

Public Intellectuals and the Common Good: Opportunities for Evangelical Scholars

A Proposal for InterVarsity Press
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Introduction:

In one of his last published essays, the late Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C. asked “Where Are College Presidents' Voices on Important Public Issues?” As was widely accepted by that time, the University of Notre Dame’s president emeritus noted in the February 2, 2001, issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that scholars and, in particular, college presidents, had abandoned questions plaguing the public.

Hesburgh argued that the pressure to raise funds drove college presidents to embrace politically safer ground versus wading into the uncertainty that often comes with public engagement. As a former member and chair of the Civil Rights Commission, he argued that the most pressing issues of the day were being decided in arenas void of individuals who were arguably best trained to provide needed insights.

Little has changed since Hesburgh made that argument. Books and articles concerning public intellectuals generally begin with the assumption that their contributions are valuable but relatively absent, at least in Western culture. As a result, some of the most recent additions to the literature draw insights from practices public intellectuals embrace within a global context.

While history notes the prominent role evangelical intellectuals once played in Western culture, recent history also records their relative absence. As Mark Noll chronicled in 1995, in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, part of the challenge was the relative lack of intellectual engagement evangelicals were practicing at that time. By nearly every known indicator, intellectual engagement has since increased. However, evangelicals are not immune to the lure of political safety as well as the perils of specialization. The scholarship they produce all too often fails to inform a particular public whether that public be the Church and/or the state.

The “Public Intellectuals and the Common Good” project seeks to assess the present array of challenges, identify valuable opportunities, and provide examples of relevant practices as they relate to helping evangelical scholars expand their vocational understanding to include that of the public intellectual. Far from where some self-appointed public intellectuals find themselves working today, this project will also help evangelical scholars cultivate a sense of need for their work in relation to the broader context of the common good.

With colleagues from the Lumen Research Institute, we coordinated the “State of the Evangelical Mind” symposium held at the Sagamore Institute in Indianapolis in September 2017. That

symposium resulted in the summer 2018 theme issue for *Christian Scholar's Review* and an edited volume published in the fall of 2018 by InterVarsity Press. In many ways, the "Public Intellectuals and the Common Good" project is an extension of "The State of the Evangelical Mind" project along with other efforts such as the contribution we recently made to *Higher Education: A Handbook of Theory and Research* entitled "The Promise and Peril of Public Intellectuals," and the essay "Public Intellectuals and Their Commitment to the Common Good: The Role of Christian Academics," delivered at Australia's Excelsia College, and pending publication.

Significance/Argument of the Book:

Attempts to define the qualities embodied by public intellectuals all too often begin with arguments for the on-going need for such figures. Somewhere between the demise of authority and the surge in specialization are the reasons why so many people question their relevance.

At the same time, what we hold in common as a society continues to be pulled to the margins. When seeking to honor the role of the public intellectual, too many scholars thus find themselves trading shrillness for substance as they pander for social relevance.

Stanley Hauerwas reminds us Christians are among the last socially definable groups who possess a common reading core, and in a sense, a common vocabulary and mission. Public intellectuals speaking from such a platform have a distinct advantage in this troubling season of marginalized core values. Historically, evangelicals such as Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley, to name only two, understood that the claim God's Word made on their lives compelled them, in turn, to engage in the challenges of their day.

In the present context, what then would such a commitment look like when exercised by evangelical scholars? What historically well-defined qualities of public intellectuals need to be adopted? What qualities need to be jettisoned? What ones might need to be cultivated anew?

This volume thus seeks to answer those questions by exploring definitions of public intellectuals, the common good, and ultimately what an evangelical understanding might contribute in terms of the relationship the two share.

Market Need/Competing Books:

A review of the literature turned up no titles that explore the commitment to serve the common good by evangelical public intellectuals. Only one title we found explored the role of public intellectuals from a Christian theological perspective. In addition, only two titles we found explored the common good from a comparable perspective. Despite the volume of titles related to public intellectuals and the common good, no titles explore the commitment of public intellectuals, regardless of the presence or absence of a faith persuasion, to the common good.

As a result, this proposed volume fits within a vibrant stream of literature but comes with a previously unexplored perspective.

Perhaps the best place to begin an assessment of the related literature is with a quick overview of volumes related to the American intellectual tradition. The most comprehensive volumes in this genre are David A. Hollinger and Charles Capper's magisterial *The American Intellectual Tradition: Volumes I & II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011—Sixth Edition). The most frequently cited volume, however, is Richard Hofstadter's *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage, 1966). The most relevant volume to this proposed project is then Mark A. Noll's *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995). While many of the figures these authors treat in their respective efforts would qualify as public intellectuals, none of their efforts specifically focus on the intellectuals they treat as acting in such a capacity.

