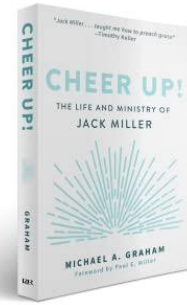




Michael A. Graham, *Cheer Up! The Life and Ministry of Jack Miller* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020).

A brief Commendation, by Tim J. R. Trumper.

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I never met Jack Miller. Yet, on one occasion in the early 1990s I was taken to Cole Abbey (Free Church of Scotland) in London, to hear Dr. Miller give a lunchtime talk. I can still see him in my mind's eye illustrating a point but recall nothing of what he said. Truthfully, the experience was anticlimactic. I did not know, then, that I would one day teach at Westminster Seminary where he had taught and later write a book to plead for a more balanced assessment of his Sonship Discipleship Course (*When History Teaches Us Nothing: The Reformed Sonship Debate in Context*). Thus, I came to Michael Graham's study (first in its doctoral form) with much interest, but as neither an insider nor as a heavy critic of Dr. Miller.

In sending out complimentary copies of the biography, P&R have asked, however, not for feedback about Dr. Miller but for help in spreading word about the book. This I am happy to do and with sincerity. A number of reasons come to mind.

First, the book is most readable. It flows well in style and content and was most enjoyable to read. The book is attractively produced and, with welcome first and last words from Paul Miller (son) and Rose Marie Miller (wife), has an air of authenticity about it.

Second, the biography sheds light on the wider context of conservative Presbyterianism in the second half of the twentieth century.¹ While this might narrow the field of interest among readers, it is also possible that Miller's influence on the likes of Tim Keller might open up the inner world of Presbyterianism to those who know little of the Reformed tradition. Those already fascinated by the history of Presbyterianism will welcome this extension of their knowledge up to the recent past.

Third, the intertwined lives of Jack and Rose Marie Miller accent the grace of God. Graham's evident admiration of the Millers does not preclude him from covering the faults and failings of the man. This is true to Jack and to Rose Marie who, perhaps to the awkwardness of the more reserved, put out there how much they needed each day to preach to themselves the gospel of Christ. Graham does an admirable job, then, in underscoring the merits of a biography of Jack Miller, while reflecting Miller's magnification of the need we each have of saving and restorative grace in Christ.

In this regard, Graham cuts through a discussion that has arisen previously over the extent to which biographers cover the failings of their subjects. Iain H. Murray, an advocate of heroes, came in for criticism for his biographies of Jonathan Edwards and Martyn Lloyd-

¹ You know the years are passing by when people you have met start turning up in history books!



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Jones for turning them into paper saints. In fairness to Murray, he was reflecting a biblical observation that love covers a multitude of sins (Prov. 10:12; 1 Pet. 4:8). Yet, to avoid the negative altogether creates an imbalanced tribal view of history and underplays the importance of grace in the lives of the godly. On the other hand, getting down in the dark and the dirty not only contradicts the love that covers a multitude of sin, if pressed too far it reveals the biographer's heart and underplays the longsuffering mercy of God and the transforming power of his gospel.

Thus, against the backdrop of the recovery of the Puritans and the temptation to create pristine images of them and their heirs to the present, and the iconoclasm of today's Woke movement, Graham does excellently in navigating those chapters which Miller would have preferred not to be read aloud (a quote from Lord Grantham in *Downton Abbey*). He neither evades such chapters nor sullies the biography with every nuance of sin, gossip, and judgment. Instead, he documents facts without reveling in them. *Cheer Up!* is, then, a model of balance to which other biographers would do well to aspire. While some readers may feel they would want to hear more from Norman Shepherd about his view of Miller's involvement in the controversy, Graham cannot be held responsible given the likes of Richard Gaffin who preferred not to be interviewed for the biography. Of course, in striking this balance, Graham was inevitably aided by Miller's habitual admission of his need of grace and by his passion for repentance.

Fourth, the biography is a subtle and welcome counteraction to today's preoccupation with celebrities. As Trevin Wax notes in his endorsement, Miller was a Christian leader "whose spiritual influence far exceeds his name recognition." If then, like me, you support underdogs, which translates into an irritation in our hasty day with attributions to celebrities of ideas and sayings first aired or emphasized by others, you will welcome this tribute to Miller and his influence. In fairness, you will also warm to those like Keller and Joni Eareckson Tada rushing forward to acknowledge their debt to Miller.

Fifth, the biography coincides with the increasing emphasis on theology being missional. It is not surprising that Miller, an advocate of God's radical grace, was so engaged in church ministry at home and abroad, seeking both the revival of the church and the influx of converts from society. He reminds us that down in our own estimation is the way to authentic service in the Lord's kingdom. Higher Presbyterians may, then, be able to learn more from the posthumous Miller than they dared to while he was living. The biography doesn't commit the reader to agree with everything Miller taught or did, but surely, few in tune with God and his gospel will come away from *Cheer Up!* without being challenged about its place in our lives, inspired to make more of Christ, and thoughtful about areas of lingering disagreement.

Those absorbing the published biography can take in more by hunting down the original doctoral dissertation (Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary). In the meantime, our thanks to Michael Graham for a fine and fair-minded account of the life and times of Jack Miller. May our hearts and churches outgrow what yet remains ingrown. *Soli Deo gloria!*