

GWC Newsletter | September 2025

Contextual Theological Education

by The Rev. Dr Mark Dickson (GWC Principal)

GWC is one of many Bible colleges across Africa where students are trained to do ministry in their home context. Among all these fine institutions, a common denominator (besides the Bible of course) is the use of corresponding textbooks. At conferences in Nairobi or Dodoma and elsewhere in Africa, I always ask lecturers what textbook they are using for theology systematics. About 70% of the time, the same answer comes back: Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology. I have thought about that. Although Grudem authored his book for a Western context, what happens is that students in the classroom ask questions to do with their own context. The ensuing class discussion is massively formative, and, as students read this uncommonly accessible and orthodox treatment of Christian doctrine, they develop an important reading instinct; an ability both to detect authorial blindspots such as bias, as well as their genius in applying 'that' text in 'that' way to 'that' foreign context (from the student's point of view). What else is this if not an instinct for contextual reading.



GWC has a somewhat unique teaching aspect in that from the first year already we introduce all our students to Bible Theology, which sets in motion a way of reading that sets them free to discern Jesus Christ in all the Bible, and then, supported by Greek and Hebrew, they are well placed to do their own work in applying the sacred text to their local context.

It is of great urgency for us that African Christians speak and write about how the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as taught in the Bible, is able to address the continent's many challenges and opportunities. This newsletter forms part of GWC's contribution to a continent-wide suite of conversations that do not shy away from applying the Gospel to the big issues of the day. While not exhaustive, we have touched on some of the uniquely African topics that our students are grappling with, and the views that we believe will shape thought leadership within the church in Africa.

May these articles spark thought, initiate discussion, and help you refine your own biblical worldview on the issues you face or see around you.

Questions Students Ask...

How does one cope with the crippling burden of "black tax"?

The concept of "black tax", with its unfortunate term of phrase, is really part of a natural ecosystem that exists, when children take up the responsibility to care for their parents' needs. It honours the sacrifices made by their parents, which enabled them to get to a firmer footing in life, and should be seen as giving, or, at most, gracious obligation. God has after all gifted us with our families, and the beauty of the African culture is that siblings care for one another in the spirit of common sense (what Africans call ubuntu). This support can, however, feel like a tax when the relationship is one of expectation and demand, which, sadly, can be a reality when it comes to fallen man. In these instances, I would caution against "feeding greed", and assert that "each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give" (2 Cor 9:7a). This response does not mean to simplify the pressure that young people feel, and it certainly requires prayer, wisdom, and personal reflection to discern what a biblical response looks like in each unique situation.



Response by faculty member
Rev. Sivuyile Lurai

How does Africa relate to the West, particularly in the context of ministry and in Bible colleges?

There seems to be a push-back against Western culture, not just in South Africa and Africa, but even in Western countries, based on the history of colonialism and oppression. This has become a big talking point both in and outside our lecture halls and is an opportunity for open discussion: Why do we do things in a Western way in an African college? Should we not teach subjects in a less rationalistic, concept-driven (typically Western) way, or eat food that represents our culture? There are many good, practical suggestions made that we have implemented. One example is that students can now choose to preach in their home language, which is especially helpful if they are returning to a non-English speaking church for ministry. Another example is that lecturers are more deliberate in prescribing and recommending African sources and scholars.

I do affirm that we need wisdom to work out what the best approach to take is. I speak to students about acknowledging that we are lying on the bed that was made; the hurt and pain caused by colonial oppression is not instantly healed. The people that brought Christianity to Africa certainly weren't faultless, but that's the Bible – God using broken people to grow His kingdom.



Response by faculty member
Rev. Dr Thapelo Khumalo

Ministry in Conflict Zones

Jok Luk and Seme Ludanga are South Sudanese students at GWC, whose theological studies are preparing them to return home to preach the gospel in a war-ravaged context...

“For those who have lived through war, the challenges are immense, and nothing else seems more overwhelming. I was born into a loving family with livestock and land, but we lost everything to war – homes, crops, cattle, and beloved family members. Suddenly, we were forced to survive in forests with wild animals, mosquitoes, and no food security.

