

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA: THE PAST AND PRESENT AS POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF FUTURE TRENDS¹

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Throughout its history, theological education in Australia has proved itself to be a miracle of survival in the face of the seemingly insurmountable challenge of a paucity of resources. It has largely taken place outside of the government funded universities.² As a consequence, theological education has largely been located in a diversity of institutions—typically small and under-resourced, and most with some (often close) connection to a denominational entity or church organisation.

This is in marked contrast with universities in Europe and North America, where theological education is deeply embedded into the university system, often forming one of the key faculties in the foundation of a university. Belonging in a university system brings different attitudes to theological education, as well as a much richer base of resourcing. Theological education differs between countries, often significantly. But by any measure, the Australian experience of theological education is distinctive when compared to how it is delivered in every other country.

1 I thank the organisers of the 2017 conference held in Adelaide for the invitation to present a plenary address and also the 2017 ANZATS executive committee for suggesting the title of the paper that I should present. I should note that as well as the materials referenced in the footnotes found throughout the paper, I was able to gain very helpful insights from four presentations and subsequent discussion made at the Council of Deans of Theology on 28 April 2017 by Dermot Nestor (Research and Research Training), Les Gainer (The Changing Nature of the Student Body), Aaron Chalmers (The Higher Education Sector and Theology), and David Perry (Changing Community and Political Contexts). David Perry's response paper and subsequent discussion at the Council of Deans of Theology on 13 October 2017 was very useful in clarifying certain issues. I would also like to thank Charles Sherlock, Mark Harding, Graeme Chatfield, and Ray Roennfeldt for their substantive feedback to earlier versions of this article.

2 To this day much, if not most, theological education still takes place in institutions separated from government funded universities, although there are significant exceptions—see later discussion under the subheading, "Association with the Universities."

This paper will explore some of the influences that have shaped Australian-based theological education into the forms in which it is found today.

EXCLUDED FROM UNIVERSITIES

Few things have shaped theological education in Australia as much as its almost total exclusion from the government funded universities. This is all the more remarkable given the strong impulse in Christianity to set up educational institutions to educate its clergy and laity,³ and given the fact that theology was a foundation discipline in the oldest European universities.⁴ Yet at the time of the founding of the University of Sydney, the tension between Roman Catholics and Anglicans in Sydney about how theology should be delivered in the tertiary sector was one of the factors that made it possible for the New South Wales Government to establish the university

3 The strength of the impulse to create an educated clergy across all denominations might be illustrated by a discussion of the research team of which I was a member, as they reviewed the book manuscript before its publication, as to whether to insist on changing the words “all Christian denominations” (emphasis supplied) in the following paragraph which was eventually published in the executive summary of Charles Sherlock, *Uncovering Theology: The Depth, Reach and Utility of Australian Theological Education* (Hindmarsh, SA: ATF, 2009), 12: “All Christian denominations in Australia now participate in theological higher education, through 69 colleges grouped into 26 Higher Education providers, including five consortia . . . and six universities . . . Some 14,000 students are engaged in learning and these institutions, representing around 6,200 EFTSL.” The team spent an entertaining twenty or thirty minutes trying to think of an exception to the statement that *all* Christian denominations are engaged in education, by trying to think of a group of Christians which may have a presence in Australia, however small, who were not involved in theological education (I remember suggesting the Syrian Orthodox Church, for example). Charles responded to all the suggestions that we could make by naming the director/president/CEO of the relevant educational institution, and also stating where the educational centre was to be found. In the end the research team allowed the word “All” to remain.

4 The University of Paris began operating in ca.1150 as an annex of the Notre-Dame cathedral school. “One of the first series of lectures delivered at Oxford University was on theology. As early as 1193, Alexander Neckam from St Albans gave biblical and moral lectures on the Psalms of David and the Wisdom of Solomon. One of the first university buildings was the Divinity School, begun in 1423 specifically for theology lectures,” so Wikipedia s.v. “Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Oxford.” The oldest continuously operating university, the University of Bologna (1088), began by applying the disciplines of grammar, rhetoric, and logic to the areas of canon law and state law. Theology was added as a discipline in 1364 (unibo.it/en/university/who-we-are/our-history/university-from-12th-to-20th-century).

in terms which excluded the teaching of Christian theology.⁵ As other universities were established across Australia, they likewise did not include theology in their educational offerings, and indeed, the charter of the University of Melbourne specifically excluded the teaching of theology.⁶

Up until the late 1960s and 1970s, almost all theological education in Australia took place in denominationally established and funded institutions.⁷ While this had the salutary effect of keeping a strong connection between the teaching of theology and the denominations which founded the institution in which it was taught, it has shaped theological education in ways which have created their own challenges.

Small, Relatively Under-funded Institutions Closely Tied to Parent Denominations

One consequence of the excluding of theology from publicly funded universities is that theological education has taken place in relatively small institutions, often under very tight budgetary constraints.⁸ For example, the 1964 Martin Report (see below) found that at that time there were 2,374 theology students in fifty-nine different seminaries, some with very low numbers.⁹

The clearest set of publicly available statistics of the numbers in theological colleges is found in the 2009 study that grew out of a scoping exercise funded by a grant from the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching (later the Australian Learning and Teaching Council), which was carried out by Charles Sherlock on

5 See, for example, Bruce Kaye, "On Not Having a Plan B: Anglicans and the Founding of the University of Sydney," *Connor Court Quarterly* 5 (2012): 27–42. Mark Harding has reminded me that, "teaching could happen in the denominational colleges associated with the USyd, like St Andrews."

6 John Hill, "The Foundation of the Sydney College of Divinity: Part I: From the Origins to 1980," *Journal of Christian Education, Papers* 88 (1987): 40.

7 See later section, "Association with the Universities," for details of the correction between theological education and the university sector.

8 "Finance for scholarships, building and salaries was hard to obtain from church authorities, so that shoestring budgets were common well into the twentieth century." Ian Breward, "Historical Perspectives on Theological Education in Australia," *Lucas* 19 and 20 (1995–96): 8.

