When Religion and Health Align

Mobilising Religious Health Assets for Transformation

James R Cochrane, Barbara Schmid and Teresa Cutts (editors)

Cluster Publications
2011
Contents

Acknowledgements xi

About the Contributors xiii

Preface: The Hope of Alignment xvi
  Introduction xvi
  From the Past to the Present xvii
  The African Religious Health Assets Programme (ARHAP) xix
  When Religion and Health Align xxiii

Section 1

Overview and State of the Field

1. The Continued Paradigm Shift in Global Health and the Role of the Faith Community
   Christoph Benn
   Introduction 2
   Developments in the Last Decade 3
   AIDS as a Catalyst for Equity in Global Health 5
   A Paradigm Shift in Global Health Ethics? 6
   Can the Faith and the Health Communities Find a Common Language? 9
   Conclusion 13

2. Discovering Fire: Changes in International Thinking on Health Care—the Challenge for Religion
   Gillian Paterson

3. ‘An FB-oh?’: Mapping the Etymology of the Religious Entity Engaged in Health
   Jill Olivier
   Mapping the ‘Faith-Based Organisation’ Landscape 24
4. **Participatory Inquiry on the Interface between Religion and Health: What Does it Achieve, and What Not?** 43

*Steve de Gruchy, James R Cochrane, Jill Olivier, Sinatra Matimelo*

- An Historical Overview 44
- Four Key Ideas Behind PIRHANA 45
- The Theoretical Foundations of PIRHANA 47
- An Overview of the PIRHANA Tool 50
- Technical Research Matters 54
- What Does Participatory Inquiry Achieve and What Not? 56
- Conclusion 59

5. **Boundary Leaders: Seeing and Leading in the Midst of the Whole** 62

*Mimi Kiser*

- Institute for Public Health and Faith Collaborations 63
- Recognising the Systems Nature of Health Challenges 63
- Leadership that Sees the Self in the Whole 66
- Liberative Pedagogy 68
- Analysis 70

6. **Liquid Boundaries: Implications for Leaders**

*Mobilising Religious Health Assets for Transformation* 75

*Gary Gunderson*

*Section 2*

**HIV and AIDS**

7. **A Purpose-Driven Response: Building United Action against HIV & AIDS for the Church in Mozambique** 86

*Geoff Foster, Carina Winberg, Earnest Maswera, Cynthia Mwase-Kasanda*
8. Challenges and Possibilities of Religious Health Assets: Charting an Islamic Response to the HIV and AIDS Pandemic

Muhammad Khalid Sayed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Problems of an Orthodox Islamic Response to HIV and AIDS</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic Marriage and the Risk to Women of Contracting HIV</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ‘Islam-centred’ Response by Positive Muslims to HIV and AIDS</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic Jurisprudence for an Orthodox-Centred Response Effective Against HIV and AIDS</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. Tough Negotiations: Religion and Sex in Culture and in Human Lives

John Blevins

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PIRASH Workshops: The Research Findings of a New Methodological Tool</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings from the Workshops</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion from the Workshops and Further Questions</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Theology and Sexuality</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion, Sexuality and Identity</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critiquing Modern Power, Grounded in Social Justice</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towards Religious Communities with many Sexual Subjects</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. On the Pedagogy of HIV and AIDS: Conversations with Indigenes

Sepetla Molapo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the Pedagogy of HIV and AIDS: A Brief Overview</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Definitions of HIV and AIDS: Indigenes as Adherents of the Dominant HIV and AIDS Pedagogy</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On Defeated and Contaminated Blood: Understanding the Causes of HIV and AIDS among Indigenes 139
What about Safe Sex? Indigenes on Sex that Involves the Use of Condoms 142
Concluding Remarks 145

Section 3

Practice

11. Trustworthy Intermediaries: Role of Religious Agents on the Boundaries of Public Health 150

James R Cochrane
Introduction 150
The Context 151
The Challenge 152
Building Trustworthy Intermediaries 155
Assessing GSOs, and Beyond .... 158
Conclusion 160

12. The Relevance of Healthworlds to Health System Thinking About Access 164

Lucy Gilson
Introduction 164
Understanding Access and Addressing Access Barriers 165
Unpacking Acceptability 167
Bridging the Worlds of Patients and Providers: What Role for Trust? 170
What are the Implications of These Insights for Improving Health Care Access? 173
To conclude 176


Frank Dimmock with Tali Cassidy
Introduction 178
Method of CHAs Study 179
Historical Background of CHAs 179
Function, Mandate and Comparative Advantage of CHAs 182
Current and Future Threats 185
Future Steps and Prospects 186
Conclusion 189

14. The Memphis Model: ARHAP Theory Comes to Ground in the Congregational Health Network 193

_Teresa Cutts_

Introduction 193
The Memphis Landscape 194
Theories and the Logic Model 195
Covenant Committee Design 199
Programme Expansion and Structure 200
Evaluation of CHN 203
Early Mapping Efforts and Data Snapshots 204
Summary and Lessons Learned 206

