

VOCATION AND EDUCATION

Ashley Cooper

ASHLEY COOPER LOOKS THROUGH THE LENS OF CLIFF COLLEGE TO PROMOTE THE NEED FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TO BE AVAILABLE FOR ALL.

As we explore the theme of vocation, I am reminded that Cliff College has always been committed to discerning vocation and training disciples of Christ to fulfil their call. Over the years, students have connected with the college to 'test a call', to explore vocation, and be trained in areas of evangelism and mission. This continues to be our core purpose. I am always excited to meet people from all over the country who begin the conversation by stating 'it was when I was at Cliff...', and they go on to share how God called and equipped them for ministry. Many of them are changing the world in their contexts. The mission statement of Cliff College currently is:

'Equipping the Church for Evangelism and Mission'

Our vision is to be a beacon of excellence for training in mission and evangelism, serving the church especially in the UK, but also internationally. Recognising our commitment to the Methodist Church, and our heritage in the Wesleyan family, we exist to train men and women in mission and evangelism. This training should impact all sections of the church and serve the widest possible constituency.

Howard Mellor writes:

The theme of lay training is very significant through the work of Champness, Cook and Chadwick, who wanted Cliff to be recognised alongside other theological colleges, but not imitate them. Cliff was for lay training. Chadwick wanted to emphasise the college as a lay training college with a distinct emphasis on

evangelism, which he championed for the next twenty years. Having spent a year in the life of the college exploring life, vocation, scripture and discipleship, there is a clear recognition that those who have engaged with Cliff went back into circuit life, to their employments, to the preaching plan.'

G. Howard Mellor (Cliff Principal 1994-2005), 'Cliff More than a College,' Cliff Publishing, 2005, 443

They went back to serving the church more effectively and ready to hear God's call for Holy living. Vocation and Holiness, for Cliff, were intended to hold firmly together.

VOCATION – A CALL TO BE

If you are looking for a simple definition of a vocation, the literal meaning of the word is a 'call.' However, a vocation is more than an ordinary call, it is a call from God, and anyone who has felt God's call knows that the process is anything but simple. While most people think of a vocation as that which they are called to do in life, it is important to understand that the first and most important call from God is a call to be – the universal call to holiness.

A career or a profession is something that you have in order to support yourself and to contribute in some way to the good of society. You don't need to believe in God to choose a career or a profession. A person can pick, choose and switch professions freely depending on his/her preferences, strengths or circumstances. A profession or a career always has a horizontal dimension. When we talk about vocation, we introduce a vertical dimension into our life, which is God. It is no longer, 'What do I prefer?', but rather, 'What does God want me to be?' A vocation is not something that you can switch like a profession or a career.

This universal call to holiness is rooted in our baptism. It is a call to know, love and serve the Lord. It is a movement that draws us toward a deeper union with God. We feel a growing desire to love God and to love our neighbour. We come to understand that there is a reason for our existence and meaning in our lives. The universal call to holiness is an ongoing conversion

12 Vocation and Education

experience. It keeps opening our eyes to a new awareness of God's loving presence. It keeps inviting us to turn toward God by aligning our will with God's will.

A willingness to do God's will is built on two convictions. We have to believe that God loves us more than we love ourselves and that God wants our happiness more than we want it. In other words, we have to believe that God knows more than we do about what will make us truly happy. If God had given us everything we ever asked for, we would be seriously unhappy. The basis of our desire to find and to do the will of God should be the belief that God's will for us is our only chance to be truly and lastingly happy.



While most people think of a vocation as that which they are called to do in life, it is important to understand that the first and most important call from God is a call to be – the universal call to holiness.



VOCATION – TRAINING FOR ALL

In our current context at Cliff, we are offering new and exciting ways to explore vocation, holiness and a radical discipleship. We are looking for effective ways to train God's people for mission and ministry across the life of the church and the world. We are seeking to respond to the needs of the church in our generation – and this is a clear requirement to work alongside the lay people of our church to train and educate them to fulfil the new roles that are opening up in the life of the church as pastors and leaders of congregations.

In developing the Cliff Local stream, we recognise a significant need in the life of the church and realise that this need is not being fully met by what we offer in onsite training. We have, therefore, decided to bring world class education that's typically only available onsite, to local communities across



the UK. This seeks to help support the diversity of training and vocation needs that exists across the Methodist Church with an equally diverse set of training options. The demands of life, work and ministry no longer prevent access to quality theological education. Cliff Local is being piloted in four locations across the UK. For more information or to explore the possibilities of developing training in your local context, then please contact us.

Internationally, we remain committed to exploring God's call with those around the world. We feel that, as Wesleyans, our call is not only to those most local, but to those individuals without the access and opportunities to higher education. Wesley said that the world was his parish, and at Cliff we say the world is our classroom. Through the international work, we will seek to promote the charisms and ideals of the college while spreading the effective training in evangelism and mission.

Cliff remains an amazing place, it is a creative community with all its diverse life; 'an academic institution, a missionary organisation and a retreat with opportunity for the formation of future vocations, a place of pilgrimage and celebration, conferencing and consultation. It is also a place of prayer, worship and contemplation' ('Cliff More than a College', 508). Cliff remains committed to the church and, more importantly, to those disciples of Jesus who are seeking to explore, learn and grow in holiness for life.

The Revd Ashley Cooper serves as the Principal of Cliff College. He is passionate about equipping the church, both lay and ordained, to navigate this new context and build the church needed for this generation. More information about Cliff College can be found on its website www.cliffcollege.ac.uk or why not just pay us a visit!



CLIFF COLLEGE
www.cliffcollege.ac.uk