9 See Table 40, [L. H. Martin], "Tertiary Education in Australia: Report of the Committee on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia to the Australian Universities Commission, Volumes 1–3" (Commonwealth Government of Australia 1964–65), II: 143. See also Geoffrey L. Barnes, *ANZATS: The First 35 Years* (Macquarie Centre, NSW: Sydney College of Divinity, 2007), 16.

behalf of the research team. After painstakingly gathering data, Charles Sherlock identified that in 2008 there were 6,209.9 “equivalent full-time student loads” (EFTSLs) in the discipline of theology, which gives an average of 89.9 EFTLS per provider over the sixty-nine colleges.¹⁰ Of these colleges, sixty-two offered degrees in undergraduate theological training with a total of 4430.7 EFTLS (or an average of 71.5 EFTSLs).¹¹ This figure, however, conceals the reality of the wide range of student numbers across the various theological providers.¹² The statistics gathered for each provider in Appendix G reveal a fuller picture, as summarised in Table 1, which shows the number of providers of undergraduate theological education with student loads of various ranges of EFTLS.

TABLE 1: EFTSL NUMBERS IN PROVIDERS OF UNDERGRADUATE THEOLOGICAL DEGREES IN 2009

EFTSL range	Number of Providers
Greater than 100	9
76–100	5
51–75	3
41–50	7
31–40	11
21–30	10
11–20	13
Less than 10	4
Total	62

Sherlock, *Uncovering Theology*, App. G.

The EFTL numbers in Table 1 indicate very small student numbers in classes for the majority of providers. Take, for example, an institution with twenty-one EFTSLs.

¹⁰ Sherlock, *Uncovering Theology*, 12.

¹¹ Sherlock, *Uncovering Theology*, 242–47 (Appendix G).

¹² At the Australian Catholic University, Notre Dame University and Avondale College the EFTSL number is “inflated” by counting the “service teaching” relating to the compulsory religion courses for students enrolled in degrees other than theology (412.0, 526.8, and 46.0 EFTLS respectively). “Service teaching” numbers have been excluded from the number reported in Table 1.1. Furthermore, average EFTLS are increased by several larger providers. For example, of those enrolled in undergraduate degrees in theology, Alphacrucis reported 455.6 EFTSLs, Moore College 321.0 EFTSLs, and Morling College 132.4 EFTSLs.

Even in the most efficient delivery of a three-year degree (i.e. one in which there are no options in which students can choose between more than one class), twenty-one EFTSLs in a program implies an average class size of seven students. There were twenty-seven providers in 2008 with fewer than twenty-one EFTSLs, which means that those institutions averaged less than seven students in a class. It is only those institutions with seventy-six or more EFTSLs that would average class sizes of just over twenty-five students. There were only fourteen providers with this kind of student load.

The economic impact of the small numbers of students in a program can be discerned from the following graph. Figure 1 is a chart derived from an analysis of the cost to deliver theological education by Richard Cardew, which was shared with the 2009 ANZATS principals' conference.

The dollar figures have increased since 2009 with increasing wages and other costs, but the basic insight has not changed: class sizes of less than twenty students are very inefficient from a financial perspective. Let it be pointed out, that of the sixty-two providers of undergraduate theological education in 2008, forty-five of them (or 75%) were clearly operating with class sizes of less than twenty, and often much less.

Not only are class sizes in theological education sub-optimal from a financial perspective, they take place in institutions that are usually funded by Christian denominations, in institutions which have limited funds, and where there are multiple demands on those funds. It is little wonder, then, that Stuart Piggin would say, "The story of theological colleges in Australia is one of [an] unromantic, uphill struggle against anti-intellectualism and paucity of resources."¹³

Yet from another perspective, the fact that theological education has survived and, indeed, has prospered, is a miracle of Christian commitment and sacrifice by staff and students alike.

13 Stuart Piggin, "A History of Theological Education in Australia," *Lucas* 19 and 20 (1995–1996): 40.

MULTI-COLLEGE PROVIDERS

Given the small size of institutions providing theological education across Australia, it is natural that many of the institutions sought to gain efficiencies of scale by gathering into multi-college providers (previously described as consortia).

Australian College of Theology

The first multi-college provider to be established was the Australian College of Theology (ACT). It was established by the General Synod of the Church of England in Australia and Tasmania in 1891 as a response to the multiplication of small regional theological colleges for the training of Anglican clergy. The ACT became, “an examining body which created something of a common syllabus and uniform standard throughout Australian Anglican colleges which lasted until 1970.”¹⁴ The ACT reports to the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia.¹⁵ It now includes colleges with affiliations to Baptist and Presbyterian churches, as well as Anglican and interdenominational institutions,¹⁶ and it offers degrees up to doctorate level. The ACT became self-accrediting in 2010. Among its strengths is the strong enforcement of common standards through the moderation of the major assessment of each unit of study from all of its institutions that takes place before results are finalised. The ACT provides all of its affiliated colleges, some of whom are small, an accreditation and quality assurance framework far beyond what each college would be able to mount in their own right.

14 Piggin, “Theological Education in Australia,” 31.

15 See, for example, the “Reports of General Synod Bodies and Other Bodies: The Seventeenth Session of the General Synod: Book 4:3–8 September 2017,” 4:155–63.

16 In 2017 it listed the following as “our colleges”: Bible College SA; Brisbane School of Theology (interdenominational); Christ College (NSW; Presbyterian); Laidlaw College (NZ; interdenominational Bible college background); Malyon College (QLD); Mary Andrews College (NSW; est. 1891 to train women); Melbourne School of Theology (non-denominational Bible college since 1920); Morling College (NSW; Baptist); Presbyterian Theological College (VIC); Queensland Theological College (Presbyterian); Reformed Theological College (VIC; Reformed Evangelical); Ridley College (VIC; Anglican); Sydney Missionary and Bible College (Interdenominational); Trinity Theological College (WA); Vose Seminary (WA; Baptist); Youthworks College (NSW; 2000; Anglican). See <http://www.actheology.edu.au/our-colleges/>.

