

Wisdom & Folly in Pastoral Ministry: Samuel Miller's Use of Antithesis in His Published Lectures

By Zachary Groff

In His Word, God has characterized the worship He requires as reverent, joyful, truthful, spiritual, and covenantal.¹ God speaks to His gathered people in certain elements of worship (the Call, Scripture Readings, Assurance of Pardon, Preaching, the Benediction, etc...), and His people speak to Him in certain other elements (Singing, Confession of Faith/Sin, Prayer, Offering, Taking of Oaths, etc...). His directive commanding us to pray in corporate worship especially demonstrates the covenantal, or dialogical, nature of well-regulated worship. In fact, there is a confessional basis for approaching the task (and privilege) of public prayer with both care and diligence. The Westminster Confession of Faith devotes two full paragraphs to prayer, but lists the remaining elements of public worship together in a single paragraph. Westminster Confession of Faith XXI.3–4

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1. While this is not the place for a full literature review, the following books are worth referencing in support of the characterization of worship described above: Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel Worship*, ed. Don Kistler, Modern Reprint Edition (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1990); Joseph A. Pipa and C.N. Willborn, eds., *The Worship of God* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2005); G. Van Dooren, *The Beauty of Reformed Liturgy* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Premier Publishing, 1980). For a helpful recent historical illustration of biblical worship, refer to Everett A. Henes, "Less Outward Glory: An Examination of Calvin's Reformation of Worship," *The Confessional Presbyterian Journal* 13 (2017): 121–128, 253.

2. Consider the Standards' treatment of Adoption. This glorious and important doctrine is limited to one paragraph in the Confession, and one question in each of the Catechisms.

3. For a recent book-length treatment of Miller's life and ministry, see James M. Garretson, *An Able and Faithful Ministry: Samuel Miller and the Pastoral Office* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014).

(Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day) give the following instructions regarding prayer:

3. Prayer, with thanksgiving, being one special part of religious worship, is by God required of all men: and, that it may be accepted, it is to be made in the name of the Son, by the help of his Spirit, according to his will, with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance; and, if vocal, in a known tongue.

4. Prayer is to be made for things lawful; and for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter: but not for the dead, nor for those of whom it may be known that they have sinned the sin unto death.

Mentioned before either the preaching of the Word or the administration of the sacraments, prayer occupies a conspicuously important position in the Confession's description of worship. Though the Larger and Shorter Catechisms pose questions about preaching (WLC 155–160; WSC 89–90) and sacraments (WLC 161–178; WSC 91–97) before prayer is introduced (WLC 178), both catechisms devote more questions to prayer (WLC 178–196; WSC 98–107) than to preaching and sacraments combined. Though a topic's frequency of mention or position within the Westminster Standards do not necessarily denote its relative importance,² it is clear that anyone who would identify as a confessional Presbyterian must have a keen interest in prayer.

Nineteenth Century American Presbyterian minister Samuel Miller (1769–1850) understood the importance of prayer in the church's public worship of God. As a pastor, Miller labored primarily in New York, and he afterwards served as one of the original faculty members of Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey.³ Toward the end of his life, he published a volume to instruct young ministers and seminarians in the practice

of public prayer. *Thoughts on Public Prayer* (1849) is Samuel Miller's final book-length publication.⁴ Due to its subject matter, it remains an important book for any man called to corporately represent (or lead) God's people in prayer.

In the first section of this article, I summarize *Thoughts on Public Prayer*, giving close attention to Miller's use of antithesis in promoting biblical methods of praying in public worship. One result of Miller's use of antithesis is that much of his book expresses a polemical tone against faulty practices. Miller's writing is also filled with an energetic urgency as he pleaded with the next generation of Presbyterian ministers. Considering the importance which Miller assigned to the ministerial duty of public prayer, and the observed weakness of public prayer in the church of his day, his tone and style is not out of place.

In the second section of this article, I illustrate how Miller's adoption of an at-times strident tone in *Thoughts on Public Prayer* compares to his writing style in other books and tracts published during his lifetime. Certainly, Miller's deeply held conviction about the importance of public prayer may have influenced his tone. When *Thoughts on Public Prayer* is analyzed alongside other works published in his lifetime, it is clear that his intended audience had an even greater influence over his writing style. To substantiate this claim, I compare Miller's *Thoughts on Public Prayer* to his published works on *Infant Baptism*⁵ and *The Utility and Importance of Creeds and Confessions*.⁶ In each of these works, there are points of stylistic continuity and different emphases in tone. Miller's volume on public prayer is especially worthy of close scrutiny not only because it contains helpful advice for men aspiring to serve the church through praying in corporate worship, but because it is his last published work, representing the fruit and maturation of decades of ministry. Any perceived stridency is not born out of youthful zeal, but rather reflects his chosen method of persuasion when addressing seminary students and young ministers about a matter of great significance to the church. He more frequently employed antithesis in his writing in works addressing seminary students and young ministers than in otherwise comparable prepared remarks to laypeople. As an eminent churchman and seminary professor in his day, his uses of contrast, comparison, and antithesis match stylistic features of biblical wisdom literature,⁷ befitting his practical and instructional purposes.⁸

The three examples of Miller's writing chosen for examination in this paper were selected for their different audiences, subjects, and dates of publication.

The most substantial of the three is *Thoughts on Public Prayer* (1849), which addressed seminary students and young ministers on the topic of a primary means of grace (corporate prayer). The work on infant baptism was published fifteen years prior in 1835, the contents of which were originally delivered to a local congregation on the topic of a different primary means of grace (the sacrament of baptism). The third example on creeds and confessions was originally published ten years earlier still in 1824 for the benefit of seminary students, and did not handle a means of grace for its subject matter. Though Miller's body of work is far more extensive than the three chosen examples,⁹ these selections allow for a test of the proposition that Miller's intended audience, more than his topic, influenced his writing style and method of argumentation.

THOUGHTS ON PUBLIC PRAYER AND SAMUEL MILLER'S USE OF ANTITHESIS

It was Miller's conviction that a ministerial duty as important as representing and leading God's people in public prayer requires special focus, preparation, and planning. One biographer of Miller astutely notes, "That Miller would devote his final literary efforts to this subject evidences the burden he felt for the worship practice of congregations in the corporate communion of their public prayers" (Garretson 130). By addressing those responsible for the public prayer ministry of the

4. Unless otherwise indicated, Samuel Miller quotations in this article are taken from Samuel Miller, *Thoughts on Public Prayer*, Modern Reprint Edition. (1849; repr. Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1985).