However, a growing sub-category of volumes related to the American intellectual tradition do focus on intellectuals who act in such a capacity. As is echoed in most of the titles or subtitles of those volumes, a prominent theme is the demise of the public intellectual—for example, Alyssa Bowditch's (editor) *Public Intellectuals: An Endangered Species?* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), Russell Jacoby's *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), John Michael's *Anxious Intellectuals: Academic Professionals, Public Intellectuals, and Enlightenment Values* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), and Thomas M. Nichols' *The Death of Expertise: The Campaign against Established Knowledge and Why it Matters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). The most widely cited of these volumes may be Richard Posner's *Public Intellectuals: A Study in Decline* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). The only volume offering a theological treatment of the public intellectual is Ada Marie Isasi-Díaz, Mary McClintock Fulkerson, and Rosemary P. Carbine's (editors) more hopeful *Theological Perspectives for Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness: Public Intellectuals for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

In recent years, explorations of public intellectuals have also begun to include the efforts of scholars laboring in non-Western cultures. Michael Desch's (editor) *Public Intellectuals in the Global Arena: Professors or Pundits?* (Notre Dame: IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016) is an impressive consideration of those efforts in a wide variety of global contexts. In terms of more specific titles published in English, works such as Romila Thapar's *The Public Intellectual in India* (New Delhi, India: Alpeh Book Company, 2015) offer more detailed explorations of the work public intellectuals are doing in locales such as India.

Works concerning the common good, while not as voluminous as ones concerning public intellectuals, do comprise a definable and growing space within the related literature with the most recent effort being Robert B. Reich's *The Common Good* (New York: Knopf, 2018). More closely related to this proposed volume are Walter Brueggemann's *Journey to the Common Good* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2010) and Miroslav Volf's *A Public*

Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2013).

Perhaps of equal importance to the proposed project as the previously noted works are narrative accounts of individuals who acted as public intellectuals and sought to serve the common good. When considering efforts whose primary character(s) reflect those qualities, there is no shortage. However, one recent title worthy of being mentioned is Jeremy L. Sabella's *An American Conscience: The Reinhold Niebuhr Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2017) along with the documentary bearing the same title by Martin Doblmaier.

Volume Overview: The main components of the book include a foreword, an introduction, seven chapters, and a conclusion.

Foreword (George M. Marsden)

Introduction, “Evangelicals, Public Intellectuals, and the Common Good” (Todd C. Ream, Jerry Pattengale, and Christopher J. Devers): The introduction offers definitions for terms and phrases such as evangelical, public intellectual, and common good, surveys the literature from which those definitions are drawn, and then weaves them together in a way that theologically connects the efforts of evangelical public intellectuals to a particular understanding of the common good. The introduction then concludes by offering an overview of the volume, biographical details concerning the contributors, and how their offerings work together in relation to the larger purpose of the volume.

Chapter One, “A Theological Exploration of the Present Landscape” (Miroslav Volf): In this opening chapter, a theological exploration will be offered concerning the decline in public intellectuals and why, in particular, so few evangelical scholars cultivate the habits needed to serve as public intellectuals. In today's polarized culture, facing those challenges comes with considerable risks. However, evangelical scholars historically focused on the common good in ways that allowed them to transcend waves of political and social divide. This chapter will explore how those historical examples are perhaps ripe with possibilities for the present moment.

Chapter Two, “A Pastor's Perspective” (John M. Perkins): The Church is the locus of identity for all who profess faith in Christ. As a result, the life of the Church proves to be crucial for cultivating the identity of evangelical scholars, evangelical scholars called to serve as public intellectuals, and public intellectuals focused on serving the common good. Clergypersons, however, not only labor to cultivate such individuals, but often do so through their own examples. As a result, this chapter will explore the responsibility the pastor has to cultivate public intellectuals focused on the common good and do so, at times, through the examples they set.

Chapter Three, “A University President's Perspective” (Linda A. Livingstone): As noted in the introduction, college and university presidents historically served as public intellectuals. For

various reasons, many members of the current generation forsake such possible duties. If evangelical scholars are going to cultivate the habits of public intellectuals who focus on the common good, university presidents play a critical role and arguably lead the way. As with pastors, this chapter will explore the responsibility university presidents have to cultivate public intellectuals focused on the common good and do so by virtue of their own examples.

Chapter Four, “A Journalist’s Perspective” (Katelyn Beaty): As evidenced by the role pastors play, not all public intellectuals focused on the common good serve on college and university campuses. Historically, journalists have also played a critical role, raising questions, and pursuing answers to a number of matters plaguing the wider public. In addition, the habits of communication their profession demands prove to be instructive to academics who find it difficult to transcend the language and style of argumentation often fostered by their particular discipline. This chapter will thus not only focus on how journalists serve as public intellectuals focused on the common good, but also on the examples they can set for evangelical scholars.