Melbourne College of Divinity

Melbourne University had the authority by 1881 to confer degrees in every discipline except theology. Furthermore, professors at the university were not permitted to be clergy. A concerted attempt was made in 1909 to reverse this legislation to allow theology to be taught at Melbourne University, but this failed. As a response, legislation was introduced to the State Parliament of Victoria in 1910 to establish the Melbourne College of Divinity (MCD), to allow it to offer the Bachelor of Divinity and the Doctor of Divinity degrees.¹⁷ It consisted of a multi-college provider made up of a number of colleges associated with different Christian denominations and was established as a self-accrediting institution.

Under the leadership of registrars between 1910 and 1975, and deans between 1976 and 2011, the MCD regularly reported to the Victorian State Parliament. It started offering a Bachelor of Theology in 1973, and by 1993 was teaching a joint degree in Art/Religious Studies with the University of Melbourne as affiliated institutions.¹⁸ An application was submitted by the MCD to become a university of specialisation which was granted in 2011. The University of Divinity (UD) formally began operating in 2012 under the leadership of Vice-Chancellor, Peter Sherlock.¹⁹ Throughout its history, the MCD/UD has had strong links with the churches related to their associated teaching institutions, and with the Victorian Parliament. Being first self-accrediting and then a university has contributed to its access to funding to support research. The benefits

17 Peter Sherlock, "The Foundation of the Melbourne College of Divinity," *Journal of Religious History* 40 (2016): 204–24, provides a background of the events that led up to the founding of the MCD. "An Act to provide for the Constitution and Incorporation of a College of Divinity under the name of the Melbourne College of Divinity [17th December, 1910]," begins by noting: "Whereas by section twenty-five of the University Act 1890 as amended by the University Act 1903 it is provided inter alia that . . . the Council thereof may after examination confer in any Faculty except Divinity any degree diploma certificate or licence: And whereas it is expedient to provide facilities for the conferring of degrees diplomas and certificates in divinity and for that purpose to provide for the constitution and incorporation of a body . . . which body shall be authorised to offer degrees diplomas and certificates in divinity." See also Piggin, "History of Theological Education in Australia," 32.

18 Paul Beirne, "The Melbourne College of Divinity: A Selective Historical Overview," *Pacifica* 23 (2010): 123–36, esp. 129–31.

19 Gabrielle McMullen, Paul Beirne, and Peter Carpenter, "The Creation of Australia's First 'University of Specialisation,'" *Pacifica* 28(2015): 217–28.

of belonging to a multi-college provider have ameliorated many of the limitations inherent in some of the small student numbers in the colleges of the university.²⁰

Sydney College of Divinity

In the late 1970s, several Catholic and Protestant theological colleges across Sydney separately applied to the New South Wales Advanced Education Board for the right to offer undergraduate degrees in theology. While they were granted the right to offer diplomas, they were denied the right to offer a Baccalaureate in Theology. The Board wrote to several applicants seeking a “rationalisation of resources . . . and the establishment of a degree-supervising authority administered by the institutions,” somewhat in the style of the Melbourne College of Divinity.²¹ Much negotiation was needed to form the Sydney College of Divinity (SCD), and some colleges, including Moore Theological College, dropped out of the process. Finally, in 1983, the Sydney College of Divinity was incorporated.²² It became self-accrediting in 2016. In 2017, Sydney College of Divinity has members that include colleges associated with the Roman Catholic Church (the Catholic Institute of Sydney), the Salvation Army (Eve Burrows College), the Greek Orthodox Church, Nazarenes, and others.²³ The SCD has enabled a group of theological colleges based in New South Wales to work together to more efficiently provide an accreditation framework for offering recognised degrees in theology, something that would be very challenging for many

20 In 2017 the associated teaching institutions of the MCD were the Australian Lutheran College; Catherine Booth College (Salvation Army); Catholic Theological College; Morling College (Baptist); Pilgrim Theological College (Uniting Church); St Athanasius Coptic Orthodox Theological College; Stirling Theological College (Churches of Christ); Trinity College Theological School (Anglican); Whitley College (Baptist); Yarra Theological Union (Catholic). See <https://www.divinity.edu.au/university-of-divinity/about-us/our-partners>.

21 Hill, “The Foundation of the Sydney College of Divinity: Part I,” *Journal of Christian Education Papers* 88 (April 1987), 41–42.

22 Hill, “The Foundation of the Sydney College of Divinity: Part I,” 39–53, and “The Foundation of the Sydney College of Divinity: Part II: From 1980 to the Present,” *Journal of Christian Education Papers* 89 (1987): 35–51; Raymond Nobbs, “From Nowhere to Know-How—Sydney College of Divinity: The First Twenty Years,” *Pacifica* 17 (2004): 121–36.

23 According to <http://scd.edu.au/mis/2017>: Australian College of Christian Studies (formerly Emmaus Bible College); Australian College of Ministries (ACOM); Catholic Institute of Sydney; Eve Burrows College (Salvation Army); Korean School of Theology; Nazarene Theological College; NSW College of Clinical Pastoral Education; St Andrew’s Greek Orthodox Theological College; St Cyril’s Coptic Orthodox Theological College.

of the member institutions to do, given the size of their student bodies and financial resources.

Association with the Universities

While divinity was specifically excluded from the University of Melbourne by the original act of Parliament which set it up, and despite the practical exclusion of divinity from the University of Sydney at its inception, the parliamentary act establishing the University of Sydney did not specifically exclude the examination of divinity. “In 1935, . . . the University set up a board of studies in Divinity, which was to organise a program of studies leading to the degree of Bachelor of Divinity,”²⁴ a postgraduate degree, usually following a BA. Over the next twenty-five years, thirty-three students graduated with a BD from the university.²⁵

In the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, several initiatives fostered the study of theology and biblical studies at various universities across Australia. For example, the Adelaide College of Divinity was founded in 1979. At that time, it combined five theological colleges representing Anglicans, Catholics, and the Uniting Church, and linked with the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences at Flinders University. In 1985, the Perth College of Divinity (PCD):

brought together the Anglican Institute of Theology, the Baptist Theological College of Western Australia, the Catholic Institute for Adult and Tertiary Education and the Perth Theological Hall of the Uniting Church in Australia. During 1984–1985 the PCD opened negotiations with Murdoch University with a view to establishing the teaching of theology as an offering of the University. In 1986 the University commenced offering degrees in theology on the basis of an Affiliation Agreement with the PCD.²⁶

24 Hill, “The Foundation of the Sydney College of Divinity: Part I,” *Journal of Christian Education Papers* 88 (April 1987): 40.

