**Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians - Abstracts**

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| Reimagining the Human? Building a Human Rights Culture in South Africa Today.  Selina Palm  In the light of the gap between legal visions and social realities in South Africa and an often widening disconnect between religious and human rights discourses, this paper explores the need for a liberating theological hermeneutic for human rights if the attitudes sitting at the heart of this culture are to be nurtured. This is critical if churches are to respond constructively to the post-apartheid call by many theologians to play an active role in building a human rights culture that serves those who remain right-less and marginalised. South African feminist theologians such as Ackermann and Pillay draw on a Trinitarian doctrine of the Imago Dei to underpin a subversive vision of a new social order and point to relational ways of becoming human in ways that I suggest owe a debt to the human rights theology of Jürgen Moltmann. His approach was influential in the Reformed shift on human rights in the 1970s, engaging churches globally in the anti-apartheid struggle. This vision of a liberating theology for human rights needs concrete embodiment and enactment at the centre of churches mission and identity if they are to avoid becoming a liability and reclaim prophetic voices as an asset in the shared task of turning human rights from legal rhetoric into socio-cultural reality. |
| Empowering or succumbing to patriarchy: Contestation in the discourse of resistance and reconstruction of virginity in religio-cultural communities in Southern Africa.  Sinenhlanhla S. Chisale - University of South Africa  The article explores the contestation in the discourse of virginity as a phenomenon of sexuality in religio-cultural communities: Is the resistance and reconstruction of virginity empowering or does it in fact succumb to patriarchy? Virginity is understood by religion and tradition as a sign of purity and feminists argue that it is a weapon of male dominance over women’s sexuality. This paper argues that women and girls have their own hidden ways of resisting the hegemonic patriarchal understanding of virginity. In their hidden ways they redefine and reinterpret virginity in a way that theoretically empowers them while in one way succumbing to men’s demands of sexuality. The phenomenon of virginity is interpreted in a way that empowers husbands, brothers and fathers because it is commercialised in *lobola* negotiations. Women in this context play a role of protectors of virginity under the guard of men. This non-empirical qualitative study explores women and girls’ hidden transcripts of redefining virginity which may on face value appear to be empowering but in reality are a form of submission to patriarchal traditions. The theoretical framework is an integration of African feminist cultural hermeneutics developed by African women theologians and hidden and public transcripts theory developed by James Scott. Findings indicate mixed responses to patriarchy by women and girls. Women and girls in this context publicly accept the public ideology of virginity but secretly resist this ideology by constructing their own ideology of virginity that they believe empowers them while in real terms they are submitting to patriarchal demands of women’ sexuality. However, findings also indicate that some strategies of resisting patriarchal traditions of sexuality developed by African women and girls are empowering and liberating |
| Agency, Complexity and Hope: Female Resistance in the Old Testament  L. Juliana Claassens  Stellenbosch University  This paper reflects on the nature and significance of female resistance in the Old Testament. Drawing on the concluding chapter of my recently completed book, *Claiming Her Dignity: Female Resistance in the Old Testament* (Liturgical Press, 2016), this paper considers the agency of women who even in the most difficult of circumstances show themselves able to rise up and change their situation of victimization into a space of transformation that benefits not only themselves but also their communities. Moreover, it will be shown that the resistance of women who find themselves in various situations of violence can be described as quite complex. Reading stories of female resistance in the Old Testament with compassion implies that one understands and appreciates that these women are acting to the best of their ability in very difficult circumstances. Finally, despite the complexity that inevitably is associated with women’s resistance in the Old Testament and in so many communities around the world, one finds that a common feature of all these women who stand up and refuse to accept violence as normal is that their resistance is rooted in the hope that things can be different. Hope as the source of these women’s resistance is thus the ability to imagine a counter reality in which the future is distinctly different from the present. |
| “The Ekutuleni Mission in Sophiatown: A macro analysis of welfare provision for African urban dwellers in the socio-economic and political environment of the 1930s”.  Phindile Gumede -St Augustine College  This paper examines the motives for welfare provision by the Church and the state for African urban dwellers in Johannesburg during the 1930s. The decade is characterised by massive growth of industries, the growth of African female presence and deep contestations about the sexual divisions of labour by many educated African elite and the white urban occupants. The welfare work done by the first five single Anglican women for African people in Johannesburg has been fundamental in promoting the core principles for social Christianity in the twentieth century. One woman in particular, whose work will be used as a case study of analysis; has been the pioneer for welfare provision especially for African children in the rand. Dorothy Maud founded the Ekutuleni Mission in 1927 and supervised four nursery schools with growth and progression. The study on this mission in particular has not been covered widely by Historians because; much of the sources for this mission are not widespread in the archives. For this paper, I have used sources adapted from the Wits Historical Papers which include letters and pamphlets about the mission centre and publications by the Department of Social Work in the 1920s-1930s. |