5. Samuel Miller, "Infant Baptism Scriptural and Reasonable: And Baptism by Sprinkling or Affusion, the Most Suitable and Edifying Mode," in *Miller on Presbyterianism & Baptism* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1835), 199–318.

6. Samuel Miller, "The Utility and Importance of Creeds and Confessions: Addressed Particularly to Candidates for the Ministry," (1824); cf. in *Doctrinal Integrity* (Dallas, TX: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1989), 1–72.

7. John A. Kitchen, *Proverbs: A Mentor Commentary*, Mentor Commentary Series (Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2006), 26–7; James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, Third Edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 63–4; Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 34–5.

8. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of Wisdom: A Redemptive-Historical Exploration of the Wisdom Books of the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2017), 23–24.

9. For a nearly exhaustive accounting of Samuel Miller's writings, see Wayne Sparkman, Samuel Miller, D. D. (1879–1850) An Annotated Bibliography, *The Confessional Presbyterian* 1 (2005): 11–40.

church, he hoped to encourage pastors to regard public prayer with the same esteem in which they held other functions of their ministerial office. Early in *Thoughts on Public Prayer*, Miller elevated the importance of corporate prayer by relating it to the corresponding and complementary duty of preaching. He wrote, “In prayer, we always *Speak to God*, in the way of his own appointment; in preaching, *God speaks to us* by his commissioned servant, if that servant preaches the preaching which the Master bids him” (14). Together, prayer and preaching enact the dialogue between God and His people that takes place in corporate worship.

Miller sought to meet a need in the church of his day by writing a volume dealing specifically with issues surrounding corporate prayer during public worship. He did so in six chapters that may be arranged in three topical groupings. The first three chapters provide helpful background information, examine issues surrounding public prayer, and introduce Miller’s proposed solution. Chapters three and four continue with a description and denunciation of faulty practices in corporate prayer. The book then closes with two chapters that describe and commend faithful examples of public prayer.

In his preface, Miller introduced his concern that Presbyterian ministers had approached the worship of God through the use of liturgies in such a way so as to fail to cultivate warmth and well-ordered zeal in devotion. “It has even occurred to me to doubt whether the well known doctrine of our beloved Church, with regard to Liturgies, may not have been so rigidly interpreted, and so unskillfully applied, as to lead to practical misapprehension and mischief in regard to the devotional part of the service of our sanctuaries” (4). Miller defined “Liturgy” and identified the issues facing the church with regard to liturgies later in the book, in chapter three. Miller’s main concern was that there were men in the church of his day who moved beyond commending liturgies as useful to insist upon requiring strict liturgical plans for properly worshipping God. As noted above, he anticipated that concern—and the antithesis between proper and faulty applications of liturgies—in the beginning of his preface, striking a polemical tone even before starting his introduction into his topic.

In the body proper of the volume, Miller explicitly stated his purpose in three different places. His main goal in writing the book was to impress upon his readers the importance of public prayer, and the need to prepare for it in a variety of ways. He clearly addressed the same audience he taught in his seminary classrooms: young Presbyterian ministers and seminarians.

I hope, in the following pages to satisfy every impartial reader, that public prayer is not only a divinely prescribed, but an unspeakably important ordinance; and that both the nature and the means of excellence in the dispensation of this ordinance, are such as not only to admit, but to demand appropriate study, and careful moral and mental culture (16).

My sole object is to impress on the mind of every reader, what I wish to be considered as the leading principle of this volume, viz.: that, even in the hands of the most able and pious men, high excellence in public prayer is not, ordinarily, to be attained without much enlightened attention being directed to the acquirement (35).

It is one of the main objects of the present volume, to impress upon the mind of every young Presbyterian minister who reads it, this sentiment, that while, on the one hand, the reading or recitation of prescribed prayers is by no means the best method of conducting the devotions of the sanctuary, and is liable to many weighty objections; so, on the other hand, it is a great mistake to imagine that sacred attention to the mode of conducting this service, and preparation for it can be safely neglected, or made the object of only occasional or superficial study; in short, that every Presbyterian minister who wishes to make the most of his services in the sanctuary, for the glory of God, and the best edification of his people, is bound to pay a greatly increased attention to the whole subject of public prayer (139).

However, in the introductory material preceding the statement of his plan, Miller leveled a well-deserved polemic against the liturgical formality of the Roman Catholic Church (12–13), and presented an antithesis between preaching on the one hand, and prayer on the other (13–14). He defined prayer and preaching as twin ordinances in a manner that he himself recognized might suggest unintended opposition of the two against each other. This recognition drove him to qualify his remarks, “It is not wise, however, to exalt either of these exercises at the expense of the other” (14). Later in the book, he employed antithesis not to highlight complementarity, but rather to commend certain practices at the expense of faulty innovations and ill-formed habits.

The introduction also included a comparison between those who give a proper esteem to public prayer and those who do not. Miller described the antithesis between “an humble, penitent, fervently pious Christian” (36) and the insincere man who adopts anything

“adapted to meet any other ear than that of the God of mercy, or to answer any other purpose than to express repentance toward God, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and simple, humble desire for the blessings asked for” (37) in his private prayers. Miller juxtaposed the sincere prayer and the contrived prayer in an antithetical comparison. In doing so, he made application to the personal devotional practices of the young men he addressed in his book. Rather than focusing merely on the outward show of public prayer, he began his project by pushing for a reformation of the heart in personal piety. The thrust and style of his writing clearly demonstrates that he made the heart his target, with public prayer in corporate worship serving as the occasion.

Miller included four other helpful observations as he laid out the background to his topic in the opening chapter. First, he affirmed the blessings of the Holy Spirit working in and through our natural faculties to accomplish God’s purposes in and through us. He helpfully wrote, “In all spiritual influence, God deals with us as rational creatures; not by superseding or suspending the use of our natural faculties; but by so quickening, elevating, enriching, and strengthening them, as to make them capable of greatly improved exercise” (18). His point echoes that of Westminster Confession of Faith V.3 (Of Providence), which reads, “God, in his ordinary providence, maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at his pleasure.” This point is foundational for the argument later in the book that effective extemporaneous public prayer requires careful planning on the part of the minister.

