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Studying Systematic Theology: An African Contextual Approach

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This article explores historical, theological, hermeneutical, and personal approaches of doing systematic theology. It suggests the place of systematic theology in relation to other theological disciplines such as exegesis, historical theology, and practical theology. The article begins with a definition of systematic theology, then traces the development of systematic theology as a theological and academic discipline. Next, it examines the various sources of systematic theology and provides how the disciplines relate to systematizing doctrine. Finally, using the metaphor of cross-currents in African holistic spirituality, the article suggests how systematic theology relates to other disciplines.

Key words: Systematic Theology, African contextual approach, Historical foundations of theology, Praxis Oriented theology

What is Systematic Theology?

As Stanley Grenz and John Franke points out, systematic theology can be defined simply as a process of doing/studying theology (2001:16). Thus, every definition of theology carries the

definer's presuppositions and biases. No one does theology from a vacuum. In view of this, I define systematic theology as *the ongoing process of articulating contextual constructs derived from God's self-revelation in Scripture, reason, and history, in order to aid the church to faithfully live for God in this world and for the glory of God*. Thus, systematic theology is a contextual discipline. It stems out of the needs of the church and the society. It is also a doxological discipline. Theology ought to inspire worship. Prosper of Aquitaine's ancient dictum, *lex orandi lex credenda*, the "rule of prayer equals rule of doctrine," shows that early Christians paid attention to doctrine, practice, and worship (Wainwright, 2008: 225-227; Yong, 2008: 46). The Bible is the normative source of revelation for systematic theology, aided by history (tradition), Christian experience, and reason.

Though every Christian is a theologian in the sense that each Christian reflects on his or her own faith, not every Christian has the resources or the ability to intellectually articulate and systematize their faith. Therefore, systematic theology is really the "business" of systematic theologians — those who have been trained to engage in that task. Systematic theologians have the intellectual resources to articulate their faith and by so doing help Christians to better understand their faith. The next section will show how systematic theologians have carried out the "business" of systematizing doctrines. The history is rather brief. The article begins with the formative stage of systematic theology, i.e., the patristic period. Here, the article highlights the roles of Origen, Tertullian, and Augustine in systematizing doctrine. Secondly, the article examines systematic theology as an academic discipline.

The Historical Foundations of Systematic Theology as a Discipline

The Formative Stages of Systematic Theology: The Patristic Period

Early Christians did not find it necessary to systematize or to logically expound their beliefs because, as Peter Toon (1979: xiii), explains, "controversies had not raised questions to be answered and the implications of the worship and faith of the Church had not been fully recognized." As time went by and this stated need arose, Christians responded by articulating their beliefs. Their response was in connection to three immediate concerns: the need to refute heresies that threatened their faith; the need to firmly ground young converts for the purpose of baptism and the Lord's Supper; and the need to teach and preach the truth of God's Word in a

comprehensive manner. These three concerns, show that practical rather than theoretical concerns were the impetus for doing theology.

As time passed, the series of teachings that the early Church formulated in response to the needs of the church became the “rule of faith,” the standard baselines or points of belief for the Church. *Ho kanon tes aletheias* (canon of truth) and *regula veratatis* (rule of truth) are other terms that are often used in place of *regula fidei* “rule of faith.” It was much later, precisely, the age of medieval scholasticism, that theology became an academic discipline where the various topics that constituted the simple “rules of faith” of early Christianity, were formulated into more complex doctrines. Several theologians played a significant role in the process of developing complex Christian doctrines. The leading ones were Origen, Tertullian, and Augustine. Some of their articulations shaped the face of systematic theology for generations.

Origen (c. 185-254) was “the first to formulate a number of doctrinal principles” by using the logics of Greek philosophy (Evans, 1986: 33). He affirmed that scripture was the primary source for theology. He avowed divine inspiration and unity, and used allegory as a hermeneutic. Like many apologists of the first century, his theology emerged out of an engagement with and resistance to those who opposed or contradicted the message of the Bible. For example, his *First Principles* argues for the unity of the Old and the New Testaments (against Marcion) and the providence of God that sustains a coherent universe (against Marcion and Valentinus).

