Human Dignity & Gender Equality as integral to Curriculum Development

Proff Julie Claassens & Elna Mouton
Stellenbosch University
Human dignity?

○ God created people in God’s image (Gen 1:26-27). “Human dignity” therefore says something about the Creator

○ When God + humanity were alienated because of sin, God again took the initiative + restored the relationship in Jesus Christ (Phlp 2 – read against the background of empire and a deeply stratified society)

○ God’s purpose was to bring about a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), a new humanity (Eph 2:15)
Possible elements of a course on Human Dignity & Gender

Session 1: Introduction
Session 2: Women/Men and the Media
Session 3: Women/Men and Poverty
Session 4: Women/Men and Work
Session 5: Women/Men and HIV-AIDS
Session 6: Women/Men and Violence
Session 7: Women/Men and the Church
Session 1: Introduction

- Gender and Culture
- Stereotypes
- Privilege, Power, Patriarchy
- Can culture be critiqued?
- Gender, Culture and Scripture
Gender & Culture

- Gender is not determined by our biologies, but is constructed socially and culturally.
- Patriarchy + power = hierarchy + dominance.
- “It took many years for early feminists to convince men and women that biology is not destiny and that what it means to be masculine and feminine can change over time and across cultures” (Margaret Kamitsuka)
Stereotypes

Men are....
• Strong
• Logical
• Destroyers
• Violent
• Independent
• Aggressive
• Dominant
• Protectors

Women are....
• Weak
• Emotional
• Nurturers
• Non-violent
• Dependent
• Meek
• Submissive
• Protected
Feminism is the radical notion that women are people.
Gender, Culture & Scripture

The Bible (with its origins in ancient patriarchal societies) plays an important role in forming and sustaining a worldview where men are (often) privileged and in power.
Gender, Culture & Scripture

The example of Hagar illustrates one front on which women’s practices of memory are working. Hagar is certainly in the biblical text; her suffering is profound; her wits are keen; her encounters with the divine are groundbreaking. Yet the prevailing voice of the tradition has made her virtually invisible. Recovering the lost memory of her creative striving to survive interrupts the dominant discourse. It demands that the corporate memory of the ekklesia make room for the female, the foreigner, the one in servitude, the religious stranger – and the person who is all four – as a vital player in the history of humanity with God. By bringing Hagar visibly into the cloud of witnesses, it lifts up a source of lament and resistance as well as strength and inspiration for all who remember her name (Elizabeth Johnson, Friends of God and Prophets, 1999:145-146).
Session 2: Women/Men and the Media

- Female representations in the Bible, art, movies (cf Bathsheba’s story in 2 Sam 11:1-6, often presented as responsible for her own rape)
- Women/Men and advertising (> women’s bodies turned into objects to sell products. Do we tolerate this as a form of violence against women?)
Bathsheba’s Story in Brackets (2 Samuel 11:1-6)

1 In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. 2 It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king’s house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing [...]; the woman was very beautiful [...]. 3 David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, “This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.” 4 So David sent messengers to get her [...], and she came to him [...], and he lay with her [...]. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house [...]. 5 The woman conceived [...]; and she sent and told David, “I am pregnant” [...].

6 So David sent word to Joab, “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” And Joab sent Uriah to David.
Session 3: Women/Men and Poverty

- Biblical story of Naomi and Ruth
- The “Feminisation of Poverty”
  - Access to and level of employment or income
  - Access to and level of education
  - Household work/Access to leisure
  - Access to private property
  - Poverty and motherhood
- Globalisation
The Peaceable Community

It is a human community in which the marginalized person has dared to insist upon full participation, in which the one in the center has reached out beyond societal norms to include the marginalized. It is a community in which children are celebrated and the elderly are attentively cared for. It is a community in which all are fed, a community in which joy is the dominant note” (Katherine Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 8).
Women and Poverty in South Africa
Women hauling water, Welverdiend Village

www.ots.duke.edu/~abarbee/academic/web/album14.ht
Role of Globalisation

Many are the economic widows and orphans who are being created by the poverty enhancing syndrome of globalization. Africa has known many traumatic displacements of her population. When Southern African men left women and children to serve in the mines of Egoli, they began a trend which continues to this day. Women and children who are expecting fathers and sons to return, to bring wealth or send a contribution for the management of the family have been regularly disappointed. These women and children have worked the land and themselves dry, trying to survive (Mercy Amba Oduyoye).
Session 4: Women/Men and Work

- Equality in the workplace?
- Equal work, equal pay?
- The glass ceiling
- Sexual harassment
- Formal vs informal sector
- Globalisation
- Employment and Motherhood
- The “second shift” (Unpaid work, i.e. household activities and child care)
Session 5: Women/Men and HIV-AIDS

- Movie *Yesterday*
- Denise Ackermann, “Tamar’s Cry: Reading 2 Sam 13 in the Midst of an HIV/AIDS Pandemic”
- Beverley Haddad, “Gender, Violence and HIV/AIDS: A Deadly Silence in the Church”
“The Body of Christ is grievously ill. The Body of Christ has Aids”

Denise Ackermann, *After the Locusts*

“Many who suffer from HIV and Aids are not killed by the virus but by the stigma”

Nelson Mandela, quoted in Gerald West, “Reading the Bible”
Women particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS pandemic due to following reasons:

- Biological
- Cultural practices (e.g. lobola)
- Migrant labor system
- Child rape / myth virgin girl
Session 6: Women/Men and Violence

- The rape of Tamar (2 Sam 13) and the responses of the male family members
- Rape and mutilation of the Levite’s wife (Judges 19-21)
- Rape scripts
- Rape as a means of war
- Film “The Greatest Silence: Rape in The Congo” - rape is not about sex but power
Session 7: Women/Men and the Church

• What is the reality of women’s ministries in the church(es) today?
• What gender constructs and stereotypes underlie this experience?
• How does this reality relate to the biblical vision of the church as well as the instances throughout the history of the church where women were included in ministry?
• What are practical strategies that we can employ to effect change in our curriculum and congregations?
Exercise
(for students and pastors)

• You are the pastor of a church. You are convinced that the church needs more female pastors; that your church needs a female pastor.

• Discuss: What strategies would you propose to convince the congregation of the value of female pastors?