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Fireside Chats and Formation for Faithfulness: A theological reflection on theological education for sexual formation

Introduction
What follows is an exercise in practical theology as a critical phenomenology of pastoral practice (Graham 2002/1996, 209) examining the practice of theological education1 for sexual formation at the Southern Theological Education and Training Scheme (STETS) in Salisbury, where the colloquial term for sex in ministry education is “fireside chats”. The inquiry is sparked, however, by a much larger phenomenon experienced in the wider church: clergy sexual misconduct. Before theologically reflecting on the practice at STETS in Part III, Part I will discuss the theory-practice split in theological education, the development of the discipline of practical theology and emergence of the Pastoral Cycle, and the nature of practice. These discussions will set the stage for Part II which introduces a model of theological reflection on theological education. In Part III, the model will be used to examine theological education for sexual formation at STETS.

At the heart of this inquiry is the relationship between theory and practice, belief and action. This relationship is the core concern of practical theology, a discipline which seeks to move from the periphery to the centre of theological discourse. This concern is also central to the problem which spurs this inquiry: sexually transgressive behaviour engaged in by ministers.

Clergy Sexual Misconduct
Although it is difficult to assess the full scope of the problem, a number of studies suggest that the incidence of clergy sexual misconduct2 is significant in the life of the

1 The use of the term ‘theological education’ in this paper refers specifically to the training of ordinands for the ministry of Word and Sacrament. This is an admittedly narrow use of a term which rightly embraces the education of the whole people of God. (Farley 1988) Charles Wood (1996, 306-8) distinguishes between “education in Christian faith”, “education in Christian life” and “education for ministry/church leadership”, noting that “theological education” plays a role in each and an especially crucial role in the latter. I use the term “theological education” rather than “ministerial training” to emphasise the role of theological reflection in the sexual formation of ordinands.

2 “Clergy sexual misconduct” may be defined as a person with ministerial authority engaging in
Church. In a survey of Church of England priests (CTBI 2002, 84), twenty-five percent of the sample reported inappropriate sexual contact with someone other than their spouse. A study of American Lutherans indicated that thirty-seven percent of ministers were involved in some kind of clergy sexual misconduct. (Ibid., 83) Karen McClintock (2004, 103, 106) asserts that thirty percent or more of clergy are at risk of crossing a sexual boundary at some time in their career, the risk increasing with the number of years of service. Finally, a study in the United Church of Canada suggests that the rate of ministers’ transgression of the sexual boundaries of someone in their care is twice that of secular counsellors. (CTBI 2002, 83)

The impact of clergy sexual misconduct is far-reaching. The role and power of the minister leaves victims and others questioning their faith and querying God’s nature and agency. The impact on the individual victim can be severe, leaving them feeling that their soul has been “burnt out” (URC 2006, 9-10 citing Orr MacDonald 2000). The emotional, spiritual and material toll on the clergyperson and all the families involved can be similarly high. Congregations can suffer long-term dysfunction, with trust in clergy compromised. (Ibid., 12-21) Finally, with our own house out of order, the ability of the Church to offer an holistic sexual ethic in a society saturated in the commercial exploitation of sex is severely compromised.3

Despite the severity of potential consequences, historically the institutional response to clergy sexual misconduct has been what one survivor calls DIM: denial, ignorance and minimization. (Ibid., 13, citing Dee Ann Miller 2000)4 Ministers who confessed and showed contrition were moved to another unsuspecting church or institution, or

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3 Graham et al (2005:175) note Pope Gregory I of Rome’s conviction that the integrity of the Church is part of its witness.

4 Marie Fortune (1989, 120) identifies three dynamics in the institutional response that prevent justice being done: “shooting the messenger”, misnaming the problem, and “blaming the victim”, each of which is an “automatic, institutional response to the revelation of internal injustice” reflecting the patriarchal nature of the church.
asked to resign. This has changed in recent years with strengthened disciplinary procedures and policies (Benyei 1998, 60). Nonetheless, there remains an element of *don’t ask, don’t tell* during training on the topic of an ordinand’s sexuality.

Why might clergy sexual misconduct be so prevalent? Those who study the phenomenon note that ministers are powerful and susceptible people, in stressful jobs, without clear boundaries, without having received adequate training, working without supervision, invited into intimate situations, and operating in an ecclesiastical culture of sexual shame and secrecy that is built on a biblical ethos of women as sexual and domestic servants. (URC 2006, 5, 8-9; CTBI 2002, 84-91, 99) Ninety-one percent of Church of England priests surveyed as to causality highlighted the absence of awareness training in theological colleges and continuing ministerial education. (CTBI 2002, 91) In short, education and support for the practice of ministry appears to be not as helpful to the cause of prevention as it might be.

While acknowledging that the aetiology of clergy sexual misconduct is not fully understood, it is assumed herein that its prevalence is evidence of less than adequate sexual formation in ministerial training. In Parts II and III below, a model will be constructed and applied to facilitate theological reflection on theological education for sexual formation, to seek to unearth potential distortions or inadequacies and to point to a direction for reformed practice.

**Part I: Foundational Issues**

*The theory-practice split in theological education*

Edward Farley’s groundbreaking work *Theologia* (1983) began a conversation about theological education that continues to this day. *Theologia* traces the history of

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5 See McClintock (2004, 131-160) for a discussion of “policies that protect” and sample policies.
6 This observation is based on my teaching experience in STETS and on a survey I undertook in 2004 of ministry training courses and colleges used by the United Reformed Church. The purpose of the survey was to ascertain the extent and content of the teaching of sexual ethics in those institutions. Colleagues support this characterisation.
7 Moreover, there is some suggestion in the literature that people attracted to ministry are susceptible to transgressing boundaries. See, CTBI (2002, 88-89). However, Friberg and Laaser (1998, 7-8) note that the overwhelming consensus in a survey of training administration and faculty was that potential offenders could not be detected through traditional psychometric means. See, also, Benyei’s (1998, 65-72) discussion of the aetiology of clergy sexual misconduct and types of transgressors. If there is a predilection towards sexual misconduct in people drawn to the ministry, this underscores the importance of preventive education and support for ordinands and ministers.
theology and theological education as moving from an understanding of theology as a unity and a habit (habitūs) of the soul, the personal sapiential knowledge of God that attends faith (1983, 31), through theology as the content of study and then a collection of theological disciplines (ibid., 43-44), to a functionalist clerical paradigm in the 20th century as providing the unity in theological education (ibid., 133). In the original conception of theology as habitus, both sapientia (personal wisdom) and scientia (scholarly enterprise), practice and theory were a unity. One’s deep engagement with the study of God and the things of God inculcated habits of the soul which shaped one’s actions and enlivened one’s study. Habitus was a cognitive disposition and an orientation, an enduring structure of the soul that consisted of “practical, salvation-oriented (existential-personal) knowledge of God.” (Ibid., 35-36).

This understanding of theology persisted through the Middle Ages, which saw the founding of universities and the reclamation of Aristotle and the Greek classics. It was Aristotelian anthropology –the concept of phronesis, character formation for practical wisdom— that was appropriated to name the theological habit of soul as habitus. (Browning 1991, 2; Farley 1983, 35-36) From the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment, theologia was the knowledge of God in habitus.

In the seventeenth century, the study of theologia as resulting in a divinely enabled practical wisdom eventually gave way to the study of theology as a science or discipline (ibid., 56), and later to ‘theology’ as a generic term for a cluster of disciplines (ibid., 81). Farley posits that this genre change to theology as objective content was the outcome of the sectarian controversies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the battle to define doctrinal truths. (Ibid., 81) With the shift from theology as habitus to theology as a collection of truths, theory and practice were split. (Ibid., 60) A two-fold division between sciences of theory and of practice became standard in the eighteenth century (ibid., 76), manifested in the fourfold

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8 MacIntyre (2007/1981, 154) describes the Aristotelian virtue of phronesis as the central virtue without which any of the virtues can be exercised. It refers to the capacity to know how to exercise judgment in particular cases, requiring inseparable excellence of both character and intellect. See infra, p. 15, n.19 for his definition of ‘virtue’.
pattern of theological education⁹ that persists today: Bible, Church History, Dogmatics, and Practical (applied) Theology (ibid., 75).

Farley notes that Schleiermacher’s monumental work, *Brief Outline of Theological Study* (1811), articulated the unity of theology in this context as aimed at preparing the leadership of the church (teleological unity, *ibid.*, 87) and at explicating the essence of Christianity (material unity, *ibid.*, 88). His supplanting of the fourfold pattern into three theological cognitions – practical, historical and philosophical – did not succeed, and by the 20th century his insight that theology was the science of the essence of Christianity had ceased to function. His identification of a clerical paradigm as the end of theological study, however, became “virtually universal in the understanding of the structure and course of theological study.” (*Ibid.*, 94)

It is the rise of the clerical paradigm and the loss of *theologia* as the unifying centre of theological education that is its significant problem according to Farley, resulting in the elimination of practice in its “widest and most significant sense” implicit in theology as *habitus*. (*Ibid.*, 132) He advocates the recovery of *theologia*, appropriating the ancient Greek ideal of *paideia* as education that cultures the human being in virtue. (*Ibid.*, 152-153) The culturing of the *habitus* of faith would bring to conscious reflection and inquiry the pre-reflective insightfulness that attends faith as the way we live in and toward God. (*Ibid.*, 156-157) Such culturing would engender theological understanding as a dialectical life process of “perpetual self-correction”. (*Ibid.*, 165)

*Theologia* stimulated an energetic conversation about theological education, with conversation partners in virtual agreement with Farley’s conclusion that the problems of theological education are essentially theological. (Kelsey and Wheeler 1995, 182; Brittain 2007, 426-427) The healing of the split between theory and practice and the aim of an integrated practical wisdom (*habitus*) are central in that conversation, e.g., Kelsey (1993, 87-89); Brittain (2007, 429).

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⁹ See Farley (1987, 19, n.7) on the difficulty of locating the actual beginning of the fourfold pattern in a specific work.
Practical theology: a discipline coming into its own

At the same time, there has been movement in the discipline of practical theology that corresponds to this conversation. (Calahan 2005, 64) Long concerned with the relationship between theory and practice but marginalised in academia, in the last few decades practical theology has developed greater clarity and a stronger voice. Paul Ballard and John Pritchard (1996, 15) describe an emergent practical theology as having a “full and proper part to play as a distinct discipline within the theological enterprise” as descriptive, normative, critical and apologetic. Influenced by the re-emergence of practical philosophies, Donald Browning (1991, 7) claims for practical theology a central place in the theological endeavour, asserting that “Christian theology should be seen as practical through and through”. These developments are consonant with David Bosch’s (1991, 10) articulation of the purpose of the church as participation in the *missio Dei*.

The theory-practice question is at the heart of the work of practical theology. (Mudge and Poling 1987, xvi-xvii, xxiii-xxvi) Ballard and Pritchard (1996, 57-70) map the methodologies of practical theology according to the way they look at the relationship between theory and practice, ordering them in four categories:

1. *Applied theology*, premised on practice as the application of theory – our response in faith to God’s grace and initiative in creation and salvation;
2. *Critical correlation*, positing a dialogical and interpretative relationship between tradition and contemporary reality;
3. *Praxis*, which evaluates value-laden current practice to determine a kingdom-serving response; and

They note there are points of convergence, particularly between critical correlation and praxis models, and a growing consensus in the usefulness of the pastoral cycle for theological reflection. (Ibid., 67) Graham et al (2005, 2-4) also map the development of practical theology toward more integrated, inductive approaches that reject any separation between theory and practice.
The integration of theory and practice is often conceived as a movement in the pastoral cycle. The cycle draws on the ‘See-Judge-Act’ method of Young Christian Workers and liberation theology (Graham et al 2005, 188). It moves from experience \(\rightarrow\) exploration \(\rightarrow\) theological reflection \(\rightarrow\) response/action…which again leads to experience \(\rightarrow\) and the cycle goes on.

In this model, theology can be described as a *performative discipline* which insists that theological understanding is dependent on practical engagement (Graham et al 2005, 170; Graham 2002/1996, 7).

The pastoral cycle and the human as a learner

The pastoral cycle parallels contemporary adult learning theory, which is rooted in Dewey’s foundational theory of experience. John Dewey (1859-1952) is the pre-
eminent American philosopher of education who argued that a philosophy of
education was best built upon a theory of experience. Teaching and writing at a time
when a new ‘progressive’ education was trumpeted as superior to traditional
authoritarian education, Dewey articulated a theory of experience which remains
foundational to education theorists and practitioners. Two principles frame his theory
of experience: the principle of continuity (“every experience both takes up something
from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those
which come after”, 1997/1938, 35) and the principle of interaction (experience as an
interplay between internal and objective conditions, ibid., 42). 13

The late 1970s into the 1980s saw a surge of thinking about the role of experience in
adult education, building on Dewey’s insights. In 1984, David Kolb published
Experiential Learning, defining learning as “the process whereby knowledge is
created through the transformation of experience”. (Kolb 1993, 155) A number of
other theorists contributed to the surge, focusing on reflection as the key component
to learning from experience, e.g., Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985); Schön (1983).

Kolb’s model of experiential learning was derived from Dewey, Piaget and Lewin. He
posits that learning is a continuous process grounded in experience (ibid., 145),
requiring learners to use four abilities: to involve themselves fully and without bias in
new experiences (Concrete Experience abilities); to reflect on and observe their
experiences from many perspectives (Reflective Observation abilities); to create
concepts that integrate observations into logically sound theories (Abstract
Conceptualization abilities); and to use these theories to make decisions and solve
problems (Active Experimentation abilities). (Ibid., 148) The learner thus moves
between being an actor and an observer and from specific reflection to abstract
analysis. Thus learning can be conceived of as a cycle or spiral which holds these

13 Dewey viewed the principle of continuity as arising because of the biological fact of habit (Dewey
1997/1938, 35), the physiological and bio-chemical mechanisms for which now have been identified in
brain research (MacKeracher 2004, 92-122). Dewey theorised that the way we are constituted as
human beings facilitates the creation of habits of attitude (emotional and intellectual) and “basic
sensitivities and ways of meeting and responding to all the conditions which we meet in living”
(Dewey, ibid.). The principle of interaction reflected the dynamic relationship between the human
being and her environment, which also has been illuminated by brain research (MacKeracher, ibid.).
Dewey’s principles of continuity and interaction are implicit in the ongoing spiral. Note, however, that Kolb’s cycle is highly cognitive; it does not account for the impact on experiential learning of emotion or relationships with others, or for the operation of multiple kinds of knowing. A significant part of the contemporary conversation about adult learning addresses these issues. Kolb’s (and Dewey’s) focus on the human as a rational being reveals the importance of the theory of the human person that underlies thinking about education, an insight that will arise repeatedly in this inquiry signalling the need for further work.

Kolb’s cycle and the pastoral cycle describe the same movement, with the pastoral cycle holding analysed experience in conversation with theological tradition. Thus the pastoral cycle incorporates contemporary adult learning theory -- enabling persons to engage in a transformative conversation between their experience and their tradition.

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14 See MacKeracher’s (2004, 53-70) discussion of modifications to the Kolb cycle, and current developments in transformative learning theory discussed below at pp. 26-27.
Beginning with practice

The pastoral cycle and related models of theological reflection begin with experience or the situation (in the matter to be explored below, with a practice). This is a distinct change and challenge to more traditional models of theological reflection that began with a theory and then sought to apply the theory to a situation or practice. Beginning with experience, situation or practice, however, does not mean that theory/theology has no place at the start. As Browning asserts in *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (1991, 6), practices are value-laden. His method of theological reflection is a move from theory-laden practice to a retrieval of normative theory to the creation of more critically held theory-laden practice (*ibid.*, 7). Elaine Graham, too, speaks of practice as value-directed and value-laden (2002/1996, 7) and describes “purposeful practices” as “the implicit bearers of ultimate truth claims” (*ibid.*, 97) that are foundational to, rather than applications of, theological understanding (*ibid.*, 111). Plantinga Pauw (2002, 35-36) notes the inseparable interdependence of beliefs and practices, which is expanded on by Volf (2002, 250-255) who treats how beliefs shape practices. Thus theological understandings are deeply embedded in the interpretation of experience and in practices.

