

# Newsletter

## April 2022

Dear Friends,

2022 has got off to a good start with a good crop of students and a renewed excitement that we can all be together face to face. I hope you enjoy reading the following news from students and faculty about their studies and research in 2022.

Thank you for your continued prayers and support, it is a great encouragement to us as we partner together in God's work.



The Rev Dr. Mark Dickson



## The Future Might Be Online, But Ours Is Still Firmly Residential

by The Rev. Dr Mark Dickson, Principal

We would all like to know what the future holds. Well, maybe not too far into the future. Just the next five or six years would be enough. This would help with all our planning, especially for ministry—not to mention business. Just knowing what the next year holds would actually be pretty amazing, given that the world has recently veered from one global crisis to the next.

As the prime minister of Canada in 2014, Stephen Harper spoke to the press about Vladimir Putin mounting a "slow-motion" invasion of Ukraine. That was eight years ago. We shake our heads. Back then, people already had a pretty good idea of what would happen. Even the military build-up on the borders of Ukraine was hard to miss. We all had months to make preparations for what was inevitable.

At the end of 2021, we could have looked each other in the eye and asked: 'Well, what does the invasion of Ukraine mean for the world economy?' I am not trying to be Captain Hindsight, but I really feel that we should have at the very least spoken about it. I am not alone in thinking about Chamberlain in 1938 waving his piece of signed paper, saying, "peace in our time."

So the truth is that we could have prepared ourselves better because it wasn't rocket science that an invasion would mean that oil prices would go through the roof. I've heard on major news that US\$300 a barrel is not impossible. It makes one shudder.

None of the above is intended to say what is right and wrong about the present conflict. Instead, I intend to show that we can see where things are headed if we look carefully enough. This is a thought worth entertaining, especially concerning education in the digital age.

Almost everyone is vigorously promoting the value of online education, with a lot of money being allocated in the West for developing digital education in Africa. Thanks to The East African Cable System, our bigger cities have decent connectivity, especially in eastern Africa. There is also a growing concern to train Christian pastors for the thousands of churches that do not have trained leaders, meaning that there is a major drive to bring online education to the millions who live outside of our cities. But the attempt to bring the internet to people in those vast tracts of rural Africa will be hampered by the fact that two-thirds of Africa's population still don't have access to electricity.

Then again, it is also true that rural communities across the continent seem to make do, finding ways to keep their devices charged. They may not always have access to Wi-Fi or signal coverage, but they get by. Thus the lack of electricity and fast Wi-Fi is a problem that can also seemingly be overcome. That is to say, online education will not necessarily be restricted to large African cities. One answer has been to develop a portable mini-server that is taken on a geographical circuit from area to area, spending a day in each, and then connecting up to a satellite or local fast Wi-Fi and of course, receiving a battery recharge at the same time.

However, reading the future of online education in Africa correctly must go far beyond merely appreciating the incredible utility of digital media. True, the world would be in a much poorer space were it not for Zoom.

Furthermore, it's inevitable that internet connectivity will only get better and faster, while even our most admired apps today will appear inadequate tomorrow. Yet there's more to these developments than rapid change. What we must do is reckon with how Africa perceives the internet.

Almost half of the countries that abstained in the vote to censure the aggressor in the current European war came from Africa. Many people around the globe would be surprised to hear that. It seems to be assumed that ubiquitous access to social media should produce an outlook similar to what exists in the West. But this is not the case, rightly or wrongly. Many of these countries also severely restrict or even switch off the internet for internal political reasons and seasons. Suspicion about the role of digital and other media in fostering opposition to the ruling party is quite widespread across Africa, leading to various bans.

My point is not really about whether it's right or wrong to control the internet. My point is that as we think about the future, and especially the medium-term future of online education, there are many practical realities demanding consideration. GWC may well offer something online in 2024. However, as to make a start in this direction, we remain committed by and large to a residential model.

**GWC, therefore, faces the future with confidence, knowing that residential learning in a face to face setting will remain a high priority for African Christians. Outside of Africa, there are people who may have heard of ubuntu. Still, we know it as an indigenous concept that can describe a kind of human flourishing that occurs when people live together in a physical community. In its own way, ubuntu exerts its own influence in the discussion about online learning on this continent.**

In 2022 many have still considered it worthwhile to travel down to Cape Town and enter into a theological community, devoting time to study with other future gospel workers, even if it means being away from home and country. A theological community is almost impossible to create online. But it is readily created, fostered, and nurtured at GWC.

