faith and the practice of our spirituality.

At this time and all over the world, there are many conferences like this one, honouring this ‘radical disciple of Christ’. Someone could consider it as a source of the protestant canonisation processes and legends. I am happy that I can bring this short testimony that he was really like that and that we should follow his direction, being conservative in Christian doctrines and radical in their applications. I believe that we and our European churches need both: to accept the truth and authority of the Holy Scriptures and to be radical in application in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let me finish with one of John Stott’s prayers:

Almighty and everlasting God, Creator and Sustainer of the universe, I worship you.
Lord Jesus Christ, Saviour and Lord of the world, I worship you.
Holy Spirit, Sanctifier of the people of God, I worship you.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end.
Amen.

Heavenly Father, I pray that this day I may live in your presence, and please you more and more.
Lord Jesus Christ, I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow you.
Holy Spirit, I pray that this day your fruit may ripen in my life – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Holy, blessed and glorious Trinity, three persons and one God, have mercy on me. Amen.
We continue to receive enthusiastic responses to the new look of our journal, which is now published by Amsterdam University Press (AUP). What AUP does not tell you openly, we can tell you here: EJT is available at a reduced price to subscribers in many countries. The published rate below applies to subscribers in Western and Northern Europa, the USA and Canada; the reduced rate in the rest of the world!

We warmly encourage you all to take out your own subscription, but maybe even more to ask your institutional library and/or any other libraries to subscribe. In the transition to AUP we have lost some libraries as subscribers, so please check that your library still takes EJT.

The most recent issue (30.1, April 2021) is unique in that it contains not one but two editorials. The first is a response to the coronavirus pandemic which is holding Europe in its grip: what does this mean for the church?, asks Johannes Reimer. Our second editorial is timely in a different way, as Pavel Černý commemorates the centenary of the great evangelical leader and theologian John Stott by means of a brief biography.

In the first article Carsten Ziegert revisits the legacy of James Barr for biblical semantics, asking what happened afterwards, with special attention to the Hebrew Bible. Pieter Lalleman argues that the Septuagint deserves more positive attention than it normally receives, while Jens Dörpinghaus makes sense of the movements of Jesus and the disciples after Easter as variously described by the Gospels and Acts. Meiken Buchholz reflects on migration and argues that the Book of Acts provides a hermeneutics for contemporary experiences of displacement and cultural diversity. Ian Randall describes how the East African Revival affected Switzerland and introduces the key persons in this story. Bernhard Reitsma asks of the Muslim criticism of the apostle Paul’s missionary policies – described in 1 Corinthians 9 – is justified, bringing the Insider Movements into the discussion. Finally, Aaron Edwards offers another contribution to our response to the pandemic: is theology a proper subject to study at this very moment? The answer largely comes from C. S. Lewis!

The issue has a record number of pages so it is exceptional value for money.

Once again the issue concludes with the book reviews, prepared under the responsibility of review author Hans Burger. As members and friends of FEET you are warmly invited to send Hans (jmburger@tukampen.nl) suggestions of books that can be reviewed and/or to offer yourself as a reviewer. We would love to further diversify our pool of reviewers.

Do also check the FEET website for the featured author, this time Dr Meiken Buchholz.

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The Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians (FEET) warmly invites you to the next biennial conference which will take place in Prague, Czech Republic, on 26–30 August 2022. The theme of the conference will be “Hope for the World: Eschatology as a Source of Life for the Mission of the Church”.

We will gather in the Olsanka Hotel quite in the centre of Prague, the same venue where the 2018 FEET Conference took place.

Especially in this time of the Covid-19 crisis and its effects on our lives, on economy and on society, people are looking for hope. Theology and the church are challenged to reflect and formulate a biblical hope for our days. This conference will give biblical orientation on eschatology and on the mission of the church on the basis of the hope contained in the Gospel.

Well-known and highly qualified theologians from different European countries will present main papers on the following subjects:
1. Biblical essentials: Hope for the people of God and for the world according to the Old and the New Testaments.
2. Apologetics and mission: Characteristics of the hope cherished by people in secular Europe and how to deal with them in evangelism and apologetics.
3. The hope of the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting and its meaning for Christian life and witness today.
4. The hope of Christ’s coming to judge the world and its meaning for preaching the gospel.
5. The hope of the arrival of the Kingdom of God and its practical implications for politics and the pursuit of social justice.

In addition there will be workshops on aspects of the conference theme, meetings of discipline groups, Bible readings, a meeting for doctoral students and on Sunday after worship a tour of Prague. We encourage the giving of papers in the discipline groups of Old Testament, New Testament, Systematic Theology, Church History, Practical Theology, Ethics, Apologetics and Missiology. If you would like to participate in this way, please contact Dr Klaus Bensel (secretary@feet-europe.org) with the title of your proposed paper and a short abstract.

Further information will the given on www.feet-europe.org.

We will communicate a special link for registration before too long. Please mark the conference dates out in your diaries now.