

I Have a Dream...

A Charter for the Church?

If there was a document that outlined how the church and its members should be, we would be hard pressed to find a more clear and concise summary than the one given by John Stott at All Souls Church, Langham Place, London in 1974. With due apologies to Martin Luther King and his famous dream speech in Washington, D.C., Stott concluded his sermon with his own dream for the church (for our purposes only one word in the text of his dream has been amended).

I have a dream of a church which is a biblical church— which is loyal in every particular to the revelation of God in Scripture, whose pastors expound Scripture with integrity and relevance, and so seek to present every member mature in Christ, whose people love the word of God, and adorn it with an obedient and Christ-like life, which is preserved from all unbiblical emphases, whose whole life manifests the health and beauty of biblical balance. I have a dream of a *biblical* church.

I have a dream of a church which is a worshipping church— whose people come together to meet God and worship him, who know God is always in their midst and who bow down before him in great humility, who regularly frequent the table of the Lord Jesus, to celebrate his mighty act of redemption on the cross, who enrich the worship with their musical skills, who believe in prayer and lay hold of God in prayer, whose worship is expressed not in (*Sabbath*) services and prayer gatherings only but also in their homes, their weekday work and the common things of life. I have a dream of a *worshipping* church.

I have a dream of a church which is a caring church— whose congregation is drawn from many races, nations, ages and social backgrounds, and exhibits the unity and diversity of the family of God, whose fellowship is warm and welcoming, and never marred by anger, selfishness, jealousy or pride, whose members love one another with a pure heart fervently, forbearing one another, forgiving one another, and bearing one another's burdens, which offers friendship to the lonely, support to the weak, and acceptance to those who are despised and rejected by society, whose love spills over to the world outside, attractive, infectious, irresistible, the love of God himself. I have a dream of a *caring* church.

I have a dream of a church which is a serving church— which has seen Christ as the Servant and has heard his call to be a servant too, which is delivered from self-interest, turned inside out, and giving itself selflessly to the service of others, whose members obey Christ's command to live in the world, to permeate secular society, to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, whose people share the good news

of Jesus simply, naturally and enthusiastically with their friends, which diligently serves its own parish, residents and workers, families and single people, nationals and immigrants, old folk and little children, which is alert to the changing needs of society, sensitive and flexible enough to keep adapting its program to serve more usefully, which has a global vision and is constantly challenging its young people to give their lives in service, and constantly sending its people out to serve. I have a dream of a *servicing* church.

I have a dream of a church which is an expectant church— whose members can never settle down in material affluence or comfort, because they remember that they are strangers and pilgrims on earth, which is all the more faithful and active because it is waiting and looking for its Lord to return, which keeps the flame of the Christian hope burning brightly in a dark, despairing world, which on the day of Christ will not shrink from him in shame, but rise up joyfully to greet him. I have a dream of an *expectant* church.

Such is my dream of a living church. May all of us share this dream, and under God may the dream come true!"

John Stott - Excerpted from The Living Church by John Stott. © 2007 John R. W. Stott. Publisher, InterVarsity Press, Norton Street, Nottingham NG7 3HR

Questions for Study

1. What does it mean to be biblically balanced?
2. What is true Worship?
3. What does it mean to "bear one another's burdens"?
4. How appropriate is it for the church to change, in order to meet the changing needs of society?
5. Our church - expectant or settled?
6. Has there been a time in your church life (past or present), which has come closest to exhibiting some of the values articulated above?
7. Could any of the values given above come into conflict with our dream for the mission and message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?
8. Stott describes his dream for a "living church". Describe a "dead" church?
9. If there was only one thing you could change about your current church / fellowship, what would it be?
10. What evidence is there from scripture that the dream Stott outlines will come true before Christ returns?