Second, he outlined the two requirements for diligent preparation for public prayer: the spirit or grace of sincere piety, and the gift of natural and spiritual quality of speech (19–23). Third, he provided four examples from history of prominent preachers who evidently neglected preparation for public prayer—William Twisse, Samuel Davies, Robert Hall (Baptist Minister), and Thomas Chalmers (25–35)—giving examples drawn from accounts of the men’s personal acquaintances. Fourth, he included a statement on the freedom of conscience that confessional Presbyterians possess to base every aspect of worship on God’s Word. He wrote, “Whatever is most agreeable to the word of God, and most edifying to the body of Christ, we are, happily, at full liberty to introduce, and progressively to modify” (40). This again illustrates Miller’s theological grounding in the Westminster Confession of Faith, as XX.2 (Of Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience) reads, “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in

anything, contrary to his Word; or beside it, in matters of faith, or worship.” Such liberty serves as a shield for men’s consciences against unbiblical impositions and innovations in worship. The Westminster Confession of Faith continues in XXI.1 (Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day), “But the acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.” Through Scripture, the Holy Spirit is both shield and guide in all areas of faith and practice, including—and especially—in worship.

Miller’s second chapter contains a description of the history of the church’s practice of public prayer. Miller began by charting the history of known practices of public prayer from the Old Testament church and the Hebrew synagogue setting to the New Testament and early Christian church environment. Early in this section, he drew an antithesis between New Testament prayer on the one hand, and undesirable “restraint and formality” (49) of rigid liturgical forms on the other hand. In the New Testament, Miller observed, “We see a still more marked absence of all confinement to servile forms” (49). Miller left no room for an appeal to the Lord’s Prayer as an example of a common prayer to be used on all occasions.

In six points, He demonstrated that the Lord’s Prayer was ever always a rubric, or “general directory” (50) for the church to use in framing its own unique prayers; that is, the early church did not regard it as a mandated form to be followed slavishly. First, Christ delivered the Lord’s Prayer to His disciples on different occasions for different purposes (50). Second, the exact wording of the Prayer varies from one Gospel to the other (51). Third, Miller observed that the prayer was technically adapted to the condition of the church before Pentecost, when the New Testament church was “set up” (51). Fourth, the biblical record does not include further instructions from Christ (or anyone else) for using the Lord’s Prayer subsequent to its delivery to the disciples (52). Fifth, the content of the Prayer itself does not include a clause for giving explicit thanks to God, which is commanded elsewhere (53). Finally, there is no further mention of the Lord’s Prayer or its strict use by the Apostles after Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension (54). Miller may not have forbidden the use of the Lord’s Prayer at this point in the book, but neither did he commend it as even an occasional form for use in public worship.

Through his discussion of the history of public prayer, Miller drew an antithesis between extemporaneous prayer and imposed common prayer according to set forms. He claimed in this chapter, “Prayer according to the taste and ability of each officiating minister, for the time being, without being trammelled by imposed forms, was the only method of public prayer in common use in the Christian Church” (61, see also 81–82). He then listed, described, and examined five activities which seeped into the practice of the church as it experienced spiritual declension and weakness over time. Miller’s list includes praying toward the east, prayers for the dead, prayers to the saints and to the Virgin Mary, prayers in an unknown tongue, and responses in public prayer (litanies). These were practices which, like imposed common prayer, Miller viewed as accretions on the practice of the church that compromised its purity, and should be rejected.

Finally, in this section, he discussed four biblical postures for public prayer: prostration (117–118), kneeling (118–119), bowing the head (119–120), and standing (121–127). In the lengthier discussion of standing for public prayer, he offered four reasons in favor of adopting the standing posture for all occasions of public prayer (125), and two objections against such a prescription (126–127). After defending a thesis in favor of standing for public prayer, Miller proceeded to develop his wholesale opposition to sitting for public prayer (127–130). This contrast of standing and sitting for public prayer is another example of Miller’s use of antithesis in building his argument for the proper regulation of public prayer. Miller described the abhorrent alternative posture of sitting in stark opposition to the ideal posture of standing.

In the following chapter dealing with arguments in favor of so-called “liturgies,” Miller continued to give background information before entering into a focused denunciation of faulty practices in public prayer. He opened this section by offering both lexical and etymological definitions for the term “liturgy.” Made up of the Greek words *leit* and *ergos*, “liturgy” may be rendered literally as “public work” (131). He then contrasted Romanist (mysticism-freighted ceremonial forms) and Protestant (public exercises defined by the church) liturgies (131); completely prescribed (Episcopalian), partially prescribed (Continental and Methodist churches), and extemporaneous (Presbyterian and Independent)

liturgies (132); and the directory-guided and prescribed forms of worship (135). He wrote of the early Scottish Presbyterian Directory of worship that “it was, in fact, rather a “Directory” for the worship of God, than a liturgy to be verbally and servilely repeated” (135). In this section, Miller argued not for a total ban on prescribed liturgy as-such, but rather he argued against required, common/universal, or preference for imposed liturgies. He asserted that “to impose forms of prayer at all times, and upon all persons who publicly minister in holy things, and to confine them to the use of such forms, is by no means either desirable or wise” (139). On the contrary, ministers must be guaranteed liberty of conscience to obey God’s Word in matters of ordering worship.

Miller then presented a lengthy discussion of arguments for and against a prescribed liturgy in thesis-antithesis arrangement (139–149). The arguments for a prescribed liturgy included the alleged practice of the Old Testament covenant community, the value of appropriating the model of the Lord’s Prayer, the alleged practice of the church throughout history, the granting of confidence to the worship leader and the congregation, its confessional usefulness, and its function as a guard against bad prayers of the minister’s own creation. Through his development of these arguments, he inserted objections that illustrated his method of presenting antithesis to rebut bad thinking. In response to the argument that prescribed liturgies help to foster and confirm a church’s confessional identity, he posed the rhetorical (and antithetical) question, “What shall we say of the sovereign power of a liturgy as a barrier against error, when we find orthodox and evangelical men, and the most thoroughly Popish Puseyites that ever entered a sanctuary, repeating the same words every Sabbath with apparent cordiality?” (146). Miller argued for the purging away of the religious externalism that often attends imposed formal prayers, and he did so by contrasting the ideal (“orthodox evangelical men”) and the unacceptable (“Popish Puseyites”) to show that such prescribed forms did nothing to distinguish them one from another. He was after a reformation of the heart, and not merely a reformation of outward manners that made insincere pastors appear pious and orthodox.

