NTSSA: TITLES, PRESENTERS, ABSTRACTS

**Christian Discourse and Culture Sub-group:**

*Clash of Cultures in African Christianity*

Elias K. Bongmba, Department of Religion, Rice University

In this paper I discuss the new clash of cultures in the African context by exploring recent debates on the place of culture in the African church triggered by the growth of Pentecostal Charismatic Christianity in contemporary Africa. I begin with a historical account of the debate about culture in Africa and its relation to religion. I next argue that just when most thought that the debates on inculturation and adaptation in African Christianity had moved the debate forward and created a homeostasis within the institutional church body, the rapid growth of Pentecostal Christianity has introduced new disruptions. I next analyze the contested ideals and practices and conclude by arguing that the questions posed today invite all stakeholders to rethink the idea of the Christian church and its ecclesial practice among the nations. The subject matter will be discussed using a critical hermeneutics of anthropological, historical, and theological texts that inform an understanding of culture.

*Framing the Future of Early Christian Discourse. Politics, Culture, and Identity*

Gerhard van den Heever, Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies, UNISA

This paper puts Christian-speak and Christian practices as cultural events, indeed as elements of culture, under the spotlight. In particular, it is the reception history of early Christian tradition and discourse in the field of contemporary cultural production that is the focus. While it can be argued that, since South Africa (or any long-Christianised society) is a Christian country, the conflation of Christian discourse and culture largely renders a naturalised Christian discourse invisible, nevertheless Christian discourse still operates as identity and habitus producing inducement agency. The paper highlights how Christian discourse produces culture and vice versa, how culture produces Christian discourse, so that the question posed here is concerned with the theoretical framing of both elements of the conjunction such that both cease to be distinctive concepts denoting separate meaning domains. The aims and interests of the paper are worked out with reference to how cultural events like the emergence of new religious movements in Western societies, the grand cultural shifts enunciated by the sexual revolution of the 1960s, the contemporaneous re-apocalypticization of religion (and Christianity in particular), together with the – since 2003 especially – emphasis on empire as conceptual frame for the study of Christian discourse, contributed to new conceptualizations of early Christianity, as well as the methods and approaches by means of which this should be studied. It is argued that what we have by way of a discipline-configured picture of Christian origins and the long trajectory of reception history of Christian discourse, is a function of, embedded in, and indeed co-determinative of broader cultural events.

*Culture, Christian Discourse and the Hunger Games: Dystopian and Utopian Reflections*

Bill Domeris, SATS, Bryanston, Johannesburg

Dystopian was a rarely used literary term until the advent of Suzanne Collins’ trilogy – the Hunger Games. The term, coined in 1952, describes a genre of literature where an imaginary future-world is characterised by malevolence and oppression. Collins’ three books (four films) depict such an imaginary world, where teenagers from twelve hunger-filled districts fight to the death in an annual Hunger Games, as punishment for an abortive revolution against the oppressive Capital. Katniss Everdeen, who embodies beauty, courage and strength, becomes the unintended symbol of the new revolution – the Mocking Jay. In a very real sense, the Hunger Games are a modern cultural artefact. The books and films have sparked intense debate, not least because they play into the prevailing conspiracy theories of modern North America, and form a commentary on contemporary teenage culture. There is a wider context, where young women choose, in their hundreds, to go and fight in the Middle East for a revolutionary movement. This paper looks at the cultural function of books like the Hunger Games, and their impact on modern social discourse, in the wider context of Dystopian and Utopian literature. In conclusion, we reflect on one of the first century Christian communities (the Johannine Community) whose worldview is reminiscent of the Hunger Games but which offers an alternative voice to the contemporary dystopian discourse.