Section 4

LOOKING BEYOND AND AHEAD

15. Frontiers of Public Health and Social Transformation: Faith at the Table 212

_Katherine Marshall_

Setting the Scene 212
Caveats and Definitions 214
Navigating Disconnects and Tensions around Religion and Development 215
Trends in International Development, Faith, and Health 220
Faith and Health: Moving towards More Concrete Action 224
Malaria and Faith – A Case Study 228
Ideas on Paths Forward 231

Index 235
The research activities and writing of scholars and practitioners affiliated with the African Religious Health Assets Programme (ARHAP) have contributed tremendously to a growing appreciation of the role of religion as a social force, particularly concerning religion’s influence on various, complex social determinants of health or health disparity. The summary report of ARHAP research, sponsored by the World Health Organization in Zambia and Lesotho, demonstrated the ways in which religious entities function as significant assets for the health of communities and individuals. In the first lines, the authors reiterate the ARHAP research agenda: ‘Though often hidden from Western view, religion is so overwhelmingly significant in the African search for wellbeing, so deeply woven in the rhythms of everyday life, and so deeply entwined in African values, attitudes, perspectives and decision-making frameworks that the inability to understand religion leads to an inability to understand people’s lives.’ (ARHAP 2006:1) As research into the social determinants of health becomes more central to public health scholarship, ARHAP plays a crucial role in demonstrating the scope and breadth of religion’s reach within this research.

And yet, the predominant assumption that underlies much of the research of ARHAP—the idea that religious entities are health assets for individuals and communities in both tangible and intangible ways—needs to be examined more fully if ARHAP research is to illumine religion’s various, differing functions in different cultural contexts. Although public health researchers have often failed to recognise the social function of religion, they have, in fact, demonstrated that religion does not always, inevitably contribute to individual health and wellness. ARHAP’s contribution of helping public health researchers and practitioners understand the power of religion as a social force will be enhanced by ongoing research that reveals the complexity of that function without simply assuming that religion always functions as an asset.

In 2008, scholars affiliated with ARHAP began to undertake such research in the field of human sexuality. Drawing from that research, this
chapter will explore the role of religion in regard to adolescent sexual health, sexuality and sexual decision-making both in the United States and South Africa. That exploration will entail both an analysis of the findings of the workshops undertaken as part of this research as well as a theological reflection on the ways in which religious communities—specifically Christian communities—might function as assets in regard to sexuality and sexual health. This interdisciplinary approach draws on the distinctive strengths of ARHAP work, employing both methodological tools developed by ARHAP in other projects and theological perspectives articulated by ARHAP scholars, bringing this extant work into the context of human sexuality.

**PIRASH Workshops: The Research Findings of a New Methodological Tool**

In order to understand the role of religion in regard to adolescent sexual health, Paul Germond, a scholar at the Sociology Department at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, and Tessa Dooms, a graduate student of Germond, developed a new research tool: Participant Inquiry into Religion and Adolescent Sexual Health (PIRASH). Drawing on the insights of Participatory Inquiry into Religious Health Assets, Networks and Agency (PIRHANA), an earlier suite of research tools developed by ARHAP scholars, the PIRASH research initiative consisted of two workshops in local communities—one with young people and one with community leaders—in order to understand the social forces that impacted young people’s emerging sense of sexuality, sexual identity and sexual decision-making.

As of early 2010, PIRASH workshops were conducted in South Africa (one workshop in Potchefstroom and six workshops in greater Johannesburg) and the United States (two workshops in Atlanta and one workshop in Raleigh/Durham, North Carolina), with a total number of 157 participants (71 young people and 86 adults). The data analyzed for this paper does not include five of the Johannesburg workshops because that data had not been aggregated at the time of writing.

The PIRASH workshops were interactive, focused on relevant concerns, and grounded in the practices of appreciative inquiry that endeavoured to identify the particular strengths and assets that communities intrinsically possess in order better to address the sexual health of their young people rather than to prescribe a singular ‘solution’ from a group of outside experts. Specifically, the workshops were designed to provide data to increase understanding of the following:

1) What are the positive and negative effects of religious expression and are those effects related?

2) What kinds of community structures need to be mobilised or created to maximise the positive effects of religious belief and to address the negative effects?
The workshop series consisted of two separate, day-long workshops, one for young people between the ages of 16 and 23, and one for religious and community leaders. Over the course of the PIRASH workshops, Christian, Jewish and Muslim religious leaders, as well as young people from those religious traditions participated; the majority of participants were Christian though. This chapter will focus on findings from five modules of the young people’s workshop.

1. **Module 1: Ranking of the sources of information on sex and sexuality**, in which participants identified and ranked the various sources of information that were influential for the group.

2. **Module 2: Indexing messages about sex and sexuality**, in which participants identified and ranked the most common messages about sexuality from those sources.