In response to the six arguments in favor of prescribed liturgies, Miller advanced seven arguments against the same (150–169).¹⁰ He argued against prescribed liturgies for public prayer by first using a *reductio ad absurdum* argument in applying the same logic to preaching. He then gave two arguments from

10. Whether or not he intended to answer an imperfect number (six) of arguments with a perfect number (seven) of arguments is impossible to know, absent additional evidence from Miller’s personal correspondence.

sola scriptura: negatively, there is “no countenance in the Word of God” for prescribed liturgies for prayers (151). Positively, the practice of the apostolic church excludes any such forms. Miller wrote, “we find testimony which plainly implies that no such forms were either prescribed or in use in the apostolic churches” (152–153). Fourth, prescribed prayers stifle the spirit and gift of prayer, two necessary qualities that Miller commended to readers who aspire to improve in the work of public prayer. Fifth, prescribed prayers naturally lack applicatory value. Sixth, genuine revival begets liberty in worship, not proscription. Finally, Miller argued that prescribed prayers are inadequate in exceptional circumstances for which there is no previously conceived common prayer. He concluded this lengthy attack upon his opponents’ position by writing, “These and other allied considerations, satisfy me, beyond a doubt, that the claims of liturgies, as the best method of conducting our public devotions, and, above all, as the *exclusive* method, cannot be sustained” (170). In this remark, Miller’s principal contention is clear—he was willing to allow for the use, but not for the exclusive use, of liturgies in public worship. Likewise, he was not opposed to the judicious employment of common prayers, but he utterly rejected the exclusive use of form prayers in public worship.

Before moving into a direct denouncement of faulty practices in public prayer, Miller pitted his concept of the ideal prayer ministry against the supposed usefulness of liturgical forms. He identified the conditions requisite for the success of extempore prayer: a pious and equipped ministry. Only in the absence of a godly and equipped ministry are liturgical forms useful to the church. Conversely, when the ministers of the church are godly and appropriately equipped for the work of the ministry, there is no need for prescribed forms in public prayer. The Westminster Assembly’s Directory for Public Worship was intended to strike the balance between imposed forms and “opening the door too wide to irregular and undigested effusions in public worship” (172–173). One issue that Miller’s presentation raises is whether or not it is appropriate to view the Directory as a concession, or even as a crutch, for inferior ministers. Whether or not he might have conceded that the Directory was indeed a crutch or so-called “necessary evil” for the church and its ministers, he regarded the Directory as a helpful guide to ministers in the work of preparing for Lord’s Day worship.

As is made clear above, Miller spilled a great deal of ink refuting faulty practices in public worship, and particularly those that used prescribed forms in public

prayer. There is no need to repeat that analysis at this point, but it is important to recognize that Miller continued his polemical method and tone into the two following sections of the book, where he condemned faulty practices and commended faithful practices in public prayer.

Miller first listed 18 frequent faults of public prayer that he had observed in a lifetime of ministry (177–215). His concrete examples are helpful and cautionary. He condemned the repetition of pet words and phrases, undue hesitation in speech, and low-brow, or ungrammatical speech. On this last point, he wisely advised his readers to show love to their cultured and educated congregants by avoiding offense resulting from poor grammar. He wrote, “he who undertakes to be the leader and helper of others in their devotions, ought to remember that he is a debtor to the wise, as well as the unwise, to the learned as well as the illiterate” (182). He also cautioned against irregularity and lack of orderliness, inappropriate fixation upon minute details, excessive length, and excessive use of figurative speech. His specific advice against a too liberal use of figurative speech is just as important to keep in mind nearly 170 years after its original publication. He wrote of figurative speech, that “some greatly admire it and call it an eloquent prayer. But the fervent utterance of the heart is always simple” (190).

Continuing his catalog of faulty practices, he forbade any mention of partisan politics and celebrities, writing that “in the house of God persons of all political opinions may meet, harmoniously and affectionately meet, provided they all agree in acknowledging the same Saviour, and glorying in the same hope of Divine mercy” (191). He declaimed sentimentality as resulting in “expressions of the amatory class” (194), and he corrected flippant, frivolous speech by calling for meekness in preference to cleverness. He strictly forbade excessive didactic language and allusion to hard doctrines that would rile up unbelievers in the midst of the assembly. Consider Westminster Confession of Faith III.8 (Of God’s Eternal Decree):

The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men, attending the will of God revealed in his Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel.

Not surprisingly, Miller's advice repeatedly echoes the confessional standards of the Presbyterian Church. He abominated irreverent familiarity of language, unseasonable (and insincere) humility and self-deprecation, flattery (particularly of guests and visitors), lack of focus, hasty endings, and quick delivery in speech. Miller summed up the antithesis to these 18 faults within the last few pages of this section. He wrote, "Words 'few,' 'well considered,' and 'well ordered,' are the inspired characteristics of a good prayer" (211). He then moved on in the next section to elaborate upon this brief characterization.

In the third section of the book, comprising the last two chapters, Miller described and promoted faithful practices in public prayer. He first described 15 traits of faithful prayer in public worship, frequently illustrating the good practices by comparing them to their antitheses in bad practices. First, public prayers ought to be scriptural in content, for such language is always right, safe, edifying, simple, tender, experimental, and hospitable to those in the congregation. On the other hand, scriptural prayer must not result in a servile and obtuse constraint, for that would take Scripture out of context, and would misapply it in an embarrassing manner (219–225).

Effective prayer is also orderly, comprehensive (general in nature), and appropriately succinct. Miller provided a helpful motivation for succinctness when he wrote, "The fact is, it ought to be our aim in prayer, as well as in preaching, to leave off before weariness approaches, and in that full tide of elevated feeling which becomes the later as well as the earlier stages of that solemn exercise" (231). Well-ordered public prayer is seasonable and appropriate to the occasion upon which it is offered, and marked by an evangelical tone and instructiveness in the gospel. Miller testified, "Truth is the food of the soul. Gospel truth is that on which the Christian lives and grows from day to day" (233). Good public prayer covers a variety of topics, incorporates a variety of doxologies, includes evangelistic petitions for the spread of the gospel, uses the various names and titles of God, expresses the confident hope of the Christian believer, evidences clear purpose, and incorporates the appropriate and occasional use of the Lord's Prayer. Miller wrote of the Lord's Prayer, "We believe and teach that the occasional, the frequent use of it, is proper, and sufficient to meet every demand that the most scrupulous regard to the principle of Christian obligation can lay upon us" (249). Of central importance for good public prayer is humility. Miller contended that "we can only hope to succeed by having the heart

right" (252). Finally, public prayer should conclude with a strong "Amen."

The next chapter includes Miller's advice for attaining excellence in public prayer. First, personal devotional exercise is absolutely necessary. By way of contrast, Miller wrote, "It is an old maxim, that no one was ever truly eloquent who did not really and deeply *feel*; who did not truly and heartily enter into the spirit of the subject concerning which he undertook to speak" (262). After describing the man lacking in sincere personal devotion to God, Miller then proceeded to describe men in his life who demonstrated warm relationship with God in their public prayers. Samuel Miller the seminary professor here put on full display his concern for the hearts of his students. Though the historical groundwork and catalog of faulty practices were important to the development of his argument against strict imposition of liturgical forms and common prayers, Miller's experiential motivation is at the heart of the book.

