

AN ABLE AND FAITHFUL
MINISTRY:

Samuel Miller and the Pastoral Office

An Able and Faithful Ministry
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JAMES M. GARRETSON



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CONTENTS

Foreword	vii
Preface	xi
Introduction	1

Part One: Life and Ministry

1. Heritage of Piety	9
2. Pastoral Ministry in New York City: 1793–1803	25
3. Pastoral Ministry in New York City: 1804–1813	35
4. Plans for a Presbyterian Theological Seminary	45
5. An Able and Faithful Ministry	55
6. Seminary Professor: 1813–1850	79
7. Confessional Churchman	111
8. Preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ	133
9. Gospel Promises and the Hope of Christian Missions	143

Part Two: Theological Foundations for the Gospel Ministry

10. The Importance of the Gospel Ministry	159
11. The Importance of Mature Preparatory Study	173
12. Sermon Preparation: An Introductory Overview	187
13. Preparing a Sermon: Choice of Texts	205
14. Preparing a Sermon: Style	215
15. Preparing a Sermon: Parts of a Discourse	229
16. Holding Fast the Faithful Word	253
17. Spiritual Weapons for a Spiritual Battle	275
18. Preaching the Gospel in Great Cities	291
19. A Theology of Public Worship	307

**Part Three: Ministerial Deportment and the
Work of the Christian Ministry**

20. Clerical Manners and Habits 325

Part Four: Ministerial Legacy

21. Final Days 385

22. A Life Well Lived 399

Subject Index. 417

FOREWORD

It is an edifying and humbling experience to become better acquainted with Samuel Miller. The second professor of Princeton Theological Seminary, appointed in 1813 to join Archibald Alexander, the original professor of the institution founded in the previous year, Miller brought twenty years of pastoral experience in New York City and both intellect and piety that, with his colleague and eventually with their former student Charles Hodge, set the tone for Princeton's impact down to and beyond his death in 1850. For its insights into the ministry and character of Samuel Miller, James Garretson's book is of great value to pastors and candidates for ministry and should be required reading for administrators and faculty members of theological seminaries.

Miller's intellectual quality was shown in the 1803 publication, in two volumes, of his *Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century*, and it continued to be manifested in numerous publications reflecting his teaching of church history and practical theology through his thirty-seven years at Princeton. But his most lasting impact on students and colleagues was through his personal piety. In his study, Garretson provides a moving account of the seven-man committee, on which Miller served, to appoint Alexander as the original faculty member, and the same sort of prayerful piety is manifested in the seven resolutions Miller adopted when he was appointed. Reflected here is Miller's sensitivity to God's plan in the important work being undertaken and his consciousness of setting an example for his colleagues, students, and local community.

Miller was strongly committed to Presbyterian doctrine and polity, but his moderation is apparent in his approach to the Old School / New School tensions and in his advice to a pastor about how to handle ecclesiastical controversy. He provided an exemplary model of "speaking the

truth with love." A close friend and former student commented that his preaching style was consistent with his character: "There was the same symmetry about his sermons as there was about his character—everything was in its right place." Discussion of Miller's homiletical instruction reveals an odd characteristic of some early nineteenth-century preaching: "My first counsel is that you always make choice of your text before you write your sermon." Evidently some would produce a sermon and then scramble around to find an appropriate biblical text—certainly a bizarre approach for those in the tradition of Zwingli, Calvin, and the Puritans.

One might ask if the style and context of the early nineteenth century can still be relevant to our time. Miller himself was aware that his own time was quite different from the culture of the Puritans, yet his comments on serving in great cities sounds almost modern. While his advice to ministerial candidates on marriage and relation to females reflects the age of Jane Austen or of Anthony Trollope, it nevertheless is still practical. While his advice about humor may sound like that of Richard Baxter in the seventeenth century, he had an excellent sense of humor. His comments on the conduct of public worship are very practical, right down to the minister's contact with his congregation following the sermon and service. Where did our tradition of the minister's sometimes awkward greeting at the door come from, anyway?

A word about the author: James Garretson has served as both a pastor and a seminary professor and thus is well qualified to describe his subject. He has produced three previous books on Old Princeton and obviously relishes the values of the institution that has influenced so much of the orthodox Presbyterian tradition and also much of the broader evangelical world. He has made thorough use of secondary sources and especially of primary materials, including Miller's manuscripts in the Princeton Seminary archives. Much of this book is quotations of Miller, skillfully woven into Garretson's narrative.

A characteristic descriptive word Miller used was *interesting*: a pastor was going through "interesting and trying circumstances"; another was going through an "interesting moment" that required ministerial fortitude; females "form a most interesting and active part of every church"; communion services represent "peculiarly solemn and interesting seasons." It is as though Miller was bemused by what every experience in

ministry might reveal about the unfolding providence of God. His own role in that unfolding providence should be one of great interest to historians, ministers, and seminary educators today.

—William S. Barker
professor of church history, emeritus,
Westminster Theological Seminary
former president, Covenant Theological
Seminary

PREFACE

As the years pass, my appreciation for the model of ministerial training implemented at Princeton Theological Seminary in the opening decades of the nineteenth century has only deepened. The seminary's founding faculty, Archibald Alexander and Samuel Miller, were men of stellar academic credentials whose learning was accompanied by an equally strong commitment to the cultivation of personal piety and sanctified instruction in the preparation of future generations of Christian ministers, teachers, and missionaries.

Few men in the history of American Presbyterianism have left such a profound mark on the institutional development of ministerial training in the United States as Archibald Alexander and Samuel Miller. Their devotion to Christ, faithfulness to scriptural teaching, experience in pastoral ministry, churchmanship, and academic scholarship provided a ministerial training environment without equal in its day, and one which, as the reader will soon discover, still has much to offer for men who are called into the pastoral ministry in our time.

While religious hagiography is to be avoided in the writing of Christian biography, the Scriptures enjoin believers to honor as well as imitate the example of their spiritual leaders in the manner in which their lives are spent in service to Christ. As the risen Christ gives pastors and teachers to help educate and equip Christians to live out their calling before God as His redeemed people, the example of a man such as Samuel Miller and the ministerial legacy that he bequeathed to the church remain of ongoing value for demonstrating what a biblically based model of pastoral ministry will look like in both content and expression.