In contrast to Origen, Tertullian (c.160-225) critiqued the use of Greek philosophy to articulate Christian doctrine. He preferred to articulate doctrine from the overarching paradigm of the “kerygma that all is fulfilled and perfected in Christ” (Evans, 2004: 134). Like Origen and other early Christian thinkers, Tertullian’s theology was driven by apologetic concerns as evidenced by his two major apologetic works *Against Marcion* and *Against Praxeas*. Often called “the father of Latin theology,” Tertullian shaped the doctrine of the Trinity especially in the West (McKim, 1988: 11). He was the first to use the term *trinitas*, and the two terms he employed to construct a theology of the Trinity, *substantia* (substance) and *persona* (person), have never been abandoned even in modern theological constructs.

Augustine of Hippo (c. 354-430) is perhaps the most influential theologian in Christian history. G. R. Evans (2004: 238) observes that Augustine's writings "were by far the most numerous in almost every monastic library, after the books of the Bible and liturgical texts." Augustine solidified the use of philosophy in theological constructs. For instance, he believed that to be created in the image of God is to possess a rational (intellectual) soul and thus to exist is to think (Augustine, 1965: 10.11-12). His contribution also lies in his correlation of memory, intellect, and will to the idea of the Trinity (Ibid., 9:12.18). Augustine also contributed to other theologies such as the existence of God, theodicy, God's providence, foreknowledge, human freedom and responsibility, practical theology (preaching), soteriology, and exegesis. His theology survived him for hundreds of generations.

By the end of patristic era, the creeds of the church (Nicene, Niceno-Constantinopolitan, and Chalcedon) were all in place. The creeds helped to regulate doctrine in times of heresies and controversies. However, systematic theology as a discipline was still in its embryonic stage. The next section highlights how systematic theology evolved into a more complex academic enterprise. Four streams recap the development of systematic theology as an academic discipline.

Systematic Theology as an Academic Discipline

Four streams of doing systematic theology can be identified in the growth of systematic theology as an academic discipline: 1) Medieval theology (monastic and scholastic); 2) Reformation and Confessional theology; 3) Evangelical conservative theology; and 4) postmodernist theology.

Medieval theology can be characterized into two: "monastic" and "scholastic." Monastic theology took place in the monasteries where the monks translated scriptures, read and preserved primary texts (such as Augustine's, Peter Lombard's, Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure's and others), and interpreted Scripture by use of rhetoric, grammar, and dialectic. The monks also focused on *lectio divina*, that is, the prayed reading of the Bible. In other words, they read the Bible devotionally. The Bible, for them, was not a book read for ideological purpose but for practical Christian living. The Bible transformed their lives as well as the communities the monks served. The Bible was a book that was alive and transformative.

In contrast, scholastic theology occurred in the schools and universities. *Disputatio* (question and answer) was the preferred methodology. The answers to the questions were synthesized into what was termed as the *summae* (summary) of Christian doctrine (e.g. Thomas Aquina's *Summa Theologica*). The sources of their theology included scripture, reason, and tradition (ecclesial and creedal), and experience. The guiding premise was that theology was an intellectual articulation of divine mystery. A good example of this intellectual articulation of doctrine is St. Bonaventure's assumptions in regard to doing theology (Evans, 1986: 86). In contrast to the prayed reading of scripture, scripture was read ideologically, rationally, and systematically.

Reformation and Confessional theology draws from the four streams of the Reformation. The four streams are Lutheran, Reformed, British/Anglican, and Radical/Anabaptist. The works of the Reformers set the pace for later articulations of theology. For instance, John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* became the standard reference text for many Reformed theologians and did the works of Martin Luther, John Wesley, and others. The works of the Reformers were refined and systematized finding its "creedal expression in the Augsburg Confession (1530), the Formula of Concord (1577), the Second Helvetic Confession (1566), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and the Westminster Confession (1647)" (Davis, 1984: 24). Additionally, Protestant scholastics such as Wollebius (1586-1629), Cocceius (1603), Quenstedt (1617-88), and Turretini (1623-1687) drew their theology from the key tenets of the Reformation movement (Ibid). Francis Turretini was perhaps the most significant figure of Protestant scholastic movement. His contribution to systematic theology is not only his intellectually precise work *Institutio Theologiae Eleuticae* (Turretini, 1847), but also his use of scripture, tradition, and reason to his theological works (Muller, 2003: 137-45).

