Culture
Book Reviews
Christ on the Road to Emmaus

"Christ on the Road to Emmaus," c, 1725/1730. (OSV News photo/courtesy National Gallery of Art)



by Mike Mastromatteo

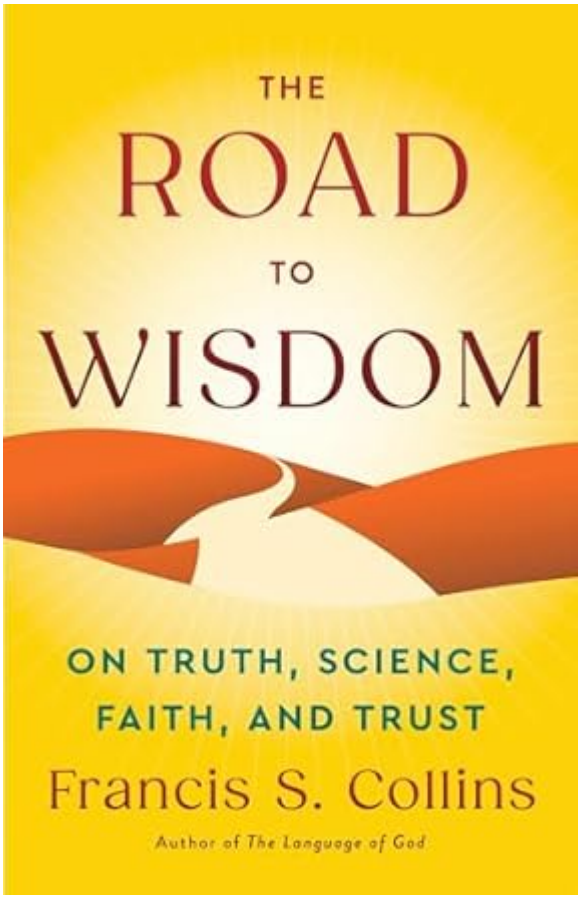
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Just as America roils and frets over the election of a divisive and power-hungry president, a new book charts a path back to civility and commonality of interests. *The Road to Wisdom: On Truth, Science, Faith, and Trust* by Francis S. Collins, a medical doctor and head of the team of scientists uncovering the human genome project, offers a timely message of truth and understanding as a possible antidote to today's political turmoil and social unrest.




The Road to Wisdom: On Truth, Science, Faith, and Trust
Francis S. Collins
288 pages; Little, Brown and Company
$30.00

Collins served as director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) from 2009-2021, during which time he led a team of scientists and researchers to develop the mRNA vaccine during the COVID-19 pandemic. The author's message is especially poignant given his standing in the scientific community and his return to his Christian roots after a long period of atheism.

As Collins explains early in the book, "I also realized that my youthful endorsement of materialism and atheism provided no useful answers to deeper questions about life and death. To my great surprise, a deeper exploration of faith traditions led me to become a serious Christian in my twenty-seventh year. Despite predictions by friends at the time, I have never encountered a situation where I found my scientific and spiritual worldviews to be in serious conflict."

In some ways, *The Road to Wisdom* serves as a follow-up to Collins' 2006 release, *The Language of God*, in which the author argued that evidence of God's existence

would have to come through faith and not proof. Now, Collins makes a convincing argument that science and faith are not incompatible but can be complementary in reaffirming basic truths while offering a much-needed salve to the spiritual malaise of the times.

Collins's central argument in *The Road to Wisdom* is that the mistrust of science and the social media-borne atmosphere of tribalism, recrimination, cancel culture and enemy-making stand in the way of a more harmonious future.

"We are in serious trouble when some believe that their faith requires them to distrust science, or when others believe that political allegiances are a better source of wisdom than truth, faith, or science," Collins writes. "To be clear, this is not just a problem of one end of the political spectrum; no political party has a monopoly on virtue or vice. There are always temptations to put politics above truth.
But something deeper in our culture is wrong. In many aspects of our daily discourse, the links between truth, science, faith, and trust seem to have been broken."

Collins reiterates throughout the book that the eagerness to accept dubious facts from social media and extreme viewpoints from both the right and left of the political spectrum bodes ill for the future. He adds that uncivil discourse can be overcome by availing oneself of more varied news sources that demonstrate competence, integrity, humility and the willingness to admit mistakes.

He also bemoans the growing tendency of citizens to establish echo chambers by relying too heavily on podcasts and other less trustworthy sources that align with one's own attitudes and biases.

"In a polarized society like ours, a requirement of aligned values to justify trust may severely limit our opportunity to learn from objective experts who don't happen to inhabit our same bubble," Collins writes. "Perhaps of even greater seriousness, we may be more vulnerable to trusting in those with marginal competence but shared tribal values."

As a scientist, human genome researcher and committed Christian, Collins is at his best when advocating for a new confidence in the achievement and potential of the scientific method while urging people of faith to remember the Beatitudes in their interactions with neighbors. Faith must work hand in hand with truth, science and trust, Collins says.

*The Road to Wisdom* is an encouraging read not only for potential policymakers and civic leaders but also for Christians looking to spread the Gospel message. Despite the author’s vast experience in science, human genome research and administration, this book eschews complex technological prose and makes its argument in plain, accessible language for all readers.

Ultimately, Collins’s book offers a timeless message, one especially relevant in the current climate of mistrust, polarization, scapegoating and the pernicious impact of social media.

"Truth, science, faith, and trust … represent the grandest achievements and insights of human civilization. They literally hold out the promise of a better life for every person on this planet – in material terms, in spiritual terms, and in social and cultural terms. To give up on them would be to give up on humanity’s potential."

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