



# Women in church and society

## Report of research done by a research team at the PU vir CHO

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### Abstract

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*The research project “Women in Church and Society” was conducted under the auspices of one of the focus areas for research and postgraduate education at the Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys: “Reformed Theology and the Development of the South African Society”. This focus area is based in the Faculty of Theology (PU vir CHO) and is directed by Herrie van Rooy. Project 2 of this focus area is “The socio-historic context of the Bible and its implications for the development of South African Society” and is under the leadership of Fika J. van Rensburg. The first sub-project of Project 2 to be completed is “Women in Church and Society”. It commenced in 2000 and had its fourth and final workshop in September 2002. It was managed by a five-person executive committee and had the following categories of collaborators: 16 PU vir CHO researchers, 10 researchers from other South African universities, 6 international researchers, 19 masters’ and doctoral students, and 21 researchers with special expertise in relevant areas. In total 48 papers<sup>1</sup> were read and discussed at the four workshops; and most of them have either been published or are in the process of being published as articles in accredited journals. This article is a report on the activities and outcome of the research project.*

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1 The 48 papers (as well as the publication status of each) are listed at the end of this report (p. 747-750).

## Opsomming

Die vrou in kerk en samelewing. Verslag van navorsing gedoen deur 'n navorsingspan van die PU vir CHO

*Die navorsingsprojek "Die vrou in kerk en samelewing" het deel uitgemaak van die navorsingsprojekte van een van die navorsingsfokusareas en nagraadse programme van die Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys: "Gereformeerde teologie en die ontwikkeling van die Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing". Hierdie fokusarea gaan uit van die Fakulteit Teologie van die PU vir CHO, onder die direkteurskap van Herrie van Rooy. Projek 2 van hierdie fokusarea is "Die sosiohistoriese konteks van die Bybel en die implikasie daarvan vir die ontwikkeling van die Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing". Die leier van die projek is Fika J. van Rensburg. Die eerste subprojek van Projek 2 (wat hiermee voltooi is), is: "Die vrou in kerk en samelewing". Die projek het in 2000 van wal gestreek, en die vierde en laaste werksbyeenkoms van die navorsers was in September 2002. Die projek is bestuur deur 'n uitvoerende komitee van vyf persone, en het die volgende kategorieë medewerkers gehad: 16 navorsers van die PU vir CHO, 10 navorsers uit ander Suid-Afrikaanse universiteite, 6 internasionale navorsers, 19 meesters- en doktorsgraadstudente, en 21 navorsers met besondere kundigheid op aanverwante terreine. In totaal is 48 referate gelewer<sup>2</sup> en bespreek tydens die vier werksbyeenkomste. Die meeste van hierdie referate is óf reeds in geakkrediteerde tydskrifte gepubliseer, óf in voorbereiding om vir keuring ingedien te word. Hiermee word verslag gedoen van die werksaamhede en afloop van die navorsingsprojek.*

## 1. The project management and research team

The project was managed by a five-person executive committee: Fika J. van Rensburg (Leader), Ronel Pieterse (Secretary), Koos Vorster, Elma Cornelius, Herrie van Rooy.

The project had the following categories of collaborators:

- **16 PU vir CHO researchers**

Christa Rautenbach (Law), Christopher Rabali (NT), Douw Breed (NT), Dries du Plooy (Dean and Church Polity), Elma Cornelius (Greek and NT), Fika J. van Rensburg (NT), George Lotter (Practical Theology), Georgina Jardim (Semitics), Hans J.M. van Deventer (OT), Herrie F. van Rooy (OT & Director Research), Jorrie Jordaan (NT), Koos Vorster

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2 Die 48 referate is onder punt 9 aan die einde van hierdie verslag (p. 747-750), tesame met die publikasiestatus van elk.

(Ethics), Marianne Dircksen (Latin), Paul Krüger (OT), Rolien Roos (Law), and Wim C. Vergeer (NT)

- **10 researchers from other South African universities**

Christina Landman (RITR, Unisa), Elna Mouton (NT, University of Stellenbosch), Frances Klopper (OT, UNISA), Gerrie Snyman (OT, UNISA), Johannes N. Vorster (NT, UNISA), Kathleen Boner (St Augustine's Catholic College), Lilly Nortjé-Meyer (NT, Rand Afrikaans University), Madipoane Masenya (OT, UNISA), Maretha Jacobs (NT, UNISA), and Pieter Botha (NT, UNISA)

- **6 international researchers**

Athalya Brenner (Theology and Religion Studies, University of Amsterdam), Cilliers Breytenbach (NT, Humboldt University, Germany), Hanna Stenström (NT, University of Uppsala), Kari Syreeni (NT, University of Uppsala), and Robin Gallaher Branch (Fulbright American visiting professor [Oral Roberts University] at PU vir CHO), Talvikki Mattila (University of Helsinki)

- **19 masters' and doctoral students**

Albert Thugwana (M.-student, PU vir CHO), Anita Wikell (Ph.D.-student, Uppsala), Annika Borg (Ph.D.-student, Uppsala), Asa Mika (Ph.D.-student, Uppsala), Brent Connock (Ph.D. student, PU vir CHO), Heinrich Grosskopf (Ph.D. student, PU vir CHO), Jacomien Zwemstra (MA.-student, PU vir CHO), Juanina Ooppel-Visser (M.-student, PU vir CHO), Laura Maleya Mautsa (Ph.D.-student, PU vir CHO), Leentje de Lange (M.-student, PU vir CHO), Nelius van Rooy (M.-student, PU vir CHO), Nico Grönum (M.-student, PU vir CHO), Peet Botha (Ph.D.-student, PU vir CHO), Ronél Pieterse (Ph.D.-student, PU vir CHO), Timothy van Aarde (M.-student, UP), Maureen Ebersohn (Undergraduate student, PU vir CHO), Trudie Stark (Undergraduate student, PU vir CHO), San-Mari van Heerden (Undergraduate student, PU vir CHO), Yeol Kim (Ph.D.-student, PU vir CHO)

- **21 researchers with expertise in special areas**

Alta Swart (Gereformeerde Kerk Vryburg), Annette van der Walt (Geref. Kerk Vanderbijlpark-Suid), Braam Kruger (Geref. Kerk Barberton), Elsje Buchner (NGK Garsfonteinpark, Pretoria), Erika Stutterheim (Director Social Work, SAPS), Erina du Plooy (Geref. Kerk Potchefstroom-Noord), Hessel Dijkstra (Geref. Kerk Groblersdal), Hentie Kruger (Geref. Kerk Lyttleton), Juanita Terblanche (Potchefstroom City Council), Louis Kruger (Advocate, Bloemfontein), Mike van Tonder (Practical Theology, & NG Kerk Aranos), Nico Vorster (Geref. Kerk Bultfontein), Phia van

Helden (Geref. Kerk Centurion), Sarah Jane Wessels (URC Rust-ter-Vaal), Annelize Liebenberg (Theology, PU vir CHO), Ben Smit (Geref. Kerk Brits-Wes), Danie Snyman (Geref. Kerk Heidelberg), Fanie Coetzee (Geref. Kerk Potchefstroom-Noord), Jan Venter (Geref. Kerk Pretoria-Annlin), Kobie van der Walt (Geref. Kerk Vanderbijlpark-Suid), and Mattie Hough

## 2. Background and problem statement

The status and role of women in the church has been an important topic of research for some decades in South Africa. In Afrikaans Protestant circles, the *de iure* status and role in both the *NG Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church)* and the *Hervormde Kerk* have been that gender should not serve as the basis for any form of discrimination among church members. In the *Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (GKSA)* the issue has not yet been resolved. These churches serve as examples of the situation in South Africa. Although it is true that women have been acknowledged as full members in many denominations in South Africa, yet even in those denominations the *de facto* status and role of women give practical evidence to the contrary. And the same goes for society: Although the Bill of Rights included in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) has secured the equality of gender, the *de facto* status and role of women in society in many cases remain one of being discriminated against.

The main research problem of the project was the following: What are the status and the role of women in church and society, and in what way can Scripture and/or present human rights legislation help religious societies to define that role and to change the *de facto* situations and attitude?