3. **Module 3: Perceptions of sexual norms and practices among the group**, in which group members were read a series of 25 statements about sexual practices, beliefs and values to which they had to respond, either agreeing with, disagreeing with or expressing uncertainty in each case.

4. **Module 4: Creating a continuum of sexual acts**, in which members of the group brainstormed to create a list of ‘sexual acts’ (as defined by group). The group as a whole then worked together to rank those activities from ‘least sexual’ to ‘most sexual’ (again, as defined by the group). Finally, individual participants named which kinds of acts on this continuum constituted sex, both from their own viewpoint and from the viewpoint of their religious tradition.

5. **Module 5: Characteristics that constitute a healthy sexual life**, in which participants created and ranked a list of qualities or characteristics that are important for sexual health and to which they aspire.

**Findings from the Workshops**

The first module of the young people’s workshops required participants to name the sources through which they receive messages regarding sexuality. The participants listed 38 distinct sources; religion was listed by just under half (45%) of the groups, but was only ranked as a predominant source by one group (in Atlanta).

The ranking of the predominant religious messages occurs early on during the workshop and it demonstrates the multiplicity and complexity of religious messages that young people negotiate. Those messages present prohibitions (abstinence) and expand possibilities (it is okay to be straight or gay because God made us to be sexual). They speak of the gift of sexuality and they exhort youth to delay any expression (wait for marriage). In short, these messages offer differing perspectives that stand in tension with one another; they are internalised by young people.
in a context in which they already receive an inordinate, contradictory number of other messages regarding sexuality from a dizzying array of sources over the course of their day.

The third module of the young people’s workshop required participants to respond to a series of propositions, stating whether they agree with the proposition, disagree with it, or are uncertain about what they believe in regard to the proposition. Responses revealed a high level of disparity among members of one or more of the groups for twelve of the twenty-five propositions. In other words, there is no majority or even strong plurality of opinion with regard to these propositions in at least one of the groups.

Some of the propositions elicited a high level of uncertainty among participants regarding their own perceptions. The predominant response to the propositions was ‘uncertain’ in at least one of the sites for 15 of the 25 propositions.

Additionally, there was a high discrepancy between the sites for some of the propositions, demonstrating divergent perceptions between the participants as a group in one site when compared to participants as a group in other sites.

Finally, it is important to note that there was a consensus among participants in answering seven of the 25 propositions. These propositions included, among others, that young people involved in their community are sexually active (most agreed) and that one should not have sex before marriage (disagreed).

Consensus was not limited to these seven propositions. In fact, there was a high level of consensus among all participants, both among community leaders and young people, across all sites, when asked to name the characteristics of a healthy sexual life. The only divergence in responses came from community leaders in one Atlanta workshop. While all other participants named certain kinds of qualities to which one might aspire, two of the top three responses among community leaders in Atlanta were pragmatic and action-oriented: education and safe sex or being tested for HIV.

Finally, if the responses given in Module Three by participants across the sites demonstrate the complexities and contradictions that arise when trying to reflect on the intersections among religion and sexuality, some of the contours of those complexities are revealed in two conversations that erupted spontaneously at the workshops in Potchefstroom and Atlanta. In Potchefstroom, a question (quoted below) from a participant prompted a 10-minute conversation in which both Christian and Jewish participants contributed to the discussion below:

I find it very strange. We are told to treat each other equally. We are told to be faithful. We are told to know the purpose of sex once we engage in sex. They contradict each other. Does anyone else feel that way?

When we say in the Bible that sex before marriage is a sin, where is that in the Bible?
And what about Solomon? Did he not have many, many wives and yet many say today that having more than one wife is a sin. Why was it not a sin for Solomon? And if we keep saying that women who have babies when they’re not married are sinful, aren’t we saying bad things about Mary? Aren’t we like the people who condemned the mother of God?

The contradictory messages are offered to us but we don’t question it. We simply take it. Why don’t we question it? If the meaning of sex is unclear, why don’t we say ‘excuse me’ and ask questions?

In Atlanta, participants raised the complex and contradictory messages they received about ‘love’ and ‘protection,’ two elements they had named as characteristics of a healthy sexual life. Perhaps the most telling instance of the complexities regarding religious messages about sexuality arose when participants were asked to develop a comprehensive list of specific sexual acts and then to place those acts on a continuum from ‘least sexual’ to ‘most sexual.’ A number of important findings arose from this exercise:

♦ Young people are exceedingly aware of a broad spectrum of sexual acts even though their religious traditions are reluctant to speak about sexual activity with specificity;
♦ Across the workshops, young people named over 45 separate sexual acts with an average number of 30 acts listed among each group;
♦ There is no consensus in defining the term ‘sex’ in the context of these diverse acts;
♦ In fact, this non-consensus leads to confusion when talking about topics like sex before marriage;
♦ There is a strong divergence between young people’s perceptions of how ‘sexual’ some acts such as oral sex are when compared to the perceptions of community leaders.

