Enhancing the Evidence Base for Australian Theological Research

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Abstract

This article reports on a project to expand the evidence base for Australian theological research in two ways. Firstly, by preparing an evidence-based, expert informed ranking of religion and theology journals. Secondly, by analysing Australian Research Council grants in religion and theology, and benchmarking against other fields in terms of grants awarded, success rates, relationship to staff numbers, and publications. Some recommendations for enhancing the role of religion and theology research emerge from this analysis. The project is set in the context of the history of Australian theological research within the Australian higher education system.

Keywords

Religion, Theology, Australia, Journal Ranking, Australian Research Council, Australian Academy of Humanities

Introduction

Theology is one of the oldest disciplines in European universities, yet has a marginal and complicated place in Australia's higher education system.[1] This is partly to do

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[1] The role of theology within Australia's higher education system is discussed by Stuart Piggin, "A History of Theological Education in Australia," in *The Furtherance of Religious Beliefs: Essays on the History of Theological Education in Australia*, ed. Geoffrey R. Treloar (Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1997); Geoffrey R. Treloar, "From the Martin Report to TEQSA: Church and State in Australian Theological Education, 1965–2015" (unpublished conference paper, 2017); Majella Franzmann, "Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands," in *Religious Studies: A Global View*, ed. Gregory D. Alles (New York: Routledge, 2008), 219–41; and Paul Oslington, "The Place of Religion and Theology in the National Research System" (paper presented at the Council for Humanities and Social Sciences [CHASS] Inaugural Forum, Canberra, and the Australasian Association for the Study of Religion [AASR] annual conference, Sydney, 2012).

with the history of our churches and partly to do with the history of our higher education system.[2] Our first universities were founded at a time of intense controversy over the place of Roman Catholics and dissenting churches in the English universities. The University of Sydney, founded in 1850, mostly by devout Anglicans and Presbyterians, specifically excluded the teaching of theology and confined the church's role to residential colleges on the edges of the campus.[3] It was a case of excluding clerics to facilitate both education and true religion.[4] The University of Melbourne took a similar approach, leading to the establishment of the Melbourne College of Divinity in 1910 as a degree awarding consortium of church colleges.[5] Similar reasons were behind the other major theological consortium, the Australian College of Theology, which was founded in 1891.[6] Almost all students of theology at these colleges were preparing for ordained ministry in their church denominations.[7]

Many universities later included religious studies in their Faculties of Arts, taking a purportedly neutral outsider approach to religions, in contrast to the committed insider approach of theology. Religious Studies has tended to attract anti-

[2] Histories of our higher education system include those by Hannah Forsyth, *A History of the Modern Australian University* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2014) and Glyn Davis, *The Australian Idea of a University* (Melbourne: MUP, 2017). For general histories of our churches see Hilary Carey, *Believing in Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996) and Ian Breward, *A History of the Churches in Australasia* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001). More detail on the Roman Catholic Church can be found in Patrick O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community: An Australian History*, 3rd ed. (Sydney, UNSW Press, 1992) and on the evangelical churches in Stuart Piggin and Robert D. Linder, *The Fountain of Public Prosperity: Evangelical Christians in Australian History 1740–1914* (Clayton, VIC: Monash University Publishing, 2018).

[3] Bruce N. Kaye, "Anglicans and the Founding of the University of Sydney," *Connor Court Quarterly. Special Issue: The Christian View of History and the Revival of the Liberal Arts* (collected papers from a colloquium held at Campion College, Sydney, August 2012).

[4] It is a myth that Australia's constitution mandates the exclusion of religion from public life, or from our higher education system. This is discussed by Tom R. Frame, *Church and State: Australia's Imaginary Wall* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2006). Jeffrey Stout who is not a religious believer also argues that the slippage of the meaning of secular from neutrality between religions (including no religion) and exclusion of religion is damaging for society ("2007 Presidential Address: The Folly of Secularism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76 [September 2018]: 533–44).

[5] Paul Beirne, "Melbourne College of Divinity: A Selective Historical Overview," *Pacifica* 23, no. 2 (2010): 123–36; Peter Sherlock, "Why Australia Needs Theology" (lecture at Trinity College, University of Melbourne, 2017), https://www.trinity.unimelb.edu.au/getmedia/6ce2f214-cbbe-40da-8a75-cda1cbea55c8/Why-Australia-Needs-Theology.aspx.

[6] Geoffrey R. Treloar, ed., *The "Furtherance of Religious Beliefs": Essays on the History of Theological Education in Australia* (Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity for the Evangelical History Association of Australia, 1997); "The Three (or Four) Identities of the Australian College of Theology, 1891–2016," in *Theological Education: Foundations, Practices, and Future Directions*, eds. Andrew M. Bain and Ian Hussey (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018).

