

Towards a Biblical Public Theology

Pedro Arana

I. Introduction

In this article, I will attempt to draw a sketch of what is known as public theology and relate it to two autochthonous Latin American theologies: liberation theology and the theology of integral mission. To conclude, I will offer a humble attempt at a broad-stroke outline of a biblical public theology.

I confess that when I first began drafting these paragraphs, public theology was virgin territory for me. My first reaction upon receiving the invitation to present on *public theology* was, “But aren’t *all* theologies public?” Not a one has ever been private, much less secret. Being the first time I had ever heard of public theology, I sat down to research it. It turns out that here in this conference I am

Pedro Arana Quiroz, from Peru, studied in Scotland and is a Presbyterian pastor. He was the General Secretary for Latin America of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, a founding member of the FTL, and the Executive Secretary of the Peruvian Bible Society.



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an old lion in a cave full of Daniels! You young people are already knee-deep in public theology!

II. Defining Public Theology

Without being called public theology, the Protestant and evangelical Christian voice has been heard clearly since our political independence from Spain and Portugal.

The study of public theology introduces a new nomenclature into the context of the *Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana* (FTL, Latin American Theological Fellowship), which has, from its beginning, been driven by a continuous quest: to draw out the implications of theology for the various sociocultural problems facing our Latin American sub-continent. The FTL has initiated rich dialogue with other fields of knowledge, starting with history and continuing on with anthropology, sociology, and economics, as can be observed in its theological journal, the *Boletín Teológico*.¹

This paper will concentrate on the book *Teología pública* [Public Theology], by Rudolf von Sinner, a Swiss theologian who has lived for years in Brazil and is a professor at the *Escola Superior de Teologia*, in São Leopoldo/Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. The book is a compilation of von Sinner's three presentations at the *Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana*, in San José, Costa Rica, in their John A. Mackay lecture series, in June of 2014. Von Sinner is widely considered an authoritative voice in the field of public theology.

1. The FTL began publishing a Spanish-language theological journal as early as 1972. From 1981 to 1997, the publication was formalized as the *Boletín Teológico*, published three times a year. Since then, the content has been consolidated into one or two books a year, still numbered as volumes of the *Boletín Teológico*.