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# **The Evangelical Faith of Queen Elizabeth II and Her friendship with Her Chaplain John Stott and with Billy Graham**

**A small documentation**

**Thomas Paul Schirmacher**

## The Evangelical Faith of Queen Elizabeth II

All her life, Queen Elizabeth II missed a Sunday worship service only when she was seriously ill. She always visited services open to the public, not private ones in the palace; everyone could see her every Sunday. Even when she was visiting the Royal Chapel in Windsor Park, the chapel was open to the public. The same was true when she was residing at Balmoral Castle in Scotland. She attended the public worship service in the small village church in Crathie nearby.

She did not invite anyone from the United States more often than Billy Graham, the chief theologian of the Evangelicals, John Stott was her personal Chaplain for 52 years, and among the many patronages she had, one was special for her. She was the Patron of Scripture Union. In 2017 she attended the 150th jubilee of Scripture Union in person.<sup>1</sup>

## Excerpts from the Christmas Speeches by Queen Elizabeth II<sup>2</sup>

“Her declaration of her faith in Christ has become increasingly prominent in her recent Christmas Day broadcasts, and I certainly know of one pastor who found himself bursting into tears before his TV set because he was so moved that our monarch was pointing the nation towards her Lord and Saviour.” (“The Queen’s Faith“)<sup>3</sup>

### 1947

“I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong. But I shall not have strength to carry out this resolution alone unless you join in it with me, as I now invite you to do: I know that your support will be unfailingly given. God help me to make good my vow, and God bless all of you who are willing to share in it.”

### 1978

“Christians have the compelling example of the life and teaching of Christ and, for myself, I would like nothing more than that my grandchildren should hold dear his ideals which have helped and inspired so many previous generations. I wish you all, together with your children and grandchildren, a very happy Christmas.”

### 1981

“We generally know what is right and how we should act and speak. But we are also very aware of how difficult it is to have the courage of our convictions. Our Christian faith helps us to sustain those convictions. Christ not only revealed to us the truth in his teachings. He lived by what he believed and gave us the strength to try to do the same—and, finally, on the cross, he showed the supreme example of physical and moral courage. That

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<sup>1</sup> See the photo in Dudley Delffs. *The Faith of Queen Elizabeth*. Zondervan: Grand Rapids (MI), 2019. Opposite of p. 128, see also p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Taken from: <https://www.royal.uk/history-christmas-broadcast#chapter-wrapper-4>

<sup>3</sup> On the Queen’s 90th birthday: JEB. “The Queen’s Faith”. *evangelicals now*, May 2016. <https://www.e-n.org.uk/2016/05/features/the-queens-faith/f06fc/>

sacrifice was the dawn of Christianity, and this is why at Christmas time we are inspired by the example of Christ as we celebrate his birth.”

## 2000

“Christmas is the traditional, if not the actual, birthday of a man who was destined to change the course of our history. And today we are celebrating the fact that Jesus Christ was born two thousand years ago; this is the true Millennium anniversary. The simple facts of Jesus' life give us little clue as to the influence he was to have on the world. As a boy he learnt his father's trade as a carpenter. He then became a preacher, recruiting twelve supporters to help him. But his ministry only lasted a few years and he himself never wrote anything down. In his early thirties he was arrested, tortured and crucified with two criminals. His death might have been the end of the story, but then came the resurrection and with it the foundation of the Christian faith. For me the teachings of Christ and my own personal accountability before God provide a framework in which I try to lead my life. I, like so many of you, have drawn great comfort in difficult times from Christ's words and example.”

## 2002

“I know just how much I rely on my own faith to guide me through the good times and the bad. Each day is a new beginning, I know that the only way to live my life is to try to do what is right, to take the long view, to give of my best in all that the day brings, and to put my trust in God. Like others of you who draw inspiration from your own faith, I draw strength from the message of hope in the Christian gospel.”

