

**The remarkable career of Christina Landman,
pioneer feminist theologian rooted
in the Reformed tradition**

Mary-Anne Plaatjies van Huffel

Department of Systematic Theology and Ecclesiology,
University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, South Africa

Abstract

This article celebrates the contribution of Christina Landman as a noted scholar and church leader. Landman's exemplary career and contributions as an acclaimed church historian, theologian, writer, lecture specialising in the area of gender and church leader will serve as a continuous source of inspiration for generations to come. Her contributions have had a substantial impact on both the church and society in South Africa. Firstly, an overview of her academic history will be given. Then, attention will be given to Landman's service on numerous boards and committees. Finally, the projects spearheaded by Landman at the Research Institute for Theology and Religion will be highlighted. In an attempt to find a unified theme around which to organise her contribution, the following was chosen: gender, healing, oral history, and her engagement as a local pastor and in church polity (not because these represent the full spectrum of Landman's work, but because they represent some of the key insights of her approach to doing theology).

Introduction

Christina Landman was born in Pretoria on 8 February 1956. On 18 May 2008 she was ordained as a minister of the gospel in the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA) in Dullstroom. She is a member of the Seminary Management Committee (Northern Theological Seminary) of the URCSA and was elected as actuary (church polity expert) of the Northern Synod of the URCSA in September 2010. However, neither ordination nor her election to the decision-making structure of the church was a walk in the park for Christina Landman. She achieved these things ultimately as a God-given token of her dedication to her calling. On numerous occasions she had been interviewed on social justice and church-related issues, which indicates the importance of her role in the dominant discourses in South Africa at

Mary-Anne Plaatjies Van Huffel

large. In so doing she became a leading voice in many theological conversations in the country.¹ This article gives a glimpse of the diversity of areas relevant to her research and reveals some insights into her remarkable life and equally remarkable career. It represents an initial attempt to appreciate the scope and scale of Landman's influence.

Overview of academic history²

She obtained five distinctions at Lyttelton High School in her final year in 1973 and started studying theology straight after matric, knowing that the church she belonged to, the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), still did not ordain women. She obtained seven degrees (*cum laude*)³ at the Universities of Pretoria and South Africa. Her knowledge of ancient writings is dynamic and powerful as seen clearly in her article, *Educating the body of the female child: Feminism in dialogue with Jerome (d 420)*. She adopted a magisterial tone in this article expressing feminist views on the body of the female child

¹ Brandpunt, with Jannie Pelser, Radio Kansel, Kan poligamie Christelik wees?, 5 February 2010; Kruis en Dwars, with Johan Symington, RSG, God is liefde, 14 February 2010; TV-program: Regstreeks with Robinson oor Angus Buchan en die man as hoof van die vrou, KykNet 11 April 2010; Radio Kansel Voorvaders/ Verhouding Kerk en Politiek –1 June 2010 (Brandpunt); Praat Saam, 27 September 2010: Erfenisdag/Heritage Day; Radio Kansel, 29 November 2010, Vrouepredikante se toekoms in die kerk; TV – Fokus – Most Influential Woman in Education and Training; Praat Saam – Genadedood, 17 January 2011; Kruiskerk – Genadedood – opname 25 January 2011; Is die tsunami/aardbewing in Japan deel van God se straf? - Monitor, RSG, Menseregtedag 21 March 2011; Kruiskerk – Die einde van die wêreld op 21 Mei 2011 – opname 8 April 2011; Kruis en Dwars (RSG) – Profesie – opname 3 May 2011; Praat Saam (RSG): Die eindtyd – 23 May 2011; Rian (KykNet) – 14 June 2011; Moet die vrou onderdanig wees? Radio Kansel (opname 6 June 2011); Kruiskerk, Vroueslanery, opname 4 August 2011; Radio Kansel, Sal 'n goeie God mense vir ewig verdoem om in die hel te brand? opgeneem 17 February 2012; Kruiskerk, Godsdiens en volhoubaarheid, 25 April 2012; RSG Praat Saam: Hoe sekulêr het die samelewing geword?; RSG Kruis en Dwars: Gaan die kerk agteruit? Sunday, 23 September 2012; RSG Kruis en Dwars: Versoening, 15 December 2012; Dagbreek, KykNet 18 December 2012; Kerk en Kersfees; Kruiskyk, Genadedood en Nuwe harte breek ook soms, 28 February 2013; Woordfees, Stellenbosch, 3–9 March 2013. Besprekings van W McLoud se Abraham en sy gode, en Nicki Spies, Wat is die storie met seks?; Praat Saam, RSG Genesing, 8 October 2013; Radio Northern Cape, Oral History, 8 October 2013; Oordenkings en erediens, 2 - 9 November 2013, RSG; Verwondering op Kruis en Dwars, RSG, 22 December 2013.

² See Curriculum Vitae of Christina Landman <http://www.christina-landman.co.za> (Access 13 April 2014).

³ Christina Landman earned the following degrees: BA (1976), BA (Hons) Greek (1977), 1980: BD (Script: Aspects of the exegetical method of Augustine) (1980), MA (Greek): The use of non-Christian literary sources in the Church History of Eusebius of Caesarea. (1981), DTh (Church History): The use of Scripture in the Tractatus de regia potestate et sacerdotali dignitate of Hugo Floriacensis. (1987), BA (Hons) Latin (1988), Postgraduate Diploma in Translation. (1990), DTh (Pastoral Therapy): Doing narrative counselling in the context of township spiritualities (2007). She obtained her second doctorate after doing counseling at Kalafong Hospital part-time for seven years. Her thesis was published under the title "Township spiritualities and counseling" (2009).

The remarkable career of Christina Landman, pioneer feminist theologian ...

in dialogue with Jerome's views on raising a child as articulated in his letter to his friend Laeta in 401 AD (Landman 2006a:1). She sees Jerome's work as seminal in that it started a tradition of an "education of disembodiment" in the Christian tradition.