‘Practice’ is a concept that has been subject to philosophical, sociological, ethical and anthropological inquiry of late (Coakley 2002, 78), which inquiry has informed theological thinking about Christian practice. Exploring the apprehension and articulation of practical theology in postmodernity, Graham (2002/1996, 97-110) drew on the work of Max Weber, Anthony Giddens, Alisdair MacIntyre, Pierre Bordieu and Judith Butler to come to an understanding of practice as purposeful activity performed by embodied persons in time and space as both the subjects of agency and the objects of history. Practice is also the bearer of implicit

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15 Browning (1991, 8) posits a fundamental practical theology that has four submovements: descriptive theology → historical theology → systematic theology → strategic practical theology. These movements track the movements described above in Kolb’s learning cycle and the pastoral cycle.

16 In *Transforming Practice*, Graham preferred the term ‘pastoral theology’ to ‘practical theology’, noting differences in tradition and emphasis while noting that they are often used interchangeably. (2002/1996, 11-12, n.1) For the purposes of this paper, I will use ‘practical theology’.

values and norms within which certain configurations of privilege and subordination are enshrined. (Ibid., 110)

This last observation about privilege and subordination is an important corrective to those forms of theology based on definitions of practice which are blind to the “racialised, gendered and otherwise power-laden nature of Christian tradition”. (McClintock Fulkerson 2007b, 300). It will become important in the later reflection in Part III below.

Graham notes that it is practice that constitutes and transmits the core values on which human culture may be founded (2002/1996, 6-7), and asserts that practice is at the heart of theology:

Theology is properly conceived as a performative discipline, in which the criterion of authenticity is deemed to be orthopraxis, or authentic transformatory action, rather than orthodoxy (right belief). (Ibid., 7, citing Chung 1990\(^\text{18}\)).

Theory and practice are indivisible. Graham insists that the proper focus of practical theology is the practice of the faith community, which is “the medium through which the Christian community embodies and enacts its fundamental vision of the gospel”. (Ibid.) Craig Dykstra (1997, 175) also calls for the recognition of the centrality of practice in Christian life and theological education.

Like Graham, Dykstra and Dorothy Bass (2002, 21, n.8) derive their understanding of practice from the social sciences, particularly from MacIntyre’s (2007/1981, 186-188) discussion of virtue in moral theory.\(^\text{19}\) They define a Christian practice as “things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in


\(^{19}\) MacIntyre (2007/1981, 187) defines ‘practice’ as “any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.” This understanding of practice is foundational to his articulation of the core concept of a virtue as “an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.” (Ibid., 191)
response to and in light of God’s active presence for the life of the world”. (Dykstra and Bass 2002, 18) In other words, they are the human activities in and through which Christians participate in the missio Dei\textsuperscript{20}, God’s involvement in and with the world. Moreover, by participating in practices, we come to know God. (Ibid., 24) This definition is couched in theological and metaphysical terminology, in comparison to Graham’s emphasis on practice as a human construction that is inventive and unpredictable\textsuperscript{21} (Graham 2002/1996, 101-102) and calls for critical scrutiny.

While both definitions of practice express an indivisibility of belief and practice, the metaphysically-rooted definition continues the age-old privileging of belief. Systematic theologian Miroslav Volf (2002, 245-263) emphasises that belief (equivalent to “authentic doctrine” (ibid., 247)) shapes and ultimately grounds practice. Beliefs describe how humans are constituted as agents of practices by receiving the grace of God\textsuperscript{22}, and offer normative direction for that way of life (ibid., 255). The nature of practice (“as Christ, so we” (ibid., 250)) functions to attract and habituate individuals to a set of beliefs (ibid., 256) and to facilitate deeper understanding of these beliefs (ibid., 258). Volf warns against a functionalist notion of belief:

\emph{God, not just human talk about God, is the proper object of theology…..we engage in practices for the sake of God; we don’t construe a picture of God so as to justify engagement in a particular set of practices. As the highest good, God matters for God’s own sake, not for the sake of a preferred way of life. Since we identify who God is through beliefs – primarily through the canonical

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\textsuperscript{20} David Bosch (1991, 10) articulates the missio Dei in his seminal work Transforming Mission as “God’s self-revelation as the One who loves the world, God’s involvement in and with the world, the nature and activity of God, which embraces both the church and the world, and in which the church is privileged to participate.”

\textsuperscript{21} Graham notes that Farley’s notion of habitus seems to allow little scope for practical wisdom as the product of human history. Bourdieu’s habitus is the product of human labour, creating symbolic, purposeful strategies with many layers of meaning. He emphasises the inventiveness and unpredictability of practice. Graham writes: “the conventions of habitus are often transformed in the very process of its reproduction. Structure and practice are thus dialectical: habitus is not an unchanging or static entity”. (2002/1996, 102)

\textsuperscript{22} “Inscribed in the very heart of God’s grace is the rule that we can be its recipients only if we do not resist being made into its agents”, writes Volf (2002, 255), thus, “Christian practices may be construed as human ‘resonances’ …of the divine engagement with the world through which human beings are sustained and redeemed.” (Ibid., n.23 citing Welker, M. (Hoffmeyer, J.F. (trans.))1994. God the Spirit, 313ff. Minneapolis: Fortress Press for a theological appropriation of the notion of ‘resonances’.)
witness to divine self-revelation – adequate beliefs about God cannot be
ultimately grounded in a way of life; a way of life must be grounded in adequate
beliefs about God. (ibid., 260)

As we will see below, defining ‘adequate beliefs about God’ is essential to
interpreting and evaluating practice.

Despite differences between Graham’s, Dykstra/Bass’s and Volf’s articulations of
‘practice’, all understand practices to be communal activities that transmit and
recreate/reformulate core Christian values. In this understanding, theological
education – explicitly concerned with the transmission and embodiment of Christian
values – is a Christian practice that is properly the subject of theological reflection.
(See also Browning (1991, 9)). Kallenberg (Murphy et al 1997, 161) asserts that
theological education is a tradition-constitutive practice. As such, it is a practice that
requires theological reflection for its ongoing faithfulness.

**The belief-practice gap**

Before considering how such theological reflection might be carried out, it is
important to address the gap between beliefs and actions/practices which is central to
our inquiry. The theory-practice split lives on in that our individual and corporate
actions are not always consonant with what we profess to be our most deeply held
values. The apostle Paul noted this in Romans: *I do not understand my own
actions…. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.*
(Romans 7: 15a, 19, (NRSV)) This reality is explained variously in Christian
tradition as a result of sin or idolatry (Farley 1990, 120-138). What is signalled here,
again, is that our understanding of the human person will shape how this gap is
handled. For the moment, let us consider other conceptions of this gap and its
function in human life.

Amy Plantinga Pauw (2002, 45) notes that the Socratic tradition explained failures of
practice as a result of ignorance or intellectual deficiency, remediable by education. If
the person comes to know what is right, she can do what is right. Augustinian
tradition, however, focused on motivation – positing that desire is the link between
belief and practice. Knowing what is right is not enough; the person has to desire
what is right. Plantinga Pauw (ibid., 47) describes the further distinction between disorder in our first-level affections (what we desire) and in our second-order affections (what we want to desire), and notes that greater cognitive and moral efforts will not resolve basic human antagonism to the good. Only reorientation of both first and second order affections will work toward reconciliation of belief and practice.

Yet the gap, however persistent and perplexing it is, performs other important functions in human life and culture besides alerting us to a disorder in our affections. It can signal the need and possibility of greater understanding and growth. Human living is in a constant state of change. New knowledge and technologies and the consequences of past actions result in external and internal environments that differ from decade to decade, year to year, even moment to moment. If a belief is not adequate to explain or to assist a response to a changed circumstance, or if a belief is not tenable on the basis of new knowledge, it is often the gap between belief and practice that signals the need for critical reflection about both belief and practice.

Kathryn Tanner identifies the ambiguities and inconsistencies in practice as the very things that spark and require theological reflection. She concludes:

\begin{quote}
sustained and explicit theological reflection helps establish Christian practice... by sharpening commitments; by guiding performance of Christian practices in the face of the ambiguities, disagreements, and shifting circumstances of everyday life; by contributing to the excellence of such practices by making them more meaningful and meaning-giving; and by imbuing them with a historical, contextual, and theological richness that might otherwise be lost from view at any one place and time, and thereby enhancing their resourcefulness to meet the challenges of that place and time. (2002, 234)
\end{quote}

23 Tanner (2002, 32) observes that practices that are inconsistent, ambiguous and open-ended are functional: they help to “sustain a Christian way of life in a complex, conflictual and unpredictable world. They are what enable Christianity to be an abiding force in human life whatever the circumstances.”

24 Note, too, that Plantinga Pauw (2002, 42, citing Charles Taylor 1989. Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity, 205. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) asserts that a stable relationship of mutual reinforcement between religious beliefs and practices may require critical theological reflection, given the tremendous power of communal and long-term religious beliefs and practices that are easily corruptible. In such cases (e.g., apartheid in South Africa), critique from the margin is helpful.

What is suggested in this paper is that theological reflection provides a means of understanding and working to reduce the belief-practice gap as regards sexual ethics and clergy sexual misconduct.

**Part II: Models of theological reflection on theological education**

In recent years, theological reflection has taken centre stage as a primary mode of practical theology. (Graham *et al* 2005, 2-6) Here it is proposed as a method of surfacing underlying values and traditions, and for enabling a means of critical reflection on both embedded theory and modes of practice so as to suggest directions for reform. The following discussion on the logic and telos of transformation will seek to identify the requisite elements of a model for theological reflection on theological education for sexual formation.

**At the heart of theological reflection on theological education: the logic and telos of transformation**

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but rather be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.* (Romans 12:1-2 (NRSV))

Transformation toward communion with God is the telos of engagement with God – transformation of persons, structures and ultimately the world. Any model of theological reflection must exhibit in its workings the logic and grammar of transformation.

James Loder (1996, 271-276), exploring interdisciplinary method in Christian education, identifies transformation as a unifying foundational theme. He construes transformation as a deep structure of experience expressed variably in individual and social human life, with a grammar based in the organic development of the person and society. Loder’s view is consistent with Dewey’s theory of experience (*infra* at p.)
10). He posits a logic and grammar of transformation which intertwines novelty (Dewey’s principle of interaction) and continuity (Dewey’s principle of continuity), consisting of five steps:

a. a conflict borne with perseverance;  
b. interlude and scanning;  
c. insight felt with intuitive force;  
d. release and redirection of the psychic energy bound up with the original conflict; and  
e. interpretation which tests the insight for coherence with the terms of the conflict and for correspondence with the public context of the original conflict. (1996, 273, emphasis in original)

Loder’s identification of a conflict at the heart of transformation corresponds to educational and theological thinking about the process of learning. Dewey observed that knowledge was created through problem solving: a matter arises that is perplexing, confusing or uncertain, stimulating investigation. (Dewey 1910, 13) Jack Mezirow, whose work on transformative learning theory will be discussed below, similarly saw the impetus for transformative learning in a “disorienting dilemma”. (Mezirow 1981, 7) Theologian Mary McClintock Fulkerson (2007, 13) notes that “theologies that matter arise out of dilemmas – out of situations that matter.” Theological reflection arising out of conflicts can be generative, as discussed above in the context of gaps between beliefs and practices (infra at pp. 17-18).

Christian transformation, according to Loder, is the work of the Holy Spirit under the agency and initiative of God – “whereby one awakens…to the on-going transformational activity of Christ’s Spirit in the world”. (1997, 278) One is converted, Loder writes, “into the transformation of all things” (ibid., emphasis in original), or, in the language of Bosch, into the missio Dei. Loder (ibid., 280-283) identifies five learning tasks that are “intentionally fostered forms of learning by which one comes to participate in the ongoing transformational Spirit of Christ”: learning interpretation and responsible action; learning to face and embrace

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26 Loder (1997, 274) recognises that a person may enter the sequence at any point, but will be drawn to complete the whole.  
27 See also Tite (2003) on the necessity of crisis and cognitive dissonance in theological education.
appropriate conflict with perseverance; learning to celebrate; contemplative wondering; and, the most crucial in Loder’s estimation, learning from convictional experiences or insights.

Loder’s work grounds transformation in the spiritual experience of the community of faith. His brief description of the grammar of transformation implicitly highlights the need for spaces that provide the consideration and weighing of other information (step 2), a process of validity testing (step 5), and the support of a community (‘public context’ in step 5). However, the brevity of the description leaves questions about what is scanned in the second step of interlude as the conflict is explored.

Into the breach steps transformative learning theory. Transformative learning theory, originated and developed by Mezirow, contributes significantly to describe the process of transformation in secular and in theological education (Sorenson 2007; Fleischer 2006; Leslie 2004).

Transformative learning theory
Transformative learning theory seeks to explain the process of learning that significantly changes a person’s attitudes and actions from the inside out. The theory is not theologically based, rather being built on a theory of the person in which rationality is sovereign and on a philosophy of education that has the goal of helping adults to realise their potential for becoming more liberated, socially responsible and autonomous learners. (Mezirow 2000, 19; 2003, 58, 62) Nonetheless, its insights have been useful in theological education. After a description of transformative learning theory, its application to theological education will be briefly described.

Mezirow begins with the understanding that, through childhood, an individual acquires habits of expectation (recall Dewey’s principle of continuity) through socialisation. These meaning-making habits of expectation, resident in the neural pathways and brain structure,28 are the perceptual and conceptual lenses through which we interpret new experiences. Mezirow calls these generalised sets of habitual

expectation ‘meaning perspectives’ (1991, 4) or ‘frames of reference’ (2000, 16) and defines them as “the structure of assumptions and expectations through which we filter sense impressions.” *(Ibid.)* They govern our perceiving, comprehending and remembering, and act

*as perceptual and conceptual codes to form, limit, and distort how we think, believe, and feel and how, what, when and why we learn. They have cognitive, affective and conative dimensions. These habits of expectation filter both perception and comprehension.* (1991, 34)

The central contribution of transformative learning theory is that frames of reference can be transformed through critical reflection on the presuppositions upon which they are based. (1991, 62; 2000, 19) As frames of reference are first formed (usually) uncritically and pre-rationally, they may result in distorted views of reality and are limited. Mezirow posits that overcoming limited, distorted and arbitrarily selective modes of perception and cognition through critical reflection on assumptions is central to development in adulthood. (1991, 5) Critical reflection can be focused on content, premises or process (1991, 6), and focuses on underlying assumptions—epistemological, logical, ethical, psychological, ideological, social, cultural, economic, political, ecological, scientific, spiritual, or pertaining to other aspects of experience. (2000, 19) Reflection is transformative when it recasts distorting, inauthentic or otherwise invalid assumptions, resulting in transformed points of view or frames of reference (if premises are recast). (1991, 6) A transformation can be epochal – a sudden, dramatic, reorienting insight – or incremental. (2000, 21) Under

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29 In *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning,* Mezirow compares his concepts of meaning perspective and meaning scheme with similar concepts used by other theorists and authors: horizons of expectation (philosopher of science Karl Popper), perceptual filters (psychologist Irvin Roth), paradigms (Thomas Kuhn), frames (sociologist Erving Goffman; Gregory Bateson), ideologies, schemas (Goleman and others), personal constructs (George Kelly) and language games (Wittgenstein). (1991, 38-61)

30 In 2000, Mezirow introduced new terminology. A frame of reference (replacing meaning perspective) is described as having two dimensions – a *habit of mind* (the broad predispositions we use to interpret experience) which is expressed in resulting *points of view* (clusters of meaning schemes that are habitual, implicit rules for interpreting experience). (2000, 16-18)

31 In articulating transformation theory, Mezirow drew on the critical theory of Jurgen Habermas, who defined three domains of learning (technical/instrumental, practical/communicative, and emancipatory) which have different purposes and different modes of discovery and validation. (Mezirow 1981, 4-5) Habermas’ epistemology of emancipatory learning, including self-knowledge and critical inquiry into the way one’s history and biography has shaped one, proved foundational to Mezirow’s articulation of perspective/frame of reference transformation (1981, 6). Mezirow later redefined Habermas’ emancipatory learning domain as the transformation process that can impact either instrumental or communicative learning domains. (2000, 10)
Mezirow’s theory, transformation is not complete until the person’s transformed perspective is integrated and manifested in action. (1981, 7; 1990, 335; 2000, 23-24)

Before continuing the discussion of transformative learning theory, it may be helpful to note that under the theory, a faith perspective would constitute a frame of reference. Conversion, be it epochal or incremental, would transform how a person interprets and understands her experience, and how she acts. It is also important to note that critical reflection is not a concept foreign to faithful living, to theological education or to theology itself. It is liturgically expressed in Lenten practices of examination and repentance. John Hull (1990, 308) argues that “critical openness” is essential for the continuing vitality and relevance of the Christian faith. Michael Welton (1993, 105-123) captures the power of the call to conversion in conscientization, a process of critical reflection pioneered by Paulo Freire and absorbed into liberation theology. And critical reflection is central to critical correlation and praxis models of practical theological reflection (Ballard and Pritchard 1996, 61-68; Groome 1987, 65, 69-74).

