

What is Public Theology?

- **Public theology is concerned with how the Christian faith addresses matters in society at large. It is concerned with the “public relevance” of Christian beliefs and doctrines.**
- **Public theology is a relatively new discipline, although many Christians have seen theology as having public implications, and have spoken about theology in the public domain in the past.** Public theology has arisen in the United States of America from the privatization of Christian faith and the narrow concern of some Christians with personal salvation.
- **Public theology assumes that Christian engagement in the major issues of society requires an intellectual as well as a practical grounding.** It therefore seeks to provide academic rigor to the conception of public theology.
- **Public theology assumes that it is relevant for all humanity, not just Christians.** It should be conceived from a perspective that recognises both the marginal location of the Christian faith in a post-Christendom world, and the value of other disciplines. For instance, the doctrine of creation has relevance for the whole of humankind. If God is creator, then God is the creator of everyone, not just churchgoers. Similarly, many contemporary social and ethical debates have relevance for theology. For example, genetic research and ecology have implications for a Christian doctrine of creation.
- **Public theology has several audiences which demand different levels of academic rigor: the world, the Church, and the academy.** The development of scholarship to address these various audiences is both theoretical and pragmatic. In theoretical discussions, the utility of various theological theories are considered. Public theology also addresses practical questions, often in the secular language of human rights, justice, etc.
- **Public theology is located as one voice among many in the marketplace of ideas.** Theology is no longer the only voice in the public domain and it does not have a privileged status. Unlike other types of theology, it does not seek to “convert”, but is concerned with the well-being of society.
- **Public theology seeks to provide resources for people to make connections between their faith and the practical issues facing society.**

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