She was appointed as a junior lecture in the Department of Church History at the University of South Africa (Unisa) in 1980 while she was still a student. A bright academic career awaited the brilliant young Christina Landman. Soon she was promoted, first to the position of Lecturer in 1981 and then to Senior Lecturer in 1984. She rose to the rank of Associate Professor in 1991. This was the first time a South African-born woman became a Professor of Theology in South Africa, an honour rightly bestowed on this esteemed scholar. In 1996 the University Council of Unisa created a post at the Research Institute for Theology and Religion (RITR) with specialisation in religion, gender and oral history. In 1996 she joined the RITR as Chief Researcher. Since then, she has worked at the RITR. In 2002 she was promoted to Professor and she was subsequently appointed as Research Director of the RITR. During 1988, 1991 and 1992 she studied in Germany and in the Netherlands with bursaries from Unisa. She is also a National Research Foundation-rated researcher. She is the author/editor of six academic books⁴ as well as 15 popular books.⁵ She has written 56 scientific articles and presented papers at approximately 49 national and international conferences.⁶ Her academic writing is of a very high calibre and flows primarily out of her

⁴ Windows on origins (1985); Europe's role in a South African methodology (1991); The piety of Afrikaans women (1994); Digging up our foremothers, stories of women in Africa (1996); A preliminary bibliography of published material on the AICs (1997); Township spiritualities and counselling (2009).

⁵ Wat nou van Isebel? Verhale van vroue in die Bybel (Lux Verbi, 1996); Nagstukke (Lux Verbi, 1998); Lirieke van die liefde (Lux Verbi, 1999); Woorde wat heel maak (Lux Verbi, 2000); Vryers en vennote: verhoudings in die Bybel (Struik, 2001); Passion and partnership in the Bible (Struik, 2001); Leefstyl-Bybel vir Vroue (Lux Verbi, 2003); Reach for Life (Lux Verbi, 2003); Platgeslaan, opgestaan (Lux Verbi, 2005); Donkermaan, volmaan (Lux Verbi, 2006); Jou dink nuut gids oor seerkry (Carpe Diem, 2008); God gee die môre-ster (Lux Verbi, 2008); Hoogtyd vir 'n hoë lied (Aktua Pers, 2009); Ek is ... waardevol (Christelike Lektuurfonds 2011). In 2004 she won the Christian Booksellers of South Africa "Book of the Year Award" for Leefstyl-Bybel vir Vroue.

⁶ A theology of the carcerated body, a paper presented at a Conference on "Lichamelijkheid in detentie", organised by the "Dienst Geestelijke Verzorging van het Ministerie van Justitie, Nederland, on 24 April 2006 at Elspeet in the Netherlands; Body theology and trauma in a township setting, a paper presented at the fifth conference of the International Prison Chaplain's Association on 22 August 2005 in Cornwall, Canada. Religion: The politics of peace and conflict in intimate spaces, a paper presented at the Oxford Round Table, at Oxford University, United Kingdom, on 14 July 2008. Religious memory and healing: The oral historian as healer in three South African contexts, a paper presented at the 16th International Oral History Conference at the University of Economics in Prague, Czech Republic 7-11 July 2010; Seelsorgliche Begleitung von Frauen mit HIV/AIDS, in Katja Heidemanns & Marco Moerschbacher (Hg), Gott vertrauen? AIDS und Theologie im südlichen Afrika, Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 2005.

Mary-Anne Plaatjies Van Huffel

work as the Research Director at the RITR. In 2007 she won *The Most Published Woman at Unisa Award*. The size of the collection of essays produced by her is symbolic of her career. The variety of the essays, well-articulated and well-structured and profoundly scholarly, in terms of content as well as quality judging from the institutional affiliations where they were presented, speaks volumes of the diverse audiences in which Landman's insights have found positive reception. This multifaceted scholar likes to dialogue with scholars of different disciplines, for example Philosophy, Church History, Church Polity, Public Theology, Practical Theology, Feminist Theology and Missiology, without striving towards synthesis or consenting to antithesis.

Landman serving on boards and committees⁷

Few women theologians in South Africa have made their mark on decision-making structures, editorial boards and executives committees, formerly led exclusively by men, as decisively as Christina Landman has done. She served on numerous boards and committees, including the Advisory Committee, National Orders of the President of the Republic of South Africa, and the Church History Society of Southern Africa, a society for professional church historians in South Africa. She is also a member of the Society for Practical Theology in Southern Africa, a member of the Southern African Missiological Society, an executive committee member of the Oral History Association of Southern Africa (OHASA) and an executive committee member of the International Oral History Association.

She is adamant that research results should be disseminated. Therefore, while occupying the position of Research Director of RITR, she published numerous articles in accredited journals and attended conferences where she presented papers both nationally and abroad. The present editor of *Studia Historiae Ecclesasticae*, an accredited journal, based at the Unisa, is none other than the distinguished Prof Christina Landman herself. She is also the editor of the Oral History Journal of South Africa and of the OHASA Conference Proceedings. As an editor of scholarly journals, Landman oversees with outstanding capability the peer review process for submitted manuscripts to ensure high-quality, timely reviews, assists with the selection of referees for manuscripts and communicates with authors on the status of their submissions. As editor-in-chief she ultimately played a pivotal role in ensuring that high-quality articles were published in the abovementioned accredited journals.

⁷ See Curriculum Vitae of Christina Landman <http://www.christina-landman.co.za> (Access 13 April 2014).

Projects at the Research Institute for Theology and Religion, 2003–2014

Since 2003 Prof Landman has been involved in three major projects at the Research Institute for Theology and Religion. They are (a) The Gender and Religion Project, (b) Concepts of Illness and Healing amongst farm workers, and (c) The Oral History Project (Middelburg Nazareth).⁸ These projects focused among other things on the influence of religious discourses on the lives of people in vulnerable communities, such as farm workers, prisoners, victims of domestic violence, HIV-infected and HIV-affected people, and the youth. Special emphasis is being placed in these projects on the vulnerability of women.⁹ These projects gave rise to numerous publications. In attempts to find a unified theme around which to organise Landman's contribution, the following were chosen: gender, healing, oral history, and her engagement as a local minister and in church polity (not because these represent the full spectrum of Landman's work, but because they represent some of the key insights of her approach in doing theology).

