**TSSA annual meeting 2015**

**From Farm to Fork: Theological and Ethical Reflection on the Production, Distribution and Consumption of Food**

**Abstracts**

**Chairperson: Manitza Kotze (UWC)**

**Speaker: George Byarugaba (UWC)**

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*Exploring the Influence of Food Symbolism on Food Insecurity in Roman Catholic Communities in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape Provinces*

Various research results point out poverty and inadequate food production and inadequate distribution as the main culprits for food insecurity in many African countries. This research wishes to contribute to the existing knowledge on food insecurity and concentrate on South Africa and investigate whether food symbolisms can also lead to systematic food insecurity and discrimination of some people.  Since the official end of political apartheid in 1994, there have been great improvements in terms of grants, aid, increase in food production and change of structures. Nevertheless, food insecurity still persists. This research seeks to uncover new facts concerning the cause of food insecurity in South Africa. It brings to the fore that instead of focusing on structural changes only, researchers need re-evaluate some of the cultural and religious beliefs attached to food production, distribution and consumption. The research also hopes to highlight that when people are informed through liberating education, they will critically analyze the causes of the problem; see the possibilities for change and work towards change. This solution would go to roots of the moral problem of food insecurity and put institutions and structures on a new, more humane and beneficial foundation.

Smaller venue

**Chairperson: Louise Kretschmar (Unisa)**

**Speaker: Ernst M. Conradie (UWC)**

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*What do we do when we eat? A theological investigation*

This paper will explore the human act of eating food in the context of evolutionary history. The story of evolution is often described in terms of the survival of the fittest and competition over food, habitat and procreation. This is a story based on predatory habits, from the time of parasitic bacteria to the emergence of carnivores and omnivores. It is also a story of cooperation amongst social species but such cooperation cannot and does not qualify the need for food. The logic seems to be one of “eat or be eaten”, or (better) “eat and be eaten”. Human evolution has to be understood in terms of this history of predation. How is such predation to be understood theologically?

The biblical food regulations in Genesis 1 allow for eating organic leftovers in the form of fruit, nuts and seeds – each of which minimises violence and only limits the potential of such seeds. Likewise, the food consumed in the Holy Communion (bread and wine) require human inputs but not the killing of other living organisms. Drinking milk and eating cheese, honey or eggs do not entail killing those that produce such food products but may well amount to theft by those in positions of power. By contrast, eat vegetables, roots and especially various forms of meat implies that one living metabolism is absorbed by another. While this cannot necessarily be described as a form of violence (pending definitions of violence), it does beg numerous questions. Is the very act of eating not an almost inevitable manifestation of sin? Even if food is produced in a relatively “humane” manner it seems non-sensible to think that the need for predation can be avoided from an evolutionary perspective. How, then, should the act of eating be understood theologically – with Manichean disdain over the crude biological nature of eating, with an Augustinian innocence or with a cultured Pelagian sophistication?

Medium-size venue

**Chairperson: Louise Kretzschmar (Unisa)**

**Speaker: Etienne de Villiers (University of Pretoria)**

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*May Christians Request Medically Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia?*

In the present debate in South Africa on medically assisted suicide and euthanasia the issue of the legalisation of these two practices dominates. The more personal question of whether we as Christians should regard medically assisted suicide and euthanasia as morally acceptable and as a result may also promote and personally request their application plays a secondary role. It is a pity, as the issue of the moral acceptability of these two practices is, in my opinion, in certain respects more basic and important than the issue of their legalisation. Should medically assisted suicide and euthanasia be legalised in South Africa we as Christians would still have to decide whether we personally support the two practices from a moral perspective.

It is not possible within the scope of one paper to deal adequately with all the aspects involved with the question: ‘What view should Christians have on the moral acceptability of medically assisted suicide and euthanasia?’ In this paper the attention will be solely directed to the question: ‘Is it morally acceptable for terminally ill Christians to voluntarily request medically assisted suicide or euthanasia?’ The ethical issues involved with the application of non-voluntary and involuntary euthanasia applied to other than terminally ill patients are not discussed.