Later Protestant scholastic theologians (from the Reformed tradition) include the "Old" Princeton theologians, Charles Hodge (1797-1878), A. A. Hodge (1823-1886), B. B. Warfield (1851-1921), John Gresham Machen (1881-1937), and neo-conservatives Carl F. Henry and Harold Ockenga. Central to these theologian's theology was the belief that truth must be seen to be propositional, timeless, and universal. Thus Stanley Grenz (2000: 4) observes that for the Princeton theologians, "the correct theology is the one which best crystallizes biblical truth into a set of universally true and applicable propositions." Carl F. Henry (n.d.: 181), for example, asserted that the task of a

systematic theologian is “to exhibit the content of biblical revelation as an orderly whole.” Thus, their theological method is known as “concordance” or “propositional.” Their work emerged as a response to the challenges of modernism especially Darwin and the prevailing waves of biblical criticism. With the collapse of modernism fundamentalist and foundational methods of systematic theology were heavily critiqued. Postmodernist methods became prominent. Postmodernist approaches to theology emphasize social context and the need to re-contextualize truths to the shifting needs of societies.

Consequently, rather than viewing the Bible as containing a set of propositional truths that are universal and timeless, postmodernism emphasizes the context and historicity of theology. Postmodernist theologians, such as Stanley Grenz (2001: 16-18), argue that theology is contextual because it is derived from a particular context, for a particular audience, by a particular person (the theologian), using a particular framework/language. Thus, for postmodernist theologians, there is no such a thing as a purely propositional, timeless, universal, or neutral theology. Postmodernist theologians argue that propositional theology impedes the church’s social engagement because it largely ignores the context. Grenz (Ibid: 15) observes that “the traditional evangelical commitment to objectivism and rational propositionalism has worked against an adequate understanding of the relationship between theology and culture.” This leads to a discussion on the role of systematic theology as praxis-oriented theology.

Systematic Theology as a Praxis-Oriented Discipline

Recent approaches to systematic theology have emphasized the interrelationship between theology and praxis (See for example Yong, 2008: ch. 2; Volf, 2002; Hauerwas, 2004). These theologians call for a connection between orthodoxy (right belief), orthopraxis (right practice), orthopathos (right emotions), and doxology (worship). These four components, they say, help bridge the gap that often exist between theology and practice (experience; liturgy; worship). It has been shown earlier that the early Christians presumed the interconnection between doctrine and practice. Faith in God, i.e., *credo* (“I believe”) was more than mere confession; it involved trusting in God affectively, surrendering wholly to God’s leadership, living a life of obedience, a life that sometimes meant persecution and/or death (Yong, 2008: 41). Seeing theology as a purely

intellectual exercise robs it of its practicality to real situations. Praxis-oriented systemic theology is much appreciated in non-Western cultures because of the reality of suffering in those contexts.

Musimbi Kanyoro (1996: 82), a Kenyan theologian, spoke for many non-Western theologians when she wrote: “for us in Africa, it does not matter how much we write our theology in books, the big test before us is whether we can bring change to our societies. This is the tall order and we agonise about it.” Kanyoro’s observation is indeed true.

I can’t stop but think how my background has shaped how I think about the Bible and theology. As an African theologian who grew up in a poor rural village in Kenya, my background influences how I interpret the text and how I reflect theologically. For example, when I read scripture, I think about my poor neighbor who cannot afford food. I think about an eighty-five-year-old lady who is taking care of her three malnourished grandchildren orphaned by HIV/AIDS. I think about my Member of Parliament who gets paid a non-taxable salary of a million Kenya shillings per month while my pastor gets paid less than 10,000 Kenya shillings a month. I think about Kenya, a country said to be 80% Christian, yet ravaged by hatred and tribalism. I think about the thirty people burnt alive while trying to seek refuge at an Assemblies of God church in Eldoret during the post-election violence of 2007/2008. I think about the massive student riots in the universities, the unending lecturers strike, the vast corruption in government offices, and the unpaid peasant farmers. I keep wondering, what does this Book say to me? What does this Book say to Kenya? Can this Book change my situation? From this personal narrative, it is clear that it is impossible to read the Bible, to do theology, from a purely neutral ground.