Gender

Landman devoted her life to deconstructing dominant discourses, especially gender discourses, in church and society. It is remarkable that, although Landman's articles date back to 1980, they retain a brilliance and a contextuality precisely because they respond to contemporary issues of gender, healing, oral history, her engagement as a local minister and church polity.¹⁰

⁸ See also Curriculum Vitae of Christina Landman <http://www.christina-landman.co.za> (Access 13 April 2014).

⁹ CEO Award 2010. Interview with UNISA's staff journal Award <http://www.christina-landman.co.za/ceo-award.htm> (accessed 1 May 2014).

¹⁰ Pastoral counselling between Western medicine and township spiritualities, a paper presented at the 1st National Conference on Pastoral Work in Health Care, held at Pretoria Academic Hospital, on 31 August 2006; Spiritual healing as indigenous knowledge systems, a paper presented at a conference The impact of knowledge systems on human development in South Africa, organised by the Research Institute for Theology and Religion, Unisa, on 8 September 2006; Women healers in Atteridgeville. Some methodological issues, a paper presented at the annual conference of the Church History Society of Southern Africa, on 13 January 2004, Pretoria, University of South Africa, 12–15 January 2004; The tenets of a Theology of healing, a paper presented at a conference Reconciliation: Developing a Theology of Dialogue. The laity vs the theologians held at the University of Pretoria on 6 October 2004; Religion as a means of preventing injury and promoting safety: Christian discourses on embodiment as safety discourses, in *African Safety Promotion* Volume 5.2 (2007); The healing of intimate spaces through the deconstruction of religious discourses: Co-constructing alternative stories of faith in the context of township spiritualities, in *Practical Theology in South Africa* Volume 22.3. 2008, 201–218 a paper presented at the 8th World Conference on Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion, held in Durban, on 2 April 2006; Women healers in Atteridgeville: research method and findings, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* Volume 30 (1), 2004, 205–221; Hi/stories of gender injustice, in *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*. Volume 34 Supplement, 2008, 161–180; Farm ministries in the

Initially Landman writes from a feminist standpoint theory perspective. Feminist standpoint theory analyses the dominant discourses and the dualist sexist usage of language in texts. Feministic standpoint theory is associated particularly with the work of Nancy Hartsock, who used a modified Marxist analysis of the class culture and applied it to gender (Jantzen 1996:99). Nancy Hartsock alleged that feminist standpoint theory is a method of approaching life and politics, rather than political conclusions on the oppression of women (Hartsock 1981:35). According to Nancy Hartsock it is the epistemological preference of women, as women, that provided a justification for the truth speeches of feminists. Christina Landman deconstructs texts from the perspective of feministic standpoint theory. Since 1995 the deconstruction of the dominant discourse has become increasingly important to Landman (1999a:416-418). Her work in the field of gender is backed by a broad and deep knowledge of the whole gender discourse in the South African context as proficiently portrayed in her article, *Ten years of feminist theology in South Africa*.

Within theology, her first love has always been gender, and her work evinces the conviction that religious identity links a person to his or her religious beliefs or affiliations (Landman 2013a:1). Religious identity, like all other identities, is constructed by social discourses. According to Landman (2013a:4), religious identity is therefore constructed not by stories of failure and abandonment, but by stories of resilience in the face of loss. Her premise is that the reconstruction of religious identity through the relative influence of oral history research leads to the empowerment of interviewees from victimhood to agency (Landman 2013a:6).

Since 1990 she has written numerous articles to address the question of gender justice¹¹ and that of the influence of Puritanism on Afrikaans

Hoedspruit area: Past and present, in *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* . Volume 34.2 2008, 187–201.

¹¹ Gender justice, economic justice and the role of the churches, a paper presented at the South-African-German Conference with the theme Gender Justice – An issue for Corporate Social Responsibility at the Evangelische Akademie Arnoldshain, Germany, on 13 December 2007. Marie du Toit (1880-1931): The pastoral responsibility of the church: A response with integrity, a paper presented at a conference on same-sex marriages: Responding with integrity, held by the Beyers Naude Centre for Contextual Theology at the University of Stellenbosch, on 17 November 2006. Women's right to polygamy, a paper presented at SAWID (South African Women in Dialogue) at the University of Pretoria on 6 July 2005. Stories of gender justice, a paper presented at the annual meeting of the South African Missiological Society at the University of the North-West (Potchefstroom Campus) on 24 January 2008. Gender-based violence and God-talk, a paper presented at the Joint Conference of Academic Societies in the Fields of Religion and Theology at Stellenbosch University from 22 to 26 June 2009 (23 June 2009 – Circle of African Women Theologians); Engendering theological education, a paper presented at the Joint Conference of Academic Societies in the Fields of Religion and Theology at Stellenbosch University from 22 to 26 June 2009 (24 June 2009 – Church History Society of Southern Africa); With MM Pieterse, Feminist responses to the historical and current influences of belief on sexual

The remarkable career of Christina Landman, pioneer feminist theologian ...

women.¹² In 1994 Landman published *The piety of Afrikaans women*, in which local Calvinism was criticised as being as sexist as it was racist (Landman 2013c:209). In *The piety of Afrikaans women* Landman engages in a methodological discussion on religion feminism, which is religion feminism as it was discussed in Western Europe in the early 1990s. In South Africa the book was read not against this background but rather as an onslaught on Afrikanerdom and as a liberal effort to alienate metaphysics from spirituality. Christina Landman's presupposition is that the theological anthropology of the DRC is dualistic by nature. The book was severely criticised by the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians for dealing with white women's stories only (Landman 2013c:209). This book ultimately led Afrikaans women (white women of Dutch descent) to define themselves publicly as either traditionalists or feminists (Landman 1995b:147). Landman rewrote the book in 1999 as *The piety of South African women* in which the stories of black women were included.