*The Left Behind Timeline: Identities and Repopulation in a Post-Apocalyptic Era*

Margaret Mollett, Research fellow, Department of Old and New Testament, US

The popular perception of “apocalypse/apocalyptic” is one of finality – drastic decline in global population resulting in social, cultural, economic upheavals and imminent conflagration. According to the Left Behind timeline, however, the post-apocalyptic era spans from the rapture through the tribulation, Armageddon, the second coming of Christ, the Millennium, the White Throne Judgment, and then conflagration before entry to eternity. In every one of these periods a number of identities are added and subtracted: One hundred and forty-four converted Jews, “living believers,” unbelievers, “sheep,” “goats,” and “resurrected believers.” A crucial issue from a dispensational view is that resurrected believers and the spouses they reunite with will be unable to have children during the Millennium, thus a drop in population. Babies born of unresurrected believers will be able to sin, and with the loosening of Satan towards the end of the 1000 years many will be cast into the lake of fire. While this paper gives an overview of the apocalyptic timeline as plotted by dispensationalism, it mainly examines the nature and effects of this doctrine and its fictionalisation in the light of cultural theory.

*Powerful Performances: The Acting-Out of Identity in Early Christianity*

Tim Ledgerwood, Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies, UNISA

The power of performance in the ancient world cannot be underestimated. From the writings of Marcus Aurelius onwards, the theatre that constituted the Roman games, the place and role of the holy man in late antiquity, and the performance of ascetics in later centuries, each of these aspects reflected a defining manner of performing Christian identity. This paper will examine the role of martyrs and holy men in the formation of early Christian identity, and will consider the aspect of spectacle and performance in this role. It will examine how this cultural performance sought to regulate how Christians behaved, and how they publicly performed their faith. This paper will conclude by making some observations regarding the role of performance in the formation of early Christian identity.

*Christian Zionism as a Theology of Violence: Reflections from the New Apostolic Reformation*

Irvin Chetty, Professor, University of Fort Hare

This paper addresses the challenge of Christian Zionism interpreting religious texts with a selective hermeneutic to garner, *inter alia*, “military” support from Pentecostal, Charismatic and Evangelical formations for the modern nation-state of Israel. Christian Zionism grounds itself on the interpretation that God has an on-going special relationship with the Jewish people apart from the Church. Jews have a divine right to possess the land of Palestine. According to Christian Zionists, however, this divine right extends beyond the promise to Abraham and becomes a command to every Christian believer to unreservedly support the modern nation-state of Israel. Out of this “subculture” has emerged John Hagee, a Christian television preacher who has launched Christians United for Israel (CUFI). John Hagee believes God’s plan for Israel includes a nuclear war with Iran and “*violently*” pushing the Palestinian people into Saudi Arabia and Egypt. CUFI’s main goal is to muster Pentecostal, Charismatic and Evangelical support for the modern nation-state of Israel. This Christian backing should be extended to every conceivable measure especially in her use of violence to suppress Palestine in her quest for full recognition of nationhood. A pilot study on this theme of “Christian Zionism as a Theology of Violence” was conducted in 2015 to explore the views of the New Apostolic Reformation which ranks as one of the newer Pentecostal movements. A qualitative methodology was chosen with the use of a focus group of key leaders of a NAR formation.

*Blood at the End of the Rainbow. Biblical Othering and South African Xenophobia*

Jacobie M. Helena, Department of Old and New Testament, US

In 2015 South Africa was yet again shaken by a wave of attacks on foreigners, mostly poor migrants from the rest of Africa. Thousands of fearful foreigners, many from Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, have sought refuge in makeshift camps. Others have returned home. According to The Economist, during widespread anti-foreign violence in 2008, 62 people were killed and about 100,000 displaced. Since 2008 at least 350 foreigners have been killed in xenophobic attacks. This horrific picture and statistics with regard to violence in South Africa are virtually unfathomable, given that the majority of South African citizens, as indicated by South Africa Statistics of 2012, would consider themselves Christians. In the light of the 2015 flaring of xenophobic events with mortifying effects of violence in South Africa, the manner in which the Bible, as a foundational text within the Christian religion, contributes to our view of the other, becomes essential. The aim of my argument is not to suggest a causal relationship between biblical texts and contextual events. Instead, the aim of this contribution is to investigate how the construction of discourses related to identity, specifically in connection to foreignness, in society is accomplished in the text of 1 Peter. While observing similar identity construction efforts in current public discourse, as for example related to xenophobia, the text of 1 Peter will be analysed by identifying textual markers related to foreignness in connection to the identity construction in the text in its ancient Greek and Roman context. In the end, observing the discourse of foreignness in the text of 1 Peter and the impact of biblical discourse in the South African context, may aid our understanding of the recent xenophobic attacks in South Africa, in a nation striving to embody the notion of “Rainbow Nation” where foreignness is blurred and diversity is celebrated.