Transformation theory: a work in process
Mezirow’s theory sparked an industry. Numerous theorists and practitioners have responded to further develop or critique the theory, and regular conferences and a journal have been founded. Mezirow has sought to integrate some of the developments into the expanding theory.

Edward Taylor has been tracking the development of the theory. He summarises his 1998 review as follows:

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32 Mezirow admits to being greatly influenced by Freire’s work. (Jarvis, Peter 1993. “Learning as a Religious Phenomenon?” in Jarvis, Peter and Walters, Nicholas (eds.) Adult Education and Theological Interpretations, 10. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company.)
33 The First National Conference on Transformative Learning was held at Teachers College, Columbia University, in April 1998. (Mezirow 2000, xi) The Sixth International Transformative Learning Conference took place in East Lansing, Michigan in October 2005. (Cranton et al 2006)
34 Journal of Transformative Education (Sage Publications).
35 Mezirow published with associates Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress in 2000 growing out of the first conference, including a theory of what it is that is transformed (Kegan), integrating women’s ways of knowing (Belenky et al), the importance of engaging with difference (Parks Daloz), and the imperative to examine power relationships (Brookfield). He also published Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood with associates in 1990, highlighting programmes and approaches that facilitate critical reflection.
36 Taylor has written articles critically reviewing empirical studies of transformative learning theory through 2005 (Taylor 1997 and 2006), and a critical review of the theory and practice (Taylor 1999).
In general it revealed a supportive, but critical picture of transformative learning theory. To its favour, transformative learning was found to be effective at capturing the meaning making process of adult learners, particularly the learning process of paradigmatic shifts. Much of the research confirmed the essentiality of critical reflection, a disorienting dilemma as a catalyst for change, and many of the phases of the transformative process described by Mezirow (1991). At the same time, the research revealed a learning process that needs to give greater attention to: the role of context, the varying nature of the catalysts of transformative learning, the increased role of other ways of knowing, the importance of relationships and an overall broadening of the definitional outcome of a perspective transformation. (2007, 174)

Taylor’s most recent review concludes that present research continues to affirm, perhaps even reify, Mezirow’s conception of transformative learning. The essentiality of critical reflection continues to be demonstrated (2007, 176, 185). He also noted that context, relationships and emotion play a significant role in transformative learning (ibid., 186-188). Finally, he (2007, 189) noted the emerging presence of divergent conceptions of transformative learning theory.

What is particularly interesting about the continuing development of transformative learning theory is that a number of learning theorists, critical of Mezirow’s highly cognitive focus37, have sought to expand transformative learning theory to embrace the impact of emotion and relational context as well as multiple ways of knowing, including those that touch on ‘spirituality’38. Educator John Dirkx, who calls transformative learning “soul” or “inner work”, argues for “a more integrated and holistic understanding of subjectivity, one that reflects the intellectual, emotional,
moral and spiritual dimensions of our being in the world”39. (Dirkx et al 2006, 125) In 2005, the Sixth International Transformative Learning Conference opened with a keynote address by Jorge Ferrer40 who advocated transformative learning approaches that seamlessly integrate the knowing of heart, body, mind, spirit and “vital energies”. (Cranton et al 2006, 154) A number of presentations at the conference focused on intuitive, imaginative, arts-based and holistic approaches. (Ibid., 141) Moreover, in 2003, Maia Duerr, Arthur Zajonc and Diane Dana (2003) surveyed North American universities for the use of transformative learning methodologies that emphasized reflective learning, the intuitive and imaginative process, and the ethical, spiritual or contemplative dimensions of education. They noted that the interest in contemplative and spiritual dimensions of higher education had increased dramatically during the past several years. (Ibid., 178) Other studies reveal that spirituality plays a role in transformative learning linked to empowering cultural and personal identity (Tisdell and Tolliver 2003, 377-381) and vocation (Kovan and Dirkx 2003, 101-103).

Importantly, engagement with transformative learning theory has proved productive in theological education and in sexual formation, though no study as yet has brought the two together. Christine Sorenson (2007) studied the use of transformative pedagogy for the formation of students in an evangelical discipleship course in Pakistan and found that it addressed the problem of prior formation and effected integration of spirituality and theology. Barbara Fleisher (2006) relates the theory to theologian Bernard Lonergan’s understanding of conversion and reports the fruitful use of critical reflection by the Loyola Institute for Ministry in New Orleans. David Leslie (2004) evaluates the effectiveness of a transformative model for ministerial education of Ordained Local Ministers for the Church of England in Liverpool favourably and advocates broader use of such approaches. And Dorothy Butler Scally

39 Dirkx notes that this kind of learning is deeply personal and evokes powerful feelings (2006, 132); frames of reference are emotionally charged clusters of relational experiences (ibid., 135). Transformation requires imaginal, dialogical relationship with unconscious emotional energies brought into awareness – a form of reflection less analytic than that in Mezirow’s theory (ibid., 136-137). Thus, he brings issues of relationship, context, affect/emotion , and imagination to bear on the theory – issues that will have a particular bearing on sexual formation.

40 Ferrer and two colleagues, Marina Romero and Ramon Albareda (2005, 326), link transformative learning to spiritual growth and introduce a participatory approach to education that engages multiple ways of knowing (somatic, empathic, imaginal, contemplative, affective). See also Yorks and Kasl (2006), who seek to engage the whole person and her multiple ways of knowing to foster transformative learning; and Gunlnaugson (2007), who also seeks to engage multiple ways of knowing and advocates generative dialogue as a practice to spark and support transformative learning that shifts the learner’s consciousness.
(2000), an adult educator, created and evaluated adult learning programs to address personal sexual development. She found that personal sexuality was a significant and crucial site for transformative adult learning (ibid., 342).

The review of transformative learning theory and its continuing development contribute to the logic and grammar of transformation in three ways: first, critical reflection on underlying assumptions is a powerful tool for effecting transformation in how a person sees the world and acts in it. Graham’s observation that privilege and subordination are deeply embedded in value-laden practices (infra pp. 12-13) signals the need for critical reflection on underlying assumptions. This is particularly notable as regards the theology of sexuality and gender embedded in traditional Christian sexual ethics based on precritical biblical interpretation. Second, transformative learning theory insists that inner change is manifested in outer change – a change in one’s frame of reference should result in a change in one’s behaviour. The grammar of transformation, then, aims at faithful action. Third, the developments in transformative learning theory demonstrate that context, relationships, emotion and imagination are also important factors in transformation and integration. These may be particularly helpful in identifying pedagogical practices that are integrative, linking cognition, affect and volition – important considerations for sexual formation.

In sum, a model of theological reflection on theological education for sexual formation should embody the logic and telos of transformation: taking conflict and disorienting dilemmas seriously; requiring critical reflection on the underlying values and tradition as well as context and culture; attentive to the role of emotion, relationality and imagination; supporting insight born of engagement; facilitating validity-testing interpretation; and aiming towards action.

A model for theological reflection on theological education based on Farley and Browning

This paper began with a brief discussion of Farley’s foundational work on theological education addressing the theory-practice split. We return now to that work for a
farther discussion of his concept of theologia as theological understanding, which will provide a framework for constructing a model of theological reflection on theological education for sexual formation.

Farley (1988, 128; 1983, 165) understands theology as historically situated reflection and interpretation. In The Fragility of Knowledge (1988, 141), written as a sequel to Theologia (1983), he posits that the life of faith calls for five types of interpretation: a. mundus, a type of interpretation in which all the others come together in concrete acts in the world appropriate to faith and the situation; b. vocatio, the life situation of one’s work; c. traditio, the dimension of tradition in the life of faith; d. veritas, the dimension of the truth of the gospel; and e. actio, the dimension of Christian praxis. (1988, 141-142) The aim of theological education is to discipline and make rigorous ways of interpretation and understanding in order to equip faithful living. (Ibid., 171)

These types of interpretation are implicit in Farley’s earlier treatment of theologia. In Theologia (1983, 151), he proposed the recovery of theologia to restore unity and proper theological criteria to theological education. He defined theologia as theological understanding that is both a habitus of sapiential knowledge and a dialectical activity (ibid., 170, 178). Habitus, a disposition or habit of the soul akin to Aristotle’s concept of phronesis or practical wisdom, was discussed briefly earlier. It is the dialectic activity of theological understanding that provides a framework for a model of theological reflection.

Farley describes theological understanding as a dialectical activity that interprets and assesses the situation of the believer, a process that is evoked by “faith’s attempt to exist faithfully in its situations” (ibid., 169) and which has the character of perpetual self-correction. (Ibid., 157, 164) It begins with “the axiom of the primacy of the situation in which theological understanding occurs” (1983, 165), which includes the enduring structures of nature, the fundamental ontology and existentiality of human being, and the concrete situation and moment in the person’s life. He proposes a dialectic of theological understanding that has five movements (1983, 165-169), which I frame using the modes of interpretation identified in The Fragility of Knowledge (1988):
1. **Describing the faith world of the situation**\(^\text{41}\) (*traditio-mundus*): Farley says that we are in the world “in the posture and reality of faith” (1983, 165). To use Mezirow’s terminology, our interpretation of events and experiences is shaped by our religious frame of reference. This first step surfaces pre-reflective references and imagery of faith, the concepts and language that shape our understanding. Note that this step seeks deliberately to unpack the values embedded in the situation. This contrasts with the Pastoral Cycle and related methods of theological reflection which begin with a description of the situation or experience (Ballard and Pritchard 1996, 77-78; Green 1990, 42).

2. **Critical reflection on the situation** (*mundus*): Faith intervenes with the primacy of the situation, provoking self-conscious awareness of corruption in and the relativity of the situation and repudiating the situation’s claim to normativeness. (Farley 1983, 166)

3. **Critical reflection on the faith world** (*traditio*): Faith applies the hermeneutic of suspicion to itself to “overcome the propensity to worship norms” and unmask elements that serve oppressions, ideology and legitimatizations of privilege. (*Ibid.*, 167)\(^\text{42}\)

4. **Veritas**: To transcend the impasses of the critical reflection on the situation and the tradition, discernment is undertaken seeking the enduring truth that is expressed in persisting images, symbols and doctrines. This step addresses Volf’s concern about “adequate beliefs”.

5. **Vocatio/actio/mundus**: Attempts to discern, beyond the possibilities of corruption, “the place, legitimacy, beauty, redemptive possibilities, in short the theonomy, of the situation”. (*Ibid.*, 168-9)

\(^{41}\) See, also, Farley’s (1987, 12-14) discussion of the tasks involved in the interpretation of situations: identifying distinctive and constituent features; uncovering disguised repressions in its past; considering the wider context/intersituational issues; and discerning the situation’s demands. The proposed model will seek to facilitate this kind of inquiry.

\(^{42}\) Farley asserts, “theological understanding embraces both a self-conscious knowledge of the mythos and a self-conscious refusal to regard it as absolute.” (*Ibid.*, 167)
This articulation of Farley’s *theologia* as a dialectical activity can be expressed as a six-step model of theological reflection that equips perpetual self-correction:

![Diagram of six-step model](image)

*figure 3: Model based on Farley*

The model meets the criteria of the logic and *telos* of transformation, as it engages conflict/disorienting dilemmas deeply, calls for critical reflection on the situation and the tradition, seeks convicting insights into the truth of the gospel, and commends itself finally in faithful and responsive action. Loder’s fifth step (validity-testing interpretation for coherence and correspondence) is implied in the processes of critical reflection on *traditio*, and the discernment of *veritas* and *actio*.

Where the model falls short is in accounting for the affective, motivational and volitional aspects which are implicit in Loder’s grammar of transformation and underscored in contemporary developments in transformative learning theory. Farley’s work, like Kolb’s, is heavily cognition-based, signalling again the underlying importance of a theory of the person. The model also fails to provide the means of
discerning veritas. To rectify these deficiencies, I will use Browning’s five dimensions of practical reason in the veritas step to test validity claims, as one of the dimensions takes seriously human tendencies and needs (anthropology). In this way, the model will include attention to the affective/emotional, relational and social aspects of the person, which are of crucial importance in considering the question of sexual formation and which will fuel the movement between steps five (vocatio) and six (actio). Moreover, Whitehead’s (1987, 36) insight about the central role of imagination in theological reflection, mirrored in developments in transformative learning theory (see infra at pp. 25-26), will be attended to in vocatio.

In sum, a Farley-based model incorporating Browning’s attention to practical reasoning to discern veritas and actio and Whitehead’s attention to imagination in vocatio will be used to reflect theologically on theological education for sexual formation at STETS.

Part III: Theological reflection on theological education for sexual formation

The earlier discussion of practice implies that theological reflection is most helpful when rooted in the reality of a situation. Thus, this reflection on theological education

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43 In Theologia, Farley (1983, 143) observes the crumbling of the “house of authority” (see discussion infra at pp. 48-50) and identifies “enduring truth” as fundamental theology: “As finally a truth about God and the presence of God, it has to do with what the world is and what the human being is”. (1983, 168) In The Fragility of Knowledge (1988, 120, 127), he asserts that precritical theology is insufficient and must be broken open, noting that what is needed is a postauthority paradigm for communicating ancient truths to a modern world. Neither book offers a method for discerning veritas, although Ecclesial Reflection (1982, 311, 344) posits that ecclesial universals “all have the following three features or dimensions: ecclesiality’s global reference, the human problematic of sin and the reality of redemption, and the transcendent” and that discernment of ecclesial universals relates to the discernment of generic universals– the world as it is.

44 Browning (1991, 8), noted infra at p. 13, n. 15, reconceives theology as “fundamental practical theology”, encompassing four submovements in a hermeneutic circle: descriptive theology (exploring the thickness of practice, ibid., 47, 111); historical theology (identifying what our normative texts”effective history” imply for praxis, ibid.:50); systematic theology (evaluating metaphysical questions, ibid., 51); and strategic practical theology. Strategic practical theology identifies what right praxis should be in light of validity claims reflecting the five dimensions of practical reason: visional; obligational; tendency-need (anthropological); environmental-social; and rule-role. (Ibid., 51, 71) Browning posits that the four subtheologies are the four movements of theological reflection in all practical religious activities, including education (ibid., 9), enabling “mutually critical current dialogue between interpretations of the Christian message and interpretations of contemporary cultural experiences and practices.” (Ibid., 46)

45 Graham (1996, 87-89) critiques Browning’s practical moral reasoning as built on an individualistic and cognitive model of human nature and faith development. However, its usefulness in the above model lies in its call for the consideration of non-rational aspects of human being in the consideration of human tendency-needs.

26
for sexual formation is rooted in the educational practice of the ministerial training course where I am on staff, the Southern Theological Education and Training Scheme (STETS) in Salisbury. STETS is an ecumenical (predominantly Anglican) three year non-residential course, training ordinands for the Church of England, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church. Academic work is provided via distance learning with weekly tutorials in home areas, supplemented during brief residential periods. Guided vocational work is done at local sites under training ministers, also supplemented in the residential periods. Personal formational work is presumed to take place through academic work, at the training site and through community participation and relationships with staff in the residential periods.