Landman is of the opinion that the rise of feminism in Europe during the seventies to a large extent passed by Afrikaans Reformed women. Feminism was only brought up by the RITR during 1984 at a conference with the theme: *Sexism and feminism in theological perspective* (Landman 1997:15). It had been the first time feminist theology received academic attention in South Africa (Landman 1995b:143). Landman avers that religious discourses support hetero-patriarchy.¹³ According to Landman a

relationships, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*. Volume 31.2, 2005; Polygamy: Politics, philosophy or culture?, a paper presented at the Unisa Philosophy Seminar on Wednesday 15 September 2010 at Unisa. Women and (c)overpower, *Theologia Viatorum* Volume 28 (1), 2004, 56–69.

¹² Die invloed van die Nederlandse Piëtisme op die spiritualiteit van Afrikaanse vroue – en die implikasies daarvan vir die pastoraat, a paper presented at the monthly meeting of the Praktiese Teologie Gespreksgroep at the University of Pretoria on 6 October 2004; The influence of Puritanism on Afrikaans women, a paper presented at the annual conference of the Church History Society of Southern Africa on 19 January 2005 at the University of the North-West, Potchefstroom Campus; Beguine Spirituality: The medieval spirituality of our Dutch foremothers, a paper presented at the annual meeting of SPIRASA (Spirituality Association of South Africa), at Hagia Sophia on 27 January 2005.

¹³ Freedom to women of faith, a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Church History Society of Southern Africa with the theme Religious freedom and the church, at the University of Pretoria on 15 January 2008; Religious discourses supporting hetero-patriarchy, a paper presented at a consultation at Mont Fleur, Stellenbosch on 6 March 2009, on The evil of patriarchy in the church, society and politics in South Africa, organised by the Centre for Christian Spirituality, University of Stellenbosch. Conference theme: Religion: The politics of peace and conflict. 13–18 July 2008; The ethics of human development as transformation: Ethical practices in deconstructing religious and cultural discourses. Keynote address given at a conference of the International Institute for Development and Ethics (IIDE), Emerging perspectives on the ethics of development and transformation, held on 17 September 2008 at the University of the Free State; The history and future of training faith leaders for participation in Employee Assistance Programmes, in *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*. Volume 35 Supplement, 2009, 99–115.

Mary-Anne Plaatjies Van Huffel

colonising form of Calvinism is still exerting an adverse influence on the lives of women in South Africa, preventing the views of Calvin himself on the freedom of women from being applied in local Calvinist churches (Landman 2009c:13).

Landman also gave significant recognition in her work to black feminist theologians such as Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Bernadette Mosala, Bonita Bennett and Roxanne Jordaan, Madipoane J Masenya, Isabella Phiri, Nukozola Mdende and Marian Nixon. Mercy Amba Oduyoye is being seen as Africa's first and finest woman theologian. According to Landman (2007a:11), Oduyoye's theology can best be described as a theology of stories that have changed worldviews on gender, ecumenism and restorative historiography. Landman (2007a:11) furthermore gives credit to Oduyoye for working tirelessly to establish African Women's Theology as an academic discipline, worthy of its place among other theological disciplines worldwide.

With regard to the Confession of Belhar she states clearly that it is regrettable that justice is embodied in sexist language in the Confession. She put a challenge to the URCSA to take cognisance of the embeddedness of sexism in the Confession of Belhar. She suggests certain changes in the language of the Confession, saying, for example, that references to believers should be inclusive, that references to the maleness of God should be excluded and that pronouns representing God as male can be replaced by the same word "God". She admits, however, that it will be much more difficult to change the male images that refer to God in the Confession of Belhar. "At the beginning and at the end of this confession, God is referred to as "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (Landman 2006b:4). Most of Landman's proposals with regard to gender sensitivity have been attended to in current translations of the Belhar Confession.

Christina Landman, together with esteemed scholars of URCSA such as Prof Allan A Boesak (Convenor), Prof Rothney Tshaka, Prof Nico Koopman and Prof Jeremy Punt were tasked by the General Synod of URCSA to present a report on homosexuality to the General Synod in Hammanskraal in September 2008. They proposed, among other things:

That the same ethical directives that apply for heterosexual living in all its facets should also apply for homosexual living. Synod shall not require of them what it does not require of its heterosexual members. This means that homosexual persons express their intimate sexual relations within the context of the relationships accepted above, which for us means the context of Christian marriage blessed by the church ... As confessing members of the church of Christ homosexual Christians shall, on the basis of their faith in Jesus Christ, have access to all the

The remarkable career of Christina Landman, pioneer feminist theologian ...

offices of the church, and upon fulfillment of all the academic requirements for the ministry, to the office of minister of the Word.” (*Report on homosexuality to the General Synod in Hammanskraal* 2008:48–49).

None of the recommendations of the task group was accepted by the General Synod. Landman is being challenged by the URCSA’s inability, both at synodical level and at congregational level, to embody the principles of the Confession of Belhar with regard to the issue of homosexuality.

Illness and healing

Christina Landman is passionate about educating and training people in vulnerable communities.¹⁴ At Unisa she is also engaged in Short Learning Programmes for training church leaders as well as the laity. During 2010 Prof Landman received the CEO Award for being South Africa’s most influential woman in training and education. All the research projects spearheaded by Prof Landman at the RITR engage the community itself in the research and leave behind skills and structures from which the community can benefit.

From 2000 to 2007 Landman worked as a voluntary counsellor at Kalafong Hospital in Atteridgeville. This had a tremendous influence on the way she did theology. Thus healing became the central point of Landman’s theological contributions.¹⁵ In her PhD thesis, *Doing narrative counselling in the context of township spiritualities*, she describes a narrative pastoral counselling practice that negotiates healing between binaries that, when kept in opposition, keep patients from experiencing holistic healing. According to Landman some of these binaries are Western medicine versus supernatural healing; Western culture versus African culture; dogma and culture versus the needs of lived experience; happiness versus suicide; God as patriarch versus God as empowerment; and the patient as passive victim to harmful religious discourses versus the patient as agent in his/her own healing (Landman 2007b:346).