## 2008

“I hope that, like me, you will be comforted by the example of Jesus of Nazareth who, often in circumstances of great adversity, managed to live an outgoing, unselfish and sacrificial life. Countless millions of people around the world continue to celebrate his birthday at Christmas, inspired by his teaching. He makes it clear that genuine human happiness and satisfaction lie more in giving than receiving; more in serving than in being served. We can surely be grateful that, two thousand years after the birth of Jesus, so many of us are able to draw inspiration from his life and message, and to find in him a source of strength and courage.”

## 2011

“Finding hope in adversity is one of the themes of Christmas. Jesus was born into a world full of fear. The angels came to frightened shepherds with hope in their voices: ‘Fear not’, they urged, ‘we bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour who is Christ the Lord.’ Although we are capable of great acts of kindness, history teaches us that we sometimes need saving from ourselves – from our recklessness or our greed. God sent into the world a unique person – neither a philosopher nor a general (important though they are) – but a Saviour, with the power to forgive.

Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian faith. It can heal broken families, it can restore friendships and it can reconcile divided communities. It is in forgiveness that we feel the power of God's love.

In the last verse of this beautiful carol, O Little Town of Bethlehem, there's a prayer:

O Holy Child of Bethlehem,  
Descend to us we pray.  
Cast out our sin  
And enter in,  
Be born in us today.

It is my prayer that on this Christmas Day we might all find room in our lives for the message of the angels and for the love of God through Christ our Lord. I wish you all a very happy Christmas.”

## 2014

“For me, the life of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, whose birth we celebrate today, is an inspiration and an anchor in my life. A role-model of reconciliation and forgiveness, he stretched out his hands in love, acceptance, and healing. Christ's example has taught me to seek to respect and value all people.”

## Queen Elizabeth II and Billy Graham

Whenever Billy Graham visited the UK, he saw the Queen and she invited him to preach. Whenever she was in the USA, most times on private visits, she also visited Billy Graham and his family.

Greg Laurie writes,

“Her Majesty was also a moral beacon to the U.K. and beyond. That came as a result of her faith in Jesus Christ, which she spoke of openly and often. ... Her heart for service brought her in contact with millions during her lifetime, but there was little opportunity to cultivate relationships. The station of a leader at this level necessitates few close friends and confidantes. However, it is certain that Billy Graham could be counted as one of them. Their friendship began in 1955, a year after his historic and triumphant crusade in England, which shaped the future of Christianity in that country. His preaching in the U.K. had a revival-like impact, not just on the people, but on their monarch as well. Billy's 1954 crusade ended with an invitation for a private audience with Prime Minister Winston Churchill. During that auspicious occasion, the two men talked about the things you might expect men of such influence to discuss — the future of democracy and the fate of the world. Churchill shared with Billy that he had all but run out of hope. But the young evangelist assured the cynical politician there was hope because the Bible said so. They ended their visit in prayer. And that meeting led to his first contact with the Queen. Billy and the Queen enjoyed a friendship that spanned six decades, him having a seminal impact on her faith. It was an unlikely comradeship. He was the son of a dairyman who secretly hoped to become a professional baseball player; Queen Elizabeth II was probably the only famous person in the 20th and 21st centuries who was genuinely herself all the

time. She was born with a specific role and certain responsibilities, grew up within these expectations, understood them, and knew how to live with them.”<sup>4</sup>

Here is a summary of what Billy Graham said himself:

“No one in Britain has been more cordial toward us than Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II,” Billy Graham wrote in his autobiography, *Just As I Am*. “Almost every occasion I have been with her has been in a warm, informal setting, such as a luncheon or dinner, either alone or with a few family members or other close friends.”