# Hold Your Plans Loosely: Surprising Reflections From Theological College

by Ikho Poswayo

## Tell us a little about yourself?

I was born and raised in the Eastern Cape. In 2008 I moved to Gauteng to study at the University of Johannesburg. That's where I came to faith through the ministry of Campus Outreach. After my Honours in Financial Management, I moved to Cape Town to work in the finance department of an oil company. After working there for five years, I started my undergraduate degree at GWC.

## When you first started your undergraduate at GWC, what were your reasons?

I had come to college for the Higher Certificate, which was meant to be just one year. I'd initially come because I wanted to grow in my faith and be better equipped in handling the Bible. I'd thought that I'd go back to corporate and be able to counsel colleagues biblically, with more confidence than I had before college. But during that year, **I had so much joy in learning and growing. I wanted to learn more.** More than that, I decided to come back for the Bachelor of Theology degree. Because I had the conviction that Biblical Counselling was an area I would love to be used in by God on a full-time basis, rather than a side thing I did informally with work colleagues, **I knew that I would need to have solid doctrine as a foundation for further studies in Counselling.** So I came back for the BTh.

## Was your motivation for doing postgraduate studies different?

Honestly, while I'd heard good reasons for doing postgraduate studies, my personal motivation was that it was the door God opened for me. **I learned that God will sometimes use our circumstances to direct the paths our lives take.** He directed me that way. But I didn't know what he was doing. And I battled a lot with that in the first couple of months of my postgraduate degree.

## How has studying prepared and equipped you for ministry in the future?

I have been given valuable tools for studying God's word, learning how to engage critically with different interpretations and applications of it. **But beyond the technicalities, my time studying theology has been a time of really wrestling with what I believe and how it applies to ordinary life.** This bridging of the gap between knowledge and life application is something that is incredibly important in ministry, especially the field I'm interested in.

## What would you say to yourself (or someone with a similar vision) entering theological training?

Be prepared to be stretched both inside and outside the classroom. It's not a walk in the park. Theological training has been the hardest of all the studying I have done. And that's because the things you will learn are not things you can just park aside and move on as you were. What makes it hard is the fact that it works both mind and heart. But it is worth it! I've already started to see how God is using my training for his purposes, and I know that there's more to come. **Enter with humility and an open mind so that your plans regarding how you will go on to use the training might change, according to God's plans.**





# Buildings: Creating Spaces That Are Both Accessible And Sustainable

by Clive Alfino

GWC's various buildings in Muizenberg are the spaces where our students live and learn together. They're indispensable to the residential theological community. But they're also not cheap, and things tend to break down over time. So I want to tell you about two building-related projects that are presently underway: the Hope solar panel system and the Morris House elevator.

## Firstly, Hope's solar panels:

This student residence consists of four floors, each approximately 400m<sup>2</sup>. The ground floor has parking facilities for 15 vehicles, a reception, and a student lounge. Floors one through three have 39 sharing rooms and four single room flats. The fourth floor is the dining and lounge area and a commercial kitchen. We can seat 120 people for a meal here. The Hope Centre is a lively space. This brings me to the matter of our solar panels.



We currently have 102 PV panels installed on Hope's roof. These provide the electrical requirements for the building during the day. However, because we don't yet have a lithium battery system linked to it, our solar system cannot serve the building at night or in bad weather. The estimated cost to install this system is in the region of R1 million.

The cost seems high. However, because the Hope centre already has an entire borehole filtration system in place, once this battery system is installed, we will be awarded a 'green house' certificate. This certificate is not insignificant. In addition to saving costs in the long run, it demonstrates our commitment to renewable energies and future generations of South Africans.

**Secondly, we come to the Morris House elevator:** This building consists of three floors. The lecture rooms are on the ground floor; reception, offices, and the kitchen area on the first; and meeting rooms, offices, and our auditorium are on the second.