*Problematisation of Religiosity in the Current South African Socio-Political and Economic Landscape: A Reflectional Exercise*

Mogomme Alpheus Masoga, School of Human and Social Sciences, University of Venda

Mbiti once asserted that Africans are notoriously religious. For Mulago Africans are incurably religious. It becomes necessary to look intently at the current South African socio-political and economic landscape in the context of religiosity. There are vivid indications that religiosity in South Africa has become a common “terrain” of use, abuse, and misuse in processes of both politicking and moralising. Interestingly, when any political leadership asserts power there is also a discourse of “religiosity” that develops. This propensity has unfortunately equated religion or being religious (in South Africa) to political democratic legitimization, consolidation and normalization. There are notable relevant narratives and accounts in South Africa which include the frequent visits to Moriya, the headquarters of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), in Limpopo and also the Isaiah Shembe meeting place at eKuphakameni. The question is whether religion or religiosities are appropriate instruments to give political credibility. The paper aims to question how religion and religiosity affect the current South African socio-political and economic landscape. In fact some anecdotes and narratives of how polarized this situation is will be presented and analysed.

*Colonial Infusion in the 1840 English-Setswana Gospel of Luke by Robert Moffat*

Itumeleng Daniel Mothoagae, Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies, UNISA

The Gospel of Luke was translated in 1840 by the missionary Robert Moffat, pointing to questions relating to the translation process, namely, who were the interpreters of Robert Moffat, to what extent did Robert Moffat involve the indigenous people of the language, in this case Batswana, and the use of English translation. It is the intention of this paper to draw similarities between the 1611 King James Bible and the 1840 English-Setswana Gospel of Luke. I will argue that in the Gospel of Luke we can draw instances of intentional colonial infusion. In this way the paper will historicise the process of making Bible translation part of the construction of Christian culture among Batswana. Decolonial theory will be used as analytical tool.

**Gender and Sexuality Sub-group:**

*Construction and Representation of Femininity in 1 Corinthians: Rhodes Must Fall and So Too Must Paul?*

Johnathan Jodamus, UCT

Gender delimitations and engendering brought about by the social constraints and patriarchal regulatory schemas of the dominant Graeco-Roman culture, necessitated what was construed as ideal gendering and permeated all social interactions in the ancient Mediterranean. By demonstrating how certain passages within 1 Corinthians are scripted as feminine and very often construct and represent hegemonic views of femininity typical of Graeco-Roman society, I will argue, that the implicit gendered discourse of 1 Corinthians serves only to script women’s bodies to mimetically perform along the lines of the dominant structurings of ideal femininity. In so doing Paul re-inscribes and perpetuates normative structurings of femininity from the broader cultural system and transposes it into the Corinthian community. As a result Christian bodies are scripted to perform according to the dominant cultural protocols and engendering praxes.

*“What Kind of Birth Pains Produced Eve?”: Androgenerativity versus Sexual Reproduction in John Chrysostom*

Chris L. de Wet, Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies, UNISA

Forming part of a larger project on masculinity in early Christianity, the purpose of this paper is to develop the novel notion of androgenerativity as an ideal mode of reproduction (over and against sexual reproduction) in the thought of John Chrysostom. There is a distinct point in Chrysostom’s commentary on Genesis (and further interpretations of 1 Corinthians 11) where God’s *modus operandi* of creation changes; where creation shifts from fabrication to reproduction, where the human body, and no longer the earth, becomes the primary trajectory of creation, when creation occurs no longer by means of the spoken word of God, but via the penetration of the human body. This critical moment is found in Chrysostom’s fifteenth homily *On Genesis* when Eve is created from the rib of Adam. A further explanation thereof is found in his twenty-sixth homily *On 1 Corinthians*. When I refer to androgenerativity, I refer to an ideal mode of reproduction in which the male body serves as the primary trajectory and origin. Other bodies are therefore produced *from* the male body. Androgenerativity stands in contrast to sexual reproduction *between* male and female, the second creative-reproductive shift that takes place in the seventeenth and eighteenth homilies *On Genesis*, which Chrysostom considers thoroughly postlapsarian. In this paper, I will highlight four characteristics of androgenerativity in contrast to sexual reproduction. First, androgenerativity assumes total psychic and corporeal perfection; an exact and precise alignment between the psychic, corporeal, and cosmic technologies of domination – in other words, it presupposes the ideal (but unattainable) masculine body, unadulterated by sin or passion. It requires an angelic body, so to speak. Second, androgenerativity assumes a passionless sexuality. Third, androgenerativity does not change and rupture the body (as is the case with childbirth), but leaves it intact, thereby signifying a painless virginal mode of reproduction. Finally, androgenerativity positions itself against the ancient social values of marriage and procreation as a means to eternal life.