[7] An interesting exception is the college founded in Parramatta by Rev. Samuel Marsden, which has a claim to be the oldest higher education institution in Australia, and certainly the oldest to enrol international students. See Denise Austin, *Our College: A History of the National Training College of Australian Christian Churches* (Sydney: Australasian Pentecostal Studies Press, 2013).

religious, often former religious believers, and has struggled to establish itself as a coherent discipline as distinct from the older disciplines it grew out of such as history, philosophy, classics, philology, and oriental studies.[8] As Australia's newer universities were founded they also kept theology at a distance,[9] at least until government funding was tied to student numbers and some university administrators saw the potential revenue streams from adopting theological colleges. Examples are the arrangements between CSU and St Marks National Theological Centre; between the University of Newcastle and Morpeth; and arrangements that Flinders University made in Adelaide and Murdoch University made in Perth.

An exception to the exclusion of theology is the Australian Catholic University—a public university founded in 1991 following Australian government pressure to consolidate teaching and nursing training—though it curiously lacked a Faculty of Theology for many years.[10] Another exception is the University of Notre Dame Australia which was founded as a private university in Western Australia in 1989.[11] Others may follow in the next few years such as my own institution, Alphacrucis, associated with the Pentecostal movement and with campuses now in every Australian state, and Avondale, associated with the Seventh Day Adventists and located on the NSW Central Coast. One of the theological colleges, Melbourne College of Divinity, became a university in 2010 through an act of Victorian Parliament just before the states handed over power to accredit universities to the Commonwealth and the national regulator TEQSA began operating. Its accreditation as the University of Divinity is in the somewhat unusual category of University of Specialisation, which some other theological colleges are currently seeking.

Much less is known about theological research in Australia than is known about research in other disciplines. Australia's church-run theological colleges have produced a smattering of scholars of international renown, some of whom sadly have

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[8] Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[9] The story of the University of Western Sydney is told by Mark Hutchinson, *A University of the People: A History of the University of Western Sydney* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2013); "Presence in the West: Religious Contributions to the Secular Ideology of an Australian University," *Journal of Religious History* 37, no. 3 (2013): 391–409.
[10] Greg Craven, *The Idea of an Australian Catholic University* (lecture at St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, 2008); John B. Hirst, *Australian Catholic University: The First Twenty-Five Years* (North Sydney: Australian Catholic University, 2015).
[11] Edward Molloy and Peter Tannock, *The Founding and Establishment of the University of Notre Dame Australia* (2014), https://www.notredame.edu.au/about/notre-dame.

left to pursue opportunities in overseas universities.[12] In recent times, the adoption of some theological colleges into universities, the increasing demand for postgraduate research degrees in theology, and requirements from accreditation agencies, have raised the profile of research in the sector. Theological colleges not connected to universities receive no direct project or block government funding for research, nor the funding of research time for academics that is built into university teaching funding, so resourcing research continues to be difficult.[13]

A landmark study of the Australian theology sector *Uncovering Theology* led by Charles Sherlock and supported by peak bodies and some government funding highlighted the increasing engagement of theology with the national research system and the strength of theological research.[14] The ARC ERA rankings provide evidence for religion and theology research in our universities, but most Australian theological researchers operate outside the universities.[15] The websites of individual colleges provide some information on the publications of their researchers and some, such as Alphacrucis, have undertaken a mock ERA, but lack of consistency and many gaps make it difficult to formulate an accurate and up-to-date picture of Australian research publications in religion and theology. As well as the lack of data on publications, it is difficult to gauge the quality of these publications due to the absence of an authoritative ranking of journals that is comparable with rankings that exist for other disciplines.[16]

Another area of obscurity is competitive research grants in religion and theology. The most important source for Australian researchers is the ARC, and it makes available on its website the details of grants it has awarded. However, it is not just a matter of searching for grants awarded in the religion and theology subject

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[12] Surveys include Robert J. Banks, "Fifty Years of Theology in Australia, 1915–1965," *Colloquium* 9 (1976) (Part I, 36–42; Part II, 7–16); Gideon Goosen, *Australian Theologies: Themes and Methodologies into the Third Millennium* (Strathfield, NSW: St. Pauls Publications, 2000).

[13] Neil Ormerod, "Future Bites for Theological Colleges," *Eureka Street* 21, no. 17 (September 6, 2011); Paul Oslington, "Competition Policy in Higher Education," in *The Australian University in Crisis*, ed. William Coleman (Melbourne: Connor Court, 2019).

