

Newsletter

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GWC George
Whitefield
College

Theological Training in Africa for Africa



BTh: God's Preparation for Living in Our Complex World

by **The Rev. Dr Mark Dickson (GWC Principal)**

Whilst leading some students on a mission outreach in Lesotho, a faculty member of GWC encountered someone in a café in Ladybrand who was the international director of a large telecom company. While chatting, it turned out that the sole qualification that person had was a Bachelor of Theology (BTh).

This is not an isolated or unique story touching on questions around 'employability.' Though some consider a tertiary degree in theology too narrow, the opposite is true. In fact, studies have shown that in certain parts of the world, a person with a theological degree is highly employable. After all, by the time a student graduates with a degree in theology; they will have acquired: research and analysis skills; interpretive skills as well as those needed to synthesise different types of information; the ability to understand the meaning of complex written documents; practice in presentation and public speaking; problem-solving skills; the ability to formulate questions; experience in teamwork; and writing skills. This is just a sample of theology's 'transferable skills.'

Some parents encourage their school-leaving children to study theology before going off to study chemistry, physics, management, science or teaching. Many who've chosen this route will attest to how theological college transformed their understanding in countless, invaluable ways. I know I would have benefited prior to my studies in physics from learning that modern physics denies the reality of time, which is just one of many other modern myths. Today students entering higher education will be bombarded with newer ideologies. But theological training can ground them with a better understanding of the world God made, from gender to leadership and identity. Undergirding all this, students learn that God has spoken authoritatively through his Word.

Ultimately, the best reason for enrolling in a BTh is to be truly prepared for active ministry. Of course, not all theological degrees are created equal—the best major in coming to grips with what the Bible teaches. Studying theology this way is never purely theoretical, contrary to popular belief. **Someone who studies the Bible is well positioned to know God better and practically implement that knowledge in their lives.**

For example, during the student uprisings at UCT in 2017, some of the students most active in the negotiations between protesters and management were GWC graduates. Despite never receiving training in negotiation, taking up this role was clearly an outworking of other skills, along with their conviction that God calls us to be peacemakers.

To study the Bible is, therefore, indeed, to become more practical. That is why most leading universities in Africa and the West were started by Christian theologians and pastors. **What Africa needs now are preachers, teachers and leaders who can tell the continent accurately about Jesus.** As they do this, God will bring Abraham's blessing to bear upon the many societies and countries that make up this great continent. The result will be practically glorious.



How Past Theological Studies Serve Present Ministry Demands

by Rev. Sandile Mthethwa
(GWC Alumnus, Rector at The Message Church)

A few thoughts come to mind when considering the topic at hand. T. C. Hammond's "In Understanding Be Men" is one such thought. This little book is an old but essential classic on the doctrines of the God. The fact that Hammond's book has gone through some 16 editions speaks volumes. **The value of theological studies for competent and enduring ministry down to simply persevering in the Christian life is a matter that is overwhelmingly undersold.**



Having had the opportunity and privilege to go through various forms of theological training—including a BTh at GWC—has helped me not only appreciate theology but also meaningfully appropriate it and its implications for my hearers and for my own personal spiritual growth. As I get older, my need to know and articulate God's truth for life and in ministry expands. **And theological studies have been one of the best platforms to further furnish my heart and mind for the Christian life and service.**

In recent years, these benefits have become very apparent to me at The Message, where I serve as a pastor. As a church we have various opportunities and platforms for engaging with students, both on and off campus. In addition to a thriving student Bible study and breakfast, we're also training select students to lead Bible studies in university residences and have even secured some funding to have a student apprentice. Throughout these ministries, my theological training has been indispensable.

College buoyed me in my prayerful efforts to obey Paul's exhortation: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). It doesn't get any more straightforward than this.

Let God's Truth Shape How You See Everything Else

by Dr Nathan Lovell (Director of Research, GWC)

C. S. Lewis is famously quoted as saying, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." He was claiming something about the nature of Christian theology, that it's more than thinking about God and the church and other "spiritual" things. Christian theology is thinking about the world and everything in it—in God's way. In context, Lewis was making a point about studying theology instead of other disciplines.



