

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

²⁷ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

— **Genesis 1:26-27**

(New Revised Standard Version)



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Theology, Disability and Human Dignity conference

An interdisciplinary and international conference on the theme *Theology, Disability and Human Dignity* was hosted in collaboration with the Centre of Rehabilitation Studies, Faculty of Health Sciences in May 2011.

“How often do those of us who are able-bodied not run up the stairs without thinking what a challenge it is for someone with limited movement? How is it possible that we at first did not even think to include sign language service for our deaf conference attendees? Why are so few restaurants and guesthouses in town truly accessible, not to talk about our university buildings? Organizing this conference taught us all to look at the people living with disability in our midst with different eyes.”

– Prof Juliana Claassens



Above: Rev Wilhelm van Deventer and guide dog Tonto arrive at conference dinner

Other outcomes of *Theology, Disability and Human Dignity* conference:

- **Media coverage** with the organizer Juliana Claassens speaking on four local and national radio stations.
- **Opinion article** appeared in the KwaZulu-Natal-based newspaper *The Witness*: 'Beyond the Plastic Girl', 10 October 2011.
- A selection of the conference papers will appear in the international *Journal of Religion, Disability and Health*.
- **Conference volume**, *The Quest for Dignity: Theology, Disability, and Human Dignity*, edited by Juliana Claassens (Faculty of Theology) and Leslie Swartz (Department of Psychology) will be published by SUN Media in 2012.



Above: Panel discussion: Students from Stellenbosch University living with disabilities: Tatiana Metzger, Ntsakisene Mashele and Michelle Nel

HOPE Postdoctoral fellowships

As part of the HOPE Project four postdoctoral fellowships have been created to work on Hope-related themes. In 2011 two postdocs were awarded. Two further postdocs will be awarded in 2012.



Far left: Post-doctoral fellow Dr Funlola Olojede; Title of thesis: Human Dignity in Biblical Tradition

Left: Post-doctoral fellow Dr Retief Muller; Title of thesis: Human Dignity, Missiology, and the intercultural encounter in Southern Africa

HUMAN DIGNITY

The term “human dignity” is rooted in the theological claim in Genesis 1:26-27 that all humans are created in the image of God – the *Imago Dei* that implies that human dignity belongs to all people regardless of factors like skin colour, gender, social status, physical or mental capabilities, sexual orientation, etc. Thus human dignity is a gracious gift from the Creator God.

The commitment by the Faculty of Theology to the promotion of human dignity also relates to the constitution of South Africa that reads: “**Everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected**” (Chapter 2.10, *South African Bill of Rights*). Similar language is also found in the preamble to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights that affirms the inherent rights of all human beings.

The perspective that human dignity is not dependent on anything humans are or do, has important implications for how we view people of all walks of life, regardless of ability, moving the conversation away from achievement or utility value. In our own society in which race matters, class matters, gender matters, sexual orientation matters, the very idea of one’s createdness as foundation to be treated with honour and respect, is a compelling thought.