This research problem was divided into four subsidiary components:

- What are the hermeneutical principles for interpreting the Bible on the status and role of women in church and society, and what should the status and role of women in church and society be?
- What was the status and role of women in antiquity?
- What is the status and role of women in prominent religious traditions?
- What is the status and role of women in church and society today, what are the implications of the legislation on human rights, and how can the status and role of women be aligned with the Bible and legislation?

### 3. The scientific background

#### 3.1 The theoretical framework of the collaborative study

Churches have played and are playing a major role in the current position and status of women in society. Promoting gender awareness and defining and promoting a new way of thinking about the identity of women will contribute to positively change the role and status of women in church and society.

The theoretical framework for the research gave prominence to the following considerations:

- According to current scholarship the authors of the books of the Bible seem to be exclusively male.
- Language is a powerful tool in constructing realities.
- The books of the Bible were predominantly produced in patriarchal societies.
- Research needs to be done on the hidden history of women, because women's history cannot be determined by only reading writings of male authors.
- The socio-historic contexts of the books of the Bible, especially when using these texts as normative for present-day societies, must be acknowledged and taken into account.

#### 3.2 The relation of the project to ongoing and previous research

Any change in the current lowly status of women in South African society will need a social move, especially in South African churches. This social move implies gender awareness and a new way of thinking about the identity of women, the role of the church in establishing the identity of women, the relevance of patriarchy, and the hermeneutical presuppositions in reading the Bible.

According to many researchers (like Schussler Fiorenza, 1983; Torjesen, 1995; and Cornelius, 2000) hermeneutics, especially with regard to the reading of sacred texts, has been a problem. The issues are the following:

- The fact that the authors of the books of the Bible seem to be exclusively male is ignored (Schussler Fiorenza, 1983; Torjesen, 1995; Cornelius, 2000).
- The power of language in constructing current realities is ignored (Passman, 1993; Syreeni, 1994; Vorster, 1997a, 1997b; Borg, 1998).

- The relevance of patriarchy is ignored (Arthur, 1984; Ament, 1993; Torjesen, 1995).
- Women's history cannot be determined by only reading writings of male authors. Research needs to be done on the hidden history of women, as found (e.g.) in ancient mosaics (c.f. Morris, 1973; Irvin, 1980; Lefkowitz & Fant, 1982; Meeks, 1983; Arthur, 1984; Versnel, 1987; Hemelrijk, 1987; Bremmer, 1987; Peradotto & Sullivan, 1993; Sawyer, 1996).
- The importance of acknowledging and translating the socio-historic contexts of the books of the Bible, when using these texts as normative for present-day societies must be stressed (Meeks, 1983; Petersen, 1985; Elliott, 1991; Robbins, 1992; Syreeni, 1999; Janse van Rensburg, 2000).

This project aimed at research that would contribute to solving the problems that the *lacunae* mentioned above create.

Research has shown that in different present-day institutions women suffer because of tradition and churches' views on women (Casey, 2000). This project aimed at determining the power of the institutions of the major religious movements, e.g. Islam, Christianity, and African indigenous religions.

### 3.3 Specific objectives and significance of the research

#### 3.3.1 Aim and objectives

The aim was to contribute to change the current lowly status of women in South African society, and especially in South African churches through promoting gender awareness and by defining and promoting a new way of thinking about the identity of women. The ultimate aim was and is to have women restored to full participation in all spheres.

In order to bring about this change, the objectives were the following:

- Determining the status and role of women in the different religious traditions, focusing on the status and role of women in South African churches and society;
- determining the role of the church in establishing the identity of women;
- determining the hermeneutical presuppositions in reading the Bible, and making available valid interpretations of the relevant portions in the Bible by applying these presuppositions;

- determining the relevance of patriarchy in interpreting sacred texts, and applying these interpretations in and for present-day society;
- constructing the status and role of women in antiquity;
- determining the implications of legislation on human rights for the status and role of women in church and society

### 3.3.2 Significance

Full participation of women in church and society will lead to a more effective use of human resources. Thus, since women's full participation in society and in church is vital to society's infrastructure, the significance of the research lies in a contribution to gender awareness. In this way it is hoped that the project will contribute towards the development of a more holistic and gender-inclusive South African social and cultural infrastructure.

Another benefit of the project was that historically disadvantaged researchers were involved. They were empowered in the process.

### 3.4 Methodological considerations

The broad methodology applied was a multi-disciplinary historical approach utilizing subject-specific literature. This approach can be bifurcated into strictly theological disciplines and those disciplines within the humanities that further facilitate a thorough investigation of women in church and society.

- To determine the status and role of women in different religious traditions, relevant subject-related literature (primary and secondary sources) were studied, and prominent researchers from the relevant traditions were involved.
- To determine the role of the church in establishing the identity of women, a phenomenological study was done.
- To determine the hermeneutical presuppositions in reading the books of the Bible, the current state of research in this respect was determined, evaluated, and reformulated.
- To determine the relevance of patriarchy in interpreting sacred texts, the role of patriarchy in the production and interpretation of ancient sacred texts was studied.
- To construct the status and role of women in antiquity, relevant ancient texts were studied.

- To determine the implications of legislation on human rights for the status and role of women in church and society, relevant legislation was studied and interpreted.

The contribution of each of the 48 papers is discussed below under each of the four sub-projects.

#### 4. Project 2.1a: The hermeneutical principles within Reformed Theology for interpreting Scripture on the status and role of women in the church: theory and practice (Leader: Fika J. van Rensburg)

This first component of the project was both theoretical and practical in nature. It focused on the hermeneutical principles within Reformed theology for interpreting Scripture on the status and role of women in the church, and on what the status and role of women in the contemporary church should be according to Scripture. Relevant existing research results were integrated in the study of each of the problems.

##### 4.1 Relevant theoretical issues

In his paper *Relevant theoretical issues for constructing the status and role of women in antiquity* (Workshop of Sept. 2001) **Cilliers Breytenbach** raised the issue as to the status and the role of women in the *early church*. This in turn raised a second set of issues: From which temporal and regional segments of the past of Christian women do we have enough “holy remains” to have adequate memory of them? Will it suffice to set a time limit of AD 100 but to refrain from undertaking regional or ethnic demarcations? Are the documents and other “holy remains” from the first centuries of Christianity able to serve as adequate illustrations of the position of women in the early church? Or are we as readers confined to perceptions of male authors about women (if they had cared to mention them at all)?

Breytenbach pointed out that, since the roles and status which early Christian authors ascribed to the women of their era were part of the way in which their societies defined gender, the question should be redefined to: What was the status and the role of women in the early church as part of the *Greco-Roman antiquity*? This raises the question of the categories and models with which gender-studies endeavour/ed to set the stage for the reappearing of women in our (re-)construction of Greek and Roman antiquity. Since women’s status and role in Early Christianity was dependent on their locus, one has to clarify the status and roles of the women in those cities and regions in which pre-Constantine Christianity originated and flourished. Against this backdrop our question on the



status and role of women in that part of the early *churches* has to be posed – provided we have drawn our perceptions on *status* and *role* from that part of the Roman provinces.

Breytenbach also reminded us that we are not the first to ask the question on the status and the role of women in the early churches. Therefore, it is important to establish which questions have been asked and which of these have been answered. It is also important to establish this: How do the answers of those who initiated such questions, i.a. – feminist exegesis and gender studies – influence the way in which we ask our questions and answer them?

Finally Breytenbach argued that our answers, together with those answers of others we accept, modify, or reject, would enable the historian to employ the story of Early Christianity. This must be done in such a way that the now foregone role and status of women in the early church, her story, will be so remembered in such a way that female and male readers of the historians' history will *understand* the first chapters of the sequel on the status and role of women in the church.

#### 4.2 Hermeneutical presuppositions for interpreting the Bible on gender issues

A paper on *Important hermeneutical presuppositions when interpreting the Bible on gender issues* was read by **Fika J. van Rensburg** (Workshop of May 2001). His point of departure was the acknowledgement of the authority of Scripture. He argued that this acknowledgement is being threatened equally from two fronts: Higher Criticism, and Fundamentalism. He argued that the Holy Spirit is the actual author of the Bible and the analogy of Scripture must therefore be kept in mind. Where the Bible seems to contradict itself, the problem lies with the interpreter and not the Bible. The points in case are (a) the full liberation from and end to gender discrimination (Gal. 3:28), over against (b) the limitations set for female believers (the exhortation to remain silent: 1 Cor. 14:33-35; the prohibition to teach: 1 Tim. 2:11).