A number of people have helped shape my interest in writing on the men of Old Princeton. The writings of Iain Murray first introduced me,

as a young man, to the importance of religious biography in the nurture of the Christian life and ministerial maturation. David B. Calhoun's publications proved particularly formative in stimulating my research on the model of ministerial training that marked Princeton Theological Seminary during the nineteenth century. I have especially appreciated Sinclair Ferguson's personal encouragement to "keep on writing," which he shared with me while we were on a walk around the campus of Westminster Theological Seminary one cold, wintry day. Special thanks are also due to my good friend Jonathan Watson, whose patient (and at times painful!) counsel on how to be a better writer has slowly borne some fruit over the years.

Very special thanks goes out to Jim Montesano for his friendship and prayers; your zeal and enthusiasm for Christ and His church have been a real source of blessing to me. Likewise, the author is indebted to his colleague in ministry, Mr. Jared Wortman, for all the ways in which he has helped and encouraged me in our campus outreach to the students at Harvard Law School. A personal word of thanks is also due Mr. Dan Knapke and Mr. Matt Bennett for the privilege of working together through the ministry of Christian Union.

As a student at Covenant Theological Seminary in the 1980s, I greatly appreciated Dr. William S. Barker's courses in church history. The blend of scholarship and pastoral sensitivity that marked his classes remain a fond memory of early mornings well spent. Dr. Barker's willingness to contribute the foreword to a book on a fellow Presbyterian historian in whose spiritual lineage he has followed is particularly appreciated.

As always, Mr. Ken Henke, reference archivist in special collections at Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey, has been of invaluable assistance in locating and securing obscure documents. Dr. Eric Hewett's expertise in the classical languages helped ensure the textual accuracy and intended meaning of a number of Latin phrases scattered throughout Miller's writings.

Mr. Jay Collier and the Reformation Heritage Books staff deserve special recognition; their expertise and commitment to the publication of God-honoring literature is a source of untold blessing to the church worldwide.

Finally, I must thank my family for all that they have meant to me and for the various ways in which they have enriched my life. A special word of thanks goes out to my wife, Susan, and children, Asha, Trace, Michaela,

Rebekah, and Isaiah, for loving me, tolerating my failures, forgiving my sins, and helping me to become a better man, husband, and father.

I wish to dedicate this book to my youngest son, Isaiah. Thank you for the love and example that you have given to me in living out the Christian life; I wish I had been more like you when I was your age!

—James M. Garretson
October 31, 2013
Cambridge, Massachusetts

To "follow Christ" is to imbibe the spirit of Christ; to have a large portion of "the same mind that was also in him." Men may hold the truth with intelligent accuracy, and contend for it with earnestness, without submitting to its power. He who receives with ever so much speculative exactness the genuine doctrines of the gospel, just as the Saviour left them, cannot be said, in the best sense of the word, to "follow" him, unless "he give him his heart;" unless he receive his truth in the love of it; unless he unfeignedly yield to him his love and confidence, as his great High Priest and King, as well as his Prophet. That gospel minister, then, who truly follows Christ, is not only "sound in the faith," but also a converted man; a cordial, devoted, experimental Christian; a man "full of the faith and the Holy Ghost;" who speaks that which he knows, and testifies that which he has experienced; who loves his Master and his work above all things; and who accounts it his highest honour to be like Christ, and "his meat and drink" to do his will. He rejects the aspirings of carnal ambition. He is willing to "learn of him who was meek and lowly in heart," and to be himself nothing, that Christ may be "all in all." In a word, he is one who lives daily under the power of that religion which he preaches to others; who "walks with God"; who maintains a life of "fellowship with the Father of his spirit, and with his Son, Jesus Christ;" and who studies daily to "grow in grace," to "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts," and to have his meditations and desires as well as his treasures in heaven. His hatred of sin, his self-denial, his meekness, his forgiveness of injuries, his benevolence, his conscientious regard to truth and justice in every thing, his deadness to the world, his condescension to the poorest and weakest of the flock, his disinterestedness, his holy zeal and diligence, all bear witness that the love of Christ constrains him; that the imitation of Christ is his "ruling passion;" and the glory of Christ the great end for which he lives.

—SAMUEL MILLER

1835

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of Christianity, there have been men in each generation whose ministerial example remains a source of inspiration for countless generations of Christians who come after them. While blessed with a number of gifted pastors and teachers, few ministers in nineteenth-century American Presbyterianism commanded the influence and respect that Samuel Miller (1760–1850) attained throughout the course of his lifetime.¹ Perhaps best remembered for his years of service as Princeton Theological Seminary's second professor, Miller's piety and labors as a teacher and author earned him a reputation as one of the most learned Presbyterian theologians of the nineteenth century.

1. For helpful overviews of the history of American Presbyterianism, see D. G. Hart and John H. Muether, *Seeking a Better Country* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2007); Lefferts A. Loetscher, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983); James H. Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Louisville: Geneva, 1996). Hart and Muether are particularly good in examining the theological currents that affected the development of Presbyterianism in the United States. For a collection of primary source materials documenting the development of Presbyterianism in America see Maurice W. Armstrong, Lefferts A. Loetscher, and Charles A. Anderson, *The Presbyterian Enterprise: Sources of American Presbyterian History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956). For standard nineteenth-century treatments see Richard Webster, *A History of the Presbyterian Church in America from its Origin until the Year 1760* (Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1857); Charles Augustus Briggs, *American Presbyterianism: Its Origin and Early History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1885); George Hays, *Presbyterians: A Popular Narrative of Their Origin, Progress, Doctrines, and Achievements* (New York: J. A. Hill, 1893); Robert Ellis Thompson, *A History of the Presbyterian Churches in the United States* (New York: Christian Literature); *A Short History of American Presbyterianism: From Its Foundations to the Reunion of 1869* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath School Work, 1903). For a valuable pictorial history, see James H. Smylie, *American Presbyterians: A Pictorial History* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1985).

The Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America was established in 1812,² and Miller joined founding faculty member Archibald Alexander at the new denominational school in 1813. Miller would continue as a professor at Princeton until his retirement in 1849. Together, Alexander and Miller would establish Princeton's reputation as a premier Presbyterian ministerial training center committed to piety and learning in the service of the church.

Samuel Miller's labors as a preacher, pastor, professor, author, and conscientious churchman were notable in his lifetime and remain exemplary for men aspiring to pastoral office today. Miller's life of principled piety and diligent churchmanship demonstrate a proper balance between the individual and corporate dimensions of a minister's membership in the body of Christ. A seasoned pastor and gifted preacher, Miller's classroom instruction, publications, and personal counsel were all suffused with a pastoral focus that centered the academic instruction presented to students upon the ministerial obligations they would one day assume as officers in Christ's church.

Samuel Miller's achievements as a leading nineteenth-century historian are well known. His early historical publications documenting the intellectual and cultural developments of the eighteenth century established him as a scholar of note on both sides of the Atlantic. As a professor at Princeton, Miller brought his extensive knowledge of European and American cultural history to bear upon his instruction on the history of Christianity. Miller's publications on Presbyterian government and church office would likewise establish his reputation as an authority on the development of Presbyterian doctrine and polity. A lover and defender of Presbyterian history, government, worship, and ministerial order, his learned works remain standard and now classic treatments of their topics in the history of American Presbyterianism.

But Miller's legacy is more than the intellectual mastery he achieved in various fields of specialized learning. His depth of spiritual understanding permeated his life and ministry and was a powerful factor in the influence he commanded among the men of his generation.

2. For a popular treatment of the school's founding and history, see William K. Selden, *Princeton Theological Seminary: A Narrative History 1812–1992* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). For a comprehensive institutional history of the school published in celebration of its bicentennial, see James H. Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary in American Religion and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

Contemporaries of Miller all gave testimony to it, and that depth is still to be found in both his published and unpublished writings.

Of particular value for ministerial training today are Miller's insightful observations on the calling and responsibilities of the pastoral office. In the early years of the seminary, Alexander and Miller shared responsibility for student's instruction in pastoral theology. Both men had served for a number of years in pastoral ministry before receiving appointments as professors, and both brought to their instruction the ripened reflection of their ministerial experience. Miller's rich insights into the calling, challenges, blessings, and cost of pastoral ministry remain of ongoing value in developing a biblical theology of pastoral leadership that is rooted in Scripture and the Reformed confessional heritage of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms.

As a church historian, Miller's interests were also directed to the history of preaching. Familiarity with the principles of rhetoric and the practice of preaching as it came to expression in different periods of the church's history enriched his observations about the strengths and weaknesses of the various theological traditions in which it was rooted. Attentive to the spiritual dimensions of life in the writing of Christian biography, Miller's instruction placed strong emphasis on the benefits of the Reformed experimental preaching heritage for a pulpit ministry exercised "in power and demonstration of the Spirit."

Miller's instruction was similar in emphasis to his colleague Archibald Alexander but somewhat distinct in approach. Miller's godly example and pious instruction on the work of the Christian ministry provide the kind of biblically grounded, historically informed, and pastorally nuanced ministerial instruction that will prove helpful in preparing men to be "able and faithful ministers" of the New Covenant in today's churches. While Miller's contribution as an intellectual historian and his writings on Presbyterian doctrine and polity are well documented, the factors that shaped his understanding of the pastoral ministry and the approach he took to ministerial instruction at the seminary has not been addressed in the manner his work deserves. For all of his outstanding achievements, his primary calling at Princeton was to serve as a pastor-educator in the training of forthcoming generations of prospective Presbyterian pastors, teachers, and missionaries.

Part 1 of this study provides an introduction to Miller's life, his role in the founding of the seminary, and his work as a professor at Princeton.

Additional chapters examine his denominational involvement, style of preaching, and instruction on how the missionary imperative relates to gospel preaching. An understanding of his churchmanship and interest in missions is essential for grasping the ministerial ideals to which he was committed when providing instruction for his students.

Part 2 highlights Miller's theology of preaching and pastoral ministry through an examination of his sermons and lectures. Two of his introductory lectures provide a framework for the theology of gospel ministry that the training at Princeton represented. The section also includes selections from his lectures on sermon composition and delivery, which are transcribed and published for the first time. Various sermons he delivered on such topics as doctrinal faithfulness, the spiritual warfare in which Christian ministry is engaged, the relation of public worship to the facilities in which congregations meet, and the challenges of preaching the gospel in "great cities" provide representative samples of the themes that characterized the theology of ministry that he sought to instill among his students and those called to the pastoral office.

Part 3 focuses on the ministerial manners and habits that Christ's representatives are to embody. Miller's material provides detailed and practical guidance for students who are preparing for the ministerial office in order that they might know how to conduct their future pastoral relationships and responsibilities in a way that honors Christ and addresses the needs of His church.

The concluding section highlights the final year of Miller's life while providing a summary of his achievements and an assessment of the continuing value of his instruction in pastoral theology for men who have been called to the gospel ministry today.

The present work is complementary to my earlier volume, *Princeton and Preaching: Archibald Alexander and the Christian Ministry*.³ While Alexander and Miller shared the task of instructing students in homiletics and pastoral theology, their extant lecture notes and related publications address distinct subjects in detail. Alexander, for example, provides more material on the call to the ministry than that found in Miller's lecture notes. Alexander's writings also address the topic of "characteristical" preaching and the "matter" of the sermon's content in greater detail

3. See James M. Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching: Archibald Alexander and the Christian Ministry* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2005).

than is found in Miller's writings. On the other hand, Miller's unpublished lecture notes on sermon composition are far more systematic and complete than those which remain from Alexander's instruction on this topic. Likewise, Miller's introductory lectures, letters on clerical manners and habits, and related ordination and installation messages provide a rich body of material expounding the perspective on pastoral theology that students received at Princeton during the years of his professorship; these topics are not addressed in such a comprehensive manner in Alexander's writings.

Because of the intimate nature of the school's program, the size of the student body, and the course responsibilities shared by the two men, it is not surprising that their lecture material not only overlaps, but is also complementary.