Miller was opposed to mandated liturgies because he saw them as a stifling influence that also allowed men to grow lazy in their spiritual communion with God. He was personally acquainted with the great privilege of special intimacy with God that accompanies tending to the church, and he abhorred any extra-biblical requirement that would threaten that privilege. Rather, Miller pushed an agenda that would cultivate intimacy with God in the lives of his readers. He poignantly observed, "I have been sometimes surprised and delighted to find plain unlettered men performing this duty with a readiness and richness both of thought and expression, superior to those exhibited by many learned and eloquent divines; convincing every fellow-worshipper that they had acquired the precious gift not by literary study or discipline, but by habitual and intimate communion with God" (265). Miller recommended several measures to be taken for the cultivation of a vibrant spiritual life.

First, personal devotion to God frequently involves the reading of good books, and Miller understood that. His second point of advice was for men engaged in public prayer to study good instructional material on the subject (268). He specifically recommended *A Discourse concerning the Gift of Prayer* (1670) by Bishop Wilkins, *A Method for Prayer* (1710) by Matthew Henry, *The Spirit of Prayer* (1677) by Rev. Nathaniel Vincent, *A Guide to Prayer* (1730) by Dr. Isaac Watts, and a number of collections of forms of prayer (by Jenks, Bishop Andrews, Bishop Kenn, Bennet, Jeremy Taylor, Scott, and Jay). He also recommended the devotional use of historical Reformed and Presbyterian confessions, catechisms, and

commentaries on the same, including Thomas Vincent's *Commentary on the Shorter Catechism*.¹¹

He directed his readers to memorize lengthy portions of Scripture, prioritizing passages from the Psalms, Isaiah, Daniel, and the New Testament Epistles, including Revelation (280). Next, those responsible for praying in assemblies of public worship must be always mindful and alert to events and providences worthy of public prayer (284). The odious alternative is the man who either neglects to bring such matters to the throne of grace in public prayer when everyone in the room has them on their mind, or even worse, does so improperly and clumsily. Miller wrote, "How worthy of censure is that minister who, in the midst of occurrences which occupy every heart, and dwell upon every tongue, will not spend a thought in preparing to present before the throne in the most acceptable manner those petitions which so many around him feel a deep and tender interest!" (288–289). Another useful exercise for developing effectiveness and excellence in public prayer is the practice of writing out devotional compositions (prayers) on a regular basis. Miller believed that "the true plan is to write often; to write much; to store the mind with ample furniture for the exercise; but to leave the utterance of the moment to the impulses of a feeling, gushing heart" (300). This discipline of writing out devotional material is just as helpful in seasons of life that do not involve frequent opportunities for public prayer as it is in times of regular praying ministry.

In his conclusion, Miller returned to the antithesis between careful preparation in preaching and negligent laziness in public prayers. This is seen clearly in a rhetorical question he posed, asking,

How shall we estimate either the judgment or the fidelity of him, who spares no pains to improve, enrich, and elevate the character of his sermons, from week to week, while that of his public prayers seems to engage but little thought; to call forth little or no effort; is marked with little or no improvement; and goes on from year to year, in the same dull routine as a mere secondary concern? (304–305)

Yet, as he did earlier in his treatise, Miller deftly handled the antithesis so as not to pit these two ordinances—preaching and prayer—against each other, but rather to lift prayer to the rank of preaching in the estimation of his audience. In this project, he made a valiant effort worthy of study and emulation.

SAMUEL MILLER'S AUDIENCES AND HIS USE OF ANTITHESIS

As noted above, Miller's style of writing in *Thoughts on Public Prayer* resembles the style of biblical wisdom literature in highlighting the way of righteousness by juxtaposing to it the way of foolishness. This characteristic of his last published work matches his purpose in that he sought to give practical and persuasive instruction to the next generation of ministers as they led congregations of Christ's church in public prayer. This stylistic quality also distinguishes his work on public prayer from another work of his dealing with a means of grace, his *Infant Baptism, Scriptural and Reasonable: and Baptism by Sprinkling or Affusion, the Most Suitable and Edifying Mode*, first published in July, 1834.

The prefatory remarks on *Infant Baptism* make clear that Miller's audience was popular and his purpose apologetic. Miller delivered the original lectures that served as the basis of the published work at a church in Freehold, NJ, and he sought "to present the subject in that brief, plain, popular manner which is adapted to the case of those who read but little ... for the use of those Presbyterians who are continually assaulted, and sometimes perplexed, by their Baptist neighbours" (*Infant Baptism*, 200). Though his subject might have invited a polemical tone marked by sharp contrasts between right and wrong, the work rather bears a didactic, lecture-like quality to it. In four lengthy discourses, and five shorter notes, he presented the case for infant baptism, defended it against objections, presented the case for sprinkling/pouring as being the proper mode of baptism, drew practical conclusions, and took up brief explorations of several theological, practical, and historical issues of interest in relation to baptism.

There are some examples of contrast and antithesis peppered throughout the work. However, they are not marked by the same urgent tone as the examples in

11. The less familiar works cited are: Benjamin Jenks, *Prayers and Offices of Devotion* (1697). Lancelot Andrewes, *The Private Prayers of Bishop Andrews* (1675; New manual of private devotions, 1810). Thomas Kenn (Ken), *A Manual of Prayers for the use of the scholars of Winchester College: and all other devout Christians* (1686). Thomas Bennet, *Devotions: viz. Confessions, petitions, intercessions, and thanksgivings, for every day of the week* (1702). Jeremy Taylor, *The rvle and exercises of holy living ... together with prayers containing the whole duty of a Christian and the parts of devotion fitted to all occasions and furnish'd for all necessities* (1650). John Scott, *The Christian Life ... with directions for private devotion and forms of prayer fitted to the several states of Christians* (1681). William Jay, *The Domestic Minister's Assistant* (1820). Miller may have had in mind various collections made up of several of these men's work.