The Bible, Van Rensburg argued, is God's Word for, to, and through human beings. The variety of books, written at different times and by different authors, is the product of a developmental process. The facts that the books are not timeless, but directed towards a specific time and situation, and often address a very specific issue, indicate that the Bible is intended *for human beings*.

The Bible is the eternal and forever valid Word of God. The Bible is time-addressed, but not time-bound. Some parts of Scripture can be identified

as time-bound only when Scripture itself clearly indicates it, such as the parts of Scripture dealing with the codes for slaves (Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-4:1; 1 Pet. 2:18-25). The relevant parts of Scripture regarded as limiting the role and function of female believers can be divided into two categories: (a) those with a clear indication of the fact that they are time-bound (head covering for female believers: 1 Cor. 11:2-16; and the “remain silent”-exhortation: 1 Cor. 14:33-35). In the case of the prohibition to teach (1 Tim. 2:11) there is (b) no such indication, and, therefore, caution is necessary. Nevertheless, Van Rensburg’s own approximation is this: *It is not scripturally valid to make any distinction between the status and/or function of individual believers on gender grounds.*

In **G.J.C. Jordaan’s** paper *The time-addressed character of Scripture as hermeneutical rule when interpreting the Bible on gender issues* (Workshop of May 2001), he argued that the Bible can neither be read as a timeless (super-temporal) book nor as a time-bound book. The Bible has to be read as a time-addressed book which definitely takes into consideration the time in which it was written or in which the words were spoken. Jordaan related the time-addressed character of Scripture to the growing line of clarity within the history of God’s revelation. The line of revelation did not keep developing after the New Testament had been put into writing, but rather the written word – through the power of the Holy Spirit – has continued to give light and instruction to believers in successive generations (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16,17).

Jordaan also argued that the decision whether a passage has normative authority or historical authority, or whether it is central or peripheral to the revelational scope of the passage, is a hermeneutical decision that the exegete has to make. In making this decision, the exegete should keep in mind the hermeneutical rule of *sacra scriptura sui ipsius interpretes*.

In his paper *Telling women to be like men? Some theoretical aspects in interpreting the Bible on gender issues* (Workshop of May 2001) **Gerrie Snyman** argued that there is a need for a new hermeneutical framework after apartheid, since a hermeneutic that justifies discrimination on the basis of race or gender cannot provide a church with the fruits of the spirit. He also pleaded that the human side of the process of reading the Bible should not be negated.

Snyman also stressed the importance of not viewing parts of Scripture that are merely *descriptive*, as being *prescriptive*. Hence, he criticized the search for women in the Bible showing a glimmer of power within patriarchy. Finally he argued that men cannot decide on the role of women in the church when women are not part of the decision-making

process: the Bible can no longer be read on behalf of women, but should rather be read in co-operation with them.

#### 4.3 Identity, remembrance, and transformation as key concepts in Biblical Hermeneutics

**Kari Syreeni** discussed some *basic hermeneutical* concepts and applied these to *biblical* hermeneutics in general as well as to the *particular* interests of the project in (*Identity, remembrance, and transformation as key concepts in Biblical Hermeneutics* – Workshop of May 2001). The general framework that underlies Syreeni's concept of biblical (and other) hermeneutics is the model of *three worlds*. When reading, we enter a *text world*; when thinking, feeling, interpreting things around us and making plans for the future, our primary level of action is *symbolic*; and when hungry, we need *concrete* food. Syreeni's thesis is that the concepts identity, remembrance and transformation together are the key to understanding the dialectic of *historical continuity and change*. He chose to start with the concept of *identity*, since opting for the concept of *truth* easily bends hermeneutics toward normative (systematic) theology, while opting for power tends to change its character towards politics or rhetoric. He also argued that history is only available to us as a memory: history as a written, interpreted, or experienced reality.

#### 4.4 Reading from the threshold as a possible path toward re-opening the transformative potential of biblical texts

**Elna Mouton** argued that reading from the threshold could provide a possible path towards re-opening the transformative potential of biblical texts (*Reformed exegesis from within liminal spaces?* – Workshop of Sept 2001). She also suggested a new angle on women's experiences and healing processes within the churches. The paper invited Reformed exegetes to redefine the tradition by responding creatively to its interpretive memory with respect to the position and role of women in the church and society. Mouton refocused biblical authority – as the ultimate test for the integrity and relevance of the Reformed tradition – within the dynamic (albeit patriarchal) nature of the biblical texts, and particularly within their metaphorical perspectives on God, humanity, and the earth. The theological framework presented by three controversial New Testament texts with regard to women – 1 Corinthians 14:33-40, Ephesians 5:21-6:9, and 1 Timothy 2 – was emphasized as a visionary strategy toward reconciliation and wholeness.

#### 4.5 Narrative rationality, morality and readers' identification

Taking its point of departure from Toulmin's description of the heritage of modernity, **Gerrie Snyman** suggested that the *Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika's* (GKSA) model of identification with biblical characters has become problematical (*Narrative rationality, morality and readers' identification* – Workshop of Sept 2001). The problem of character identification was discussed with the help of Esther 9 in terms of readers' identification with Esther's character. The paper concluded with a discussion of narrative rationality that requests readers to look for moral meaning and not legalistic principles with which society can be directed.

#### 4.6 Utilizing the covenant in determining the status and role of women

**Hennie Momberg** argued that it is only within the stipulations of the covenant that the woman finds, together with the man, her biblical status and role in church and society. (*The implications of the covenant as a basic structure of the history of the revelation in determining the status and role of women in the church and society* – Workshop of May 2001).

#### 4.7 The ethics of gender and biblical scholarship

In his paper *The ethics of gender and biblical scholarship*, **Pieter J.J. Botha** discussed the impact (and importance) of thinking on gender on biblical scholarship (i.e., New Testament scholarship) (Workshop of May 2002). He also indicated how gender criticism, ethical theory, and biblical study interact to promote ways of self-understanding and the renewal of theological ethics.

#### 4.8 Tradition and society and the role of women in the church

Reading a text presupposes a quest on the part of the reader to understand the text. This process is not always a smooth one, especially not when the text dates from a time and place very foreign to the present reader. Hans van Deventer investigated how the "rough places" that inevitably limit the understanding of an ancient text can be overcome to some extent (Workshop of Sept 2001). In his paper, *How to make the rough places plain – tradition and society and the role of women in the church*, Van Deventer took as point of departure the contribution of Iser to literary theory. There are two ways in which the "gaps" in the text related to the role of women in the church can be filled: from a traditional perspective; or from a perspective grounded in the present society. Van Deventer suggested that such an interaction between tradition and a present-day society is necessary for the continuation of that tradition.

## 5. Project 2.1b: The status and role of women in antiquity (until 200 AD) (Leader: Elma Cornelius)

This second component of the project included both historical and philological aspects. It focused especially on the way in which relevant pericopes in the Bible are to be interpreted, taking into cognisance the socio-historic context of each passage. Relevant existing research was integrated in the study of each of the problems.

### 5.1 Deliverance via dynamic verbosity

**Robin Gallaher Branch** indicated how women could apply words to gain a victory: *Women who win with words: Deliverance via dynamic verbosity* (Workshop of Sept. 2002). Branch indicated how the wise woman of Abel Beth Maacah turned the tables on Joab (2 Sam. 20); how Abigail tamed David, a hot-headed hero (1 Sam. 25); and how the older sister of Moses, by tradition Miriam, guided a princess of Egypt toward motherhood (Ex. 2). All three these characters proved to be pivotal in Israel's history. As winners with words, these orators contributed dynamically to the biblical text by providing an alternative model of deliverance, one showing that victory could come by means other than the sword. These women worked towards life and the common good. Branch examined the similarities and differences of these three political saviours and suggested insights their stories could provide for today.

### 5.2 The male monotheistic image of God in the Old Testament

People experience God in heightened awareness that can only be represented by images and symbols. Each culture has its symbols, words, and images for God. In her paper, *Women and the male monotheistic image of God in the Old Testament*, **Frances Klopper** (Workshop of May 2001) argued that many, if not all of the images we have of God, are of a male figure. She added that the male images of God have become increasingly problematic for women because these male images typically justify the subordinate position of women in church and society. Klopper explored the history of ancient Israelite religion in order to ascertain the context of the male monotheistic image of God in the Old Testament. She contended that, once we understand its context and the way women in Old Testament times dealt with the problem of relating to a God represented as male, a possible solution could be at hand for the way forward.

