

# Episode 143 Faith and Educators Across the Disciplines

## **Nathan Hatch**

I'm Nathan Hatch, and I'm President Emeritus of Wake Forest University where I served 17 years. Before that I was Provost at the University of Notre Dame. I'm a graduate of Wheaton. And I'm a historian, particularly of American religion.

## **Andrew Schuman**

My name is Andrew Schuman and I serve as the Executive Director of the Veritas Forum. We're a nonprofit organization based in Boston, and it's a privilege to serve.

## **David Capes**

Nathan, Andrew, good to see you. Welcome to The Stone Chapel Podcast and to the Lanier Theological Library. You've been here a few hours? What are your impressions? Nathan, let's start with you.

## **Nathan Hatch**

This is an amazing collection of books, and an amazing place for scholars and students to work. And I don't think many people know about it. So I think the best days are ahead as people realize the resources that are here.

## **David Capes**

Andrew, what about you?

## **Andrew Schuman**

It's been tremendous to get a chance to look through some of the incredible collections here. I've been a C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien fan for a really long time. And so seeing some of the autograph manuscripts, "Learning in Wartime", that essay, that was a special moment for me.

## **David Capes**

So what brings you to Lanier Theological Library? Andrew, you're living in Boston, and, Nathan, North Carolina? So what brings you here?

## **Andrew Schuman**

Well, it is a privilege to be here. We're here today, to do a dinner. We're going to talk about what it looks like to invest in the next generation of Christian scholars. The Veritas Forum is a nonprofit that works across about 200 universities around the world, with Christian scholars, and helping to support those scholars to contribute to their universities, foster dialogue and the pursuit of wisdom and truth. So we're here today to talk about what it looks like to invest in that next generation of scholars.

**David Capes**

Nathan, how did you get involved with the Veritas Forum?

**Nathan Hatch**

Well, I've given my life to colleges and universities. It's a terrific vocation. And I was involved during the 1990s, funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, and in a whole effort to support particularly young Christian scholars, and nurture them, connect them in networks, mentor them. That was a very successful venture over a decade. And since then, no foundation or group has taken up that challenge until now. And the Veritas Forum has this whole new program, The Veritas Scholars Program. And so I'm very happy to work as a Senior Advisor. I think it's a very important initiative.

**David Capes**

One of the things that I know young scholars need is the wisdom that comes along from people who've been ahead of them in the game. People who have been in a publication, in academia, and in administrative work. And often, we haven't had those kind of models. Everybody's doing their own thing. They're working on their own research, or they're working on their own classes. But this is a very intentional kind of effort.

**Nathan Hatch**

It is. It's across the board. So it will be in the humanities, the social sciences, science, engineering, even medicine. And it is true, a Christian gets a place in university, but it can be a very lonely existence. And people in their field, there may be a dozen or so Christians across the country, but they may be spread from California to Boston. So one of the strategies of this new effort is to network people, so that they can meet others in similar situations and then find senior mentors for them. One of the early efforts is to have a summit. We had the first last summer where we had about 20 senior scholars and about 80 junior scholars gather in disciplinary cohorts. And then together we had meetings. And I think it was a tremendous encouragement to these younger scholars.

**David Capes**

Now, are these people who already finished their PhDs. Are they close to finishing?

**Andrew Schuman**

Well, mostly these are scholars that are tenure track, so they're committed to the academy. They've already been teaching for a while. They are looking to be in the academy for a long time and looking for mentors, looking for exemplars in their fields. Mentors who can show what it looks like to navigate the academy well, to serve the university, holistically with a full vocation of a Christian scholar, which encompasses so much from teaching to mentoring to admin. Straight up leadership, to having a public voice, to contributing to society. And so we have this big vision, the Christian vocation of a scholar and what good that can be done through Christian scholars today. And so the program is built around these exemplars, these distinguished scholars sorted by field. Right now we have 12 different academic fields that we're working in. And there's a scholar or two leading mentoring cohorts, in each one of those fields to support those tenure track or early career scholars as they lay the foundation for what we hope will be a long and flourishing career.

**David Capes**

So this is the future of what Veritas Forum is going to be about. Right? I got to know Veritas a number of years ago through videos that you did and through books and publications. And I think I first saw John Lennox on one of your videos. He's a wonderful mathematician from Oxford University. So are you still doing those kinds of events as well?

**Andrew Schuman**

Yes, very much so and that body of work continues to grow. So Veritas Forum was founded in the early 1990s at Harvard University. Professors, chaplains, students, believed that the big questions of life should be the central questions of the university. That there should be a respectful, charitable dialogue that takes place around those questions that brings in different worldviews, different religions. And in what isn't really a venue in which students and faculty can explore Christian faith. So we continue to do that. We do forums at about 200 universities around the world and US, Europe and Asia. And that continues to be the core, vital heartbeat.

