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Pollard's "May It Always Be True: Educating Students in Faith" - Review

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Charles Pollard

May It Always Be True: Educating Students in Faith

Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2011 pb 224pp \$16.00

ISBN 978-0-89112-048-3

Should Christian college presidents write books about Christian college education? Some board members might wish that presidents would spend more time taking potential donors to lunch. Others might demand that presidents write books so that the board members can hand potential donors something at lunch. Faculty might bless the president who either writes a book or takes donors to lunch, especially if either activity brings needed revenue to campus and keeps the president from what they view as meddling with curricular matters.

In *May It Always Be True*, Charles Pollard, president at John Brown University, offers a collection of chapel talks given over his first years as president at John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Arkansas. Most readers of this journal have chapel talks of their own on their hard drive and perhaps have wondered if they should attempt to find a publisher. Pollard's book will not answer that question. At points, I thought he should have left his talks on his hard drive. For example, I was left cold by particular references—by name—to students who sang well in a college

performance at John Brown or who could shoot three-pointers apparently at will. As have many of my readers, I have taught such students, but not these students, and wished that he had edited out their names in preparation for publication. Pollard also refers to faculty members who said particularly wise things in particular campus contexts. In Pollard's original chapel talks, such references would have helped achieve the immediacy and intimacy every speaker desires. As published chapters, they produce the unfortunate and opposite result, creating a feeling of exclusion, of being locked outside. The genius of many books lies in their authors' (or editors') ability to make the particular general; this volume too often leaves the particulars particular, and thus seems to exclude outsiders from at least one layer of meaning that insiders would grasp.

At some points, Pollard does succeed in making the particular general. His talks on fear, doubt, calling, work, and death (given at a convocation!) reach well beyond the hallways of John Brown. He could have given his Advent talks in my church in Washington without losing many listeners in details familiar to him but foreign to them. In short, as a book of devotionals directed mainly toward students and somewhat toward faculty, the book may work. In fact its Worldcat genre descriptors are "sermons" and "anecdotes." But it is not a book about Christian higher education per se, and so the subtitle, *Educating Students in Faith*, may lead some to experience a feeling of the bait and switch they are more likely to associate with an electronics store. Readers wanting a contemporary college president's views on Christian higher education might be wiser to read Philip Eaton's *Engaging the Culture, Changing the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), released about the same time as Pollard's volume and reviewed in this journal.

Pollard's effort perhaps serves as a caution to all faculty that when we engage in the process of editing not only chapel talks, but faculty forum presentations and even conference papers, we must keep in mind that most of our readers will not have been there and therefore we need to generalize. Still, I grant the richness that particularity brings to a book such as Pollard's and do recommend it to those who collect in this genre.

Ken Badley