Mundus/traditio

This section will attempt a thick description\textsuperscript{46} of the practice of theological education for sexual formation at STETS, based on literature and observation. Underlying values, theories and theologies will be noted. The larger context of Western culture will be briefly described.

Poised between Athens and Berlin

David Kelsey (1993) describes North American theological education as poised in the tension between ‘Athens’ and ‘Berlin’. ‘Athens’ denotes a type of schooling for which \textit{paideia} is the heart of education. In ancient Greece, \textit{paideia} was the process of ‘culturing’ the soul and forming character. It was an unself-conscious process impacting the whole person, carried out by the surrounding culture which formed the virtues needed for young men to function as responsible adult citizens. (\textit{Ibid.}, 7) Modified over time, particularly by Plato, the ‘Athens’ understanding of ‘excellent education’ is summarised by Kelsey (\textit{ibid.}, 9) as having a goal of cultivating the excellence (\textit{arete}) of the soul, which is a knowledge of the divine Good itself. The goal of \textit{paideia} could not be taught but indirectly; knowledge of the divine Good comes through contemplation leading to insight working a slow conversion. In the first centuries of the Common Era, Christianity was an alternative \textit{paideia}, “given by God in Jesus Christ, turning on a radical conversion possible only by the Holy Spirit’s

\textsuperscript{46} Rebecca Chopp (1995, 113) sees the way forward for reforming theological education as through “a thick description of the present, including identifying emergent possibilities in the present.”
help, and taught only indirectly by study of divinely inspired Scriptures in the social context of the church.” (Ibid., 11)

Kelsey (ibid., 12) uses ‘Berlin’ to denote the type of schooling which arose with the Enlightenment revision of the University, notably in the founding documents of the University of Berlin (written by Schleiermacher). This kind of education is “bipolar”, stressing Wissenschafter (orderly, disciplined, critical research) and professional education for ministry. Recall the earlier discussion (infra pp. 4-6) of Farley’s description of the loss of theologia and the rise of the clerical paradigm.

Underlying these two views of ‘excellence in education’, Kelsey (ibid., 19-27) notes, are disparate understandings the theory-practice relationship and different theories of the human being47 – differences that ultimately are not reconcilable. After analysing contemporary proposals for theological education (including Farley’s) as to how they handle the tension between the two understandings of education, he concludes that there will always be an uneasy truce between ‘Athens’ and ‘Berlin’ while noting that each contributes helpfully to the other. (Ibid., 227-228)

While not using the term ‘Athens’, Ballard and Pritchard (1996, 69-70) assert that the English tradition of ministerial training, both Anglican and nonconformist, is at heart an ‘Athens’ understanding of education as formation of character. A review of the Hind report Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church (“Hind” 2003), ostensibly the most influential contemporary document in theological education in Britain, reveals an overarching adoption of an ‘Athens’ model in which ‘Berlin’ understandings of theological education are incorporated. The word ‘formation’ in the title signals allegiance to ‘Athens’, as does the discussion of the goal of theological education as ‘inhabited wisdom’ (ibid., 42, 57). ‘Berlin’ shapes the text through partnerships with Universities and church colleges (ibid., 10-13) to provide significant academic content, a concern with meeting the standards of higher education bodies,48 and an emphasis on professional training (ibid., 41, 48, 54, 58-59).

47 See, also, Paul Overend’s (2007) discussion of the differences in the idea of the human person between ministerial training for inhabited wisdom and the liberal academic approach to education, and n. 69 infra on theological anthropology and theories of the person.
48 See Overend’s (2007) treatment of the inherent and growing tension within UK theological education in relation to its alliance with other higher education institutions.
While noting a ‘helpful’ distinction between the educational/academic, formational and training dimensions of the whole process of preparation for ordained ministry (ibid., 2), the report uses ‘formation’ variably to refer either to the whole process or that part which refers to the personal, liturgical and spiritual development of the person.

Hind defines “formation”, noting that it is widely used but often without explanation, as

development towards the role of particular responsibility for enabling and ordering the Church’s life toward God. Thus, it is formation in the holiness which Christ gives to the Church, in enabling the vocation of the Church as a whole which it receives from Christ and in enabling the missionary endeavour in the name of Christ. (ibid., 37, emphasis in original)

Hind goes on to note that ‘formation’ alludes to “elements of transformation, the Spirit of God at work in fallible human beings, forming Christ in them”. (Ibid., 38) This happens by way of

a dynamic and continuing process drawing on a range of contexts, in which the candidate moves between gathered and dispersed settings of the Church’s life, and, under supervision, is helped to grow towards the role of the ordained, defined...in terms of service, holiness, vocation and mission. (Ibid., 39, emphasis in original)

This definition is Christocentric and ecclesiocentric, concerned with spiritual virtue and professional leadership.

From this definition of formation, Hind (ibid., 47-61) derives a framework for ministerial education to map out the formational journey, further sketched in a Statement of Expectations for Ministerial Education the summary of which begins: “The Church seeks that all God’s people grow in faith, deepen their discipleship, and learn more deeply to ‘inhabit godly wisdom’” (ibid., 57), language that speaks of theology as habitus, the practical wisdom and character that results in holiness of life.
The Expectations (*ibid.*, 58-59) are set forth in categories of Being\(^{49}\), Knowing/Understanding, and Doing\(^{50}\), the content of which is related to key words from higher education and professional bodies.

STETS (2007, 3, 5) is inspected and validated both by the Churches it serves\(^{51}\) and by the University of Surrey. Like Hind, STETS conceives of the education it provides as educational, vocational and formational – addressing knowing, doing and being. (*ibid.*, 4-5, 17) The great bulk of a student’s time is spent on knowing – the academic component of the course, which is the most highly developed and controlled part of the course.\(^{52}\) Vocational and formational work are delivered primarily through Developing Ministry modules which guide work done in training sites throughout the three years (*ibid.*, 29-30), supplemented by brief residential periods (*ibid.*, 21, 24) and a two hundred hour placement in the second year.\(^{53}\) A review of the Developing Ministry modules discloses them to be focused primarily on ministerial practice.

Formation of the person – her self-awareness, how she understands herself in relation to others, her interpersonal adeptness – is not directly addressed in teaching materials. Those aspects of formation are assumed to occur by osmosis in the crucible of cognitive learning and interpersonal relationships in each part of the course. At the end of the second and third years, STETS completes interim and final reports to the sponsoring Churches. (STETS 2007, 54-56) Those reports are written on the basis of the observations of students’ tutors and training ministers and staff observations of the following four categories: personality, character and relationships; faith, vocation and spirituality; quality of mind and theological learning; and ministry within the church/mission and evangelism/leadership and collaboration. Should the reporting

\(^{49}\) “Being” is described as growing in faith, discipleship, prayer and vocation.
\(^{50}\) “Doing” is described as developing skills in and for ministry.
\(^{51}\) The Church of England, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church.
\(^{52}\) STETS organises the course on the estimation that students spend fourteen and a half hours a week on the academic part of the course (STETS 2000, 17) and two or more a week on their training sites (*ibid.*, 15). Centre-based learning in the form of six weekends and a six day Easter school each year (*ibid.*, 19), and a 200 hour placement at the end of the second year (*ibid.*, 29-30), provide additional academic, vocational and formational work.
\(^{53}\) Most of the academic modules – which cover scripture, theology and mission – contain a small segment (1-2 hours out of 72) of spiritual formational work addressing spiritual topics. At current writing, however, the entire course is being revised with an aim to integrating the bulk of the vocational/formational work into the academic modules by 2010.
process or other observations uncover a formational problem, staff address this directly with the student to seek to remedy it.

As seen in the history of *paideia* as a culturing of the soul accomplished indirectly (Kelsey 1993, 9), the link between study and action, belief and practice is thought to occur naturally through immersion in the culture. This may help us to understand why it may be that personal formation is more often assumed than planned for. Sorenson (2007, 12) notes that traditionally models of theological education “rested on the notion of formation by osmosis, the idea that in learning theology a person was also being formed.” STETS’ practice reflects such an understanding, while also assuming the formative power of the community culture, although the community only gathers seven times a year.

**Sexual formation in Hind and at STETS**

For the moment, I define sexual formation simply as work directed at the internalisation of Christian sexual ethics. At the end of the paper, I shall propose a more fulsome definition based on the theological reflection.

Hind (2003) does not specifically address the question of sexual formation. In the Expectations grid (*ibid.*, 58), it implicitly could relate to the category ‘becoming more aware of self and others’. However, in further Hind work on learning outcomes (*Shaping the Future* 2005, 70), the Church of England explicitly states that it expects candidates for training “should respect the will of the Church on sexual morality”, i.e., to conform to traditional (unspecified) Christian sexual ethics. And in *Beginning Public Ministry: Guidelines for ministerial formation and personal development for the first four years after ordination* (1998, 7), the Advisory Board of Ministry articulates the expectation that during initial (college- or course-based) training, ordinands will have developed “an understanding of issues of sexuality and power in

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54 See, also, Charry (1997, viii, 3-4, 18) who asserts that classic doctrines are salutary, containing truths about God that shape us, and that knowing and loving God conforms us to God, in whom we flourish. She writes that the classic theologians assumed that “God’s being, work, and teaching, as well as the practices of the church, are genuine knowledge that may effect salutary human transformation when applied prudently and caringly in the proper setting and under optimum circumstances”. (*Ibid.*, 15)
relation to working with colleagues of the opposite sex and in general parish encounters.”

STETS does not specifically address the question of personal sexual formation in its primary formational and vocational work. Like Hind, it does not make specific reference to sexual formation. Currently there is no specific requirement by the Churches or the University that students engage in intentional personal sexual formation.

STETS’ provision of teaching related to sexuality (‘fireside chats’) currently consist of one lecture on the theology of sexuality and gender which unpacks precritical biblical sexual ethics and links sexuality and spirituality; an hour long unscripted conversation between divergent staff on the issue of homosexuality and the church; and one lecture on boundaries and sexual ethics in ministry. These are not integrated into reflective practice. It is assumed that students for whom the lectures provoke personal concern or reflection about their sexuality or sexual expression will address that with their spiritual directors or seek other assistance.

55 It also suggests that the first four years post-ordination include further work on “awareness of sexual dynamics in working relationships.” (Ibid., 20)

56 STETS’ primary formational method, called Developing Ministry Modules that guide practice at the training sites, does not directly address sexuality or sexual formation.

57 STETS defines formation, or ‘being’, as resulting in being equipped to
- embody and express the ways of God in the life of the Church and the world;
- draw on the resources of Church life, thought and worship for ministry and mission;
- exemplify trust in God and expectancy for the kingdom of God through prayerfulness and Christian service;
- order one’s life, working co-operatively for the fuller realisation of God’s mission in the world; and
- develop sound habits of reflective practice, contributing to the growth in wisdom in Christian ministry and mission. (STETS 2007, 5)

58 The Churches (CofE, Methodist, URC) do not formulate required curriculum for courses and colleges, rather they validate training institutions against outcomes, some of which may indirectly or implicitly cover sexuality. These outcomes cover relational being (Shaping the Future 2005, 70 (Church of England); and 95, 102 (Methodist Church)). The Churches also require that students become familiar with the denomination’s declarations and policies on sexuality. The United Reformed Church is currently considering adding a specific requirement that sexual formation issues of ethics, boundaries and power be addressed in theological education. (URC 2006, 27)

59 Nor is sexual formation intentionally covered during curacy (Church of England), probation (Methodist Church) or internship (URC) periods. The Revd David Hart, Coordinator for Initial Ministerial Education for the Salisbury Diocese, reports in conversation that there is no systematic treatment of sexual formation in training during the first four years after ordination. Nor do the Methodist Church (Jones 2008) or the United Reformed Church systematically cover personal sexual formation in continuing ministerial education, although the URC is contemplating requiring such coverage (URC 2006, 27-28).
Fear and loathing, shame and secrecy
Aside from the assumption of formation by osmosis, there may be other reasons for the lack of specific attention to matters of personal sexual formation including: a curriculum bursting at the seams; the specialisms, interests, and power of teaching staff; fear of conflict and division in the current debate over homosexuality; and the culture of secrecy and shame noted earlier (infra at p. 4), which derives from complex historical, political and theological factors which are beyond the scope of this paper.

The larger context
STETS exists in a larger context – that of Western Christianity situated in the United Kingdom, a highly secular, pluralistic democracy. In the UK, the Church (established and nonconformist) has suffered decline since the middle of the 19th century. (Brierley 1999) The 2001 Census reported that 72% of the population identify themselves as Christian (National Statistics Online 2003); yet less than 7% regularly attended worship in 2005 (Brierley 2008, 2.24). The culture is both secularised and sexualised: the media is awash in sexual imagery used for commercial purposes; the marriage rate continues to fall (National Statistics 2003); the rate of children born to unwed parents continues to increase (ibid.), as does the rate of teenage sexual infection (ibid.); and there is an increasing acceptance of homosexuality, evidenced by the availability of civil partnerships for homosexual couples. All these phenomena are at odds with traditional Christian sexual ethics, which in contrast appear to be puritanical and out of touch with human realities. Moreover, in recent years, clergy sexual misconduct has been sensationally reported. The assumed affect of such misconduct and the Church’s DIM60 response to it, and of the vociferous public debate within the Church on homosexuality, is to diminish further the Church’s credibility to speak on sexual matters.

Mundus
This situation – theological education that fails to equip intentional sexual formation and a church that appears to have nothing constructive or meaningful to offer its

60 Denial, Ignorance, Minimization, discussed infra at p. 3.
context on the subject of sex – need not be normative. A faith perspective critiques the situation as follows:

The ecclesia as a redemptive community

McClintock Fulkerson (2007a, 13-14) writes about the wound as a stimulus to creative thinking and transformative action. The hurt of those victimised by clergy sexual misconduct calls for an examination of who God is and what God does. The hurt and confusion caused by failing to equip ordinands and ministers to live out their sexuality faithfully and the historically DIM response to clergy sexual misconduct is critiqued by a fundamental understanding of the church as a redemptive community (McClintock Fulkerson 2007), agent and participant in the missio Dei – God’s redeeming of the whole created order. Implicit in this critique is a critique of the institutional preoccupation of Church leaders rather than the needs of victims, and the power imbalance between men and women, adults and youth/children. Clergy sexual misconduct (which is primarily perpetrated by men (CTBI 2002, 85; URC 2006, 8-9)) can be conceived of, in part, as a natural expression of the precritical biblical ethos of women as the sexual and domestic servants of men. A cavalier ‘lads will be lads’ response to misconduct and a concern to preserve the reputation of the institution and the clergy have contributed to the DIM response. All of this falls far short of the theological understanding of the dignity and integrity of all persons regardless of gender or age and a conviction about the ecclesia as a community of justice and love.

Christ at the margins

Latin American liberation theologians61 remind us that Christ often was found at the margins. Many stories of Jesus’ healing and embracing activities recall the rightful place of the church – to be on the margins with the sick, the poor, the victimised, the outcast.62 His welcome and address of women and reconceiving of marriage63 testify

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62 See, e.g., Matthew 4:23-25; Matthew 8:1-17; Matthew 9:1-13, 18-38, etc.
63 The only teaching of Jesus that touches on sexuality regards divorce. In Mark 10:1-16 and Matthew 19:1-12, Jesus is asked if it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife. Quoting Genesis, he says no – “what God has joined together, let no one separate.” He then goes on to redefine adultery, saying that whoever divorces a spouse and marries another, the original spouse commits adultery against their first partner. Jesus altered marriage and family life in a highly significant way, according to Countryman (1989, 155-58, 169). He took the wife out of the realm of disposable property and made her an equal to her husband. For the first time, marriage became an indissoluble unity in the flesh which recognised
to his work at redeeming relations between women and men, the reconciliation poetically described by Paul as the breaking down of the barriers between slave and free, male and female in Galatians 3:28. Jesus’ criticisms of Temple and Pharisaic hypocrisy⁶⁴ can be read as warnings about the pressures of institutionalisation, the insidious and idolatrous infection that arises when concern for survival of the form is prioritised over faithfulness to the content. Christ at the margins focuses our attention on true holiness over institutional survival.