*Questioning the “Natural Given”: Gender Critical Lenses as Hermeneutical Tool in Contemporary Discourses on Gender, Sexuality and Biblical Texts*

Rev Nina Müller van Velden, PhD candidate, US

Within contemporary discourses on gender, sexuality and biblical texts, the interrelated themes of essentialism and the complementary nature of human genders appear to play a large role. With such a hermeneutical framework, probing topics like the sex-gender relationship, gender and sexual identities, marriage, heteronormativity, patriarchy, and inclusivity relating to the LGBTIQA community, typically unleashes a more literal and so-called “biblically-based” affirmation of traditional views of sex and gender (often citing the creation narratives of Genesis 1 and 2). Such conventional views, however, tend to compromise inclusive, egalitarian and dignified spaces of all genders and sexualities. This paper proposes that New Testament narrative texts, specifically those found in the Gospels (with the focus here on John 12:1–8), can offer alternative outcomes if read by means of gender critical lenses. Gender-critical hermeneutics enables constructionist perspectives of gender, both in the socio-cultural context of the narrative itself, as well as in contemporary interpretations thereof, promoting the dignity and equality of all persons

**Jesus and the Gospels Sub-group:**

*Reading the Parable of the Great Supper as Part of Q’s Formative Stratum*

Llewellyn Howes, UJ

In his book, The Formation of Q, Kloppenborg identifies three redactional layers in the Sayings Gospel Q: the “formative stratum” (or Q¹), the “main redaction” (or Q²), and the “final recension” (or Q³). He ascribes the Parable of the Great Supper in Q 14:16–21, 23 to the main redaction, and interprets the parable by considering only that literary context. As an alternative, the present paper interprets the parable as it would have featured in Q’s formative stratum. On the one hand, the paper finds that the parable develops three simultaneous themes: (1) everyone is welcome in God’s kingdom, but the needy and unclean are particularly welcome; (2) contamination is a necessary attribute of God’s kingdom; and (3) food is available for everyone in God’s kingdom. On the other hand, the paper finds that the parable probably existed in the formative stratum before it was incorporated into the main redaction

*The Limits to Forgiveness in Matthew*

Marius J. Nel, US

This paper investigates the limits to forgiveness in the Gospel according to Matthew. Not only is the theme of judgement prominent therein, and sin against the Holy Spirit described as being unforgiveable (Matt 12:31–32), but is the extent of Jesus’ atonement unclear (for many, but not all – Matt 20:28). Forgiveness is also understood by Matthew as rescinded (Matt 18:23–35) or negated by an unwillingness to forgive others (6:12; 14–15). The social and theological limits Matthew imposes on forgiveness will be analysed in order to ascertain the function thereof for the Matthean community.

*“Passionate Masculinities”: Jesus and Peter in Mark’s Passion Narrative of 14:53–72*

Malebogo Kgalemang, University of Botswana

The Passion Narrative of Mark 14:53–72 possess a compelling representation and construction of masculinities of the characters of Jesus, Peter and the religious leaders. This paper uses postcolonial theory to analyse the representation and construction of the Passion narrative masculinities. A postcolonial masculinities approach seeks to situate the characters of Jesus and Peter as colonized males in a context ruled by the Roman imperial power. This paper argues that both Jesus and Peter’s masculinities are performed in competing colonised male spaces. It further argues that their encounter with each other, and other colonized characters, is a postcolonial masculinities of negotiation, and resistance.