Thoughts on Public Prayer. Toward the beginning of the first discourse, Miller introduced the anthropological basis¹² for his biblical sacramentology with an aphorism which stands as an example of his milder style in *Infant Baptism*. “For, as our bodies in this world of sin and death, often become sources of moral mischief and pain, so, by the grace of God, they are made inlets to the most refined moral pleasures, and means of advancement in the divine life” (Miller, *Infant Baptism*, 201). He presented before his listeners two alternatives, “moral mischief and pain” or “moral pleasures, and means of advancement in the divine life.” Conspicuously, this is the clearest example of contrast or antithesis in the work, not otherwise required by the context. Additional examples¹³ from *Infant Baptism* may be attributed more to the demands of context (meeting specific objections phrased in terms of contrast) than to stylistic decisions. Though both *Thoughts on Public Prayer* and *Infant Baptism* offer defenses of Presbyterian practices of the means of grace against divergent traditions, they differ in terms of style. Other differences between them concern their original audiences and their dates of publication. A brief consideration of one of Miller’s earlier works shows that the matter of audience more greatly influenced Miller’s style than the circumstance of publication (or composition) date.

As disagreements over confessional subscription flared up in the courts of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) during the 1820s and 1830s, Samuel Miller emerged as a champion of the pro-confessional stance of the Old School wing of the denomination, even as he sought to maintain ecclesiastical union with his erring brothers (see Garretson, 113–129). Through the course of the controversy, he produced several written works for public consumption in defense of strictly maintaining the Presbyterian Church’s doctrinal standards. He based *The Utility and Importance of Creeds and Confessions* (1824; reprinted 1833) on material from a lecture delivered to seminary students at Princeton Theological Seminary, and the stylistic commonalities with *Thoughts on Public Prayer* are striking.

Miller divided his remarks in *Creeds and Confessions* into four parts. In the first, he presented arguments in favor of publishing and maintaining creeds. He then proceeded to answer common objections to the use of creeds. He briefly defended the thoroughness of

Reformed creeds and confessions before finally delivering concluding practical remarks. The practical nature of creeds and confessions is made clear in Miller’s common definition for each of them as

an exhibition, in human language, of those great doctrines which are believed by the framers of it to be taught in the Holy Scriptures; and which are drawn out in regular order, for the purpose of ascertaining how far those who wish to unite in church fellowship are really agreed in the fundamental principles of Christianity (Miller, *Creeds and Confessions*, 5).

His principal argument which he developed throughout the course of the lecture demonstrates the importance of creeds and confessions: “The adoption of such a creed is not only lawful and expedient, but also indispensably necessary to the harmony and purity of the visible Church” (Miller, *Creeds and Confessions*, 6). For Miller, a faithful church is by necessity also a confessional church.

In making his case for the church’s duty to produce and promote creeds and confessions, Miller presented seven complementary arguments. Throughout, he employed antithesis in illustrating both the need and desirability for doctrinal standards. First, he argued, creeds and confessions are necessary for the maintenance of unity in a church. Miller pointed out that the two alternatives of subscribing to the Bible alone or perpetuating an unspoken understanding are equally unworkable and result in chaos. However, the proper employment of sound creeds and confessions provides a way out of doctrinal error and confusion. He wrote in support of doctrinal standards for church membership, “As long as such a test is faithfully applied, she cannot fail of being in some good degree united and harmonious. And when nothing of the kind is employed, I see not how she can be expected, without a miracle, to escape all the evils of discord and corruption” (Miller, *Creeds and Confessions*, 11). The overall picture is one of two alternatives—standard or no standard—with two results—agreement or disagreement. Miller appended this antithetical presentation of two competing options as a closing illustration toward the end of the section in which he developed the argument that creeds and confessions are necessary for unity in the church. Throughout the course of the lecture, he followed this same pattern, closing his individual arguments with a comparative illustration.

Miller’s second argument proceeded to demonstrate that without a stabilizing creed, the church would

12. He describes the holistic nature of the human person as both body and soul, distinct but inseparably united.

13. I count five possible examples on pages 230, 233, 257–8, 274–5, and 277–8.

inevitably fall into compromise. Such compromise necessarily follows dependence upon a variable standard for pronouncing judgement or making decisions. He wrote of churches in a common denomination that "they must either have such "a form of sound words," which they have voluntarily adopted, and pledged themselves to one another to "hold fast," or they can have no security that any two or more successive decisions concerning soundness in the faith will be alike" (Miller, *Creeks and Confessions*, 13). The two options set before the church are clear: creed or compromise. He went on to illustrate this in the fifth argument in this section, that church history (experience) proves that creedal statements and standards are necessary to maintain purity of doctrine, and to filter out heretics.

After describing creeds as obligatory for a church's doctrinal transparency in his third argument in this section, Miller then argued that published confessional documents and diligent theological research promote one another. He wrote,

The fact is, when men love gospel truth well enough to study it with care, they will soon learn to estimate its value; they will soon be disposed to "contend for it" against its enemies, who are numerous in every age; and this will inevitably lead them to adopt and defend that "form of sound words" which they think they find in the sacred Scriptures. On the other hand, let any man imbibe the notion that creeds and confessions are unscriptural, and of course unlawful, and he will naturally and speedily pass to the conclusion, that all contending for doctrines is useless, and even criminal... if, in a word, they consider it as unnecessary, and even criminal, to select from the mass of scriptural truth, and to defend, as such, the fundamental doctrines of the gospel; then, nothing short of miracle can prevent them from sinking into that coldness and sloth with respect to the study of doctrine, and finally into the deplorable "lack of knowledge" by which millions are constantly "destroyed" (Miller, *Creeks and Confessions*, 17, 19).

Miller here presented a picture in which the nurturing of confessional commitments works in a kind of feedback loop with sincere study into the things of God. As a believer becomes more familiar with Scripture, his esteem for God's truth becomes increasingly pronounced, to the point that he would defend it against injury and confusion. For Miller, an effective defense of God's truth must be maintained through summarization and systematization of that truth into confessional documents. Such documents also promote the further

exploration and study of the truth (in all its implications) which they serve to defend.

Miller gave further evidence for his fourth argument in his sixth argument, which is that the most forceful opponents of creedal formulations are latitudinarians and heretics. Whereas lovers of doctrinal truth are wholly comfortable with subscribing to a confession of the truth, those who eschew confessional subscription seek to downplay distinctions that would label differing views as either true or false. He wrote,

It is an invariable characteristic of the orthodox that they lay great stress on the knowledge and reception of truth; that they consider it as necessary to holiness; that they deem an essential part of fidelity to their Master in heaven to consist in contending for it and maintaining it in opposition to all the forms of error. On the contrary, it is almost as invariable a characteristic of modern heretics, and more especially of those who fall under the general denomination of Unitarians, that they profess lightly to esteem modes of faith; that they manifest a marked indifference to truth; they, for the most part, maintain, in so many words, the innocence of error; and hence very naturally reprobate, and even vilify, all faithful attempts to oppose heresy, and to separate heretics from the Church (Miller, *Creeks and Confessions*, 24-25).