The argument is developed in four steps. First, a brief sketch is provided of relevant changes in the moral landscape over the last century, which we as Christian have to take account of when deciding on medical ethical issues. Second, two extreme and opposite contemporary views are critically discussed: (i) the view that Christians should morally reject medically assisted suicide and euthanasia on account of the absolute proscription against such practices entailed in the message of the Bible, and (ii) the view that Christians, like non-Christians, have to decide on these two practices on the basis of their own autonomy, as distinctive Christian beliefs do not provide any relevant moral guidance, but at the most have some motivational value. In the third step, the moral implications of some relevant Christian beliefs for deciding on the moral acceptability of requesting medically assisted suicide and euthanasia are discussed.

Medium-size venue

**Chairperson: Ernst Conradie (UWC)**

**Speaker: Willem Fourie (University of Pretoria)**

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*You shall not kill? An interreligious exploration of Christianity and limitations to the right to life*

International human rights law regards the right to life as ‘the supreme right’. Yet it does allow strict limitations to this right, most often expressed as the prohibition of the arbitrary deprivation of life. This logic is reflected in numerous regional and international positions on the right to life. The General Comment on the Right to Life in the African Charter is one of the most recent attempts at synthesizing and focusing the limitations to the protection of the right to life. This is done by describing the circumstances under which taking a life should not be viewed as arbitrary. A life may only be taken if it is acceptable under international law, which means that the intentional deprivation of life is only allowed ‘if it is both necessary and proportionate’. Do similar limitations to the protection of the right to life exist in Christianity? Under which circumstances are the intentional deprivation of a life acceptable? This exploratory contribution seeks to identify and compare selected relevant religio-juridical elements in Christianity in conversation with selected elements in Hinduism and Islam.

Medium-size venue

**Chairperson: Wessel Bentley (Unisa)**

**Speaker: Manitza Kotzé (University of the Western Cape)**

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*GM food and collective sin: A Christian theological ethical reflection*

While there are various ethical concerns that are raised in terms of genetically modified (GM) food, there seems to be excellent arguments both for and against for most of them. In this proposed paper I will argue that ethical concern over the possible destructive socio-economic effects, however, is the area where Christian theological ethics might make the most meaningful contribution. This might also be expressed as the notion of collective sin.

An understanding of sin as collective, a mutual situation that we all share in and that not only refers to individuals transgressions, but also the very structures and systems that make up our world is particularly helpful in discussing GM food through the lenses of a doctrine of sin. This notion also underlines the socio-economic dangers, where large corporations hold a virtual monopoly over the production and selling of GM food, understanding power as “power over” and domination. The proposed paper intends to reflect on this understanding and how it might add value to the larger discussions on the ethical concerns surrounding GM food.

Smaller venue

**Chairperson: Ernst Conradie (UWC)**

**Speaker: Louise Kretzschmar (Unisa)**

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*“What are we eating? Ignorance of additives is not blissful but injurious”*

In keeping with the theme of “From farm to fork”, this paper discusses the theological-ethical questions that need to be raised about food additives. First, the wider context of food production and processing is noted. Second, the nature of food additives of various kinds, the reasons for their use and the means by which they are administered is outlined. Third, the inherent disrespect for creation that the use of harmful additives demonstrates is discussed. Finally, their effects on human beings and nature as a whole are analysed to determine the extent to which their use is injurious or harmless.

Medium size venue

**Chairperson: Ernst Conradie (UWC)**

**Speaker: Hermen Kroesbergen (Justo Mwale University)**

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*Thanking God and thanking the farmer?*

In this paper I will address the question how showing gratitude over our food towards God relates to practical considerations concerning the production and distribution of food. Can we thank God for food that has been produced in an unethical way? On the one hand, do we implicate God in unethical practices if we do so? Or, on the other hand, do we limit God if we allow such practical considerations to play a role in our expressions of gratitude towards Him?

Using Austin Farrer's conception of 'double agency' and Peter Winch's reflections on the both reciprocal and asymmetrical relationship between secular and religious language, I will argue that the practical plane of food production and the spiritual plane of expressing gratitude over food should be kept both separated and related. It is important to avoid the risks and temptations involved in drawing together thanking God and thanking the farmer too closely or too little.