*DNA in Antiquity: Revisit Jesus’ Birth*

Andries G. van Aarde, Professor Emeritus and Senior Research Fellow in the Unit of the Advancement of Scholarship, UP

Biologically, to be born fully human (in Latin: vere homo) a male person needs at conception the contribution of a male Y chromosome and a female X chromosome. Without these contributions Jesus of Nazareth would have no connection to humanness. According to the Aristotelian view on “DNA” (Aristotle, “On the generation of animals”/“Peri zoon geneseōs”), the Hellenistic view on female-male contributions to the conception of vere homo in antiquity (see also Galen on the Hippocratic Corpus), differs from today’s biology. In the Hebrew Scriptures and Rabbinical traditions (also in Graeco-Roman literature) evidence exists as regards to divine involvement as a third contribution in the conception of vere homo. The roles of woman and man provide the second and first contributions. In light of these evidences, the paper revisits Jesus’ conception and the textual evidence in the New Testament. The results of the investigation are compared with the propositions in the Athanasian Creed (Quincque Vult) and the exegetical and/or dogmatic views of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann concerning Jesus’ birth. In light of our understanding of “DNA” in antiquity, the aim of the paper is to explore the ethical and cultural relevance of Christians’ belief in Jesus as both vere homo and vere Deus. The paper represents a critical discussion (Auseinandersetzung) with British New Testament scholar Andrew Lincoln.

**Pauline Sub-group:**

*“And this is what some of you used to be …” (1 Cor 6:11): The Pre-Conversion Past of the Readers and Its Function in Manufacturing and Promoting New Christian Behaviour in Pauline Literature*

Christoph Stenschke, Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies, UNISA

On several occasions Paul refers in some detail to the readers’ pre-conversion past and paints a gloomy picture of their “old life”. This paper analyses the prominent passages and examines how such references “function” in Pauline discourse. In addition to their significance for soteriology (the “plight” to which the Gospel of Christ offers the “solution”; the greater the plight, the greater the solution!), these references describe the life which is to be abandoned once salvation is experienced. They serve as the dark backdrop for the present existence of believers and to motivate new behaviour. Paul demands that there be a clear distinction between “then and now”. This paper also briefly addresses the relationship of these one-sided statements to the more positive references to non-Christian behaviour in Paul’s letters, e.g. when he refers to moral values shared by believers and non-Christians alike. In closing the question is raised how such statements – far from harmless when used out of their context and Pauline function! – may be appropriated responsibly in today’s church and the wider society.

*New Inscriptions from Metropolis Incorporating Imperial Ideology and their Significance for Pauline Studies*

Mark Wilson, Asia Minor Research Center, Antalya, Turkey

Roman Imperial ideology, as Jeremy Punt has persuasively argued, underpinned the Roman Empire’s ongoing existence. One of the best-known expressions of such ideology is the “good news” (εὐαγγέλιον) inscription found in Priene in 1899 and popularized by Deissman in 1911. A fuller text of this important inscription was found during excavations at Metropolis in the 1990s. Additionally, two inscribed altars were discovered during the excavations at the theatre and bouleterion. The altars date after Octavian became *princeps* and declare him to be *Caesar Hilasterios*. Their subsequent publication in 2006 has gone unrecognized by Pauline scholars, and *hilasterios* has not yet emerged as an imperial term redeployed by Paul. This paper will first discuss the archaeological discovery of the two altars and their epigraphic publication. It will address the historical situation in the Roman Empire that caused the erection of such imperial altars, especially in Asia. Next, it will discuss Paul’s possible relationship with Metropolis located between Ephesus and Smyrna. It will then review briefly the *status quaestionis* of Paul’s use of *hilasterion* in Romans 3:25. It will conclude by discussing whether *hilasterion* is an imperial term and how Paul might have redeployed the imperial ideology of Caesar as Reconciler into his discussion about Christ’s redemptive work in Romans.

*Paul’s Use of the Root ὀφείλ-: Any Difference between a Moral and Legal Obligation?*

Hennie Goede, NWU

The apostle Paul uses words related to the root ὀφείλ- in 10 instances in his undisputed letters. These words all fall within the broad semantic domain of debt or obligation, and carry a legal import. While the legal context of debt and debtor is clearly relevant, this paper asks whether Paul considered a moral or religious obligation as enforceable as a legal obligation. In Roman law a legal obligation was enforceable, but a moral obligation not. To answer this question, Paul’s use of these words will be compared to the legal use of these words in the first century AD. An adequate answer to this question will throw light on believers’ obligation towards God in the light of Christ’s salvific work, and on believers’ ethical obligation towards one another and other persons.