25 Piggin, “Theological Education in Australia,” 33.

26 <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/pcd.htm>; cf. “Perth College of Divinity Synod Report 2017.

As elsewhere in Australia, formal theological education in Queensland took place outside the public universities. It was not until 1991 that theological education was available in Griffith University, where it was offered in affiliation with the Brisbane College of Theology.²⁷ St Barnabas College (Adelaide; Anglican), St Francis Theological College (Brisbane; Anglican), St Marks Theological College (Canberra; Anglican), and the United Theological College (Sydney; Uniting), all offer their degrees through Charles Sturt University. St Marks has done so since 1996.

It has been possible to study biblical studies in two of the Australian public universities, although they were not offered in a formal theological studies program. From 1969 at Macquarie University, with the arrival of Edwin Judge—a leading researcher in New Testament Sociology—biblical studies and early Christian history could be studied with Professor Judge and other specialists in biblical, rabbinic, and Coptic studies located within the Department of Ancient History. Biblical and theological studies can also be pursued at the University of Queensland (e.g. with Rick Strelan in the School of Historical and Philosophical Inquiry), the Australian Catholic University, and the University of Notre Dame. Furthermore, theology and biblical studies were also offered for some years at the University of Newcastle.²⁸

In sum, since the 1970s, it has been increasingly possible to study biblical and theological studies in public universities in Australia and New Zealand. It is still true to say, though, that most theological study, especially that leading to professional employment as clergy, still takes place outside of the public university sector: most typically in one of the three large theological multi-college providers,²⁹ or in the larger providers such as Moore Theological College, Alphacrucis College, and Avondale College of Higher Education.

27 Tom Boland, "Theology in Queensland," *Colloquium* 26 (1994): 15.

28 Daniel Fleming, Terence Lovat, and Brian Douglas, "Theology in the Public Square of Australian Higher Education," *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 12 (2015): 30–42.

29 One of the multi-college providers, the University of Divinity, has become a specialist university in its own right, but in doing so has remained outside of the public university system.

OTHER FACTORS THAT HAVE SHAPED THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Associations, Societies, Conferences and Journals

The Fellowship for Biblical Studies was established in 1950 to provide a venue for meetings of biblical scholars in Melbourne. The journal of the association, the *Australian Biblical Review*, began publishing in 1951. Both the fellowship and journal are still active at the time of writing.

The 1960s saw the emergence of two organisations of national/international scope: the Australian and New Zealand Society of Theological Studies (ANZSTS), and the Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological Schools (ANZATS). For many years, ANZSTS and ANZATS met at the same yearly conference, thereby providing an opportunity for academics working in the small theological colleges scattered across Australia and New Zealand to interact over scholarly interests and practical matters relating to the endeavour of theological education. Many of the dramatic changes in theological education, including the emergence of the links to universities across Australia and New Zealand were reported at the AGMs of the two societies, and in the occasional academic paper presented at the meetings.

The roles of ANZATS and ANZSTS developed over time. ANZSTS concentrated more and more of its energies on the publication of the journal *Colloquium*, and in 2011–2014 negotiations took place that resulted in ANZSTS dissolving itself and passing the management of *Colloquium* over to ANZATS.³⁰ At its beginning, ANZATS acted as a semi-official accrediting agency for the theological schools and the multi-college providers that joined it as members, modelled along the lines of the American Association of Theological Schools. It also represented the sector to the government from time to time.³¹ Its activities as an accrediting body became increasingly moot with the registration of theological colleges first as Higher Education Providers (HEPs), and the accreditation of degrees offered through them by various state government agencies. Interactions with government agencies have increasingly become the domain of the Council of Deans of Theology (CDT). At the

30 For example, see “President’s Report 2013–14” to the ANZATS council by Gerard Kelly; and council minutes from 2012 through 2014.

31 Geoffrey L. Barnes, *ANZATS: The First 35 Years* (Sydney: SCD Press and ANZATS, 2007), 13–33.

time of writing, the activities of ANZATS are increasingly focused on the running of yearly conferences, the occasional principals' conference, and the publication of the journal *Colloquium*.³²

Australia has not lacked in academic associations relating to the disciplines of biblical, theological, and ministry studies. For more than a decade after its establishment in 1993,³³ the Australian Theological Forum ran well-attended conferences and its activities extended to the establishment of a press (ATF Press). While the ATF itself has largely ceased its operation, as of the date of writing, ATF Press is still flourishing under the energetic leadership of Hilary Regan. The Australian Catholic Theological Association (ACTA) and the Australian Catholic Biblical Association (ACBA) have been meeting in association since their establishment in 1975.³⁴ Their meetings are sometimes timed to overlap or adjoin meetings of ANZATS. Other associations include the Australian Academy of Liturgy, the Association of Pentecostal and Charismatic Bible Colleges, the Australian and New Zealand Association for Theological Field Education (ANZATFE), and the Australian Association for the Study of Religion. All of these associations and societies run academic conferences, as do the UD, the SCD, Moore College, Alphacrucis College, the Catholic Institute of Sydney, Avondale College, Tabor College Adelaide, and several other theological providers. Nor should one overlook the active involvement of Australian academics in the American-based Society of Biblical Literature (SBL), the American Academy of Religion (AAR), and the European-based Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas (SNTS) and Society for Old Testament Study (SOTS).

Participation in academic societies, once rare among those involved in theological education across Australia and New Zealand, has increased, and in doing so, has enriched the quality of the academic thought undergirding theological education.

32 During my two terms as President of ANZATS (2008–2011, 2015–2018) and during the period in which Gerard Kelly was president (2012–2014), much council time has been devoted to talking about the relationship between ANZATS and the CDT, and in discussing its membership categories and its purpose.

33 <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/archived/religionreport/australian-theological-forum-celebrates/3535932>.

34 <http://www.catholictheology.asn.au/introduction/history>.

