The "Clerical Paradigm": A Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness?

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The seminary where I first taught pastoral care sits across the street from the university where I did my graduate work in religion and psychology. When I crossed the street from academic study to ministerial teaching two decades ago, however, I entered a new world. Many of my students were second-career adults ready to move into ministerial vocations. Eager to learn theology, they also wanted to know how to use it.

Around the same time, my husband left doctoral study to pastor a small, working-class congregation in the suburban outskirts of the city. To keep a dwindling membership afloat in a marginal neighborhood, he needed resources neither of us had imagined in graduate school. He eventually acquired the skills and wisdom that helped sustain a vibrant ministry. I had a similar experience developing expertise in training as a pastoral counselor. Oddly, though, the literature in practical theology of the 1980s defined this kind of attention to "hints and helps" as a problem. For the most part, it still does.

Negative comments about the problem of "tips and hints" and "applied theology" are common among those who teach in practical theology in the United States and beyond. Such comments are voiced regularly at meetings and appear in our publications. In one fell swoop, practical theologians dismiss "application" and "rules of thumb" as distasteful leftovers from the days of the "clerical paradigm" when theological education focused solely on equipping clergy. Criticism is seldom turned back on systematic theology or any other area of the curriculum. For example, a recent book on theological method bemoans the recent history of "'applied' or pastoral theologies, with the latter as the 'hints and helps' of pastoralia" or "merely applications of truth found within systematic theology."[1] The story of the clerical paradigm encapsulates our history and the history is seldom told in any other way.

Is there a subtle disdain hidden in the analysis of this 1980s literature, I began to wonder, for the wisdom specific to clergy and congregational

1 Elaine Graham/Heather Walton/Frances Ward, Theological Reflection. Methods, London (SCM Press) 2005, 3.

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ministry? I have continued to consider this question as I work with students going into ministry. Why did the phrase "clerical paradigm" arise as a primary way to characterize the problem of theological education? Why did it gain such staying power? Does it adequately comprehend the problems faced by practical theology and pastoral practitioners? Does it contain hidden prejudice against practice and doubts about the church itself?

Proclamations about the clerical paradigm, first suggested by systematic theologian Fdward Farley, established a major precedent for the ensuing discussion. It is time to look more carefully at the original source of this term and ask what was helpful about the portrait and what dilemmas it left unresolved. Such an investigation will allow us to assess where previous attempts to reinvigorate practical theology succeeded and where they went astray.

The concept of the clerical paradigm has so dominated the discourse, I will argue, that it has distorted our perception, misdirected blame, and hence left other problems unattended, particularly the rise of what I will call the "academic paradigm." In relying heavily upon the construct of clerical paradigm, theologians eager to revitalize practical theology inadvertently denigrated congregational and pastoral "know-how." This was not their intent, but it was a consequence of the increasingly careless usage of an initially useful term. Although I begin with an analysis of Farley's proposal, I do not take issue so much with its original formulation as with its subsequent use. Nor do I focus on the institutional or empirical question of whether or not seminaries are teaching ministerial skills and practices. Instead, I am interested in the shared rhetoric about the problem and solution in theological education that has subtle and not so subtle consequences for institutional life. Perceptions of the clerical paradigm as the main problem have perpetuated a "fallacy of misplaced concreteness," as Alfred North Whitehead might say, or the mistaking of a helpful generalization for concrete reality.[2]

Behind my analysis stand two aims that go beyond the boundaries of this essay but merit brief mention. I have a wider interest in assessing the practical theological literature of the 1980s in general and a desire to explore and reclaim the value of pastoral know-how. The important efforts of the 1980s both advanced the discussion and left some serious problems unresolved. On the one hand, scholarship in practical theol-

2 Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality. An Essay in Cosmology, New York (Harper) 1929. Whitehead defined the fallacy as "neglecting the degree of abstraction involved when an actual entity is considered merely so far as it exemplifies certain categories of thought" (11). This is the "fallacy involved whenever thinkers forget the degree of abstraction involved in thought and draw unwarranted conclusions about concrete actuality." See: Herman E. Daly/John B. Cobb/Clifford W. Cobb, Eor the Common Good. Redirecting the Economy towards Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Euture, Boston (Beacon Press) 1989, 36.

ogy contributed to a major reorientation in theological education in the United States. It identified religious practices as a valid subject matter, contested conventional curricular divisions between theory and practice in the classical and practical fields, and embodied a dialectical engagement between situations, religious traditions, and Christian convictions in teaching and research. On the other hand, some commentators, such as David Kelsey and Barbara Wheeler, argue that the discussion of theological education and practical theology has made little real difference in the actual practices of faith and ministry and in the overall organization of theological study in seminaries, divinity schools, and graduate programs.[3] There are many reasons for the limited impact of practical theology. But a key question has been overlooked. How do those who practice ministry embody theological knowledge? How do they learn how to practice? As I will ultimately conclude, the field of practical theology needs to learn a lot more about practical theological know-how: how to teach it, how to learn it, and how to demonstrate it.

The Clerical Paradigm as the Problem in Practical Theology

Fncouraged by professional interest and institutional support, several scholars contributed significantly to the repositioning of practical theology as a respectable academic enterprise in the 1980s.[4] They agreed almost universally that previous eras, dating back to Schleiermacher in the nineteenth century, had defined the field too narrowly. "Clerical paradigm" became the code term for this problem. Farley first proposed the phrase as a way to characterize the troubling preoccupation of theological education and practical theology with ministerial skills of individual pastors.[5] He was not alone in raising this concern. Others before Farley, such as Alastair Campbell, had already identified the problem.[6] With this phrase, however, and a powerful historical portrait to match, Farley codified it.

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3 David H. Kelsey/Barbara G. Wheeler, New Ground. The Foundations and Future of the Theological Education Debate, in: Theology and the Interhuman. Essays in Honor of Edward Farley, ed. Robert R. Williams, Valley Forge, Pa. (Trinity Press International) 1995, 189.