Morris House contains an old hoist type elevator (1200mm x 900mm), primarily to provide access for those who are physically disabled. It consists of an enclosed shaft, but the car itself has bars rather than doors. This makes use of the lift somewhat terrifying. Not only does it creak, malfunctions are not uncommon and more than a few students can trade stories about being stuck in it.

The estimated cost to upgrade the elevator is in the region of R 500 000. Again, this seems like a lot of money. But in addition to ensuring the safety of our students, this upgrade will be evidence of GWC's concern to make our spaces accessible for everyone.

**Click here to donate towards these projects now.**



# GWC's Commitment To Higher Theological Training On The Continent

by Drs Dick and Caroline Seed

In August 2018, we partnered with GWC to run a non-accredited three-phase introductory course across Africa in teaching and learning for higher theological education (TALHITE). When lockdown prevented us from travelling, we moved online and managed to extend the scope of the training across the continent and beyond. The impact has been life-changing for many new and existing lecturers in theological institutions, who have previously had to struggle with no training and little assistance.

As one participant writes, "This introductory course in Teaching and Learning for Higher Theological Education is good and useful for our theological colleges in the Anglican Church of Tanzania. In my opinion, this course should be integrated into our university curriculum. It will bring tremendous change to teaching and learning in Tanzania. Time was too limited. It should be a full-time course."

So we're firmly convinced, and testimonials such as the one above are evidence that this online short course speaks to GWC's vision: "That Africa be filled with preachers and teachers who deeply love the Lord Jesus and who have a profound understanding of Scripture," by providing training for lecturers that is biblical, theological, and contextual. However, it is only an introductory course.



Lecturers and academic leaders in South Africa and other African countries need an accredited professional course that is theological education specific, which will enable them to speak confidently as evangelical leaders in the increasingly complex world of higher education. Although there are secular programmes available, there is currently nothing for theological educators in Africa.

As we look to the future, we seek to establish a Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Theological Education (PG Dip. HTE) as a GWC-accredited course. This will be a two-year part-time online programme run from GWC for lecturers teaching in theological institutions. We expect to draw participants from the pool of 150 lecturers who have already completed the introductory course and have graduated with Bachelor of Theology degree, who want to move into teaching positions.

It is expected to take two years to complete the accreditation and set up processes. Potential participants are waiting eagerly for the programme to begin. Please pray that the Lord will open all the necessary doors so that this exciting next step in the realisation of GWC's core vision becomes a reality.

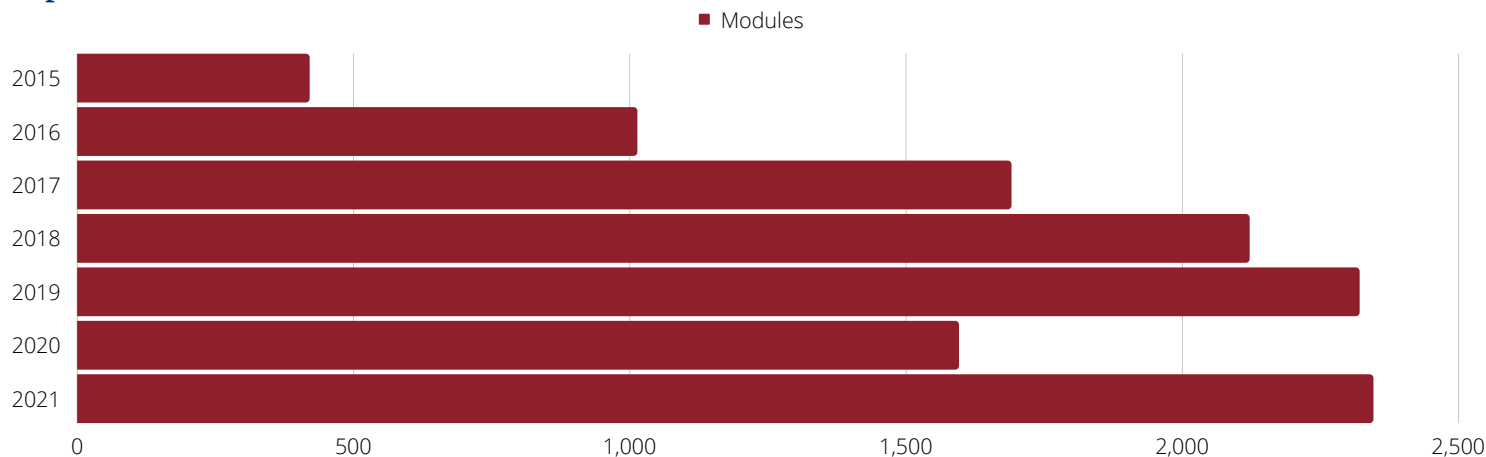
Drs Dick and Caroline Seed are mission partners with Church Mission Society (UK). Originally from REACH SA, they joined CMS in 1999 and served as theological educators in institutions in Nigeria, Rwanda, Ghana and Kenya. They set up Theological Education Development Services (TEDS) in 2013 to provide training and consultation for theological institutions. They work with two part-time facilitators in Kenya and South Africa.