¹⁴ Training the trainers, held in Limuru, Kenya, on 5 July 2004; Sexuality and Spirituality in a South African Female Prison.

¹⁵ Women healers in Atteridgeville: research method and findings. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 30 (1), 2004, 205–221; Doing narrative counselling in the context of township spiritualities PhD thesis UNISA 2007, 3; The healing of intimate spaces through the deconstruction of religious discourses: Co-constructing alternative stories of faith in the context of township spiritualities. *Practical Theology in South Africa* Volume 22 (3). 2008, 201–218; Township spiritualities and counseling. Unisa, 2009; Religious memory and healing: the oral historian as healer in three South African contexts. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* Volume 36(3), October 2010, 207–217; Traumatized between culture and religion: Women’s stories. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*; Vol 68, (2) doi: 10.4102/hts.v68i2.1147. 2012, 1–6.

Mary-Anne Plaatjies Van Huffel

During 2008 she conducted a research project entitled “Concepts of illness and healing amongst farm workers in the Hoedspruit area” among farm workers in the Lowveld. According to Landman (2008a:8) Reformed missionary work in the eastern Lowveld has failed because Reformed churches do not seem to have responded adequately to the healing needs of black believers, especially farm workers who, as a result of insufficient financial resources and a lack of transport, have little access to modern healing facilities, and whose lives are governed by religious and cultural discourses that view the causes of illness and healing differently from the way Reformed theology views it. The departure of farm workers from the historical mission churches in favour of indigenous churches with pronounced healing ministries had taken place during the course of time. According to Landman, between 2001 and 2006 the Reformed, Anglican and Methodist churches lost 26.2% of their members to churches that offer some kind of healing (Landman 2012:1). A large majority of farm workers believe that the causes of illness are spiritual (Landman 2008a:14). They therefore prefer to benefit from the integration of church healing, indigenous healing and modern medicine. Landman (2012:6) points out that the majority of churches in South Africa offer some form of healing, be it diaconal, ritualistic or faith healing. For example, the Roman Catholic Church offers diaconal healing through food packages and hospices, charismatic churches focus on faith healing, and African independent churches offer a combination of faith and ritual healing. Western and township views on healing differ significantly in terms of the natural and supernatural causes of and the cures for illnesses (Landman 2012:1–6). She argues that township women are trapped between the binaries presented by Western, cultural and township healings and their choicelessness in terms of abortion, adoption, abuse, death and sex. Through narrative counselling, based on social construction theories, these women experienced healing by exploring the healing spaces between the binaries of cultural contexts and Western medicine, through the liberty afforded them by the perspective of a preferred way of being (Landman 2012:1). Landman (2007b:339) suggests that, through diaconal healing, ritual healing and faith healing and especially through a combination of these types of healing, blended with African traditional insights in healing, patients are increasingly finding health in the context of township spiritualities. She argues (2007b:3) that “township spiritualities” are a combination of (Western) diaconal healing, (African) ritual healing, (Pentecostal) faith healing, and human rights. She further argues that the healing of churches and their women believers is possible through the shifting of harmful discourses, economic empowerment and life-enhancing liturgies. Prof Landman (2008a:14) proposes a theology that integrates ecclesiastical, clinical and indigenous insights into holistic healing.

Landman's engagement in oral history projects

As a practical theologian, Landman's area of theological research includes numerous oral-history projects. She presented numerous papers on this topic at national and international conferences.¹⁶ According to Landman, oral-history research in South Africa strives to heal memories with religious identity as dialogic space and inter-text (Landman 2013a:1). The aim of oral history research is to focus on the religious, healing and moral subtext of storytelling. Oral history research in South Africa therefore plays a major role in the construction of contra-cultures and the deconstruction of the discourses that keep people captive in the dominant discourses of ageism, sexism, racism and oppression. Landman, being an executive member of both the OHASA and the International Oral History Association, deftly takes up the question of the importance of oral history in numerous publications.¹⁷ Over the past few years, the OHASA and National Archives and Record Services of South Africa (Department of Arts and Culture) have convened a number of conferences that provided a platform for discussions and debates regarding the role and position of oral history in South Africa. Landman played a pivotal role in these developments. Her premise is that oral history can play a role in the construction of contra-cultures and the deconstruction of the discourses that keep interviewees captive in the dominant themes of ageism, sexism, racism and oppression. "Religious identity, like all other identities, is constructed by social discourses. Oral history is not blameless in this regard, supporting social construction by affirming people's life stories" (Landman 2013a:1). In these oral history research projects Landman engages with the alternative voices, the hidden voices, the untold stories and the veiled

¹⁶ Religious memory and healing: The oral historian as healer in three South African contexts, a paper presented at the 16th International Oral History Conference at the University of Economics in Prague, Czech Republic 7–11 July 2010. Delivered on 8 July 2010; Reclaiming Tonteldoos as a sacred site, a paper presented at the 7th Annual Conference of the Oral History Association of Southern Africa, "Oral history and heritage, national and local identities" in Mbombela, from 12 to 15 October 2010 (13 October 2010). Women's stories of being cursed: Healing between western medicine and township spiritualities, a paper presented at the Third National Conference of the Oral History Association of Southern Africa, entitled Culture, memory and trauma, held in Richard's Bay, on 7 November 2006.

¹⁷ Paper presented at SAAP (South African Association for Pastoral Workers) in Pretoria on 18 May 2005. Concepts of illness and healing among farm workers in the Hoedspruit area, a paper presented on 8 October 2008 at the 5th annual conference of the Oral History Society of Southern Africa, held from 7 to 10 October 2008 in East London, with the theme "Hidden voices, untold stories and veiled memories; Serving the spiritual needs of women in a South African correctional centre". Also, "Religious memory and healing: the oral historian as healer in three South African contexts", in *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* Volume 36.3 (October 2010), 207-217; Sexuality and spirituality in a South African female correctional centre, *Scriptura* 88(3), 2005.