CONCLUSION FROM THE WORKSHOPS AND FURTHER QUESTIONS

The PIRASH workshops provide evidence for some common assumptions regarding adolescent sexuality and reveal a number of perspectives common among young people that might be surprising:

♦ Young people identify multiple sources for messages regarding sex and sexuality;
♦ They are surrounded by those messages on multiple occasions throughout the course of their daily lives;
♦ Even if religion is not seen by young people to be a common source for messages about sexuality, the message it provides is much narrower, addressing topics such as abstinence and ideas that sex is dangerous and dirty;
♦ Young people display diverse opinions (between and within groups)
when asked about their beliefs regarding specific sexual activities (further research about the implications of this diversity of opinion is necessary to understand its origins and effects);

- Contrary to common assumptions that young people’s beliefs about sexuality and sexual behaviors are indecisive or without certainty, the response in only 17% of the propositions was ‘uncertain;’ over 80% of group participants were able to state a clear belief about sexual behaviors;

- Young people’s beliefs sometimes mirror the stated teachings of their religious traditions, but often these are in tension with other beliefs, although a greater part of the South African groups held that the teachings were realistic (27% as opposed to 0% in the United States);

- Young people are very knowledgeable about a broad spectrum of sexual behaviours;

- There is no consensus in defining the term ‘sex’ in the context of these diverse acts—in fact, this non-consensus leads to confusion when talking about topics like sex before marriage;

- Despite a low ranking with regard to providing regular, consistent messages about sexuality, religion was seen by young people as a resource for informing their own values regarding healthy sexuality.

To conclude, young people can (and sometimes do) use religion as a resource for information about sexual values and activities. Although they disagree with what they perceive as religious teachings on sexuality, young people are asking critical questions about these teachings by employing the resources of those traditions themselves. They raise their critiques in light of a particular reading of scripture or by asking whether theological virtues such as love or trust can be displayed in relationships other than a traditional heterosexual marriage. The conversations in which the young people raised these kinds of questions are theological in nature, despite the fact that the young people were not explicitly articulating theological positions. As such, the implications of these kinds of conversations are theologically important.

Drawing from these implications, the second part of this chapter will articulate a set of theological commitments—commitments deeply resonant with those already articulated by theologians who have worked with ARHAP—that could help ground a different, more comprehensive approach to reflection and discussion on human sexuality in religious institutions; this kind of approach has important implications for the particular function of religious communities as assets for adolescent sexual health.

**Christian Theology and Sexuality**

Public health researchers have not predominantly considered religion as a force for influencing social determinants of health. As
such, they have not sufficiently understood the implications of this complicated relationship not only for individuals who find themselves in an ambivalent relationship to religion and sexuality but also for communities and societies shaped by religion. Yet, this social function of religion is precisely the perspective needed to understand the effects of religion on human sexuality.

At first glance, one might assume that the research agenda of ARHAP might not provide the resources for developing a scholarly analysis of this complex, ambivalent relationship because ARHAP’s work is premised on the assumption that religion is an asset for communities; if such a commitment grounds the various research activities of ARHAP, a legitimate question can be raised as to the capacity of ARHAP research to account both for the complex ways in which religion might be an asset for sexual health as well as a hindrance. Yet, I will argue in this section that ARHAP scholarship is indeed a resource for analysis. The source of such scholarship is to be found in the theological writing of Jim Cochrane and Steve de Gruchy, two theologians who have long standing, founding connections with ARHAP and its work. I will draw on the theological perspectives developed by de Gruchy (2007) in a paper entitled ‘Re-Learning our Mother Tongue?: Theology in Dialogue with Public Health,’ and on the theological perspectives developed by Cochrane (2006) in a paper entitled ‘Of Bodies, Barriers, Boundaries, and Bridges: Ecclesial Practice in the Face of AIDS’ (Cochrane, 2006), to build a theological argument with the following claims:

1. Sexuality and religion in Western culture comprise a powerful site for the creation of identity which is why efforts to raise critiques of theological teaching on sexuality are so contentious;

2. Despite such contention, a theological commitment that appreciates religion’s role as a social force while also being grounded in social justice will take the risk of raising such critiques; and

3. One way beyond the seeming impasse common in many religious traditions in regard to human sexuality would be to advocate for religious communities—locations for expressing faith together in community rather than debating theology in academies—to allow for multiple voices and to learn from the hard work of figuring how to live in community when all of those voices are actually allowed a place at the table.

**Religion, Sexuality and Identity**

In his paper, de Gruchy (2007) summarises key findings from ARHAP research initiatives to map religious health assets in Zambia and Lesotho, in order to reinforce the groundbreaking work of ARHAP in demonstrating the central role of religion in the health and wellness of communities in Africa. Drawing from that work, de Gruchy (2007) reiterates the importance of religion to public health when viewed from
a framework of the social determinants that influence health in society.