Smaller venue

**Chairperson: Ernst Conradie (UWC)**

**Speaker: Nadia Marais (Stellenbosch University)**

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*#rainmustfall – Reflections on drought, thirst, and the water of life*

South Africa recently experienced one of its worst droughts in recent years, which is already having profound implications for the production, distribution, and consumption of food – not least in the steady rise in food prices, as one of the consequences of lack of water for farming. More specifically, the notion ‘water of life’ raises questions regarding understanding water (and rain, in particular) as a gift given by the God of life – or even a ‘creative blessing’ (David Kelsey) bestowed – especially as this kind of rhetoric would play an important role in the way in which churches and religious communities would respond to the lack of rain and lowering water reserves during the drought. This paper aims to explore the contributions that ecological theology – and the work of South African theologian Steve de Gruchy in particular – may make in reflecting upon drought, the experience of thirst, and water as ‘blessing’ for ecological and human flourishing.

Medium-size venue

**Chairperson: Manitza Kotze (UWC)**

**Speaker: Mpumelelo Moyo (Midlands State University – Zimbabwe)**

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*Ethical issues on Zimbabwe’s land reform and the quest for food security*

The issue of the Zimbabwean land reform raises many ethical issues, some to do with ownership, livelihoods, food sustenance and many others. The Zimbabwean land reform was a fast track way of distributing land to indigenous people. Due to its chaotic nature many have come to characterise it as ‘jambanja’ (free-for-all). As a result of its mayhem the process has been marked by unjust distribution of land. The Zimbabwean government retained large estates owned by transnational, domestic and state capital. These estates were encouraged by the state to produce, ethanol fuel from sugar, timber, citrus, tea, coffee, dairy and conservancies for wildlife ranching. One interesting scenario, however, is that those who have been given small pieces of land have broken records in food production such as maize. While some of those who benefited large estates have either been largely unproductive, or leased farms or growing cash crops, which do not enhance food security. Such unfair practices have impacted negatively on the gains of the land reform. The article investigates the impact of the land reform on agricultural production and food security, given the political and economic challenges and injustices therewith. The article argues that the story is not a simple one of collapse and catastrophe, leading to food insecurity, poverty and mayhem. It is much more subtle and convoluted one needs to look closely at the Zimbabwean crisis in the wide context of global economics and politics.

Smaller venue

**Chairperson: Nadia Marais (SU)**

**Speakers: Ndikho Mtshiselwa & Leepo Modise (University of South Africa)**

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*Eucharist as symbol of equality in land ownership and food production*

On Eucharist, Gustavo Gutiérrez (1973) argued that “... communion with God and others presupposes the abolition of all injustices and exploitation...” This paper therefore sets out to investigate how the Eucharist could be employed in South Africa as a symbol of equality to address the issues of inequality, injustice and exploitation in the ownership, production and distribution of food. First, since the theology of Eucharist is grounded on the Christian Bible, it stands to reason that the issues of ownership, production and distribution of bread and wine in the Bible would receive considerable attention. Second, the present paper discusses the Eucharist elements, namely the bread and wine, as elements of food production and symbols of sharing the body of Christ in the context of economic inequality in South Africa. Third, based on the descriptive-normative approach, this paper proposes the way the Eucharist may be used as a symbol of equality to redress inequality in the ownership, production and distribution of food in South Africa.

Smaller venue

**Chairperson: Manitza Kotze (UWC)**

**Speaker: Eraste Nyirimana (Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary)**

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*Reading the Nabal Story (1Samuel 25:2-42) in the South African context of struggle for access to food security*

The proposed essay undertakes to read the Nabal Story in 1Samuel 25:2-42 in the South African context of inequalities and struggle for access to resources in general and to food security in particular. From this perspective, the narrative is seen to be constructed around three main characters. Nabal, is a wealthy man displaying a great sense of entitlement over his wealth. He sees no reason he should be generous to a group of “nobodies” whom he apparently reproach for being responsible for their situation of need. David is a leader of a group of landless and marginalized people who claim that they deserve at least the generosity of the wealthy Nabal. Their argument is that even if Nabal’s wealth is his, they contributed to maintaining a favourable atmosphere for the accumulation of this wealth. This is a group of people who, if they are pushed away by the wealthy Nabal, seem to be ready to take their share by force. The conflict arising from the radical positions of the two sides is resolved through the wisdom of Abigail, who is able to expose the senseless selfishness of the wealthy party and to rebuke the violent approach of the needy party. The Abigail solution seems to be what is needed in a context of economic inequality such as that which prevails in South Africa