[14] Charles Sherlock, *Uncovering Theology: The Depth, Reach and Utility of Australian Theological Education* (Melbourne: ATF Press, 2009). Further work on teaching and learning is found in Les Ball, *Transforming Theology* (Melbourne: Mosaic Press, 2012). Both of these publications were sponsored by the peak body CDT and received some government funding through the now defunct Australian Learning and Teaching Council, and Office of Learning and Teaching.

[15] The most recent rankings are ARC 2019a, along with the new impact and engagement metrics ARC 2019b.

[16] An example of rankings in another discipline is the Australian Business Deans Council rankings available on their website. The best ranking across all disciplines remains the 2010 ARC ERA ranked journal list, which is no longer officially used by the ARC.

codes, for many applicants avoid these codes and use history, sociology or other codes because of perceived difficulties of obtaining ARC funding for explicitly theological research.

This project addresses two major gaps in the evidence base: it provides an evidence-based expert-informed ranking of religion and theology journals, and an analysis of ARC grants in religion and theology. It is endorsed by the peak bodies the Council of Deans of Theology and ANZATS, and is funded by the Australian Research Theology Foundation with additional contributions from the University of Divinity, Charles Sturt University, and Alphacrucis. It builds on a previous 2011 project financed by the Australian Research Theology Foundation and several universities on the place of theology in Australia's research funding system, and which included an analysis of ARC grants in religion and theology. We appreciate the engagement of senior ARC staff with both the current and previous projects.

We will now summarise the methodology and findings of the two parts of the project, before drawing general conclusions about Australian theological research.

Journal Rankings

Rankings of universities and journals are an increasingly prominent part of contemporary academic culture. It is not just politicians, journalists, and bureaucrats who are driving this, but also academics' own concerns about esteem.[17]

Criteria

What are appropriate criteria for ranking religion and theology journals? Citations are the most important impact metric for journals in the sciences, and the most used citations statistic is the impact factor, which is the number of citations the journal has attracted divided by the number of citable items the journal has published over a specified period. Another statistic is the H Index, which is the number of articles cited at least that number of times over a specified period. This gets around the problem of

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[17] The debate over rankings is surveyed by Wendy N. Espeland and Michael Sauder, *Engines of Anxiety: Academic Rankings, Reputation, and Accountability* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2016). My own primary discipline of economics seems rankings obsessed—perhaps a symptom of its uncertain place in sciences and the wider society.

journal impact factors being distorted by a single very highly cited article. Besides citations, esteem measures are sometimes used, as in the case of surveying scholars working in the field and asking them to rank journals.

There are many problems with citation measures. The set of journals from which citations are collected is crucial. For instance, if a small number of theology journals are included in a set of mostly religious studies journals then the citation rates of the theology journals will be very low, suggesting that theology journals are of low quality. An alternative explanation that religious studies and theology are disparate fields seems more plausible because reversing the analysis and including a small number of religious studies journals in a set of theology journals leads to the religion journals being little cited.

The time period over which citations are collected also matters. In the sciences, articles tend to be cited for a shorter period, whereas in the humanities, it tends to take longer for the significance of contributions to emerge and classic articles and books are cited heavily for many years.

Disciplinary cultures also make a difference to citation measures. The sciences have a journal publication culture whereas books, and chapters within books, are most important in the humanities. Co-authorship is the norm in the sciences but rare in the humanities. There are large variations in the average number of citations in journal articles across different fields, with scientists generally citing a lot more articles than humanities scholars. Patterns of citation across disciplines are themselves an interesting subject. Basic science, for instance, is much more cited in the applied sciences than in the reverse and classics is more cited by religion scholars than the reverse.[18]

In the humanities, geographic and other contextual factors have more impact upon citations than in the sciences. Physics is physics whether it is done in Australia or Europe, but history or sociology of religion is often geographically specific. A physics publication thus is potentially citable in all physics journals, whereas an

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[18] A group of scientists has recently begun mapping disciplines and their interactions using citation data. A field is a cluster of publications that cites itself, and the strength and direction of citation relationships between fields can then be investigated. Citation maps are discussed by Jennifer Howard, "Citation by Citation, New Maps Chart Hot Research and Scholarship's Hidden Terrain," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (September 11, 2011), and a citation map for the social sciences produced by Jevon West, Carl T. Bergstrom, and Martin Rosvall is reproduced as figure 1 (*Maps of Science: The Social Sciences* [2004], http://www.eigenfactor.org/map/maps.php). It would be really interesting to map the relationships between different religion and theology subfields, and the relationships to other fields such as history, philosophy, and literary studies.

article on trends in Australian church attendance is less likely to be cited in European religion journals, and European church attendance is similarly of less interest in the Australian context. Accordingly, some types of work where context is important, including a lot of religion and theology scholarship, are going to attract fewer citations because of their nature. Novel or non-mainstream research tends to be undervalued by citation counts, though may turn out to be the most significant in the long term as it becomes the new mainstream.