The Hermeneutical Foundations of Systematic Theology

Hermeneutics refers to the methodology of interpreting texts. “Texts” refers both to the written and the unwritten works; anything that “communicates meaning and calls for interpretation” (Vanhoozer, 2007: 26). Considered from this broad outlook, “texts” could include, scripture, tradition (plus creedal), human experiences, events, cultures, and so on. How then, do we interpret these “texts”?

There is no one single answer to this question. Methods of doing systematic theology largely depend on one's view(s) of the sources of theology. For example in regard to scripture, interpreters could approach from a fundamentalist, liberal, or evangelical view; in regard to tradition, from Roman catholic, Orthodox, Reformed, Pentecostal etc.; in regard to reason, from metaphysics, epistemology, logic, deductions, the various theories of hermeneutics etc., and to religious/spiritual experience, one could approach from the frameworks of affective/sense-experience of Friedrich Schleiermacher; the numinous/sacred (awe) experiences of Rudolf Otto and Friedrich Heiler; the psychological experiences of William James; to more recent emphasis on charismatic experience of the Holy Spirit. The point is that an interpreter should be aware of his/her presuppositions in regard to these sources, and subject those biases to the authority of scripture.

Another key point of concern in methodology of systematic theology is the question of order. How should one organize systematic theology? Traditionally, the doctrine of God and creation is often placed before ecclesiology and eschatology. Hamartiology is often placed before soteriology. Karl Barth, however, chose to place hamartiology within his discussion of Christology. He wanted to emphasize that we only understand sin by looking at Christ, the one without sin (Dyrness, 2008: 865-866). Other examples of innovative ordering of systematic theology include Douglas Knight's (2006) eschatological approach, Amos Yong's (2014) pneumatological approach, and Stanley Grenz's (2000) trinitarian and communo-eschatological approaches. Thus, theologians order their theological discourse depending on their theological objective(s) and their presuppositions. The following section describes the sources of systematic theology.

The Sources of Systematic Theology

The process of reflecting on the sources of systematic theology involves reflection on their theological foundations. The sources of systematic theology influence the functionality and relevance of theology to the church and to the society. The nature of the various sources and how they relate to (systematic) theology is emphasised. In the process, the writer shows the legitimacy of these sources for the overall program of theology.

The Role of Scripture

Most Christians believe that scripture, both the Old and the New Testament, is the foundation of theology. For the Roman Catholic tradition, scripture includes the Apocrypha. The writer does not affirm the canonicity of the Apocryphal books though he believes they should be read for other purposes other than doctrinal formulations. The thorny issue between Protestants and Catholics is the question of authority. For Protestants, scripture is the primary source and the authority for Christian doctrine and practice (Heb 4:12; 2 Tim 3:16). Systematic theologians should pay attention to the leading of the Holy Spirit, as Scripture is divinely inspired (Acts 1:16; Heb. 10:15-17; 2 Pet. 3:16). To avoid proof texting and eisegesis, systematic theologians should read scripture alongside the works of biblical scholars who are trained to “look at the broader context and engage the biblical authors themselves as theologians” (Dyrness, 2008: 865). Accordingly, systematic theology stems from biblical theology.

