

POINTERS

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Theological and Bible College Education in Australia

There have been some dramatic changes to the state of theological education in Australia in the last two decades. Once theological colleges were the preserve of men who were being prepared for ordination and Bible colleges were reserved for people who were training to become missionaries. Now both theological and Bible colleges cater for a wide range of students and interests.

1. Theological and Bible Colleges In Australia.

I have defined colleges as institutions with the following factors for this article:

- * viable or separate institutional premises
- * diploma and degree based courses with a duration of at least one year
- * denominational links for officially recognised ministry training.

By my count there are about 105 colleges in Australia, including four creative arts and media colleges. Of these approximately two-thirds are denominationally based, with the Catholic colleges (Diocesan and Religious) comprising about 40% of these.

The Anglican Church diocesan structure ensures that there are several diocese based training colleges and graduates from some colleges are more

likely to find vocations in certain dioceses than others.

The Baptists and Uniting Church have colleges in the five largest

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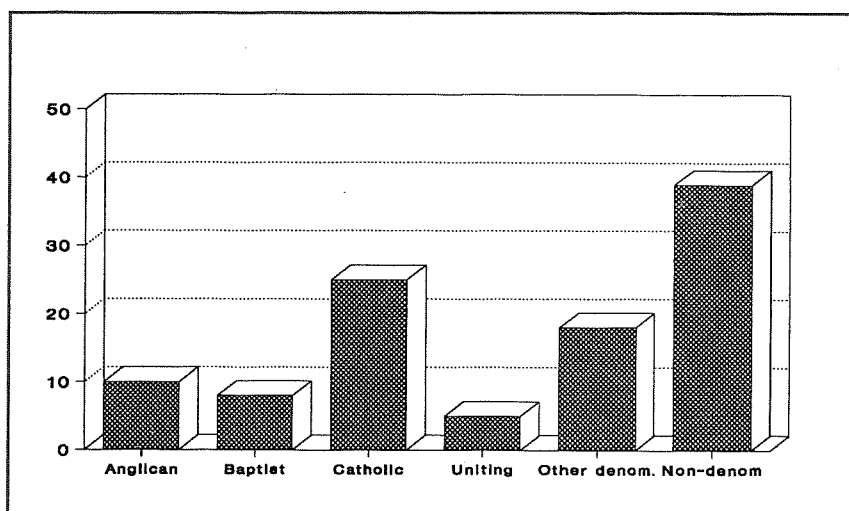


Fig. 1. Denominational Affiliation of Australian Theological and Bible Colleges

Note: Other denom. includes ecumenical colleges and Non-denom. includes Pentecostal colleges, most of which serve beyond their denominations.

The Christian Research Association was formed in 1985 to serve the churches of Australia. Its task is to provide up-to-date and reliable information about religious faith and church life in Australia. The following organisations have membership on its board: the Anglican Dioceses of Brisbane and Melbourne, Interchurch Trade and Industry Mission, Research Office of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference, Prahran City Parish Mission, Uniting Church Synods of New South Wales and Victoria, World Vision of Australia, and Zadok Centre.

states, which can be contrasted with the Lutheran Church which is actually larger than the Baptists, yet has one national seminary (Adelaide). This reflects the concentration of Lutheran work in South Australia and their consistency of approach to theological education, but is also related to the historical development of the denominations.

The primary reason for the existence of a denominational college is the provision of officially recognised training for candidates to a particular form of ministry. This has led to a proliferation of colleges, many of which are finding it difficult to maintain a variety of courses and a diversity of faculty staff. While mainline denominations are co-operating increasingly, many small and "independent" churches are in the process of forming their own colleges. One of the reasons for the formation of these colleges is a mistrust of theological education and an expressed desire to get back to 'the plain teaching of the Bible'. These colleges are usually staffed by part-time lecturers who are also local ministers and in essence they provide a type of in-house training.

2. Courses, Communities and External Studies

Approximately 44 of the training opportunities mentioned in the *On Being* guide are courses, community-based discipleship programs, external studies and specialised lay education centres. Their existence and proliferation testifies to the increasing number of people indicating an interest in short-term study and practically-oriented programs.

3. Training in Education

There are now six institutions which provide specialised training for ministry related to the growing denominational and non-denominational Christian schools movement. (This does not include Catholic institutions, but does include the Lutheran Teachers College and the Seventh-day Adventist College at Avondale).

4. Changes and Challenges

a) Greater focus on the theological disciplines for their own sake rather than for career purposes.

Today many college students have no intention of being ordained. Many are interested in studying for their own personal development, for personal ministry reasons and for specialised purposes, like youth work and education in day schools.

b) Wider range of courses

The increase in the number of students has fostered development in a wider range of courses including some based around specialised interests, eg. cross-cultural studies, counselling, personal development and communication and spirituality. There are many courses available in extension programmes and a greater variety of post-graduate programmes catering for a variety of students.

c) Increasing number of women

In the last two decades the possibility of ordination has arisen for women in several denominations and this has had an effect on candidature. As well formal theological study has enhanced and promoted the wider ministry opportunities which are now available for women.

d) Increasing number of small Bible colleges.