On one hand, suffering often draws people to Christ. Churches have grown rapidly, with committed followers in nearly every village and refugee camp. People seek Christ as a source of hope and healing. On the other hand, hardship can also cause disillusionment. Some abandon their faith when they see non-Christians prospering. Others come to Christ expecting material miracles and leave when life doesn’t improve immediately. It’s a challenge for the church to disciple believers beyond circumstantial faith. Through my theological studies at GWC, I’ve come to understand that suffering is integral to Christian growth. While painful, it draws us closer to God and transforms our view of life. What a privilege to be able to go back and share this hope with those who don’t yet know it.” – Jok Luk, BTh 3



“The challenges of ministry in South Sudan are not in the sense of persecution, but rather the desperation of a war-torn situation that causes displacement, loss of loved ones, loss of property and trauma. War affects everyone, both believers and non-believers. I was born during the war of the liberation struggle, I grew up in this situation, and I came to faith in Jesus in such situation. Through the faithful teaching and rigorous training I’ve received at GWC, it is my prayer and desire to contribute to the church positively by training pastors who are already in ministry, as well as preparing the younger generation of pastors through faithful gospel teaching at Bishop Gwynne School of Theology in Juba. War and instability may not end, but only Jesus can offer a true word of comfort and healing through the Gospel, to those affected by it.” – Seme Ludanga, MTh



A cross in Seme’s home town of Yei, which says ‘Yei for Jesus’.

Growing Africa’s Kids for the Lord



Siyakhulisa training day in Gauteng

Jo Taylor is a GWC alumnus from the College’s earliest days. In her time here, she says the “ministry bug bit” and what followed was 25 years of children’s ministry at St Stephen’s Bible Church, Claremont, Cape Town. Jo shared a bit about the new ministry she has launched, Siyakhulisa Kids...

“In South Africa, the majority of churches cannot afford full-time children’s workers. If they do have one, it is rare for them to be theologically trained. How then, do we equip volunteers to do kids’ ministry, and train more people on the ground to serve children? Siyakhulisa Kids, meaning “we grow children” was birthed in response to this need, and is the outcome of a number of years of prayer and discussion together with my pastor, Rev. Dr Geoff Gertzen, and within REACH-SA. The aim is to help equip those responsible for children’s ministry in the local church, and to help them find resources that are relevant to their context, affordable and biblically faithful. I am also passionate about helping make churches safe spaces for children and teens in their community.

My studies at GWC gave me complete confidence that teaching the Bible is what we need to be doing in kids’ ministry, letting God’s power through His Holy Spirit reveal Himself through Scripture to children. It excites me to think that in different pockets across South Africa, and in varied contexts, we will start to see children’s ministry as discipleship.

I would love to visit more churches, so please do invite me to come and observe and hear from you.

www.siyakhulisakids.com



Africa: The World’s Youngest Continent



60% of the population is younger than 25 years old



There are over 21 million children in South Africa



75% of Christians profess that they came to faith before the age of 18

Sharing Hope in Lavender Hill

A few years ago, Marcello Brown found himself in a hospital bed, with all his vitals dropping, and a great sense of fear overcoming him. The fear was not dying, he says, but dying knowing that he was not in a right standing with God. He cried out for forgiveness, declaring belief in Jesus and asking for a place in His kingdom. Emerging from a coma two days later, he found God had answered his prayer and, more than that, spared him his life to serve the Lord faithfully, together with his wife Kylie.

The Browns, now in their first year of theological studies, are involved in children's ministry at St. Paul's church in Lavender Hill, and shared some of their story of what it looks like to do ministry in a context of drugs, poverty, gangsterism and brokenness in their home suburb of Lavender Hill...

Can you describe your ministry journey so far?

Kylie: I grew up in St. Paul's church in Lavender Hill, and even though I was interested in knowing more about faith throughout my youth, I think it was only when our son was about five years old, and we were at our lowest point in our life and marriage, that I really surrendered myself to the Lord and understood what it meant to be a Christian. It was then that I started serving, in kids' ministry and with an after-school programme run by St. Paul's at local schools. We also created a discipleship group with teen girls from surrounding areas, to create a safe space for them.

Marcello: I joined Kylie in kids' ministry at St Paul's, having been discipled by Pastor Rev. Andrew Barnes, and we have been heading up the after-school programme there. We are also working towards getting a youth group started, which is greatly needed. Informally, we've invested in building relationships with gangsters in our block of flats who have witnessed the changes in my life.

Why did you feel it was important to study at GWC?

Kylie: People in our community are exposed to wrong Bible teaching: health, wealth and prosperity, and passages taken out of context. For the past few years, we've been exposed to the truth at St. Paul's, and the growth that is happening there is a direct result of this. Now that I understand what people need, I want to equip myself with the truth, and the tools to show people how to correctly read and apply Scripture.



Marcello and Kylie Brown together with their children Zachary, Meekhai, Ezekiel, and Vashtee.



St Paul's after-school programme in Lavender Hill.