The Role of Tradition

Tradition stands for creeds and confessions of the church. It functions as the “horizons” of meaning that persons bring to Scripture. But tradition is not always a matter of belief. It could refer to practices or other Christian resources that shape such belief. According to A. N. Lane (1975: 37-55), there are four ways of understanding the role of tradition in relation to Scripture that are common in Christian theology. First, the coincidence view posits a mutual overlap between the teachings of the Church, tradition, and scripture. Coincidence view was dominant in the early church especially in Tertullian and Irenaeus. The second view is the supplementary, which elevates tradition over scripture i.e. tradition supplements Scripture. This view dominated medieval Christianity. Third, the ancillary view posits that tradition is subordinate to Scripture. This view became predominant during the Reformation as a reaction to the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church. Lastly, the solitary view which ascribe exclusive authority to the Bible. This is what many Protestants think *sola Scriptura* means. There is a need to blend the third and fourth views together. Tradition is secondary to Scripture, but it also serves to guide our use of Scripture. I believe, this assertion has the support of Scripture and theology.

First of all, Christianity is a religion founded on historical claim such as the following: “And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith” (1 Cor 15:14). This means

that the Church bears testimony to what God has done throughout history. Secondly, Paul reminded Timothy to “continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of.” (2 Tim. 3:14). Primarily he was to observe the teachings of the “the sacred writings” or ‘scripture’ for purposes, not only of “salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” but also for “reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 15-16). Paul also encouraged Timothy to preserve the teachings of those who had gone before him (1 Tim. 1:14; 2:2). The past is anchored on the active presence of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is involved in the traditioning process. If indeed God is active in the history of the Church, we cannot neglect the past for God is in the past as well as the present and the future.

However, inasmuch as we should observe Catholic tradition, we need to be aware of two things: First, that Jesus warned against subordinating the Word of God to tradition (Mk 7:13). Second, that traditions are not static. As theologians working in a different cultural milieu than those that our spiritual parents lived, we need to review and revise discussions. We need to think afresh in light of new questions that emerge in the modern era. There is such a thing as a distance between the reader and the Bible. For this reason, it is important to re-think theology in light of modern age concerns. An example from Africa would suffice to illustrate what this means. Several African theologians who strongly affirm the historic doctrine of the Trinity have called for a review of the Greco-Eurocentric expressions of the doctrine (for example, Mugambi, 1989: 75; Kombo, 2007: 246-247; Kombo 2009: 125-143). Their goal is not to abandon the traditional belief, but to reflect on ways of indigenizing the doctrine of the Trinity and other doctrines of Christianity. Lamin Sanneh (2009) has emphasized the need to translate Christian doctrine to the language or understanding of the people we reach out to. This African reflection back on tradition and reflection on current relevance of it, shows that tradition is not static but dynamic. Tradition is alive. Consequently, theology must also be alive.

The Role of Reason

The affirmation of the importance of revelation (scripture) in theological reflection, does not necessary negate the place of reason. Reason aids in logical systematization of doctrine to make it coherent and consistent. Human beings are rational creatures. We should seek to understand because God is the creator and the source of truth; thus, all truth is God’s truth. As the creator of

our minds, God desires that we worship him with our minds. Unfortunately, evangelicals have not been known for intellectual sophistication as Mark Noll (1994: 7) has convincingly pointed out. Contrary to the aversion for intellectual rigor, Thomas Oden (1987: 191) asserts that Christian reflection calls for intellectual abilities that include, “clear reasoning, right discernment of the relations between seemingly distant and varied teachings, multilayered powers of intuitive insight, sound movement from premises to conclusions, capacity for critical analysis, and the power of internally consistent reflection.” However, it is also important to know that God transcends the scope of scientific knowability. God cannot be contained by our logical deductions. In fact, early Christians viewed theology as faith seeking understanding (*fides quarens intellectum*) (Ibid: 21). Knowledge emerged out of faith in God. Therefore, our theological reflection should be as rational as humanly possible, but then, we should maintain a certain level of caution, humility, acceptance of mystery, and intellectual humility. Theologians must accept that sometimes their thoughts are provisional and in need of more depth and focus.

The Role of Experience

Christian experience includes people’s experiential phenomena, whether mystical or otherwise. Though it is difficult to empirically authenticate or prove these experiences, yet, whether acknowledged or not, they shape how we do theology. One’s experiences are part of the biases or presuppositions that are in play in the task of constructing theology. They also affect one’s view of God. Thus, they are a legitimate source of systematic theology. Having examined the sources of theology, it is important to attempt to show how systematic theology relates to other disciplines. The paradigm of African holistic spirituality provides a rich metaphor for this task.