# Explore: Progress, Plans, And All Praise Be To God

by Nevil Carrington

At the heart of the Explore program are small groups of believers meeting together under the guidance of a trained facilitator. The last two years of COVID-19 struck at that heart, making those groups at times incredibly difficult and others impossible. **But thanks be to God that Explore isn't merely still going but growing.** As the graph shows, though the total number of module enrolments dropped in 2020, we registered slightly more module enrolments last year than we did in 2019. Furthermore, 2021 saw our largest number of graduating students to date. So, Explore continues to expand across Africa.



Anticipating further growth, Explore will be taking some bold steps to better establish Explore on the continent. **We have several exciting projects planned for the period of 2022 to 2025.** Undergirding these projects will be a virulent communication strategy. In fact, you can expect a newsletter exclusively devoted to Explore in the upcoming months and a rebrand in the not-too-distant future. **One aspect of this rebrand will be the production of an accredited Higher Certificate Programme offered by GWC.**



Training facilitators in Central Buganda



Exploring lands in Sierra Leone

Despite being widely spoken throughout our continent, English remains a barrier for many potential Explore students. Therefore, within four years, we hope to complete translations of the Explore material into as many as seven African languages—including Chichewa, French and Portuguese. **This comes alongside our ambition to reach the majority of sub-Saharan African countries before the end of 2025.** We aim to build hubs in key countries to extend our reach. These will simplify administration while also providing training services to Explore facilitators.



Finally, on the administration front, we aim to start the process soon of shifting all student information to a new database platform. This platform will provide improved reporting and an online Explore classroom. This will include facilitation training sessions for all Explore modules. As always, our ambitions for this platform are **increased access to the Explore program and improved assistance for facilitators**. We're even exploring avenues to make this platform function offline in areas where the internet is challenging.

So, look out for our forthcoming newsletter. Please pray for the Explore department and the many facilitators and students around Africa. And feel free to contact us to hear more about the projects mentioned above and others that are on the cards.



DONATE

Click on this link if you would like to donate to the work of Explore in providing theological education to pastors and teaching congregants more about God's Word, in Africa.

# NEWSFLASH

A New Student Initiative:

Campus Ministry Training & Discussion group:

A number of students at GWC have expressed an interest in and passion for University Campus Ministry. To this end, a new student initiative began recently: a training and discussion group, led by a 3rd year student, Youngkwang Kim.

He has over 15 years of experience in campus ministry, training campus ministers, and oversight of many campus teams in South Korea, and so comes with a wealth of helpful knowledge and expertise. This group, a mix of undergrad and postgrad students, meets fortnightly on Tuesday afternoons to discuss, share and learn about the importance of campus ministry, with the particular focus on campus ministry in Africa.



“Devoting ourselves to Campus Ministry, through God's help, will help us in laying a foundation and moulding future leaders. When discipleship is done on campus, it impacts societies and their local churches. We pray for more leaders that are willing to invest their energy in Campus Ministry.” Miriam Zange, 3rd year student.

