

Call for Papers – LIMINA 6:1 (Spring 2023)

# Future(s) of Theology

Between ecclesial demands, societal expectations and academic frameworks



Theology is experiencing a re-examination of its role as an academic discipline. Precisely at a time of evident yet ambivalent religious revival and the emergence of new spiritualities, signalling a profound need for purpose and symbols, theological discourse appears to have lost its intellectual and cultural relevance.

The factors driving these uncertainties are manifold: Societal as well as educational policy changes, new demands posed by religious pluralism and the diversity in worldviews, questions with regard to the positioning of theology within academia and particularly in relation to the humanities, as well as a purported 'lack of relevance' according to various stakeholders. Furthermore, there is a growing tension between independent academic theology on the one hand and requirements and expectations raised by the Church on the other. Universities also record a declining trend in student numbers taking up theology. In the face of these challenges, theology has to reflect on its established understanding as a discipline in order to (re)think and (re)structure itself as a vital voice that resonates in today's world as well as in the future .

Theology faculties can almost seem like anachronistic relics in a modern landscape of knowledge acquisition and transfer. Yet they are also an important reminder of the origins of academia and the integral concept of education based on intellectual self-discovery. However, if theology is to fulfil a contemporary function beyond that of historic memory, it has to re-examine its role and relationships within the shifting contexts as outlined above. What are the specific academic characteristics that distinguish it from the human and cultural sciences? Does the future of theology lie in

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its integration with these disciplines, adapting to their frameworks of research, and in its emancipation from ecclesial obligations? How would such a reinvention affect the relationship between theology and the Church? What are the intersections and delineations between (denominational) theology and ('neutral') religious studies? The differentiation into ever more specific and specialised subjects over time has become a hurdle in addressing the pressing issues of our time. It causes fractions and hinders a crucial synthetic approach to theology.

The discipline of theology not only has to reassess its ecclesial responsibilities, it also has to respond to questions raised by an increasingly secular yet also increasingly religiously diverse society. This multiplicity of world-views and value systems challenges theology to re-evaluate its structures and positioning. Theology is put under pressure by social and cultural shifts such as economic, technological, ecological and public health related developments. Theological reflection on these altered frameworks inevitably also inspires theological self-reflection for a new way forward.

**LIMINA – Theological Perspectives from Graz 6:1 (2023) will investigate the pertinent question of the future(s) of theology.** The following suggested topics may be of particular interest:

- Is theology still relevant today?
- How can theology be academically independent on the one hand and meet ecclesial demands and expectations on the other?
- How has the relationship between the Church and the discipline of theology changed recently?
- What role or function can theology play in an increasingly secular and religiously diverse society? What 'purpose' does theology fulfil in such a society?
- What understanding of science matches the discipline of theology? Is theology a clearly independent discipline or does it increasingly converge with categories of the humanities? How does public perception of science and research as the exclusive domain of natural sciences affect the scientific understanding of theology?
- What distinguishes theological thought from other disciplines? What constitutes its unique methodological characteristics?
- Is the classic curriculum of theology still adequate today? What would an alternative model look like?
- What happens in the interaction between a theology grounded in denominational concepts and the diverse theologies represented

by religious pluralism? How can theology engage with pluralism and what are the competencies required for such an exchange?

- Does theology always refer to or include 'spiritual' theology? Is it possible to redefine 'spirituality' within contemporary theology?
- Is theology experiencing a deepening divide between 'liberal' and 'conservative' categories? What do these terms mean and do they serve to adequately describe different trends in theology?
- What do we know about the biographical backgrounds, expectations and perspectives of theology students? How do these change during the course of their studies? How and to what extent do students' backgrounds and experiences in turn trigger changes at university, faculty and institute level?
- Does theology necessitate spiritual grounding and what form of spirituality is suited for the future of theology?

We are looking for topical and innovative scientific articles for our next issue of [LIMINA – Theological Perspectives from Graz](#). Please submit **your outline** (max. 4,000 characters) to: [redaktion@limina-graz.eu](mailto:redaktion@limina-graz.eu)

The final article should be approx. 40,000 characters. For more information about the journal, the peer review process and publication guidelines please visit: <http://unipub.uni-graz.at/limina>

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