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Reviewing *Where Wisdom May Be Found: The Eternal Purpose of Christian Higher Education*

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Where Wisdom May Be Found: The Eternal Purpose of Christian Higher Education. By Edward M. Meadors. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2019. 348 pp. ISBN: 978-1498296106 (hardcover) \$35

The captain of a sailing vessel traversing the seas had many responsibilities. They knew the destination, the weather conditions, and the capabilities of the ship and crew. With these in mind and many other variables, the captain set the course to successfully complete the voyage. The captain called for the setting of the sails and, when necessary, brought the ship into action. The captain monitored the sea charts, the coastal maps, and the stars and had to be the ultimate juggler of variables in order to bring the ship to the destination and accomplish the mission.

There were many skills sets and specialties amongst the crew. Topmen and reefers hoisted and trimmed the sails. They were sure-footed and steady as they climbed the lines and handled the sails—sometimes in the middle of a storm or battle. The boatswain knew the miles of ropes and cordage that held together the masts and sails in an intricately woven pattern. The coopers, carpenters, and caulkers all had special skills needed for the preparation of the ship for the voyage and, more importantly, for the maintenance of the ship in times of trouble. The myriad of seamen, landsmen, and officers had their daily tasks to keep their world afloat. Large crew or small, day or night, rain or shine, calm or gale, peace or battle—the captain was responsible for knowing each of the sailors by name and the jobs they performed. Without this knowledge and skill, the voyage would fail.

While it may seem melodramatic to compare the ship captain with an anthology editor, they have similar responsibilities. Like the captain, the editor must know the final destination of the collection of essays. The editor knows the skills and strengths of the contributors and plans the essays' goals and parameters. Book editors select and assign the essay topics to the right contributor to draw out the richest, most nuanced

depth of thought and meaning. Like the captain, they chart the order of the essays to bring the anthology to the desired conclusion. Continuing this analogy one last step, *Where Wisdom May Be Found*, edited by Edward M. Meadors, however, gets lost at sea.

It is generally thought that essay anthologies are not very popular in the context of selling or reading. The primary cause for this unpopularity is that the essays are often disjointed, not pulling together into a specific, cohesive theme (Kahn, 2017). Unfortunately, this is an apt description of this work. As a whole collection, *Where Wisdom May Be Found* seems to be content to state what is obvious for Christians: There is wisdom in God's Word, and it is available to those who earnestly seek it. Through 26 chapters spanning 332 pages, 27 contributors, and including a chapter written by the editor himself, *Where Wisdom May Be Found* reminds the reader that wisdom is to be found in the various academic disciplines. One would hope that wisdom as defined by Christians would be found throughout the curriculum in Christian universities. Most of the contributors do an excellent job of conveying this thought and building each argument with skill. However, while the contributors are assigned specific facets of the academy, they often repeat each other in laying their groundwork. Once their case is presented, there is little or no connection to the other essays, resulting in a lack of cohesiveness. Returning to the analogy of the ship captain, this anthology is like the ship and crew with an order to set sail, but without specific leadership from the captain. Each crew member has his or her own idea of where to go, how fast to travel, and the best means to get there. In the end, the ship goes nowhere. Unfortunately, after a long read, this work tends to leave the reader frustrated and thinking of lost opportunities and what the anthology could have accomplished.

Where Wisdom May Be Found is not without its bright spots. Wisdom abounds in its essays. In the first essay, Meadors himself reminds us of the role of wisdom in redemption and, in a limited way, ties this to Christian higher education. He refers to this as "the Liberating Yoke" and reminds us that "Authentic repentance involves not just a change of mind, but also an *expansion* of mind" (2019, p. 9). He speaks of the transformative power of a renewed mind (Romans

12:2) and its expanded capacity for wisdom. This essay is well developed as a contribution but lacks enough direction to lead the anthology as a whole.

Clinton E. Arnold's essay "The Role of Biblical Exegesis within the Christian College Curriculum," the second essay in this anthology, admonishes Christian faculty members that it is their calling and responsibility to step beyond their fields of specialization and embrace a deeper study of scriptures prayerfully and empowered through the Holy Spirit. They are to open their eyes, minds, and hearts even more to experience a greater understanding of God and to bring this opportunity to their students. This strong essay promotes the importance of integrating faith and learning.

By detailing Socratic philosophy, James S. Spiegel, in his essay "Philosophy as the Love of Wisdom," highlights the influence of the pursuit of wisdom on society and reminds the reader that the very definition of philosophy is the "love of wisdom." Paul R. DeHart's essay—"Wise Politics: Classical Philosophy, Medieval Christianity, and the Contemporary World"—carries the pursuit of wisdom by way of classical philosophy through the Early Church age to today. He shows the long struggle of applying philosophical practices to Christian beliefs and to scripture and values that eventually shaped the basis of Western systems of law and government. Both essayists provide a brief, but yet thorough, review of the development of Western philosophy and its ever-changing relationship with the Christian Church.

The remaining essays explore the role of wisdom throughout various disciplines such as the arts, social sciences, and rhetoric. Nine essays cover the hard sciences, and one even speaks of the role of wisdom in the area of athletics. Each of these provides insight into the role of wisdom in each discipline. In the final four pages of the last essay in the anthology, "Concluding Sapiential Postscript: 'Get Wisdom,'" Jeffrey P. Greenman attempts to present a concluding argument for the pursuit of wisdom in Christian higher education. He pulls together a few thoughts that are common to some of the other essays and ties these to the idea that the promotion of wisdom is in essence the calling of Christian higher education. Unfortunately, this seems to be too little and too late.

An article in the December 2019 *Writer's Digest* calls for the editor of an essay anthology to be ruthless and to edit the original content to bring cohesiveness, maintain interest, and manage page length (Lindholm, 2019). The contributors are experts in their fields; however, they do not have the big picture nor typically see the other essays. An essay anthology is not usually a collective, collaborative project. Thus, the editor must shape the focus of the anthology. Establishing the goals and parameters for each essay, and selecting the right contributor is only part of the effort of achieving a cohesive and overarching narrative. While the authors of this critique do not know the level of “ruthlessness” employed by Dr. Meadors in the editing process, the anthology’s lack of cohesiveness suggests that it was limited. His opening essay could have been more intentional in setting the stage for—and guiding—the collection. Instead, it seems to the reader that his essay is just one good stand-alone essay looking for direction itself.

Perhaps the analogy of an essay anthology setting sail on a voyage to a desired, narrowly defended theme is incorrect or, at least, is a limited view. Maybe it is fine to travel around in circles without really going anywhere or to set off on an essay adventure knowing only a rough direction to head and not having a final destination in mind. In an October 2016 post to *Notion Press*, Aishwarya Mukundarajan does say that the theme of an anthology may be very narrow or broad. The cohesiveness is not exclusively found in a well-defined theme. Cohesiveness can be in the form and style of the essays or in sharing a common time period or setting. This may have been the case with the essays that make up this anthology. All of the essays, some more than others, share a common setting: Christian higher education. Whatever the case, passive editing or intentionally broad cohesion brought simply by a common setting—at least for the reviewers of this anthology—reflects Kahn’s point. It simply is not a satisfying read. The contributors have presented many astute points, thoughts, and arguments that are both scripturally and academically supported. However, after a book full of points well made, the collection fails to gather the points into a cohesive conclusion to make the jump to the “and therefore” statement. *Where Wisdom May Be Found* seems to be content to drift aimlessly, but with good conversation.

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