4 For an excellent bibliography, see: Theological Education 30/2, 1994, 89-98.

5 Edward Farley, Theology and Practice Outside the Clerical Paradigm, in: Practical Theology. The Emerging Field in Theology, Church, and World, ed. Don S. Browning, San Erancisco (Harper & Row) 1983, 21-41; and Edward Farley, Theologia. The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education, Philadelphia (Fortress Press) 1983, 87. Although he continues this argument in later work, this paper focuses primarily on its initial appearance in these earlier publications. See: Edward Farley, The Fragility of Knowledge. Theological Education in the Church and the University, Philadelphia (Eortress Press) 1988.

6 Alastair V. Campbell, Is Practical Theology Possible? in: Scottish Journal of Theology 25/2, May 1972, 217-227.

The clerical paradigm soon became a widely used shorthand for everything that was wrong with previous understandings of theological education and practical theology. In the reigning model, the so-called classical areas of Bible, history, and doctrine convey the theory or truths of the tradition, while the practical arts then apply them to ministry, centered almost entirely on the technical functions of clergy. In the 1980s, the hope was to get "beyond clericalism" in theological education, as the title of one book put it, and back to contextual, congregational, and theological approaches.[7] Rightfully redefined, practical theology, like theological education in general, entails more than the know-how of parish ministers and ought to involve theological engagement with contemporary issues and the Christian gospel both in congregations and society at large.

Few people have stopped to assess the adequacy of this portrayal. Most simply assume the clerical paradigm sufficiently defines the predicament, partly because it has done such a good job capturing an important aspect of theological education's entrapment in scope and method. As an introduction to one major edited volume observes, the idea is "so widely held that it is often taken to be self-evident."[8] Some scholars take issue with Farley, but the debate has rarely questioned this basic category.[9]

Farley's *Theologia* is indeed a pivotal and informative text. It gives a detailed interpretation of developments in theological education from early Christianity through the twentieth century and formulates a response. He begins with what he admits is a "tendentious genetics" of the assumptions behind the current organization of theology, making a largely lost history available for reanalysis before offering his prescriptive response. For those wanting to understand practical theology's plight and the gulf between academy and church, it is a good place to start. Even though Earley focuses primarily on mainstream Protestant theological education, he believes that parallel developments occurred in Roman Catholic and Evangelical circles. As he notes, the "theological encyclopedic movement is as much a Catholic as a Protestant work."[10]

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7 Joseph C. Hough/Barbara G. Wheeler, Beyond Clericalism. The Congregation as a Focus for Theological Education, Atlanta (Scholars Press) 1988.

8 Barbara G. Wheeler, Introduction, in: Shifting Boundaries. Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education, ed. Barbara G. Wheeler/Edward Earley, Louisville (Westminster John Knox) 1991, 9.

9 "Nothing published so far has challenged either Farley's explanation of the almost universal experience of fragmentation or the terms he uses to analyze theological education's malaise," Kelsey/Wheeler, New Ground, 183. An exception to this claim might be found in: Joseph C. Hough/John B. Cobb, Christian Identity and Theological Education, Chico, Calif. (Scholars Press) 1985, 3-5. They briefly deny that confinement by the clerical paradigm is the crux of the problem and assert that the key dilemma is confusion in the church about ministerial leadership. See also other chapters in: Barbara G. Wheeler/Edward Farley, eds., Shifting Boundaries. Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education, Louisville (Westminster John Knox Press) 1991.

10 Farley, Theologia, x.

Theologia basically tells the story of theology's displacement as the "unity, subject matter, and end of clergy education" and its replacement by the clerical paradigm.[11] Here Farley is not talking about theology as conventionally understood today in terms of systematic or constructive doctrinal work as one of many areas of study. Indeed, this understanding is an unfortunate fallout of the encyclopedic movement of eighteenth-century Germany and its instantiation in educational institutions and academic societies up through today. Instead, he refers repeatedly throughout the book to a time when theology was "one thing" rather than many, a "single science" pertaining to the salvific wisdom of God. Culminating with Schleiermacher's *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology* but continuing well into twentieth century curricular structures, the attempt to establish the validity of studying Christianity within the modern university led to the elaboration of a "theological encyclopedia" dividing theology into subdisciplines of Bible, dogmatics, history, and practical theology. Theology was portrayed as a science, comparable to its companion sciences of medicine and law, with religion as its object, clerical education as its aim, and several specialized areas as its components.

In a summary of his thesis, Farley says, "the problem of the study of theology, the *one thing*, eventually gives way to the problem of theological encyclopedia, *the interrelating of the many things*."[12] When the "one thing" split into four branches and each branch divided into more subspecialties, each specialty established its own fiefdom with its "sociological accoutrements" of guilds, journals, methods, and scholars.[13] These areas evolved more out of circumstance than through any clear rationale about their necessity or their relationship to the whole. One principle that did shape this reorganization – the distinction between theory and practice – simply exacerbated a growing division between practical theology and all the other areas.

Although Schleiermacher had a slightly different tripartite schema in mind, it was he who proposed what Farley calls the "clerical paradigm" as theology's aim.[14] Schleiermacher equated theology with law and medicine as practical sciences designed for the promotion of social goods. For theology this good was the church's need for an educated leadership. Although Schleiermacher also saw the Christian experience of redemption by Christ as a material purpose for theological education, this understanding gradually vanished over the next century and the clerical paradigm "became virtually universal" as the key formal rationale.[15] Practical theology became a culminating cluster of courses directed toward the tasks and functions of ordained ministry. In a footnote, Farley clarifies,

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11 Ibid., ix.

12 Ibid., 54, emphasis supplied.

13 Ibid., 4, 105.

14 Ibid., 85, 87.

15 Ibid., 94.

> Hereafter, this expression, *clerical paradigm*, will be used to refer to the prevailing (post-Schleiermacher) Protestant way of understanding the unity of theological education.... Although this paradigm will be questioned as an adequate approach to theological education's unity, the author wishes to avoid the impression that this is a questioning of either the validity of clergy education itself or of the validity of education for specific activities and skills.[16]

Is the Clerical Paradigm the Main Culprit?

