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A Theology of Public Life

What has Washington to do with Jerusalem? In the raging debates about the relationship between religion and politics, no one has explored the religious benefits and challenges of public engagement for Christian believers – until now. This ground-breaking book defends and details Christian believers’ engagement in contemporary pluralistic public life, not from the perspective of some neutral “public,” but from the particular perspective of Christian faith, arguing that such engagement enriches both public life and Christian citizens’ faith itself. As such it offers not a “public theology,” but a “theology of public life,” analyzing the promise and perils of Christian public engagement, and discussing the nature of civic commitment and prophetic critique, and the relation of a loving faith to a liberal politics of justice. Theologically rich, philosophically rigorous, politically, historically and sociologically informed, this book advances contemporary discussion of “religion and public life” in fundamental ways.

CHARLES MATHEWES is Associate Professor of Religious Studies, University of Virginia. His other publications include *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition* (2001).

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*This book is for my mother
Martha Thomas Mathewes
IX.30.1935 - I.1.2006*

*She loves me like a rock
- Paul Simon*

Saeculum autem hoc eremus est
Augustine, *sermo*. 4.9.9

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Acknowledgments

The tale grew in the telling. It began with reflection on a sermon, given by Revd. Sam Portaro at Brent House at the University of Chicago, on the oddities of the agenda of “putting Christ back into Christmas” – the upshot of which was that Christ would not get into Christmas by some sort of willed politico-cultural imposition, but rather by being found already there, in the vulgar and kitschy desires that we various theological snobs sniff at. I have written this always thinking of his last line: “That, after all, is how Christ got into Christmas in the first place.” That sermon, hundreds more, and the liturgies of which they were a part, shaped this book decisively; and so I thank Revd. Portaro, Revd. Bruce Epperly, Revd. Jeffrey Fishwick, Revd. Paula Kettlewell, and Revd. Jonathan Voorhees, and the communities of Brent House at the University of Chicago, St. Paul’s Charlottesville, and Christ Church Charlottesville, for teaching me the way of Christ, albeit as awkwardly and abashedly as Episcopalians do that sort of thing.

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Possession, and the Christian Faith,” gave me whatever instruction I have on matters relating to religion and culture.

Several journals, and one publisher, were good enough to allow me to reprint material that first appeared in their pages. I have drawn on the following in this book: “On Using the World,” in *Having: Property, Possession, and Religious Discourse*, ed. Charles Mathewes and William Schweiker (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2004); “Reconsidering the Role of Mainline Churches in Public Life,” in *Theology Today*, 58.4 (January, 2002); “Faith, Hope, and Agony: Christian Political Participation Beyond Liberalism,” in *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 21 (2001); “Augustinian Anthropology: Interior *intimo meo*,” in *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 27.2 (June, 1999); “Pluralism, Otherness, and the Augustinian Tradition,” in *Modern Theology*, 14.1 (January, 1998).

I have worked in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia for the past nine years, and I have now lived here in Charlottesville longer than I have lived anywhere else in my life. Many graduate students helped me, especially Sarah Azaransky, Brantley Craig, Willis Jenkins, Emily Gravett, Karen Guth, Paul Macdonald, Jon Malesic, Angel Mendez, Mark Ryan, Keith Starkenburg, Jeff Vogel, and Chad Wayner. My colleagues in the department, particularly Jennifer Geddes, Asher Biemann, Larry Bouchard, Jim Childress, Jamie Ferriera, Charles Marsh, Margaret Mohrmann, Peter Ochs, and, during their time here, John Milbank, Gene Rogers and Corey Walker deserve great thanks. My department Chair, Harry Gamble, has been a welcome sage and supporter throughout. In Spring 2003 an undergraduate research seminar was dedicated to reading a draft of this book, and the students in that seminar – Patricia Amberly, Peter Andres, Sarah Jobe, Sarah McKim, Cate Oliver, and William Winters – contributed materially to it. I also thank Carl Trindle, Principle of Brown College at UVA, for sponsoring the seminar – and for much more.

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My mother, Martha Thomas Mathewes, has been with this book since before it began and with its author for some time before that as well. She is the person who first oriented me to the world, and she has always been my guiding star. If this book expresses an attitude, a way of living in the world, it is as much hers as anyone's. I hope she will approve.

Charlottesville, Virginia
January 6, 2006

Abbreviations for works by St. Augustine

<i>ad Gal.</i>	<i>expositio epistolae ad Galatas</i>
<i>conf.</i>	<i>confessiones</i>
<i>contra acad.</i>	<i>contra academicos</i>
<i>DCD</i>	<i>de civitate Dei</i>
<i>DDC</i>	<i>de doctrina Christiana</i>
<i>de mor.</i>	<i>de moribus ecclesiae catholicae</i>
<i>de pat.</i>	<i>de patientiae</i>
<i>de Trin.</i>	<i>de Trinitate</i>
<i>DUC</i>	<i>de utilitate credendi</i>
<i>DVR</i>	<i>de vera religione</i>
<i>enmar.</i>	<i>enmarationes in Psalmos</i>
<i>ep.</i>	<i>epistulae</i>
<i>Gen. ad litt.</i>	<i>de Genesi ad litteram</i>
<i>in Io. ep.</i>	<i>in Iohannis epistulam tractatus</i>
<i>sermo.</i>	<i>sermones</i>