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By Grace Are We Saved Robert L. Millet

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ROBERT L. MILLET. *By Grace Are We Saved*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989. viii; 128 pp. \$9.95.

Reviewed by Joseph B. Romney, professor of religion and associate director of the honors program at Ricks College.

Few subjects are more significant than that addressed by this book. Anyone who makes a serious attempt to deal with salvation and grace is to be praised. The preface, introduction, and closing testimony clearly express the author's "appreciation for our Lord and for what he has done for mankind" (3) and declare that "because of him, our minds are at peace. Our souls may rest" (111). These quotations provide the theme of the book.

The introduction describes an unsettling encounter between the author and a young lady who failed to appreciate the role of the Savior in the process of repentance. In that encounter, Millet tried to make her understand the significance of Christ in her quest for salvation. The book seems to be an extension of the series of interviews with her and is best understood as the author's personal testimony that the grace of Christ is an essential component of our eternal progress.

The first four chapters emphasize the necessity of grace: salvation is free and grace is required because all have sinned, so we must rely wholly upon the merits of Christ and acknowledge his hand in all things. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 indicate that we must do our share in this process, through repenting, thus allowing our progress from grace to grace, a process that can then lead to justification and sanctification. Chapter 8 asserts that a balance is required between grace and works. The four closing chapters indicate that if we do our part and are blessed with the grace of Christ, we will receive the desires of our hearts; perfection is possible when we draw strength from Christ, and joy will be the result.

The author frequently cites and quotes at length from the standard works as well as from both LDS and non-LDS writers. The book includes a bibliography and index in addition to its 111 pages of text.

Millet indicates that many Latter-day Saints, to whom this book is principally addressed, and others outside of the Church, fail to understand grace and works. He writes that Latter-day Saints often reach conclusions that "not only are unnecessary and theologically misleading, but also are potentially damaging to our spiritual well-being" (vii), and that others are confused and uncertain regarding "the Latter-day Saints' view of Jesus Christ and the work of redemption" (61). I believe this assessment is accurate.

Because this misunderstanding exists and the concepts of salvation and grace have received so much attention both within and without the Church, a successful treatment of them requires especial clarity. Millet's approach appears to be to reach the desired appreciation of Christ and personal peace after understanding the relevant doctrines. The author's personal testimony emerges throughout the book, most expressly in "A Note of Testimony" that concludes the work. Unfortunately, however, the teachings involved are not presented in sufficient clarity to provide a sound doctrinal understanding upon which one can build his or her own personal testimony. Put another way: that the author has a firm testimony of the necessity of the grace of Christ is beyond doubt; that the text provides the basis for a similar testimony for others is doubtful.

In the first place, the broad organization of the book, which I reconstructed earlier in this review, is not readily apparent from the book itself. While the eighth chapter proclaims the essential balance between grace and works, the first chapter announces categorically, "Salvation is Free," and in the first two paragraphs asserts that "salvation, which is exaltation, which is eternal life, is free" (7) and that "free salvation is salvation by grace" (8). On the next page Millet quotes Bruce R. McConkie saying that salvation comes "by grace without works" (9). Taken at their face value, these statements are inconsistent with the assertions in chapter 8 and elsewhere. If a balance is required, it is not clear as the book begins.

These first pages present another difficulty that crops up throughout the text. When a point is being made, the text or supporting material often says things that do not substantiate the point, or at least confuse the issue. For example, the sentence that claims that "salvation is free, freely available, freely to be found" continues, "by those who seek and inquire and obey" (8). The necessity of "works" is thus inserted in the midst of a section making the point that salvation "is by grace without works" (9). And in a section emphasizing the nothingness of man, that "man has no power to transform a fallen soul" (16), Millet quotes passages indicating that one must stand "steadfastly in the faith" and "walk uprightly" (18). The competing claims are not irreconcilable, but the text does not adequately help us make a reconciliation.

Since "grace" is an essential concept, what is meant by it should receive precise attention. If it is a word describing a single concept, that should be explained, or if it encompasses several concepts, they should be described and related. But the book contains at least six diverse statements that appear to be definitions of grace (on pages 4, 8, 72, 74, 94, 100, 105) and numerous uses of the term in contexts where the sense in which it is being used is

unclear. It is not that the various usages are inherently inconsistent, only that the reader is left to make the necessary synthesis without clear guidance from the author.

Closely related to this problem is the challenge presented in explaining and relating many other doctrines and words connected to salvation and grace. The book does devote a chapter each to justification and sanctification, albeit with some of the limitations I am describing. Doctrines of the fall and atonement, and words such as *wholly*, *free*, and *alone* need attention similar to that given to the word *perfection*, where “finite” and “infinite” perfection are distinguished (84-86), and to the phrase “necessary and sufficient conditions” (70). This latter distinction, found in the chapter on “The Essential Balance,” is at the heart of what is being discussed in the book and could well serve as the logical framework for the entire work. But although this analytical tool is appropriately introduced, it is not adequately developed or broadly applied.

The way in which authoritative and illustrative material is used also causes difficulty. A major problem is created by the use of non-LDS sources, including C. S. Lewis, John MacArthur, Leon Morris, and Paul Tillich. If these writers are a source of doctrine, some effort should be made to establish their credibility. The notion that God may inspire people of all creeds throughout the world is introduced to indicate that the divine role should be acknowledged in all things (27), and later to show that “we should not be surprised to find meaningful truths elsewhere in the religious world” (63), but in both cases no direct application is made to the non-LDS sources used in the book. Moreover, any such sources should comport with basic LDS doctrine. For example, although citing C. S. Lewis is quite in vogue these days, I am not certain his orthodoxy is necessarily our orthodoxy. Consider, for example, his claim that “we now need God’s help in order to do something which God, in his own nature, never does at all — to surrender, to suffer, to submit, to die. . . . But supposing God became a man — suppose our human nature which can suffer and die was amalgamated with God’s nature in one person — then that person could help us” (36).

There are also problems with the use of citations and quotations. First, the form of citations is inconsistent. Express permission to use is cited for some sources and not others; full citations are not always given in first entries, and subsequent references are not uniformly treated. Second, the author quotes from his own earlier works, in one case with inadequate citation to what was his and what was quoted in the earlier writing (105). The whole process of an author quoting himself seems to me to be somewhat presumptuous. I see the model of Elder McConkie, who started his doctrinal library

with the teachings of President Joseph Fielding Smith as a foundation, but in Millet's case the foundation is not laid on a recognized doctrinal authority. Third, the excessive use of quotation entangled with commentary often makes it difficult to follow the intended thought, especially when the quoted material includes extraneous information, as I have mentioned.

The internal consistency of the discussion is damaged by failure to correlate a subject when it appears several times in the text. The same subject may well apply to various topics, but the text often indicates no awareness that the subject has been previously treated, sometimes with the same apparent purpose. For example, the concept that we can retain a remission of sins from day to day appears in a discussion that all have sinned (17-18), in a discussion of justification (46), and in relation to singing a song of redeeming love (106). Each time the same scriptural source is used, but the teaching is presented as if it were being newly introduced to the reader. In another case, the teaching that we must not unduly focus upon ourselves seems to be the theme of both chapters 4 and 11.

In summary, then, Millet's book reflects a strong personal testimony by a devoted disciple of Christ that the Savior plays an indispensable role in our eternal progress. It engenders in the reader a feeling of love for Christ and provides a strong reminder that we must look to him as a necessary condition of our salvation. Parts of the text are helpful for doctrinal understanding, but it fails to present the pertinent teachings in sufficient clarity to be of significant general value.