### 5.3 Feminine wisdom

At a first glance, women did not take a prominent place in the Hebrew Bible. The book of Daniel is no exception to this generalization. Most of the female characters mentioned in this book are not strong characters. Not one of the Jewish hero-figures is a woman. The only exception to this rule concerning female characters seems to be the “queen” in Daniel 5. **Hans van Deventer**, taking his cue from Brenner who, along with Van Dijk-Hemmes, introduced an alternative to “feminist” studies of the Hebrew Bible conducted in a historical mould, situated himself within the field of “feminist” interpretation (*Traces of feminine wisdom in the Book of Daniel* – Workshop of May 2002). Brenner and Van Dijk-Hemmes’s contribution lies in the re-routing of gender positions entrenched in the texts away from gendering authorship to that of gendering the text’s authority. This route has opened a quest for identifying so-called female voices within the text. Van Deventer proposed that a feminine wisdom tradition possibly lies behind the text of Daniel 5:10-12 and concluded by questioning the present function of the character of the “queen” in this text.

### 5.4 Patriarchy and the New Testament

Gender is constantly defined – it is a combination of conscious and unconscious social and cultural construction. **Elma Cornelius** argued that in ancient times Plato and Aristotle provided us with two examples of gender theory (*Patriarchy and the New Testament* – Workshop of May 2001). Aristotle’s notion of natural order pre-elects a woman’s role through recourse to her nature as natural subject – women are then the natural and biological inferiors of the patriarchal male. Plato, on the other hand, saw gender roles as flexible social constructions. It seems as if Aristotle’s view played an important role in the way many understood and still understand the nature and roles of women. If gender theory is based on the difference between men and women (in other words, following Aristotle), one ends up in patriarchy. For a long time modern researchers have accepted that patriarchy was the only social organization in the ancient world. New research, however, seems to indicate that Plato’s view did not fall on deaf ears. In ancient society contradictory forces were at work – therefore the position of women and the social attitude towards them were correspondingly diverse. Cornelius contended that we are thus confronted by two opposite major social organizations in ancient society. The focus of her paper was to determine in what respects the New Testament partakes of the patriarchal views of antiquity and in what respects it is diametrically opposed to it.

In his paper *Paul and Love Patriarchalism: Problems and Prospects* (Workshop of Sept. 2002) **Kari Syreeni** investigated the term “love patriarchalism” (*Liebepatriarchalismus*), coined in the 1970s by Gerd Theissen in his seminal sociological studies on Paul and the Corinthian community. This concept of love patriarchalism has been criticized by feminist and liberationist theological scholars for political conservatism. Syreeni argued that this criticism, although understandable, is no less politically conditioned than is a conservative view. Syreeni pointed out that the exegetical problems with “love patriarchalism” rather lie in its generalising nature. However, this concept depicts one influential post-Pauline stream of tradition and raises vital questions concerning Paul’s contribution to this development.

**Louis Kruger** argued that at an early stage in the development of Christianity an attempt was made to create a synthesis between the beliefs of Christianity, the tenets of ancient Greek thought, and Roman law and culture (*Prejudice against women in Christianity – root causes – Workshop of Sept. 2001*). The attempted synthesis had the effect of introducing into Christianity elements that were extra-biblical and fundamentally contrary to the central New Testament’s redemptive message. These elements have remained in Christianity to this day. As a consequence of the attempted synthesis, the radical uniqueness and newness of the Christian faith have in some respects not fully been actualised. In particular, the consequences of redemption have not been fully actualised in regard to the view of woman and her position in Christianity.

Kruger contended that in both Greek and Roman culture the dominant societal notion was patriarchy. Patriarchy as a societal cohesive order system can be benevolent; but patriarchy, in the sense of an androcentric, hierarchical, societal notion of male domination, manifests a one-sided view of humanity and therefore creates the possibility of abuse and oppression. Patriarchy has no viable theoretical basis but is merely a societal notion that causes women and men to be socialised into the roles that patriarchal society expects of them – including the role of the “superior” male and the “inferior” female. Patriarchy is clearly rejected by the Bible in favour of theocentrism, but, to a great extent, biblical exegesis has been biased in favour of a patriarchal interpretation. The patriarchal notion within Christianity and Western society mutually support and perpetuate each other. Originating from Roman culture and Roman law, patriarchal empirism became embedded in Christianity – so that the first church was referred to as the “Holy Roman Empire” – as well as a legalistic approach to redemption: the early church continued the ideal to rule the world in the name of God, in similar fashion as the patriarchal, militaristic and legalistic Roman Empire. Christianity distorted

Roman patriarchy, which was not derogatory of woman, to include a derogation of woman. Because of the unity between Church and State the above precepts became strongly embedded in Christianity and the radical differences between patriarchy and Christianity's message of redemption were not adequately identified and distinguished in Roman Catholicism as well as in Protestantism.

### 5.5 Hierarchy and the female recessive body

**Johannes N. Vorster** contended in his paper *Hierarchy and the female recessive body in Early Christianity* (Workshop of Sept. 2001) that the "recessive body", a distinction formulated by Leder, has to be taken into account in reading ancient literature. He argued that the principle of hierarchy and the notion of the recessive body open possibilities for understanding social interaction in antiquity. At the same time, however, these aspects problematize early Christian models for contemporary gender relations. The recessive body of antiquity can be constructed by taking humoral theory into consideration.

### 5.6 Submission and violence

Gender relations are a very serious contemporary issue. The democratic ethos has problematized traditional gender roles and social behaviour. Feminist critiques, among others, have uncovered the pervasiveness of male violence towards women. In his paper, *Submission and violence: exploring gender-relations in the first-century World*, **Pieter J.J. Botha** (Workshop of May 2001) argued that to Christians and others dealing with Christianity a proper understanding of New Testament perspectives on matters of sexuality, gender roles, male violence, authority in relationships, and so forth, is of crucial significance. However, depictions of such relations are often presented unrealistically; they ignore certain historical sources and favour inappropriate theoretical models. By means of a wide range of sources, Botha constructed and interpreted aspects of the mentality underlying first-century men-women interaction. Generally speaking, gender relations in antiquity seem to reveal a tendency to inherent *violence*. Gender relations clearly were *fundamentally* hierarchical. According to Botha a distinct narcissistic and egocentric motivation can also be detected within these relations.

### 5.7 Initiation of women

**Marianne Dircksen** highlighted this question: Has the discontinuance of formal initiation ceremonies in church and society contributed to the present identity crises experienced by adolescent girls? (*Initiation of women into church and society* – Workshop of May 2002). This question



was put into perspective by a short overview of the most important initiation practices that women were subjected to in ancient societies. In ancient societies all religious acts were supposedly founded by gods or civilising heroes or mythical ancestors. These origins provided the required authority and firmly established the initiate's new societal and religious role. This holds true in the case of initiation rituals pertaining to women in indigenous African, as well as in ancient Greek and Roman cultures. Very few such rituals have been retained in contemporary societies and religions, and the collective identity has been replaced by a strong focus on individuality. Dircksen asked whether these tendencies have contributed to the dilemma of a teenager searching for her own identity and her rightful place in church and society.

## 5.8 The husband-wife code in the New Testament

**Brent Connock** contributed towards constructing the literary context of the husband-wife code in the New Testament in his paper *The literary context of the husband-wife code in the New Testament* (Workshop of May 2001). Connock investigated the contributions made by Graeco-Roman and Jewish authors to the *Haustafeln*. Gaining a better understanding of the embellished Christian applications of the husband-wife code necessitates one to be familiar with the early forms as used in the societies that established and utilised these codes. Connock established the varying views as held and practised by Graeco-Roman and Jewish societies. He also gave pointers as to the effect a construction of the literary context should have on the interpretation of relevant pericopes in the New Testament.

## 5.9 Gifts and gender roles

**Heinrich Grosskopf** attempted to establish whether the fact that male and female individuals are bestowed with certain gifts makes possible a more "equal" view on gender-roles. In order to prove this hypothesis Grosskopf exegeted the verses mentioning the gifts of the Holy Spirit that men and women can have individually as members of Christ's body (*What light do gifts in Romans 12:3-8 shed on gender-roles in New Testament context?* – Workshop of May 2002).

