

# A Culture of Values and Justice: Public Theology through Latin American Protestant Christianity

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One of the chief difficulties in the way of aggressive Christian effort in South American countries is the absence of *Christian public opinion*. In view of the fact that the mind of Christ cannot be realized on moral, social and economic questions without the cooperation of a *healthy public opinion*, we urge the churches

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to take all possible steps to *foster the growth of such opinion*.<sup>1</sup>

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This paper will approach public theology from the perspective of Protestant<sup>2</sup> ideas and practices, taking public theology to be part of the missiological task of Protestant leaders and communities in Latin America. Given the breadth of the subject matter, here we will limit ourselves to a few reflections and leave a more detailed study for another time.<sup>3</sup>

One of the primary concerns of evangelical Christians in the first few decades of the twentieth century was establishing their opinion in the face of the different events occurring on the American continents. The matter was of such import that the Congress of Christian Work in South America, held in the city of Montevideo in 1925, addressed this concern. Publicizing an opinion regarding the various matters affecting ethics and social and economic problems required evangelical social thought to be engaged at all times. While a handful of evangelical

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1. Committee on Cooperation in Latin America, *Christian Work in South America: Official Report of the Congress on Christian Work in South America, at Montevideo, Uruguay, April 1925*, vol. 2 (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1925), 72. Italics added by the author. Available online: <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001413947>.

2. Protestantism arrived in Latin America through so-called mission via immigration, especially in countries in which the Catholic Church was not as powerful. These types of immigrant churches grew deep roots in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, and Paraguay. In the cases of Mexico and Peru, Anglo-Saxon mission societies arrived with the desire to plant new Christian churches from the Protestant perspective. The Spanish term “evangélico” typically translates into English as “Protestant” in general and does not refer in particular to the “Evangelical” subculture as observed in the current-day United States of America. This essay uses the terms “evangelical” and “Protestant” as synonyms.

3. A more detailed study of this subject was presented at the Universidad Seminario Evangélico in Lima in the seminar “Public Theology in Latin America: A Historical Interpretation from the Ideas and Practices of Evangelical Christianity,” June 19–20, 2015.