Mary-Anne Plaatjies Van Huffel

veiled memories.¹⁸ In so doing she carved out a space in which to reflect critically on these voices. For example, in the Dullstroom-Emnotweni project called “Women’s space in the church” she deduced that the relationship between men and women of faith is one of political correctness (Landman 2013b:1). She (2013b:1) suggested that, although there is a strong “human rights generation” present in the church that looks after the rights of women in terms of abuse, in practice the women do not seem to be safe in terms of their right to insist on safe sex, and the churches do not offer structural assistance in cases of rape or physical abuse. On the one hand it seems as if these women do not have leadership aspirations in the church, or they do not have the freedom to express these aspirations. On the other hand the men seem to be scared that such aspirations may exist. In spite of these fears and all the fighting and gossiping that seem to be rife in some of the congregations, both men and women emphasise that they feel safe in the church (Landman 2012:1).

According to Landman the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has introduced a process in South Africa in which healing became possible through storytelling (Landman 1999a:415). She argues that this process was based on the deconstruction of dominant discourses and their replacement by alternative stories (Landman 1999a:417). This, she says (1999(a):415) introduces a new era in oral history research in South Africa in which healing, that is discontinuity, and not truth or the establishment of a continuous tradition, is the aim of research on and through storytelling. Among others she highlights this in research that focuses on the forced removals of the 1960s among the so-called Coloured people now living in Eersterust, a town just outside Pretoria (Landman 1999a:415–427).

From 2003 to 2004 she worked as an Independent Prison Visitor in the Pretoria Female Prison at the request of the Inspecting Judge of Prisons. She describes a variety of spiritualities prevalent in prison and the prisoners’ views of their physical rights as people of faith and made suggestions in terms of policy for providing spiritual care for the incarcerated body (Landman 2006c:321-343). Prof Landman describes the interface between spirituality and sexuality in the correctional centre. She proposed alternative religious discourses on the incarcerated female body (Landman 2011a:53-58).

¹⁸ “Teaching oral history – the place of oral history in community education”, a paper presented at the 6th Annual Conference of the Oral History Association of South Africa (OHASA), “The Politics of collecting and curating voices”, held in Cape Town from 13 to 16 October 2009; “The silent voices of women older than 50 who are living with HIV/Aids”, a paper presented at the annual conference of the Oral History Society of Southern Africa (OHASA) with the theme “Truth, legitimacy and representation: Oral history and alternative voices” in Polokwane on 25 October 2007.

The remarkable career of Christina Landman, pioneer feminist theologian ...

According to Christina Landman, alternative spiritualities, such as prostitute and gay spiritualities, should be regarded with respect and seen within a viable variety of spiritual bondings in prison settings (Landman 2006c:335). She views counselling skills as a prerequisite for oral history interviewing in the light of the retraumatisation that occurs when interviewees relate traumatic experiences of the past (Landman 2013a:1).

Landman as pastor and public theologian

Twenty-nine years after the completion of her theological studies and, having earned seven degrees, this amazing woman was legitimised on 18 November 2006 as a candidate for the ministry in the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA). During all the years Christina Landman kept faithful to her calling. Two years after legitimisation, on 18 May 2008, she was ordained as a pastor in the URCSA in a Zulu-speaking congregation in Dullstroom (Sakhelwe), Mpumalanga.

As a local pastor in an impoverished community Christina Landman became more engaged than ever before in numerous community projects involving schools, hospices, counselling, the training of the laity and church council members etc.¹⁹ She even embarked on a building project, namely a place of worship for the URCSA in Dullstroom. Landman had been challenged with regard to the public role of the church, its political responsibility and its relationship with the state. For example, in cases where violent protest is an option, should the church take on the challenge of siding with the poor and deprived? (Landman 2011b:6). The Dullstroom-Emnotweni uprising in 2009 put Landman's theological reflections on the Confession of Belhar and public theology to the test.²⁰ The notion of public theology according to

¹⁹ CEO Award 2010 Interview Unisa Staf Journal <http://www.christina-landman.co.za/ceo-award.htm> (Access 1 May 2014). Seelsorgliche Begleitung von Frauen mit HIV/AIDS, in Katja Heidemanns & Marco Moerschbacher (Hg), *Gott vertrauen? AIDS und Theologie im südlichen Afrika*, Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 2005. A Theology for the Older, Female HIV-Infected Body, in *Exchange* Volume 37, 2008,52–67. A paper presented at a seminar organised by the Circle of African Women Theologians, Engendering Theological Education in Africa, held in Kempton Park, on 20 May 2004; HIV/AIDS and Spiritual Care. A paper presented at the 4th Pan African Conference of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians with the theme The Girl Child, Women, Religion and HIV and AIDS in Africa in Yaoundé Faculty of Protestant Theology, Cameroon on 8 September 2007. A paper presented at a WCC/TEE Workshop on HIV/AIDS.

²⁰ Simon Maimela as public theologian of the 1980s and 1990s, in *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* Volume 36 (Supplement), July 2010, 49–65; With Mokhele Madise: Soccer prayers as a means of teaching religious values... 2010; Public Theology for Intimate Spaces, in *International Journal of Public Theology* 5 (2011), pp 63–77. A theology for the recession, in *Discourse: Recesson: An in-depth look into the realities behind the news*. University of Johannesburg, pp 49-43. A Public Theology for Intimate Spaces, a paper presented at the Centre for Public Theology, University of Pretoria, on 4 August 2008, at a

Mary-Anne Plaatjies Van Huffel

Landman (2010a:2) can be defined within the dialogical spaces between “private” and “public”, between God-talk as personal religious belief and God-talk as public discourse, between theology as the self-interest of faith communities and theology as a voice relevant to civil society and, finally, between public theology as making dogmatic pronouncements of eternal value in public and public theology as caring publicly in the context of societal need. She sees Simon Maimela as a forerunner of Public Theology in South Africa through his contribution to Black Theology and his influence on the formation of public opinion (Landman 2010a:1). According to Landman (2010a:3) the first aim of Public Theology is to bring the needs of the voiceless to the public arena. The second aim is for Public Theology to present itself as a site for dismantling the religious discourses that sustain race- and gender-based discrimination. The third aim is to deconstruct these harmful religious discourses and rescope them as healthy societal practices that will bring healing to those who suffer discrimination and are deprived of their human dignity. This notion was put to the test while Landman was the pastor of the Dullstroom URCSA.