If you would like to support us through prayer, please sign up to receive our prayer letter here:

PRAY



# Theological Training: A Risk Worth Taking In Service Of The African Church

by Priviledge Tafirei

A few weeks ago, I shared a [reflection](#) on my undergraduate studies at the Gospel Coalition Africa. I unpacked three pitfalls that students must beware of as they pursue theological studies. Theological training is so enticing that one faces the danger of missing the purpose of engaging in the discipline of theological study. Most students enter theological training because they desire to serve the church, helping God's people to grow in their knowledge and love for him. However, as one's brain starts to be massaged with deep theological thoughts, it's easy to forget the fundamental reason for theological study: **to serve the local church.**

Thus it's important for theological students to be reminded that deep theology cannot stop in our heads. For it's so easy to fall into theological pride, settling for intellectual prowess without spiritual progress. **Deep theology should lift our eyes up in awe and wonder at God, driving us to our knees in prayer and melting our hearts in love.** In short, it should lead us to worship God and love our neighbours. Only that isn't always the case.

After reflecting on the various pitfalls for theological students, it might be tempting to conclude that it's too dangerous. That we're better off avoiding higher studies entirely. This is certainly one of the ways we might read James 3:1, **"Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly."** However, this verse can also be understood as an exhortation to take the Bible teaching seriously. To do that, we shouldn't flee from theological training but humbly enter into it



I am of the view that every Christian should be a theologian. The numerous pitfalls are warning signs. Not to ward us away from theological training but to approach them soberly and seriously, navigating them in a healthy and fruitful way. **There is a great need, especially in our motherland Africa, for more men and women to devote themselves to the discipline of theological education.** Our continent is desperate for faithful brothers and sisters who can engage with theological ideas and help contextualise those truths for their people.

Someone once said to me, 'We know better when we worship better.' But I think the opposite is more accurate: **We worship better when we know better.** And for us to know better, we need more men and women filled with the Spirit of God, who give themselves to studying theology **to help the church know God better and worship him well.**





# The Legacy and the Future of the Church in Africa: Part 2

By Dr Vuyani Sindo

In my [previous article](#), I looked at the criticism common among black millennials within the South African context that calls Christianity a white man's religion. I tried to answer that common objection by looking at the past, particularly the role that the Ethiopian church played in Martin Luther's imagination of the church, during the Reformation. Though I have slightly modified the aims for this follow-up article alluded to in the previous one, I will continue to look at the legacy of the African church, especially the role of theological education.

In dealing with the role of theological education in Africa, this article will look at the common objection that has been raised against the mission of GWC. I will deal with this objection similarly to how I did in my previous article. I will be looking into the past in seeking to answer some of the objections against the GWC mission statement:

SHAPE MINDS  
via a classical  
theological  
education

NURTURE HEARTS  
devoted to  
Christian service  
and

TRAIN VOICES  
to effectively  
communicate the  
word of Christ

Most criticisms focus on the first part: our commitment to classical theological education. For some, this is Eurocentric. But is it? I have lost count of how many times, when I tell people of GWC's mission, they ask me: 'When are you going to do something African?' **As if classical theological education is foreign or not suited for the African continent.**

In his book, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity*, Thomas C. Oden lists seven ways that Africa shaped the Christian Mind (pages 42–61). For the sake of time and what is relevant for us as GWC, I will only list the first three. They are:

1. The Western/European idea of the university was born in the crucible of Africa
2. Christian exegesis of scripture first matured in Africa
3. African sources shaped early Christian dogma[1].

**At GWC, we are very proud of our theological library. We continue to invest in it hoping that, God-willing, it will be one of the best-resourced theological libraries on the continent.** Interestingly, the importance of libraries has its roots on this continent and it has been key in shaping minds for generations. Libraries are foundational for universities.

Writing about how influential the ancient Library of Alexandria was on medieval European universities, Oden says: "The history of the first medieval universities such as Padua (Italy), Paris (France), Salamanca (Spain) and Oxford (England) followed methods of text examination, curricular patterns and philosophical imperatives that were refined in second-century African Christianity as early as Pantaeus and Clement of Alexandria. Christian scholarship was born in the leading academic centre of the ancient world: Alexandria. That vital crucible of learning was itself transformed by Christianity and exported to Rome, the Rhone valley, Byzantium and Antioch."

