

W. Marshall Johnston and Daniel J. Crosby,
*A Dangerous Mind: The Ideas and Influence of
Delbert L. Wiens*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015.
Pp. 268. Softcover, \$32.00.

Delbert Wiens is of no use to those searching for simple, pragmatic answers to the crisis of Christian identity in the modern era. To start, the emeritus professor of Humanities and Philosophy at Fresno Pacific University (FPU), despite having attained advanced degrees from prestigious schools such as Yale and the University of Chicago, opted for an academic career at a small denominational college. Furthermore, Wiens refuses to peddle mere ideals abstracted from the concrete life of a particular people. Instead, through various writings he probes the condition of the church from his distinct vantage point as a Mennonite Brethren (MB) from Corn, Oklahoma. His decades-long critique of the modern

North American church is sophisticated and insightful, but it is rooted in and specific to his inherited faith tradition. Thus, because Wiens will not subordinate an earthy, peculiar incarnation of church to a “truer,” more non-descript Christian experience, he will mostly remain an enigma to a culture that eschews the particulars of time and place and the patience required to attend to them.

Nevertheless, there are Mennonites and non-Mennonites alike who have been impressed by Dr. Wiens’s unique perspective, whether through his writings or classroom instruction at FPU, as is evident in the festschrift volume, *A Dangerous Mind: The Ideas and Influence of Delbert L. Wiens*, edited by FPU professors Marshall Johnston and Daniel Crosby. Honouring the fiftieth anniversary of Wiens’s 1965 publication, “New Wineskins for Old Wine: A Study of the Mennonite Brethren Church,” friends, colleagues, and former students of Wiens present essays ranging from contributions to classical scholarship, to memoirs, to historical reflections. *A Dangerous Mind* also includes four previously unpublished pieces by Wiens selected from across the full span of his career and post-retirement.

The articles are arranged into four main sections consisting of 1) introductory and historical material, 2) memoirs and tributes, 3) scholarly essays, and 4) Wiens’s own writings. Except for the fourth section, content does not always keep to the categories assigned by Johnston and Crosby. Some memoirs venture into Mennonite history, some histories betray the affection of a memoir, and some essays are a tribute to the legacy of Wiens’s insights. But given his lament of the disintegrated treatment of knowledge in so-called “universities,” one suspects a little overlap in the material is appropriate for his festschrift.

Notable in the collection is the fifty-year retrospective of “Wineskins” by the late Paul Toews, FPU history professor and director of both the MB Historical Commission and the Centre for MB Studies. Positioning “Wineskins” in the life of Delbert Wiens, Toews also broadened his scope to include the MB tradition as a whole and revisited the cultural tensions that “Wineskins” originally sought to address. His piece argues for “1965 as the coming of age of an MB intellectual tradition,” and describes the subsequent marginalization of the MB intellectual class. Continuous with his earlier edited work, *Bridging Troubled Waters* (1995), Toews’s retrospective in this volume will be an added resource for tracing the ongoing development of the MB tradition.

By honouring their friend and colleague, Johnston and Crosby have done a service in producing the first of what will hopefully be

more focused engagements with this seminal MB intellectual. This book is a fine introduction to the work of Delbert Wiens and is for anyone who suspects that the church's path beyond the modern era entails more particular rootedness, not less.

Michael VandenEnden
St. Catharines, Ontario