There are a few technical issues to watch with citation measures. Different sources of citations (such as Google Scholar, Elsevier's Scopus, and the Clarivate Web of Science) vary greatly in their coverage of books and journals, and how far back in time they go.[19] Impact factors depend on the count of citable articles as well as citations and there are large variations between journals and sources to contend with. A journal that publishes a large proportion of book reviews that are counted as citable articles, yet tend to be less cited, will have its impact factor pulled down artificially. One thing that was striking about the citation data in religion and theology was how few citations journals outside of the top journals in these fields attract, making impact factors subject to large standard errors.[20] This makes ranking on the basis of citations particularly problematic for religion and theology. Citation measures also just consider usage by other academics, neglecting wider impact and engagement, for instance in the churches, schools, and NFPs.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of journal rankings is their effect on the behaviour of scholars and administrators. Complaints include a preoccupation with where scholars publish rather than what is published, pressure for scholars and editors to follow academic fashions, and the neglect of Australian journals and research on Australian topics. These problems are magnified the more rankings drive appointments, promotion, workload, redundancy, and funding decisions in universities.

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[19] Anne-Wil Harzing and Satu Alakangas compare results from citation analyses from Googler Scholar, Scopus, and the Web of Science (see "Google Scholar, Scopus and the Web of Science: A Longitudinal and Cross-Disciplinary Comparison," *Scientometrics* 106, no. 2: 787–804).

[20] D. I. Stern found standard errors to be large and hence the reliability low for impact factors journals outside the top journals in economics, a field with a much larger volume of citations than religion and theology (see "Uncertainty Measures for Economics Journal Impact Factors," *Journal of Economic Literature* 51, no. 1 [2013]: 173–89).

Rankings are unlikely to lose their influence in the academic world anytime soon and the view taken in this project is similar to that of a recent commentator who wrote that, "the institutional and administrative realities within which we work demand comparative assessment and accountability. Bibliometric measures are here to stay, so let's make the best of them. It is better to try to understand—and to argue for more appropriate uses of—quantitative metrics than to turn our backs on them in ignorance."[21]

Methodology and Results for Journal Rankings

Our first task was to assemble a comprehensive list of journals in religion and theology, including journals that seek to bridge between religion and theology and other academic fields. Existing listings such as the Australian Research Council ERA list, international listings, and suggestions from experts in various fields enabled us to identify just under one thousand journals. This is approximately double the number of religion journals included in the last journal ranking exercise that the Australian Research Council conducted in 2010.

In view of some of the problems with citation data discussed above, we supplemented citation data with comparisons to other rankings of religion and theology journals that were available, and utilised the expertise of a panel of senior researchers in different areas of religion and theology. Our rankings may be found here.

Citation Data

For citations, we used the publicly available Elsevier Scopus SCImago data which has been available since 2004, and reported citations, impact factors, and H indices for the journals. Coverage of religion and theology journals in Scopus is seriously incomplete and idiosyncratic. The majority of currently listed journals are religion journals, while the few theology journals that are listed suffer as a result of this and are undervalued in the SCImago statistics. An advantage of SCImago is that it includes book citations

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[21] Steven Engler, "Bibliometrics and the Study of Religions," *Religion* 44, no. 2 (2014): 193–219 (216).

as well as journal citations, though the set of books included may be as problematic as the set of journals.

Established in the 1960s, the Clarivate Web of Science data predates Scopus, and is the foundation of the current discipline of bibliometrics. It has had several owners, most recently Thomson Reuters, and previously ISI. Clarivate has been chosen as the supplier of citation data to the Australian Research Council for ERA purposes. Its focus is on journal citations and the coverage of religion and theology journals in the Arts and Humanities Citation Index and Emerging Sources Citation Index sections of the Web of Science is much wider than the coverage in SCImago. Impact factors are not calculated by Clarivate for arts and humanities journals because of concerns about using the Impact Factor indicator out of context. Clarivate citation data in this context is the most reliable source based on cover to cover indexing of journals and books selected under their journal selection criteria and the consistency of capturing citation connections. Citation metrics are only available to subscribers of their platform and so have not been made public in this report or in our rankings spreadsheet.