| Name: Leila Hassim  Institution: St. Augustine College Fellow  Title: Faith and Literary Protest: Then and Now; Medieval Womens’ Literary Protest Strategies, focussing on Marguerite Porete’s *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, and its relevance to current South African Womens’ issues surrounding Faith and Protest..  What does a thirteenth century spiritual treatise credited to a French woman who was burned at the stake, have to do with issues of faith and gender in current South Africa? The separation between the two by time, geography and culture would have one think that there can be no link. Yet, a closer look at Marguerite Porete’s *The Mirror* *of Simple Souls* would have one consider that Marguerite was dealing with issues not unlike those women in South Africa are currently facing. Three such issues are: arguing for the allowance of contrasting diversity, reclamation of personal autonomy and reverence of female dialogues as opposed to its reduction to clichéd feminist discourse. Social critique in Marguerite Porete’s *The Mirror of Simple Souls* is embedded in the text’s spiritual theme. The theological and social aspects of the text are intertwined and not easily distinguishable. No attempt at disentanglement will be made. Instead *The Mirror*’s less obvious counter cultural commentary and formulations which are masked as theological discussion and which are rooted in the female experience and how that all relates to current issues of faith and gender in the South African context, will be discussed. |
| Women and resistance: Rev. Eve Abraham’s responses to migrants/refugees  *Clementine Nishimwe University of Johannesburg/UNISA*  Migrants and refugees living in host countries raise ethical and legal questions concerning the rights and responsibilities of individuals and societies when both the host countries, migrants and refugees are wrestling with rising economic inequality and socio-political insecurity.  Given the problematic of care encountered by the Central Methodist Church it has become clear that the South African political set up and the negative attitudes towards migrants/refugees often make it difficult for many care givers and faith-based institutions to care for them. This article argues that women resistance can often contribute to the care for vulnerable groups of people. Regardless of the risks of the political distresses that are involved in the care for migrants/refugees, Rev. Eve Abraham a priest at Christ Church Anglican Church opened a camp for about a thousand migrants/refugees who were victims of the March 2015 xenophobic attacks. She created an atmosphere where migrants/refugees regain their dignity and respect. In this way, Rev. Eve formed a node where migrants/refugees who seek help meet caregivers and is expressing an ongoing resistance to the government’s policies on migrants and refugees. |
| Between Boundaries: Holding a Space between Quran and Bible in a Feminist Classroom  Sarojini Nadar and Fatima Seedat  University of KwaZulu Natal  Abstract  The purpose of this paper is to theorise the teaching and learning of feminist approaches to Bible and Qur’an in a Masters course, with a historically Christian focus, within a South African higher education context. The paper draws on a critical review of a major assessment task of students, as well as our pedagogical experiences to consider how students made meaning of the space created for conversation on different feminist approaches to the two sacred texts. When viewed through de-colonial feminist pedagogical thought, our analysis reveals that our job as teachers was to hold onto the tension in the space between the feminist approaches to the sacred texts, and not to succumb to the pressure to release, trivialise nor exacerbate the tension. The students’ essays then reveal much creativity in how they engage the feminist approaches to the two texts with varying degrees of “inflation and conflation of the spaces” between them. The reflections in the paper challenge and extend the dominant literature on Christian-Muslim hermeneutics in two ways: through a focus on the pedagogical aspects of the encounter between the two sacred texts in a secular university feminist space; and through an emphasis on the intellectual insight drawn from the encounter as conversation and as a ‘becoming’, rather than the encounter providing a utilitarian response to a perceived crisis. |
| “Not in our name without us” The Intervention of *Catholic Women Speak* at the Synod of Bishops on the Family: A Case study of a global resistance movement by Catholic Women.  *Nontando Hadebe*  University of South Africa  Abstract: This article will illustrate through a case study of the intervention of Catholic Women Speak (CWS) at the Synod of Bishops on the family in October, 2015, the dynamic movement within Steyn’s theory of diversity literacy from ‘reading’ the social script of injustice to conscientization and finally actions for transformation, a methodology similar to liberation/feminist theologies. In the Catholic Church power, privilege and leadership is institutionalized in the hands of celibate males and in the context of the synod they had power to vote on teachings on family life. This hegemony and exclusion of women’s voices and experiences was challenged by *CWS* illustrating the connection between theory and praxis. |
| Greening Faith: Re-thinking Herbal Treatment in Pentecostalism.  Nomatter Sande  University of Zimbabwe  Abstract  The space for environmental concerns within religious communities has gained significant attention recently. Scholars have, of course, long debated on the complex relationship of religion and environment and noteworthy insights have been gleaned in these studies. However, Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe and Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) in particular has remained resilient to the widespread campaign of using herbs as effective treatment. As such, the source and knowledge of herbal treatment is ascribed to evil spirits and demonic influence. Thus, the theology of greening faith is critical in this context to promoting environmental concerns and reforming congregation behaviour towards positive attitudes to the use of herbs. This paper is advocating for the greening of faith by the use of herbal treatment in the Pentecostalism thereby promoting the preserve of the environment. The paper uses the principle of hermeneutic of suspicion and data is gleaned through in-depth interviews. This paper contributes constructively to the new reality of preserving ecology through the use of herbs. |