Consideration must also be given to their distinct temperaments and literary gifts. The "symmetry, balance, and proportion" that contemporaries described in Miller's personality and sermons is particularly evident in his published writings. Unlike Alexander, who has a number of classic "one-liners," Miller tends to write in units of thought, and his reasoning power is demonstrated in their completeness rather than in isolated sentences. In reading Miller's publications, one quickly recognizes the symmetry and proportion found in his expositions and their accompanying literary power when read as a whole. As much as possible, this book allows him to speak for himself so that the reader may learn what it was like to sit as a student in his classroom and experience the power of his preaching in congregational settings.

While the two volumes focus on different men, the content is related, and the material in each work is intended to supplement the other. Readers interested in gaining a fuller understanding of the instruction students received at Princeton Theological Seminary during the years that Alexander and Miller served on the faculty would do well to read both books to experience the breadth and depth of their combined pastoral instruction.

Part One

LIFE AND MINISTRY

In forming the religious character...it is of the utmost importance that the foundation be laid in clear views of divine truth. Doctrinal knowledge is apt to be undervalued by private Christians, and especially by the young. They imagine, according to the popular prejudice, that if the heart be right, and the conduct correct, the doctrines embraced are of small moment. This supposes that the heart of any one may be right, while his principles are essentially wrong; or that his practice may be pure, while his religious opinions are radically erroneous. But nothing can be more contrary both to Scripture and experience. The great Founder of our holy Religion declares that men are "sanctified by the truth." In fact, it is only so far as the truth is received, loved and obeyed that real religion has any place either in the heart or life.... It is not intended here either to assign the reasons, or to show the sin and folly of this deplorable fact; but to remark that the foundation of this fact is commonly laid in youth. If the young, and even the thinking and serious portion of the young, were as careful to store their minds with elementary principles, and with clear, discriminating views of revealed truth, as they are with the best and most accredited elements of other sciences, we should not find so many hoary-headed Christians unable to defend their own professed principles, and led astray by the artful varieties of error. That firm and accurate foundation of knowledge which is laid in youth, is most apt to remain unmoved, and to serve as a basis for the loftiest and most useful superstructure in after life.

—SAMUEL MILLER
July 1830

Chapter 1

HERITAGE OF PIETY

A man's ancestry is often a pointer to his family's future. For some families, a heritage of piety is bequeathed to coming generations, and the impact of that legacy cannot be assessed until that great day when the secrets of men's hearts will be made known. History will record its effects, but the future will determine its rewards.

Family Background

Samuel Miller enjoyed the privilege of being raised in a home saturated with biblical piety. The sixth son and eighth child of the Rev. John and Margaret Miller, Samuel Miller was born October 31, 1769, in Dover, Delaware.

Miller's family ancestry was marked by strong Christian convictions and pious lives. Samuel Miller's paternal grandfather, John Miller, was a Scottish immigrant who settled in Boston in 1710. Owner of a sugar refinery and distillery, he held membership in Boston's Old South (Congregational) Church until his death in 1749.

John Miller's wife, Mary, was remembered as "a very pious woman." A daughter of Joseph Bass, her family tree included Samuel Bass and John Alden, the latter of whom was one of the original Mayflower pilgrims who landed at what is now known as Plymouth Rock. "Distinguished for a holy life and conversation," and known as "a man of great integrity and worth," it was said that Alden "was blessed with a competence, and with a goodly number of children, all of whom delighted in the ordinances of God."¹

1. Samuel Miller Jr., *The Life of Samuel Miller, D.D., LL.D., Second Professor in the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church, at Princeton, New Jersey* (1869; repr., Stoleon-Trent, Staffordshire, UK: Tentmaker, 2002), 1:14.

John and Mary Miller's marriage produced three boys. The first son, named after his father, died as an infant; the second, also named John, would become a minister and the father of Samuel Miller. The third son grew to manhood but disappeared along with the rest of a ship on an ill-fated voyage to the South Seas.

Born in Boston in 1722, John Miller studied Greek and Latin at a local classical academy under the tutorship of John Lovell. While completing his classical studies with Lovell, John became a Christian through the ministry of the Rev. Dr. Sewall, minister at the time of the Old South Church. Sewall's ministry in Boston was blessed by God to the conversion of a number of the city's population. Samuel Miller reflected on Sewall's impact upon his father's life in a letter dated March 27, 1830:

I have a real affection, as well as veneration, for the memory of that man. My father was born in the bosom of the Old South Church; was baptized by Dr. Sewall; was much and affectionately noticed by him; was savingly brought to a knowledge and love of the truth, as he believed, by means of the sermons preached by Dr. Sewall from John xvi. 8, etc., and afterwards published in a little volume. I think my father has told me, that there was a revival of religion in the church about the time those sermons were delivered.²

John Miller's conversion was soon followed by a call to the pastoral ministry. Miller read theology with the Rev. John Webb and was subsequently licensed to preach the gospel in May 1748 through the council of clergy affiliated with the Old South Church. Shortly afterward, he received a call from the united Presbyterian churches in Dover and Duck Creek Cross Roads, Delaware. Ordained by the Old South Church in April 1749, Miller relocated to Delaware to begin a pastoral relationship that would last more than forty-two years.

Two years after his arrival in Delaware, John fell in love with and married Margaret Millington. Margaret was an attractive young woman whose father had once served as a merchant ship commander but had subsequently become a planter in Maryland. In the coming years, John and Margaret would be blessed with nine children, three of whom died before they reached the prime of life. Joseph would die while still an infant; a second son died at age five, and the oldest son, John, died in 1777 of disease while serving as a volunteer surgeon in the Continental Army.

2. Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller*, 1:16.

A conscientious and caring pastor, John Miller was a studious minister “interested in the advancement of Christian learning.” In 1763, Miller was awarded the master of arts by the College and Academy of Philadelphia.³ As a father, Miller maintained strong standards in the classical education he provided for his children in the family home. Four of his sons would later graduate from his alma mater, while a fifth completed his studies at a “seminary of almost collegiate reputation.”