**One can thus say our emphasis on the importance of our library continues a rich heritage that has its seedbed in Africa.**

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[1] It is worth noting that I am in no way arguing that those who formulated the mission of GWC were influenced by Oden's work or cognizant of the African role in shaping Christianity. That assertion will be anachronistic. It is quite probable that they were more influenced by the spirit of the Renaissance "ad Fontes" ([back] to the sources). What I am arguing for, using insights from Oden's work, is that the classical sources that we emphasise at GWC have their seedbed on the African continent.



The second contribution of Africa to global Christianity according to Oden is in the area of exegesis. **GWC is very passionate about exegesis and this comes through in our emphasis on the need for students to study the original biblical languages.** Most scholars, when they think of African exegesis, tend to think of the allegorical interpretation of the Alexandrian exegetes, most notably St Augustine. Some people might know that GWC, in its hermeneutical framework and use of the socio-historical grammatical approach to exegesis, follows more along the line of the ancient Antiochene school of exegesis[2]. According to [Chris Len de Wet](#), "the Antiochene exegetical school is renowned for its emphasis on the importance of history in the exegetical process in response to the allegorical excesses of the Alexandrian exegetical school." So he continues, "the Antiochene exegetes had a specific two-fold scriptural hermeneutic, namely that scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit, but the role of humans is acknowledged." This means as I was taught in my very first year at GWC, **"that the study of the language and rhetoric of the text is important as well as the history behind the text because the Holy Spirit is revealed in history."** Anyone familiar with the GWC handbook on exegesis would be aware that these are the things that the college is passionate about.

But one might wonder, what has Antiochene exegesis got to do with Africa? After all, wasn't the Antiochene exegesis simply a response to the more spiritual excesses of the Alexandrians? This is where the insight of Oden's work comes in. He writes that "virtually all Christian exegesis following Origen and Didymus the Blind actively borrowed from their studies in large portions, even while at times resisting or opposing certain aspects of the checkered tradition later called 'Origenism.'" He further notes: "it is no exaggeration to say that the greatest fourth-century Christian exegetes of East and West (Gregory Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine) were all profoundly influenced by the writings of Origen. Even when Origen's detractors rejected his excesses, they continued to depend on his philological, linguistic and historical studies." **Thus what we do at GWC, while clearly following the Antiochene exegesis, nonetheless has its roots on this continent through the influence of Origen.** Thus, it would be wise for the next generation not to forget the rich heritage that we are part of.

The third contribution, according to Oden, that Africa made to global Christianity is how this continent was the source of early Christian dogma. Oden points out how the African early church fathers such as Tertullian, Cyprian, Athanasius, Augustine, and Cyril shaped the dogmatic formulations of the orthodoxy in both the East and the West. Most of us as Reformed evangelicals subscribe to the Nicene creed, but some of us are unaware of the crucial role the early African church fathers like Athanasius played in its formulation.

[2] For more on the differences between the Alexandrian exegesis and the Antiochene exegesis see Christ Len De Wet's 2007 MA dissertation: "The Homilies of John Chrysostom on 1 Corinthians 12: A Model of Antiochene Exegesis on the Charismata". Pretoria: University of Pretoria



So, is Christianity a white man's religion? Is GWC's mission of shaping "minds via a classical theological education" foreign to this continent? My answer to both questions is a resounding: No. **Africa has long been part of the Christian story, from the story of Joseph to the exodus.** Our DNA is present, from the Lord Jesus finding safety in Egypt as a baby to Simon of Cyrene, who helped Jesus to carry his cross. We were there. From the Ethiopian eunuch, who was the first gentile to accept Jesus, to early church fathers who were part of formulating the early Christian dogmas, **this continent has been part of the Christian story and continues to be part of its future.**

When we think of the Christian story, we need to know that this continent has been part and parcel of that story. Africa is not simply a consumer of the Christian story. It has always been and will forever be part of the Christian story. Please don't get me wrong, I am not arguing for narrow Afrocentrism.

All I am saying is that when we think of the universal church, let us not forget that Africa has been a part of it for a long time.



The GWC Ark Endowment fund is held offshore and is set up for the long-term sustainability of GWC. At present, 80% of our annual operational budget flows in from donated income, and we aim to halve this with the help of the interest from the Endowment. The future growth and expansion of the College necessitates this new development. Please pray with us as we raise significant support for the GWC Ark Endowment.

**To learn more about the Ark Endowment Fund, please click on this link:**

