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
- OIP – 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 Teologiese 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 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 frequency 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 academic 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!

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%
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 (EFT) 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 Prof. 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. 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
Chairman of the Editorial Board
University of Pretoria