John Miller’s pastoral ministry in Delaware began eight years after the colonial Presbyterian churches had split into the Old and New Sides in 1741. At the time Miller arrived in Dover, Presbyterianism in the colonies was divided between the Old Side Synod of Philadelphia and the New Side Synod of New York. Miller’s sympathies eventually aligned with the Old Side Presbytery of New Castle shortly before the reunion of the two synods in 1758.⁴

Portions of John Miller’s pastoral ministry took place during the turbulent years of the Revolutionary War, and the spirit of patriotism that characterized the colonies was also found in the Miller’s home. The aura of war and the events surrounding the forging of the new nation would make a strong impact on Samuel Miller. A visit to Philadelphia in 1787 proved particularly influential in molding Miller’s appreciation of the new nation’s founding fathers. While there, he observed the Continental Congress during its deliberations on the forming of the Constitution of the United States. The courage and statesmanship of men such as Washington, Franklin, and Hamilton earned Miller’s respect and left a lasting impression on the maturing teenager.

But for Samuel Miller, the national events unfolding at this time were secondary to even more formative influences that were shaping his character and preparing him for what would become his life calling as a Christian minister. Samuel Miller’s childhood was spent in the beauty of Delaware’s countryside helping his parents care for the family farm. His father’s rural pastorate—far removed from the events of the war and temptations of city life—provided Samuel with a close-knit family whose home was suffused with genuine Christian love and a Christ-centered piety. The Miller children were blessed with parents who loved Christ

3. The school was later renamed the University of Pennsylvania.

4. For an older work examining the division in colonial Presbyterianism, see Leonard J. Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition: A Reexamination of Colonial Presbyterianism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1949).

and sought to raise them in the admonition and fear of the Lord. John and Margaret prayed for their children's salvation and, through the example of their lives, left an indelible impression upon their children's souls of true biblical piety.

Margaret Miller's example as a wife and mother was particularly influential in Samuel's life. As Samuel Miller's son would later note in a biography of his father, "A mother's influence, in moulding the character of her children, and the record of it, in elucidating divine truth, especially God's precious promises to faithful parents for their offspring, are particularly important." This was especially evidenced in letters Margaret had written that were still in the family's possession: "Her letters, of which several have been preserved, while they give evidence of no high literary cultivation, yet conclusively reveal excellence of another kind: true warmth of heart, tenderness of affection, and fervent piety breathe through them all without exception."⁵

As an old man, Samuel Miller spoke with deep affection of his mother's influence and the burden she carried for the spiritual welfare of her children:

I have heard the Rev. Dr. Rogers, of New York, say, that he had very often seen my mother, soon after her marriage, and that he thought her decidedly one of the most beautiful women that he ever saw in his life. But her moral and spiritual beauty were still more remarkable. She was bred a rigid Episcopalian, but, soon after her connexion with my father, joined in communion with the church of which he was pastor, and continued a member of it while she lived. She was one of the most pious women that I ever knew. Courteous and benevolent in a very uncommon degree, she endeared herself to all who knew her. To the poor, she was assiduously and tenderly beneficent; and in her every domestic relation a pattern to her acquaintances. I never think of her character, taken all together, without a mixture of veneration, wonder, and gratitude. The fidelity with which she instructed me; the fervor and tenderness with which she prayed with me; and the unceasing care with which she watched over all my interests, especially those of a moral and religious nature, have been as I should think, seldom equalled. I have reason to be deeply humbled that I did not profit more by them; and

5. Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller*, 1:26–27.

yet I am persuaded I do not live a day without deriving some benefit from them.⁶

Conversion

As Miller reached his teenage years, he began to lose interest in the study of classical literature, deciding that further studies in the Latin and Greek classics would be of little benefit in preparing for the career in business he planned to pursue. Momentous changes were on the horizon, however, for the direction his life would soon take. By the time he turned eighteen, he had developed a renewed interest in completing the classical education he had begun under his father. Even more importantly, that was the year he first became a Christian. Miller's papers describe the events that took place at this time in his life:

The first eighteen years of my life were spent under my parental roof. I was never placed in any school, or public seminary, of any kind, prior to my entrance into the University of Pennsylvania in 1788, when I was eighteen years and eight months old. From the age of about twelve, I had been studying the Latin and Greek classics, at home, under the direction of my father, (who was an excellent Latin, Greek, and Hebrew scholar), and two elder brothers, who had preceded me in acquiring a knowledge of classic literature under parental instruction. But I pursued this object with many interruptions and with little zeal, owing to an expectation and desire of relinquishing the study of the learned languages, and entering a counting-house, with a future view to merchandize as a profession. Hence I studied little, and that little to small purpose. But about my eighteenth year, it pleased God, in a remarkable manner, to direct my views otherwise, (for which I desire here to record my sincere thanks), and to excite in me a desire for the acquisition of knowledge; though without any settled purpose as to a future profession. After this change of feeling and of purpose respecting a classical education, I was, for some months, under great perplexity and embarrassment, how to pursue and complete my education in a better manner than I could possibly do under the tuition of an aged and infirm parent. During this anxiety, I was brought under very serious impressions of religion, which I hope soon after issued in a cordial acceptance of the Saviour as my hope and life. Early in the Spring of 1788, I made a profession of religion in the church

6. Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller*, 1:26.

of Dover, under my father's pastoral care. I have often looked back on that step, with its preceding and attending exercises, with much solicitude as to the question, whether it was founded on a saving acquaintance with Christ or not. I can only say, that I had a hope in Christ, which, though afterwards and often painfully interrupted, was then steady and comfortable; and that my excellent mother, an intelligent and faithful counselor in such matters, concurred in the measure of uniting myself with the church.⁷

Samuel Miller's newfound faith in Christ was indeed genuine and would continue to mature and develop in the coming years under his family's watchful eye. His conversion was soon followed by the opportunity to study in the more academically challenging environment of a university setting.

University of Pennsylvania Student

Advanced in years and limited in his ability to provide the kind of educational opportunity that would most benefit Samuel, Miller's father gave permission for his son to live away from home and enroll at university to complete his formal education. Heartened, no doubt, by Samuel's public profession of faith, John Miller may have begun to see the way in which God might bless his son's talents in the service of Christ and wanted to do all that he could to prepare him for God's future place of appointment.