This point, however, is not the central one for him. Having summarised this argument, he turns the argument around to make a theological claim about the nature of religious communities, arguing that religious communities do indeed function as a social force, establishing norms, fostering and strengthening ties, creating occasions for shared experience, articulating a shared telos beyond individual commitments and providing a structure for shared efforts. Yet, religious leaders and members of religious groups are often just as blind to their social power and social responsibility as any Western public health researcher who considers religion merely as a demographic variable on a statistical survey.

In short, de Gruchy argues that the findings of ARHAP research initiatives reveal important insights about the quality, values and characteristics of religious communities for religious communities. For religious leaders and laypersons fixated on religious conversion or evangelism, the idea that religion can function to mobilise people not for the sake of salvation in an afterlife but for the good of the community is revelatory.

This power to mobilise, according to de Gruchy (2007), must be used wisely and faithfully, which is why it must be tied to a theological vision of social justice. He is clear on this point: such a vision may well overlap with others’ visions of social justice but a vision grounded in religion must have theological foundations. This was a central task of de Gruchy’s own theological work (whose voice, spirit and commitment are sorely missed by his untimely and unexpected death in 2010). He worked to articulate the theological richness of the ARHAP research by describing the vision of social justice it helped him to imagine—a justice grounded in ethics, but most decidedly a theological ethics.

De Gruchy’s efforts to articulate the theological foundations for understanding religion’s capacity to affect the social fabric opened up new insights for religious communities about their capacities and their responsibilities. It helped them to understand that their faithful response to God’s call in this world could not focus only on salvation for a life after this bodily life, but must include ministries that paid particular attention to human beings here and now—human lives and human bodies caught up in social systems that robbed them of the opportunity to express the fullness of God’s creation. Efforts by de Gruchy and other theologians to develop this idea meet with varying levels of success. In the area of human sexuality, I would argue that there has been little success for advancing such a claim. Further, I would argue that these limitations arise because sexuality is markedly different from other social states. Although de Gruchy (2007) described the utter lack of awareness that religious faith acted as a social force (a lack seen both among individuals and within communities), in the context of human sexuality, people of faith often explicitly frame their religious belief in terms of its social
force. In short, they are keenly aware of religion as a social force in the context of human sexuality.

An obvious question arises: why the difference? Why, in the context of sexuality, does religion’s capacity to be a social force come to the fore? To explore that question, we need to depart from de Gruchy’s theology for a bit and turn to cultural history, specifically the scholarship of the French cultural historian, Michel Foucault.

In the first volume of his unfinished multi-volume series, *A History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault (1990:1-35) both describes and critiques what he sees to be the predominant claim regarding the study of human sexuality in the secular, modern West—a perspective that could be summarised as follows: Western culture has, for too long, been constrained from an honest, fruitful discussion about and appreciation of our sexuality. We have been trapped by narrow-mindedness, prejudice, and religious superstitions. Sexuality has been the subject that was taboo, demanding our silence. Thankfully, we are beginning to cast off the mantles of those taboos and to begin to think and speak with clear-headed openness. We are moving into a sexual liberation in which we celebrate our authentic, sexual selves.

Having described what he sees as the babbling chorus about sexuality in the secular West, he then goes on to mount a rigorous critique of this claim, arguing that, on the contrary, sexuality has been and continues to be an aspect of our human lives with which we are obsessed. Rather than a pervasive silence regarding sexuality, Foucault argues that sexuality resides at the centre of our concerns. In other words, we cannot quit thinking about sexuality. We study it, seek to understand it, attempt to liberate its ‘true potential,’ stake our identities upon it, and confide to our confessors (in the religious garb of priest or the secular garb of a psychotherapist) its function in our deepest dreams and desires. While we may have more freedom to speak about sex than did earlier societies (though Foucault argues that very strong restrictions operate on us that were not part of many earlier cultures), this is merely a change in the mechanisms by which sexuality stakes a claim on us and not evidence of a change in the function of sexuality. That function remains unchanged. For Western culture, sexuality is a tremendously powerful kind of knowledge that compels us to believe that if we can merely unlock sexuality’s secrets, we can discover the truth about ourselves.

Sexuality, then, is tied to our sense of self, our sense of who we are, in ways that few human activities or experiences are. Sexuality is not merely the instrumentalist naming of activities on a continuum; rather, it functions to help constitute identity or subjectivity. In this way, Foucault (1997e) called it ‘the seismograph of our subjectivity.’

Foucault died of AIDS-related complications in 1984 just as he was finishing the fourth volume of *The History of Sexuality*, which explored the connections between Christianity and sexuality. In accordance with the wishes of his estate, this volume has never been published and the
unfinished manuscript is not available for viewing. While we do not know the full extent of Foucault’s argument in that unfinished volume, he did provide us with intriguing glimpses of his thought at this point through the shorter essays, media interviews and public lectures he offered on the topic as he was working on the volume. In these other sources, Foucault (1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1997d, 1997e, 1999) lays out the connections between the Christian pastorate, human sexuality and Western social sciences and secularism.