Here's the full quote from his essay titled "Is Theology Poetry?" Lewis writes: "The waking world is judged more real because it can thus contain the dreaming world; the dreaming world is judged less real because it cannot contain the waking one. For the same reason I am certain that in passing from the scientific points of view to the theological, I have passed from dream to waking. Christian theology can fit in science, art, morality, and the sub-Christian religions. The scientific point of view cannot fit in any of these things, not even science itself. I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."

At GWC, we teach theology because we value theological knowledge. But, like Lewis, we recognise theology's broader value. We're convinced that understanding the world theologically gives a basis for science because the God who created the universe made it understandable. We think concepts like beauty and art have a relationship to the aesthetics of God's creating work. It is Christian theology that tells us that God made all people in his image, worthy of dignity, respect, and honour. And so it is theology that underpins human rights and our understanding of culture. And since our idea of the 'good life' is shaped by our understanding of what is good, theological truth also underwrites ethics and political philosophy.

Sometimes people think that studying theology means being impractical and abstract. However, the opposite is true. Knowing God better means understanding his world, our lives, and people using theological tools. Since we're in Africa, it means understanding God's purpose in redeeming African cultures and valuing what God is doing here. Theology properly appropriated entails worship and witness that is both faithful to God and culturally sensitive. It means being shaped into the image of his Son, Jesus Christ, in both our understanding and in our behaviour.

There's no theology that's not practical. And people who study theology, but work in other disciplines, understand the foundational truths that underpin their 'secular' work better as well. All truth is God's truth.

"To the Ends of the Earth": Explore in Botswana's Prisons

by Explore

Sitting around God's Word has been a privilege for 13 inmates at the Gaborone Boys Prison in Botswana. These inmates started Explore the Bible in January with much enthusiasm for the module. Their enthusiastic joy is evident as they participate in their sessions, asking questions when something is unclear, reading relevant passages to the group, and even having opportunities to lead part of the sessions.

"Explore has helped inmates deepen their understanding of the Bible and has been a phenomenal tool for spiritual maturity as the boys gain a clearer understanding of what God reveals in his Word. Explore does not simply offer tools for studying the Bible, but through God's Spirit, the hearts of the inmates are being transformed. There is a spiritual rehabilitation happening in our prisons" exclaimed Bekezela Maunze, an Explore team member in Botswana.

The team has been promoting Explore to various prison officials and pastors involved in prison ministry to have an Explore group in every prison in Botswana. Praise God for this incredible testimony, and please pray for our team on the ground. Pray that all those involved may ultimately turn to Jesus in faith and repentance.



Theological Development Africa

by Mrs Alison Lee (Executive Ambassador, GWC)

In March this year, we had the opportunity to visit Uganda Martyrs Seminary in Namugongo (UMSN). UMSN is a partner college of GWC and is part of the Theological Development Africa program (TDA). The TDA program provides bursaries for some of its students. We're very grateful to support UMSN's vision to train church ministers committed to the Christian faith. UMSN was established by the Namirembe Diocese and officially inaugurated in 1977. Its name celebrates the Christian martyrs who paid the greatest price for the gospel. These martyrs were killed at the site of UMSN by order of Ssekabaka Daniel Basamula Mwangi II on the 3rd of June 1886. This unyielding commitment to Christ echoes today in the seminary's name.

UMSN equips the people of God by providing holistic and relevant theological education and training. Its mission is to train the lay readers and clergy serving in the church and the world. **Attracting students from Uganda, Sudan, Kenya, Malawi, Congo, Tanzania and Rwanda, we're thankful for the two GWC alumni serving on UMSN's faculty:** Rev. Alex Sserwada and Rev. Grace Kavuma. The seminary has 300 students who study on-site for part of the year before returning to their respective dioceses to continue their studies remotely. This number is increasing annually.