The intimate link between spirituality and sexuality
The failure to address sexuality directly also ignores the intimate link between spirituality and sexuality. Joan Timmerman (1992, 2005) observes that sexual development can parallel spiritual development, and that our sexual experiences provide us with opportunities to grow emotionally and spiritually.⁶⁵ Intentional and reflective pedagogies can nurture sexual and spiritual growth (Friberg and Laaser (1998, 89-103); Scally (2007)).

Something to offer
God is God of our whole existence, creator, redeemer and sustainer. Made in the image of God, with dignity and creativity, the human person’s sexuality is a means of participating in God’s continual re-creation and sustaining of the world through acts of love and nurture. Western culture’s commercialisation and preoccupation with

the equality of the sexes made in the image of God. The disciples were disturbed by this teaching. In Matthew, they say, “well, if that’s the case, it’s better not to marry.” Matt. 19:10.

⁶⁴ See, e.g., Matthew 23; Mark 7:1-23.

⁶⁵ Timmerman (2005, 578) writes about the reciprocal growth between one’s sexual health and spiritual growth: “Becoming aware of sexual power and capable of managing it is also the key to spiritual adulthood. Our sexuality provides the rites of passage that also contain spiritual tasks and achievements”:

- Awareness of being sexual beings – corresponds with the tasks of spirituality: coming to self-knowledge and self-acceptance.
- Perceiving our capacity and need for intimacy – allowing oneself to be vulnerable and open to another. Essential component of adult maturity.
- Experiencing ecstasy or self-transcendence….through sexual activity, religion, art, dance. The ecstatic state temporarily dissolves the boundaries of the self, so that one experiences part of a larger whole, then the boundaries are reconstituted in a new, hopefully enlarged sense of self.
- Choosing commitment or love.

“These moments in which sexual development signals personal passage and transformation” are not just indicia of change, they are instrumental in causing “the shift from child to adult, alone to connected, consumer of the emotional resources of humanity to generator of life and love”. (Ibid., 579) She also touches on the chicken-egg of relationship-identity: “the challenge of intimacy begins in the call to come to know ourselves and then to love and trust who we are. Our identity – and this includes our sexual identity—grounds our ability to be faithful to other people and to values” (Ibid.).
self-gratification, sexual and otherwise, is a degradation of the potentiality implicit in holistic and life-giving sexuality. The Church’s current inability to articulate a credible, consistent, life-giving sexual ethic to the world consists of a missed opportunity to participate in the missio Dei.

**Traditio**

This section will submit the tradition to a hermeneutic of suspicion, critically reflecting on its assumptions and adequacy.

**Critiquing formation by osmosis**

Formation is a concept that is widely used but little analysed. (Hine 1986, 87; Overend 2007, 9) Foster *et al* (2006, 125-6 and n. 1) observe the varied ways the term is used, noting that “almost no one…is truly satisfied with formation language.” Nonetheless, implicit in the notion is an integration of thought and behaviour. Sorenson (2007, 8-9) states that there are two aspects for formation in her evangelical tradition: an external paradigm becomes internalised; and a person’s thinking and behaving becomes a mature personal expression of their faith. Her exploration of formation in theological education underscored the importance of the integration of reason and emotion, objective and subjective knowledge, and experience with knowledge. (*Ibid.*, 26) Similarly, Hind’s definition – growing towards holiness in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit (2003, 37-39) -- aims for a marriage of theological understanding and action that corresponds with that understanding. Jones (2002, 189) relates it to the complex interrelationship between belief, desire and action.

It is clear that formation seeks to marry thought and action. The question is how to accomplish it (a question beyond the scope of this paper except to note that pedagogies of formation are an area for further work). Ellen Charry (1997, 26-28) believes that the debate between cognitivists, who believe behavioural change begins with knowledge, and behaviourists, who assert that action creates patterns of thought, is unhelpful as thought and action are mutually reinforcing. She also posits that moral environments for shaping character

*must supply a social context for practicing skills, provide concrete models for emulation, create opportunities for self-reflection, and enlist the emotions in the*
pursuit of excellence...and provide numerous and live conversation partners for the journey in the form of a living community within which to practice moral discernment. (Ibid., 26)

Cherry’s observation and the literature on reflection in experiential learning argue against a reliance on formation by osmosis. Theological educators advise against it. George Lindbeck (1996, 289-290, 301) notes that contemporary ordinands come in to theological education in America with less prior Christian education and formation than those in prior generations. This may be true in the UK as well, given that the surrounding culture is increasingly secularised and sexualised. Indeed, it is likely that candidates coming into a selection process in the UK will be as or more formed by the secular context than they will have been formed by traditional Christian sexual ethics. The conclusion that Lindbeck (ibid., 290-291) draws is that the weaker informal processes of formation are, the more important are intentional formation programmes.

Sorenson (2007, 13) observes that the lack of intentional formation has been the focus of much concern in discussions of theological education. She enumerates the following factors that mitigate against osmotic formation in traditional theological education: prior formation (what students come in with, recall Dewey’s theory of experience discussed infra); the philosophical underpinning of education which privileges reason and rationality over intuition, imagination and emotion; and curricular fragmentation which splits theology from spirituality. In her study of transformative learning and formation in theological education, she found that intentional formational activities produced significant results – with relationships being a key area of challenge and growth for students that acted as a marker for spiritual growth. (Sorenson 2007, 175, 278-279) Academic teaching of salutary doctrine is not enough. As Miller-McLemore (2007, 26-28) observes, that the

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67 Lindbeck (1996, 294-296), contemplating spiritual formation and theological education in America, observes a widening gap between theology and spirituality and the remoteness of the practical part of curricula from personal appropriation and internalisation. He concludes that the difficulties of spiritual ministerial formation within theological education are increasing.
academic paradigm is inadequate for equipping embodied critical thinking is a fundamental problem in theological education.

Moreover, sexuality is an important aspect of spiritual and personal formation, as noted above in the discussion of sexuality and spirituality. Scally (2007), an adult educator, identifies personal sexuality as an area of subjugated knowledge that is central to the “reflexive project of self in society” (ibid., 274) and engaging with “the human relational infrastructure – issues of fairness, trust, respect, love and intimacy” (ibid., 349). Her intentional application of reflective learning technologies proved transformational.

**Critiquing the ‘house of authority’**

The Church’s lack of direct attention to sexual formation not only misses opportunities for potentially impactful personal and spiritual development, it also implicitly approves of an unexamined, precritical understanding of sexual ethics. Students come into training with notions of Christian family values that place heterosexual married sex as the only appropriate sexual expression. Without intentional pedagogies that allow students to evaluate this ethic in light of the more complex, patriarchal and historically-bound reality of scripture and to examine and reflect carefully on their own experience, this prior formation (Sorenson 2007, 13) is left intact…privileging heterosexuals, married people and, in more biblically literal Christian traditions, men. Moreover, the Church’s DIM response to clergy sexual misconduct distinctly privileges both men and clergy and attempts to preserve institutional hegemony.

The Church’s failure clearly to wrestle and articulate a Christian sexual ethic for the twenty-first century derives in part from its entrenchment in precritical ways of ordering its educational endeavour. Farley (1988, 119-120) notes the contemporary paradigm shift which recognises the historicity of all knowledge: all knowledge is part of and influenced by context, language, power relations and a myriad of factors. He observes that theological education both resists and accepts this paradigm shift. (See also Farley 1982, 244) The fourfold pattern of Bible, Church History, Systematics and Applied Theology is fundamentally a precritical ordering of learning that persists in contemporary theological education. (Ibid., 128) He calls for the dismantling of
the “house of authority” -- the precritical, unhistorical way of understanding Christianity that presumes that scripture, dogma and the magisterium manifest a priori truth -- and the articulation of a postauthority paradigm for communicating ancient truths to the (post)modern world. (1988, 124-127)

An effect of the fourfold pattern is that other disciplines cannot lay claim to being necessary to theological inquiry (Farley 1983, 134). This has been particularly damaging in the area of sexuality, as the contributions of psychology and the biological and physical sciences have not been widely employed to assist the Church to understand the nature of sexuality in interpersonal relationships.

Critiquing conformation vs. transformation: sexuality and human flourishing

The tradition of not addressing sexual formation directly inhibits sexual well-being and human flourishing. Aristotle’s understanding of learning is that its goal is eudaimonia, human flourishing, achievable through character formation in the virtues. The primary goal of eudaimoneia is entirely consonant with the Christian gospel. Jesus’ saying I came that they might have fullness of life (John 10:10 (NRSV)) encapsulates the understanding that the reconciliation worked by the incarnation – life, death and resurrection— is a reconciliation of humanity to its true stature and fullness, made in the image of God. This issue again underscores the importance of theological anthropology to the endeavour of sexual formation and theological education, a topic beyond the scope of this paper. Such theological anthropology would best be informed by insights from other disciplines.

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68 Farley describes the collapse of the ‘house of authority’ in Ecclesial Reflection (1982, 165-168), arguing that such collapse changes the genre of theology from citation/application of a priori authority to reflective theological inquiry (ibid., 178-180). Theological reflection has three dimensions: the depiction of ecclesiality (portraiture/description), the question of truth, and reflective praxis. (Ibid., xviii)

69 MacIntyre (2007/1981, 148) describes eudaimonia as “the state of being well and doing well in being well, of a man’s [sic] being well-favoured himself and in relation to the divine”. He notes that it is the virtues (recall the earlier discussion of phronesis as the central virtue, infra p. 5, n. 8) that enable a person to achieve eudaimonia.

70 Kelsey and Wheeler (1995, 198) note the importance and impact of underlying theories of the person and theological anthropology to issues of theological education: “At their deepest levels, both theology and education depend on pictures of and theories about the human being. Therefore, anthropological clarity… is essential if the remarkable theological education debate of recent years is to bear fruit in the future.” They consider anthropology to be the “most important unattended topic” in the current literature on theological education, identify the anthropology behind conventional theological education to be that of persons as “affectively moved rational performers”, and find two anthropologies in the contemporary discussion of theological education: human persons as agents, and human persons as expressive subjects. (Ibid., 193-198) See also Slee (1993, 335), Overend (2007) and Farley (1988,
Moreover, the insights of moral theorists and theologians like Kierkegaard (Graham et al 2005:180), who argue that following the dictates of external authority is less mature and knowledgeable than acting out of hard won personal conviction, argue for transformation over conformation as the goal of sexual formation.

**Veritas**

This section seeks to tease out the persisting images, symbols or doctrines that reflect enduring truths in the face of crumbling of the ‘house of authority’ discussed above. The challenge of this section is to identify a methodology that enables the endeavour with rigour and integrity. In a real sense, such identification perhaps is the most important piece of theological work to be done, yet a fulsome treatment is beyond the scope of this paper. For the limited purposes of this paper, Browning’s advocacy of practical reasoning as a basis of validity claims will be used to identify areas of theological conversation important to drawing out *veritas* for sexual formation in theological education. Practical reasoning is an important contributor to validity claims in this area given the embodied nature of our sexual knowing, the perichoretic unity of theory and practice, and the harm that disembodied abstraction in theological thinking in this area causes.

Browning (1991, 71) identifies five dimensions or levels of practical reasoning:\n
- **visional** (raising metaphysical validity claims);
- **obligational** (raising normative ethical claims);
- **tendency-need or anthropological** (raising claims about human nature, its basic needs and the kinds of premoral good required to meet these needs);
- **environmental-social** (raising claims that deal primarily with social systemic and

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146) on the importance of theological anthropology; and see Tennant (2005) on implicit assumptions about self and identity in transformative learning theory.

71 In his prescription for theological study, Farley (1988, 147) calls for philosophical and theological anthropology as part of foundational studies. In *Theologia* (1983, 134-5), he writes of the importance of issues of science and fundamental anthropology to the theological endeavour. And in *Ecclesial Reflection* (1982, 332-344), he asserts that ecclesial universals are related to generic universals—the structure of the world as it is and human beings as they are. Farley (*ibid.*, 337) posits that psychology and the social sciences are apposite to the task of reflexive praxis, the third dimension of theological reflection, see note 68 *infra*. His theological anthropology, *Good and Evil* (1990), draws on biological and social sciences to understand the human condition.

72 These dimensions correspond with the notion that behaviour/action is “(1) made up of concrete practices (rules, roles, communication patterns); (2) motivated by needs and tendencies; (3) limited and channelled by social-systemic and ecological constraints; (4) further ordered by principles of obligation; and (5) given meaning by visions, narratives and metaphors.” (Browning 1991, 111) See also Browning (1987, 88-100) for a more fulsome description of the five dimensions or levels.
ecological constraints on our tendencies and needs); and rule-role (raising claims about the concrete patterns we should enact in our actual praxis). What follows is an identification of areas for further theological conversation in order to advance discerning veritas in theological education for sexual formation.

**Visional claims**

A number of doctrines and understandings can be fruitfully engaged in a contemplation of sexual formation in theological education: an embodied theological anthropology (in conjunction with tendency-need claims, below); the doctrine of sin73 and the theology of grace; the sacrament of sexuality (infra at p. 45, n. 65); and retrieving pearls of wisdom from scripture and tradition74.

**Obligational claims**

What does loving God and neighbour mean in the context of sexual activity? (See Ind 2003). Historically, the Church has defined faithful sexual expression as married sex, and, in some communions, married sex for the purposes of procreation. Such a definition of sexual expression is both too narrow and too broad: too narrow because only a part of the population will ever marry and be capable of procreation, and too broad because it has failed to criticise cruel, forced or selfish sexual expression within marriage. The focus on form over content has failed us. What is needed is a clear articulation of healthy and faithful expression that gives guidance and potentially blessing for all people: married, single, male, female, gay, straight, young, old. The articulation of such an ethic of sexual love requires the participation of people in


74 I suggest three pearls from scripture and tradition:

- that sexuality is a good and necessary part of the created order, capable of being a great joy and blessing -- in the continuation of the species, participating in God's continued recreation of the world, and in the celebration and strengthening of committed loving relationships;
- that the power of sexuality is a fearsome thing that, if not rightly ordered, can undermine social structure, e.g., the inheritance of property, the stability of families to raise children. In other words, regulating sexual behaviour is part of structuring an ordered society; and
- that sexuality can be abused, so that its outcome is not love, but harm; this means that it is an area of vulnerability (Latin *vulnus* - wound).

diverse circumstances in the conversation. This conversation may be assisted by the
disciplines of moral philosophy and ethics in conversation with theology.

**Tendency-need/anthropological claims**
Browning (1987, 99) notes that this dimension of practical reasoning relates to basic emotional needs, one important component of sexual expression. An understanding of sexuality and sexual expression that draws on insights from other disciplines such as psychology and the physical and social sciences is essential to the construction of a theological anthropology\(^7\) that assists articulation of sexual formation. It is cruel, inhumane and futile to attempt the endeavour without incorporating those insights.

**Environmental-social claims**
In the area of sexual formation, a consideration of these claims may be fulfilled under consideration of obligational claims as defined to include society’s interest in ordered sexual behaviour.

**Rule-role claims**
Consideration of these types of claims could encompass the unique aspects of ministerial functioning and leadership that are impacted by sexual formation. (See discussion at note 77 below.)

**Vocatio**
This section and the next seek to discern “the place, legitimacy, beauty, redemptive possibilities, in short the theonomy, of the situation” (Farley 1983, 168-9), so that the direction of the Church’s vocation may be discovered. These sections follow on and derive their content from the preceding step. As *veritas* is established, the vocation of the Church is clarified as agent and participant in the *missio Dei*.

*Vocatio* is also an exercise of the imagination – what kind of a church shall theological education be preparing? Whitehead (1987, 40, 53) understands imagination as a source of religious information, a way that we re-imagine past truths to express them in the present and future. Foster *et al* (2006, 12-13), drawing on

\(^7\) See, e.g., Farley (1990) chapter 4: “The Biological Aspect of Human Being”.
Dykstra’s concept of “pastoral imagination”, posit that it is pastoral imagination that “integrates knowledge and skill, moral integrity and religious commitment”. Clearly, imagination has a role to play in discerning the theonomy of the situation. Imagining a Church that is a community of justice and caring, where sexuality is known as a good and blessed gift and people are assisted to grow into that gift illuminates STETS’ vocation.