Again, Miller compared two alternatives in a presentation of irreconcilable thesis and antithesis. He presented to his students two paths which they could follow. In this argument, any middle-ground would end in latitudinarian compromise. Concluding this section of arguments in favor of using creeds and confessions, Miller simply pointed out that creeds are inescapable in controversies of religion and ecclesiastical practice. Even the harshest detractors against creedal statements must set a standard for public teaching. To require a man to forsake all confessions is nothing less than to impose upon him a self-contradicting creed.

In the second section of his lecture, Miller answered five common objections to creeds and confessions. In his answers to the first three objections, he employed comparison, contrast, and stark antithesis to demonstrate the absurdity of the objections and to illustrate his counterarguments. To the objection that creeds will eclipse the Bible in thoroughly confessional churches, Miller directed his audience to consider the Reformed churches of Scotland, the Netherlands, France, and Geneva at the height of their spiritual vitality and confessional concern, comparing them to the rest of church

history. He inquired as to whether “any churches, since the days of the Apostles, ever discovered more reverence for the Scriptures, or treated them with more devout regard, as the only perfect standard of faith and practice, than they” (Miller, *Creeds and Confessions*, 33–34). In Miller’s estimation, there exist no better examples of high regard for Scripture in history than those found in thoroughly confessional and creedal churches.

Miller turned the objection that strict confessionalism interferes with the individual’s liberty of conscience around on its head by illustrating how the absence of confessional fidelity injures the church. He did this by presenting two options that lay before the church with regards to maintaining a creedal standard in the examination of candidates for the ministry. He wrote in relation to strict confessional subscription,

It is so far from encroaching on the “rights” of others; so far from being chargeable with “oppression;” that it is really, in the most enlightened manner, and on the largest scale, maintaining the rights of conscience; and that for such a church, instead of doing this, to give up its own testimony to the truth and order of God’s house; to surrender its own comfort, peace, and edification, for the sake of complying with the unreasonable demands of a corrupt individual, would be to subject itself to the worst of slavery (Miller, *Creeds and Confessions*, 42).

The church either may maintain a high standard or may surrender it. The result of the former is the ensuring of churchwide Christian liberty; the result of the latter is the giving up of several crucial requisites for ecclesiastical vitality. As in the previous section of *Creeds and Confessions*, Miller employed these antithetical propositions and illustrations as closing statements for each of his arguments.

The third objection claimed that the enforcement of subscription to creeds and confessions discourages intellectual honesty in the pursuit of knowledge that may, it is assumed, contradict the confession to which one has subscribed. Miller proceeded first to make the point that any candidate for the ministry should be sufficiently settled in his theological convictions before taking up a call to the ministry. Having done that, he then demonstrated that the issue in this objection is not so much subscription to a confession as it is individual honesty. He wrote, “Truly upright and pious men will always follow their convictions; while, with regard to those of an opposite character, their light, whether they remain or depart, will be found to be of no value, either to themselves, or the Church of God” (Miller, *Creeds*

and Confessions, 47). For seminary students and young ministers, Miller presented an antithesis that pitted the righteous man against the unrighteous man. Not only does this antithesis evoke biblical passages comparing the proverbial honest man with the proverbial charlatan, but it also forcefully impresses upon the minds of young and aspiring clergymen the need to constantly examine themselves and their views in the maintenance of their ordination vows. The fourth and fifth objections in this section concern the supposed real effects of confessions, that, negatively, they have failed to fulfill their purpose, or positively, they have produced heightened discord and strife. To the former, Miller pointed out, “This objection evidently proceeds on the principle, that a remedy which does not accomplish everything, is worth nothing” (Miller, *Creeds and Confessions*, 48). Such a principle, he went on to prove, is faulty and does nothing to contradict the usefulness of creeds and confessions. To the fifth objection, Miller provided three responses questioning the objection’s veracity and arguing in favor of the desirability of defending truth against error. The alternative to defending the truth is to surrender it and to fall into error, which is unacceptable to the church as an institution founded upon the truth.

In the next brief section, Miller addressed the issue of how extensive creeds ought to be. Arguing for creeds that go beyond bare fundamentals of Christian religion, Miller drew several denominational comparisons. First, he compared Presbyterians to Independents and Congregationalists in matters of polity, such as the licensing of preachers and the administration of the sacraments. Then, he compared paedobaptists to antipaedobaptists in their opposing views of the proper recipients of baptism. Finally, he distinguished Presbyterians from Prelatists (Episcopalians, Anglicans, etc.) in their views of ordination. In each of Miller’s illustrations, he used comparison to support his point that creeds and confessions need to be extensive enough to settle these differences. A sufficiently extensive confession of faith will maintain ecclesiastical unity by providing definition and transparency of conviction. By necessity, the adoption of a sufficiently extensive confession of faith will not be all-inclusive of every genuine Christian believer. However, public adoption of extensive confessional standards will help believers to align themselves with that particular expression of Christ’s church which they believe to be truest to the Bible’s teaching on these contested—but important—doctrinal issues.

In his concluding remarks, Miller offered six practical applications that follow from the rest of his lecture. At the opening of this section, Miller observed concerning

confessional subscription, “The subject, beloved pupils, on which I have been addressing you, is eminently a practical one. It enters deeply into many questions of personal and official duty” (Miller, *Creeds and Confessions*, 58). Miller’s concluding remarks in this section prove again that his writing style and the tone of his argumentation depend more on his audience (“beloved pupils”) than on his subject matter (“a practical one”). His first practical observation is that creeds do not oppress the truth at all, but the so-called “liberty” of those who oppose the use of creeds results in enslaving chaos. Too lengthy to quote here, Miller extensively developed this antithetical comparison to substantiate his observation (Miller, *Creeds and Confessions*, 58–59). His second application to his audience—seminary students aspiring to ordained church leadership—was a forceful reminder that subscription to a confession or creed is no mere formality, but a solemn act of obligation.

He then answered the question of how to proceed considering the entirety of his lecture up to that point. In reference to the man who changes his views and cannot continue in good conscience with a particular body, Miller wrote, “When he ceases to be able to do this, without sinning against God, he will, if he is an honest man, immediately withdraw. If he remains, and suffers himself habitually to violate his engagement, under the pretence of benefitting the body to which he has vowed allegiance, he will be chargeable with the sin of treacherously and basely ‘doing evil that good may come’” (Miller, *Creeds and Confessions*, 63). Again, Miller presented a pair of antithetical options—one truthful and the other dishonest—to admonish his pupils to choose the way of honesty and integrity. His fourth observation further developed his view of the effects on the church of dishonest clergymen. He wrote,

Ministers, my young friends, may be said to hold in their hands the interests of the Church, to a degree which no other class of men do; and which ought to make them tremble under a sense of their responsibility!... On the one hand, if the ministers of religion be generally enlightened, orthodox, holy, diligent, and faithful men, the church to which they belong will never fail to display the influence of this character in happy results. On the other hand, never was the Church, in any country or age, corrupted, divided, and ruined, but the mischief was done by its ministers (Miller, *Creeds and Confessions*, 65).