By mid-July 1788, Samuel Miller had removed to Philadelphia in order to attend the University of Pennsylvania. While at university, he would reside with his sister Elizabeth and her husband, Colonel Samuel McLane. A number of the letters that John and Margaret Miller wrote to the McLanes have been preserved and bear witness to the spiritual concern they had for their son while he was living in a large city. One of the earliest letters was written by John Miller at about the time Samuel arrived in Philadelphia:

You well know what my desire is respecting him; viz., that he may be a well-informed, sincere, prudent and humble follower of Christ. Unless his education is sanctified, by divine grace, for this purpose, I think he had better be without it. Were he, from right principles, disposed and prepared for the gospel ministry, it would be inexpressibly

7. Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller*, 1:33.

pleasing to me, and I doubt not to you, notwithstanding the temporal discouragement, which, at present, may lie in the way of it.

The other professions of Physic and Law, as they are now conducted by the generality, appear to me unfriendly to a life of real piety, especially the last. And as to the first, I dread Sammy's spending so much time in Dover, as would be necessary to qualify him for it. Such a number of idle young fellows you could scarcely find in so small a place. Should he be found qualified for the Senior Class, he will want to continue there until the next Commencement; otherwise his stay will be much shorter. On the whole, I must warmly solicit you, to direct him into such a path of prudence, and urge him to such a veneration for a pious and virtuous life, as may give us all, by the will of God, much comfort concerning him.⁸

Margaret Miller also wrote to her daughter and son-in-law the week her beloved "Sammy" took residence at their home:

Oh, my dear Sir, it is with gratitude I recollect your kind invitation to him, which no length of time will efface from my mind, And I rely very much on your care of him. Please to exercise the most unlimited control of his conduct, and I think he will love you the better for it. Sammy is at a very trying time of life. I hope, my dear Child [i.e., Elizabeth], you will have a watchful eye over him at all times. Oh, may that eye which never slumbereth nor sleepeth direct him in all his way—is the prayer of your afflicted mother; and I ask for him and myself also an interest in your prayers.⁹

A letter written to Elizabeth on May 12, 1789, expresses the spiritual burden John felt for Sammy's future. John hoped that Sammy, who had recently been ill, would recognize God's mercy in his recovery and that it would become an incentive to keep his youthful priorities focused on the things of eternity:

But you will, I hope, be much more solicitous for your own and our spiritual welfare, than for any of our temporal concerns. Eternity, with all its most solemn and important scenes, will very soon be opened to our view: we are living on the borders of it, and need to be continually realizing it, that we may live above the present world, and have our hearts chiefly placed on God and heaven. Under these lively impressions, we wish you frequently to take opportunities of conversing with your brother Sammy, and giving him such advice

8. Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller*, 1:34.

9. Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller*, 1:35.

and counsels, as may tend to a proper improvement of the affliction God has been pleased to visit him with, and the mercy that has been shown him, in his being so far restored to health. You will endeavor to direct his views, should his life be spared, to such studies and pursuits, as will, by the divine blessing, render him most useful in the world, and the greatest comfort to his connexions. You will endeavor to guard him against the dangerous snare of vain and trifling company; against imbibing the spirit, and following the maxims and habits of a degenerate world; against all those things, which, in your devourest hours, you will judge are inconsistent with a spiritual and holy life.

Your mamma and I have been in a poor state of health a great part of the past winter; but at this time enjoy as much health as our time of life and growing infirmities give us reason to expect. May the Lord prepare us for our great change, and afford us the comfort of seeing our dear children engaged in the ardent pursuit of heavenly wisdom before we leave them!¹⁰

Samuel's illness also became a providential turning point in his life. While living with the McLanes, he had joined with their family in weekly worship at the Second Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. One of the co-pastors at the church was the Rev. Ashbel Green, a minister destined to become one of the most influential figures in the history of colonial American Presbyterianism. During his illness, the youthful worshiper found himself the recipient of Green's pastoral visits.¹¹ Green's influence and pastoral interest provided spiritual direction at a time of special need in Miller's life and began a bond of friendship that would last the remainder of their lives.

Having been admitted to the senior class upon his arrival at the University of Pennsylvania in 1788, Miller graduated the following year with the class of 1789. As recipient of the "first honor" in his class, Samuel delivered the Latin salutatory oration as part of the graduation exercises.

10. Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller*, 1:38.

11. "In the course of this illness, Dr. Green, though I had no other claim upon him than being the son of a brother minister, and a boarder in the house of one of his flock, kindly and affectionately called, more than once, to see me, and conversed and prayed with me with a fidelity and tenderness which I shall never forget, and which marked, at that early period of his pastoral life, a sacred regard to his official duties, and a happy talent in the fulfillment of them." See Joseph H. Jones, ed., *The Life of Ashbel Green, V.D.M.* (New York: Robert Carter & Bros., 1849), 524.

Call to the Ministry

After his graduation, Samuel Miller returned home where he began the study of theology under his father's tutelage. In the months leading up to his graduation and in the weeks following his return home, John Miller's aspirations that his son would pursue a call to pastoral ministry began to take shape in Samuel's heart and mind. An entry in Samuel Miller's diary for August 20, 1789, sheds light on his developing sense of call:

Set apart a day of fasting and prayer for the divine direction in my choice of a profession. Before the day was closed, after much serious deliberation, and, I hope, some humble looking for divine guidance, I felt so strongly inclined to devote myself to the work of the ministry, that I resolved, in the Lord's name, on this choice. How solemn the undertaking. May the Lord help me to make a suitable estimate of its character, and to enter upon it with the deepest humility, and at the same time with confidence in the riches of his gracious aid.