In a second paper, *Gifts among the genders? Some metatheoretical considerations*, Grosskopf proposed that auxiliary disciplines (such as sociology, psychology, law – i.e. human rights – and feminism) make a definite contribution to theological research on gender issues and that they provide stimulating insights for the debate on this matter (Workshop of Sept. 2002).

## 5.10 The place of God, men, and women in the Letter to the Ephesians

In her paper *The place of God, men and women in the Letter to the Ephesians* – Workshop of Sept. 2002) **Lilly Nortjé-Meyer** pointed to the fact that already in the fourth century BC the household was seen as the basic unity of society. Even Aristotle said that the smallest and primary parts of the household were master and slave, husband and wife, and father and children. The head of the household was expected to hold all three superior roles. If the master/husband/father ruled his household appropriately, and if governmental authorities similarly performed their duties, human life would reflect the harmony intended by God/the gods as he/they ruled the universe. Nortjé-Meyer used the pyramidal structures of the universe, the church, and the household to explain the author's portrayal of the relationship between God, men and women.

## 5.11 Guidelines to women for proper behaviour (1 Tim. 2)

In the paper *Voorskrifte vir betaamlike gedrag vir die vrou in 1 Timoteus 2: vir die erediens of vir die huwelik?* (Workshop of Sept. 2001) **Douw Breed** contended that the guidelines given in 1 Timothy 2 do not concern women's conduct in a worship service but rather are guidelines for their marriage relationships.

## 5.12 The widows in the congregation according to 1 Timothy 5:14

**Christopher Rabali** argued that 1 Timothy 5:9-15 is one of those New Testament texts that makes apparent that many female church members had key and important roles to play within the early churches alongside their male counterparts (*An interpretation of the exhortations to the widows in the congregation in 1 Timothy 5:14* – Workshop of May 2001). This passage from Scripture indicates that the early churches regarded the gifts and skills of female members as being important. Rabali, however, contended that it would be stretching the rules of biblical interpretation to use passages such as 1 Timothy 5:9-15 in support of the contemporary arguments for the ordination of women in offices of the church.

## 6. Project 2.1c: The status and role of women in prominent religious traditions (Leader: Koos Vorster)

The third component of this project included both historical and ethical aspects and focused on the view of women in prominent religious traditions. Different themes were investigated to determine the religious

influences on the role of women in religious communities and in society at large.

### 6.1 The status and role of women in African traditional religions

In their paper *The status and role of women in African traditional religions* (Workshop of Sept. 2001) Albert Thugwana and Koos Vorster stated that in the traditional African context women are regarded as inferior to men and are supposed to submit themselves to men. In fact women are taught to be submissive to men even in the earliest stages of their lives. Thugwana and Vorster then highlighted the fact that although women do submit to their husbands, their status is not reduced to that of a slave. The phenomenon of *lobola* was also explained, since some people mistakenly view it as the practice of buying a woman.

### 6.2 Conceptualisation of women in Islam

When thinking of a Muslim woman, the first image that comes to mind is that of a veiled woman, or, especially after 11 September 2001, of the *burqa* in Afghanistan. This image is immediately viewed as oppressive and as an indication of the inferior status of women in Islam. In her paper *Conceptualisation of women in Islam and its possible symbolic value* (Workshop of May 2002) **Georgina Jardim** explored the origins of the *hijab* (the head covering) and gave an overview of Muslim women's opinion of it. Jardim raised the question as to how this concept functioned in earlier Islamic societies and whether the conceptual formulation has changed today. She argued that the conceptualisation of women has a function other than apparent oppression.

### 6.3 The recognition of Muslim marriages in South Africa

Monogamous marriages as defined in Roman-Dutch law (referred to as civil marriages) are, in general, the only marriages recognised as valid marriages in South Africa. A marriage is described as a voluntary union between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. Christa Rautenbach argued that in this definition lies the first and most important reason for the non-recognition of Muslim marriages (*The recognition of Muslim marriages in South Africa: quo vadimus?* – Workshop of May 2002). These marriages are not monogamous but either *de facto* or potentially polygamous. According to South African common law, these marriages are *contra bonos mores* and therefore void. Rautenbach contended that Section 15 of the 1996 Constitution recognises freedom of religion and makes provision for the recognition of religious and traditional marriages by means of legislation. However, certain sections in the 1996 Constitution seem fraught with potential conflict. Rautenbach

concluded by discussing the proposals of the South African Law Commission regarding the future recognition of Muslim marriages in South Africa.

#### 6.4 The status of women in the Catholic Church

Kathleen Boner discussed the position and stereotype of Catholic women in general and of religious women (women vowed to the service of Christ and the Church) in her paper *The status of women in the Catholic Church and its historical base* (Workshop of Sept. 2001). The influence of Vatican Council II and the subsequent renewal of religious life on the attitude of nuns to women's rights to full participation in the work of the Church was also touched upon. Boner discussed the influence of the work, writings, and debate generated by religious women in the USA and the response of male theologians to the request for the ordination of women. She voiced opinions based on oral evidence of the attitude of a minority of priests and seminary students in respect of the fuller participation of women in the Catholic Church. She then gave an overview of the contribution of women to the liturgy, catechesis, and material support of the Catholic Church in South Africa; and also highlighted the present situation in South Africa and the work being done to promote the rights of women in the Catholic Church.

#### 6.5 The gender issue in the GKSA

The ways in which women are viewed today has changed a lot since the beginning of time. From being regarded as a mere male possession, a female has become a person in her own right. In Christ, women were liberated and had an important task and function in the church and kingdom of God. **Ronel Pieterse** argued that this new identity of women has, however, never been fully realised in church history (*The gender issue in the Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (GKSA) up to date* – Workshop of May 2001). In the course of history women were again enslaved, but then to a specific mindset of what their role and function in society and the church should be. Pieterse pointed to the fact that in the church, and in this instance the GKSA, men were the people who formed opinions about what women should and should not do – in life in general and in the church in particular. Historically the rise of feminism and the emancipation of women began to change this view and women have progressively challenged their allotted roles in society and in the church. Women's true position in Christ was reinvestigated and, concomitant with this renewed interest in the position of women, certain relevant issues came to light and were subsequently discussed. Pieterse indicated that in the GKSA the most prominent issues that have been raised concerning women in the church were the wearing of hats, women's right

to vote, and the still pending question whether women could be office-bearers. She concluded with a challenge to the GKSA to resolve this issue soon.

**Wim Vergeer** applied theories of T.S. Kuhn on the progress of science in his study of the changing position of women in the Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (GKSA) (*Anomalies in Reformed interpretation of Scripture on the status of women in church and society* – Workshop of May 2001). Vergeer argued that the resolutions and appendices of the 1988 Synod of the GKSA concerning the issue of women in office is the governing paradigm on the status and role of women in the church. He contended that this paradigm has in recent times increasingly been challenged by a number of anomalies that can no longer be adequately explained. He highlighted and discussed anomalies on ecumenical, hermeneutic and exegetic levels, as well as anomalies in the application of Scripture. Vergeer concluded that a new paradigm that could explain all the relevant phenomena is on the horizon.

## 7. Project 2.1d: The status and role of women in the church today (Leader: Ronel Pieterse)

The fourth component of the project included both phenomenological and ethical aspects. This component mainly focused on a phenomenological study of the status and role of women in (mainly Protestant) South African churches, the implications of the legislation on human rights, and suggested *modi operandi* for the way forward.

### 7.1 Judicial matters

The twentieth century has seen the systematic rectification of women's rights in social institutions and in society at large. This process included two important documents of the United Nations. These are the Vienna Declaration of 1983 and the Beijing Declaration of 1995. These documents address the remnants of the old patriarchal societies in the contemporary world with clear statements on women's rights in societies throughout the present-day world.