Did Farley succeed in avoiding these pitfalls observed in passing in a footnote? Even if he did, have those who followed him maintained the importance of educating clergy for "specific activities and skills?" In a later chapter in *Theologia*, Farley makes mono-causal statements about the problem of the clerical paradigm that seem to betray his good intentions. The reason Protestant churches do not see theology as meaningful, he insists, "is *simply* the triumph and narrowing of the clerical paradigm."[17] The clerical paradigm is also "responsible for" a truncated view of practice and even for the alienation of ministry students from "praxis, that is, from issues of personal existence and social justice." Not only that, the clerical paradigm "appears to be one of the historical forces at work in the American exclusion of 'theology' from the university."[18]

One upshot of such claims is that the clerical paradigm, and in time practical theology and the church in general, begin to take heat that rightfully belongs with systematic theology and the other disciplines. The "clerical paradigm" becomes a scapegoat for larger problems faced by systematic theologians, especially theology's own marginalization in both the academy and wider public. In actuality, I believe, the singular focus on professional pastoral skills is more a symptom than a cause of theology's demise.

What has been overlooked in Farley's aftermath is his incisive critique of the whole of theology. He argues that two premodern understandings of theology underwent unfortunate transformation in modernity. From early on, theology referred to both the personal salvific knowledge of God and the discipline or organized study of such knowledge. A great change, which he frequently dubs "cataclysmic" because of its "radical departure" from previous patterns, came with developments leading up through the Enlightenment to today.[19] With the rise of rationalism, historical critical method, and separation of different theological sciences, theology's fundamental focus on "sapiential and personal knowledge"

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16 Ibid., 98, original emphasis.

17 Ibid., 131, emphasis supplied.

18 Ibid., 133.

19 Ibid., 39, 49, 62.

of divine being and the promotion of "a Christian *paideia*" or cultivation of this divine wisdom was lost. Theology as *habitus* or as an act of practical wisdom about the divine became instead a "generic term for a cluster of disciplines."[20] Education was rendered simply an "aggregate" or "mélange of introductions" to all the divergent specializations. Theological understanding was displaced as the overall purpose and dispersed "into a multiplicity of sciences."[21] The two types of theology continue but now in deranged form. In his words,

> Theology as a personal quality continues ... not as a salvation-disposed wisdom, but as the practical know-how necessary to ministerial work. Theology as discipline continues, not as the unitary enterprise of theological study, but as one technical and specialized scholarly undertaking among others; in other words, as systematic theology.[22]

In short, practical theology was not the only area blighted. All areas lost touch with their rightful theological meaning, systematic theology included.

Farley himself loses sight of this dimension of his analysis. Later in *Theologia*, he simplifies his picture of the problem and describes it as the "'clericalization' of theology." He says, "in the clerical paradigm, theology...is something for the clergy alone."[23] Yet one could easily argue, or perhaps should more accurately argue, that in the *academic paradigm* theology became something for the academy alone. Congregations avoid theology not because they see it as clerical, as he argues, but because they see it as intimidating and reserved for learned academic experts who have influenced clergy. The problem is not just "clericalization," in other words, but an equally troubling "academization" of theology. At the same time, theology is excluded from the university not just because it is equated with preparation for ordained ministry as Farley emphasizes, but because of its revelatory, confessional nature.[24] That *theologia* or knowledge of the divine gained through revelation no longer has standing in the academy poses a greater problem than Farley acknowledges.[25]

Theologian Van Harvey suggests that systematic theology's own peers have also squeezed it out (even though he himself largely agrees with Farley's diagnosis that clerical professionalism has led to theology's marginalization). Biblical and historical studies have retained a purpose and

20 Ibid., 81.

21 Ibid., 14, 15, 49.

22 Ibid., 39.

23 Ibid., 130, 169.

24 Ibid., 114, 134.

25 Farley's positive argument that theology can have a post-confessional form in the university is brief. See: Ibid., 161, 198. The question of how *theologia* can be sustained within the secular university is revisited in: Farley, Fragility of Knowledge, 56-82.

place despite historical criticism and the demise of speculative metaphysics. They did so, however, by displacing systematic theology. "The development of specialized Old and New Testament had the effect of taking away two of the traditional fields of competence claimed by the systematic theologian," Harvey says. "What was once the subject matter of theology was, as it were, subcontracted out to New Testament studies, church history, philosophy of religion, and ethics."[26] Not surprisingly, systematic theologians became increasingly confused about the nature of their own particular expertise. I see a further example of this confusion as systematic theologians attempt to reclaim the study of Christian practices as central, territory already traversed and studied by practical theologians.

One way systematic theology has tried to retain a place in the university in the last several decades is by becoming ever more sophisticated. Theology is not just "*perceived* as technical," as Farley says. It has *become* technical, and not just because of the clerical paradigm. In the last several decades, systematic theologians began to write for a public removed from Christian life and ministry. Few parishioners saw such abstruse theological activity as something in which they engaged. When they wanted to understand their religious lives, they turned instead to scholars better able to provide lively, meaningful language: psychologists, economists, political scientists, and even authors of spiritual memoirs. Thus, in the "academic paradigm," systematic theology faced a no-win situation. Too pious for the academy, it became too academic for the church.

In other words, Farley actually exposes an academic paradigm as virulent and problematic as the clerical paradigm. Perhaps if he had so labeled systematic theology's plight, preoccupation with the clerical paradigm might have been tempered and some of the unhelpful consequences avoided, including a phraseology that bestowed a subtle negative connotation on "clergy" and largely ignored the "academic" dilemma. One ironic result is that in some cases the practical areas became even less relevant to ministry and more removed from practice, lest faculty be accused of merely promoting clerical skills.[27] Theologians in both systematic and practical theology underestimated the intelligence involved in practice and overlooked the limitations of merely academic knowledge.

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26 Van A. Harvey, On the Intellectual Marginality of American Theology, in: Religion and Twentieth-Century American Intellectual Life, ed. Michael J. Lacey, New York (Cambridge University Press) 1989, 188, 190.