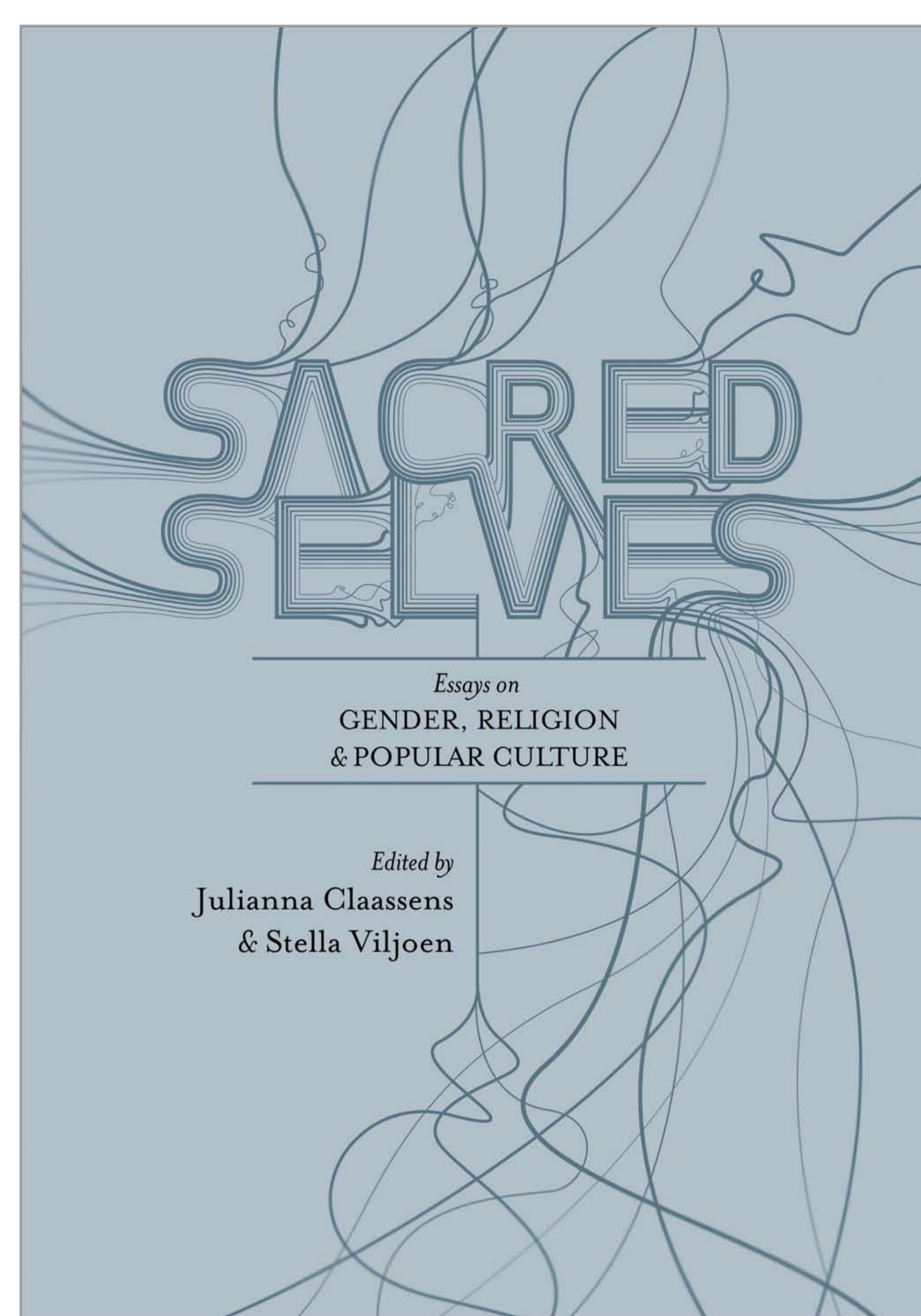
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The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians

The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians is a community of theologians who meet to reflect critically about a variety of concerns that harm the wellbeing of women and men: HIV-AIDS, poverty, violence, and in our instance, the way personhood is reflected in the media. The Circle also initiates writing projects to raise awareness about these important concerns, cultivate young scholars and hone writing and critical thinking skills.

As part of the newly formed Stellenbosch Chapter of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, Julianna Claassens (Faculty of Theology) and Stella Viljoen (Department of Visual Arts) collected essays in a volume called *Sacred Selves: Essays on Gender, Religion and Popular Culture* that will be published by Griffel Press in April 2012.

In this unique interdisciplinary collection of essays, theologians and media theorists investigate the intricate intersection between gender, popular culture and religion, particularly as it pertains to questions of a gendered identity. *Sacred Selves* interrogates various forms of popular culture, from crime fiction, vampire films and Nigerian praise songs to Christian magazines and church promotional material as texts that build and replicate gender ideals, concluding that a broader, more nuanced, understanding is needed of what it means to be a man or a woman.



SACRED SELVES
 ESSAYS ON GENDER, RELIGION AND POPULAR CULTURE
Edited by Julianna Claassens And Stella Viljoen
 Griffel, 2012

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Above: *Launch of Stellenbosch Chapter of Concerned African Women Theologians*

Right: *Table of Contents – Sacred Selves: Essays on Gender, Religion and Popular Culture*

International Collaboration: Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University, and the Protestant Theological University, Kampen, Netherlands

Reflecting a six year long collaboration with yearly conferences, a collection of essays will be published in 2013 with the international publisher Semeia of the Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, GA.

This collection of essays published under the title *Fragile Dignity: Inter-contextual Conversations on Scriptures, Family and Violence* (ed. Julianna Claassens and Klaas Spronk), explores the theme of human dignity and violence in the context of the family as well as society from a variety of intra-disciplinary perspectives. The conversation includes responses from different parts of the world, modeling the importance of extending the conversation.