He traces the ways in which Christian practices of self-examination and confession—the confession of actions understood to be sinful and the soul-searching reflection on forbidden desires and unbidden dreams—were translated into the heart of cultural institutions, fields of knowledge and practices of care in Western modernity. Foucault believed that the gradual erosion of the monolithic power of Christian churches in Europe during the Enlightenment was not a signal of the end of Christendom but the necessary precursor to a ‘Christianization-in-depth’ (Bernauer 1990) as the very same practices of confession and self-reflection that were assumed to have lost cultural power with the decline of Christendom ushered in the human sciences, most notably psychology, and complex practices of intervention into people’s lives ‘for their own good.’

The common connection between the Christian pastorate and the various institutions of Western modernity is an unquestioning belief in the certainty and fixity—the ‘givenness’—of the self. This strong desire to ‘know the self,’ to uncover its deepest truths and reveal its essence is an invention of Western culture from the first centuries of the common era to the present. Prior to this time, in Greek and Roman cultures (an analysis of these cultures was the subject of the second and third volumes of Foucault’s The History of Sexuality), there was no conception of a ‘true self.’ There was, rather, a common understanding that a core ethical obligation of one’s life was to fashion one’s self well, to construct the self. Foucault opts for this kind of practice and argues that our sense of a core, central, and certain ‘self’ is pernicious because it covers the ways in which our subjectivity is constituted by complex, ever-present cultural systems and mechanisms and practices. For those of us in the modern West, some of the most powerful of those systems, mechanisms, and practices are found in our efforts to study and know and understand our sexuality.

**Critiquing Modern Power, Grounded in Social Justice**

This constitution of the self is the effect of the power of sexuality. This kind of power—the power to produce identity—was very important to Foucault (1980). He found this type of power to be pervasive in Western modernity and viewed it as dangerous not for what it denied but for what it created. Modern power, according to him, was marked not so
much by denial, violence, and oppression. Foucault was not naïve—he still believed this kind of monarchical power of one person or group of people over another existed—but he also believed that the more common expression of power in Western modernity occurred through various systems and mechanisms that endlessly tell us who we should be and how we should govern ourselves, offering us incentives if we follow the rules laid out before us. For Foucault, this type of power is dangerous for (at least) two reasons:

1. The costs of the benefits bestowed on those who agree to play by the rules demanded by this kind of power are paid by those who do not or who cannot play by the rules because they are deemed to be dangerous or abnormal or foreign, and

2. Each of us is easily caught up in this web of power because we enjoy the benefits it bestows on us. Because we are caught up in this type of power, we are less able to see its effects, to develop a critique, or to mount a resistance.

When he died, Foucault was hard at work creating a description of the kind of ethics that would help us to resist such an exercise of power. He never fully articulated his ideas in this area. For those of us interested in his ideas, that work falls to us. For those of us interested in theology, the effort to think *theologically* about this kind of power falls to us. For the purposes of this paper, the attempt to think theologically about this kind of power in the context of sexuality requires us to return to de Gruchy’s (2007) theological insistence that any efforts to mobilise religion as a social force for health must be grounded in social justice.

We return to de Gruchy to think about Foucault’s ideas about sexuality and power because de Gruchy gives us a place in which to ground religious power as a social force. Without such grounding, the pernicious connection between Christianity and a modern obsession with human sexuality continues unabated and the benefits bestowed on those whose identities mirror that of an approved sexual subject are paid for by those whose identities do not. However, once we understand this kind of social power at work and move to ground ourselves in a theological vision of social justice such as the one de Gruchy (2007) calls for, two critical questions immediately arise.

First, are we willing to speak out against this kind of power since it is manifestly unjust for those who must pay the cost of being an abnormal sexual subject? Grounded in a commitment to social justice, the answer to that question is ‘yes.’ Second, since social justice marks our grounding commitment, how do we resist the temptation of this kind of modern power? As social subjects who are ourselves caught in modern power as it operates within the intersection of religion and sexuality, the answer to that question is that we must be willing to lose our own identity as sexual subjects since such an identity was procured through injustice to other sexual subjects.
Either of these implications is exceedingly demanding, which is why we see such consternation among religious people with regard to sexuality. If we are grounded in a theological commitment to social justice, we will pay a price when we speak out because we risk upsetting a status quo that bestows benefits to others who will resist any call for them to renounce such benefits. We pay the price of no longer being able to reap those benefits for ourselves anymore. We must renounce them. Grounded in a theological commitment to social justice, we must renounce our own identities since we recognise that those identities were laid down and solidified in exercises of power that are unjust. Grounded in a theological commitment to social justice, we have to work to see the sexual subjects whom we have been taught to see as sinners, as dangerous, as ‘other,’ not based on those identities, but in the identity of a child of God.

