

## THE JOURNEY OF *HTS THEOLOGICAL STUDIES*



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### CHAIRPERSON'S ADDRESS AT THE LAUNCH OF HTS ONLINE BY AOSIS (OJP) IN THE SENATE HALL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA ON 2 MARCH 2009

#### Ladies and Gentlemen!

We are living in rapidly changing times. Even our vocabulary struggles to keep up with the times. New words are created on a daily basis, especially with regard to information technology and the electronic media. And to crown it all, there is an acronym for almost everything. Some will be mentioned here tonight. At the outset, let me therefore list some of those you are likely to encounter:

- AOSIS – *African Online Scientific Information Systems*
- OJP – *OpenJournals Publishing*
- SCOPUS – *The largest abstract and citation database of research literature and quality web sources*
- ISI – *Institute for Scientific Information*
- IBSS – *International Bibliography of the Social Sciences*
- ASSAf – *Academy for Science for South Africa*
- ARWU – *Academic Rating of Worldwide Universities*

And then of course, UP (University of Pretoria), HTS (*HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies*), HTC (Reformed Theological College) and NRCA (Netherdutch Reformed Church of Africa)

Every vowel in the alphabet has been used: Africa, electronic, information, online and university, the A being the most important. In the above acronyms A stands for *Africa* and *academy*, which is exactly what today is all about. Nowadays almost everything takes on an electronic format. We could even refer to an 'e-HTS'!

My address consists of four steps: *Research*, *University of Pretoria*, the *Faculty of Theology* and the *HTS Theological Studies*. Like a blow torch cutting to the core, I will conclude with the essence of tonight's proceedings by focusing on the HTS going online, against the background of research by the UP and the Faculty.

**Research** is 'the thorough, systematic and patient study in a particular discipline, undertaken to discover or to establish certain facts or principles'. However, research on its own does not mean much. Knowledge restricted to the confines of ivory tower academia is of little significance. Research should reach the world, in other words it should be *disseminated* – hence the critical importance of academic publications. Not only do they offer the necessary platform for researchers to publish their results, they also provide an opportunity to enter into discussions with peers all over the world, and by doing so, to refine or adjust insights and findings.

**Academic journals** play a crucial role in fulfilling this role, as is explained by the following definition: 'An academic journal is a peer-reviewed periodical in which scholarship relating to a particular academic discipline is published. Academic journals serve as forums for the introduction and presentation for scrutiny of new research, and the critique of existing research.'

The advantages of academic journals, compared to books, are many: they are more economical, enable critical debate over a relatively short time span, are usually more accessible and cheaper, and they are often more focused on the essence of the research. Last but not the least, references to articles and authors in journals can be more easily monitored. The so-called 'impact figure' is determined by the number of influential and independent citations by peers that appear in other (similarly recognised) journals. The quality of research results, which determines accreditation with index companies and government controlled funders/sponsors, therefore lies *inter alia* both in the peer-reviewed contents and in the short time-span between the date of submission, editorial acceptance and the date of publication. A recent development therefore is that, not only citation of articles and authors is considered, but also the *time* it takes to disseminate the research. The question now is: how *soon* after publication is the research noticed? How long this interest lasts, now also comes into the equation. Citations and their frequency are the only real indicators of interest in the research. Simply put, it means that electronic journal indexes are now able to indicate the 'shelf life' of research.

According to the so-called 'Bradford's Law', most citations appear in a limited number of scientific journals. In a recent study it was found that out of the 7 528 leading journals worldwide, more than half of the citations appeared in only 300 journals! What's more, a mere 3 000 of these journals represent citations from 75% of all published articles and 90% of all cited articles.

The **University of Pretoria** strives to be internationally recognised as a top South African research university. Since the mid-nineties of the previous century, the University of Pretoria's research output has been the highest by far among South African universities, outscoring the University of the Witwatersrand, the University of Cape Town, the University of KwaZulu Natal and the University of Stellenbosch – the 'Big Five' of South African universities. Research output has a weight of 40%

for ranking by institutions such as the *Shanghai Jiao Tong* ranking (in terms of which the University of Pretoria was ranked just above the top 500 universities in the world last year – for more interesting information in this regard, see <http://www.topuniversities.com>) Of that 40%, 20% pertains to citations in two journals, *Nature* and *Science*, and the other 20% to citations in ISI and IBSS journals.

Since *HTS Theologische Studies/Theological Studies* ISI accreditation in 2007, the University of Pretoria's publication in ISI journals has increased from 49.5% to 53.7%. For the first time the University now also appears in ARWU's research discipline, 'Social Sciences General', a category for which we did not qualify before.