27 This can be illustrated by curricular conclusions like the following: "Seminaries need to resist the pressure to do a quick curricular fix to 'prepare' pastors to be better leaders of Christian education programming in local churches. Such a response ignores the validity of the critique of the 'clerical paradigm.' Rather, seminaries need to become ... communities of reflective activity seeking wisdom about 'the believer's existence and action in the world' (Farley)." Barbara Brown Zikmund, Theological Seminaries and Effective Christian Education, in: Rethinking Christian Education. Explorations in Theory and Practice, ed. David S. Schuller, St. Louis (Chalice Press) 1993, 121-22.

What Happens to Application in the Academic Paradigm?

Fixation on the clerical paradigm as the key problem in theological education and practical theology has had the odd consequence of further devaluing the already questionable status of congregational life, ministerial practice, and clergy competence. This is unfortunate and probably not the end Farley or others had in mind. As Farley himself acknowledges, Schleiermacher valued such practice. Schleiermacher saw theology, along with medicine and law, as different from the pure conceptual science of philosophy precisely because they all embrace practices. All three "originate in the need to give cognitive and theoretical foundations to an *indispensable practice*" that responds to "fundamental human needs," whether spiritual, social, or bodily.[28]

What then was the end Farley desired, if not an enhancement of clerical practice? He recommends the recovery of *theologia* or an "education which centers on a *paideia* of theological understanding."[29] "*Paideia*" implies the holistic involvement of the learner and includes all Christian believers. However, the context and actual exercise of *paideia* go largely unexamined. Little is said about how to cultivate and enact it. In the sequel to *Theologia* that extends Farley's reflection on education, *The Fragility of Knowledge*, this term receives surprisingly little attention despite its potential.

Instead, the emphasis falls heavily on the cognitive. The general goal of theological education is facilitating theological "thinking." There is nothing wrong with emphasizing critical rational intellect in ministry. Indeed, a ministry informed by scholarship, book learning, and reflection is highly desirable. A problem arises, however, as practical theologian Craig Dykstra points out, when intelligence receives a narrow definition as primarily linguistic, logical competence. This ignores a range of intelligences and qualifications related to somatic, spatial, kinesthetic, aesthetic, and personal knowing, as identified by Howard Gardner and others.[30]

The problem is not just a matter of a limited definition of intelligence, however. A larger theoretical and methodological issue is at stake. Ultimately, few people attempt to challenge or dismantle the valuation of theory over practice or the one-directional relationship between theory and practice evident in Schleiermacher and the gradual devaluation of

28 Farley, Theologia, 86, original emphasis.

29 Ibid., 181.

30 Craig Dykstra, Reconceiving Practice in Theological Inquiry and Education, in: Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition. Christian Ethics after MacIntyre, ed. Nancey C. Murphy/Brad J. Kallenberg/Mark Thiessen Nation, Notre Dame (University of Notre Dame Press) 1997, 177, n. 29. This article first appeared in: Wheeler/Farley, Shifting Boundaries, 35-66. Most recently, Dykstra has talked about this intelligence in terms of "pastoral imagination" and "pastoral excellence."

practice that resulted.[31] Theory drives practice, acting is ultimately subordinate to thinking, and critical reflection occupies a more important place than practical competence, a conviction that continues to shape theological curriculum.

In descriptions of practical theology, interpretation has been key. Action and implementation are often afterthoughts, even though both of these are understood as important elements in the science of hermeneutics. Practical theologian Don Browning, paraphrasing Richard Bernstein and Hans-Georg Gadamer, says that in the practical wisdom necessary for ministry, "understanding, interpretation, *and application* are not distinct but intimately related."[32] Major spokespersons in practical theology such as Browning and Farley, however, have had immense interest in the first two: understanding and interpretation. They have had less to say about "application."

All agree that practical theology involves more than application of theory to practice. Concern about application shapes understanding from the beginning. Yet they seldom ask how understanding actually informs action. When Farley takes up "action" later in *The Fragility of Knowledge*, he does so briefly and only as one of several "interpretative" modes of education. He does not describe its concrete actualization in faith, ministry, and congregation.[33] No one really wants to talk about application or use of knowledge. It is still basically left to the various subdisciplines of practical theology to figure out how knowledge will shape and be shaped by practice. Application is something that happens in some ill-defined fashion there. In the end, "clerical tasks" are no more than just that: technical chores that distract from theology's more fundamental aim of reflection and interpretation. Since the educational focus on such tasks has been defined as the problem, little attempt is made to fit them back into the picture at all.

Is There Anything Commendable about Practical Know-How?

In the last few years, several people have begun to question cognitive or cerebral definitions of practical theology's task. This is most apparent in the far-reaching discussions about "practice." Farley's work itself helped

31 John E. Burkhart, Schleiermacher's Vision for Theology, in: Practical Theology. The Emerging Field in Theology, Church, and World, ed. Don S. Browning, San Francisco (Harper & Row) 1983, 52-53.

32 Don S. Browning, A Fundamental Practical Theology. Descriptive and Strategic Proposals, Minneapolis (Fortress Press) 1991, 39, emphasis supplied.

33 Farley, Fragility of Knowledge, 153-55, n. 5. Even though Farley titles his most recent book "Practicing Gospel," his primary practice is still thinking. He defines theology as "interpretative or thinking activity" rather than faith active in the world. Edward Farley, Practicing Gospel. Unconventional Thoughts on the Ghurch's Minsitry, Louisville (Westminster John Knox Press) 2003, 7.

propel others to "reconceive practice," as Dykstra titles an important 1991 article. This article is one of the first attempts in practical theology to develop the concept of practice. Informed by a close reading of Farley, Dykstra also criticizes theological education's focus on individual clergy skills. It is philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, however, who provides the infrastructure that allows Dykstra to depart from Farley's agenda, and precisely around the reconstruction of practice.[34] An impoverished understanding of practice is a serious part of the problem in theological education, Dykstra argues, including the failure to include practice in the areas of Bible, history, systematic theology, and ethics, and to see that such disciplines are themselves a form of practice.