Smaller venue

**Chairperson: Nadia Marais (SU)**

**Speaker: Helgard Pretorius (University of Stellenbosch/VU Amsterdam)**

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“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?” Tracing the current revival of theological interest in the ascension of Jesus Christ

The relative neglect of the ascension as a crucial theological topic has been widely acknowledged for many years and lamented by only a few. For different reasons, news that there has been a recent revival of theological interest in the ascension might understandably evoke the response: “why do you stand looking up toward heaven?” In an attempt to engage with this new body of literature, this paper responds to the angels’ famous question by raising a few questions of its own: What significant studies have the last two decades delivered on the ascension? What distinguishes the recent revival of interest from other, more dated, investigations? What trends and directions can be discerned and what are the major points of agreement and contention? How do these studies relate to other pressing debates in theology, philosophy, ethics, politics and religion? Animating these questions is the hunch that a strong sense of the ascension (and its significance for faith and life) has more to offer than is easily acknowledged.

Smaller venue

**Chairperson: Louise Kretzschmar (Unisa)**

**Speaker: K.T. Resane (University of the Free State)**

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*Naboth’s vineyard: theological lessons for the South African land issue*

This article is an appeal to South African political and ecclesiastical leaders to form a synergy in order to redress the land issue in the post-apartheid era. It surveys the historical development of land dispossession through various initiatives as a prima for national conflicts in Africa. From the Berlin Conference (1884) to 1990, when the apartheid government relocated millions of Black people to some Bantustans known as homelands, or newly created townships, the land conflicts continued. The dispossession stripped the masses of their dignity, integrity, and respect. The story of Naboth’s vineyard (1 Kgs. 21) is used as a theological framework to redress the land issue. The narrative is expounded to compare the African land perspectives with those of eighth-century Israel. There is an appeal for the ecclesiastical formations to form a synergy with the political stakeholders in addressing this matter.

Smaller venue

**Chairperson: Danie Veldsman (UP)**

**Speaker: Eddy Van der Borght (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)**

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*The quest for identity in churches in the context of the quest for identity in South African society.*

I intend to present a critical review of Conradie, EM & Klaasen, J (eds) 2014. The quest for identity in so-called mainline churches. Stellenbosch: SUN Press placing in the context of the continuing quest for identity in South African society with reference to the finding of the most recent reconciliation barometer and comparing it with the quest for identity in European churches.

Medium-size venue

**Chairperson: Wessel Bentley (Unisa)**

**Speaker: Tanya van Wyk (University of Pretoria)**

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*Claiming narrative for Systematic Theology and public discourse: A critical reflection on the ‘personal odyssey’ of John W. de Gruchy*

This paper will offer a critical reflection on the publication of John W. de Gruchy, titled I have come a long way (2015). This will be done by referring to aspects from another one of his publications, titled, A Theological Odyssey: My life in writing (2014). The purpose of this joint critical reflection is an exploration of the use and the contribution of narrative theology, including biographical or ethno-autographical theology, for systematic theology. It concerns a postmodern epistemology in which ‘theology is not a discreet academic or ecclesiastical discipline separate from the problems and possibilities confronting society’ (De Gruchy 2014). In this regard the paper is also about ‘reclaiming narrative for public discourse’ (Doak 2004). It is argued that this narrative public discourse is especially suited for practicing a political theology, with its key elements being a prophetic theology, a public theology critical of policy, a theology of justice and a human society and a theology of concrete change.

Smaller venue

**Chairperson: Ernst Conradie (UWC)**

**Speaker: Koos Vorster (North-West University)**

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*“Go out and gather each day ...” The implications of the ethics of Exodus 16 for modern Consumerism*

 This presentation focuses on the implied ethical principles of the history of the manna in Exodus 16 and the relevance of these ethical principles for the contemporary culture of consumerism.  The principles that can be derived from this history are the principle of labour and rest, of sharing, the ethical principles of responsible consumption, the protection of creation and of remembrance of God's concern for humankind and creation.  Modern consumerism with its underlying neo-liberal economic philosophy appears to violate these principles in many ways.  The implied ethical principles of the manna history is thus highly relevant in the ethical discourse about economic planning, labour and rest, the environment and God's involvement in the modern world.

Medium-size venue