| Topic: Determinants of religious affiliation among Christian female students at a university in Zimbabwe  Excellent Chireshe    ABSTRACT  The study was carried out to find out factors that determined the current religious affiliation of 27 Christian female students at Great Zimbabwe University. A qualitative design, phenomenological in nature, was adopted for the study. A questionnaire, with predominantly open-ended questions, was employed to collect data from a purposefully selected sample of 27 Christian female students who were in the Religion and Gender Studies class. The participants belonged to diverse churches representing Mainline (Catholic and Protestant), Pentecostal, and Zionist/Apostolic churches. Data were coded, classified according to themes that emerged, and then interpreted. It emerged that the following factors influenced the participants to join various Christian churches: parents/family, the issue of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues, message of prosperity, social problems, opportunity to preach, the form of preaching, and spouses. The most frequent determinant was parents or family whereby participants indicated that they were born in those churches or that the churches were their family churches. Both satisfaction with, and lack of satisfaction with membership to current churches was noted, indicating that religious affiliation was not always a matter of choice. Recommendations for further, and more comprehensive, studies were made. |
| Identifying ‘Daughtership’ in Fatherhood and Sonship relations in the 21st century Zimbabwean Pentecostalism. A practical theology enquiry.  Joachim Kwaramba  University of Zimbabwe  The wave of revival within Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe has introduced a concept of the religious ‘sonship and fatherhood’ that claims a Biblical origin. The concept has seen a bias on the masculinity as rarely one hears the mention of ‘daughtership’ in all the call for sonship. This is a mentorship a relation between a spiritual father figure and a believer which seems as equated to the Catholic ‘Godfather’ concept. The belief has seen nations interrelating through religion as most Zimbabwean preachers sought the mentorship of the seasoned local pastoral figures and from other nations. These pastoral figures include the likes of Apostle Ezekiel Guti, Bishop Tudor Bismark on the local scene and Prophet Victor Kusi Boateng, Apostle Johnson Suleman, Pastor Robert Kayanja and Prophet T B Joshua. The paper observes that the most spoken of mentors are mainly for male preachers whose wives automatically become ‘mothers’. These male mentors claim biblical narrations in both the Old and New Testament as indicating a divine importance of this notion. The paper also observes that the relations of Abraham and Lot; Elisha and Elijah; Elisha and Gehazi, Gamaliel and Paul, Paul and Timothy etc. have impacted the Zimbabwean Pentecostals. It seems in these relations there is no identity of women standing on their own as ‘daughters’ but are succumbed in the sonship ideology, creating a gender challenge in Pentecostalism. It seems due to the African masculinity, African Pentecostalism has not yet accepted more openly the relations of Noami and Ruth,‘mothers and daughters’. This theological enquiry forwards an advocacy towards emancipating the women as ‘daughters’ in such mentoring relations of sonship and fatherhood in a Zimbabwean setup. |
| Resisting Jezebels?: Pentecostalism, Perceptions and Images of Single Ladies in Southern Africa  By  Kudzai Biri, University of Zimbabwe  Abstract  This study is an in depth analysis of the perspectives and attitudes towards single ladies in Pentecostal churches in Southern Africa. Utilising sermonic discourse in different Pentecostal churches, particularly women fellowships the study critiques the deployment of contradictory sermonic discourses concerning single ladies. While on one hand there is a quest to empower single ladies through entrepreneurship programmes, the socio-cultural realities militate against them. In fact, single ladies have been dethroned on the moral pedestal and the images perpetuated are largely negative. The deployment of the Biblical Jezebel and feminisation of sins in sermonic discourses embodies multiple negative images on single ladies that usurp them of their authority and dignity in the church. This is apart from the surveillance of these single ladies as resistance and defensive mechanism against the “Jezebels” who are viewed as having evil agenda of snatching husbands and seducing men. The study therefore challenges Pentecostalism as a radical movement to give attention to the prevailing culture of resistance and surveillance fostered through stereotyping and stigma. It also challenges to engage a head on confrontation with the plight of single ladies in order to create safe space for them in the church and society. |
| Christina Landman  University of South Africa  Abstract  **Women remembering their pasts**  The paper will give a short introduction on the ways in which South African women remember their pasts. The sources for this section will be the results of the author’s oral history projects with women from a variety of religious and cultural backgrounds.  As a case study the ways in which South African-German women remember their pasts will be presented. On the one hand, several women from the Altkroondal house for the aged near Rustenburg in the North West have been interviewed who were young during the time of Hitler and Nazism. Some have blocked out memories of women supporting Hitler from South Africa as memories that are no longer relevant to their present situation. Others have shifted their memories from support to apartheid to supporting a black regime. On the other hand German women, such as Monika Wittenberg, have been interviewed who were frontline fighters against apartheid. Their memories, too, have been affected by events and changing scenarios, such as trauma experienced in their private lives and the fact that one remembers differently in old age than when you were young.  The paper will conclude by trying to answer whether memory can indeed be gendered. If so, healthy ways of dealing with gendered memory will be explored. |