

John Newton,  
*Ministry on my mind:*  
*John Newton on entering pastoral ministry*  
transcribed Marylynn Rouse  
(Stratford-upon-Avon: The John Newton Project, 2008),  
ii+31 pages; ISBN: 978-0-9559635-0-6.

In the history of the Church, there are a number of classical studies on the nature of pastoral ministry that anyone aspiring to the office of pastor has to read: Gregory of Nazianzus' *Oration 2* (362 AD), for example, or *The Reformed Pastor* by Richard Baxter. John Newton's *Ministry on my mind*—not Newton's title, but that chosen by Marylynn Rouse—now available for the first time since he wrote it in 1758, makes for a good addition to these classical studies of what it means to be a pastor.

Marylynn Rouse, an expert on all things Newtonian (that is, relating to John Newton, not Isaac Newton!) has transcribed and richly annotated a manuscript that Newton had simply entitled "Miscellaneous Thoughts and enquiries on an important subject." In the late 1750s Newton was wrestling with whether or not he had been called to the ministry. Certain hindrances stood in the way of his becoming an Anglican minister, though he eventually did become such in 1764. For a while he even considered becoming a Congregationalist. The reflections in this pamphlet, thought, do not concern at all which denominational body to join, but seek to answer far more basic questions: How do I know God is calling me to pastoral ministry? What is entailed in such a ministry?

Newton's pamphlet is clustered around a number of biblical passages—Mark 9:24; 2 Corinthians 2:16; Luke 14:28; Hebrews 5:4; and 1 Timothy 4:16—and concludes with five resolutions, the last of which emphasizes in Newton's mind the three key doctrines to be preached: Jesus Christ crucified, love, and the "practice of Gospel holiness" (p.23).

Consider, for instance, Newton's reflections on 1 Timothy 4:16 ("Take heed unto thyself and unto thy doctrine"). Newton was rightly convinced that this was a very important text when it came to the subject he was considering. "O that it were always upon my thoughts" (p.17). Newton probed this verse first by looking at two ways the conjunction "and" can be construed. The Pauline admonition can be read thus: "Take heed of thyself, *and then* take heed of thy doctrine." If a pastor fails to live a holy life, it will cause great reproach on what he preaches. A second way is by reading it as "take heed to thyself *in order to* the taking heed to thy doctrine." A preacher's life must be marked by "watchfulness, prayer and self-denial," otherwise the Spirit will be grieved and he will find he does not have the spiritual resources to preach right doctrine (p.17).

Then, Newton notes, the minister must take heed to his life, for, like it or not, he is "a public person" and "the eyes of many" are on him. If he falls, God's people will be discouraged and his fall will "cause the ungodly to triumph." Finally the minister must take heed to his life, "for there

the principal danger lies.” Newton rightly knew that the greatest foe which any gospel minister faces is “wretched self.” In short, a minister’s life needs to be “a pattern of . . . meekness, humility, heavenly-mindedness, and zeal.”

Although Newton ostensibly has two paragraphs on the need of the minister to watch his doctrine, only one really deals with this part of the verse. The other tackles again the importance of the minister’s life. But what Newton says regarding the importance of correct doctrine is very much to the point. The minister must watch what he teaches lest he “poison the people under the pretence of feeding them” (p.18).

In this section of his reflections, centred on 1 Timothy 4:16, there is little doubt that Newton’s focus is on the necessity of a holy life for a truly vital ministry. Given a somewhat different way in which pastors are trained today—with an emphasis on formal academic education—Newton’s words here need to be heard by all involved in teaching pastors as well as by all who hope to become such.

Attractively produced with specimens of Newton’s handwriting, this pamphlet is an excellent example of eighteenth-century Evangelical thinking on the pastorate. Yet, it is also a reflection that transcends its time and space, and as such, it deserves a place in the classic literature on pastoral ministry mentioned above.

Michael A.G. Haykin.