African Holistic Spirituality as a Paradigm for Integrating the Different Theological Disciplines

This section argues that African cosmology (worldview) provides a rich paradigm for integrating the various disciplines of theology. The holistic nature of African cosmology could help in the quest to integrate theological disciplines together. Integration of theological disciplines has always been a concern for theologians. Harold W Turner (1979: 42-64) attempted to integrate the sacred and the secular disciplines by using structural diagrams. However, structural diagrams enhance the divide between sacred and secular rather than solving it. Rather than use a structural diagram to

show the mutual connection between the sacred and the secular (i.e. all the disciplines), the analogy of “currents” is more fruitful. Currents provide a richer analogy because currents naturally flow into each other, nourishing, invigorating, and even disturbing each other in the process, and yet are distinct from each other (Okesson, 2007: 39-64). The image of “currents” is holistic and is not trapped in dualism or compartmentalization.

The idea that the sacred (i.e., theology) and the secular (i.e., other disciplines) never meet is antithetical to African worldview. For the African, the sacred and the secular, the supernatural and the natural, the practical and the abstract, though distinct realms and may require different sets of epistemological methods of study, are, nonetheless, inextricably linked and cannot be separated. The discussion below borrows the language of systematic theology in light of the African worldview. Thus, we begin with anthropology.

Anthropological

For African peoples, a person exists as person-in-communion. Communion is broadly understood to include the living and the dead, the unborn, non-human world, and the supernatural. Religion permeates all the spheres of human life. John S. Mbiti (1975: 9), a renowned theologian of African religion, asserts that religion “has dominated the thinking of African peoples to such an extent that it has shaped their cultures, their social life, their political organizations and economic activities.” Thus, Africans are “notoriously religious” (1989: 1). The dichotomy that exists between secular and sacred, especially in the West, has no place in Africa. This supernaturally oriented and other-centered nature of life could aid the integration of systematic theology to other disciplines. From this outlook, systematic theology exists for the “other” — the church and society. Thus, systematic theology does not belong to the systematic theologian, or even to his/her immediate “nuclear family” — the particular discipline one is engaged in. Systematic theology is for the whole community.

Creational

The term “creational” in this article denotes the non-religious disciplines such as philosophy, aesthetics/art, literature, music, political, mathematics, and others. African society integrates the entire religious life within the “creational” disciplines. African philosophy, aesthetics, art, music,

and so on, were intimately linked to the religious faith of the peoples. Borrowing from this African orientation, systematic theology should be seen as relating and not as antithetical to other disciplines. These non-religious disciplines are sources of truth. Furthermore, systematic theology should dialogue with philosophy, physics and other abstract subjects in order to enrich its logic and systematization. The study of culture, languages, archeology, and so on, require a set of skills and knowledge only available in the so-called “secular” disciplines of ethnography, anthropology, geography, and even statistics. A wise theologian studies, or at least, converses with experts of these “other” disciplines so that he or she can better nourish his or her argument.

Exegetical (Biblical Theology)

African traditional cosmology does not have a sacred book or holy books (1975: 15). However, as Mbiti (Ibid: 27) argues, even though African Religion “has no sacred books, it is written everywhere in the life of the people.” Accordingly, in terms of offering a specific exegetical experience, African cosmology might not have a lot to offer systematic theology, but in terms of offering a holistic outlook to reading “texts,” African cosmology provides a richer outlook. Following our earlier definition of hermeneutics as interpretation of texts, both written and unwritten, it is still possible to speak of African indigenous hermeneutics. Indeed, African philosophers such as Kolowole Owolabi (2001: 148) have argued for an appreciation of African indigenous hermeneutics as a method of philosophizing. But in terms of exegesis and biblical theology, the biggest contribution from African worldview is the practicality of religion to the people. Thus, if Africans had a sacred text, they would have read it in very pragmatic and realistic ways. This is evidenced by how Africans read the biblical text today. For many African Christians, the Bible is alive and speaks to their everyday concerns. Seldom is the bible read as an abstract text.

