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Editorial Note

The question of theology's relevance has become unavoidable in contemporary culture. In a world marked by technological acceleration, political fragmentation, ecological anxiety, and growing mistrust toward institutions, theology is often perceived as either a remnant of the past or a specialised discourse detached from lived reality. Yet precisely within this climate of uncertainty, theology may rediscover its deepest vocation. The task of theology today is not to retreat into defensive self-preservation, nor merely to repeat inherited formulas, but to engage courageously with the questions, wounds, and aspirations of humanity while remaining rooted in the mystery of God revealed in Christ.

Theology today stands at a crossroads. On one side lies the temptation of irrelevance: a theology reduced to abstract language, incapable of speaking to contemporary experience. On the other side lies the danger of dilution: a theology that abandons its own identity in order to conform to cultural trends. The challenge is therefore neither isolation nor assimilation, but dialogue grounded in fidelity. Theology must become a reflective and critical mediation between faith and the changing conditions of human existence.

This challenge emerges strongly in the recent addresses of Pope Leo XIV to academic communities. In his address at the inauguration of the academic year of the Pontifical Lateran University, the Pope insisted that theology must articulate the faith within present cultural contexts while responding to the "risk of cultural emptiness"[1] that increasingly characterises contemporary society. Theological reflection, therefore, cannot remain confined to internal ecclesial concerns; it must confront the existential questions emerging from today's social, intellectual,

[1] Leo XIV, Address on the Inauguration of the Academic Year of the Pontifical Lateran University, 14 November 2025, Rome, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/speeches/2025/november/documents/20251114-inaugurazione-lateranense.html [accessed 16 May 2026].

and technological transformations. Theology remains meaningful insofar as it illuminates human existence and opens new possibilities for hope, justice, and communion. The Pope insists that theology must reveal the "beauty and credibility"[2] of faith so that Christianity may appear as "a fully human proposal."[3] In this way, it helps bring about the concrete transformation of society.

One of the most significant tasks of theology today is precisely the recovery of meaning. Many contemporary societies experience unprecedented material progress while simultaneously suffering from profound spiritual disorientation. Human beings are increasingly evaluated according to productivity, efficiency, and performance. In his address at Sapienza University of Rome, Pope Leo XIV described the anxiety produced by systems that reduce persons to numbers and intensify competition.[4] Against such reductionism, theology recalls the irreducible dignity of the human person. It insists that the human being is not simply an economic unit, a biological mechanism, or a digital profile, but a creature called into a relationship with God and others.

In this sense, theology today must recover its anthropological significance. It must speak once again about what it means to be human. Questions concerning identity, freedom, suffering, desire, and transcendence remain central even in secular contexts. Indeed, modern technological developments, including artificial intelligence and transhumanist visions, intensify these questions rather than eliminate them. Theology cannot ignore such developments. As Pope Leo XIV observed in the Lateran University discourse, theological and philosophical reflection must engage critically with emerging forms of rationality associated with transhumanism and posthumanism.[5] Theological inquiry therefore becomes an essential conversation partner in debates concerning the future of humanity itself.

Yet theology does not merely respond intellectually to contemporary problems. Its task is also pastoral and prophetic. Theological reflection must emerge from attentive listening to the cries of the world. War, ecological destruction, forced migration, social fragmentation, and loneliness are not external to theology's concerns; they are among the places where faith seeks understanding today. In

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] See Leo XIV, Address to Professors and Students during the Pastoral Visit to Sapienza University, 14 May 2026, Rome, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/speeches/2026/may/documents/20260514-visita-pastorale-sapienza.html [accessed 16 May 2026].

[5] See Leo XIV, Address on the Inauguration of the Academic Year of the Pontifical Lateran University.

his Sapienza University address, Pope Leo XIV warned against the "pollution of reason"[6] produced by the rhetoric of war and ideological simplifications that create enemies. Theology, in contrast, is called to cultivate complexity, memory, and reconciliation. It must resist superficial narratives and foster deeper forms of discernment capable of sustaining peace and solidarity.

Moreover, theology today must rediscover dialogue as one of its constitutive dimensions. This dialogue is not a sign of weakness or relativism, but an expression of confidence in truth itself. In his message to the International Federation of Catholic Universities, Pope Leo XIV reflected on the university as a place where different worldviews encounter one another.[7] He recalled that Christianity, from its earliest centuries, engaged other systems of thought precisely because the Gospel sought intelligibility within diverse cultures. Theology therefore cannot fear engagement with philosophy, science, politics, or other religious traditions. Its vocation is not to dominate these conversations, but to illuminate them through the wisdom of Christ.

The Pope's reflection on Christ as the "Wisdom"[8] that gives coherence to human thought is particularly significant for contemporary theology. Theology today must avoid presenting faith as something external to reason or opposed to intellectual inquiry. Rather, theology proposes that faith opens reason toward a fuller horizon of meaning. This perspective is especially important in academic environments where religious discourse is often viewed with suspicion. Theology contributes not by imposing conclusions, but by expanding the scope of inquiry itself. It reminds contemporary culture that truth cannot be reduced to what is measurable or technologically useful.