We considered using citations from Google Scholar in conjunction with the Harzing Publish or Perish software that facilitates analysis.[22] For other fields, this software has been shown to provide data on a more complete set of books and journals, though it is unclear whether this applies to religion and theology. Unfortunately, the need to carry out an individual analysis for each of our almost one thousand journals made using this prohibitive within the timeframe and budget of this project, but analysis of the Google Scholar data using the Harzing software could be part of a future project.

Another possibility was generating Google N-grams[23] for each journal title, which would have given us the number of mentions of the journal title in books published in English over a time period nominated by us. A difficulty with this is that journal titles are often abbreviated or mentioned rather than properly cited in books, especially in older publications. Some journal titles such as "Religion" or

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[22] Anne-Wil Harzing, "Publish or Perish" (2007). Software available at http://www.harzing.com/pop.htm; *The Publish or Perish Book: Your Guide to Effective and Responsible Citation Analysis* (Melbourne: Tarma Software Research, 2016).
[23] Jean-Baptiste Michel et al., "Quantitative Analysis of Culture Using Millions of Digitized Books," *Science* 331, no. 6014 (January 2011): 176–82. An example of their use is the appendix to Paul Oslington, *Political Economy as Natural Theology: Smith Malthus and Their Followers* (London: Routledge, 2018).

"Theological Studies" are used in other ways than to cite an article in that journal. Using Google N-grams would, however, remedy the limitation of the Clarivate citation data which includes citations from only books indexed in the Book Citation Index Science and in Social Science and Humanities. An illustrative example is given in figure 2, but timeframe and budget constraints on this project made full analysis of journals with Google N-grams impossible.

Existing Rankings

Alongside citations data, the research team utilised existing rankings of theology journals. The most important is the [ranking undertaken by the Australian Research Council as part of ERA 2010](#), though withdrawn and no longer officially used or published on the Australian Research Council website. Their great advantage is that they cover all disciplines and allow us to benchmark religion and theology rankings against other disciplines. Rankings exercises undertaken by the Australian Catholic University and the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium, were also utilised as comparative studies.

Expert Panel

The expertise of senior scholars in religion and theology was drawn upon to review the draft ranking that Paul Oslington determined on the basis of the citations data and comparisons with other available rankings. We appreciate the contributions of our expert panel: Prof. Neil Ormerod (Theology—Sydney College of Divinity), Prof. Mark Thompson (Theology—Moore College), Assoc. Prof. Denise Austin (History—Alphacrucis), Prof. James Dalziel (Christian Education—Morling College), Dr. Mark Harding (Biblical Studies—ANZATS/CDT), Assoc. Prof. Jacqui Grey (Biblical Studies—Alphacrucis), Dr. John Flett (Missions—University of Divinity), Prof. Darren Cronshaw (Pastoral Studies—Sydney College of Divinity), and Dr. Fotini Toso (Research Development Coordinator—University of Divinity). The draft rankings were reviewed in the light of the comments and suggested alternative rankings from the reviewers, but responsibility for the rankings provided in the spreadsheet rests with the project team led by Paul Oslington.

Scales

After much discussion the research team decided to use a ranking scale A*-A-B-C to parallel the ERA 2010 scale, allowing benchmarking across disciplines and consistency with other bodies such as the Australian Business Deans Council who use this scale in their rankings. The alternative would have been ranking journals into bands consistent with the current Australian Research Council ERA numerical scaling system, whereby a score of 5 represents performance "well above world standard," at the highest level, and 1 corresponds to performance "well below world standard," at the lowest. The most recent ranking of Australian Universities religion and theology is available here.

Distribution

Our distribution of rankings is broadly similar to the rankings of religion and theology journals in ERA 2010, though we have a large tail of C-ranked journals that reflects our greater comprehensiveness.

Competitive Research Grants

The increasing focus in contemporary universities on winning competitive research grants raises many issues. The most obvious is that research grants are input to the research process and not an output. One could imagine an academic who produced many high-quality and heavily cited publications losing out in a university appointment or promotion committee to an academic with a poorer publication record who has however won several large Australian Research Council Grants. Yet, from a government point of view, the academic who missed out has a much higher research productivity in the sense of output generated per dollar of taxpayer funding. This creates a counterproductive incentive for academics, especially for those with strong publication records who are capable of winning competitive research grants, to find ways of doing their research that use large amounts of grant funding. It is a particular problem for humanities academics when administrators compare their research grant income with scientists, and pressure them to spend more of their time applying for research grants, rather than undertaking actual research.