Reviewing what has been revealed in the reflection thus far, I propose a more fulsome definition of sexual formation as: an intentional process by which an individual becomes aware of her sexual identity, reflects on her sexual history, considers the health and appropriateness of her sexual expression (seeking therapeutic assistance if necessary), contemplates the relationship of her sexuality and her spirituality, commits to a personal Christian sexual ethic, learns about and internalises the appropriate expression of sexuality and sexual boundaries in ministerial relationships, comes to understand the impact of clergy sexual misconduct on all parties, and is equipped to assist the church to participate in constructive conversations among diverse parties about sexuality.

A clear articulation of veritas will provide further content for the following aspects of the vocation of theological education for sexual formation: developing a paideia for sexual eudaimonia;76 discovering appropriate integrative pedagogies77,78 and

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76 I suggest that eudaimonia in this context would be competencies for:
* self-acceptance, -awareness, -knowledge, -worth.: In practical terms, this means if a person has a sexual issue (e.g., pornography or addictive behaviour) or concern, she can treat herself compassionately, acknowledge the issue or concern, and seek to address it.
* I-thou: conceiving the space between two people as sacred space, respectful of the mystery of the other, aware of the vulnerability of the other, seeking the well-being of the other; having the capability of self-giving love, self-disclosure, trust and mutuality.
* sexual literacy: knowing how to give and receive love and pleasure, affirming the bodily belovedness of the lover.
* never making anything more important than God – whether it is sexual pleasure, or the desire to procreate. (Ind 2003) Let human loving be an embodiment of the love of God.
77 Here, I want to caution against Farley’s and other’s dismissal of the clerical paradigm. As Miller-McLemore (2007) states, the problem of contemporary theological education is not the clerical paradigm per se. Rather, the problem is in an academic paradigm that fails to address the connection between thinking and action. Moreover, there are particular knowledges that are essential to ministerial functioning with regard to maintaining sexual boundaries: the power and vulnerability of the pastoral role; psychological phenomena like transference and counter-transference that impact the minister-parishioner relationship; and others. See note 79 below.
78 Dykstra (1997, 177, n.29) notes that all intelligences, as identified by Howard Gardner in Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences (NY: Basic Books, 1985), are involved in theology as habitus and must be engaged.
pedagogies aimed at preventing clergy sexual misconduct\textsuperscript{79}; resourcing\textsuperscript{80} programmes aimed at equipping ministers, congregations and individuals to respond to allegations and events of clergy sexual misconduct; and finally equipping ministers and the Church to participate in the construction of a Christian sexual ethic for the 21\textsuperscript{st} century.

\textit{Actio}

\textit{Actio} is separate from \textit{vocatio} in order to enable strategic thinking about the practical realities that impinge on the endeavours to faithfulness, such as resources, opportunities and barriers.

In the matter at hand, STETS is undertaking a process of course revision. This provides an opportunity to advocate for inclusion of integrative sexual formation work (as defined in \textit{vocatio}) in the Developing Ministry track, to recognise the barriers to such inclusion and to contemplate strategies for overcoming the barriers. Strategic use of this research can be contemplated, a focus for further research determined, and a plan of action constructed and implemented.

As action is undertaken, the situation will shift and evolve, disclosing more opportunities for reflection and action….and the cycle continues.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Fireside chats, on their own, will not be sufficient to provide opportunities for personal sexual formation. Using this stepped model for theological reflection teases out different aspects of the theory-practice unity, equipping more systematic critical reflection, and stimulating theological thinking beyond conventional parameters. Areas for further work were identified, and an impetus for action was sparked. As

\textsuperscript{79} See Friberg and Laaser (1998, 69-128) for a discussion of cognitive, affective and action outcomes to direct education for prevention of sexual misconduct; and Poling and Faith Trust Institute (2003) on clergy education on boundaries

\textsuperscript{80} The role of theological education in helping the Church to think deeply about its mission is highlighted in the Hind report (2003, 21). Research would enable the development of resources for the larger church in this area.
such, this critical phenomenological inquiry assisted imagining the transformation of Christian practice to reflect more faithfully the *missio Dei*.

**Final remarks**

The developments in practical theology over the last twenty-five years excite the possibility that the Church will be able to articulate a sexual ethic for the 21st century, an ethic constructed on a theological anthropology that recognises the reality of our embodied sexual being. Intentional, integrative educational technologies may be developed to assist sexual formation for faithful well-being. This is the great promise of practical theology.

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Title:

Making sense of sex and faith: autobiographical inquiry as a tool for theologia

Introduction

The area in which I am working is sexual formation in ministerial training. In Fireside Chats and Formation for Faithfulness (Grosch-Miller, 2008), I undertook a critical phenomenology of the practice of theological education for sexual formation at the Southern Theological Education and Training Scheme. For that purpose, I constructed a model of theological reflection based on the work of Edward Farley in Theologia (1983) and The Fragility of Knowledge (1988) to enable critical reflection on the theological understandings embedded in the practice, the context of the practice, the practice itself, and the direction for change for greater faithfulness:

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1 Before the Enlightenment, *theologia* was the knowledge of God in *habitus*, the habit or enduring structure of the soul manifested in practical wisdom – a unity of theology and practice (Farley, 1983). Farley advocates the recovery of *theologia* as education that cultures the human being in virtue (*ibid.*, pp. 152-153).
The most difficult and compelling movement in the model is the search for veritas – the enduring theological truth that will guide the discernment of vocation and action. Farley (1983, p. 168) describes veritas as fundamental theology that encompasses the truth of human life: “As finally a truth about God and the presence of God, it has to do with what the world is and what the human being is.”

2 The movements in the model, explicated at pp. 28-34 of *Fireside Chats*, are:
1. Describing the faith world of the situation (traditio-mundus), surfacing pre-reflective references and imagery of faith;
2. Critical reflection on the situation (mundus);
3. Critical reflection on the faith world (traditio);
4. Veritas -- the search for enduring truth;
5. Vocatio, actio/mundus-- seeking to discern the “theonomy” of the situation (Farley, 1988, pp. 168-169) and to act accordingly.

3 Farley asserts that there are enduring structures of nature and a fundamental ontology and existentiality of human being that are part of the situation and for which there must be account (1983, p. 165). In a later work, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* (Farley, 1990), he constructs
In *Fireside Chats* (2008, pp. 51-56), it is argued that practical reasoning is an important contributor to the search for *veritas*, given the embodied nature of sexual knowing, the unity of theory and practice, and the insufficiency of disembodied abstraction for the crafting of sexual ethics. Browning’s five dimensions or levels of practical reasoning were used to flesh out the search for *veritas*:

- **Visional** -- raising metaphysical validity claims;
- **Obligational** -- raising normative ethical claims;
- **Tendency-need or anthropological** -- raising claims about human nature, its basic needs and the kinds of premoral good required to meet these needs;
- **Environmental-social** -- raising claims that deal primarily with social systemic and ecological constraints on our tendencies and needs; and
- **Rule-role** -- raising claims about the concrete patterns we should enact in our actual praxis (Browning, 1991).

Building on Farley and Browning, I will collect data about the human experience of being sexual and Christian, conducting a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry to reveal hidden structures and deep meanings that may assist the search for the *veritas* to help guide sexual formation. I will use autobiographical inquiry as a primary tool.

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A theological anthropology that does so via the method of reflective ontology. “Reflective ontology attempts to think human reality from its very center” (1990, p. 11). Farley’s treatment of sex in *Good and Evil* is outlined in *Reflection on Practice: the importance of the living human document* (Grosch-Miller, 2009, pp. 8-10).
Research Question/Field of Inquiry

The research focus is: What is it like to be a Christian and a sexual human being? How do ordinands make sense of their sex lives in the light of their spiritual lives and vice versa?

The purpose of my research is heuristic and descriptive. The underlying goal of my work has been to understand and assist sexual formation for ministry. The scope of this research, however, is limited: mapping out how ordinands make sense of their lived experience as sexual people within a faith context. Fireside Chats concluded that sexual formation in theological education for ministry was under-theorised and under-attended. ‘Formation by osmosis’ appears to be the prevalent approach. What can we learn about being sexual and Christian by a phenomenological enquiry? Are ordinands making meaning and decisions that point in the direction of a new, more ‘faithfully realistic’ Christian sexual ethic? What impact will autobiographical inquiry have on the process of meaning making in ordinands? What impact will doing this research have on me?

Rationale

Fireside Chats discusses the prevalence, possible aetiology and impact of ministerial sexual misconduct (2008, pp. 2-4) and makes the case for intentional sexual formation in theological education for ministry. But how may such sexual formation be fostered?

The starting point is the person: the lived experience of being Christian and sexual. Adult learning theory, discussed in Fireside Chats (2008, pp. 9-12),
posits that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. In *Reflection on Practice: the importance of the living human document* (Grosch-Miller, 2009), I explore a theory of experience that is uniquely personal, interactive and formative (*ibid*, pp. 4-5). To seek to assist in the sexual formation of an ordinand, one must start with what they already know through their experience of being sexual and being Christian.

Personal sexuality is a complex reality, impacted by biochemical and cultural factors (Farley, 1990; Nelson, 1992; Ramshaw, 2003; Scally, 2000). Adult educator Dorothy Butler Scally, in her study of personal sexual story as a vehicle for transformative learning, defines personal sexuality as “the biological, gendered and enculturated experiences and expressions of being a woman or a man, including the affective, erotic and generative energies, understandings, experiences and expressions of self which are central to inter-personal and social relationships” (Scally, 2000, p. 1). She concludes that knowledge about one’s personal sexual being is subjugated, tacit knowledge and that personal sexuality is a reflexive, developmental learning project (*ibid.*, pp. 273-274). These characteristics of sexual knowledge call for the mining of experience to bring that knowledge to light and to enable reflection upon it. For these reasons, autobiographical inquiry suits the task.

That autobiographical inquiry has a role in sexual formation for ministry is implied in the report of a working group in the Roman Catholic Church in

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4 See *Reflection on Practice* (2009, p. 8, n. 19) for a discussion of my assumption that sexuality is both ontological and constructed, in contradistinction to those who treat it as more significantly biological (Fuller, 2008) or constructed (Foucault, 1978/1976).
Canada. The group published guidelines for the selection of candidates that include a probing of sexual experience in seeking to ascertain the psycho-sexual identity and vulnerability factors of potential candidates (Guindon, 1993, pp. 58-74). Once a candidate enters training, the group recommends a Human Formation Counsellor be provided to accompany and facilitate the candidate’s self-awareness, addressing issues of sexuality and psycho-sexual development openly and unambiguously, for “[i]ntegral human formation aims at full maturity in this area” (Guindon, 1993, p. 102).

The phenomenon of clergy sexual misconduct has brought sexual formation to the fore in Protestant as well as Catholic Churches. With their counterparts in the Canadian Roman Catholic Church, Protestant educators are aware that articulating external standards and reinforcing them with disciplinary procedures is not sufficient to address the problem. Theological educator Sondra Ely Wheeler (1999, p. 67) argues that:

> Because sexuality is grounded so deeply in who we are, rooted in our most basic needs, and entwined in all our experiences of care and well-being, we cannot begin with rules for sexual conduct, nor can we finish by developing procedures for adjudicating charges of sexual abuse by clergy.

While Wheeler argues for intentional sexual formation of ordinands, she implies that immersion in traditional spiritual disciplines is sufficient: “the practices that

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5 The report continues: “It [integral human formation] does not content itself with external or forced control of sexual behaviour. If there have been serious problems among priests in this area, it may perhaps be because more focus was placed on control of sexual impulses than on an integration of sexuality. Psycho-sexual maturity is part of a wider process of human maturity, without which celibate commitment does not make sense, and one which makes even less sense without a faith perspective” (Guindon, 1993, p. 102).
sustain virtuous sexual life are simply the disciplines that nurture holiness”
…scripture, prayer, confession, silence, worship and communion (ibid., p. 112).
Wheeler does not suggest working with ordinands’ past experience.  

However Wheeler (1999, p. 106) and other virtue ethicists acknowledge the
importance of self-awareness: “Because virtue ethics reflects on the character of
moral agents, its first task is to invite agents into self-understanding” (Keenan &
Kotva, 1999). Self-awareness is also seen as a key preventative by Faith Trust
Institute, which produces training events and materials on boundaries and sexual
ethics for clergy and spiritual leaders (Poling, 2003).

I propose that a method of autobiographical inquiry may not only uncover deep
structures of being or meaning-making in a hermeneutic phenomenological
study, but may also show itself to be assistive in the task of sexual formation.
This builds on Scally’s (2000) finding that personal sexuality is a
developmental, reflexive learning project furthered by reflection on personal
sexual story.

I may make a further claim. In Reflection on Practice (2009, pp. 5-7), I argue
that experience is not only a source for theological reflection, but also
potentially a source for theology. Experience that bears fruit consistent with the
missio Dei — a heightened sense of responsibility for others and the
development of ethical commitments – reveals the activity of God in the world.

6 The authors of Before the Fall: preventing pastoral sexual abuse (Friberg & Laaser, 1998) also stress
spiritual disciplines to effectuate integration.

7 The concept of missio Dei is treated in Reflection on Practice (2009, p. 6, n. 15).
Hence, an analysis of the experience of being Christian and being sexual may assist in the discerning of the veritas of human sexuality. *Fireside Chats* (2008, pp. 49-50) observes that traditional Christian sexual ethics derive from an unexamined, pre-critical understanding of the theology of sexuality. With the crumbling of the ‘house of authority’ that arose with the paradigm shift acknowledging the historicity of all knowledge, there is a need to further develop how to mine experience as a source for theology in this area of human life. As discussed in *Reflection on Practice* (2009, p. 14), this work has begun in recent decades as body and sexual theologies have emerged.

**Literature Review**

This study is located in the field of Practical Theology, which has as a primary interest faithful action in the unity of theory and practice as discussed in *Fireside Chats*. One of the primary tools of practical theology is theological reflection. Two elements in standard theological reflection were problematic for my inquiry: the ‘garbage in – garbage out’ problem of what theology is used in reflection; and how and what experience is used reflectively – whether ordinary, bodily experience can be a source for theology, not just theological reflection. I sought to address the first issue in *Fireside Chats* by formulating a model that enabled critical reflection on pre-critical theological understandings and a searching for veritas. The search for veritas raises the second issue, upon which light may be revealed by research into lived experience.

Other areas of literature that assist this inquiry include theological anthropology (discussed in *Reflection on Practice*), adult learning theory (discussed in...
Fireside Chats), virtue ethics (Fireside Chats), and literature concerning the link between sexuality and spirituality (Reflection on Practice, pp. 11-14). This last area of literature includes the work of Joan Timmerman, who posits that moments in sexual development are instrumental in causing spiritual development (Timmerman, 2005), and a number of sexual and body theologians. This literature and a theological anthropology that embraces the practically reasoned ‘truth’ of sexuality and the orientation and call to right relationship, perhaps drawing on the work of Edward Farley (1990), F. Le Ron Shults (2003) and John Zizioulas (1985), may provide a promising foundation for a re-visioned sexual theology and ethic – the veritas and vocatio of being human, being sexual and being Christian.

A distinction between religious belief and spirituality⁸ may be revealed in my research, as recent studies reveal that religion may impact negatively on sexual experience and spirituality may impact positively, at least among Christian women (Daniluk & Browne, 2010).⁹ Andrew Yip (2005), studying the faith lives of non-heterosexual Christians and Muslims, has found the link between spirituality and sexuality to be inextricable and self-authorising rather than reliant on traditional sources of religious authority. These studies suggest the possibility that some ordinands may be engaging in a similar casuistry, elevating

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⁸ Religion is characterised by traditions, rules and community; spirituality is characterised by personal and individual inspiration and knowing (Daniluk & Browne, 2010, p. 129). Heelas and Woodhead (2005) explore the difference in The Spiritual Revolution: why religion is giving way to spirituality.

