

Index Theologicus and FID Theology. Innovative Infrastructure for Theological Research – Speaker notes for the presentation at EuARe 2026

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Slide 1 — Title

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues, it's a great pleasure to speak here at EuARe about the Index Theologicus and the Specialised Information Service Theology or FID Theology for short. My name is Martin Faßnacht, and at the Tübingen University Library, I head the FID department as well as the FID Theology, whose flagship product is the Index Theologicus, or IxTheo for short. Over the next twenty minutes, I'd like to show you how IxTheo has evolved in recent years from a pure search platform into a multi-layered research infrastructure — and, at the end, why that fits particularly well with this year's conference theme.

Slide 2 — IxTheo at a Glance

First, a brief introduction: IxTheo was founded in 1975 and is today the world's leading open-access database for theology and religious studies. We now index over 5.3 million titles — not just classic articles, reviews, and monographs, but all publication types: databases, scholarly blogs, podcasts, archival material, and much more. This has made IxTheo an international hub of theological information infrastructure. The service is run by the Tübingen University Library together with the Tübingen Protestant and Catholic Theological Faculties — and we work closely with international partners, for instance in Innsbruck, Münster, Würzburg, Lausanne, and Leuven.

Slide 3 — FID Theology in the Network

IxTheo doesn't stand alone. At the Tübingen University Library, there are in fact three Specialised Information Services operating on the same principles — technical innovation, subject-matter expertise, and consistent service orientation: IxTheo for theology, RelBib for religious studies, and KrimDok for criminology. Furthermore, we're part of the nationwide FID network in Germany — a consortium of all Specialised Information Services funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), built on cooperation, knowledge transfer, and shared standards. One concrete example of this networking: the FID Theology cooperates, among others, with the FID for East, Central and Southeast European Studies at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München — a great illustration of how we work together with closely related FIDs.

Slide 4 — Five Strategic Milestones (Transition)

I'd like to walk you through IxTheo's development along five strategic milestones: from classic metadata capture, through open-access publication services and personalised offerings, to research analysis, and finally to digital humanities and artificial intelligence.

Slide 5 — Milestone 1: Metadata & Bibliographic Record

Let's start with the foundation: the bibliographic records. Every year we capture more than 35,000 new titles, using (semi-) automated cataloguing procedures for electronic and print journal articles. In addition, we also carry out retrospective indexing and integrate special collections from other partners — which adds roughly another 300,000 titles per year. So we're not only indexing what's newly published, but also systematically closing gaps in the past and incorporating external knowledge. For this purpose, we also evaluate national bibliographies worldwide and increasingly include new publication types, such as scholarly blogs and podcasts. What matters here is that, despite this large volume, we maintain high indexing quality — subject expertise meets scalable processes. The result is a bibliographic record that has grown from 500,000 to more than 5.3 million titles over the past twelve years.

Slide 6 — Milestone 2: Open-Access Publication Services

The second milestone concerns publishing itself. With IxTheo Open Journals, we run a platform currently hosting 13 theological open-access journals. A new addition to this is a scholarly-led offering for open-access edited volumes — with professional design templates for a consistent, high-quality appearance, and technical support from the FID throughout the entire publication process. Our aim is to remove the technical barriers that keep researchers from publishing open access themselves at a high standard.

Slide 7 — Milestone 2: Secondary Publication & Self-Archiving

As a complement to first publication, secondary publication plays a major role — and for this purpose, we offer two complementary paths. In our secondary publication service, the FID handles the entire workflow: digitisation, cataloguing, rights clearance, copyright advice. Through this route, we've already made 22,000 articles from more than 500 researchers in the German-speaking world available in open access. In addition, we offer a self-archiving service where researchers upload their publications themselves — open worldwide to all researchers in theology, and complementing the secondary publication service with a low-threshold, self-directed option.

Slide 8 — Milestone 3 (I): Personalised Services

The third milestone concerns researchers themselves. Thousands of scholars now have their own profile page in IxTheo, more than 500 of them with a complete scholarly œuvre and a high share of open-access publications. These pages strengthen researchers' visibility within the field — and accomplish at the same time a lasting integration into the IxTheo infrastructure: research output and bibliographic record grow together.