Why then do Australian universities place so much emphasis on grant income? One explanation might be that it is a by-product of the obsession with measurement and ranking. Research quality is difficult to measure and the rigorous assessment processes of grant bodies like the Australian Research Council make grants won a readily available proxy for the quality of research done by an individual scholar or university.

Just as journal rankings will remain part of contemporary academic culture for the foreseeable future, so will judgements about the value of research, measured by Australian Research Council success. For this reason, as well as the potential usefulness to religion and theology, researchers of grant funding, attention to the place of religion and theology at the Australian Research Council and similar bodies, is warranted.

Analysis of ARC Grants in Religion and Theology

The project, like the previous 2011 analysis of grants in religion and theology, utilises the data the Australian Research Council provides on grants that it has awarded since it began operations in 2002. Grants are awarded differently through different schemes, including "Discovery," which funds basic research, and "Linkage," which funds more applied projects in partnership with industry. There are also the highly competitive Discovery Early Career Fellowships, Future Fellowships, and Laureate Fellowships. Grants are classified according to field of research codes, including religion and theology 2204 (previously 4402).

Identifying Grants

As mentioned above, identifying grants in religion and theology is not just a matter of searching for grants awarded in the religion and theology codes. Our listing obviously includes these, but the research team also searched for the names of major Australian religion and theology researchers, and searched various religion and theology keywords. Searching outside the religion codes is important because there has been a clear trend away from applying in the religion codes, and more and more religion and theology projects are being awarded funding in other codes. Searching for grants without religion codes is somewhat of an arbitrary process but the outcome is a listing

that we believe yields a more rounded picture of Australian Research Council support of religion and theology research.

Analysis

Besides listing the grants and amounts awarded in religion and theology from 2002–2018 (see tables 1 and 2 of the linked attachment) and total grants awarded (see table 3 of the attachment), we have also reported numbers of applications and calculated success rates for applications where religion is the primary code (table 4 of the attachment).

Funding by the ARC of religion research, and especially theology research, is very thin indeed. Grants with religion as the primary code are 52/23944 = 0.2% of grants and 7/5193 < 0.01% of fellowships awarded. If we extend this to include religion or theology projects regardless of codes, then it becomes 135/23944 = 0.5% of project grants and 18/5193 = 0.3% of fellowships. Very few of these are theology projects.

Grants in religion tend to be small, and so the proportion of religion funding is even smaller than the proportion of grants awarded. Funding for projects with religion as the primary code was $13,492,912 which is 0.16% of total ARC funding. Including all religion and theology projects, funding was $50,003,628 which is 0.65% of the total.

To get an idea of how thin the funding of religion and theology research actually is, we compared the proportion of religion and theology grants with the proportion of academics in this field. There are various ways of calculating the number of religion and theology academics. We consider the most reliable estimate to be that of Charles Sherlock's *Uncovering Theology*[24] study's determination of 712 full-time equivalent academics, which makes them about 0.9% of all academics. Of these, about 209 or about 0.3% of all academics work in universities and are eligible to apply to the ARC through their institutions. Another method is to consider the primary research code nominated by university researchers as part of the ARC ERA process, that shows 181 academics, which is reasonably close to the figure calculated from the Sherlock data. Note that detailed calculations of all these figures are given in

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[24] Sherlock, *Uncovering Theology*, 42.

the attachment. What we see is that the proportions of grants and fellowships with a primary code religion are less than the proportion of religion and theology academics eligible to apply to the ARC, and very much less than the proportion of all religion and theology academics. The biggest factor in the thinness of support for theology research in Australia is the ineligibility of most theology researchers to apply for ARC funding.

We can also compare the proportion of grants in religion and theology to the proportion of religion and theology publications. From the calculations in the attachment based on ARC ERA 2015 data, publications reported with religion codes are 216/5488 = 3.9% of books, 905/45,269 = 2.0% of book chapters, 954/301,499 = 0.3% of refereed journal papers. Proportions of religion books and book chapters are well above proportions of grants awarded, though journal articles are more in line with grants awarded.

Publications data for theology academics outside universities and thus ineligible for ARC grants are not available as their institutions are not included in ERA. I have access to data for my own institution Alphacrucis and publication rates in our theology faculty are substantially higher than those reported above for religion and theology academics in universities. The same may be true of other theology faculties outside universities, but probably not true on average for theologians outside universities because they tend to be teaching focused and their institutions receive no government research funding.

Even so, including religion and theology publications produced outside the universities would put the proportion of religion and theology publications even further above the proportion of grants.

Some of the trends in the funding of religion and theology research are interesting.