⁹ A study of the interaction between Christian women’s spirituality and sexuality revealed the difficulty that Christian women face in being able to integrate the two. Ascribing importance to the authority of the church impacted negatively on sexual and spiritual satisfaction (Mahoney, 2010). Another study found that religious education can stifle sexual desire and impede relationships (Ogden, 2010). In a study of lesbian and bisexual women’s sexual satisfaction, religion did not contribute to women’s reports of sexual satisfaction, but two aspects of spirituality (spiritual freedom and connectedness) were strong predictors of sexual satisfaction (Smith & Horne, 2010). Therapists Stabb et al (2010) observe that while the religious traditions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam have resulted in sexual oppression for many, the intertwining of sexuality and spirituality can be powerful and positive.
personal experience over doctrine in making sense of their sexual and spiritual lives.

The studies of women’s sexual and spiritual lives suggest further that sexual script theory may be helpful in the analysis of lived experience data, particularly as regards gender differences that may be manifest (Mahoney, 2010). Sexual script theory (Gagnon & Simon, 1973) holds that socially constructed sexual scripts are involved in learning the meaning of internal states and organizing sexual behaviour. There is a Christian critique of this theory that rejects a purely constructive articulation of sexual behaviour, seeking to apply a critical realist use of the theory in Christian counselling that embraces the historic core of Christian teaching of sexuality (Jones & Hostler, 2002).

Methodology
The nature of what I am researching – the lived experience of being sexual and being Christian – requires a critical realist methodology. Personal sexuality is ontological and socially constructed. Christian identity assumes the ontological reality of God. The degree to which sexuality or Christianity is socially constructed is a question that cannot be answered definitively. I lean towards the view that sexuality is significantly socially constructed on top of biochemical realities, and that religion is a social construct that seeks to express the ineffable Real. The nature of religion, then, requires continual critical reflection to ascertain whether it is aligned with the Real. Hence the appeal, to me, of understanding theology as a performative discipline, the authenticity of which is judged by transformed action (Graham, 2002, p. 7), and the rallying
cry of the Reformation: ecclesia reformata semper reformanda est. I understand ‘God’ to be the creative, redemptive and sustaining force which holds the world together and which tends toward justice – right relationship between the human and the Divine, and between humans (other and self).

There is what is hopefully a dynamic tension between understanding knowledge as socially constructed and the Christian belief in an underlying and manifesting Reality that can be (somewhat) known and is foundational to human existence. A question that dances on the edges of my research is what constitutes revelation?, corollary to the question of what constitutes Christian experience (see Reflection on Practice, pp. 5-7 and n. 16). Is Rowan William’s articulation of revelation as the meaning of ‘God’ establishing “itself among us as the loving and nurturing advent of newness in human life – grace, forgiveness, empowerment to be agents of forgiveness and liberation” sufficient? (Williams, 2007, p. 30, emphasis in original) Can revelation be discerned in experience that bears fruit consistent with the missio Dei of right relationship?

While Swinton and Mowat are ambivalent on the question of whether human experience can be a locus for fresh revelation that would contradict scripture, doctrine or tradition, they argue that it is possible to hold on to one’s Christian convictions about truth and revelation, recognise the interpretive nature of scripture and tradition, and use social science qualitative research tools to gain practical theological knowledge. They recommend a “Chalcedon pattern”,

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10 Early in the book, Swinton and Mowat say “this is not to suggest that human experience is a locus for fresh revelation (a new script), that will counter or contradict the script provided by scripture, doctrine or tradition” (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 7). Later on, however, they recognise that “critical faithfulness enables us to be realistic about the interpretative nature of our grasping after divine revelation and to recognise that truth is, at least to an extent, emergent and dialectic” (ibid., p. 93).
pioneered by Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger, that seeks to order theology’s relationship to other sources of knowledge (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, pp. 83-85). Thus they recognise a dynamic tension that can be fruitful. As I am not ambivalent as to the possibility of revelatory ‘ordinary’ experience that may counter or contradict scripture, doctrine or tradition, I am less concerned with and more sceptical about theology’s priority over other forms of knowledge. Nonetheless I find Swinton and Mowat’s articulation of a key concern to be helpful:

The question is, do we have enough self-awareness and reflexivity to be aware enough of our own commitment to a body of knowledge that we can recognise those dimensions within it which are social constructs and which do require a more critical and less dogmatic position? (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 89).

Discernment of what is a social construct in religion and what is not is no easy feat and fine minds would disagree. In the end, it is a personal judgment, within the widest bounds of ‘orthodoxy’. But the question calls the researcher to reflexivity. The issue of personal reflexivity as an important attribute and source in this research project will arise repeatedly in this proposal and will be treated further in the discussion about standpoint and reflexivity.

Exploring lived experience through hermeneutic phenomenology

The nature of what I am studying –lived experience-- requires a phenomenological approach (van Manen, 1990; Swinton & Mowat, 2006; Fox, 11 As discussed in Reflection on Practice (2009, p. 17), reflexivity seeks to enable the researcher to acknowledge how her own experiences and context inform the research process and outcomes.
Phenomenology is a philosophical movement that arose in the Netherlands and Germany in the 20th century (van Manen, 1990, pp. 2-3). Swinton and Mowat (2006, p. 106) describe it as a philosophy of experience that attempts to understand the ways in which meaning is constructed in and through human experience. This perspective views a person’s lived experience (the thing itself) of and within the world as the foundation of meaning.

Phenomenological study seeks to provide a ‘thick’ and comprehensive description of the “lifeworld - the world as we immediately experience it, pre-reflectively” (van Manen 1990, p. 9). From such a description, a deeper understanding of the natural structure or meaning of experience is sought. This is the hermeneutic/interpretive task. Van Manen (1990, p. 10) describes hermeneutic phenomenology as “the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning structures, of lived experience”. The intention is that entering deeply into human experience, we may gain plausible insights about our lifeworld.12

One immediately senses the difficulty of this methodology. As a person recounts an experience, using language to describe an event, she is already interpreting it. How close can we get to retrieving pre-reflective experience? Perhaps the only answer is: ‘as close as possible’. This will require patient and focused data collection on experience as it happened: inquiry about concrete details, feelings, mood, thoughts, place, actions, choices…the knowing of

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12 The lifeworld is described by Husserl as “the ‘world of immediate experience’, ‘already there’, as experienced in the ‘natural, primordial attitude’”, prior to critical or theoretical reflection (Adams and van Manen, 2008). See Gadamer (2004, pp. 239ff) for further discussion of this concept.
sexual bodies. (See, e.g., van Manen, 1990, pp. 64-69, 147) Further challenges come with the researcher’s ongoing interpretation in hearing, seeing, reading and analysing, all shaped by her past experience and standpoint. Reflexivity is a crucial part of this type of research, as is narrative inquiry (discussed below).

Phenomenology seeks the essence, the very nature of a lived experience and its meaning. The essence and meaning structures, arguably, encompass the Real. Adams and van Manen write “For a truly profound understanding of human reality one must not only ask the meaning of being or presence, but also for the meaning of what is otherwise than being: alterity or the infinite” (Adams & van Manen, 2008). Thus phenomenology may encompass the ethical and theological inquiry: what is right relationship with self, with other, with God?

Practical theology and hermeneutic phenomenology share then, as a primary concern and as starting point, the experience of being human and the unity of practice and theory. Both, too, have an ultimate aim of the fulfilment of human nature, which in the Christian view includes a participation in the life of God in the world (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 26; van Manen, 1990, p. 12).

*Meaning-making and story-telling*

My research project will combine a hermeneutic phenomenological approach with narrative inquiry, seeking to unearth pre-reflective experience and to analyse the meaning-making that happens in being sexual and being Christian.
Postmodern life evinces the turn to the subjective, which in theology has manifested as a turn to experience in contemporary theology (Gelpie, 1994; Heelas & Woodhead, 2005) and in other social sciences has manifested as a turn to narrative (Gough, 2008a). This is a turn not incompatible with theology, as Christians are people who are formed by the meta-narrative\textsuperscript{13} of God’s creating and redeeming, seeking and saving care for the creation and humanity. Christians rehearse the story of salvation and seek to connect that story with the events of their lives in their place and time so that they may live the story. As Alisdair MacIntyre (2007, p. 216) writes:

\begin{quote}
Man is in his actions and practice, as well as his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to the truth. But the key question for men [sic] is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question ‘what am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’
\end{quote}

In the last twenty years, narrative research has become an important means of understanding human experience (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). The narrative view of experience is that the stories people tell about their lives convey the meanings that they attribute to experience. The story of the researched and the researcher are important in narrative inquiry, understood within the larger cultural, social and institutional narratives. Here, as in phenomenological research, reflexivity is an essential component.

\textsuperscript{13} Meta-narratives are overarching stories that “provide an organising framework for knowledge”, enabling the distinction between legitimate and unjustified knowledge (Ayres, 2008a).
Again, deep listening to the lived experience of being sexual and being Christian may enable revelation that may reshape the Christian meta-narrative, as voice is given to what has been silent or silenced (Gough, 2008b).\textsuperscript{14} This is part of the search for \textit{veritas}.

\textbf{Data Collection Methods}

The following methods will be used to collect qualitative data:

1. Reflexive activities that enable a clear articulation of researcher standpoint and the impact of my experiences and convictions on the research process and outcomes;
2. Reflections on teaching events and other opportunistic data;
3. A pilot focus group and related materials from January 2010;
4. In-depth, semi-structured interviews of five to eight ordinands or newly ordained individuals as they create chronological, sexual and spiritual life-lines;
5. A focus group of interviewees at the conclusion of the interview process; and
6. Autoethnographic reflection and writing.

A multiplicity of methods is desirable as contributing to the trustworthiness of interpretation, being multi-perspectival (Robson, 2002, p. 371; Swinton & Mowat, 2006, pp. 50-51).

\textsuperscript{14} Gough (2008b) notes the power of life history to “break the stranglehold of meta-narratives.”
Pilot learnings

I teach the theology of sexuality, the link between sexuality and spirituality, and ministerial sexual ethics. In January 2010, I led a day on these topics for the Oxford Ministry Course, teaching a group of fourteen ordinands. Before the day, I solicited participation in a post-event focus group and the sharing of reflective writing done before and during the event. Six students consented to participation. The purpose of the pilot was to begin to mine ordinand thinking about the topic of being sexual and being Christian. While I have not yet conducted a full analysis on the reflective writing and focus group transcript, I have noticed that:

* Gender impacts strongly on how one thinks of oneself as a sexual being. I had used a set of clip art faces to elicit writing about ‘where am I on the topic of sex?’ I had not anticipated that men would only use a male face and women a female face. Furthermore, in retrospect, I realise that the faces I chose reflected my own experience and bias about gendered sexual being. The three women’s faces were: happy; flirty; crying. There was an androgynous face that signalled shyness. And the two men’s faces could be seen as aggressive and randy. The male correspondents balked at the faces; neither male face sparked recognition and they couldn’t relate to the female/androgynous faces, although one male correspondent mused about why that was.

* The openness of an ordinand to consider new information and other perspectives\(^\text{15}\) appeared to impact strongly on the ordinand’s view of sexual

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\(^\text{15}\) Killen and deBeer posit that people come to theological reflection with different “standpoints”: a standpoint of certitude, from which the unfamiliar is seen only in term of what is already believed; a standpoint of self-assurance, in which only personal experience and perspective is trusted; or a standpoint of exploration, from which experience and tradition can be in potentially fruitful conversation (Killen & deBeer, 1994, pp. 4-19). In the body of this research proposal, I will be using
ethics, with those coming into the day with certainty about sexual ethics feeling that their position was strengthened through the day, despite teaching that deconstructed the sources of traditional Christian sexual ethics.

* Those students whose life experience challenged the traditional Christian sexual ethic (e.g., divorce; parenthood of teenaged or young adult children) were wrestling to create, in the words of one ordinand, a ‘faithfully realistic’ sexual ethic.

From the pilot and the literature, I am alerted to the potential fruitfulness of autobiographical inquiry with attention to views of theological authority.

*Personal standpoint and reflexivity*

Human knowledge is personal and situated, embedded in time, place and culture (Polanyi, 1962; Harding, 1993). Awareness of my own standpoint is especially crucial to hermeneutic phenomenological and narrative research, as I bring frames of reference and experience that will impact the design and implementation of the research and interpretation of data. Doing this research requires constant attention to where I stand and who I am, and reflexivity as to how that impacts what I am hearing, seeing, reading and thinking about. As Gadamer (2004, pp. 271-272) notes, “the important thing is to be aware of one’s own bias so that the text may present itself in all its newness and thus be able to assert its own truth against one’s own fore-meanings.”

the word “standpoint” to indicate the situation of my personal knowledge – enabling a more specific and nuanced articulation of standpoint.
My personal standpoint is that of a middle-aged American woman living in Britain, an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament in the Reformed tradition holding a progressive theology that is open to neo-orthodoxy, who is also a theological educator and whose prior sexual experience does not exactly fit the traditional Christian idealised pattern. I have been divorced and became an ‘unwed mother’ by choice as an exercise of reproductive freedom and hope; my sexual experience has revealed deep human structures of vulnerability and longing for intimacy; and some of my sexual experiences that the church would label transgressive have been healing, liberating or transforming. Yet the Church has also been a place where I experienced respectful non-sexual relationships with men that transformed my capacity for sexual intimacy and marriage. Having been raised in a traditional, gender-rigid family leaves me with feminist convictions and a strong emotional reaction against male privilege and sexual abuse and harassment. From my teaching experience and from the meaning I have made from my sexual experience, I believe that acknowledging a link between sexuality and spirituality and the developmental nature of sexuality and spirituality as reflexive projects can be the source of the construction of a personal Christian sexual ethic.

In *Reflection on Practice* (2009), I explored how my lived experience of being sexual and being Christian was closeted to me in the beginning of the research project. This year, I’ve introduced autobiographical mapping into some of my teaching, doing the exercise alongside my students. From the reflective work I have done so far, I will be alert in my research to issues of: ignorance, self-esteem, searching for intimacy and love, cognitive dissonance/wrestling, body
image, shame, silence, authority, moral agency, experience (sexual and non-
sexual) that heals/liberates/transforms, the role of rules, and particularly to areas
that contradict my own experience or arise outside of it.

The complexity of reflexivity (Hertz, 1997) alerts me to issues of role and
power in the researching relationship and other ethical issues that will be
explored below. Carolyn Ellis advises that reflexivity ideally uses all of the
senses and attention to feelings (Ellis, 2008).

*Working with autobiography*

I will be working autoethnographically and with the life stories of others, as
these are the most trustworthy sources for plumbing human experience:

> Autobiography is among the most important and valuable vehicles for
> exploring the human realm in all of its depth, complexity and
> richness….perhaps the primary inroad to the elusive phenomenon of the
> self…[and] uniquely suited to exploring issues raising from selfhood and
> identity to the process of development through the life course to the
> social/cultural ‘construction’ of human lives (Freeman, 2008).

Narrative inquiry begins with self-study and requires ongoing reflexivity
(Clandinin & Caine, 2008). Autoethnography enables the life of the researcher
to be a conscious part of the research (Ellis, 2008) and keeps reflexivity sharp.

Working with autobiography calls forth multivocality, as the past permits
multiple readings and the meaning of experience is reframed in the light of new
experience. This work is interpretive and constitutive: “the self is the source of autobiography and autobiography is a source of the self” (Freeman, 2008). This makes it a particularly rich source for this piece of research and points to its usefulness as a pedagogical tool for formation. As I reflect on my own experience and assist others to reflect on their chronological, sexual and spiritual life-lines, and as the interviewees reflect together on the experience of working autobiographically and the link between sex and spirit, we will be constructing and re-constructing the meaning of being sexual and being Christian for ourselves.

*Interview focal points*

Qualitative interviewing is most appropriate where a study focuses on the meaning of particular phenomena to the participants (Robson, 2002, p. 271). In hermeneutic phenomenological research, interviewing has a dual purpose: to gather and explore experiential narrative material and to develop a conversation about the meaning of experience (van Manen, 1990, pp. 66-68). The first part of the interview requires a focus on the concrete and particular of experience, explored to the fullest.