Dykstra likes but essentially redefines Farley's heady *habitus*. For Dykstra, *habitus* refers to the "profound, life-orienting, identity-shaping participation in the constitutive practices of Christian life." In a footnote, he observes that such wisdom requires "not only insight and understanding but also the kind of judgment, skill, commitment, and character that full participation in practices both requires and nurtures."[35] Practices such as interpreting Scripture, worship, prayer, confession, service, and so forth shape wisdom. Fducation therefore must take place in close proximity to them. Dykstra observes in another footnote, "Significant connections between actual engagements in the practices and inquiry carried out in a context formed through them is vastly underemphasized by Farley." Farley restricts learning to "analysis and interpretation of the cognitive products of practice."[36] For Dykstra, *habitus* moves away from technological and abstract knowledge toward knowledge gained in community, through history, as a result of concrete, complex, holistic engagement in Christian faith as a way of life.

Farley only partially anticipates the enhanced validation of practice that has occurred since Dykstra's article (even though the title of Farley's recently published collection, *Practicing Gospel*, shows its impact). Don Browning, for example, also draws on MacIntyre but positions him beside other practical philosophers interested in hermeneutics and pragmatism. Browning affirms theology "as a practical discipline through and through," the "theory-laden" nature of all practice, and the fluid movement from practice to theory to practice required of all good theology.[37] Flaine Graham titles her book on pastoral theology, *Transforming Practice*, apparently unaware of Dykstra's similarly titled essay. Graham

34 Dykstra, Reconceiving Practice. Although he identifies several influential scholars such as Robert Bellah, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Stanley Hauweras, and Jeffrey Stout, Dykstra says that the "most important single text" is: Alasdair C. MacIntyre, After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory, Notre Dame (University of Notre Dame Press) 1981.

35 Dykstra, Reconceiving Practice, 176, n. 28.

36 Ibid., n. 29.

37 Browning, Fundamental Practical Theology, ix, 6, 7.

uses MacIntyre, Pierre Bourdieu, and other philosophers to redefine practice as the proper focus of pastoral theology. Pastoral theology "properly conceived" is a "performative discipline" where the focus is right practice or "authentic transformatory action" rather than right belief.[38] In a recent essay, Dorothy Bass highlights four contributions of this attention to practice. It connects thinking and doing (practice requires and gives rise to knowledge), confirms the social character of thought and action (practice requires community), highlights the historical character of social life (practice exists over time), and attends to that wisdom which is yet inarticulate (practice involves people of all sorts).[39]

All this is well and good. Such scholarship, however, still leaves unaddressed the standing of practices that are particular to clergy. As one reviewer of *Transforming Practice* comments, Graham is simply following a trend (which I believe is evident in the discussion in general) that perceives the focus on pastoral skills as just "too narrow." The reviewer summarizes that Graham desires a "less clerical and more communal understanding of pastoral theology."[40]

I see a problem with the ready dismissal of clergy practice. Are such skills too narrow or has their value been fundamentally misunderstood? I do not want to re-inscribe practical theology as only concerned with ministerial technique, but are there any particular tasks for which pastors ought to be prepared and with which theological education ought to grapple? Is there any know-how that is not, as Dykstra and others so readily repeat, "*mere* know-how?"[41]

In a response to a colloquy in the late 1970s honoring pastoral theologian Seward Hiltner, Rodney Hunter is among the first to identify pastoral theology as a "form of practical knowledge." He lifts up a problem that remains unresolved despite all the attention others have given it in the intervening years. Pastoral theology stands in a quandary because the "distinctive character of practical knowledge in relation to other kinds of knowledge has not been clearly enough understood." Such "practicality rightly understood can be as profound and significant as descriptive insight into reality or visions of the good."[42]

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38 Elaine E. Graham, Transforming Practice. Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty, London (Mowbray) 1996, 7.

39 Dorothy Bass, unpublished paper, Notes for remarks to the planning committee on teaching for ministry, Vanderbilt Divinity School, 6 November 2003. See her earlier edited works for a fuller examination of these four aspects: Dorothy C. Bass, ed., Practicing Our Eaith. A Way of Life for a Searching People, San Erancisco (Jossey-Bass) 1997; Miroslav Volf/Dorothy C. Bass, eds., Practicing Theology. Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life, Grand Rapids (W. B. Eerdmans) 2002.

40 Robin Gill, review of: Transforming Practice. Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty, Elaine E. Graham, in: Theology 100, May-June 1997, 228.

41 Dykstra, Reconceiving Practice, 180.

42 Rodney J. Hunter, The Euture of Pastoral Theology, in: Pastoral Psychology 29/1, Eall 1980, 65, 69.

Hunter attempts a brief but helpful phenomenology of what this kind of knowledge actually looks like. "Whereas descriptive knowledge tells about what is," he observes, "and normative knowledge tells what ought to be, practical knowledge gives information about how to do things." This knowledge is not just about skill but it "must be gained pragmatically" through repeated exercise of skill and testing of rules of thumb.[43] Although it involves more than memorizing a set of simple sequential instructions, it does require initial step-by-step "trial and error" activity by the learner and "show and tell" between virtuoso and amateur. Through such pastoral apprenticeship, one acquires a kind of "wisdom of experience." Here Hunter is not talking about "experience" conventionally understood as personal growth in self-awareness but as a "form of knowledge that has accrued and matured through a history of practical, contingent events."[44]

Of final significance, Hunter notes that there is the distinctive paradoxical challenge and even impossibility of learning a practical knowledge that sees its source and goal as "religious." Religious knowledge entails wisdom about living at the very boundaries of human existence (e.g., sin, death, and meaningless) and about living in the grace that transcends these limits (e.g., redemption, salvation, and liberation). This raises an extremely difficult question about whether or to what extent one can really teach and learn such practical theological knowledge.

This exegesis of practical theology, practical knowledge, and practice suggests that learning practical theology has as much affinity with learning an art or sport as learning law or medicine. As liturgical scholar John Witvliet argues, art and music offer intriguing alternative ways to think about the Christian life as an "ongoing, communal improvisatory performance."[45] Most notably for my purposes here, he observes that "music and art education give more sustained, habitual attention to the basic 'skills' than does theological education." He continues, "in piano and violin, you never graduate from playing scales. These exercises are fundamental in shaping and maintaining muscle memory." What then, he asks, "are the scales we need to practice in theological education?"[46] This is an excellent question and is precisely the question that has been dismissed in the concern about the clerical paradigm. What are the scales needed for faithful practice of ministry? How do practical theologians understand and teach scales as an integral part of the larger enterprise of theological education?