Council of Deans of Theology

The Deans of the ACT, MCD, and SCD started meeting informally in 1996, and in May 1997 formally signed an agreement to form the Council of Deans of Theology (CDT). Invitations were extended to the theological multi-college providers to join later that year, and the membership has since expanded to include most HEPs and university departments offering theological education across Australia and New Zealand (Auckland and Otago Universities were invited to join in 1999).³⁵

The CDT has been effective in representing the needs of the theology sector to the government. For example, it made key submissions in the process that resulted in FEE-HELP being available to students studying theology in Australian HEPs. It continues to provide a very helpful forum where matters of governance, the structure of theological degrees, benchmarking, and a wide range of other matters are able to be discussed. Of particular importance has been the development of Threshold Learning Outcomes (TLOs) for the Bachelor of Theology and Bachelor of Ministry degrees. Two research initiatives of the CDT are worth noting here. Two teams were able to propose successful research grant applications to the Office of Learning and Teaching, and their results were made available to attendees at national conferences called specifically to share the research results, and also in the books, Charles Sherlock, *Uncovering Theology: The Depth, Reach and Utility of Australian Theological Education* (Hindmarsh, SA: ATF, 2009), and Leslie J. Ball, *Transforming Theology: Student Experience and Transformative Learning in Undergraduate Theological Education* (Northcote, Vic: Morning Star, 2012).

DEVELOPMENTS IN AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION THAT HAVE REVOLUTIONISED THE THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION SECTOR

Given that up to the early 1970s, theological education in Australia was taking place outside of the universities, most Australian institutions were offering degrees such as a Licentiate in Theology. “The first primary degree in theology in New South Wales was offered from 1954, with the constitution of the Faculty of Theology within the seminaries of the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney.”³⁶ This was a degree

35 <http://www.cdt.edu.au/about-history.html>.

36 Hill, “The Foundation of the Sydney College of Divinity: Part I,” 41.

that was accredited through licence from overseas by the Sacred Congregation of Seminaries and Universities. In 1953 and 1954, Avondale College, after fruitlessly trying to negotiate with various Australian universities, started teaching an American Bachelor of Arts (Theol) degree offered by Pacific Union College in California.³⁷ Moore and Ridley Colleges, as well as offering a Licentiate of Theology, also assisted many of its better students to prepare for the Bachelor of Divinity exams from the University of London. These accreditation and examination arrangements were enabled by overseas agencies, but new opportunities were to emerge following the Martin Report.

The Martin Report 1964–65 and the Possibility of State-Accredited Degrees

The so-called Martin Report 1964–65 was commissioned in 1961 under the government of Robert Menzies. It reported in 1964 with two volumes, to be followed by a third volume in 1965.³⁸ Volume two contained a chapter on theological training in Australia (chapter 15). It gathered data from fifty-nine theological colleges run by the Baptist Church (6), the Churches of Christ (2), the Church of England (11), Lutheran Churches (2), the Methodist Church (6), the Presbyterian Church (4), the Reformed Church (1), and the Roman Catholic Church (23). These fifty-nine institutions were teaching 2,374 students. Between them, they had 246 full-time staff and 154 part-time staff.³⁹

The Martin Report stated: “The Committee holds the view that, to the extent to which theological training deals with the furtherance of religious beliefs, it should be the educational and financial responsibility of the particular body concerned.” It

37 Milton Hook, *Avondale: Experiment on the Dora* (Cooranbong, NSW: Avondale Academic Press, 1998), 196–201, 223–28.

38 [L. H. Martin], *Tertiary Education in Australia: Report of the Committee on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia to the Australian Universities Commission*, Volumes 1–3 (Commonwealth Government of Australia 1964–65). Available for downloading from <http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/228215>.

39 [Martin], *Future of Tertiary Education*, 2:143, Table 40. This compared to 63,000 students in ten universities (1:19).

urged universities to consider offering “a wider range of courses in subjects which could be appropriate for theological training . . . not . . . training in beliefs.”⁴⁰

While it did not urge a change in the funding of theological education, other changes envisaged by the report resulted in the setting up of government agencies to accredit courses in Colleges of Advanced Education and Teachers Colleges. These were the agencies that made the Australian accreditation of degrees offered by theological colleges possible.

West Review 1998 and FEE-HELP

In 1997, Senator Amanda Vanstone, Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, set up a committee, chaired by Roderick West, “to develop a policy and financing framework to enable the sector to meet the nation’s social and economic needs in the next two decades.” This committee presented its report in 1998 to David Kemp, the Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs.⁴¹ Amongst its recommendations was the concept “That the Government should . . . implement . . . a student centred approach to the funding of higher education teaching” (e.g. Recommendation 12, p. 36); and “That the Government should make loans—with repayment contingent on future income—available to all students to cover fees up to the limit of the fees that institutions are able to charge (Recommendation 18, p. 37).⁴² These recommendations formed the background of the development of FEE-HELP, which became available for Australian full-fee paying students under the terms of the Higher Education Support Act 2003, no. 149, 2003. At that time, many students in theological colleges were able to join the FEE-HELP scheme.

Bradley Review and TEQSA

In 2008, Julia Gillard, then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, set up a committee chaired by Denise Bradley, “to examine and report on the future

40 [Martin], *Future of Tertiary Education*, 2:149 [15:51; 15:43].

41 [Roderick West], “Learning for Life (Final Report): Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy, April 1998,” available for download at <http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/57886>.