#### 7.1.1 Gender, religion, and human rights

In his paper Koos Vorster contended that one must concede that, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the noble principles of the 1983 and 1985 Declarations have still not been realised in many societies (*Gender, religion and human rights* – Workshop of May 2002). Recent studies about the violation of women's rights reveal the presence of various cultural practices where women are ill-treated and condemned by

customs to illiteracy and poverty. The deeper roots of some of these cultural customs are to be found in religious convictions. Many sociologists and theologians have the conviction that religion can be seen as undoubtedly the most important shaper and enforcer of the image and role of women in culture and society. Many contemporary abuses of women's rights thus root in a particular religious perspective of gender, that is that men are superior and that women, because of their inferiority, need not have access to education, development and economic activity. In other words, in many cases in today's society women's rights are still violated on the basis of certain religious convictions. This social phenomenon greatly impedes the process of the liberation of women because people wonder why bother about women's rights if religion tells them that women are doomed to inferiority.

Vorster argued that these convictions have currently again been actively promoted and that this development can be ascribed to the resurgence of fundamentalism in religion. Vorster defined fundamentalism as the activist affirmation of a particular faith that defines that faith in an absolute and a literalist way. Fundamentalism implies the effort to purify or reform the beliefs and practices of adherents in accord with the self-defined fundamentals underlying that faith. Fundamentalist interpretation entails a self-conscious effort to avoid compromise, adaptation, or critical re-interpretation of the basic texts or sources of belief. Vorster pointed out that this kind of fundamentalism is vibrant in movements in Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism. An outstanding characteristic of fundamentalism is that it cannot function without an intense and hateful confrontation with a self-defined enemy – and hence its militant onslaught.

Vorster concluded that the violation of women's rights today can mainly be ascribed to vestiges of fundamentalist interpretations of the texts and sources of mainstream religions. In this respect Vorster focused on Christianity, Islam, and African traditional religions. Three aspects of these three religions were examined in particular: (1) Their respective influences in the disregard of women's rights in society; (2) their historical and current fundamentalist interpretations of the women's rights; and (3) the possibilities of a solution on the basis of their historical texts.

**Koos Vorster** and **Georgina Jardim** dealt with the advancement of women's rights since the inception of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the UN in their paper *The position on the rights of women in the current human rights debate* (Workshop of May 2001). Much has been done regarding the recognition and formulation of women's rights in political, social, and economic fields. However, vio-

lations of women's rights still occur on a global scale. Vorster and Jardim argued that a potent force in these violations is religious extremism in some of the major religious traditions. This argument has been unfolded by investigating biblicism in Christianity, scripturalism in Islam and traditionalism in African religions. A study of these proves that the concepts of women influenced by religious beliefs contribute to the violation of women rights in societies where these traditions are major religious and cultural forces.

### 7.1.2 The rights of women and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996)

During the Workshop of September 2001 **Rolien Roos** highlighted the issues of women's rights at stake in her paper *The rights of women in South African Christian churches*. The application of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996), and more particularly, the Bill of Rights contained in Chapter 2 of the Constitution, on Christian churches in South Africa was analysed. Roos utilized this application with specific reference to the rights of women as members of the congregation, church council, or clergy. She addressed the following issues: The supremacy of the Constitution, the application and interpretation of the Bill of Rights, the right to equality, the right to freedom of religion, belief and opinion, freedom of association and the rights of cultural, religious and linguistic communities, freedom of trade, occupation and profession, the limitation of rights, *Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act* 4 of 2000, and the applicability of labour legislation.

In his paper *Ending discrimination against women in the Christian church – the fundamental obstacle*, **Louis Kruger** (Workshop of May 2002) argued that the Christian church has not fully distinguished itself from its tribal-patriarchal societal origins with regard to the unique otherness and radical meaning of its central message of redemption. The gospel is non-patriarchal, non-hierarchical, non-racist, and non-sexist. In consequence, he argued, the tribal-patriarchal elements still inherent in Christianity remain fundamentally obstructive as tools for removing discrimination against women within the Christian church. South African law, he argued, has distinguished itself from its historical, patriarchal societal origins by a legal-theoretical clarification. At present, and in some respects regarding the position of women, South African law is nearer to the ideals of the message of redemption than the practice of the Christian church. Kruger pleaded for an urgent re-identification and purification within the Christian church of its manner of proclamation the central message of redemption, not only for the sake of ending discrimination against the women, but also with the aim of preserving the general credibility of the Christian church and the continued acceptance of the message it proclaims.

In the debate regarding the role of women in the church, the concepts of equality and specifically gender equality are of vital importance. Churches and theologians are confronted by the question whether Scripture does or does not promote an inequality between men and women due to the patriarchal context in which it originated. In his paper *Gender equality in the light of the new SA Constitution and Scripture* (Workshop of May 2001) **Nico Vorster** attempted to clarify these concepts of equality. He contended that there is a fundamental difference between the biblical concept of equality and the contemporary Western concept of equality. He identified the main differences by way of a comparison of the biblical concept of equality with the South African constitutional value of equality which finds its origin in the global human rights discourse.

## 7.2 The contribution of feminism to the debate

**Laura Maleya** argued that feminist theories provide a critical analysis of the forces that subordinate women to men (*Feminism: Twists and Trends* – Workshop of Sept. 2001). Maleya contended that, since feminist theology is diverse and covers a wide range of dimensions, it is inappropriate to speak of feminism in the singular. She also gave an overview of feminist trends and their proponents.

**Hanna Stenström** turned to some basic questions in current feminist theology and exegesis related to the task of using Scripture in bringing about a change in the role and status of women in church and society (*Some reflections about the use of Scripture in work for change – a feminist perspective* – Workshop of Sept. 2002). The first group of questions is related to the role of the history of the Bible in the construction of contemporary theology and church practices. Stenström argued that history has often functioned as normative, in both feminist and non-feminist theology. She weighed the pros and cons of such a use of history for feminist theology and briefly mentioned some alternative strategies for feminist work with early Christian history and for using the Bible in contemporary work for change. The second group of questions treated by Stenström was related to the concept of “tradition”. She presented and discussed some alternative views in feminist theology and proposed that the view formulated by Sheila Greeve Davaney can be useful when biblical scholars choose to work for change in society and churches.

In her paper *What difference can the sense feminist biblical scholars speak make in church and society?* (Workshop of Sept. 2001) **Maretha Jacobs** focused on two matters: (1) Some ways in which feminist scholars address the dualisms characteristic of patriarchal society; and



(2) the Bible in feminist discourses. She made a few suggestions as to the possible wider significance of these.

**Alta Swart** argued that the view of Scripture feminist theology endorses boils down to the fact that it sees the Bible as a sexist book written by men (*Godsbeskouing, Skrifbeskouing en Skrifhantering van die Feministiese Teologie* – Workshop of Sept. 2002).

### 7.3 Autobiographical criticism

In her paper *Autobiographical criticism and Feminist Bible Criticism: “My” Song of Songs* (Workshop of Sept. 2001) **Athalya Brenner** argued that for her the Bible – including the Song of Songs – was an important part of her formative years and still is a significant component of her daily existence. It belongs to her life experience, the emotive baggage that accompanies her everywhere. She linked several Song of Songs-texts to specific and recurrent personal experiences and social activities of her past and present life. She then returned to the question how this intimate and emotive connection with the Song of Songs affects her academic study of, and *vice versa*, how the Song of Songs, the Bible in fact, affects her non-professional life.

**Sarah Jane Wessels** told her story as a woman who received the call to the ministry at the age of seven (*Sara se belofte: ’n Vroue-predikant se verhaal* – Workshop of Sept. 2002). However, it was only after much suffering and experiencing all kinds of discrimination because of being a woman that at the age of 63 she was ordained as minister. Her story is but one of the many stories of many women whose lives have been sadly obstructed by paternalistic and oppressive structures of the church to which they belong and the society in which they operate. Born in Nigeria and a daughter of missionaries, Sarah was named Ngupasen (The called one) by the local Tiv-speaking people. Wessels explained how her life’s experiences parallel in many ways those of Sarah in the Old Testament. Like Sarah she can now also say: “... God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.”

**Madipoane Masenya** contended that the Bible, in African South African contexts, has historically been used as a double-edged sword, both to hurt and to heal, and that this is the case even now (*Between two forms of authority: The Bible and African South African women’s experiences* – Workshop of Sept. 2001). She argued that the dilemma facing African women’s liberationist Bible readers is that of authority: Which of the two forms of authority (Biblical authority and the authority of women’s experiences) should be given priority over the other? Her paper

attempted to address the tension experienced by these Bible readers as they try to find their space between these two forms of authority.