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43 Ibid., 65.

44 Ibid., 67.

45 John Witvliet, Music/Practical Theology Comparison, unpublished manuscript, Seminar on Practical Theology and Christian Ministry, 8-9 October 2004, 1.

46 Ibid., 16.

Witvliet begins to answer Hunter's concern about how to learn something that borders on the transcendent or the unattainable. Music, like theology, "uses concrete cultural artifacts but also deals with the ineffable." Simply because music seeks to express the inexpressible does not mean, however, that acquiring the ability to make music is something mythical, esoteric, or extraordinary. Indeed, learning music is a form of education worth "demythologizing." It is honed by "ordinary activities such as practice, experiencing good examples, and taking small steps toward the kind of expression we long to offer."[47] Music is an embodied art that one learns at least initially through repeated practice of particular gestures and body movements, including how to stand, where to position one's hands, mouth, arms, and so forth.[48]

Just as technique and musicianship in art education are interdependent "right from the start," so also are skills and *theologia* interdependent from the beginning in theological education. Doing scales is an inherent facet of the imaginative synthesis of the art itself. Drawing on V. A. Howard, Witvliet emphasizes that one must live in the tension between drudgery or "means without dreams" and fantasy or "dreams without means." Indeed, the best mentor embraces "scales" *and* "artistry," "hard work *and* soaring vision."[49] One must rehearse concrete skills without losing desire for and pursuit of the occasional enactment of a surprising, satisfying aesthetic event.

My youngest son has been trying to learn guitar. For good and then for ill, he hears his oldest brother playing fluently and he quits practicing. He seems to assume that guitar playing entails instant good music and that consequently he is, as he concludes, "no good at it." He displays an all too human desire: he wants to skip the tedious intervening steps – chord repetition, chord progression, finger strengthening exercises, missed notes, poor performance – and just play guitar. The discussion in theology seems stuck right here also. Scholars and students want to skip over practice, scales, and skills, and just play *theologia* in the church and society.

47 Ibid., 7.

48 Dorothy Bass, Response to Witvliet, unpublished manuscript, Seminar on Practical Theology and Christian Ministry, 8-9 October 2004.

49 Witvliet, Music, 7-8; Dorothy Bass, Notes on the Meeting, unpublished manuscript, Seminar on Practical Theology and Christian Ministry, 8-9 October 2004, 3. Witvliet quotes V. A. Howard: "All that I describe here stands in marked contrast to two extremes: drudgery, on the one hand, or means without dreams; and fantasy, on the other, or dreams without means. My overall purpose is to show how means and dreams get connected." V. A. Howard, Learning by All Means. Lessons from the Arts, New York (Peter Lang Publishing) 1992, xiv. Witvliet also quotes Bennett Reimer: "... technique now, musicianship later [is a misconception that] has plagued performance teaching in music education throughout its history. [This] accounts for much of the convergent, rule-learning-and-following, technique-dominated, rote nature of the enterprise ... The solution is to recognize and cultivate their interdependence right from the start." Bennett Reimer, A Philosophy of Music Education. Advancing the Vision, Upper Saddle River, N.J. (Prentice Hall) 1989, 130.

What about Learning *Theologia*, Skills and All?

This analysis leads to a final problem in the literature on theological education and practical theology in the 1980s: No one attends to the social realities of seminaries and divinity schools. The theologians writing this literature were mostly talking among themselves and not about theological education as a social enterprise. The literature does not study, as Wheeler and Kelsey observe, concrete practices of schools themselves.[50]

Farley's and Kelsey's comments on curricular change and its limited place in their books on theological education are illustrative. Farley reiterates that his book is "not a curriculum proposal." It offers "no blueprint of theological study, no detailed plan for curricular reform" and brackets such institutional and pedagogical dimensions.[51] In almost identical fashion, Kelsey insists that *To Understand God Truly* "is not a pedagogical proposal. It does not imply any particular recommendations...and carries no necessary pedagogical consequences."[52] Both restrict their work to generic theoretical frameworks.

In the preface to *Theologia*, Farley admits he underwent a "serious change of mind" about this. He meant to focus on curriculum (even if still not on pedagogy), but his initial intent to consider a "new theological encyclopedia" or a new course of study eventually gave way to a focus on theology's centrality.[53] Such curricular and pedagogical efforts are needed, and his recovery of theological education's proper aim will support them, but he keeps his focus on the "conceptual" problem of ideas and attitudes despite his recognition of the need for more "thoroughgoing reform."[54]

Throughout *Theologia*, Farley notes several times the especially significant influence of graduate programs. They "may be the fourfold pattern's real home and its strongest institutionalization."[55] They embody and perpetuate the divisions between fields in the most acute sense through each new generation of scholars. Yet minimal suggestion is made about how a revitalization of *theologia* might impact them and their education. There is need for curricular reorganization in both seminary and graduate education that gives greater attention to practice and its pedagogical engagement but no guidelines on what this might look like.[56]

50 Kelsey/Wheeler, New Ground, 192-93.

51 Farley, Theologia, 12, 13.

52 David H. Kelsey, To Understand God Truly. What's Theological about a Theological School, Louisville (Westminster John Knox Press) 1991, 111.

53 Farley, Theologia, x. In his later work, Farley picks up the concern about the structure of curriculum but still protests that he is not trying to suggest an "ideal curriculum" or specific proposals. Farley Fragility of Knowledge, xi, 103.

54 Farley, Theologia, 6.

55 Ibid., 199, 112.

56 Farley, Theology and Practice, 38. Recent activity in doctoral programs, such as the new program in Theology and Practice at Vanderbilt University, are beginning to address this.