**David Capes**

This is something you're adding. This New Scholars Program is something you're adding in addition to what you've been doing for for many, many years now. Are you still doing the publishing?

**Andrew Schuman**

Still publishing books, still doing a lot of podcasting, doing a lot of videos. I think we had 16 million views on our videos just last year alone. So that's continued to grow a lot, just the influence of those platforms. And people like John Lennox, who are just so fabulous and do many forums every year. But, this effort is really what we see as our long term investment, to invest in the future scholar voices that make the forum as vibrant and really as it is, and as we want it to be.

**David Capes**

So this has only been going on since the early 1990s. I thought it had a longer life than that.

**Nathan Hatch**

And this whole new effort to work with scholars is brand new. It's less than a a year old. It's a huge need. Universities and colleges can be very controversial today, aside from the left and the right.

**David Capes**

And having that kind of charitable conversation, civil conversation. That's hard. Because everybody wants to be so polarized and offended. So it's very difficult to do.

**Nathan Hatch**

And how to help young people navigate principally in secular universities. It's easier if you're in a Christian college, but really good people who are going to be leaders in secular universities to have mentors and models. For instance, last summer, we had two wonderful presidents, Bill Tate, who is president of LSU. Very fine believer, and Santa Ono, who at that time was president of the University of British Columbia. Right after our conference last summer, he was named president, of the University of Michigan, and both are devout believers open about their faith. And to have those as models of what

can be done in universities. We just think it's very important for the future, both in undergraduate education but when you think of the importance of law schools, of medical schools, professional schools, how do you help young faculty in those schools, be people of faith and people who can enhance the community of a university and mentor their own students?

**David Capes**

So how do you go about finding mentors to mentor these younger faculty members?

**Andrew Schuman**

A number of different ways but a lot of the core mentors right now in the program have been serving with Veritas for years and years, many for over a decade.

**David Capes**

So they know you already? They know the environment?

**Andrew Schuman**

Yes. And they're very dedicated to cultivating this charitable, thoughtful space where faith can be expressed on university campuses. And, frankly, many of them came to us several years ago and said, you know, I would love to be investing in mentoring the next generation. It's so important. And, you know, Veritas could be a really great community for that kind of a mentoring program. So there's a lot of desire among senior scholars to be investing more holistically in the next generation of scholars.

**David Capes**

And the same question now for the younger scholars coming along. How did they come across your radar? How do you find them?

**Nathan Hatch**

Some of them, it's the senior professor who will know them and bring them to our attention. And they do networking and ask who are the young scholars. Who are the up and coming people for whom this would be useful, and their networks of Christian faculty. And so far, we've been able to find the mentors. And it's amazing the number of senior people that you ask, and they are very ready to do this.

**David Capes**

So if somebody's listening today, and they hear about this, and they'd be interested, saying, I'm a senior scholar, and I'd be interested in being a mentor, Andrew, what do they do?

**Andrew Schuman**

They can reach out certainly! We will try to find a way to connect them in. The need is tremendous. And we need mentors in every field. That's the long term vision. Our ten to twenty year vision is to have these cohorts. Twenty to thirty different academic fields and subfields that are contributing to the university and to society. And so we're looking for mentors. So yes, if you're listening to this right now, you want to join us, please get in touch.

**David Capes**

And the same thing would be true on the other side. If you're a young scholar, and you're finishing up your PhD, and you're starting that first academic appointment, it's a little bit intimidating. Those first few years of lecturing and working with students and being on committees and all of that. It's a little bit overwhelming for young faculty members.

**Nathan Hatch**

The demands are high, and the opportunities plentiful. And so how to negotiate that? What are your responsibility to students, to research, to being a good citizen. And having mentors to help young people negotiate that is really important.

**David Capes**

You mentioned that you're not only in schools in the United States and North America, but you're in other countries as well. And of course, I'm a theologian. So we think everything is theology at the very end of the day. So we see, at least in the West, religion declining. But it's growing in places like Africa and Asia. This seems to me to also mirror what's happening in higher education; the need for colleges, universities, in the Global South, the Majority World. Am I seeing that right, in other disciplines like science, and engineering, and non humanities.

**Nathan Hatch**

So far, this faculty effort in its early stage is principally based in the United States. I can see just as Veritas, working with undergraduates expanded internationally, I think that would be a logical move. But so far, we've focused on universities in the United States and Canada.

**David Capes**

Are there universities where you're specifically focused right now? You say not every university but State University's? Ivy League universities? What kind of universities are you focused on?

**Andrew Schuman**

I'd say, principally, significant R1 research universities. Our DNA is certainly in the Ivy League, historically. A lot of our relationships are with what you might call leading universities. We're looking at scholarship and great scholars. And that's really where our focus is.