Historical

African people believe that the past (*zamani*) and the present (*sasa*) are mutually connected. A history of a particular community, for example, defines how they live in the present time. Thus, to neglect the past is to neglect the present. There is no present without the past, there is no future without the present. The past, a people’s history, is “a constant source of new beginnings, of ontological renewal” (Ray, 1976: 41). There is no such a thing as factual history for history’s own

sake. In traditional Africa, history was viewed as a living record that has a rich practical significance to contemporary life. History was alive. The dead spoke; the living listened. Thus, for many traditional African communities, history was not about a dead past. History was and is alive. Systematic theology can richly benefit from this paradigm of history. Systematic theology relates to church history, historical theology, general history, tradition (creedal and ecclesial), in that it brings resources from the past to bear on the present. No systematic theologian worth his or her salt would deny history and still be able to do systematic theology. In fact, scripture itself, which, I believe is the primary text of systematic theology, is a product of history — the self-disclosure of God to his people. The Holy Spirit is also active in the traditioning process. Thus, theologians must listen to their theological “ancestors,” the men and women from the past. By so doing, theologians will not be producing myopic pieces of work but works that look to the past, enrich the present, and focus the future.

Practical and Liturgical

As already mentioned, African culture is very praxis-oriented. In terms of liturgy, African people connected human existence to sacred space. It even believed that the entirety of life was sacred. Traditional religious officials and leaders, an equivalent of the pastor-theologian, viewed his or her task of mediating between God and the people as a sacred calling. These religious specialists were servants of God and the community. Their lives were bound up with the life of the community such that “rites which ‘strengthen’ them ‘strengthen’ the people as a whole” (Ibid: 42). Their work required some form of virtue or dispositions that made them successful in their tasks. Prayer also saturated everything they did.

Systematic theology should first and foremost, be answerable to God, then secondly, to God’s community. Being answerable to the community entails being contextually relevant. Systematic theology should also work from the paradigm of worship. Theology is an act of worship. It should also acknowledge the limitations of the human mind and the brokenness of the world. The practical nature of systematics also encompasses missional aspects. As I have already pointed out in the *anthropological* section, systematic theology does not exist for itself. It exists for the wider community – the church, then the society at large.

Conclusion

This article has shown that systematic theology has evolved from a simple “rule of faith” to a more complex academic discipline. It arose as a discipline studied in the university. This rich heritage, which has led to serious fragmentation and divisions, has become problematic as Alister McGrath (2002: 120) shows in his book, *The Future of Christianity*. McGrath laments that Western theology is becoming irrelevant in the world because it tends to be abstract and fragmented (Ibid). African theologians must not fall into this trap of abstraction and fragmentation. Systematic theology should constantly evaluate itself in order to effectively perform its task of translating the gospel to the changing needs of the society. The African paradigm used in this article provides exciting prospects of enhancing multidisciplinary conversations so that African theology becomes richer and productive to the shifting nature of African communities in the 21st century.

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An evangelical contextual missiological approach to mission praxis in africa: an indigenous south african perspective (1950 - . 2005). by ANDRIES RAMOHLAKORE TSEHLE.Â For example, theologies such as the Black Liberation Theology, African Indigenous Theology, and Contextual Theology emerged out of concern from the indigenous South African Christians who longed for a God who directly speaks to them at their point of need without the trimmings of Western cultural and contextual paraphernalia. Philosophy and Systematic Theology. View courses in. Philosophy and Systematic Theology. All Departments.Â The methodological approach is constructive, in that emphasis is placed on helping students integrate central issues of faith in response to contemporary issues. (Requires TF 701/TF 702 as prerequisite.) (Cluster 1).Â STH TT 806: Theology and Literature This course explores the theological relevance of literature through an examination of contemporary fiction and examines the benefits and limitations of writing theology in the form of fiction. (Requires TF 701/702 or equivalent) (Cluster 1). STH TT 811: Mysticism & Philosophy: Jewish and Islamic Perspectives Thematic introduction to mysticism and philosophy, with a focus on dynamics of religious experience.