Chapter Five, “A Faculty Member’s Perspective” (Emmanuel Katongole): Faculty members arguably provide the largest pool of prospective public intellectuals. However, all too often the research agendas faculty members pursue generate results that the wider public finds inaccessible. Disciplinary jargon and idiosyncrasies create intellectual communities only individuals with specific training can access. In contrast, public intellectuals seek to make the complex matters yielded by scholarship accessible to individuals populating a wide array of learned communities. This chapter will explore how public intellectuals cultivate those habits and, in particular, how those habits can be of service to the common good.

Chapter Six, “A Program Officer’s Perspective” (Heather Templeton Dill): Foundations have historically played critical roles in relation to resources needed to pursue scholarship. In addition, by virtue of the requests for proposals they post, they often shape the research agendas scholars pursue. As a result of those critical roles, this chapter will explore the roles program officers can play in relation to the cultivation of evangelical scholars as public intellectuals and, in particular, public intellectuals poised to serve the common good.

Chapter Seven, “A Research Center Director’s Perspective” (Amos Yong): Research centers and institutes often provide resources and collaborative opportunities for scholars to focus their energies in relation to a particular set of ideas and/or social challenge. While such centers often have responsibilities within their particular communities, they often also represent their communities to the larger world. This chapter will explore what challenges and opportunities research centers face when cultivating public intellectuals and, in turn, helping them focus their energies in relation to the common good.

Chapter Eight, “Observations for the Future” (David W. Wright): This volume will close with a summary of the lessons offered by all of the previous contributors but then turn to a set of observations for the future. In particular, those observations will focus on what, for example, pastors, faculty members, and journalists can learn from one another. In addition, those observations will focus on how individuals serving in those particular professions can work

together to serve the public and, in turn, the common good.

Contributors (in alphabetical order):

Katelyn Beaty is an acquisitions editor with Brazos Press. She began her career with *Christianity Today* as a copy editor, launched the women's website ([Her.meneutics](#)), and eventually became the magazine's youngest and first female managing editor. In 2016 she published her first book, *A Woman's Place: A Christian Vision for Your Calling in the Office, the Home, and the World*. She contributes to *The Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, and *The New York Times* and comments on faith and culture for CNN, ABC, NPR, the Associated Press, Religion News Service, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and McClatchy Newspapers.

Christopher J. Devers is Assistant Professor of Education at Johns Hopkins University and Director of the Lumen Research Institute. Overall, Devers is interested in applied metacognitive processes and how people learn. Specifically, he explores learning using videos, mobile devices, and in online environments. He is also interested in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) and student success.

Heather Templeton Dill is President of the John Templeton Foundation. Most recently, she served as executive liaison to the president. Prior to joining the Foundation staff, she taught high school level history, government, and economics in Pennsylvania. While living in Charlottesville, Virginia, she was a homeschool educator as well as a manuscript editor and research assistant at the University of Virginia. Dill is also currently a member of the board of First Trust Bank and previously served on the Templeton Religion Trust steering committee and the Templeton World Charity Foundation board.

Emmanuel Katongole is Professor of Theology and Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. A Catholic priest, he previously served as Associate Professor of Theology and World Christianity at Duke University, where he was the Co-Director of the Center for Reconciliation. Katongole is the author of books on the Christian social imagination, the crisis of faith following the genocide in Rwanda, and Christian approaches to justice, peace, and reconciliation. His most recent book is *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*.

Linda A. Livingstone is the President of Baylor University. She previously served as Dean and Professor of Management at The George Washington University School of Business from 2014 to 2017 and as Dean of Pepperdine University's Graziadio School of Business and Management from 2002 to 2014. As a scholar of organizational behavior, she has contributed to journals such as the *American Business Review*, the *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, the *Journal of High Technology Management Research*, and to books such as *Business and Corporate Integrity: Sustaining Organizational Compliance, Ethics and Trust*.

George M. Marsden is Professor of History Emeritus at the University of Notre Dame. As one of the most distinguished historians of American Christianity, Marsden writes on topics such as evangelicalism and higher education. His most significant books include *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, *The Soul of the American University*, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, and *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment*. His *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* won the Bancroft Prize in 2004.

Jerry Pattengale is University Professor at Indiana Wesleyan University and a Distinguished Fellow with the Lumen Research Institute. Pattengale has authored over twenty books and contributes to a wide variety of outlets including *The Wall Street Journal*, *Christianity Today*, *The Washington Post*, *Inside Higher Ed*, *Patheos*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and the History Channel. He also serves as Executive Director of Education at the Museum of the Bible (Washington, DC) and is one of its two founding scholars.

