

# Author Meets Critics: A Theology of Public Life

Opening remarks by **Erik Owens**

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305 GASSON HALL, BOSTON COLLEGE  
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We are here today to discuss a provocative and important new book by Charles Mathewes, entitled *A Theology of Public Life*. In it he lays out an Augustinian model by which Christians should understand the relationship of religion and public life. He explains why Christians should care about public life—a realm much broader than mere politics—how they should engage this realm, and what will happen to them as Christians when they do so. It asks not, as Mathewes puts it, “What does God have to do with politics?” but rather “What does politics have to do with God?” This distinction hints at the important difference he sees between a “public theology” (the typical version of which, he argues, self-destructively accommodationist) and a “theology of public life” more completely rooted in Christian theology.

To discuss the concept of public theology, and the many other issues raised in this extraordinarily rich book, I am pleased to introduce our all-star panel of theological ethicists, each of whom has helped to shape the current discourse on public theology in important ways.

**Charles Mathewes** is Associate Professor of Religious Ethics and the History of Christian Thought at the University of Virginia, and a faculty fellow at UVA’s Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture. His research interests, as anyone who knows him can attest, are extraordinarily wide-ranging, but all his work is grounded in a deep Augustinian sensibility that we will hear more about today. In addition to *A Theology of Public Life*, he is the author of *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition* (also from Cambridge Press, relatively recently out

**David Hollenbach, S.J.**