The interviews will be semi-standardized/semi-structured (Fielding & Thomas, 2008; Robson, 2002). After trust-facilitating warm up questions (Liamputtong, 2007, pp. 56-59), the participants will be invited to draw three ‘life-lines’: one chronological with significant life events; a sexual life-line; and a spiritual life-line. This activity may take thirty minutes or more. These lifelines will then form the basis of further interviewing, first seeking concrete description of what
the participant identifies as significant sexual and spiritual events in her or his life, probing for feelings, embodied knowledge and context. Thereafter, questions designed to draw out reflection and meaning will be asked in an open-ended way (Ayres, 2008b). It is anticipated that the interview in total may require up to two hours.

Given the tendency of people to skew information to enhance their self-esteem or to avoid undesirable consequences (Fielding & Thomas, 2008), it will be important to establish the complete confidentiality of the research and my standing outside of the ordination process.

At the conclusion of interview collection, the interviewees will be invited to take part in a focus group which will enable me to witness conversation about the themes that have arisen during the interview. I may use a ‘cards on the table’ approach, laying out themes that I have identified and asking them to work with them. The purpose of the focus group will be to gain other perspectives on my observations, increasing the trustworthiness of the research, and to see how the group context shapes meaning-making.

**Nature of sample**

My sample will be purposive and opportunistic (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 69): purposive in that I will be working with ordinands or the newly ordained, who are by definition committed Christians aware that they are being formed for

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16 The ‘cards on the table’ approach was suggested by Harriet Mowat in a conversation in February 2010.
church leadership, and opportunistic in the sense that it will be a self-selected
group from the pool of ordinands at ministry training colleges.

**Provisional work schedule and resource requirements**

2010

- **June-September**: Seek approval from University of Chester Ethics Committee; Initiate conversations with gatekeepers to gain access to pool of potential participants
- **September**: Recruit sample
- **October-December**: Do interviews

2011

- **January-March**: Transcribe interviews
- **April**: Focus group of interviewees
- **May-July**: Further transcription
- **September onward**: Analysis and writing

2012

- **Projected finish date**: July 2012

Resource requirements: access to the pool of potential candidates; voice recorder; computer/paper/ink; travel expenses; time; back-up referral and support for participants; therapist/supervision for researcher.

**Ethical considerations**

Significant ethical issues arise because this research probes the sensitive and subjugated area of sexual life, requiring “the disclosure of behaviours or
attitudes which would normally be kept private and personal, which might result in offence or lead to social censure or disapproval, and/or which might cause the respondent discomfort to express.” (Liamputtong, 2007, p. 5, quoting Wellings, Branigan, & Mitchell, 2000, p. 256) As such, the standard ethical issues of informed consent, confidentiality and privacy have extra import.

**Informed Consent**

All research participants must have the right to choose to participate on full information (Robson, 2002, p. 67; University of Chester Research Governance Handbook, 2009, Pt V). Morally valid consent for research in a sensitive area or with a vulnerable population requires:

- disclosure: sufficient information about the purpose of the research and its procedures and potential risks, including a warning about potentially sensitive or emotional topics to be explored;
- understanding: information must be given in a manner to enable understanding;
- voluntariness: there must be no hint of coercion; and
- competence: an assurance that the participant is competent to give consent (Liamputtong, 2007, pp. 33-35).

Given that personal sexuality is a subjugated area of knowledge and that a significant number of people have experienced sexual trauma or abuse as children or adults, this area is particularly sensitive. Potential participants will be informed of the purpose and nature of the research and the content sought in semi-structured interviews. They will also be informed that sex is a sensitive
and personal subject, the discussion of which could trigger the memory of traumatic or confusing events. They will be asked, if they have a particular vulnerability but would still like to participate, to consult with me so that I might ensure they had appropriate support. I used this strategy for the pilot study; one woman contacted me. Through a lengthy conversation, I was able to 1) assess that she was aware of her vulnerability and had outside support, 2) give her sufficient information about the event, and 3) enable her consideration of how she might want to handle her participation. She participated well, having decided in advance not to disclose particular personal information unless she felt so moved.

Participants will also be told that they may withdraw at any time without consequence or obligation to share any further information with me. And they will be informed that I am working under the supervision of Revd Dr Margaret Whipp, academic staff at Ripon College Cuddesdon and the Oxford Ministry Course, who will have no access to the names of participants, raw data or any other confidential information. Assurances will be made that any discussion with Dr Whipp about the research will not include identifying information that might enable her to speculate as to the source of data, and written reports about the research similarly will be devoid of potentially identifying information.

Confidentiality

The sensitivity of the subject matter and the vulnerability of the ordinands require that there be a strong safeguarding of confidentiality (Liamputtong, 2007, p. 35) and that this be made clear in the information and consent material.
As discussed in *Fireside Chats*, the ecclesial culture around sex is one of shame and secrecy. Ordination training is a summatively and formatively assessed process, the outcome of which is not guaranteed. Disclosure of sexual information could negatively impact the ordination training process. To maintain confidentiality, I code all data collected so that no participant’s name is on any document except the code guide, which I will destroy once all data has been collated.

Confidentiality will be explicitly assured as within the bounds of the law, which means that personal information would be shared only with consent unless there was clear evidence of serious danger to a person or the community requiring disclosure (Liamputtong, 2007, p. 36).

Other issues that touch on confidentiality include where to hold the interviews (not a ministerial training institution) and how to report the data. As regards the latter, confidentiality will be assured by using fictitious place names and by not using any information that could lead to the identification of a person (Liamputtong, 2007, p. 37).

*Support/referral/care*

Researchers have a responsibility not to harm research participants and to minimize risks (Robson, 2002, p. 68; Liamputtong, 2007, p. 37; University of Chester Research Governance Handbook, 2009). The importance of confidentiality is underscored in this research for these reasons. However, there are other risks in the disclosing of personal sexual information. There may be
psychological or emotional distress in the emergence of a memory or in the recounting of an event (Liamputtong, 2007, pp. 38-39). While the initial information and consent process will give me the opportunity to screen for self-reported vulnerabilities and assess the support in place or necessary, it is possible that distress may arise that is not anticipated by the participant. In that event, I will have in place information about counsellors who work in the area of sexual trauma (Swinton & Mowatt, 2006, p. 66). I will use my experience as a pastor to discern whether the interview needs to be interrupted or halted, when and how to provide this information, and whether and how to follow up. I intend to conduct these interviews whilst under the care of a therapist, and will have access to her/his thinking about any matter arising. I am also aware that there may be moral and ethical limits as to how far to probe in a sensitive matter (Liamputtong 2007, p. 40), and will be aware of potential limits to protect the dignity and well-being of the participant. Further, I will offer additional interview time on request, should a participant want to come back to a particular area of questioning after the interview (Liamputtong, 2007, pp. 43-44). In this way, care is offered with regard to the lingering effects of the interview (van Manen, 1990, p. 162).

Privacy and role-management

As I will be probing deeply into private life with the intention to use the information in a public way, sensitivity is required to protect the participant’s privacy beyond holding confidences. As Brinkmann (2008) notes, “…it is an ethical challenge to the interviewer that the openness and intimacy of the interview situation can lead the respondents to disclose information they may
later regret.” (Brinkmann, 2008) Reflexively, I acknowledge that my warm and caring demeanour easily lends itself to enabling overly intimate conversation and disclosure. This is an area that will require me to be alert to my role as researcher (versus minister). Clarity about my role and self-awareness of how I use my ‘charm’ may assist me to manage it, but I recognise the potential for manipulation in the situation. The invitation to participants at the end of interviewing to come back to clarify or reframe material offers another opportunity to manage over-disclosure.

In the pilot, I found myself thinking reflexively about role clarity as I managed two obvious roles, teacher and researcher, and one inchoate role, pastor/priest. During the pre-event conversation with the person who disclosed sexual trauma, I followed a ‘natural’ impulse and asked the person at the end whether they would like me to pray with them. As soon as I said it, I felt uncomfortable, which I now know signalled role confusion. While the person accepted the invitation and I offered the prayer, on reflection I would not do that again. I would make the same reassuring and empowering statements in the course of the conversation, but I would not blur the roles and increase the intimacy of the situation by offering prayer. Later on, in the focus group, I found myself slightly tempted to be teacher rather than facilitator of a conversation, but easily held back. I will continue to manage these three roles to keep them as separate as possible – using the insights of non-researcher roles to guide my questions and conversation, while endeavouring not to slip into a pastoral or teaching role (Fox, Martin & Green, 2007, p. 85). I am aware that my advice might be sought as a minister (Liamputtong, 2007, p. 62), and will weigh up the situation before
deciding how to proceed, asking whether I am the best person to offer advice and what other options might be.

Related to role-management is the issue of the appropriateness of self-disclosure. This issue arose at a recent teaching event, when an ordinand dissolved in tears after the session. I took her to a quiet place and there heard how full of shame she was for past sexual acts. At some point, I decided that the best response was to tell her that I too had a dodgy sexual history but that I no longer felt ashamed, and began to reflect on why that was so. What followed was a liberating conversation in which we concluded that we brought special gifts to the ministry because of our pasts, including the inability to judge others, the capacity to make safe spaces in which people could grow, and a hard won personalised Christian sexual ethic. She left the room beaming, insisting that I continue in this research.

Liamputtong (2007, pp. 72-74) argues that self-disclosure is “essentially important” in conducting sensitive research. Despite the anecdote recounted above, I remain tentative about the appropriateness of self-disclosure in the context of hearing other people’s life stories. Liamputtong emphasises the importance of establishing a trustful rapport through self-disclosure particularly when researching sexuality, yet I remain circumspect. Given her strong conclusions, I will endeavour to read situations to consider the appropriateness of self-disclosure beyond the standard introductory statements (Robson, 2002, p. 281).
Researcher vulnerability

Researchers doing emotionally laden research are also vulnerable to harm (Liamputtong, 2007, ch. 4). In my research, it is possible that I may hear stories that will evoke emotional distress in me: rage at sexual abuse or male privilege, deep empathy at suffering and shame, or other unanticipated emotions. Ellis (2008) counsels that these kinds of events in my consciousness are fodder for reflexivity. Liamputtong (2007, pp. 84-88) reports that working in sensitive areas can be emotionally draining and that there may be emotional costs at the end of the research. To manage this and to enhance reflexivity, I intend to work under the care of a therapist.

Method of analysis and interpretation

Qualitative research allows a diversity of approaches for analysis and interpretation; there is no clear and accepted set of conventions (Robson, 2002, p. 456). The approach I intend to take can be called a search for the meaning through reflection/immersion (ibid., pp. 457-458) by means of hermeneutic phenomenology and narrative inquiry.

Van Manen (1990, p. 77) describes the task of getting insight into the essence of a phenomenon as one involving “a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience.” To do so, he suggests conducting thematic analysis of the texts, themes being the emerging lived meanings in the experience (ibid., pp. 78, 86-88). Themes can be derived through wholistic reading, by selective highlighting and/or by a line-by-line approach (ibid., pp. 92-95). He advises that thematic
statements be written in phenomenologically sensitive paragraphs in a creative, hermeneutic process (ibid., pp. 95-96), and that essential and incidental themes be distinguished (ibid., pp. 106-107). He conceives research to be fundamentally a writing activity (ibid., p. 7).

Narrative analysis complements a phenomenological approach, asking questions of the text such as: How is the story composed? What storehouse of religio-cultural resources does it draw on or take for granted? Are there gaps and inconsistencies that might suggest preferred, alternative or counter-narratives? (Riessman, 2008).

I intend to use a form of the Miles and Huberman system for data analysis (Robson, 2002, pp. 473-485) to identify themes and ask narrative questions of texts. It calls for

- data reduction, e.g., summary sheets after interviews; the coding of data to classify it; the writing of memos to capture ideas, views and intuitions;
  and an interim summary to spot deficiencies and gaps (useful for framing the focus group of interviewees);

- data display, e.g., matrices or networks;

- conclusion drawing/meaning-making, using such tactics as noting themes/patterns/trends; clustering; making metaphors; subsuming particulars into the general; noting relations between variables; finding intervening variables; and
“verification”\textsuperscript{17}, including reflexivity on researcher effects and feedback from informants (e.g., the post-interview focus group).

I do not intend to use a software package.

**Conclusions**

Van Manen (1990, pp. 167-173) asserts that hermeneutic phenomenological research as writing is an original activity and encourages creativity in finding a way to represent the data that is derived from it. I am curious about and open to what will emerge from my research. Will the data be best presented as reconstructed life stories? As thematically organized reflections? As a drama or poetry? As a polemic to the Church on the *veritas* of sexuality? Will the data be amenable to theological reflection using the Farley/Browning model of *Fireside Chats*? I do not know and relish the journey towards finding out.

**Limitations**

Working with personal experience, and particularly with the memory of personal events, means that I will be working with a limited set of data. Personal experience is, by definition, limited to the person. And memory is not only reconstructive but potentially capricious or distorting (Freeman, 2008). Is this knowledge valid?

I would argue that story as constituting the self is an ontological reality – that is how humans make meaning -- and that scientific notions of objective truth don’t

\textsuperscript{17} “Verification” is a construct the meaning of which is different in qualitative and quantitative research. Robson (2002, p. 476) use the term to address issues of validity and reliability, issues discussed in the body of this work under Limitations and Implications.
pertain. Rather, all that one can do is seek to continually and critically unpack past meaning for the further construction of the self.

By its nature, hermeneutic phenomenological enquiry is limited to ideographic knowledge. If, however, the interpretation is polyvalent, “then the more perspectives one uses to explore that reality, the richer the data and the deeper the understanding one will be able to obtain” (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 51). Using multiple methods (triangulation) – interviews, autoethnography, reflexivity, opportunistic encounters at teaching events, the pilot data, the invitation to interviewees to follow-up after interviewing, and the final focus group – will enhance the validity or trustworthiness of my qualitative data.

As to the final product, Van Manen (1990, pp. 151-153) summarizes appropriate evaluative criteria as follows: “our texts need to be oriented, strong, rich and deep.” Orientation, in my case, would be oriented to the world in a theological way – towards the deep meaning of being sexual and seeking to be faithful in God’s world. Strong texts are focused and exclusive, not relativistic – every situation has theonomy in it. Rich texts are thick in description, exploring the phenomenon “in all its experiential ramifications” (ibid., p. 152). Depth gives meaning and distinction, while always leaving open the possibility for fuller understanding.

**Implications**

Swinton and Mowat (2006, pp. 44-46) describe the task of qualitative research as “to describe reality in ways which enable us to understand the world
differently and in understanding differently begin to act differently.” The key concepts involved are description, interpretation and understanding (ibid., p. 46). The researcher’s task is to make as accurate a description as possible, one with which readers can identify and find resonance. The final text’s transferability lies in its ability to “raise issues and offer insights beyond the particularities” (ibid., p. 47).

My hope is that this research may raise issues and offer insights into the practice of theological education for sexual formation, insights which may spawn the development of educational tools and the further construction of theological anthropology and a fundamental theology (veritas) of sexuality. In this way, the research may have some theoretical generalisability (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, pp. 48-49).

Working autoethnographically and reflexively and with the support of a therapist, I have no doubt that that research will have implications for me – as a woman, as a minister, as a theological educator and as a practical theologian.

**Dissemination**

Dissemination will take place naturally through my teaching and ministerial work. This research will continue to shape my teaching in ministerial training colleges and other settings, and in consultative and assessment work I am asked to do in theological education. Beyond that, it will continue to shape my preaching, pastoral care-giving and church leadership.
The research or parts of it may also be disseminated in such journals as

*Theology and Sexuality*

*Journal of Adult Theological Education*

*Episteme: a journal of social epistemology*

*Journal of Supervision and Training in Ministry*

*Teaching Theology and Religion*

*Feminist Theology or*

*Discourse,*

depending on my conclusions and the form the research takes.
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Abstract

Sex in the church has long been a taboo subject, yet sex and sexuality are hot issues in the church. The debate about homosexuality threatens to divide denominations, and the scandal of ministers who abuse their power and people in their care has damaged the credibility of the church to speak on sexual matters. How may we equip ordinands, ministers and others who lead congregations to navigate contemporary sexual issues, and to live out and model a healthy sexuality? What kind of training of leaders will equip the Church to articulate a Christian sexual ethic for the 21st century? This article proposes a curriculum for the training of ordinands, ministers and other pastoral carers that includes cognitive, dialogical and reflective learning methodologies.