Towards Religious Communities with Many Sexual Subjects

Any attempt to actually point to a religious community that practices this kind of social justice is difficult, perhaps impossible, especially with regard to adolescent sexuality. Nonetheless, I do believe that this is the ethical implication to the theological point of view de Gruchy (2007) described. In his paper, ‘Of Bodies, Barriers, Boundaries, and Bridges: Ecclesial Practice in the Face of AIDS,’ Jim Cochrane (2006) develops theological perspectives that are resources for thinking about and living in the type of religious communities that could support the kind of ethical demand laid out above. Cochrane (2006:9) reflects on the work of the Masangane Project, ‘a comprehensive, integrated, faith-based response to HIV and AIDS, initiated by Moravians in the areas of Shiloh (near Queenstown), Matatiele, and Mthatha,’ and recounts the story of a woman who returned home to her village after starting antiretroviral therapy for HIV infection. The woman was welcomed home as one who had returned from the dead. Cochrane lays out the theological implications of this story, reflecting on the idea of one who returns home and on the ways in which her life provided a revelation of the power of resurrection for the community. The power of this resurrection was not confined to spiritual salvation and eternal life beyond this earthly life; rather, this revelation of resurrection resounded in the here and now and was situated in a physical body that had earlier been dying of the HIV virus spreading unabated. In other words, this revelation of resurrection requires us to attend to human bodies in the present. As Cochrane (2006) attends to the bodied life of this woman who has returned home, his theological analysis is grounded in this revelation.

I have argued elsewhere about the problem of grounding our response to people living with and dying from HIV to a kind of moral superiority grounded as compassionate pastoral care (Blevins 2006). Theological
reflection on pastoral care for people with HIV and AIDS—at least in the United States—has at times consisted of this kind of disavowed power play in which someone is ‘welcomed home’ only when they are willing to acknowledge their status as a sin-sick soul ‘fairly dripping with guilt’ (Patton 1993:132). This is decidedly not the story Cochrane (2006) tells. In Cochrane’s analysis, the woman is welcomed home not because she confesses her sin as an unapproved sexual subject who has contracted HIV, but because she has triumphed against a societal or cultural expression of sin. For Cochrane, sin in this story is not situated with the individual but with the society that created the socio-economic conditions that required the woman returning home to have left in the first place:

This person returns ‘home,’ to a township in Johannesburg far from her other home in Matatiele. She is not just a body in one place; she is mobile, on the move, part of a continual flow between rural and urban or peri-urban areas that characterises the South African political economy. Her body is geographically located in an oscillating pattern of migration that itself represents a search for work or income of some kind that is hard to come by in Matatiele, deep in the mountainous area south of Lesotho. Matatiele and Orlando, juxtaposed, signify geographies of inequality, and though each in reality represents different layers of inequality in their own areas, the pattern they reproduce is characteristic of South Africa, and Africa more widely. Her body moves within a pattern marked by privilege and privation in concert with each other, but emitting a jarring, disharmonious note (Cochrane 2006:11).

For Cochrane, then, sin is not grounded in the individual (for example, in the disapproved sexual subject who becomes HIV-positive) but in the society—in the broader mechanisms that provide a material pay-off to some members of that society at the expense of other members who become unwilling nomads in the requirements of macro capitalist markets. As such, Cochrane (2006:16) writes: ‘taking up the challenge of a comprehensive and systematic response to health and justice is a requirement pragmatically because the effects of inequality and deprivation are indicators of a human sin (of omission or commission) on a scale that impacts on all of life and engenders death.’

This description of sin as a component of societal structures illumines the activity of sin in relation to religion and sexuality. It provides a theological point of view for thinking about the pernicious temptations of the kind of power Foucault described, a power that bestows benefits to us at the expense of others who bear the cost. If this power is mobilised within a sinful structure, then the demand of religious faith is to resist this power. But how? Cochrane’s (2006) paper gives us some clues.

The return of the woman from Masangane to Orlando township holds theological import for Cochrane not only with regard to the woman herself (in the ways in which her return provides testimony to the power of resurrection) or with regard to an analysis that situates sin
at the societal level (an analysis deeply resonant with that of de Gruchy (2007)). This story is also theologically important for Cochrane because it provides an example of a religious community that relies on a testimony of God at work in this woman’s life to ground its corporate response. In short, sin can be manifested at the societal level, but so can grace. It is in this manifestation of grace that religion becomes a community health asset:

The great achievement of Masangane is to confront three central aspects of access simultaneously—availability, affordability and acceptability—and to succeed in doing so. The scope of its response is thus comprehensive because its leadership has recognised the systematic connection of the conditions of inequality and deprivation to the possibilities of public health in the life of the communities it serves, in this case, with respect to HIV and AIDS. One needs to add that Masangane’s response did not arise in the first place from some political, economic or social analysis per se, but almost intuitively, out of what is first and foremost a pastoral concern, a call to ministry. It was in coming face to face with what such a response would demand, in relation to the real conditions that acted as a barrier of one kind or another to the health of its people, that Masangane necessarily had to take account of the forces that determine the conditions of health and well-being. This is a most significant witness for the church at large (Cochrane 2006:14-15).