Marcello: Due to a lack of training and not being properly equipped for ministry, church leaders end up misleading people. I never realised how damaging and dangerous this is until I reflected on my own life, and the views that I'd developed that are contrary to the gospel of Christ. People in our community are extremely vulnerable due to poverty and a lack of education, and this means that they are easily misled: gangsterism in itself is a form of religion, you get indoctrinated into a set of worldviews from a young age.

Is there a biblical truth that's stood out for you through your studies that will better equip you for your ministry?

Kylie: I think what's struck me is how we are building a community of Christians who we'll share eternity with. I think there is still a belief in our circles that church is something you attend, but actually, we need to show them that Christianity is all of life, we are family and need to always have time for each other.

What is the most challenging part about reaching people in Lavender Hill with the gospel?

Marcello: People want the chaos in their lives to disappear, and it's difficult to help them see that God doesn't necessarily make suffering just go away, but he helps you deal with it as you're strengthened in Christ. It's also hard to be patient when people keep turning away and going back to destructive lifestyles – I need to keep remembering it is only God who saves, and we are merely sharing the truth. Even when I know I am being manipulated, I need to still love that person, just as God and others loved me when I was in that position.

BURSARY SUPPORT NEEDED

Your donation to the Bursary Fund provides a training opportunity for a ministry hearted student to be equipped to teach the Bible faithfully in their churches, ministries or Bible Colleges.

GWC Bursary support

- ✓ 91 students on bursaries this year
- ✓ 44% of students are from REACH SA
- ✓ 14 countries represented in our student body
- ✓ 19 denominations in our student body



Donate via our website
www.gwc.ac.za



Lobola in 2025: A Stumbling Block to Marriage?



BTh2 student Siphamandla Sithole reflects on the contemporary practice of lobola and the financial burden it brings, which he believes poses a significant challenge to the biblical vision of marriage. GWC faculty member Rev. Sivuyile Lurai weighs in on why he believes this rich African tradition still holds great value today...

Siphamandla: Historically, lobola was a symbolic gesture of appreciation and honour from the groom to the family of the bride. It expressed gratitude for raising a daughter and signified the uniting of two families through the marriage of their children. This often involved the gifting of a few cattle or goats, and the celebration that followed served to strengthen social bonds between the extended families. In its original context, lobola reflected values of respect, unity, and community all of which align with biblical principles. However, the practice, as it exists today, has undergone a significant transformation. It has become, in many cases, an expensive and transactional negotiation, often driven by financial gain rather than relational honour. What was once a cultural symbol of familial unity has, sadly, become a stumbling block for many young people seeking to honour the Lord through marriage.

For many, the required lobola amount, sometimes exceeding R60,000, is simply unattainable, especially in a country facing deep economic challenges. This financial burden is compounded by expectations of both traditional and Western-style weddings. As a result, many young believers are forced to either delay marriage indefinitely, opt for civil unions devoid of family support, or, most troubling of all, abandon the idea of marriage altogether leading to cohabitation, unwed parenthood, and other forms of relational instability. This trend has grave implications for the Church and for society. It weakens the foundation of the family, which Scripture consistently presents as the God-ordained environment for nurturing children, modelling covenantal love, and sustaining moral order (Genesis 2:24; Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Ephesians 6:1-4).

I believe that, as future pastors and church leaders, we need to be equipped to address this common dilemma for young Christian couples in Africa with clarity, compassion, and biblical faithfulness. If we are serious about building strong families and discipling the next generation, we must be willing to challenge traditions that have drifted from their original purpose.

We must be both respectful of our heritage and resolute in our commitment to the gospel. Cultural identity should never come at the expense of obedience to Christ.

Sivuyile: I agree with Siphamandla that, when people are involved, any good thing can be turned into an opportunity for gain or greed, and this requires much wisdom and prayer to navigate. I would however affirm the continued practice of lobola, which is deeply embedded in African culture and, which, when conducted in the intended 'spirit of lobola', serves as a positive gesture towards honouring the parents and family of one's future wife. The negotiations should be an enjoyable process filled with good humour. Yes, raising the required amount is a challenge, but I have advised young men who I've counselled pastorally to see it as one of many future obstacles that they will need to overcome in marriage – at least this is one that they have not been directly involved in bringing about! I also remind them that they are the ones wanting to get married and driving the process, no one is forcing them to do this. In many cases the full amount of lobola can be settled post-marriage; and family members and friends often contribute gifts towards helping raise it. What is the price of lobola compared to the gift of a wife, second only to Christ? I would disagree that lobola causes couples to fall into sin, this happens because they are tempted by their desires and give in to this temptation, regardless of other factors.



GWC Student
Siphamandla Sithole



GWC Faculty Member
Rev. Sivuyile Lurai