O my Father's and my Mother's God, I yield myself to thee! Yet, what an office for a poor, polluted, weak creature, who is helpless in himself, to aspire unto! Lord, help me to realize my own weakness and unworthiness; to lie in the dust of abasement, and habitually to look for strength to him who can "make me strong in the power of his might." Lord, I, this day, devote myself to thy most worthy service. I am thine by creation and preservation; I ought to be thine by a holy regeneration and a gracious adoption; and I would humbly devote myself to the promotion of thy glory to my latest breath.¹²

By late August 1789, Samuel Miller entered upon what would become a lifetime study of theology. Miller credits Ashbel Green with helping him to think through the calling and responsibilities of the gospel ministry at this critical juncture in his life:

Soon after I had completed my course in the University, this benevolent and devoted man, ever on the watch to do good, having heard that I had resolved to engage in the study of theology with a view to the gospel ministry, wrote me a long, affectionate, and most instructive letter, filled with those large views of ministerial furniture and duty for which he was always remarkable, and written with that wisdom, piety, learning and kindness, which were adapted at once to give light, and a happy impulse, to an inexperienced, youthful

12. Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller*, 1:43.

student. I felt myself much his debtor for this act of friendship, and shall never cease to regard it with fervent gratitude.¹³

Samuel Miller's confidence in his call to pursue pastoral ministry did not forever erase all his doubts. Frequent mention is made in his diary of days set aside for praying and fasting to determine God's direction in his life. One example comes from a diary entry for October 8, 1789:

This day I set apart for solemn fasting, humiliation and prayer, in view of attending on the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper on the ensuing Sabbath, and also to implore the blessing of God upon my theological studies. A pleasant day on the whole, yet compassed about with many anxious fears concerning my state, motives, etc.¹⁴

Family Losses

Bereavement was soon to come into the family home with the death of Margaret Miller in late November 1789, just a little more than three weeks after Samuel's family had celebrated his twentieth birthday. Now, for the first time in his life, Samuel Miller would face a future without his mother's presence, counsel, and prayers to guide him. In his diary, Miller eulogized his mother's memory in the dignified and stately manner of speech for which he would become so well known in his later public ministry:

On Sunday morning, a little before one o'clock, November 22d, 1789, my dear, honored, tender, faithful, affectionate and pious mother departed this life, and went to a heavenly and better world. She had been more than a week ill of inflammatory fever. Her death was probably one of the most joyful and triumphant ever known. A very short time before she expired, she repeated with a hallowed and most animating confidence, the latter verses of Dr. Watts's version of the 17th Psalm, beginning with the 3d verse: "What sinners value I resign—" Heaven grant that I may always keep in remembrance her tenderness and faithfulness as a parent; her universal benevolence and charity as a neighbor; her sincere and almost unexampled piety and holiness as a Christian. And may I be enabled, through divine grace, to walk in all her steps, that my latter end may be like hers,

13. Jones, *The Life of Ashbel Green*, 524–25.

14. Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller*, 1:45.

composed, serene, joyful and triumphant; and thus may her death be my spiritual and eternal life.¹⁵

Margaret's death was a painful loss to John Miller as well. He treasured her companionship, piety, and prayers.¹⁶ "The heavy loss we have sustained," he wrote to his son-in-law Samuel McLane, "affords just reason for mourning, but none for distress with respect to the dear departed." Margaret's trust in Christ for her salvation gave the family encouragement at this painful moment; the shed blood of Christ, as John Miller carefully noted in one of his letters, was her refuge and hope.

John and Margaret Miller had grown old together, but now John was to spend the final days of his life without the companion he had fallen in love with so many years earlier. The burden of his loss is expressed in a letter penned to his daughter Elizabeth:

The house seems a dreary habitation, the sweetest, the dearest creature in it, the best part of myself, having left us. May the Lord be the staff of my age, and the portion of my soul! On him who has hitherto taken a fatherly care of me, I desire to cast my burdens, and rely for support and comfort, in the remaining part of my pilgrimage. If my dear children set their faces heavenward, and love the Lord Jesus, I think it will give me more comfort, than all the world could give without it.¹⁷

In the months following his wife's death, John Miller's health also began to deteriorate. Samuel continued his theological study under his father during this period, helping around the home while caring for his aging father.

15. Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller*, 1:45–46.

16. Margaret's piety was commemorated in a letter John wrote not long after her death: "The older she grew, the more she seemed pleased with the gospel plan of salvation, and a life of strict holiness. And though she was early and late attentive to her domestic affairs, studying always to redeem her time; yet I have reason to believe, that she retired three or four times a day, in a constant course; at which time, she read her Bible on her knees, and poured out her heart in fervent supplications at the throne of grace, frequently observing days of secret fasting, humiliation, and extraordinary prayer; in all which, I believe, she had much communion with her heavenly Father. In my absence, or inability by sickness, she stately kept up family prayer, in which she appeared remarkably solemn and engaged. She also loved the public worship and ordinances of the gospel, and was always grieved when unfavorable weather, or bodily indisposition, prevented her attendance on them." Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller*, 1:46.

17. Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller*, 1:48.

As time passed, Samuel Miller's sense of call deepened. Reflective comments in his diary on successive birthdays often bear witness to his spiritual development and burden for greater holiness in his life. The following entry is listed on the date of his twenty-first birthday, October 31, 1790:

This day I attained the *age* of *twenty-one* years. Bless the Lord, O my soul! and forget not all his benefits, in thus preserving my life and crowning me with his loving kindness and tender mercy. What reason have I more than ever to be humbled before God, that I have hitherto been so useless in the world—have so little glorified his name, or served my fellow creatures! Lord prepare me for extensive usefulness. Give me wisdom, understanding and strength to walk in all the ways of thy commandments blameless; and such activity and diligence, as to be a means of doing some good in the world.¹⁸

In April 1791, Samuel Miller presented himself to the Presbytery of Lewes to be brought under its care in preparation for licensure. Meeting on April 19 at Wicomico, Maryland, the presbytery made examination of his "experimental acquaintance with religion" and "views in seeking the holy ministry." He sustained examinations in Latin and Greek, and also preached a homily from 1 Corinthians 15:22.

Miller's exams were continued at a meeting of the presbytery on June 21, 1791. Here he provided a lecture on Luke 10:30–38, an exegesis on the question "Did Jesus descend into hell after His death?" and sustained exams in rhetoric and logic. Diary entries record Miller's care to balance his deepening doctrinal knowledge with appropriate application to his life.¹⁹

Tragedy again struck the Miller home with John Miller's death on July 22, 1791. Bereft of his "dear, honored, and venerable father," Samuel's loss was lightened by the knowledge that his father died in the full confidence of the gospel message of salvation in Christ that he had preached over the course of his many years of ministry. The temporal pain of his

18. Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller*, 1:50.

