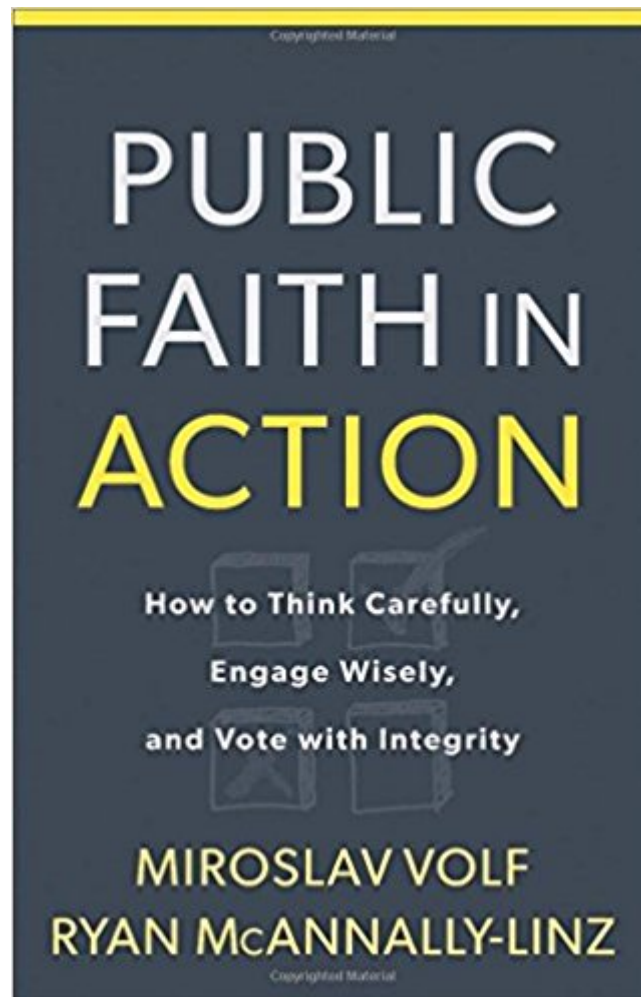


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# Public Faith In Action: How To Think Carefully, Engage Wisely, And Vote With Integrity



## Synopsis

**Celebrated Theologian Offers Wisdom for Civic Engagement** Christian citizens have a responsibility to make political and ethical judgments in light of their faith and to participate in the public lives of their communities--from their local neighborhoods to the national scene. But it can be difficult to discern who to vote for, which policies to support, and how to respond to the social and cultural trends of our time. This nonpartisan handbook offers Christians practical guidance for thinking through complicated public issues and faithfully following Jesus as citizens of their countries. The book focuses on enduring Christian commitments that should guide readers in their judgments and encourages legitimate debate among Christians over how to live out core values. The book also includes lists of resources for further reflection in each chapter and "room for debate" questions to consider.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

One of the problems with discussing theology, someone once said, is that you have to say everything all at once. Our world and culture seem to move so quickly, there isn't time for a nuanced discussion of conflicting viewpoints. People and institutions are informed by the 10-second "sound byte", and that includes the Church. Public Faith in Action manages to walk the knife edge between too much information and not enough. In this book, the authors have given us resources to think about the problems of our time and reflect on them theologically. The book models for the thoughtful reader how to think, assess and act in ways that are faithful to one's convictions. Importantly, the authors have done so without giving prescriptive, doctrinal advice. This

is not another religious book that tells the reader what to think and what to do. The best of its kind that I have read, *Public Faith in Action* offers the reader the tools to make up her or his own mind in a way that, unlike almost every other communication in our world, does not push an agenda. Divided into sections by topic, the book can be used as a resource to dip into the “hot-button” issue of the moment (the environment, aging, justice, poverty, etc.). The first chapter alone, discussing the Christians’ commitments and the actions that are the result of those commitments should be required reading for anyone considering opening their mouth in the public debate about anything. A professor of mine used to call this “epistemic humility”, knowing what you don’t know. Volf and McAnnally-Linz write: Public engagement as citizens of modern democracies “..requires us to know what bearing Christian faith has on all aspects of life. We are all amateurs when it comes to at least some aspects of public life.

If this election cycle has revealed anything, it is that there is a drastic need for improvements in the way public dialog occurs. It has also revealed the need for Christians to engage in political discourse in a distinctly Christian manner: informed by Scripture, reasonably argued, and carefully expressed. The book claims to be non-partisan. That claim is fair, though it is clear that the political leanings of the authors are center-left. In most cases the positions presented are well-reasoned and have the reasoning explained. Each topic is put forth with some foundational discussion, followed by some proposals for non-negotiable points for Christians, and then examples of points that are open for debate. It is possible that this volume will find readers who already lean left and convince them that Volf and McAnnally-Linz present a case that is truly reasonable to all Christians. This risks continued ostracization of right-leaning Christians who are unwilling to accept some of the authors’ supposed non-negotiables, though they may resonate with the need to deal with the issues. This perception is aided because nearly all of the recommended resources of the volume are from sources that range from center-left to radically left in their politics and theology. There are only a handful of conservative sources offered, only increasing the false perception that right-leaning Christians are not discussing some of these issues. These concerns aside, the volume is valuable. The tone of the volume is reasonable and non-accusatory. The authors have succeeded in presenting their case in a way that is inoffensive and engages the big ideas in culture without demeaning people that do not hold the same positions. The style of communication is exemplary for real public discourse.

“Christian faith has an inalienable public dimension.” That’s the fundamental assumption

underlying Public Faith in Action: How to Think Carefully, Engage Wisely, and Vote with Integrity, the new book from Miroslav Volf and Ryan McAnnally-Linz. Public Faith in Action began as a series of Facebook posts by Volf during the 2012 election cycle, and in many ways is a follow-up to his 2011 book, A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good, which I reviewed several years back. In an election season as polarizing and emotionally-charged as this one, the fact that this “nonpartisan handbook” has endorsements from Christian thinkers and leaders as diverse as Karen Swallow Prior, Ron Sider, Stephanie Smith, and James K.A. Smith says something. In the first part of the book, Volf and McAnnally-Linz articulate three core commitments that underpin the work, primary among which, for all Christians, is the centrality of Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Next, they seek to apply Christian convictions to a range of fraught political issues that run the gamut from protection of the unborn to end-of-life issues, and, well, everything in between. The authors conclude by emphasizing it is not enough to have (or think we have) the right views on divisive issues; we must be concerned with becoming the right kinds of people as well — people whose character is marked by courage, humility, justice, respect, and compassion. I commend Public Faith in Action first of all because for many of us, a wide-ranging inventory of our political convictions is long overdue.

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