For Cochrane, the ways in which Masangane functions as a community health asset are best understood from a theological frame embedded in the community’s faithful response to a call to ministry. Such a response demonstrates the values and commitments of a community, revealing its nature. Speaking as a Christian theologian, Cochrane argues that these values and commitments are clues to a religious community’s ecclesiology rather than being about doctrinal questions of apostolic succession, ecclesial structures such as synods, dioceses, presbyteries or conferences, or religious leadership such as ordained minister, bishop, pastor, or cardinal. The true structure of this Christian community called Masangane—its ecclesiology—is found in the community of the baptised and the ways in which they care for one another. This ecclesiology mirrors the ecclesiological perspective articulated by the American pastoral theologian Karen Scheib (2002) in her description of communion ecclesiology. In such an ecclesiology, every member of the community has both an obligation and a gift of contributing to the wellbeing of the community and its members. This vision of communion ecclesiology grounds the kind of religious community that can be an asset for the sexual health of adolescents.

A community with such an ecclesiology would be grounded in de Gruchy’s (2007) call for a theological commitment to social justice. As such, the community would be the site for articulating and supporting
a call to resist the modern power of sexuality that secures privilege for some at the expense of others. To do this, such a community would have to work hard to engage others; in the case of the community’s theology and ethics of sexuality, those others would be sexual others. All of those voices would have a place at the table.

Ken Stone (2005), a scholar of the Hebrew Bible, begins his book, *Practicing Safer Texts*, with a sustained thought experiment: what would happen if Christian communities were to quit trying to demand doctrinal conformity to a singular, universal theology of sexuality and sexual ethics and, instead, offered everyone who wanted to tell the story of the ways in which their sexuality informed their faith the opportunity to do so? The result would be a religious community with diverse ideas that might be discussed and debated. Would it not be possible that such a community could offer new glimpses into the complex, diverse gift of human sexuality and teach us something about the ways in which we might live together in that diversity?

Would such a community be messy? No doubt. And it would also be met with resistance, particularly as it pertains to adolescents. In anticipation of three sharp rebuttals that would arise from such resistance (there would undoubtedly be other rebuttals beyond these three), I want to turn back to the data from the PIRASH workshops discussed earlier to offer some rejoinders.

Wouldn’t such diversity within a religious community weaken religion’s capacity to inform young people about the ways in which faith can be a resource for a healthy sexuality? The data from the workshops reveal that religion has little capacity in this regard as it is. Young people do not see their religion as a resource in regard to sexuality. They raise sharp critiques of their religious traditions, sometimes by using the resources of the tradition itself to mount such a critique. They hold beliefs in direct opposition to their religious teachings. They do not know how to apply those teachings to their daily lives and the spectrum of sexual behaviours they hear about. Rather, young people would be better served by religious communities that provide an environment where young people can explore the merits of their critiques, deliberate on the implications of their beliefs and reflect on what their faith teaches about sexual behaviour—an environment made possible not by a singular, universal theological position on human sexuality but by a community willing to listen to different perspectives.

Wouldn’t such a diversity of beliefs and ideas simply confuse young people? The data from the workshops reveal that young people already receive large quantities of diverse messages regarding human sexuality every day. They are already attempting to negotiate these messages and they are, at times, already confused. Rather, young people could draw on experiences of being in a religious community that allows for a diversity of ideas with regard to sexuality; in so doing, they would be better able critically to assess the various messages they encounter.
Doesn’t all of this diversity simply lead to a creeping kind of relativism and erase the distinctive theological beliefs of religious traditions? The data from the workshops reveal that young people are already making sophisticated choices with regard to the messages they hear in their religious communities. On the one hand, they raise sharp critiques, but, on the other, they strongly identify religion as a resource for teaching them about the values, qualities, and characteristics that lead to a healthy sexual life. In other words, the experience of questioning a religious teaching or articulating a belief that differs from that teaching does not lead to a wholesale abandonment of faith as one slides down the slippery slope of relativism. Rather, a diverse spectrum of strongly held beliefs articulated in an environment where all of those beliefs can be expressed could equip young people with wisdom acquired from various viewpoints and help them to make healthier, more informed choices.

Sexuality and religion constitute a contested space in Western culture. Young people are trying to negotiate that space; in fact, all of us are. This chapter has attempted to explore some of the boundaries of that space by examining the data from the PIRASH workshops that drew on the distinctive research resources of ARHAP and by laying out some of the theological implications of earlier theological writing produced within ARHAP when the theological arguments developed in that writing are applied to human sexuality. ARHAP is rightly committed to seeing religion function as an asset for the health and wellness of individuals and communities.

Yet, the function of religion with regard to sexuality is more complicated and ambivalent. This chapter has attempted to point toward the kinds of characteristics that would allow religion to function as such an asset in the context of human sexuality by drawing on the rich resources of ARHAP both in the areas of social scientific research and theology. The challenge before those of us who care about religion but who recognise the damage done by it in the area of human sexuality is to continue working to articulate our visions about how religion can help us live out the gift of our sexuality and to engage in the hard, contentious work of finding places where such visions can be concretely expressed.

REFERENCES