#### 7.4 Phenomenological studies of the role and status of women

**Phia van Helden** argued that each generation of Christians should test its traditions under the microscope of the Bible and be ready to reform where necessary (*Die aktiwiteit van Gereformeerde belydende vrouelidmate tydens die erediens in 2002* – Workshop of Sept. 2002). She then gave details of the survey she had conducted – using the responses of women members of the Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (GKSA). These women responded to questions concerning their inner activity during worship services. Van Helden then linked these responses to the outer activities and lack of activities that confront women in the GKSA.

**Annette van der Walt** reported on her fieldwork in the congregations of the Vaal Triangle in her paper *The ministries of women in the congregation – the Classis Vaalriver of the GKSA as sample* (Workshop of May 2001). Van der Walt described how church councils and female members (who because of their gender are not eligible to the church council) see, experience, and organise ministry by women.

In 1990 the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa (DRC) decided to allow women to the office of minister. **Christina Landman** argued that this was not a popular decision with congregations and pointed out that this decision was not implemented till 1994 when the first woman, Gretha Heymans, was ordained as minister of the student congregation, Kowsie Kampus (*Do women ministers really make a difference?* – Workshop of May 2002). Today, 12 years after the decision was taken, only 16 women have been ordained as ministers in the DRC, that is 0,75% of the 2132 ministers serving in this church. Only nine of these ministers work in a full-time capacity in a congregation; the others are “tent makers”. The questions Landman addressed in her paper, include these: Do these women, even though they are few, make a difference in the church? What type of difference do they make? And do we need more of them, and why or why not? She based her answers on interviews with the women concerned, as well as with members of their congregations.

**George Lotter** argued that women from different backgrounds in South Africa suffered considerably before, during, and after the apartheid years (*Compassion and South African women* – Workshop of May 2002). True compassion, to his mind, is the most important starting point in dealing with the predicament of South African women. By listening to women’s stories, sympathizing with them, and grasping the real depth of their

suffering, heartfelt compassion towards them is the crucial point of departure in the improvement of their position in South Africa.

## 8. An evaluation of the research project: Women in Church and Society

### 8.1 The success measured against the aim of the project

Although it is still too early to make an accurate assessment, there is sufficient evidence to state that the aim of the project (to contribute toward changing the present lowly status of women in South African society and especially in some South African churches, and the RCSA in particular) has been reached. What is clear is that the project has already contributed toward promoting gender awareness, not the least by having female researchers report on their research. This aim was brought about not only by the delivery of each of the 48 papers, but also by the reports on the project carried in daily papers and over the radio. Furthermore, already at this stage 10 of the papers have been published as scholarly articles in accredited journals, and another 10 are submitted for refereeing. Another 15 will have been submitted to accredited journals by the end of 2002.<sup>3</sup>

Measuring the contribution of the project against its objectives urges for a more accurate evaluation.

### 8.2 The status and role of women in the different religious traditions

The status and role of women in different religious traditions, focusing on the status and role of women in South African churches and society, has been determined. First of all, it became clear that the problem of discrimination against women is not limited to Christian traditions. Regarding South African churches, it became evident that a significant majority of members are not satisfied with the *status quo* or with the present gender-discriminating practices many churches employ. In addition, they also are not in agreement with the so-called Biblical justification for many of these practices.

### 8.3 The role of the church in establishing the identity of women

The role of the church in establishing the identity of women has not been fully determined, and further research needs to be done. In particular, the

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3 All these statistics are reflected under point 9 (p. 747-750): *A synopsis of the papers read at the four workshops.*

discrepancy between legislation on human rights regarding the status and role of women in church and the actual practice of discrimination in many churches need further research. The upsurge of fundamentalism in many religions – including Christianity – is also in need of research.

#### 8.4 Hermeneutical presuppositions in reading the Bible

The project succeeded in producing plausible theoretical guidelines for constructing the status and role of women in antiquity. However, the determination of the hermeneutical presuppositions in reading the Bible could only be approximated. It became clear that there are at least three positions, and within these there are also varying degrees in which they conform to the generalised description given below. The three positions are:

- Those who acknowledge the canonical authority of the Bible, but disregard the socio-historic context of the different books of the Bible.
- Those who view the books of the Bible as mere human products of the societies in which they were written.
- Those who acknowledge the canonical authority of the Bible and also take the socio-historic context of the different books of the Bible into consideration.

Those in position (1) in a fundamentalist and simplistic way view gender discrimination in present-day churches as biblically founded, since small sections of the Bible place limitations on women. Those in position (2) view the Bible as the reason for gender discrimination and are therefore critical of the Bible itself. They view gender discrimination as not acceptable in spite of what they believe the Bible said to its first readers/hearers. For these persons, therefore, a biblical view of people's roles in society seems to be irrelevant. Those in position (3) view the present gender discrimination in church and society as unbiblical and the result of invalid interpretations of the relevant portions of Scripture as well as of the message of the Scripture as a whole. They adhere to the canonical authority of Scripture and strive for complete gender equality exactly on the grounds of this canonical authority.

#### 8.5 Valid interpretations of relevant parts of the Bible

Valid interpretations of relevant sections in the Bible (using the defined presuppositions from each of three positions defined in 8.4) have been made available, both as workshop papers and as scholarly articles. Some have also been reworked into articles for popular ecclesiastical magazines.

## 8.6 The relevance of patriarchy in interpreting the Bible

The relevance of patriarchy for the interpretation of the Bible has been established. The definition of its relevance differs according to the positions 1-3 indicated in 8.4 above. Therefore, the applications of these interpretations in and for present-day society differ accordingly. The three positions have in common that they view patriarchy as the dominant societal structure in biblical times. However, they differ on the relevance of recognizing the role patriarchy played in ancient societies and the problems it creates for non-patriarchal societies reading the Bible.

- Those in position (1) mostly view patriarchy as the norm also for present-day church and society and therefore, on the basis of Scripture, maintains that gender discrimination should be the biblical standard within the church today. In regard to society, however, they do not actively oppose gender equality.
- Those in position (2) regard the validity of the prescriptions given in the Bible as to gender roles to be limited to biblical times, because the books of the Bible are viewed as products of the societies of Biblical times. They strive for gender equality in church and society. The fact that gender equality is in contradiction of their interpretation of the Bible on this issue is not a matter of concern for them, since they view the biblical position not as totally relevant for today (i.e. they have a different view on the locus of the Bible's authority).
- Those in position (3) view patriarchy as the dominant societal structure within which God revealed his will on gender (and other matters like salvation, atonement, reconciliation, and healing). For example, God's revelation in the Greek and Hebrew languages needs to be translated into today's languages and indeed is successfully translated throughout the world. Likewise, God's revelation on gender issues in a patriarchal society needs to be "translated" when contextualized for non-patriarchal societies both in South Africa and throughout the world. The South African Constitution, for instance, affirms equality of all people regardless of race, gender, or religious persuasion. Therefore, people sympathetic to position (3) advocate complete gender equality in church and society – exactly because of their interpretation of God's revelation on gender issues.

## 8.7 Constructing the status and role of women in antiquity

This objective has been reached successfully. In the dominant patriarchal society of biblical times gender discrimination was institutionalised,

and this had a very definite effect on the status and role of women, both in religious movements as well as in society in general.

### **8.8 The implications of legislation on human rights for the status and role of women in church and society**

The implications of South African legislation on human rights for the status and role of women in church and society have been successfully determined. Where there is anything less than complete gender equality, the status and role of women are in contradiction to the South African legislation on human rights. It has also been established that private organisations in which membership is a matter of a person's own choice (such as churches) will need to rethink the validity of their own gender policy, especially within the growing human rights culture in South Africa. It is probable that there will be a test case in the constitutional court on this matter in the foreseeable future.

### **8.9 Conclusion**

In the light of this assessment of the outcome of the research project against its aim and objectives, it is clear that the project has been successful. The workshops, papers, and articles have contributed toward defining and promoting a new way of thinking about the identity of women and the differing and opposing stances on gender. In some years time it will become clear to what extent the project has contributed, first toward having women restored to full participation in all spheres of life in church and society, and second toward the development of a more holistic and gender-inclusive South African social and cultural infrastructure.

## **9. A synopsis of the papers read at the four workshops**

The following papers were read at the four workshops, with the researcher and date indicated with each paper, as well as the publication status of the contribution.