Slide 9 — Milestone 3 (II): Outlook — Self-Curation

And here we want to go one step further. Currently, we curate these profile pages editorially. The next step is for authors to be able to design and expand their own pages themselves in future. We're working with the Open Researcher and Contributor Initiative (ORCID) on this. This is an important conceptual step: it transforms IxTheo from a pure search platform into a personalised research service.

Slide 10 — Milestone 4: Research Analysis Tool

The fourth milestone puts these metadata — systematically captured over centuries — to a new use: research analysis. This lets us carry out bibliometric analyses of publication dynamics, thematic emphases, and international research collaborations. One example is the project MapTheo — Mapping Theology. It uses digital methods to map themes, lines of reception, and the formation of traditions in theology, with an approach modelled on the so-called "science of science" and built on AI-based data models. The project is led by the Computational Theology Lab at Yale University and the TheoLab for Computational Theology in Heidelberg, Zurich, and Bonn — and FID Theology, through IxTheo, is a key cooperation partner. This nicely illustrates that IxTheo is no longer just a data provider, but an active partner in international research.

Slide 11 — Milestone 5 (I): Needs Assessment via Mentimeter Survey

The fifth and final milestone concerns digital humanities and artificial intelligence — and in this case, we first listened to the community itself. As part of the conference marking IxTheo's 50th anniversary, we ran a Mentimeter survey with 59 responses on a scale of 1 to 5. The result was unambiguous: the findability of digital-humanities scholarship in theology was rated only 2.4 out of 5 — a clear indicator that DH- and AI-related content is currently hard to discover. At the same time, respondents rated systematic indexing in IxTheo as very important, at 4.3 out of 5, and regular exchange formats were also clearly endorsed, at 4.0 out of 5. Methods and tools mentioned included AI and language models, text-analysis approaches, programming, and common scholarly tools such as Zotero or MAXQDA.

Slide 12 — Milestone 5 (II): Measures Derived from the Survey

From these results, we derived concrete measures. First: improving findability, through systematic indexing of DH and AI projects, publications, research data, and code directly in IxTheo. Second: orientation and advice — the FID Theology should become the central point of contact for digital methods in theology. Third: methodological building blocks — practical support for DH projects, such as Jupyter templates, NLP and NER tools, digital editions, or metadata management. And fourth: networking, through regular exchange formats with international partner networks. The vision behind this: the FID Theology as a hub for digital theology — making work visible, providing orientation, offering advice, and supporting method development.

Slide 13 — DH Lunch Talks

Let me highlight one of these exchange formats: the DH Lunch Talks. This is meant to become a regular format around digital humanities and digital theology, connecting us with international partner networks in the digital-humanities community. It offers a stage for ongoing projects, making visible digital-theology work that would otherwise easily go unnoticed.

Slide 14 — Conclusion: IxTheo & (In)equalities

Let me close by deliberately connecting the services I've presented with this year's conference theme. "Religions and (In)equalities" asks how religions are entangled with social, economic, and cultural inequalities. I would argue that theological knowledge production itself is no exception here — and this is exactly where IxTheo comes in. First, unequal access to publications: many commercial publications simply aren't accessible at numerous locations worldwide — we address this with our open-access publication services, secondary publication, and self-archiving. Second, unequal findability of research output, which often depends on language, region, or institution — our systematic metadata record and personal profile pages work against this. Third, unequal knowledge about what is actually being researched, because thematic and regional emphases often remain implicit — here we make our metadata available for research analysis, so that emphases and gaps can be made visible. And fourth, unequal access to digital methods, because DH and AI competencies are unevenly distributed — we address this with our DH/AI collection, methodological building blocks, and the lunch talks. IxTheo is thus not only a research tool, but — as we understand it — also a concrete contribution toward making structural inequalities in theological knowledge production visible, and toward reducing them.

Slide 15 — Thank You & Contact

Thank you very much for your attention. I'm happy to take questions and continue the conversation — my contact details are on the screen, and of course, you can also find us at ixtheo.de. I look forward to the discussion.