Right: *Table of Contents – Fragile Dignity: Inter-contextual Conversations on Scriptures, Family and Violence* (ed. Julianna Claassens and Klaas Spronk)

FRAGILE DIGNITY: INTERCONTEXTUAL CONVERSATIONS ON SCRIPTURES, FAMILY AND VIOLENCE
Edited by Julianna Claassens and Klaas Spronk
 Semeia, forthcoming

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	D. Xolile and Lee-Ann J. Simon	'Household' (Dis)loyalties and Violence in Judges 14 and 15: Dignity of gendered and religious 'others' in a dialogical theological praxis	Leo Koffmann	Monica Melancthon
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		Respondent to book as a whole		



Teaching Gender in Africa

In August 2011 NetACT, a network of 14 theological institutions in nine countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, in conjunction with the Ecumenical Foundation of South Africa (EFSA), hosted a consultation on the theme “Teaching Gender in Africa”. Each seminary had to include a female representative in their delegation – in itself an empowering action, as some seminaries did not have a female faculty member on their staff.



Above: *Mrs Phoebe Chifungo from Malawi leading the devotions at the conference on “Teaching Gender in Africa”*

Jurgens Hendriks and Elna Mouton in conjunction with Len Hansen and Elisabet le Roux edited a publication of the conference papers entitled: ***Men on the Pulpit, Women in the Pews? Addressing Gender Inequality in Africa***. This collection of essays was born out of deep concern for the devastating effects of the HIV and AIDS pandemic on African communities, particularly church and seminary life. The book is a bold response from within various African contexts to a core challenge posed by the crisis, namely to understand and address the complex interface between religion, culture and gender.

The premise of the book is that, if the pandemic is to be curbed at all, any form of stereotyping – especially gender inequality as a deeply entrenched cultural and religious phenomenon – has to be addressed in nuanced and dignifying ways. It therefore takes gender issues to the heart of theological training. The authors' first aim is to focus on curriculum and staff development in the network of seminaries involved, trusting that it will be of use also to church and community leadership in general. Copies will be distributed at the various theological institutions during the follow-up workshop in Kenya in July 2012.

MEN ON THE PULPIT, WOMEN IN THE PEWS? ADDRESSING GENDER INEQUALITY IN AFRICA

*Edited by Jurgens Hendriks, Elna Mouton, Len Hansen and Elisabet le Roux
SUN MEDIA, 2012*

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Above: *Some of the delegates at the conference on “Teaching Gender in Africa”*

Left:
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Weidenhof House as A House of HOPE for students from Africa



Above left:
Prof Nico Koopman, Dean of the Faculty of Theology, and Rev Justin Phiri at the ground breaking of Weidenhof House

Above right:
The newly renovated Weidenhof House

Weidenhof House was recently renovated and now provides dignified and comfortable accommodation for 24 students, including married couples and disabled people. During the past 20 years Weidenhof House has provided a physical and spiritual home for Maties from countries like Namibia, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Mozambique and Nigeria.



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HOPE Scholarship Scheme

The bulk of the HOPE Project grant has gone to HOPE Scholarships. From July 2009 to December 2011 scholarships to the amount of R2 259 300 were granted to 38 students. Of these 11 students have received their doctoral degrees and 4 their master's degrees.



The students are from various countries in Africa and the topics of their dissertations are closely connected with the theme of Human Dignity. The effect of the scholarships is far-reaching as graduandi return to their countries, congregations, churches and communities of origin to make a difference.



HOPE SCHOLARS GRADUANDI

Name	Country	Title of Thesis
DTh Programme		
Charlene van der Walt	SA	Ideologie en mag in Bybel Interpretasie: Op weg na 'n kommunale lees van 2 Samuel 13
Justino Alfredo		The book of Ruth from a Lomwe Perspective
Christelle Bekker	SA	Die huishouding van God se helende en bevrydende ruimte in 'n tydperk van liminaliteit
Chata Msangaambe	Malawi	Laity empowerment with regard to the missional task of the CCAP in Malawi
Christopher Munikwa	Zimbabwe	The Binga Outreach: Contextualisation of mission in the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe
Funlola Olojede	Nigeria	Unsung heroines of the Old Testament
Lukas Soko	Zambia	Schism in the Reformed Church in Zambia: the challenge to Christian Leadership
Jenny Wright	SA	Between Justice and Love
Josiah Murage	Kenya	The concept of Utugie within the HIV and AIDS pandemic: a Pastoral assessment of the ecclesial praxis of the Anglican Church of Africa
Gysbert Loubser	SA	'n Kritiese studie van Wentzel van Huysteen
Johannes Ries	SA	Koinoniale en diakonale gestaltes van die missionale Gemeente binne 'n konteks van multi-kulturalisme
MTh Programme		
Ivan Ekong	Nigeria	Preaching peace in contact of violence in Nigeria
Justin Phiri	Zambia	Poverty and the Impact of Micro-credit: a theological reflection on financial sustainability in the rural areas of Zambia
SE Mathewson	SA	Exploring the role of the Christian child worker in the spiritual nurturing of children living in poverty
Menard Musendekwa	Zimbabwe	Messianism as a prophetic response to the political and socio-economic crises