I teach at the institution where Farley contributed significantly to curricular revisions that proposed the "minister as theologian" as a key motif guiding the formation of ministry students. The degree includes a senior project that involves, potentially at least, serious integration of course work and ministerial experience around a problem in the practice of ministry. Whether faculty are able to model such complex integrative work themselves or guide students toward it is another question. Too often, "minister as theologian" has meant "minister as scholar" rather than "minister as practitioner."

Not until Farley retired did he realize how his teaching had often missed the mark. He shaped generations of students in powerful ways, but he "missed a rather plain pedagogical truth," he admits. Rather than focusing on his "students' eventual use" of systematic theology in concrete struggles over questions of faith, he taught it as an academic field largely isolated from situations of relevance, a pedagogy destined to be "shed like a heavy coat in hot weather" upon graduation. "The truth is that most of my students will not imitate, repeat, or even be very interested in the contents and issues" of his own scholarly specialty as they pursue ministry.[57] Despite a "lifetime of teaching theology," he "never asked" whether "theology can be taught," a question few practical theologians can avoid in their teaching.[58]

What then does it take to shape the theologically wise pastor? People in practical theological areas confront this question long before retirement, when they first cross the classroom threshold in the role of professor. The pursuit of this question and the question of how to teach a practice unites those who teach in practical theological areas, whether pastoral care, homiletics, leadership, education, spirituality, social action, or mission.[59] This pedagogical difference also sometimes presumes and generates a more fundamental epistemological difference over whether one thinks one's way into acting or acts one's way into thinking. The 1980s literature often implicitly assumes that one thinks one's way into acting. It leaves the question of how action transforms thinking largely unexplored. It did, however, plant the seed for a moderating position in which theory and practice "dialectically" influence and transform each other that paved the way for more innovative pedagogical practices in

57 Edward Earley, Eour Pedagogical Mistakes. A *Mea Culpa*, in: Teaching Theology and Religion 8/4, 2005, 200-203. This article reflects Farley's growing awareness of the entrapments of the "academic paradigm," even though he does not use this term or recognize the need for more extensive critique of the intellectualist tradition of theological interpretation.

58 Edward Farley, Can Preaching Be Taught? In: Theology Today 62/2, July 2005, 171-180.

59 I take up this subject matter more extensively in another essay, Practical Theology and Pedagogy. Reappraising Theological Know-How, in: For Life Abundant. Practical Theology and the Education and Formation of Ministers, ed. Craig Dykstra/Dorothy C. Bass, Crand Rapids (Eerdmans), forthcoming 2008.

practical theological pedagogy.[60] In how they teach (for example, in assignments or class sessions organized around enactment, practice, and play of various kinds), many practical theologians today seem to presume, often without articulating it, that practice engenders thinking as much as thinking enriches practice.

Even with such able dialectics, however, a genuine validation of practice still eludes us. Until recently, scholars of religion as a whole overlooked the material character of religion, privileging word and idea over practice and the material world. Learning centers around books and libraries and not around "non-written expressions," as religion scholar Colleen McDannell argues in her research on "material Christianity." We have associated material, unwritten expression and practice with the mundane, the bodily, the unsophisticated, and the profane, and therefore have dismissed them.[61]

Reclaiming Know-How

In *Theologia* and work that built on it, Farley and others do a service for the theological academy. They call attention to the reduction of theological education to the training of clergy. They question its institutional compartmentalization. They reclaim theology as a responsibility of the entire curriculum and the church. Subjugation by the clerical paradigm is not, however, *the* problem that we once thought.

My argument is not so much with Farley himself as with the continued and unquestioned use of clerical paradigm as code language for what is wrong with theological education and practical theology. Many people latched on to the critique of clericalism but missed the important depiction of systematic theology's demise. Had Farley named the reduction of theology to the rational, orderly study of doctrine the "academic paradigm" or the "cognitive captivity" of theology perhaps some of the problem might have been alleviated. Instead, the clerical paradigm and its message – that theological education is *not* about teaching pastoral skills – became our narrative. Despite good intentions, the monolithic concern about the clerical orientation has tended to cast a negative shadow over practice, particularly clergy practice, and has hidden intricate interconnections between wisdom and know-how, interpretation and performance.

Recognizing this leads to new questions.[62] What is theological know-how? What forms does it take for clergy? How do different areas of study

60 For example: David Tracy, Blessed Rage for Order. The New Pluralism in Theology, New York (Seabury Press) 1975, 243.

61 Colleen McDannell, Material Christianity. Religion and Popular Culture in America, New Haven (Yale University Press) 1995, 14.

62 I thank James Nieman for his helpful response to my essay in fall 2005 and, in particular, his articulation of the general and specific moves of my analysis of the clerical paradigm

contribute to its enhancement? How does one teach know-how? There are also relational questions. What is the relationship between "scales" and "artistry" in ministry? What is the connection between know-how and other kinds of knowledge, between knowledge and action, and between practical knowing and the kind of knowing necessary for knowing God? We need to learn more about how people embody knowledge and effect change. That is, we need to know more about the connections between knowledge, practice, action, application, and transformation. I have suggested some initial answers to these questions, but we need to know much more about practical theological know-how. We need to explore the shape and practice of a pedagogy of know-how not only within seminary programs, but also in doctoral institutions that shape teachers of ministry students, as well as in congregations from which many of us come and go.

In Farley's repeated lament that theology is no longer "one thing," one cannot help but hear a kind of nostalgia for a bygone era. There is something almost mythic about this "historical archaeology" of "a time when 'theology' was a single thing," a time of "classical orthodoxy" when "a deposit of divinely revealed truths carried in ancient texts was the one ground of the one thing, theology."[63] Many other scholars have also assumed a largely negative view of specialization. Simply put, specialization equals fragmentation. It is inherently selfish, insular, and narrow.[64]

Instead of this curse on specialization and the nostalgia for theology as "one thing," what is needed is a clearer definition of the diverse kinds of theological engagement and their connection, as some scholars have already attempted. Roman Catholic theologian Robert Schreiter, for example, argues that "what has counted for theology since the thirteenth century in Western Christianity," a "university model" that emphasizes "clarity, precision, and relation to other bodies of knowledge," is no longer the whole of the discipline, if it ever was.[65] Other ways of doing theology deserve recognition, especially those that begin with the local context itself. Schreiter identifies three kinds of local theology (e.g., translation, adaptation, and contextual) and four different forms of theological expression (e.g., theology as sacred text, wisdom, sure knowledge, and praxis). In related fashion, systematic theologian Kathryn Tanner distinguishes between academic and everyday theologies. The former is *not*

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and the proposals and questions it raises. I also thank other members of the Seminar on Practical Theology and Christian Ministry, sponsored by the Lilly Endowment, Inc., for their general comments and help in response to reading an earlier draft.