“On one occasion when I was in Great Britain, the Queen was preparing her annual Christmas address to be broadcast on television around the world. To illustrate a point, she wanted to toss a stone into a pond to show how the ripples went out farther and farther. She asked me to come and listen to her practice the speech by the pond and give my impressions, which I did. I always found her very interested in the Bible and its message. After preaching at Windsor one Sunday, I was sitting next to the Queen at lunch. I told her I had been undecided until the last minute about my choice of sermon and had almost preached on the healing of the crippled man in John 5. Her eyes sparkled and she bubbled over with enthusiasm, as she could do on occasion. ‘I wish you had!’ she exclaimed. ‘That is my favorite story.’”<sup>5</sup>

“The Real Story Behind Queen Elizabeth’s Friendship With Evangelist Billy Graham”. Time 21.2.2018. <https://time.com/5168217/queen-billy-graham-friendship/>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oY04PSzHHgI>

Photos: <https://billygrahamlibrary.org/blog-billy-graham-and-queen-elizabeth-ii/>

## The Crown (Netflix): Queen Elizabeth II and Billy Graham<sup>6</sup>

The Netflix Series “The Crown” includes in season 2 its own episode for the relationship between the queen and Billy Graham, played by Paul Spark.<sup>7</sup>

Megan Bailey has reviewed the unusual relationship between Queen Elizabeth II and Billy Graham and how it is reflected in “The Crown”:<sup>8</sup>

“The Netflix show ‘The Crown’ has captivated audiences across the world, featuring the life of Queen Elizabeth. In the show, they portray her as a strong, devout Christian woman. She kneels at her bedside for prayer each night, and has a budding a friendship with American evangelist Billy Graham. She is seen speaking out her faith often and sharing how it shapes her decisions.”

<sup>4</sup> Greg Laurie, “Billy Graham and the Queen of England”. Christian Post, 21.9.2022. <https://www.christianpost.com/news/billy-graham-and-the-queen-of-england-the-unlikely-friendship.html>

<sup>5</sup> “How Billy Graham Once Reflected on His Friendship with Queen Elizabeth II”. 8.9.2022. <https://billygraham.org/story/billy-graham-and-the-queen/>

<sup>6</sup> Caroline Hallemann. “The True Story of Queen Elizabeth’s Friendship with Reverend Billy Graham”. 21.2.2018. <https://www.townandcountrymag.com/leisure/arts-and-culture/a14107629/queen-elizabeth-billy-graham-friendship/>

<sup>7</sup> See: “How Billy Graham Once Reflected on His Friendship With Queen Elizabeth II”. 8.9.2022. <https://billygraham.org/story/billy-graham-and-the-queen/>

<sup>8</sup> Megan Bailey. “The Powerful Faith of Queen Elizabeth II”. (around 2018) <https://www.beliefnet.com/entertainment/celebrities/the-powerful-faith-of-queen-elizabeth-ii.aspx>

“Queen Elizabeth was also heavily influenced by her friendship with evangelist Billy Graham. The pair created an unlikely friendship in the 1950s, and visited each other multiple times over the following decades including Easter Sunday in 1995. ‘No one in Britain has been more cordial toward us than Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II,’ Graham wrote in his 1997 autobiography, *Just As I Am*.”

“The queen's meeting with the evangelist came about after Graham launched one of his evangelistic ‘crusades.’ Graham had spoken to ‘the greatest religious congregation, 120,000, ever seen until then in the British Isles,’ according to a biography of the late John Stott, a chaplain to the queen. During one of his rallies, Graham preached for 12 weeks, drawing 2 million.”

“[The Queen] has always been deeply religious,” Robert Lacey, The Crown’s historical consultant, told *People*. “She was close to the Rev. Billy Graham in his prime, inviting him to preach at Windsor whenever he was in Britain, and meeting up with him when she visited the States. He helped her with a Christmas broadcast in the ‘90s.” He added, “Her Christian faith is fundamental to her in an old-time evangelical way.”

## Queen Elizabeth II and John Stott

Stott was appointed a Chaplain to Queen Elizabeth II in 1959 through 1991 and—a very rare thing—was appointed Extra Chaplain on his retirement in 1991, an official position he held until his death in 2011.