A striking feature of table 1 of the attachment is the low and declining number of linkage grants awarded in religion and theology. This is strange when theology is a sector more engaged than most, certainly most in the humanities, with its community or industry. Some potential linkage partners would have difficulty coming up with cash contributions to projects, but many others are large and wealthy. Part of the reason may be the reluctance of potential religion and theology linkage partners to deal with universities who are eligible to apply to the ARC. This means that allowing

institutions involved in theological research outside the university system to host ARC linkage grants would improve industry collaboration.

From table 4 of the attachment, the number of applications with religion as the primary code has averaged around 20 since the ARC began operations in 2002, but has fallen to 13, 13, and 11 in the last three years. This is at the same time when applications overall have been growing. Grants awarded with religion as the primary code in the last three years have been 2, 1, and 1, giving success rates of 15%, 8%, and 9%, all below the average success rate in religion of 17% for the period since 2002. It could be random variation. It could be evidence that applicants are increasingly avoiding religion codes, or that potential applicants' universities are not supporting ARC applications in religion codes, perhaps because of a widespread view that ARC processes are less and less hospitable to theological research or research on mainstream Christianity. There seems to have been a substantive fall in activity and probability of success in religion and theology in recent years, at the same time as increasing public interest in religion.

Issues for Religion and Theology Researchers

Some of the issues for religion and theology researchers dealing with the Australian Research Council were discussed in the paper which emerged out of the previous project. Both theological researchers and the Australian Research Council have sought to address these issues, and the research team particularly appreciate their engagement at a workshop organised at Canberra in 2012 involving leaders in the theological sector and senior Australian Research Council staff.

In terms of the recommendations from the earlier paper (in italics), there has been some progress:

- *The Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education could consider how the National Research Priorities might better reflect neglected religious issues.*
  Religious issues remain neglected in the National Research Priorities, except perhaps indirectly through national security concerns.

- *The Australian Research Council could actively recruit Humanities and Creative Arts panel members with expertise in theology, along with the other skills and experience necessary.*
  Expertise in religion and theology on the panel remains an issue, though the ARC has sought to expand the assessor pool in theology. There remains scope for expanding the assessor pool, especially including theology researchers based in universities overseas. This is particularly important for specialised areas of theology. There is also a need for more expertise in the specialised area of religion and theology on the ARC Council of Experts and assessment panels.

- *The Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Research Council could consider the appropriateness of the codes for religion and theology research.*
  There has been some debate about separating the religion and theology codes, and revising the categories within them, but no consensus has emerged. Codes are currently under review.

- *Targeted training in Australian Research Council processes for research offices of colleges and universities, and for theological researchers.*
  Little progress. This will have benefits regardless of whether or not theological colleges outside the university system become eligible institutions for ARC grant purposes. There is scope for researchers at these colleges applying through eligible universities.

- *Capacity building grants from the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education to enable theological institutions to develop their research offices, links with research universities, and networks of domestic and international researchers in religion and theology, able to facilitate partnerships and grant applications.*
  Little progress:

- *The Australian Research Council could consider an initiative specifically designed to connect religion and theology researchers up with those in other disciplines working on issues of national importance. A model for this is the highly successful Religion and Society Program run by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council.*

Little progress specifically on this, though there was a brief rise in success rates for religion and theology applications at the ARC following the previous workshop.

- *Consideration could be given to the establishment of an Australian Academy of Religion and Theology alongside the other learned academies.*
  This has not occurred, but the Australian Academy of Humanities has now established a Religion section independent of the Philosophy and History of Ideas section. This welcome initiative by the Academy of Humanities has strengthened the capacity for input from religion and theology scholars into national research policy, alongside the existing peak bodies—the Council of Deans of Theology and ANZATS—which have been more concerned with teaching and institutional issues up to this point.
  There are currently 33 Fellows in the religion section of the Academy of Humanities, most of whom were elected before the formation of a [separate religion section](). There are many historians of religion and religious studies scholars. It includes the biblical scholars John Painter, William Loader, Brendan Byrne, Dorothy Lee, and David Sim. There are no systematic theologians nor any quantitative sociologists of religion, despite Australia leading the world in this area through the work of the National Church Life Survey. Scholars of contemporary mainstream Christianity generally seem under-represented.

Conclusions

This project has contributed to the evidence base for theological research in Australia through providing an evidence-based and expert-informed ranking of religion and theology journals. Structures are being put in place for the Council of Deans of Theology and ANZATS to maintain and regularly update the rankings. As discussed, there remains scope for enhancing these rankings including analysis of Google Scholar citation data and utilising Google N-grams, as well as undertaking citation mapping to better understand the relationships between research in religion and theology and other disciplines. As well, books remain unranked. Such enhancements will of course require commitments of time from sector leaders and funding.