42 Mark Harding noted that, “The Council of Deans was established to seek a hearing from the WR, which was granted.”

direction of the higher education sector, its fitness for purpose in meeting the needs of the Australian community and economy and the options for reform.” The committee reported in 2008, and amongst its recommendations were “That the regulatory and other functions of Australian Education International be separated, with the regulatory functions becoming the responsibility of an independent national regulatory body.”⁴³

It was with the “Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011,” that the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) came into existence.⁴⁴ This Commonwealth regulator has applied consistent standards across all states, a boon for multi-college providers and other providers that offer degrees in more than one Australian state. It has enabled several institutions to become self-accrediting and is the regulatory agency that has the ability to recommend to the government that a self-accrediting HEP might become an Australian university of specialisation, an Australian university college, or an Australian university under the “Commonwealth of Australia Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011, Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015.”⁴⁵

Emergence of Self-Accrediting HEPs and Aspirants for a Form of University Status

Developments since the 1960s have enabled the emergence of a number of self-accrediting HEPs teaching theological studies, and to date, one Australian university of specialisation (the University of Divinity). Several other institutions are aspiring to move to become self-accrediting or to achieve either university of specialisation or university college status. Consequently, the numbers of the various categories of providers will continue to vary from year to year. But a snapshot can be provided by the membership of the Council of Deans of Theology, which in 2017 was made up of

43 [Denise Bradley], “Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report, December 2008,” Recommendation 11 [Chapter 3.6], xix. Downloaded from <http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/44384>.

44 <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2017C00271/Download>. Note: between 2000 and 2011 the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) had been worked as an independent national agency, funded by commonwealth, state and territory governments, and tasked with producing reports on the quality of tertiary education in Australia. HEPs associated with theological education also came within its remit. Quality is also part of TEQSA’s remit, but it also functions as an accrediting agency monitoring institutions against stated standards.

45 See especially pages 17–19.

seventeen HEPs. Among these were six universities, five self-accrediting HEPs, and six non-self-accrediting HEPs.⁴⁶ Many of these institutions are of longstanding, as is revealed by Table 2.

TABLE 2: SELF-ACCREDITING THEOLOGICAL PROVIDERS IN AUSTRALIA

Institution	Established	Self-Accrediting	University
Moore Theological College	1856	2011	
Australian College of Theology	1891	2010	
Avondale College	1897	2014	
University of Divinity (Melbourne College of Divinity)	1910	1910	2012
Alphacrucis College (Commonwealth Bible College /Southern Cross College)	1948	2016	
Sydney College of Divinity	1983	2016	
Charles Sturt University	1989	1989	1989
Murdoch University	1973	1973	1973

DEMOGRAPHIC AND FISCAL PRESSURES

Although a smaller percentage of Australians have identified themselves as Christians on each census date since Federation in 1901, the total population has been increasing at a fast enough rate that the actual number of those who identified themselves as Christians has increased in every census until that of 2016 (see Table 3).⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Six universities: Adelaide College of Divinity/University of Adelaide, Australian Catholic University, Charles Sturt University (St Mark's National Theological Centre, Canberra; United Theological College, Parramatta), Murdoch University, University of Divinity, The University of Notre Dame Australia, Notre Dame Australia; five self-accrediting HEPs: Alphacrucis College, Australian College of Theology, Avondale College of Higher Education, Moore Theological College, Sydney College of Divinity; six non-self-accrediting HEPs: BBI—The Australian Institute of Theological Education, Christian Heritage College, Eastern College Australia, Harvest Bible College, Perth Bible College, Tabor College of Higher Education.

⁴⁷ Note, the census and percentage figures for Table 3 were derived from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_Australia. The columns providing numbers of Christians, Anglicans, Catholics, and other Christians are spreadsheet calculations by the author and rounded to the nearest 100.

TABLE 3: PERCENTAGE AND NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS IN AUSTRALIAN POPULATION SINCE 1901

Census year	Total population counted	Total Christian	No. of Christians	Anglican
		%		%
1901	3,773,800	96.1	3,626,600	39.7
1911	4,455,000	95.9	4,272,300	38.4
1921	5,435,700	96.9	5,267,200	43.7
1933	6,629,800	86.4	5,728,100	38.7
1947	7,579,400	88.0	6,669,900	39.0
1954	8,986,500	89.4	8,033,900	37.9
1961	10,508,200	88.3	9,278,700	34.9
1966	11,599,500	88.2	10,230,800	33.5
1971	12,755,600	86.2	10,995,300	31.0
1976	13,548,400	78.6	10,649,000	27.7
1981	14,576,300	76.4	11,136,300	26.1
1986	15,602,200	73.0	11,389,600	23.9
1991	16,850,300	74.0	12,469,200	23.8
1996	17,752,800	70.9	12,586,700	22.0
2001	18,769,200	68.0	12,763,100	20.7
2006	19,855,300	63.9	12,687,500	18.7
2011	21,507,700	61.1	13,141,200	17.1
2016	23,401,400	52.2	12,215,500	13.3

No. of Anglicans	Catholic	No. of Catholics	Other Christian	No. Other Christians
	%		%	
1,498,200	22.7	856,700	33.9	1,279,300
1,710,700	22.4	997,900	35.1	1,563,700
2,375,400	21.7	1,179,500	31.6	1,717,700
2,565,700	19.6	1,299,400	28.1	1,863,000
2,956,000	20.9	1,584,100	28.1	2,129,800
3,405,900	22.9	2,057,900	28.5	2,561,200
3,667,400	24.9	2,616,500	28.4	2,984,300
3,885,800	26.2	3,039,100	28.5	3,305,900
3,954,200	27.0	3,444,000	28.2	3,597,100
3,752,900	25.7	3,481,900	25.2	3,414,200
3,804,400	26.0	3,789,800	24.3	3,542,000
3,728,900	26.0	4,056,600	23.0	3,588,500
4,010,400	27.3	4,600,100	22.9	3,858,700
3,905,600	27.0	4,793,300	21.9	3,887,900
3,885,200	26.6	4,992,600	20.7	3,885,200
3,712,900	25.8	5,122,700	19.3	3,832,100
3,677,800	25.3	5,441,400	18.7	4,021,900
3,112,400	22.6	5,288,700	16.2	3,791,000

Table 3 reveals that while the overall proportion of the Australian population who identify themselves as Christians has declined dramatically since 1901 (from 96% to 52%), the population base of Christians that would support theological education looks relatively stable, at least on first impression. Indeed, the numbers of those identifying themselves as Christians in Australia have exceeded ten million since the 1960s, with numbers looking more than adequate to support vibrant Christian communities and associated theological colleges. But the reality is that an increasingly smaller proportion of those that identify themselves as Christians are attending church, and those that do are over-represented by older age groups,⁴⁸ something that does not bode well for the future health of Australian Christianity. The Christian Research Association summarises the trends in church attendance in the following manner:

The number of Australians attending church services is declining. Data from the ISSP (International Social Survey Programme) shows that, between 1993 and 2009, the proportion of Australians attending a service of worship monthly or more often dropped from 23 per cent to 16 per cent. Occasional attendance (less than monthly) also dropped from 42 per cent to 36 per cent. In turn, the proportion claiming they never attend services of worship rose from 33 per cent to 43 per cent.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ See, for example, Table 2.1 in Peter Kaldor, Robert Dixon, and Ruth Powell, *Taking Stock: A Profile of Australian Church Attenders* (Adelaide, SA: Open Books, 1999), 15, which reveals that while Pentecostal and Adventist churches have a younger age profile, the majority of churches in Australia are over-represented in the older age groups, when compared to the Australian population. See also Figure 1 and Table 1 of Robert Dixon, Audra Kuncianas, and Stephen Reid, "Mass Attendance in Australia: A Report Based on Results from the National Count of Attendance National Church Life Survey Australian Census," (Pastoral Projects Office, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Australian Catholic University, 2008), 1–2, which reveal that attendance numbers of younger age groups at Roman Catholic masses and Sunday assemblies in the absence of a priest have declined between 1996 and 2006, but the numbers of those attending in older age groups has increased. The end result is that the older age groups are much larger in number than the younger age groups.

⁴⁹ <http://cra.org.au/factors-in-declining-church-attendance/>, accessed June 2017. Compare the words of Joseph C. Hough Jr., "The old-line denominations have experienced three decades of declining membership, and there is no indication that one can anticipate any sudden increase in their membership or any intensification of their efforts to recruit prospects for the ministry." "Issues and Challenges in Theological Education: Three Reflections: 1. Reading the Signs," *Theological Education* 37 (2001): 102.

Not only are the numbers of church attenders declining and the average age of those that do attend increasing, but it also appears that church attenders are giving a smaller percentage of their earnings to the church. While these phenomena have been extensively studied in the United States,⁵⁰ it has received less attention in Australia. But what research is available points to an increasing erosion of the financial underpinnings of Christian denominations, which dramatically impacts the amount of financial support that will be available from Christian denominations to support theological education.⁵¹ Theological education is but one of many important institutions that denominations are maintaining. Shrinking budgets mean that difficult choices must be made by church administrators as to which denominational institutions to keep operating and under what financial constraints they will operate.

BLACKBOARD AND MOODLE

Technologies such as Moodle and Blackboard have brought about dramatic changes on methods used to deliver theological education, particularly as it may be delivered in distance or mixed mode. For example, when the Catholic Correspondence Centre (CCC) was set up in 1969, distance education was conducted on the basis of printed materials and written answers exchanged by post, and this pattern continued through to 1994, by which time the CCC had become Broken Bay Institute (BBI) and offered degrees as an associate member of the Sydney College of Divinity. Since 2016, BBI has been a HEP in its own right. It now uses Blackboard to manage the delivery of distance units, rather than paper-based courses.

50 For example, see John L. Ronsvalle and Sylvia Ronsvalle, “The State of Church Giving through 2016: What Do Denominational Leaders Want to Do with \$368 Billion More a Year?,” 28th ed. (Champaign, IL: Empty Tomb, 1918); and Done R. Hoge et al., *Money Matters: Personal Giving in American Churches* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996). See also Loren B. Mead, *Financial Meltdown in the Mainline* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1998); and Robert Wuthnow, *The Crisis in the Churches: Spiritual Malaise, Fiscal Woe* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

51 For example, see Robert K. McIver and Stephen Currow, “A Demographic Analysis of the Tithing Behaviour of 2562 Seventh-day Adventists in Northern New South Wales, Australia,” *Australian Religion Studies Review* 15 (2002): 115–25; and Robert K. McIver, *Tithing Practices Among Seventh-day Adventists: A Study of Tithe Demographics and Motives in Australia, Brazil, England, Kenya and the United States* (Cooranbong, NSW; Silver Spring MD: Avondale Academic Press/General Conference Office of Archives, Statistics and Research, 2016), 57–71, and passim.

Moodle, Blackboard, and similar programs have enabled an increasing proportion of theological providers to engage in distance education. Among these are some who have discovered, like St Mark's in Canberra (as part of CSU), that some or all of their classes have more distance students in them than on-campus students. Indeed, the Australian College of Ministries (ACOM), which began in 1941 as the Churches of Christ in NSW Theological College, has embraced this trend to the extent that it no longer offers full-time face-to-face instruction.

While technology has allowed theological providers to address the needs of their students who live scattered across Australia and the globe, and who wish to remain in employment in their current locations, it has added further administrative complexity to already overworked and under-resourced staff.

RESEARCH

Australia has always had world-class academics working in biblical and theological studies. One need only think of the international reputation of Leon Morris and Edwin Judge, to cite two of many such academics. The last twenty to thirty years, though, has seen a great flowering of research publications flowing from academics involved in theological education.

It is challenging to provide a reliable measure of total research output from those engaged in delivering theological education, but it is possible to trace the dramatic increase in the volume of research coming from HEPs that deliver theological education. One notes that the University of Divinity cited 195 items in their research repository from 2016, which included thirty-one books and seventy-four articles.⁵² In the same year, the Australian College of Theology reported thirty books published by commercial publishers, forty-four chapters in books, and fifty-three articles published in peer-reviewed journals.⁵³ Nor should one overlook the research output of the Sydney College of Divinity,⁵⁴ Avondale College of Higher Education,⁵⁵ Moore

52 <http://repository.divinity.edu.au/view/year/2016.html>.

53 "Research Report 2016," Australian College of Theology.

54 "Report on Research and Professional Activities," <https://scd.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/ResProfActiv-2015-report.pdf>.

55 Avondale listed thirty items in its research repository relating to theological studies published in 2016. http://research.avondale.edu.au/do/discipline_browser/articles?discipline_key=438.