	<b>Researcher, date, and paper title</b>	<b>Publication status</b>
1.	Boner, Kathleen. Sept. 2001. The status of women in the Catholic Church and its historical base.	
2.	Botha, Pieter J.J. May 2001. Submission and violence: exploring gender-relations in the first century world.	<i>Neotestamentica</i> , 34(1) 2001.
3.	Botha, Pieter J.J. May 2002. The ethics of gender and biblical scholarship.	Still te be submitted.
4.	Botha, Pieter J.J. Sept 2001. Eroticism and morality in the NT world.	Still te be submitted.
5.	Branch, Robin Gallaher. Sept 2002. Women who win with words: Deliverance via dynamic verbosity.	Submitted to <i>In die Skriflig</i> (2002-10-14).
6.	Breed, Douw. Sept 2001. Voorskrifte vir betaamlike gedrag vir die vrou in 1 Timoteus 2: vir die erediens of vir die huwelik?	To be submitted as three articles to <i>In die Skriflig</i>
7.	Brenner, Athalya. Sept 2001. Autobiographical criticism and Feminist Bible Criticism: "My" Song of Songs.	In: Brenner, A. & Fontaine, C.R., eds. <i>The Song of Songs: A feminist companion to the Bible</i> . Sheffield : Sheffield Academic Press. p. 154-168.
8.	Breytenbach, Cilliers. Sept 2001. Relevant theoretical issues for constructing the status and role of women in antiquity.	
9.	Connock, Brent & Van Rensburg, Fika J. May 2001. The literary context of the husband-wife code in the New Testament.	<i>Acta Patristica et Byzantina</i> 12:68-85.
10.	Cornelius, Elma M. May 2001. Patriarchy and the New Testament.	Accepted by <i>Acta Patristica</i> .
11.	Dirksen, Marianne. May 2002. Initiation of women into church and society.	To be submitted to <i>In die Skriflig</i> .
12.	Grosskopf, Heinrich. May 2002. What light do gifts in Romans 12:3-8 shed on gender-roles in New Testament context?	Submitted to <i>In die Skriflig</i> .

13.	Grosskopf, Heinrich. Sept 2002. "Gifts among the genders?" – some metatheoretical considerations.	To be submitted to <i>In die Skriflig</i> .
14.	Jacobs, Maretha. Sept 2001. What difference can the sense feminist biblical scholars speak make in church and society?	
15.	Janse van Rensburg, Fika J. May 2001. Important hermeneutical presuppositions when interpreting the Bible on gender issues.	To be submitted to <i>In die Skriflig</i> .
16.	Jardim, Georgina. May 2002. Conceptualisation of women in Islam and its possible symbolic value.	Submitted to <i>In die Skriflig</i> for refereeing (2002-10-14).
17.	Jordaan, Gert J.C. May 2001. The time-addressed character of Scripture as hermeneutical rule when interpreting the Bible on gender issues.	To be submitted to <i>In die Skriflig</i> by end of November 2002.
18.	Klopper, Frances. May 2001. Women and the male monotheistic image of God in the Old Testament.	<i>In die Skriflig</i> , 36(3) 2002: 421-438.
19.	Kruger, Louis. May 2002. Ending discrimination against women in the Christian church – the fundamental obstacle.	Submitted to <i>In die Skriflig</i> .
20.	Kruger, Louis. Sept 2001. Prejudice against woman in Christianity – Root Causes.	<i>Studia Historia Ecclesiasticae</i> XXVIII(1):184-220.
21.	Landman, Christina. May 2002. Do women ministers really make a difference?	To be submitted to <i>In die Skriflig</i> (or maybe another journal).
22.	Lotter, George. May 2002. Compassion and the South African women.	To be submitted to <i>In die Skriflig</i> by end January 2003.
23.	Maleya, Laura. Sept. 2001. Feminism: Twists and Trends.	
24.	Masenya, Madipoane. Sept. 2001. Between two forms of authority: The Bible and African South African women's experiences.	Not to be published.
25.	Momberg, Hennie. May 2001. The implications of the covenant as a basic structure of the history of the revelation in determining the status and role of women in the church and society.	To be submitted to <i>In die Skriflig</i> .



26.	Mouton, Elna. Sept. 2001. Reformed exegesis from within liminal spaces?	To be published as "conference proceedings" by the Centre for Theological Inquiry, Princeton under the title: "Surprised by new contexts? Challenges of Reformed exegesis from within liminal spaces".
27.	Nortjé-Meyer, Lilly. Sept. 2002. The place of God, men and women in the letter to the Ephesians.	Not yet clear where it will be published.
28.	Pieterse, Ronel. May 2001. The gender-issue in the GKSA up to date.	<i>In die Skriflig</i> , 36(4) 2002: 691-716.
29.	Rabali, Christopher. May 2001. An interpretation of the exhortations to the widows in the congregation in 1 Timothy 5:14.	To be submitted to <i>In die Skriflig</i> .
30.	Rautenbach, Christa. May 2002. The recognition of Muslim marriages in South Africa: <i>quo vadimus?</i>	To be submitted to <i>In die Skriflig</i> .
31.	Roos, Rolien. Sept. 2001. The rights of women in South African Christian churches.	
32.	Snyman, Gerrie. May 2001. Telling women to be like men? Some theoretical aspects in interpreting the Bible on gender issues.	<i>Koers</i> , 67(1) 2002:1-26.
33.	Snyman, Gerrie. Sept. 2001. Narrative rationality, morality and readers' identification.	<i>Old Testament Essays</i> 15(1).
34.	Stenström, Hanna. Sept. 2002. Some reflections about the use of Scripture in work for change – a feminist perspective.	To be submitted to <i>In die Skriflig</i> .
35.	Swart, Alta. Sept. 2002. Godsbeskouing, Skrifbeskouing en Skrifhantering van die Feministiese Teologie.	To be submitted to <i>In die Skriflig</i> .
36.	Syreeni, Kari. May 2001. Identity, remembrance, and transformation as key concepts in Biblical hermeneutics.	<i>In die Skriflig</i> 35(4) 2001: 537-556.
37.	Syreeni, Kari. Sept. 2002. Paul and Love Patriarchalism: Problems and Prospects.	To be submitted to <i>In die Skriflig</i> .

38.	Thugwana, Albert & Vorster, Koos. Sept. 2001. The status and role of women in African traditional religions.	Not to be published.
39.	Van der Walt, Annette. May 2001. The ministries of women in the congregation – the Classis Vaalriver of the GKSA as sample.	Submitted to <i>In die Skriflig</i> .
40.	Van Deventer, Hans. May 2001. Traces of feminine wisdom in the Book of Daniel.	In: Brenner, A., ed. 2001. Prophets and Daniel. A Feminist Companion to the Bible – Second Series. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press. p. 247-261.
41.	Van Deventer, Hans. Sept. 2001. How to make the rough places plain – tradition and society and the role of women in the church.	To be submitted to <i>In die Skriflig</i> .
42.	Van Helden, Phia. Sept. 2002. Die aktiwiteit van Gereformeerde belydende vrouelidmate tydens die ereediens in 2002.	<i>In die Skriflig</i> , 36(4) 2002: 755-784.
43.	Vergeer, Wim. May 2001. Anomalies in Reformed interpretation of Scripture on the status of women in church and society.	<i>In die Skriflig</i> , 36(4) 2002: 661-689.
44.	Vorster, Johannes N. Sept. 2001: Hierarchy and the female recessive body in Early Christianity.	
45.	Vorster, Koos & Jardim, Georgina. May 2001. The position on the rights of women in the current human rights debate.	
46.	Vorster, Koos. May 2002. The resurgence of religious fundamentalism and its influence on women's rights.	<i>Studia Historia Ecclesiasticae</i> 28:120-143.
47.	Vorster, Nico. May 2002. Gender equality in the light of the new SA constitution and Scripture.	Submitted to <i>In die Skriflig</i> .
48.	Wessels, Sarah Jane. Sept. 2002. Sara se belofte: 'n Vroue-predikant se verhaal.	To be submitted to <i>In die Skriflig</i> . (Joint authorship: George A. Lotter.)

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**Kernwoorde:**

etiek van geslagtelikheid  
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patriargie  
vrou

**Key concepts:**

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gender  
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patriarchy  
woman