As we zoom in further, allow me two remarks as far as the **Faculty of Theology** is concerned. The lecturers of this faculty stand out in two respects. Research article outputs average 8.3 units per lecturer, whereas no other UP faculty exceeds 1 unit per lecturer. The same applies to the number of doctoral students per full time lecturer – one of the best indicators of a faculty's commitment to research. In the Faculty of Theology the average is 14 students per lecturer, in the other faculties that number is 4.

**HTS Theological Studies** is South Africa's oldest and most comprehensive theological journal. It was founded in 1943 as a joint undertaking of South African and Dutch theologians. Prof. De Zwaan (Leiden), Obbink (Utrecht), Gemser (UP) and Prof. Van Selms (UP) are regarded the most prominent role players. (The latter two were last year also listed among UP's 100 leading scholars of the past century). In the 65 years of its existence four editions of HTS appeared annually. Indeed an extraordinary achievement! At the time of its establishment, the HTS was a joint undertaking of HAUM and DeBussey (which belonged to the NRCA). At a later stage, the NHW Press (also belonging to the NRCA) was responsible for managing and publishing the HTS, until eventually the Reformed Theological College became the journal's title owner.

Since its inception, the NRCA has supported the HTS financially and otherwise. This contribution has gradually increased to an amount of R450 000 for the last financial year. Currently there are negotiations with the University of Pretoria to largely take over this responsibility since the university receives at least R4.5 million per year from the Department of Higher Education thanks to HTS outputs. When spiralled down to the Faculty of Theology, the HTS publishes 42% of the total output. Expressed in monetary terms, the HTS contributes 53% to the Faculty of Theology's income from articles.

Since its establishment HTS has also always served the international research community. Some 28% of its authors are local (UP), 52% national and 20% international. As far as language is concerned, the ratio is 64% English, Dutch and German and 36% Afrikaans. Therefore the pejorative term 'in-house' cannot be applied to the HTS.

According to a survey by the British company Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, HTS articles are quoted more often in ISI internationally recognised journals than articles from other South African theological journals. Of the authors who publish in South African theological journals, some of those who publish in HTS are also the most frequently quoted theologians. According to a recently published CREST survey (CREST is a centre of the Department of Sociology at the University of Stellenbosch) HTS takes the 14th position of the 100 or so academic journals in both the natural and social sciences in which South African academics prefer to publish.

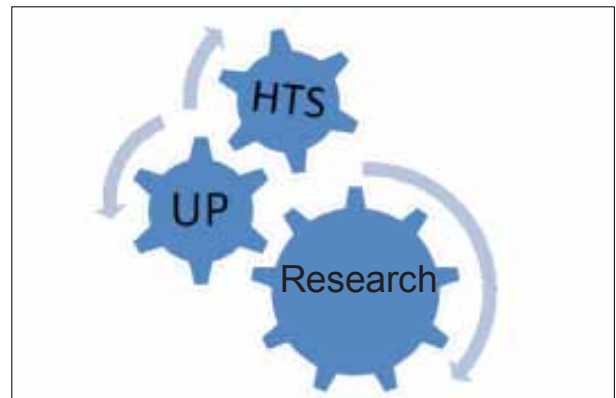
HTS is the only theological journal in South Africa that is included in the Scopus index. Scopus is the largest abstract and citation database of research literature and quality web sources in the world. It provides superior support of the literature

research process and is updated daily. Scopus offers over 16 500 peer-reviewed journals from more than 4 000 publishers, including coverage of 15 400 peer-reviewed journals (including 1 200 open access journals, 575 trade publications, 315 book series, 3.6 million conference papers, 37 million records, of which 18 million records include references going back to 1996 (75% include references), 19 million pre-1996 records go back as far as 1823, results from 433 million scientific web pages, 23 million patent records from 5 patent offices, and 'articles-in-press' from over 3 000 journals.

Prof. Andries van Aarde, who during the past 25 years as the HTS editor has maintained a high level of international recognition and has advanced HTS to the journal it is today. He plays a leading role in ASSAf's *Editors' Forum for Theological and related Journals* (EFTJ) which is currently investigating the possibility of other journals also going online. Suggestions to this effect were presented by both ASSAf and AOSIS to the Editors' Forum, chaired by Proff Dirk Human (of *Verbum et Ecclesia*) at a meeting held at the University of Pretoria on 3 March.

Ladies and Gentlemen - from now on the HTS is at your fingertips: [www.hts.org.za](http://www.hts.org.za). Use it and enjoy it!

I conclude by emphasising the *integral partnership* between the international research community, the University of Pretoria and the *HTS Theological Studies*:



The HTS has reached another milestone. This event is a demonstration of how the University meets the challenge of being *internationally competitive and locally relevant* – in the HTS, where **Academy and Africa** meet.

#### I thank you!

Johan Buitendag  
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