

Editorial

# From Dogmatism to a Public Theology: An Archaeology of Theological Knowledge and Religious Studies—Editorial

Alex Villas Boas <sup>\*</sup>, João Manuel Duque  and Isidro Lamelas 

CITER—Research Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, Universidade Católica Portuguesa,  
1649-023 Lisboa, Portugal

\* Correspondence: alexvboas@ucp.pt

The present Special Issue brings together a constellation of studies that converge around a central epistemological question: how can theology recover its public vocation without renouncing its dogmatic depth? The title *From Dogmatism to a Public Theology: An Archaeology of Theological Knowledge and Religious Studies* points to the dual movement that characterises much of contemporary theological reflection. On one hand, it expresses the need to displace theology from the self-referential closure that historically confined it to its own systems of language and meaning; on the other, it reaffirms its responsibility to engage public rationality and the social and cultural transformations of post-secular societies.

This transition from dogmatism to public theology should not be mistaken for a rejection of dogmatic thought. Rather, it calls for a hermeneutical reorientation that reclaims dogma as mediation instead of limitation, as a form of language that communicates the faith of a community within the horizon of history. What is at stake is not the abandonment of dogma but its rediscovery as an act of openness, as an expression capable of entering dialogue with other forms of knowledge. In this sense, the archaeological gesture becomes indispensable: to unveil the discursive and institutional conditions that made theology possible as a mode of truth and to identify the political and ethical dimensions that underlie its historical formations.

Michel Foucault's method of archaeology and genealogy provides the conceptual background for this transformation, together with Michel de Certeau's interpretation of religious practices as loci of meaning and invention. Through these lenses, theology appears not as an isolated discipline but as a field inscribed in complex networks of power, culture, and subjectivity. The task of an archaeology of theological knowledge thus coincides with the need to construct a genealogy of ethics, in which spirituality becomes not a private devotion but a practice of transformation and resistance. The objective of such an approach is not to replace traditional theology but to recover its critical and ethical dimension, capable of entering the university and the public sphere as a form of knowledge that contributes to the common good.

Each contribution to this volume develops this movement in a distinct way, reflecting the plurality of methods, languages, and contexts that shape the current landscape of theological research. Some articles focus on the epistemological foundations of theology, others on its ethical and political implications, while others revisit the historical figures and concepts that mediate the encounter between theology, philosophy, and culture. Taken together, they delineate a field in which theology becomes self-aware of its own discursive conditions and reorients its task toward public responsibility.

The article by Alex Villas Boas and César Candiotti establishes the theoretical framework that sustains the entire issue. Drawing on Foucault's archaeological and genealogical



Received: 31 October 2025

Accepted: 7 November 2025

Published: 20 December 2025

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tools, it examines theology's tendency toward self-referentiality and its risk of epistemic isolation. The authors argue that only by acknowledging its historical and political conditioning can theology contribute to the plural rationalities of contemporary societies. The proposed "archaeo-genealogy of theological knowledge" becomes a paradigm for rethinking theology's place within the university, enabling it to move from inward repetition to critical and public engagement.

Within the same epistemological horizon, Jelson R. de Oliveira and Grégori de Souza explore the ethical imperative of responsibility by connecting Hans Jonas's philosophy with Pope Francis's integral ecology. Their study highlights how both perspectives converge in proposing a transformation of consciousness and lifestyle as the foundation of ethical and ecological renewal. By articulating ontology, anthropology, and ethics, they show how responsibility operates as a bridge between faith and reason, revealing that theological reflection can and must participate in the public debates on ecological crisis and the future of life on Earth.

The dialogue between theology and social transformation emerges powerfully in the contribution of Jefferson Zeferino and Rudolf von Sinner, who recover the work of Richard Shaull as a precursor of Latin American public theology. By analysing Shaull's 1962 text *The New Revolutionary Mood in Latin America*, they demonstrate how his encounter with social sciences and ecumenical thought anticipated the later emergence of liberation theology. Shaull's proposal of a "theology of revolution" does not aim at ideological confrontation but at the reconstruction of human dignity and solidarity in times of social upheaval. Through this retrieval, theology is reconnected with the ethical and historical struggles that define its public vocation.

Susana Vilas Boas offers a distinct but complementary perspective by revisiting the Nicene Creed through the philosophy of language and science. Engaging Austin and Lakatos, she interprets the act of professing the Creed as performative rather than merely propositional, showing that belief is not passive assent but an enacted identity. Her reading transforms the dogmatic formula into a communicative gesture that unites rationality, faith, and community. The Creed thus becomes a living discourse that mediates between the interiority of faith and the public intelligibility of theology, an example of how dogmatic language itself can be a form of dialogue.