Dullstroom-Emnotweni was the site of protests against the lack of service delivery by the local government in 2009. The local leadership of the URCSA was confronted with challenges when its members got involved in acts of violence from the side of the community and from the side of the police. Viewing itself as an asset to the community and an agent in its development towards health and wellbeing, the church and Landman were challenged by the situation in its prophetic capacity and in the church’s relationship with the State. In an attempt to find answers to the church’s relationship with the State in situations of violence, Landman took a position of caution in which the church retained both its political distance and its prophetic voice, remained true to its calling as an asset to community development, and condoned violence cautiously when development was at stake (Landman 2011b:1). According to Landman (2011b:6) the church continues to be challenged in terms of deciding when and how violent protest is essentially and effectually developmental. Her hopes and dreams are for churches to invite gender justice, to be places of healing and to be agents for community-based development (Landman 2008b:14).

Landman as church polity expert

In September 2010, attending her first Synod meeting as an ordained minister of URCSA, she was elected as *actuaris* (church polity expert) of the Northern Synod of the URCSA. The task of an *actuaris* is, among other

conference with the theme: Responsible South African public theology in a global era: Perspectives and proposals, from 4 to 5 August 2008.

The remarkable career of Christina Landman, pioneer feminist theologian ...

things, to guide church councils, presbyteries and regional synods in difficult matters that may lead to lawsuits in a civil court. The election was indeed a vote of confidence in the leadership potential of Christina Landman. Eight months later, at a special synod, a new Church Order of the Northern Synod had been approved. Accreditation for this must be given to the meticulous work done by Christina Landman. Already at its synod in 2003 the Northern Synod of URCSA had accepted a set of 115 articles to the Church Order. The synod of 2010 tasked the newly elected *actuarii*, Prof Christina Landman, and a previous *actuarii* of the General Synod, Rev Collin Goeiman, to prepare a revision of all these articles of the Church Order for a special synod meeting in June 2011.

At the synod, articles 80 and 115 of the Church Order of the Northern Synod, which describe the role of the Moderamen in solving disputes, had been brought into disrepute. Articles 80 and 115 of the Church Order of the Northern Synod became a bone of contention in the Northern Synod. Among other things, article 80 asserts that the Executive (consisting of the Moderamen and the chairpersons of the core and support ministries) “is the first body for dealing with matters regarding church discipline or disputes ...” On the other hand, article 115 prescribes that “when an appeal is lodged with the Scribe of the Regional Synod, the Moderamen of the Regional Synod shall convene a meeting to deal with the matter as soon as possible”. Landman as newly appointed *actuarii* grappled with the question of whether the place attributed to the Moderamen in these articles of the Church Order of the Northern Synod is in accordance with the principles of (Dutch) Reformed church polity, or whether an empire is created that rules over the less mighty (Landman 2011c:2). Landman’s presupposition on the matter is that the principles of the Confession of Belhar and the practice of church visitations as in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands should be embraced by the URCSA (2011c:2). In the revision process of the Church Order of the Northern Synod, strong resistance came from both the Support Ministry for Judicial Matters (SMJM) and the Synodical Commission of the Northern Synod, which wanted to curb the powers of the Moderamen and respectively suggested that the functions described in the abovementioned articles should be awarded to the SMJM or the Synodical Commission exclusively. The practice that the moderamen should function as the first body for dealing with matters regarding church discipline or disputes has been called unreformed and undemocratic by both parties, that is, by both those who were against the powers vested in the Moderamen and those in favour of them. (Landman 2011c:1–9). The newly appointed *actuarii* took cognisance, on the one hand, of the deep-rooted Reformed understanding with regard to censure and ecclesiastical admonition, which is also adhered to in the rest of URCSA, and, on the other hand, of the pragmatic approach to church discipline in the Northern Synod, whereas more power is bestowed upon the Moderamen,

Mary-Anne Plaatjies Van Huffel

especially in the case of misconduct. After robust discussions at the Northern Synod approval was given for the following article, which gave the Moderamen of the Northern Synod rights in the execution of church discipline: “When an appeal is lodged with the Scribe of the Regional Synod, the Moderamen of the Regional Synod shall convene a meeting to deal with the matter as soon as possible” (Landman 2011c:8).

This church judicial conflict forced Landman to embark on research with regard to the execution of supervision in the Reformed Church in America and the Protestant Church of the Netherlands. In the case of the Reformed Church in America the classis as judicatory execute discipline with the synod as the final court of appeal (Landman 2011(c):12). In the case of the Protestant Church of the Netherlands ecclesiastical discipline is being executed by a regional commission for handling complaints and disputes (*regionale colleges voor de behandeling van bezwaren en geschillen*) which consist of five members appointed by the General Assembly for a period of eight years. One member with a legal background is also appointed in an advisory capacity by the General Assembly (*Kerkorde en Ordinantie van de Protestantse Kerk in Nederland 2013 Ord. 12*). Landman's premise is that the Moderamen should mediate in cases of dispute to seek reconciliation in a pastoral way, thereby preventing long drawn-out church judicial cases. Parties to a conflict will be encouraged to submit to a mediation process rather than the church's legal process (Landman 2011c:1). Landman is therefore a proponent of the following amendment to the church order: “The Moderamen mediates in cases of dispute to seek reconciliation in a pastoral way, thereby preventing long drawn-out cases. Parties to a conflict will be encouraged to submit to a mediation process rather than the church's legal process” (Landman 2011c:9). The Moderamen should therefore act in a pastoral way, according to Landman, on behalf of the church by negotiating with a Presbytery that is neglecting its supervision over a congregation. Christina envisioned a church order based on the principles and practices of anti-empire (Landman 2011c:2). The fruit of her reflections on the mediation as part of the judicial process in the URCSA and the church judicial processes as anti-empire will be tested at the upcoming synod of the Northern Synod.