This year at GWC, we welcome Peter Nsumba to our BTh program, supported by TDA. He will return to lecture at UMSN upon completing his studies. Peter says, "My work experience is in God's vineyard as a minister, and I have about five years of experience in active ministry. I have worked in different churches serving the Lord. On completing my studies at GWC, I want to return to UMSN and teach theology students using the knowledge I will acquire from GWC. I will also engage in spreading the gospel of Christ to the ends of the world."

He continues, "We are blessed by GWC and TDA for the bursaries given to UMSN to assist those who desire to be equipped to teach the Bible faithfully but are struggling financially. They started a degree program in Biblical Studies and Church Leadership and are proud of our pioneer class." Pray that God would continue to develop these partnerships across the continent, enabling God's people to pull together and see the gospel of Christ preached.

The recent Gafcon conference in Kigali presented many opportunities for training ordinands and faculty across the African continent and from Asia. Many of these Gafcon partners who wish to send students require bursary support for them. If you can support a bursary for 2024 and help us equip faithful men and women to teach and preach God's word, please visit our website: www.gwc.ac.za/make-a-donation/

Good Theological Training Makes for Better Christian Writers

by Rev. Graham Heslop (GWC Alumnus, Written content editor for TGC Africa)

The Gospel Coalition Africa features articles from over 200 authors representing over 20 African countries. As the written content editor, I have the privilege of working with most of those authors on their respective articles. And a particular joy in the editorial process is partnering with GWC students and college alumni.



Due to GWC's strong emphasis on biblical studies, its students—both present and past—are more than able Bible handlers. They demonstrate an uncompromising commitment to the scriptures coupled with the tools to apply them to our continent faithfully. Of course, we live on a vast continent. But sharing in Paul's conviction that the Bible is sufficient for all of life, GWC's students are very welcome contributors at TGC Africa. In fact, to date, of our 200 plus writers, over 30 of them have at some or other time learnt at GWC.

From my experience as an editor, I know that not everyone is a writer—at least, not everyone has a specific gifting from God in this area. Over the years, it's also become apparent to me that writing is a learnt skill. Yet whether one possesses a gift for writing or works hard at developing this ability, from TGC Africa's perspective, a writer is incomplete without a desire to imbue their work with God's truth. So I praise God that this desire is evident among the students emerging from GWC.

As literacy levels and internet access improve around Africa, God's church will need local believers to faithfully teach and apply the Bible within their cultures and communities. I'm excited to see how he will use college students on our platform to do that.

In Kingdom Work, God Reorders Our Desires

by Ms Jessica Standring (Crosslinks Gap Student)

I am part of a team of six school leavers on a short-term mission trip run by Crosslinks. We have been in Cape Town since the end of January, volunteering in different areas throughout the week and getting stuck in at Southreach Church in Muizenberg on Sundays. Two days a week, we are at GWC, helping out in the departments that can benefit most from an extra pair of hands. I have been working in the Communications department, helping to write up social media posts for the college. In our current digital age, engaging with Facebook and Instagram is a very effective way to share student stories and show a glimpse of what it is to be a student here at college. We have also enjoyed joining fellowship groups and building relationships with the students. My highlight, though, has been auditing two theology modules. **Studying Biblical Theology, alongside systematic theology in God and Humanity, gives me an ever-increasing love for our Lord Jesus as I see more of His power and character in the Scriptures.**



On Mondays, our team is based at Grace Café in the Rocklands area of Mitchells Plain. This small high school was set up as an alternative to the state-run high schools. We have enjoyed getting to know the students, sharing stories with them, and running workshops in the afternoons. We are at iThemba pre-primary school in Fish Hoek on Wednesdays and Fridays. Here, we work with much younger children: leading assemblies and running movement, music and drama classes. Although these children are much younger, it has been wonderful to share the Good news of the Bible with them explicitly.



Our work is very varied here, and we have learnt so much just by working in Cape Town and building friendships with people from all different backgrounds. We look forward to seeing how the Lord will use our final two months here for our good and His glory.