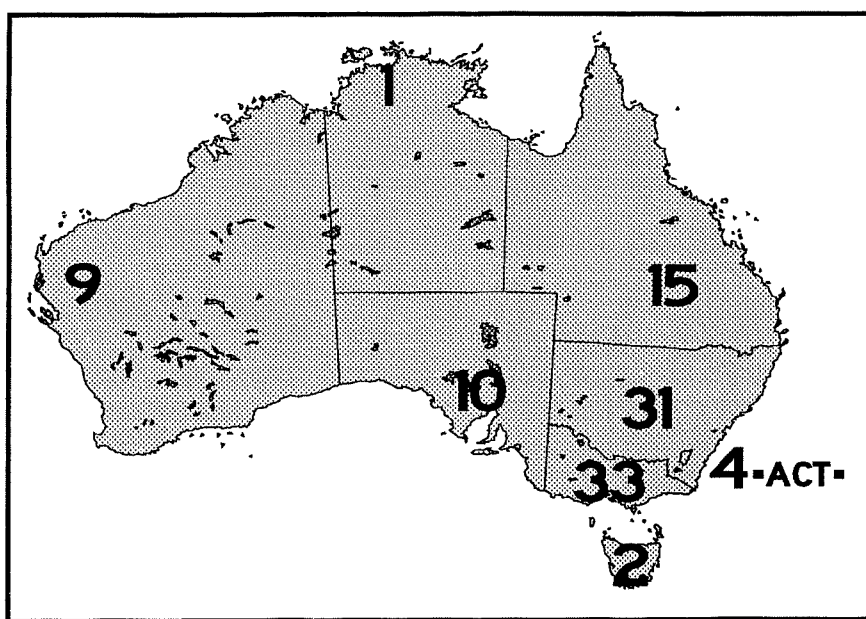


Fig. 2. Geographical Distribution of Theological and Bible Colleges

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Contributing editors: Peter Bentley, Tricia Blombery, Philip Hughes.

Apart from the reason discussed in (1) above, it is worth noting that the majority of denominational colleges were founded pre-1970, while the majority of non-denominational Bible colleges have been founded post-1970. In particular the increase in the number of large Pentecostal churches has been reflected in the increase in Bible colleges based or affiliated with a particular local church. Though these colleges may have originated in a particular denominational church, the colleges are not specifically denominational because they service a particular theological stream, rather than a defined denomination.

e) Ecumenical and Secular Connections

Theological education in particular has witnessed a growth in ecumenical ventures, particularly related to umbrella accrediting organisations, of which there are presently six major groups. These groups are based around major cities and usually reflect a co-operative attitude to degree formalisation, facilities and staff teaching.

There has also been a growth in connections between university and theological education. As universities have sought students and links with the private sector, alliances have been

made between many theological colleges, accrediting organisations and other church-related institutions on the one hand, and universities on the other. In many instances, universities are now recognising theological degrees as a sufficient basis for entrance into higher education within the universities.

Theological and Bible college education has changed so dramatically in the last twenty years it would be interesting to speculate what changes there may be in the future. One particular area which is in need of more study is the impact that non-candidates have had on the structure of courses for candidates, particularly in those institutions where candidates and non-candidates are taught together.

Notes

These notes are based on the annual **Guide to Training** provided by the Christian magazine *On Being* (August edition each year - the 1992 edition of the Guide lists 138 training opportunities for ministry in Australian and New Zealand) and the *Australasian Union List of Serials in Theological Colleges*, edited and compiled by Hans Arns (Catholic Institute of Sydney), 1990 edition.

Peter Bentley

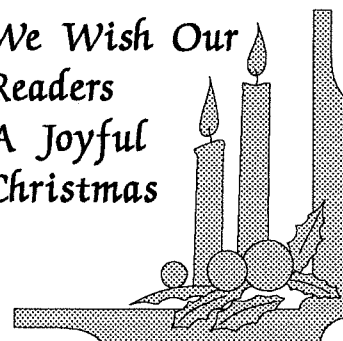
Notes for *Pointers* Readers

* *Pointers* will continue to be a useful resource for ministers, church leaders, and everyone interested in the religious dimension of Australian society. We are making it easier to store them for future reference. By increasing the size of the margin, you can put them in a ring binder without losing any text.

* We have also provided with this edition an index for the last two years.

* Have you received your copy yet of the new *Yearbook*? It is available now from CRA, Locked Bag 23, Kew, 3101.

We Wish Our
Readers
A Joyful
Christmas



Joining New Religious Movements

Researcher Doris McIlwain (research for a PhD in the Department of Psychology, University of Sydney) has found several common factors among people who join new religious movements, as well as highlighting the differences between affiliation with eastern and western new religious movements. *The University of Sydney News* reported that Ms McIlwain interviewed 160 people involved in eastern and western type religious groups, secular psychotherapy and control factors. McIlwain's research considered the first two stages of a model based on a 'rite of passage'. "The first stage, disruption, involves serious

changes to a person's attitudes and/or social bonds. In the following stage, transition, the subject is 'at sea' and intensely vulnerable to influences which purport to provide answers and identity. The third stage, known as re-incorporation, involves the subject taking on the new life role."

She "found that new affiliates of the eastern new religious movements were radically anti-authoritarian and held extremely non-traditional moral and social opinions ... were more impulsive and more likely to 'live for the moment', be 'impatient for paradise' and demand immediate gratification than were the other

groups. They were comparatively broad-minded in a religious sense: sympathetic to western-style spiritual notions and eclectic."

Affiliates of western-style new religious movements demonstrated opposite characteristics. She found they rated high on 'submission to authority', low on impulsivity and were morally conservative. Overall she found that people involved in new religious movements have typically experienced traumas and loss of community identity. She explained that these people felt so marginalised by the dominant spiritual and conventional culture that they turned to new religious movements for help.