The project has also updated the database prepared in 2012 of Australian Research Council grants in religion and theology, and compared grant success rates to publications and numbers of researchers, benchmarked against other disciplines. There has been limited progress in addressing some of the issues with the research grant and assessment system highlighted by the earlier project, and it is hoped that the updated data and discussion will stimulate action. Progress will depend on the degree of commitment and cooperation from all stakeholders: theological researchers, sector leaders, the Australian Research Council, government departments and ministers responsible for research, and the Australian Academy of Humanities.
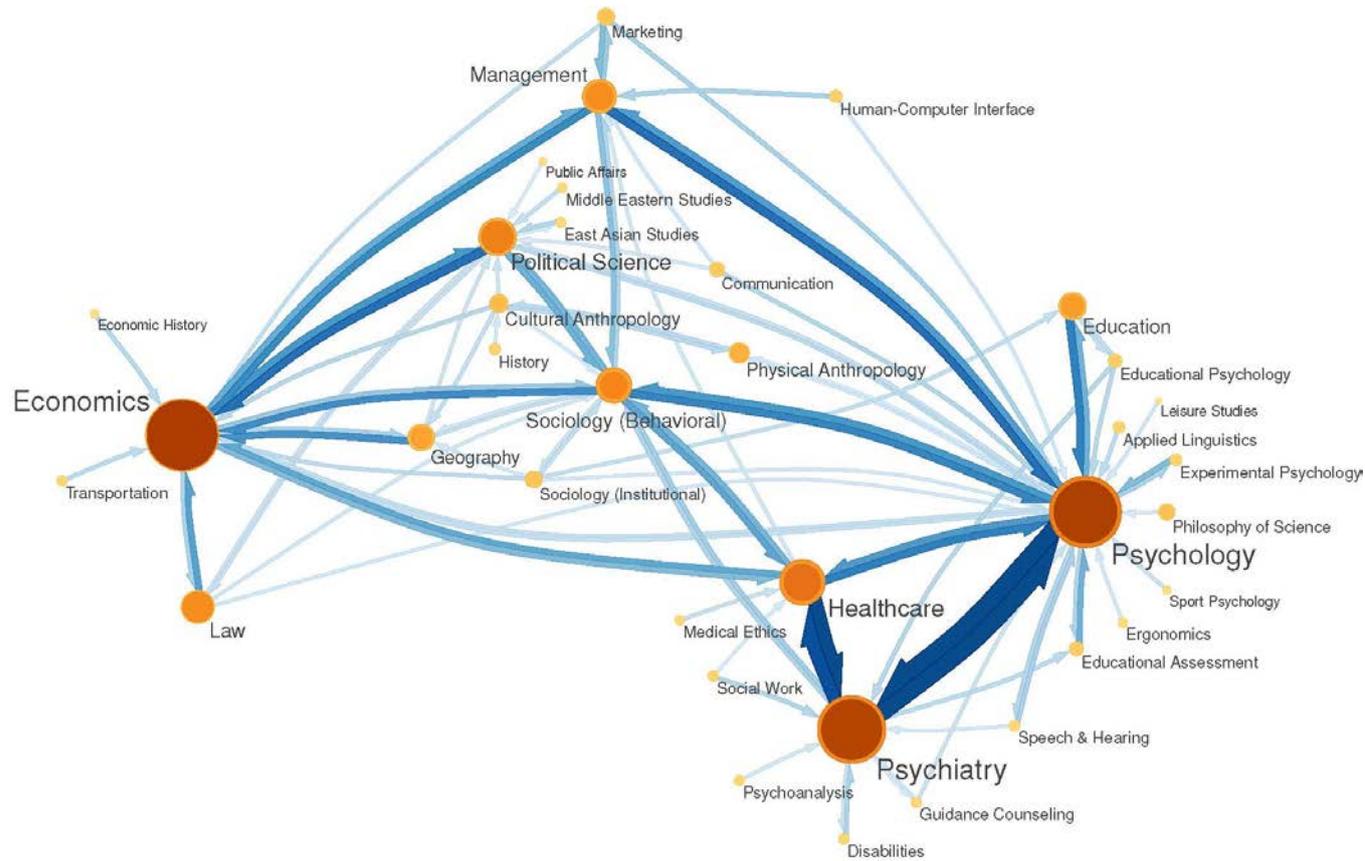
FIGURE 1—MAP of SOCIAL SCIENCE 2004

FIGURE 2—GOOGLE N-GRAM of SELECTED JOURNALS