“During his early years as rector of All Souls Langham Place in London, the late John Stott was appointed a chaplain to The Queen. This position did bring a modicum of contact with the royal family, and in January 1983 he was a guest of The Queen at Sandringham. Timothy Dudley-Smith’s two-volume biography of Stott 2 explains that this entailed ‘preaching on the Sunday and staying over the weekend, having had the forethought to hire a dinner jacket from Moss Bros.’”<sup>9</sup>

In 2006 John Stott received the *Commander of the Order of the British Empire* (CBE) being listed in the Queen’s New Year Honours List of 2006, “for services to Christian scholarship and the Christian world”.<sup>10</sup>

## About John Stott

Billy Graham has testified to Dr Stott as “the most respected clergyman in the world today.”

“Dr Stott has attended his local church, All Souls in London, since he was a small boy. following his ordination in 1945, John Stott became assistant curate at All Souls and then, unusually, went straight on to become rector in 1950. He became rector emeritus in 1975, a position he held til his death. Dr. Stott was also chair of the Church of England Evangelical Council from 1967 to 1984 and president of two influential Christian

<sup>9</sup> On the Queen’s 90th birthday: JEB. “The Queen’s Faith”. *evangelicals now*, May 2016. <https://www.e-n.org.uk/2016/05/features/the-queens-faith/f06fc/>

<sup>10</sup> Christianity Today, ‘Evangelical Rev John Stott Celebrated in Queen’s New Year Honours List’: <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/evangelical.rev.john.stott.celebrated.in.queens.new.year.honours.list/4935.htm>

organizations, the British Scripture Union from 1965 to 1974 and the British Evangelical Alliance from 1973 to 1974.” (Christian Today)

Stott was the leading proponent of Evangelicals serving within the Anglican Church and, being involved in the Evangelical Alliance at the same time, spoke up against an influential wing of evangelicalism in the UK represented e.g. by Martin Lloyd-Jones, who saw a contradiction between being an Evangelical Alliance member and a member of the Church of England, calling all Evangelicals to leave the Anglican Church and other mainline churches.

“Dr. Stott combined his commitment to evangelism and his fostering of future Christian leaders by involving himself in the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship, where he was president four times between 1961 and 1982 and a major plenary speaker at their conferences around the globe. Dr Stott’s commitment to the renewal of evangelicalism in the worldwide Anglican Church led to his involvement in the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion (EFAC), being the (honorary) General Secretary from 1960 to 1981, and later its President from 1986 to 1990. His desire to strengthen ties between evangelical theologians in Europe was a key force in the founding of the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians (FEET) in 1977, which is connected to the European Evangelical Alliance.” (Christian Today)

“One of Dr. Stott’s major contributions to world evangelisation was through the 1974 International Congress on World Evangelisation held at Lausanne, Switzerland. John Stott acted as chair of the drafting committee for the Lausanne Covenant, a significant milestone in the evangelical movement. As chair of the Lausanne Theology and Education Group from 1974 to 1981, he contributed strongly to the growing evangelical understanding of the relation between evangelism and social action.” (Christian Today)

“Having written over 40 titles and hundreds of articles and other contributions to Christian literature, Dr Stott has a prodigious literary reputation and is one of the leading Christian writers of the era.” (Christian Today)

## Appendix: John Stott: Still our greatest modern model of evangelical theology

by *Thomas Schirrmacher*

This year we commemorated the 100th anniversary of the birth of John Stott. The publishers of his books,<sup>11</sup> The Gospel Coalition,<sup>12</sup> and Christian Today<sup>13</sup> were among those celebrating Stott’s influence and emphasizing, in remarkably similar ways, that evangelicals still need to learn from Stott. They particularly recognize his effectiveness as an irenic but principled evangelical, one who sought to build bridges and who drew lines of division only where Scripture required it.