19. "O my God, whose I am and whom I am bound to serve, I entreat thee, as I advance in this pursuit, and whilst I am endeavoring to prepare myself to serve thee in the ministry of reconciliation, be pleased to add thy blessing to the whole. Oh grant me that 'preparation of the heart,' and that 'answer of the tongue,' which thou alone art able to give. O Lord, suffer me not to undertake to dispense the bread of life to others, in Christ's name, without being fed and nourished by it myself; without knowing, experimentally, 'what I say and whereof I affirm.'" Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller*, 1:53.

parting was offset by the resurrection promise that was the personal hope of both his father and mother and in which every Christian believer shares. As he reflected on his father's passing, Samuel encouraged his family to "make suitable improvement of it" by imitating "the bright example which was set before us, in the various departments of duty, by this our pious and excellent parent." Samuel said, "May we all endeavor to follow him as he followed Christ. May we never sully his unblemished reputation by irreligious or dishonorable conduct.... May we all prove worthy of such a father."²⁰

Licensure, Theological Studies

Following his father's death, Samuel remained on the family farm while continuing his preparation for licensure by the presbytery. Miller's diary records the God-centered focus of his studies during these days.²¹

On October 13, 1791, Samuel Miller was licensed by the Presbytery of Lewes. Meeting in Dover, Delaware, the presbytery approved Miller's exams in theology, "college studies," and a "popular" sermon preached from Romans 8:14.

Miller's licensure was a moment of great joy in the midst of the sadness that had filled his heart with the loss of his beloved parents.²² John Miller would have shared his son's joy in the progress he had made in the Christian life and found particular satisfaction in Samuel's licensure by the presbytery. John's prayers, pious life, and wise pastoral counsel were present, though, in a son whose calling would be in his father's footsteps as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

20. Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller*, 1:54.

21. "September 22, 1791. This day I set apart for fasting and extraordinary prayer, to renew my solicitations at the throne of grace for the blessing and assistance of heaven in pursuing my theological studies; in going on to prepare myself for the various important duties of a minister of the gospel and an ambassador of Christ; and, especially, to implore the Giver of all grace, to grant me his presence and blessing at the approaching session of Presbytery; when, with his permission, I expect to undergo a third examination, and possibly may be licensed." Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller*, 1:54–55.

22. "Oh, the solemnity of this transaction! To be a public teacher of the way of salvation! Who is sufficient for these things? O thou, with whom is the Spirit, vouchsafe to grant me thine enlightening, sanctifying and strengthening grace. Deliver me from vain glory and self-dependence. Help me to walk humbly with God, and daily to grow in conformity with thine image, and in preparation for thy service." Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller*, 1:55.

For the next few weeks, Miller served as a guest preacher in various congregations, but a sense of theological inadequacy prompted him to ask the presbytery's permission to complete additional theological studies under a seasoned theologian in preparation for ordination. The presbytery granted his request, and Miller soon relocated to Carlisle, Pennsylvania, to study under the Rev. Dr. Charles Nisbet, principal of Dickinson College.

A Scotch clergyman, distinguished scholar, and brilliant theologian, Nisbet was a popular instructor who had been serving at Dickinson since 1785. While circumstances in the curriculum did not provide Miller with the opportunity to hear formal lectures by Nisbet, the two men became lifelong friends. Miller and a few other students were welcomed into the Nisbet's home almost every evening for several hours of informal inquiry and conversation; here Miller was able to enjoy the breadth of Nisbet's learning and well-rounded personality. Nisbet's conversations with Miller influenced his views on the Christian ministry and modeled the mental culture necessary for becoming a good theologian. Miller would later write a biography of Nisbet in gratitude for the time he spent mentoring him.²³

Accepting a Pastoral Call

In early March 1792, Miller concluded his studies with Nisbet and journeyed to Long Island, New York, as a candidate for a vacant pulpit on the island. While there, he was invited to preach in New York City at the United Presbyterian congregations, which at the time were co-pastored by the Rev. Dr. John Rodgers, a longtime friend and fellow minister of Miller's late father.²⁴

Following his visit to New York, Miller returned to Delaware, where he soon received a call from his father's former congregation in Dover to serve as pastor. The United Presbyterian congregations in New York City

23. See Samuel Miller, *Memoir of the Rev. Charles Nisbet, D.D., Late President of Dickinson College, Carlisle* (New York: Robert Carter, 1840).

24. Miller published a lengthy biography of Rodgers in appreciation of his friendship and ministerial example. See Samuel Miller, *Memoirs of the Rev. John Rodgers, D.D., Late Pastor of the Wall-Street and Brick Churches in the City of New-York* (New York: Whiting and Watson, 1813). Because Rodgers's life was so intertwined with the development of colonial Presbyterianism, Miller's biography also serves as a valuable study of the early years of American Presbyterianism.

also had interest in securing pastoral ministry from Miller and issued him a call to serve as a co-pastor alongside the Rev. Drs. John Rodgers and John McKnight.

Miller, as might be imagined, found it difficult to decide which call he should accept. He set aside November 15, 1792, for a special day of prayer and fasting in order to seek divine direction. As Miller considered the options and where he might be of most use, he began to favor the congregations in New York City.²⁵

At a meeting of the presbytery held on November 20, 1792, Miller received and accepted the call from the United Presbyterian congregations of New York City at which time he requested dismissal of his membership in the Presbytery of Lewes to the Presbytery of New York. The request was approved, and he began making preparations for the move to New York. Following an emotional message to the congregation where his father had served, he bid farewell to the members whose lives had been intertwined for so many years with that of his own family, soliciting their prayers for the new field of ministry that lay before him in New York City.

25. "I confess myself to be rather inclined to favor the application from New York; and I hope for reasons which will stand the test of Christian examination. But my deceitful heart may lead me astray. O my God enlighten and guide me! If I know my own heart, I desire to go where I may, most effectually, by thy grace, promote the glory of God and the good of my fellow-men." Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller*, 1:65.