

NTSSA

New Testament Society of Southern Africa

ANNUAL MEETING 9-12 APRIL 2024
Wellington, Western Cape, South Africa

Theme: Violent Texts, Violent Interpretations, Violent Contexts
Hosted by the Gender and Sexuality Subgroup

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive issue within the diverse communities of Southern Africa. It manifests in various forms, affecting individuals across different backgrounds and contexts. This deeply troubling phenomenon encompasses acts of violence, coercion, discrimination, and abuse directed at individuals and groups based on their gender or perceived gender roles. It is an unfortunate and persistent reality that necessitates comprehensive attention and concerted efforts to combat.

For this conference, the Gender and Sexuality Subgroup invites papers investigating New Testament and Early Christian Literature through the lens of "Violent Texts, Violent Interpretations, Violent Contexts", examining its relevance for GBV and the complex backdrop of Southern African communities. We seek to explore how New Testament and related texts and interpretations thereof are intertwined with ancient and contemporary discourses and expressions of gender-based and sexual violence - in support of, in resistance to, or even both simultaneously.

The theme was intentionally chosen with the following dimensions in mind:

- ***Violent Texts***

New Testament and Early Christian writings depict violence in various ways; at times explicitly so, yet often also in implicit ways. Language, emphasis, rhetoric, plot, characterisation, and authorial subjectivity are some of the building-blocks of texts. These elements and strategies may describe, encourage, resist, condone, evoke, or challenge violence. How do the content of texts and the construction of texts relate to discourses and expressions concerning violence, specifically gender-based and sexual violence?

- ***Violent Interpretations***

Texts do not speak for themselves; they are interpreted by readers and as such serve different rhetorical and ideological purposes. New Testament and related texts, when interpreted in life-denying ways, may be abused to endorse or justify violence - whether in scholarly or lay circles. In Southern African communities, these texts might be manipulated to reinforce existing gendered and sexualised power structures, further marginalising vulnerable populations. However, it may also be interpreted in ways which resist gender-based violence and speak out against injustice - by affirming anti-violence content and positionality, or by means of resistant readings that are critical of the violence described and/or encouraged in texts. Which types of interpretations are life-giving, anti-violent, and justice-orientated? Which types of interpretations feed the agendas of patriarchy, power-over relations, abuse, and

silencing of victims? Can biblical scholarship contribute to justice, healing and reconciliation - for individuals, communities and systems? Or not?

- **Violent Contexts**

The context of Southern African communities, in which New Testament and related texts are read and interpreted, plays a significant role in determining its impact on gender-based and sexual violence. These contexts are often shaped by historical injustices, social inequalities, economic disparities, and cultural norms that can perpetuate violence and discrimination. The interpretation of texts can either exacerbate or mitigate these issues depending on how they are integrated into the broader social fabric.

Moreover, texts themselves are situated in particular contexts, often deeply entrenched in violence on multiple levels. Ancient views and expressions of discipline, punishment, conflict, empire, religious and cultural identity, and warfare meet cultural and religious expectations of gender, sexuality and embodiment, to give shape to a complex world and worldviews in which anti-violence or pacifism was not a popular option (if at all). How does this speak to gender-based and sexual violence, also in antiquity? Is gender-based violence simply to be accepted as part of the fibre of all societies, or is there space for imagining alternatives?

Submission of titles and abstracts

Within this conference theme, we welcome submissions in the fields of New Testament and Early Christian studies, specifically focusing on gender-based and sexual violence. We encourage papers that explore how gender intersects with violent relationships and inequalities - past and present - from NTSSA members in all subgroups.

Paper proposals not directly related to the conference theme, but which fall within the scopes of the subgroups of the society, are also invited.

Please submit titles and abstracts of 150-200 words by 31 JANUARY 2024. Include your name, surname, and institutional affiliation.

Submissions can be sent directly to subgroup leaders:

- Gender and Sexuality: Nina Müller van Velden <mullervanveldenne@ufs.ac.za> and Jacobie M Helena Visser <jacobiemh@gmail.com>
- Jesus and the Gospels: Mphumezi Hombana <m.hombana@up.ac.za> and Francois Viljoen <viljoen.francois@nwu.ac.za>
- Pauline Studies: Philip du Toit <philip.dutoit@nwu.ac.za> , Vuyani Sindo <vuyani.sindo@gmail.com> , Annette Potgieter <annette.potgieter@up.ac.za>
- Early Christian Studies: Gerhard van der Heever <vdheega@unisa.ac.za> and Chris de Wet <chrisldw@gmail.com>

Conference logistics

The upcoming Annual Meeting will be hosted by the Gender and Sexuality subgroup in collaboration with Huguenot College, Wellington (Western Cape, South Africa). Building upon the interdisciplinary conference "Violence against Children," held in 2022 at the University of Johannesburg, the theme for the 2024 conference is "Violent Texts, Violent Interpretations, Violent Contexts."

The Annual Meeting will take place from 9 to 12 April 2024. The Andrew Murray Centre for Spirituality (AMSS) in Wellington will serve as the venue for the conference and offer accommodation options for approximately 28 conference attendees on a first-come, first-serve basis. The conference fee will exclude accommodation costs (whether staying at AMSS or elsewhere) and travel expenses to and from the conference venue. Participants will have the option of selecting AMSS as accommodation choice when registering for the conference via the NTSSA website. Registration for the conference and costs will be announced shortly.