**Not Sub-group Related:**

*A Social Rhetorical Interpretative Analytic*

Fednand Manjewa Mbwangi, UCT

Because the intention of this paper is to reconstruct a Social Rhetorical Interpretative Analytic, the main argument that can be advanced here is that even though Vernon Robbins’ “inter-texture” and “social and cultural texture” offer some anthropological and sociological categories for defining boundaries of social, cultural and religious identities, he falls short of providing criteria for describing and explaining the significant meanings of such terms as marginalisation, stereotyping, personhood (the “I and we” narrative) which significantly explain the complexity of identity politics. However, this deficiency is collectively complemented by Esler’s social identity theory and McCall’s intersectionality that respectively allow us to critically examine the dynamics of inter-group and intra-group relations. This paper further advances the overall claim that self-categorization and intersectionality as analytical tools provide the leverage for unearthing the contributions of social, religious and cultural ethos that significantly contribute to the understanding of the complexity of identity politics. This paper proceeds first by stating an introduction of Social Rhetorical Interpretation (SRI) Analytic, a brief outline of the contributions of social and cultural analysis before highlighting the roles of self-categorization and intersectionality in explaining the complexity of identity politics.

*Preaching and Practicing: A Note on the Composition of Luke 19:1–10 with regard to John the Baptist’s Message*

Ronald van der Bergh, UP

In this paper, I will argue that the author of Luke consciously alludes to the message of John the Baptist (as found in Luke 3:7–14) in Luke 19:1–10. In so doing, Luke effects a continuation of the message of the Baptist in Jesus’ preaching – in other words, the story of Zacchaeus in Luke affirms and actualizes the message of the Baptist as portrayed by Luke in Luke 3:2a–14.

*Parenting as Paul’s Preferred Model of Leadership*

Lovemore Togarasei, University of Botswana and Visiting Professor, UNISA

Introducing the *Journal of New Testament Studies* of 2004 which carried a number of articles on early Christian families, MacDonald and Moxnes (2004:3–6) observed that, “The hope is that a direct focus on ‘family matters’ will shed new light on such diverse topics as rituals, leadership, asceticism, social location, community growth, and the lives of women, children and slaves in early Christianity.” In this paper I focus on how “family matters,” specifically parenting, shed light on Paul’s practice and understanding of leadership. In a world where poor leadership has led us into a number of problems (political, environmental, economic, ecclesiastical, etc), the subject of leadership becomes very important. In Christian circles, models of leadership with a biblical basis are likely to be more effective. In support of servant leadership, I therefore use Paul’s imagery of parenting as a model that he preferred leaders to follow. Using the undisputed Pauline letters, the paper will analyse texts like 1 Cor. 3:2 and 1 Thess. 2:7 from a historical critical perspective to draw lessons on leadership.

*Feast Observance in the New Testament: Continuation or Discontinuation?*

Michael Sokupa, Helderberg College and US

There is a growing interest among certain Christian circles for observance of Biblical Feasts. Is there any indication in the New Testament for continuation or discontinuation? This paper examines selected New Testament passages to determine ritual continuation or discontinuation of the Feasts found in the Hebrew Bible by New Testament communities particularly Christian communities. The treatment of Feasts and their ritual elements as they are found in the New Testament should be understood within the frame-work of biblical ritual theory. Therefore, beyond the exegesis of such ritual passages an examination of their ritual context will be key.

**For inclusion in the Business Meeting:**

*Perspectivally, Paul*

Jeremy Punt, US

Pauline research, in its more recent manifestations, is characterised by “perspectives,” including the “New Perspective” and “Radical New Perspective” on Paul, to name two prominent versions. Reasons for this particular “perspectival” approach to the Pauline letters and their legacy(-ies) are considered, together with its impact on future Pauline studies. (position paper in anticipation of the subgroup’s hosting of the 2017 conference)