Conclusion

For decades, Professor Christina Landman has excelled as an esteemed scholar and a highly respected church leader. Christina Landman's intra-disciplinary and even interdisciplinary approach to theology is especially appreciated by her peers. She succeeds in conceptualising and effectively communicating her comprehensive view of gender, healing and church polity. For her more than thirty-four years of service both in the academia

The remarkable career of Christina Landman, pioneer feminist theologian ...

and the church at large, six of which were spent as pastor of a local congregation, we can only give thanks to God. We thank Him especially for her collegiality and the way in which she has embodied the Belhar Confession.²¹ The work of this serious, disciplined scholar, dedicated teacher and compassionate minister of the Word provides theologians and pastors to come with a wealth of material for reflection.

Works consulted

- “CEO Award 2010 Interview Unisa Staff Journal” <http://www.christinalandman.co.za/ceo-award.htm> 1 May 2014.
- Hartsock, Nancy 1981. Fundamental feminism: prospect and perspective, in Brunch, C. ed.), *Building Feminist Theory*. New York: Longman.
- Jantzen, GM 1996. Sources of religious knowledge. *Literature and Theology* 10, June, 98–100.
- “Kerkorde en Ordinantie van de Protestantse Kerk in Nederland.” Utrecht, PKN, 2013.
- Landman, Christina 1994. *The piety of Afrikaans women*. Pretoria: Unisa.
- Landman, Christina 1995(a). Responses to The Piety of Afrikaans Women. *Religion and Theology* 2(3):1–9.
- Landman, Christina 1995(b). Ten years of feminist theology in South Africa. *Journal of Feminist Studies in religion* 11, Spring, 143–145.
- Landman, Christina 1997. Religious women and transformations. *Journal of Constructive Theology* 3(2):15–17.
- Landman, Christina 1999(a). Telling sacred stories – Eersterust and the forced removals of the 1960s. *Religion and Theology* 6(3):415–427.
- Landman, Christina 1999(b). *The piety of South African women*. Pretoria: CB Powell Bible Centre, University of South Africa.
- Landman, Christina 2004(a). Women and (c)overt power. *Theologia Viatorum* 28(1):56–69.
- Landman, Christina 2004(b). Women healers in Atteridgeville: research method and findings. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 30(1):205–221.
- Landman, Christina 2006 (a). Educating the body of the female child: Feminism in dialogue with Jerome (d 420). *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 32(1):1–15.
- Landman, Christina 2006(b). Can justice be embodied in sexist language? A challenge to the Confession of Belhar. *Ned Geref Teologiese Tydskrif (NGTT)* 47(1.2):283–290.

²¹ “Confessing and embodying justice”, a paper presented at the “Confessing and embodying Belhar and Barmen today” conference held at the University of Stellenbosch on 19 October 2004. *Ned Geref Teologiese Tydskrif*, Deel 47, Nos 1 & 2 (Maart en Junie 2006), pp. 283–291.

- Landman, Christina 2006(c). The incarcerated body: Judicial inspections, human rights and religious policy in prisons in South Africa. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 32(2):321–343.
- Landman, Christina 2007(a). Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye: Mother of our stories. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 33(1):197–204.
- Landman, Christina 2007(b). Doing narrative counselling in the context of township spiritualities. PhD thesis. University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- Landman, Christina 2008(a). Farm ministries in the Hoedspruit area: Past and present. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 32(2):187–201.
- Landman, Christina 2008(b). Hi/stories of gender in/justice. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 34, Supplement, 161–180.
- Landman, Christina 2008(c). The healing of intimate spaces through the deconstruction of religious discourses: Co-constructing alternative stories of faith in the context of township spiritualities. *Practical Theology in South Africa* 22(3):201–218.
- Landman, Christina 2009(a). The history and future of training faith leaders for participation in Employee Assistance Programmes. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 35, Supplement, 99–115.
- Landman, Christina 2009(b). *Township spiritualities and counseling*. Pretoria: Research Institute for Theology and Religion, Unisa.
- Landman, Christina 2009(c). Calvinism and South African women: a short historical overview. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 35(2):1–15.
- Landman, Christina 2010(a). Simon Maimela as public theologian of the 1980s and 1990s. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 36, Supplement, 1–9.
- Landman, Christina 2010(b). Religious memory and healing: the oral historian as healer in three South African contexts. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 36(3):207–217.
- Landman, Christina 2011(a). Sexuality and spirituality in a South African female correctional center. *Verbum et Ecclesia* 32(2):53–58.
- Landman, Christina 2011(b). Violence as development? A challenge to the church. *Verbum et Ecclesia* 32(2), 6 pages. doi: 10.4102/ve.v32i2.57 (2011):1–6.
- Landman, Christina 2011(c). Die Kerkorde as emporium en anti-emporium. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 37(3):1–9.
- Landman, Christina 2012. Traumatized between culture and religion: Women's stories. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 68(2) doi: 10.4102/hts.v68i2.1147. (2012):1–6.
- Landman, Christina 2013(a). The (de)construction of religious identity in oral history research in South Africa. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 39(1):1–9.

The remarkable career of Christina Landman, pioneer feminist theologian ...

- Landman, Christina 2013(b). Safe spaces for women in the church: the case of Dullstroom-Emnotweni. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 39, Supplement, 1–9.
- Landman, Christina 2013(c). Remembering feminist theology in South Africa 1960–1990, in Plaatjies van Huffel, Mary-Anne and Vosloo, Robert (ed.), *Reformed Churches in South Africa and the Struggle for Justice: Remembering 1960–1990*. Stellenbosch: Sum Media, 200–210.
- Report on homosexuality to the General Synod in Hammanskraal in September 2008*. Bible Media, 1–50.