<sup>11</sup> InterVarsity Press, ‘Organizations Partner to Commemorate John Stott’s One Hundredth Birthday and Ongoing Legacy’: <https://www.ivpress.com/press-releases/2021/organizations-partner-to-commemorate-john-stotts-one-hundredth-birthday-and-ongoing-legacy>

<sup>12</sup> The Gospel Coalition, ‘John Stott at 100: Why Evangelicals Still Need Him’: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/john-stott-100/>

<sup>13</sup> Christianity Today, ‘What can today’s evangelicals learn from John Stott, 100 years after his birth?’: <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/what.can.todays.evangelicals.learn.from.john.stott.100.years.after.his.birthday/136714.htm>

I have also wanted to recognize John Stott on this occasion, but I find that I have nothing better to say than what I wrote in 2011 for the booklet<sup>14</sup> distributed at the “Service of Thanksgiving for the Life of John W. Stott” in London’s St. Paul’s Cathedral with 2000 invited guests from all over the world. I never saw so many Anglican and other bishops attending the farewell service of a simple priest. It was one of the most impressive services I ever visited and “The Cross”—the title of Stott’s major work, stood in the center of it.

Here is that message, with only minor updating.

## John Stott: Man of Complementarity

John Stott, the main author of the theological preamble of the constitution of the World Evangelical Alliance and a key player in the launching of our theological journal, the *Evangelical Review of Theology*, is now with Jesus, who was the focus of his life in all he did, said and wrote. In what was probably his best book, *The Cross of Christ* (1986), he summarized his legacy to all evangelicals when he stated that only if the cross of Jesus remains our center can we achieve unity.

For me, John Stott is a role model for all evangelical theologians. He was an impressive master of complementarity, by which I mean that he was never willing to emphasize one important thing at the expense of other important things. Let me illustrate some of those complementarities by comparing John Stott to Paul—something he surely would have very much disliked!

- Like Paul, Stott was a pastor, a missionary and a great theologian at the same time. His academic theology was always aimed at the body of Christ, not his academic colleagues.
- Like Paul, he was a master thinker and systematic writer, trying to put the whole faith into one short book (Romans for Paul, the 1958 classic *Basic Christianity* for Stott). And yet he never wrote in an abstruse way so as to impress academics, but so that the whole church could benefit.
- Like Paul, he was willing to strive for the gospel and was a man of clear words; see especially his *Christ the Controversialist* (1970). And yet he was a man of peace, a bridge builder, someone who listened to other opinions very thoroughly and sought to understand them. Through his involvement in the WEA and the Lausanne Movement, he brought evangelicals and evangelical theologians together on a larger scale than ever before. But he did not do so by having no principled position or by bypassing theological discussion or biblical exegesis. Rather, he brought people together in the midst of theological debate. He was convinced that unity would not come from doing less good theology, but from more open study of the Bible together across all lines.
- Like Paul, he was as local as he was global. He managed to write, speak and travel all over the world while also being totally dedicated to personal counseling, to his local congregation and to the mentoring of those close to him.
- Like Paul, Stott became world-famous and yet remained a humble servant who never understood how Jesus could use him in such a way.
- Like Paul, he became prominent in politics and the secular world and stood before rulers—for example, preaching to the Queen and being counted among the 100 most

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.thomasschirrmacher.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Stott-Memorial-Service-booklet.pdf>



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influential people by *Time* magazine in 2005. And yet he was never absorbed by this worldly influence; rather, preaching the gospel stayed his obsession.

- Like Paul, he was a master of the old and brilliant with regard to what needed to be changed and invented anew. He never wanted to conform the old rugged cross to the modern age, but to defend the faith once for all given to the church. And yet he was open to adapting the Christian faith to ever-changing situations on all continents, even in his old age. As a young man, his evangelical gospel looked very old to some; as an old man his ideas seemed fresher than those of many people 60 years younger than he.
- Like Paul, Stott was convinced that preaching the gospel is the center of everything, but at the same time he furthered works of compassion to the needy worldwide. He saw everything through the lens of the gospel, knowing that only the cross can overcome the sins of pride, racism, mammon, hatred, sexual abuse, and so on, yet at the same time he motivated many people to become engaged in opposing those social evils.

I hope that the World Evangelical Alliance can maintain John Stott's high standards and carry his theological heritage into the future of the evangelical movement.

## Literature on the faith of Queen Elizabeth II

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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Stott](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Stott)

<https://johnstott.org/>