

THE MORNING STAR

THE WYCLIFFE COLLEGE COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 4 2019 | VOL. 08



The call to ministry: some eighteenth century advice

BY THOMAS POWER

You may be familiar with Rev. John Newton (1725-1807) as the author of the famous hymn, *Amazing Grace*. What you may not know is that he came to have an important ministry as a spiritual director, primarily through letter writing. Many people wrote to him for advice and he replied giving counsel and direction on a variety of matters, such as grace, temptation, evil, Christian character, vanity, sin, and sorrow.

He composed one of his letters, "Marks of a Call to the Ministry," in response to someone seeking advice on discerning a call to ministry. At the outset of the letter Newton provided a frank personal admission that "my first desires towards the ministry were attended with great uncertainties and difficulties, and the perplexity of my own mind was heightened by the various and opposite judgments of my friends." He admitted that he had long struggled about what was or was not a proper call to ministry. He then offered his correspondent three pieces of advice that are still pertinent today. *(continued...)*

UPCOMING EVENTS

Nov 6, Wed
Mental Health in Ministry,
p. 4

Nov 16, Sat
Christian Vocation with
William Willimon, p. 4

Nov 19, Tues
Being Christian: 12 Rules
for Life? p. 3

Nov 23, Sat
Craft, Cost & Call
book launch, p. 4

Nov 29, Fri
Theology Pub Night on
Open Theism, p. 4

(continued from page 1)

“A warm and earnest desire”

Firstly, Newton identified “A warm and earnest desire to be employed in this service” as foundational and prescriptive to a call to ministry. If the Spirit has called a person to ministry, then that person will come to prefer ministry to the material attractions of the world, despite a sense of inadequacy, and in this will be sustained by humility. For Newton, a good test in this regard was a prospective minister’s attitude to preaching. If, on the one hand, we have a strong desire to preach when we are “most fervent in our most lively and spiritual frames, and when we are most laid in the dust before the Lord,” then this attitude is commendable. However, if a person is strongly desirous of preaching to others but finds “little hungering and thirsting after grace in his own soul,” then the desire derives from a selfish motive.

“Some competent sufficiency”

Secondly, Newton urged his correspondent to look for the presence in himself of “some competent sufficiency as to gifts, knowledge, and utterance.” His rationale here was that if God commissions a person to teach others, then God will provide the means. This, in Newton’s mind, distinguished the intended minister from the lay Christian. The appearance of such gifts, however, may not be immediate but gradual and “in due season.” He makes clear that possession of such gifts is essential for performing the duties of ministry, but he equally insists that they are “not necessary as pre-requisites to warrant our desires after it.” On the whole Newton felt that aspirants to the ministry need not feel too concerned whether at the outset they possessed the requisite gifts. It was more important that their desire and willingness was strong, specifically a willingness in waiting on the Lord in “prayer and diligence” as the means of attaining the necessary gifts.

Providence and circumstances

Thirdly, Newton recommends that providence and circumstances should be looked to as determinative as to when and where one should enter the church. Until these come into play, the way ahead will not always be as clear as one expects. At the same time, one should not be over-hasty in interpreting circumstances. The important point to remember is that if God wants you in ministry, then God has already appointed the time and place when that will happen: “If you had the talents of an angel, you could do no good with them till his hour is come, and till he leads you to the people whom he has determined to bless by your means.” Cautioning against over haste, Newton cites the fact that it took five years

of waiting before his own call was realized. He cautioned his correspondent, therefore, to take his time and advised him to “be content with being a learner in the school of Christ for some years.” During this time of waiting he advised against engaging in “disputes” —by which he meant theological controversies, which at the time, involved Arminians and Calvinists—if they were unlikely to prove beneficial or useful. (He counselled on such disputes: “They tend to eat out the life and savour of religion, and to make the soul lean and dry.”) Additionally, the time of waiting could be filled by engaging in private study, being exposed to “Gospel preaching,” and being among a “lively people.”

Humility

From an initial admission on his own struggle, unworthiness and uncertainty, Newton counsels humility in light of the work of the Spirit (a test of which is one’s attitude to preaching), a discernment of gifts (but not being overly concerned about their immediate presence in preference to waiting in prayer on the Lord), and not being over-hasty in wanting to precipitate events but to use one’s time of waiting wisely.

Setting aside some old-fashioned language, Newton’s explication of the call to ministry is a thoughtful and incisive dissection of a person’s motives, the value of which can apply to those contemplating the call today.

ABOUT

Thomas Power is Adjunct Professor of Church History and Theological Librarian at Wycliffe College.



From the Registrar



All students on ACORN should complete the request for a Social Insurance Number (SIN) to be eligible for the 2019 tax forms T2202A and T4A.