At the same time, theology today must remain deeply ecclesial. Theological work is not merely an individual intellectual exercise but a service to the believing community and to humanity at large. Leo XIV's Lateran University address strongly emphasised reciprocity, fraternity, and the common good as essential dimensions of academic formation.[9] Theology cannot become self-referential or elitist. It must cultivate communities of dialogue, mutual listening, and shared

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[6] See Leo XIV, Address to Professors and Students during the Pastoral Visit to Sapienza University.

[7] See Leo XIV, Message to the Participants in the 28th General Assembly of the International Federation of Catholic Universities, 21 July 2025, Vatican, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/messages/pont-messages/2025/documents/20250721-messaggio-fiuc.html [accessed 16 May 2026].

[8] See Ibid.

[9] See Leo XIV, Address on the Inauguration of the Academic Year of the Pontifical Lateran University.

search for truth. In this regard, theology remains profoundly relevant because it offers an alternative vision to contemporary forms of radical individualism. It reminds us that knowledge itself is relational and that truth emerges within communities shaped by responsibility and care.

Another urgent aspect of theology's task today concerns hope. Contemporary societies often oscillate between naïve optimism and deep despair. Climate crises, armed conflicts, economic instability, and social polarisation generate a sense of helplessness, particularly among younger generations. Theology cannot offer simplistic solutions, but it can sustain hope by affirming that history remains open to transcendence and transformation. In the Sapienza University discourse, Pope Leo XIV encouraged young people not to surrender to resignation but to "transform [your] concern into prophecy."[10] Theology today must therefore nurture moral imagination and spiritual resilience. It must help humanity envision futures beyond violence, exploitation, and fear.

Ultimately, the question is not whether theology still makes sense today, but what kind of theology is needed today. A theology disconnected from human suffering and historical realities risks sterility. Equally, a theology that loses its grounding in revelation risks becoming indistinguishable from cultural commentary. The task before theology is therefore demanding: to think rigorously, to dialogue courageously, to listen attentively, and to witness prophetically.

Theology today remains meaningful because humanity continues to search for meaning. As long as human beings continue to ask who they are, why suffering exists, what justice requires, and whether hope is possible, theology will retain its vocation. Its task is not simply to preserve memory, but to illuminate the present and inspire the future. In this mission, theology becomes not an escape from the world, but a profound engagement with it in the light of faith.

These fundamental insights form the conceptual horizon within which the present issue of *Melita Theologica* situates its contributions. Each article explores, in its own way, how theology can remain faithful to its identity while responding to the transformations of the present.

The opening study by Paul Sciberras, *Stoking the Fire: Jesus' Provocation of the Mosaic Law and His Revelation of its True Meaning,* argues that revelation reconfigures inherited tradition: Jesus does not abolish the Mosaic Law but fulfils it, showing that theological interpretation is a dynamic process that deepens meaning and calls theology today to treat tradition as a living word rather than a closed system.

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[10] Leo XIV, Address to Professors and Students during the Pastoral Visit to Sapienza University.

Mark Joseph Zammit's *A Theology of Neighbourhood and Synodality* presents an ecclesiological response to fragmentation, proposing theology as a practice of proximity, listening, and shared responsibility, in line with the papal emphasis on reciprocity and fraternity against individualism.

Joseph Ellul's *Let us be on our way; I'll accompany you: Interreligious Dialogue as a Pilgrimage of Hope* frames interreligious dialogue as constitutive of Christian identity, rooted in historical precedent and contemporary pluralism, and describes theology and dialogue as a pilgrimage of hope that transforms difference through encounter rather than erasing it.

Hector Scerri's *Presenting Christology in a Changing World: Some Tesserae from the Colourful Christological Mosaic* addresses the enduring challenge of articulating the mystery of Christ within ever-changing cultural and intellectual contexts. By surveying key developments in contemporary Christology and engaging the contributions of theologians from different traditions and regions, the study demonstrates that Christological reflection is never static but continually seeks new language and perspectives through which the person and mission of Jesus Christ may be understood and proclaimed. In doing so, it highlights a central task of theology today: remaining faithful to the core of Christian revelation while discerning how Christ can be meaningfully presented to each generation and within an increasingly diverse and globalised world.

Finally, Jean Gove's *Why the Christian Need Not Worry About Becoming Redundant – A Reply to Bostrom* engages transhumanism by affirming a relational Christian anthropology in which human meaning is grounded not in utility or productivity but in relation to God and others, underscoring theology's relevance in the face of visions of human obsolescence.

Taken together, the contributions of this issue form a coherent theological response to the question of our time: what does it mean to do theology in a changing world? They demonstrate that theology is neither obsolete nor purely theoretical. It is a living discipline that interprets tradition, engages culture, forms ecclesial life, fosters dialogue, and sustains hope.

In a world marked by uncertainty and rapid transformation, theology remains a vital intellectual and spiritual practice. It continues to ask the deepest questions of meaning, truth, and destiny—not as abstract speculation, but as a service to humanity and to the mystery of God revealed in history.

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