63 Farley, Theologia, 142.

64 Eor example, Kelsey/Wheeler, New Ground, 186. They remark, "the subspecialties further splinter the already fragmented fourfold arrangement of studies."

65 Robert J. Schreiter, Constructing Local Theologies, Maryknoll, N.Y. (Orbis Books) 1985, 4.

more theoretical and more abstract than the latter, as we usually assume. Instead, academic theology is itself a "material social practice among others" with different approaches and aims that include a greater interest in critical questions and ordering of religious practice. Rather than a "purely intellectual activity," it belongs on a "continuum with theological activity elsewhere as something that arises in an 'organic' way out of Christian practice."[66] Those who engage in everyday theology do not need the kind of systematically consistent construction of beliefs that academic theologians desire. A more systematic theological inquiry is only called for when their faith practices break down and generate problems.[67] In other words, both Tanner and Schreiter illustrate alternative conceptualizations of theology as "many" rather than "one thing." They underscore the different ways of doing theology demanded by different contexts.

When I first started teaching pastoral care, I sometimes dealt with the challenge of teaching know-how by talking with students about the origin of the gap between what they study in seminary and their ministry. I found historical insights helpful. They allowed me to understand and describe the challenge as a long-standing problem that has been around at least since Schleiermacher, the rise of Enlightenment rationalism, and the growth of the modern university and the theological encyclopedia. I now realize that this post-dates the turning point. The medieval period was equally instrumental, as historian Randy Maddox demonstrates, in establishing theology as a theoretical or speculative university science and practical theology as just a "simplified version" of academic theology for the less educated. The social biases of theology were just as definitive then as they are today. The "debate divided roughly along the lines of those who were in the now independent universities," Maddox says, "versus those in schools with continuing monastery ties."[68] Universities covered theology proper, monasteries focused on practical theology, and neither made its way to the common folk.

This sounds incredibly, even comfortingly, familiar. The comfort of history, however, should not dampen our hope for a new day beyond intellectual elitism, prejudice, and nostalgia, a day when we are entrapped by neither the clerical nor the academic paradigm, and no longer view *thinking about faith critically* and *embodying it richly and effectively* as mutually exclusive enterprises of knowledge and wisdom.

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66 Kathryn Tanner, Theories of Culture. A New Agenda for Theology, Minneapolis (Fortress Press) 1997, 71, 72.

67 Kathryn Tanner, Theological Reflection and Christian Practices, in: Practicing Theology. Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life, ed. Miroslav Volf/Dorothy C. Bass, Grand Rapids (W. B. Eerdmans) 2002, 228.

68 Randy L. Maddox, The Recovery of Theology as a Practical Discipline, in: Theological Studies 51, 1990, 653, 656.

Abstract

Perception of the "clerical paradigm" as the main problem of practical theology and theological education has perpetuated a "fallacy of misplaced concreteness," as philosopher Alfred North Whitehead might say, or the mistaking of a helpful generalization for concrete reality. Does the concept of the clerical paradigm adequately comprehend the problems, or does it contain hidden prejudice against practice and doubts about the church itself? This article argues that the idea of the "clerical paradigm" has so dominated the discourse of practical theology that it has distorted understanding of the needs of pastoral practitioners, misdirected blame, and hence left other problems unattended, particularly the rise of an equally challenging problem, which might be called the "academic paradigm." In relying so heavily on the construct of clerical paradigm, theologians eager to revitalize practical theology inadvertently denigrate congregational and pastoral "know-how." The article begins with an analysis of Edward Farley's proposal, but the challenge lies less here than with its subsequent use and misuse. The article therefore turns from this analysis to an exploration of problems raised by the academic paradigm and alternative ways to redeem the value of practical know-how so readily dismissed under the reign of the clerical paradigm.

Zusammenfassung

Die Wahrnehmung des „klerikalen Paradigmas" als Hauptproblem der Praktischen Theologie und der theologischen Ausbildung hat den „Trugschluss der unzutreffenden Konkretheit" , wie der Philosoph Alfred North Whitehead sagen dürfte, oder das Fehlen einer hilfreichen Verallgemeinerung für die konkrete Realität immer wieder verfestigt. Versteht das Konzept des „klerikalen Paradigmas" die Probleme angemessen, oder enthält es verborgene Vorurteile gegen die Praxis und zweifelt an der Kirche selbst? In diesem Artikel wird argumentiert, dass die Idee des „klerikalen Paradigmas" den Diskurs in der Praktischen Theologie so dominiert hat, dass es das Verstehen der Bedürfnisse der pastoral Tätigen verzerrt, Verantwortung fehl adressiert und folglich andere Probleme unberücksichtig gelassen hat, insbesondere das Aufkommen eines ebenso herausfordernden Problems, welches das „akademische Paradigma" genannt werden kann. Indem sie sich so sehr auf das Konstrukt des „klerikalen Paradigmas" verlassen haben, werteten Theologen, die danach eiferten, die Praktische Theologie zu revitalisieren, unbeabsichtigt gemeindliches und pastorales „know-how" ab. Der Artikel beginnt mit einer Analyse von Edward Farleys Ansatz, aber die Herausforderung liegt weniger hier als in dem daraus folgenden Gebrauch und Missbrauch. Deshalb wendet sich der Artikel weg von dieser Analyse hin zu der Erforschung von Problemen, die durch das „akademische Paradigma" hervorgerufen werden, und zu Alternativen, um den Wert praktischen Wissens wiederzuentdecken, welcher unter der Herrschaft des „klerikalen Paradigmas" so bereitwillig vernachlässigt wurde.