The critique of economic and moral structures of domination appears in the study by Douglas Ferreira Barros and Glauco Barsalini, who interpret the notion of debt as a political-theological device that sustains the neoliberal ethos. Drawing on Foucault's analysis of power and the concept of *dispositif*, they argue that debt functions as a moral mechanism of control that internalises guilt and submission. In their rereading of *Laudato Si'*, they reveal how theology can unmask the moral economy that legitimates injustice and propose an alternative paradigm of gratuity and liberation. Their reflection situates theology within the critique of global capitalism, expanding the field of political theology beyond its classical preoccupation with sovereignty toward the ethical and spiritual dimensions of economic life.

Jacques Julien turns to the relationship between friendship, alterity, and community through a reading of Derrida and Augustine. By exploring how the Augustinian understanding of love and communion informs Derrida's *Politics of Friendship*, Julien situates friendship as a locus of theological and political transformation. Friendship, in his reading, becomes a practice of exposure to the other and a metaphor for the kind of relational openness that theology must cultivate. The movement from intimacy to community mirrors the passage from dogmatism to public theology: the recognition that truth is shared, not possessed, and that theology's vitality depends on its capacity for relationality and dialogue.

João Manuel Duque deepens the philosophical dimension of the issue by engaging Roberto Esposito's concepts of biopolitics and immunity. His analysis traces the theological genealogy of immunising structures that shape modern political thought, revealing both their protective and exclusionary functions. By introducing a Trinitarian reading of Esposito's categories, Duque proposes a reconfiguration of community that moves beyond binary logics of inside and outside. Religion, in this sense, appears as both a source of immunity and a critique of it, capable of transforming mechanisms of protection into gestures of openness. Duque's reflection exemplifies how theology can engage contemporary philosophy not through opposition but through a shared concern for the conditions of communal life.

Colby Dickinson's meditation on archaeology and hauntology returns to the methodological core of the issue. Through a dialogue between Foucault and Derrida, he interprets the persistence of spectral presences as a challenge to the modern illusion of sovereignty. To acknowledge the "haunted" dimension of history is to accept vulnerability as a constitutive element of human existence. Dickinson's reflection thus complements the archaeological method with a hauntological sensitivity: theology must listen to the voices that inhabit its silences, to the memories and traumas that resist closure. This opening to vulnerability becomes itself a form of spiritual practice, reminding theology that truth arises not from mastery but from the capacity to remember and to grieve.

The reflection initiated by Paul Gareth Weller closes the circle by returning to the institutional and methodological dimensions of theology and religious studies. His essay examines the dynamics of power, interest, and method that shape the production of knowledge within both fields. Instead of reinforcing the dichotomy between theology and the study of religion, he calls for an engaged and reflexive scholarship that acknowledges its own positionalities and commitments. Weller's emphasis on "axioanalysis," the evaluation of the values underlying academic practices, aligns with the ethical orientation of public theology, which recognises that knowledge is never neutral and that every discourse implies responsibility toward others.

Taken together, the contributions assembled in this Special Issue reveal a movement from enclosed systems of belief toward dialogical, interdisciplinary, and ethically engaged forms of theology. Each article, in its own way, performs an archaeology of theological knowledge, uncovering the historical layers, conceptual assumptions, and institutional frameworks that shape theology's discourse. Yet beyond this analytical gesture, they all point toward a constructive horizon, a public theology capable of speaking within the plural spaces of contemporary life.

The passage from dogmatism to a public theology does not mean abandoning tradition but rediscovering within it the possibility of encounter. Dogma, creed, community, responsibility, friendship, ecology, and memory are not relics of a closed past but living expressions of faith's capacity to generate meaning within history. The task of an archaeology of theology, therefore, is inseparable from the genealogy of ethics: to unveil how practices of belief can become practices of freedom.

In an age marked by polarisation, ecological crisis, and the erosion of trust in institutions, theology's public responsibility lies in fostering spaces of discernment and dialogue. The contributions gathered here suggest that this responsibility requires both methodological courage and spiritual humility. To think theologically today is to inhabit a frontier between faith and reason, tradition and critique, transcendence and immanence. It is to accept that theology's truth is not secured by authority but witnessed in the ethical and communal transformations it inspires.

The editors of this volume express gratitude to all authors and reviewers who contributed to this collective endeavour. Together, these essays testify that theology, when it dares to interrogate its own conditions of possibility, can once again become a creative and

critical force within the university and society. The archaeology of theological knowledge, when coupled with the aspiration to a public theology, opens not an end but a beginning, a renewed invitation to think, speak, and act within the shared horizon of the common good.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, A.V.B., J.M.D. and I.L.; methodology, A.V.B.; investigation, A.V.B., J.M.D. and I.L.; writing—original draft preparation, A.V.B.; writing—review and editing, A.V.B., J.M.D. and I.L.; supervision, J.M.D. and I.L.; project administration, A.V.B.; funding acquisition, A.V.B. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research was funded by FCT—Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, Portuguese Government, grant number CEECINST/00137/2018/CP1520/CT0001.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** Not applicable.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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