

The Living Church. Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor
by John Stott. InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2007. Hardcover, 180 pp.
Reviewed by Johan D. Tangelder.

What is the church? Does it have a future? During recent years there has been an extraordinary proliferation of books about the church. They reflect a feeling that the church is increasingly out of tune with contemporary Western culture, and unless it comes to terms with change, it faces extinction. In his latest book *The Living Church*, John R.W. Stott (1921) brings together a number of characteristics of what he calls an authentic or living church. He argues that the church's calling is not to ape the world, but rather to develop a Christian counter culture. But he says that at the same time, we must listen to the voice of the world in order to be able to respond to it sensitively, though without compromise. Stott's critique of evangelicals is thought provoking and right on the mark. He says, "We seem to have little sense of the greatness and glory of Almighty God. We do not bow down before Him in awe and wonder. Our tendency is to be cocky, flippant and proud."

Stott notes that a living church is a learning church. Its pastors expound the infallible Scripture from the pulpit. Many seem to think that preaching is an outmoded form of communication. But Stott persuasively argues that preaching is still the most important calling of the ministry. He encourages preachers to persevere, *because the life of the church depends on it*. Therefore, a preacher must be a student of the Word and of his times. And he quotes John Calvin, "No one will ever be a good minister of the Word of God unless he is first of all a scholar." In a living church parents teach their children the Scriptures at home, and its members reflect on Scripture every day in order to grow in Christian discipleship. Every church is called by God to be a worshipping and a missionary community. But it also has the task to expose false teaching. Stott argues that we cannot conscientiously avoid it. We did not invent the Gospel, and we have no liberty to edit or tamper with it.

John Stott has a remarkable legacy. A graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge, he was a pastor of a single parish since 1950, All Souls, Langham Place, in London. He was appointed an honorary chaplain to the Queen of England in 1959. His influence on evangelicalism reached around the world through his preaching and his writing (author of more than forty books). As a kind of evangelical ecumenist, he was the principal drafter of the Lausanne Covenant. The Covenant reminded evangelicals of their twofold responsibility in the world: evangelism and social action. He has also been a contributing editor for *Sojourners*, a magazine whose politics generally lean to the left of centre.

Over the years Stott has resisted any attempts by evangelical Anglicans to separate from the Church of England. At a meeting of the National Assembly of Evangelicals in 1966, for example, Stott publicly refuted a call from Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones for evangelicals to leave the Church of England. Interestingly, in *The Living Church*, Stott's Anglicanism is more up front than in all his other works. In fact, he devotes a chapter (Historical Appendix 1) to his reasons why he is still a member of the Church of England. All in all, I believe Stott's book will stimulate discussion as to what it means to be a biblical church in our postmodern time.