Pressing home his point, Miller contrasted not only the divergent characters but the divergent influences of two

alternatives. In his fifth observation—that members and ministers alike are duty-bound to promote the doctrinal standards of their chosen church—Miller employed antithesis to call his audience to harbor affection for cherished creedal formulations and confessional standards. He wrote, “Resist always, to the utmost of your power, the littleness of sectarian bigotry, and strive to banish it from the church. But, at the same time, cherish among her members an enlightened attachment to that particular branch of the family of Christ in which their lot is cast” (Miller, *Creeds and Confessions*, 69). Rather than expressing fondness for a particular church by levying uncharitable attacks on those without, it is incumbent upon the devoted churchman to cultivate a heightened sense of commitment to the ecclesiastical tradition with which he most closely identifies. Miller’s final observation in this section is that anti-creedal sentiment does great harm to the church, and is to be lamented by all those who come across it.

Repeating his pattern from individual sections of the lecture, Miller closed the whole with a benediction in the pattern of Psalm 1, numerous Proverbs, or Christ’s Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, using antithesis to bless and spur on his readers to good deeds. He wrote,

Happy are they who, taking the word of God for their guide, and walking in “the footsteps of the flock,” continually seek the purity, the peace, and the edification of the Master’s family; who, listening with more respect to the unerring Oracle, and to the sober lessons of Christian experience, than to the delusions of fashionable error, hold on their way, “turning neither to the right hand nor the left,” and considering it as their highest honor and happiness to be employed as humble, peaceful instruments in building up that “kingdom which is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost!” May God grant to each of us this best of all honors! And to his name be the praise, forever! Amen! (Miller, *Creeds and Confessions*, 72).

Though Miller originally composed his lecture on the use of creeds and confessions over twenty years before his book on public prayer, his use of antithesis from beginning to end stands out as a stylistic continuity. In giving parting thoughts to seminary students in both works, he used antithesis to leave them with something that was both memorable and easy to call to mind. In the case of *Thoughts on Public Prayer*, Miller urged his reading audience to remember that public prayer is just as important for the spiritual vitality of the church as faithful preaching of God’s Word. In *Creeds and Confessions*,

Miller placed before his listeners a choice between competing sources of practical instruction: “the unerring Oracle” of God’s Word and “the delusions of fashionable error.” In both works, Miller employed antithesis for the sake of his audience, to spur them on to faithful service in their high calling as ministers of prayer, Word, and sacrament.

CONCLUSION

The importance of Miller’s rhetorical style in these works goes beyond mere literary curiosity. Miller’s use of antithesis to contrast biblically faithful ecclesiastical and liturgical practices with unscriptural alternatives matches biblical warnings against following the way of the fool. Like a concerned father offering sound advice founded on biblical wisdom to his sons, Miller addressed his students with a deep concern for both their ministries and their own souls. Those offering doctrinal rebuke in the church today would do well to imitate Miller insofar as he himself faithfully adopted biblical rhetoric in his persuasive argumentation.

Particularly in the areas of public worship and public theology, Miller’s example ought to be heeded. Whereas most Christian fathers will never preach to their children from a pulpit and should not administer sacraments in the context of private family worship, they are commanded to pray with their families, to confess the

faith with their children, and to sing praises to God in their homes. Insofar as ministers serve as examples to the men in their congregations, they must equip fathers to lead their families in prayer, profession, and praise. When a minister stands before a congregation to pray, he not only speaks before God on behalf of the congregation, but he also provides a model of prayer to the families and individuals that make up the flock under his care. Likewise, a congregation’s corporate confession of faith will be only as strong as the conviction of its officers. The effect of doctrinal compromise in the teaching office of the church will make its way into the homes of families.

Considering the relationship between prayer, confession of faith, and spiritual well-being in Christian families, Miller’s use of antithesis and contrast is not only persuasive, but biblical. The identification and subsequent rejection of sinful foolishness always accompanies the promotion of wisdom in faith and practice in the church. In his addresses before the rising generation of preachers, pastors, and churchmen of his day, Samuel Miller echoed both the message and style of Proverbs 15:7–9. “The lips of the wise spread knowledge, but the hearts of fools are not so. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight. The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but He loves one who pursues righteousness.”■

In Brief: Samuel Miller: Prayer Prior to Preaching

4. GO FROM YOUR KNEES TO THE PULPIT. The more thoroughly your mind is steeped, if I may be allowed the expression, in the spirit of prayer, and of communion with God, when you ascend the sacred desk, the more easy and delightful will it be to preach, the more rich and spiritual will your preaching be, the more fervent and natural your eloquence, and the greater the probability that what you say will be made a blessing. Be assured, my dear young friend, after all the rules and instructions which have been given on the subject of pulpit eloquence—and which in their place have great value—that which unspeakably outweighs all the rest in importance, is that you go to the sanctuary with a heart full of your subject, warmed with love to your Master, and to immortal souls, remembering too, that the eye of that Master is upon you, and that of the sermon which you are about to deliver, you must soon give an account before His judgment seat. With these sentiments in full force, it is always desirable, both for your own sake and that of others, that you should enter the pulpit. And I know of no means more likely to produce them, than

humble importunity before the throne of grace. Samuel Miller, D. D. Hughes Oliphant Old, *Letters on Clerical Manners and Habits. Addressed to a student in the Theological Seminary at Princeton, N.J.* (1827; Third Edition, Princeton: Published by Moore Baker, 1835) 257–258; Revised edition (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1852), 249. This work was “perhaps the most popular and and [*sic*] widely circulated production of his pen, if we except his tracts on Presbyterianism and Baptism. It had no doubt occupied his thoughts, more or less definitely, for a number of years; and the subject which it unfolded had, evidently, been with him a life-long and favorite study. His observation of successive classes of students in the Seminary had, certainly, deepened all his impressions of the importance of much more attention to this subject, on the part especially of ministers of the Gospel, than they usually gave, or considered needful.” Beginning in 1852, this work was placed in “the catalogue of the Presbyterian Board of Publication, for permanent issue.” Samuel Miller, *Life of Samuel Miller, D. D.*, volume 2 (1869), 123.■