Theological College,⁵⁶ Charles Sturt University School of Theology, the School of Arts at Murdoch University, and the Institute for Religion and Critical Inquiry at the Australian Catholic University, to provide a suggestive rather than comprehensive list of institutions of higher learning across Australia which are generating research publications; publications, it should be pointed out, that are found on the lists of prestigious international publishing houses and in influential international journals.

Furthermore, the supervision of PhD candidates has become a regular part of an academic's workload at many institutions that provide theological education. For example, between 2000 and 2015, the University of Divinity and the Australian College of Theology graduated over 150 doctoral candidates.⁵⁷ Doctoral studies in biblical, theological, and ministry studies are also offered at the Sydney College of Divinity, Avondale College of Higher Education, Moore Theological College, Alphacrucis College, as well as Charles Sturt University, Macquarie University, the University of Adelaide, Murdoch University, and New England University among others. Where once Australians seeking doctoral studies usually headed to Europe or North America, there is a current generation of academics studying biblical studies, theology, and ministry studies at doctoral level within Australia. Such graduates are taking up many of the lecturing positions that become available in Australian HEPs and universities, and it will be very interesting to observe the distinctive Australian approaches to disciplines associated with theological education that will emerge as such Australian graduates become an increasing proportion of those lecturing at HEPs providing theological education.

THE FUTURE

If this short review of some of the key developments that have shaped theological education up until today reveals anything, it is that theological education has experienced a series of dramatic changes and opportunities, most of which would have been hard to predict before they happened. Thus, any thoughts on the future

56 The "Moore College Annual Report 2016" lists seventeen separate publications (page 12) but does not state that the list is comprehensive.

57 Jillian Cox, "The State of HDR Theology Training in Australia 2000–2015: A Project Overview," a paper presented at ANZATS in Adelaide, 11 July 2017.

of theological education must be expressed cautiously. Yet I think that there are some things that can be said about the likely future trends of theological education in Australia, however tentatively.

First, it is hard to see a reversal of many of the changes that we have seen in HEPs providing theological education. One would expect that self-accrediting HEPs would retain that status and that many of them will eventually become either Australian universities of specialisation, Australian university colleges, or Australian universities. One would further expect that the major multi-college providers will continue. History has shown the individual providers that make up the multi-college providers may well vary over time, but the economic imperatives of shared resources for quality assurance and accreditation for the small financially challenged HEPs that make up the multi-college providers will remain. Furthermore, research is now so embedded in theological, biblical, and ministry studies, and it is difficult to see that reversing, nor the fact that Australian institutions will be supervising a number of PhD candidates studying in the fields of theology, biblical, and ministry studies.

What is less certain is the state of wider Australian Christianity. Will the current trends continue, with yet further decreases in the numbers of those who identify themselves as Christians? Will those attending churches continue to decrease in number, or will Australia experience the resurgence of attendance at Christian churches similar to that which has been seen in parts of England?⁵⁸ One might hope that will be the case, but overall, it does appear more likely that there will be a further erosion of the numbers of those committed to Christianity, and in the financial contributions that they make to their denominations. Given that many HEPs providing theological education are closely tied to denominational parent bodies, these trends towards smaller numbers of Christians supporting theological education has to be a great risk factor in the survivability of many of the smaller

⁵⁸ The series of statistics reported at <https://faithsurvey.co.uk/uk-christianity.html> shows almost all measures of numbers of Christians and numbers of those who attend Christian churches are in steady decline in the United Kingdom. On the other hand, conversations with UK-based academics reveals that these general declines are not universally consistent, and in certain parts of the UK, many Anglican parishes are experienced an upswing in the number attending worship services, for example.

HEPs, at least those without endowments and sources of income other than a parent denomination.

Another unknown is the type of Christianity that will characterise Christians in Australia. Once a clear majority of the population, and with much larger numbers of church attenders than any other denomination, those that identify themselves as Anglican have been decreasing in raw numbers in the population since the 1990s, and the numbers of those who attend Anglican worship services have been in long-term decline. By way of contrast, the number of those who identify themselves as Roman Catholics has increased numerically in every census between 1901 and 2011 (and with only a small drop in numbers in 2016). Furthermore, and in contrast to many Protestant denominations, Roman Catholic worship services have been relatively well attended. Some other denominations, such as Seventh-day Adventists, are slowly growing in the numbers who regularly attend worship services in Australia,⁵⁹ and several groups with Pentecostal roots are increasing in the numbers of those who regularly attend their worship services at a greater rate still.⁶⁰ If these trends continue, Australian Christianity appears set to be increasingly Catholic and Pentecostal, while many other previously large denominational groupings will diminish in importance. What this means for the abilities of the Anglican and Uniting Church's ability to support the large network of their associated institutions, while providing diverse services ranging from aged care to theological education, is yet to be seen.

While it seems likely that the membership base and financial resources for many denominations will continue to decrease, it is hard to predict whether this will inevitably result in a decrease in the number of HEPs providing theological education. Small theological providers, like small local congregations, have an incredible resilience. Other sources of income can sometimes be tapped, and the dedicated commitment of the overworked and under-resourced lecturing personnel seems to be without end. Nor are future declining numbers of adherents to Christian denominations a given: renewal and revival are constants in Christian history.

59 See the yearly official statistical reports at <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics>.

60 See for example, <https://hillsong.com/fact-sheet>.

I find my greatest uncertainty in predicting the growing or lessening involvement of the public universities in theological education. Several contradictory trends may be observed. One may wonder whether the cost advantages of the universities and their appetite for student numbers will mean that theological education will be increasingly delivered in the state-funded universities, particularly HDR degrees in biblical, theological, and ministry studies. Or will universities decide that the numbers in Christian theology are just not sufficiently large enough to justify their continued offering?⁶¹

Whatever happens in the future, my expectation is that theological education in Australia will continue to be a miracle of survival. My prediction is that hard-working, dedicated lecturers and administrators will continue to work sacrificially with their students in the varied institutions that provide theological education across Australia. Together with their students, they will continue the serious study of the Word of God. They will celebrate the love of Christ and preach peace and reconciliation. They will continue to be a source of much good in the society in which they work, while they await the return of their Lord.

61 One might cite the experience of Newcastle University and Auckland University among those that have either wound back their offerings in theological education or eliminated them altogether.