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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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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521832267

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First published 2007
This digitally printed version 2008

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-83226-7 hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-53990-6 paperback

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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

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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.

Numerous colleagues have read parts of this book and offered useful advice; I especially thank Tal Brewer, John Bowlin, Luke Bretherton, Patrick Deneen, Eric Gregory, Paul Griffiths, Eric Jacobsen, Slavica Jakelić, Derek Jeffreys, Kristen Deede Johnson, Robin Lovin, Aristotle Papanikolaou, Chad Pecknold, Jon Schofer, Kathleen Skerritt, Darlene Weaver, Jim Wetzels, William Werpehowski, Paul Wright, Diane M. Yeager, and Phil Ziegler. When I met Oliver Davies, I recognized a sympathetic mind, with a kindred theological attitude. Continued discussions with William Schweiker, particularly throughout his Lilly-funded project on “Property,

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.

A sabbatical at the Center for the Study of Religion at Princeton University also shaped the book. Robert Wuthnow, R. Marie Griffith, Anita Kline, Elliot Ratzman, Leora Batnitzky, Penny Edgell, Leigh Schmidt, Jeff Stout, and Lisa Sideris all gave generously of their time and attention. A seminar taught by Peter Brown and Neil McLynn while I was at Princeton – “Emperors and Bishops” – greatly aided my amateur understanding of late antiquity.

xii Acknowledgments

Sometime in my first month at Virginia I met James Davison Hunter, who soon after introduced me to his brainchild, the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture. Ever since, I have been an underlaborer in the work of the Institute and its offspring, the Center on Religion and Democracy. It is no exaggeration to say that this book would not exist without the continual stimulation, provocation, and inspiration that this remarkable intellectual community has provided. I thank Joseph Davis, Justin Holcombe, Slavica Jakelic, Steven Jones, John Owen, Edward Song, and the many others who have argued and discussed with me the matters of this book. In the summer of 2002, CORD sponsored a manuscript workshop wherein my book and others were subjected to a week of meticulous attention from my fellow participants Pamela Cochran, Eric Gregory, Paul Lichterman, Ann Mongoven, and Brett Wilmot. Shelley Reese Sawyer's meticulous attention secured the workshop's success, and I am grateful to her as well. But I especially thank James Hunter for dedicating so much of his time and energy to ensure that others could think and write and talk and simply spend time living the life of the mind – not in an undisciplined, but in a supra-disciplined manner.

For their incessant patience, and gentle encouragement, never rising to the (well-warranted) level of threats, the next-to-last thanks must go to the good people at Cambridge University Press. I have been fortunate to have editors who care about my work, and I thank Kevin Taylor and Kate Brett for their long-suffering forbearance, acumen, and prudence. I am also immensely grateful to Dan Hardy, editor of the “Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine” series, for his faith, hope, and charity as regards this work, and particularly in his herculean labors in reading and re-reading its versions.

I thank all the above; but several people merit individual recognition.

My friend Josh Yates has been a boon companion throughout my time at Virginia. We arrived in Charlottesville the same semester, and since then we have been unindicted intellectual co-conspirators, occasional running partners, and significant financial underwriters of several local coffee shops. I am deeply grateful for the patience and charity that he has always shown me, as well as for his intelligence, generosity, and example.

My wife and colleague Jennifer Geddes remains my primary conversation partner, my most insightful critic, and my love. Her belief in this project, and in its author, carried them both through when things looked bleakest – and you, dear reader, owe her thanks for saving you from a seventh chapter.

Our daughter Isabelle was born during the composition of this book. Before she arrived, we never imagined working so hard, or being so happy. She is an ever-present reminder both of this book's immediate urgency and of its ultimate unimportance; I am not sure for which I am more grateful.

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>