Canada Revenue Agency has advised the U of T that no form will be processed without the SIN.

If you are in a non-conjoint program, please check your email for details on the process to collect the SIN for your tax forms.

If you are an international student, not working in Canada and not submitting a tax return, you can ignore this request.

All students should have a REG status for the winter term by December 6, 2019. If you have not done so already please add your winter course selection.

Events recommended by faculty



THE CALLING OF CHRISTIANS TODAY: CHRISTIAN VOCATION IN AN ANXIOUS AGE

Saturday, Nov 16, 9:30 a.m. — 3:30 p.m. at Grace Church on the Hill

Internationally renowned preacher, writer, and church leader, Rev. Dr William Willimon will speak on these two topics: 1. How can Christians live out our calling in the present age that is full of skepticism and anxiety? 2. How can clergy/the church help and guide Christians to find their baptismal vocation? Tickets (\$25 student rate including lunch) are available online at gracechurchonthehill.ca.

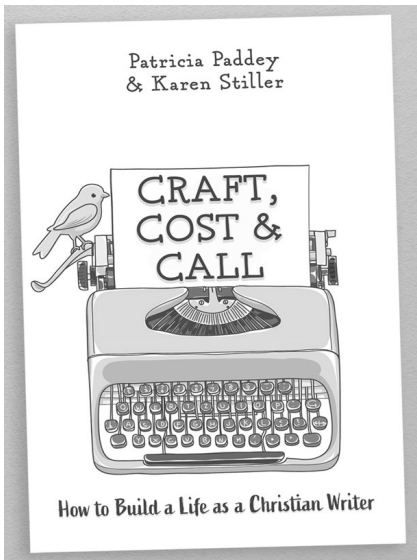


BEING CHRISTIAN: 12 RULES FOR LIFE? A STUDY OF THE BOOK BY JORDAN PETERSON

Tuesday, Nov 19, 7:00 p.m. — 9:30 p.m. at Timothy Eaton Memorial Church

Is Jordan Peterson's work compatible with Christianity? Join the conversation with Wycliffe Professor **Ephraim Radner**, Faith Today Senior Editor **Karen Stiller**, and Senior Minister **Andrew Stirling** to explore from a Christian perspective this self-help book by the controversial author. Register at temc.ca/beingchristian.

Events & Announcements



You're invited to the *Craft, Cost & Call: How to Build a Life as a Christian Writer* book launch!

Saturday, Nov 23, 7:00—9:00 p.m. at Wycliffe College in Leonard Hall

Co-authored by Patricia Paddey, Director of Communications at Wycliffe, and Karen Stiller, Senior Editor of Faith Today Magazine, this inspiring and immensely readable book offers help to people of faith who want to write well and be published. For writers hoping to launch a career or simply yearning to grow in their craft, this guidebook provides a clear path forward filled with the hard-won wisdom of long-time and widely-published Christian writers. (*Learn more at: <https://www.craftcostcall.com>*)

This is your chance to meet the authors and hear from guest writers who will share about their own writing lives. Expect an inspiring evening that will shine the light on writing as a vocation, a passion, and just plain fun. There will be delicious pie. *Register at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/craft-cost-call-book-launch-tickets-73358789113>*



THEOLOGY PUB NIGHT—OPEN THEISM

Friday, Nov 29, 7:00—9:00 p.m. at Wycliffe College in Leonard Hall

On the last Friday of every month, Theology Pub Night provides an ideal space to grab a cold beverage, mingle, and join in spirited conversation on a range of topics. We start with a time of socializing, move into an interview with someone “in the know” about the topic and then open the floor for questions and answers. This month, we will discuss Open Theism. Come with your intellectual thirst!

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO EVE: A HISTORY OF WOMEN'S INTERPRETATION

If you missed last weekend's events with Amanda Benckhuysen (from Calvin Theological Seminary) you can still buy her new book, *The Gospel According to Eve: A History of Women's Interpretation* at the Law bookstore. Note that the U of T Law Bookstore is closed this week during the Law School's Reading Week. Regular hours resume Monday November 11. Contact lawinfo@uoftbookstore.com for questions about Wycliffe texts or theology reference books.

Wednesday:

Wycliffe students and faculty:

**You're invited to
“Mental Health In Ministry”**

Throughout the month of November, Student Council is focusing on mental health. Come and join in the conversation.

Where: The Principal's Lodge

Date: Wednesday, November 6, 2019

Time: Beginning at 3:00

Ask me anything...



**... about library
research!**

Tom Power will be available in the Reading Room over the coffee period 10.30—11.30 a.m. every Wednesday to answer your questions.