



Restorative Readings: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Human Dignity

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The Bible has the unfortunate legacy of being associated with gross human rights violations as evident in the scriptural justification of apartheid in South Africa as well as slavery in the American South. What is more, the Hebrew Bible also contains numerous instances in which the worth or dignity of the female characters are threatened, violated or potentially violated, creating a situation of dehumanization in which women are viewed as less than fully human.

And yet the Bible continues to serve as a source of inspiration for readers committed to justice and liberation for all. But in order for the Bible to speak a liberative word, what is necessary is to cultivate liberating Bible reading practices rooted in justice and compassion. *Restorative Readings* seeks to do exactly this when the authors in their respective readings seek to cultivate Bible reading practices that are committed to restoring the dignity of those whose dignity has been violated by means of racial, gender, and sexual discrimination, by the atrocities of apartheid, by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and by the dehumanizing reality of unemployment and poverty.

"*Restorative Readings* is a joint venture of seasoned scholars of Old Testament and ethics from South Africa and the United States, two societies in which the Bible has historically been used to justify abusive practices of violence, injustice, and xenophobia. These essays walk a constructive middle road between the wholesale rejection of the Old Testament as irredeemably violent on the one hand and misguided attempts to ignore or explain away the Bible's violent applications in human history."

--Dennis Olson, Charles Haley Professor of Old Testament Theology, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ

"In *Restorative Readings*, Julie Claassens, Bruce Birch, and a wise group of scholars from South Africa and the United States remind us that even if the language of human dignity isn't explicit in Scripture, thoughtful exegesis of biblical texts can still found, form, and fund attention to human dignity in a world all too likely to sag under the weight of violent ideologies, market logic, and tepid politics. We rise even as we read."

--Mark Douglas, Professor of Christian Ethics, Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, GA

Juliana Claassens is Professor of Old Testament in the Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University, South Africa. Her most recent book is *Mourner, Mother, Midwife: Reimagining God's Liberating Presence in the Old Testament*.

Bruce Birch is Dean Emeritus and Professor Emeritus of Biblical Theology at Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, DC. His works include *Let Justice Roll Down: Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life* and *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (with W. Brueggemann, T. Fretheim, and D. Petersen).

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