**Nathan Hatch**

One of the mentors is from Rice.

**David Capes**

Oh yes? Really, that's wonderful.

**Andrew Schuman**

And so wherever there's just great scholars motivated by their faith to contribute to the university in the world. I mean, that's what we want to work with. And it's fun seeing them come to us, frankly.

**David Capes**

So you have your crystal ball, and you're looking down the way twenty years from now? What does this program look like? Does it continue to grow beyond the twenty to thirty faculty that you have?

**Nathan Hatch**

One of my dreams is to see what happened in analytic philosophy. A generation ago, it was desperately secular. And through a number of senior scholars, maybe the most important being Alvin Plantinga, who came from a reform background. And others like Charles Taylor, who was Catholic and Canadian, and others, like Nicholas Wolterstorff. It was a huge turn, to make philosophy of religion and religious belief, fundamentally a part of modern philosophy. And you can see that dramatic turn. But it had to do with ideas and networks, and mentoring. So we want that replicated in other fields. And so if you go into physics, as a Christian, if you can be in touch with others in your field. It seems to me that would be a wonderful thing. So that would be my long term vision, that we work by discipline.

**David Capes**

So a little every year. You have a little growth every year. A little leaven leavens the whole dough.

**Nathan Hatch**

And if we can be a resource for Christians in whatever field, to think Christianly. That is, if you're an engineer, if you're a law professor, you need to think what are the implications of faith for the larger society. If you can help be a force for education for these young faculty, that's another dimension.

**David Capes**

One aspect that people have is, I have my work life here. And I have my faith life here. I know a lot of faculty members like this. They're good Christians. They teach biology and they've never really thought about the implications of their Christian faith on their discipline of biology. And that's something that they've not invested in to this point. But it seems like you are just parting the waters and getting into that space in a great way.

**Andrew Schuman**

It's one of our huge aspirations that we could be a significant movement for that integration of faith and work, faith and scholarship, that would become more commonplace. I think there's an assumption, especially in secular academia, that faith is on one side of things and intellectual life on the other. We would love to break down that dichotomy and show that it can be one life, one pursuit. Faith and reason, faith and learning can thrive together. And we think we have a lot of work to do to really create those paths for the next generation to walk in. But I think a lot of it does happen within a discipline. So we've got exciting groups. We've got a great group right now in AI that's doing some fascinating stuff, thinking Christianly, about the implications of that technology.

**David Capes**

There are a lot of worries about AI these days.

**Andrew Schuman**

Yes, hopefully, we can be contributing to these kinds of important issues through this network of scholars in the years ahead.

**David Capes**

Almost any science, it seems to me, could go off in any one direction that could be deleterious to the whole world in some way.

**Nathan Hatch**

When you think of the the ability now to split genes, to create different kinds of animals and humans, the ethical questions surrounding that, we need people of faith engaged in those discussions for the good of society.

**David Capes**

So you have a website, tell us about what people will find on your website.

**Andrew Schuman**

Yes, we'd love it if you go to the website. You'll see a lot of content. You see a lot of our best forums which was really modeled with this kind of engagement. You'll see a lot of our exemplar scholars. And then you also see some of the community building work we do, and ways to get plugged in. If you're an early career scholar and interested in this work, interested in bringing this kind of conversation to your campus, you'll just see lots of ways to plug in. And what the best of our work looks like. So we'd love for you to check it out.

**David Capes**

So what's the URL of your website?

**Andrew Schuman**

www.veritas.org. So real simple.

**David Capes**

veritas.org. And that's a Latin word that means truth. And you are are helping us rediscover the truth. And there is a lot of great things in higher ed. But there's a lot of concerns these days, because sometimes it can go too far, one way or too far another. You are keeping a great balance. Thank you so much for being with us today on The Stone Chapel.

**Nathan Hatch**

Thank you. Pleasure.

**Andrew Schuman**

Thank you.

**David Capes**

Here are nuggets of wisdom from our guests today.

**Nathan Hatch**

We live in a day when often history is disparaged. There are fewer history meetings. And with all the changes in modern society, so many people say, why look at the dusty past. And I love a phrase by C.S. Lewis. He talked about the clean sea breeze of the centuries. And as a historian I would just say it's really important for people to get a handle on their own times. The only way you can stand off from that is to be also immersed in the past and read masters of the past and what happened in the past and it gives us such wonderful insight into the issues and problems of today.

### **Andrew Schuman**

My nugget comes from a CEO mentor who mentioned that we often overestimate what we can do in one year but underestimate what we can do in ten. And I take a lot of hope from that, a lot of encouragement that as we begin this long term project that helps bring a generational change in higher education to be thinking about what we can do in ten or twenty yers. Or here at the Lanier Theological Library, what we could do in one hundred years.