

A Tribute to John Stam

Harry Strachan, November 4, 2020

John Stam was one of the great LAM missionaries of his era. He was held in great esteem by all his collaborators, his students and the churches of Latin America.

My folks, Ken and Elizabeth Strachan, held him and his wife Doris in highest esteem. Everyone knew John was brilliant. My mother said, "Of all the missionaries, John is the second smartest, Doris is the smartest."

We Strachan kids were raised aware of the many historical linkages between our families: Harry and Susan Strachan's deep friendship with Jacob Stam; Jacob Stam's mentoring of Dad; Dad and Mother's special relation with John and Doris; and our privilege to have Uncle John and Aunt Doris to emulate.

John was a role model of professional excellence, intellectual integrity, enthusiasm, human warmth, and simplicity.

Three things deeply impressed me.

First, his deep identification with the people he had come to serve in Latin America. He waited to be ordained by the C.R. Church he had come to serve. The first of his many symbolic incarnational acts, like writing his books in Spanish.

Second his intellectual openness, but strong convictions. During his time in the LAM, the mission was under strong pressure from its conservative evangelical base in the U.S. both on doctrines of faith and political positions raised by the theology of liberation. In spite of the liberal taint, John chose to pursue his doctorate under Karl Barth with Dad's support. In the Seminary split, he maintained relations with and respect of both sides.

Third his activism on behalf of the poor, the refugee, and the marginal. His research on my Grandparents' opposition to the U.S. support of the first Somoza, and actions during the C.R. 1948 revolution recaptured for many in the family the social legacy of putting one's faith into action.

There was a boyish enthusiasm about John that always made it a pleasure to meet and talk with him. I felt his kindness even when we disagreed. He leaves his family and all of us a wonderful legacy.