John M. Perkins is a minister, civil rights leader, and community developer. He is the co-founder of the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) and, with his wife, Vera Mae Perkins, established the John and Vera Mae Perkins Foundation. The John M Perkins Leadership Fellows Program at Calvin College and the John Perkins Center for Reconciliation, Leadership Training, and Community Development at Seattle Pacific University are both named in his honor and respectively seek to carry on the work to which Perkins committed his life. He is also the author of numerous books including *A Quiet Revolution*, *Welcoming Justice*, and *Dream with Me*.

Todd C. Ream is Professor of Higher Education at Taylor University and a Distinguished Fellow with the Lumen Research Institute. Previously, Ream served on college and university campuses in residence life, student support services, honors programs, and as a chief student development officer. He is the author and editor of many books and contributes to a wide variety of publications, including *About Campus*, *Christianity Today*, *First Things*, *Inside Higher Ed*, *Modern Theology*, *New Blackfriars*, *Notre Dame Magazine*, *The Review of Higher Education*, and *Teachers College Record*.

Miroslav Volf is the Director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture and the Henry B. Wright Professor of Theology at Yale University. He has written or edited more than 20 books and over 90 scholarly articles. His most significant books include *Exclusion and Embrace* (the recipient of the 2002 Grawemeyer Award), *After Our Likeness*, *Allah*, and *A Public Faith*. Volf has given many lectures including the Dudleian Lecture at Harvard University, the Chavasse Lectures at the University of Oxford, the Waldenstroem Lectures at Stockholm University, the Gray Lectures at Duke University, and the Stob Lectures at Calvin College. He has also been featured on National Public Radio's Speaking of Faith and Public Television's Religion and Ethics Newsweekly.

David W. Wright is the President of Indiana Wesleyan University. Previously, he served as Indiana Wesleyan's Provost and helped develop Wesley Seminary, the School of Nursing, the School of Health Sciences, the Ron Blue Institute for Financial Planning, and the National

Conversations. Earlier in his career at Indiana Wesleyan, Wright led the university's entry into online education and initiated the regional campus development strategy. Beyond his tenure at Indiana Wesleyan University, Wright served as Dean of the School of Theology at Azusa Pacific University and with theological education ministries for The Wesleyan Church in England and Haiti.

Amos Yong is the Director of the Center for Missiological Research and Professor of Theology and Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary. He has authored or edited almost four dozen volumes including *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, *Renewing Christian Theology* (with Jonathan A. Anderson), *Interdisciplinary and Religio-Cultural Discourses on a Spirit-Filled World* (coedited with Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen and Kirsteen Kim), *Pneumatology and the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue*, *The Cosmic Breath*, and *Spirit of Love*. Yong has also authored over 200 articles for a wide range of peer-reviewed journals, edited collections, and other venues. He is the past president of the Society for Pentecostal Studies.

Intended Audience: Evangelicals serving in leadership roles in the church, the university, and the seminary will be amongst the group of individuals most interested in this volume. As a result, denominational leaders, pastors, university board members, administrative cabinet members, university faculty members, seminary board members, seminary cabinet members, and seminary faculty members may be among the individuals most interested in the expert opinions of the individuals who contribute to this volume. The thoughtful yet accessible nature of this book will also make it of great use to undergraduates in senior seminar-type courses as well as seminarians in an even wider array of possible courses.

The topic and the manner in which that topic is explored will also prove to be of interest to sociologists and historians, to name only two, who focus on the American religious landscape and, in particular, the portion of the American religious landscape influenced by evangelicals. As the influence of evangelicals grew over the course of the latter half of the twentieth century, scholars from a wider array of ideological backgrounds made evangelicals the object of their inquiry. This volume will be the first to address opportunities before evangelical scholars called to serve as public intellectuals and, in particular, public intellectuals motivated by commitments the common good.

Length of the Book: The foreword for the volume will run approximately five manuscript pages. The introduction, each one of the chapters will then each run approximately 20 manuscript pages. As a result, the total length of the manuscript will run approximately 185 manuscript pages.

Completion Schedule: Following a schedule comparable to the one employed in relation to “The State of the Evangelical Mind” project, initial drafts of the papers will be offered at a symposium the Sagamore Institute in Indianapolis, IN on September 26 & 27, 2019. The contributors will then send revised versions of their papers to the editors by November 15, 2019.

The editors will then send any proposed revisions back to the contributors by December 20, 2019. The full manuscript will be submitted to the publisher by January 31, 2020.