

Research Methods In Systematic Theology

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Learning Outcomes

1. Define the tasks of the branches of Systematic Theology
2. Explain the key subjects in systematic theology of interest to research at postgraduate level
3. Define the key defining features of Evangelical & Conservative Charismatic Systematic Theology
4. Critically evaluate the methodologies currently employed for Evangelical Theological Research
5. Formulate research Problem Statements in Systematic Theology

Distinctive Issues in Systematic Theology Research

1. Presuppositions significantly impact Research Process
 - Basic Presuppositions must be declared
2. Wide Range of branches and Sub-Disciplines each with their Methods
 - Describing and rigorously defending theoretical framework is fundamental to success
 - Because of the wide variations some find it useful to engage particular scholars and their outputs to make their contributions more precise
3. Multiplicity of Subjects & their combinations
 - Appears daunting but is Advantageous though requires very wide range of reading and disciplined methodology
4. Emphases on Logic rather than Empirical Data impact nature of questions and evaluations of results
 - Analytical and language skills highly essential

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Systematic Theology

The seminary discipline which is devoted to orderly organization, analyses, synthesis and evaluation of concepts from the Bible and other sources of Christian theology in order to generate a coherent, comprehensive and systematic system of thought.

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All researchers are influenced to various degrees by the worldviews, basic presuppositions and assumptions which drive and control the whole research process.

This is even more fundamental in Systematic Theology as it deals not with tangible data but conceptual and philosophical ideas and logical argumentation.

The most important of these presuppositions is the **source** of the data and / or the **standard** by which the data is evaluated.

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Three Competing Presuppositions of doing Systematic Theology

- **Roman Catholic Systematic Theology**
 - Source and Standard from Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.
- **Liberal Systematic Theology**
 - Source and Standard from “norm” that particularly emphasizes individual freedom, universal human access to God and natural revelation and may or may not include insights from Scripture or Church tradition
- **Evangelical Systematic Theology**
 - Source and Standard from the Bible

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Evangelical Systematic Theology

The seminary discipline which is devoted to orderly organization, analyses, synthesis and evaluation of concepts from the Bible in order to generate a coherent, comprehensive and systematic system of thought with the goal of providing a framework for faithful Christian doctrine and practice.



John Calvin

“[W]e ought to play the philosopher soberly and with great moderation; let us use great caution that neither our thoughts nor our speech go beyond the limits to which the Word of God itself extends...We ought to be warned...so that we may take care to apply ourselves...with teachableness rather than with subtlety. And let us not take it into our heads either to seek out God anywhere else than in his Sacred Word, or to think anything about him that is not prompted by his Word, or to speak anything that is not taken from that Word...[L]et it be remembered that men’s minds, when they indulge their curiosity, enter into a labyrinth.”

Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1.13.21.

What will you do if you get an idea to research into the concept of God among the Nzema People and its Missiological Implications?

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Disciplinary Branches in Systematic Theology

- **Apologetics:**
 - Study of theories and practices devoted to defending the Christian faith against objections and criticisms using reason, evidence, and argumentation.
 - E.g., Sinkinson, C. 2007. The nature of Christian apologetics in response to religious pluralism: an analysis of the contribution of John Hick. PhD. University of Bristol
- **Biblical Theology:**
 - Analyses of the theological messages and themes of the Bible or part thereof.
 - E.g., Booth, Adam David Patrick. 2021. Mother Jesus: The Contribution of Maternal Imagery to the Soteriology and Christology of First Peter. PhD Duke University
- **Exegetical Theology:**
 - Sub-branch of Biblical Theology which focuses on the theological analysis of a passage or book within its socio-historical context and its relationship
 - E.g., Khin Win Kyi, 2020. The Social Role of Worship: A Reading of Micah 6:1-8, MA Thesis; Luther Seminary

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Disciplinary Branches in Systematic Theology

- **Historical Theology:**
 - Branch of Systematic Theology which examines the development of Christian doctrine over time, looking at how theological ideas have developed throughout history and / or the contributions of theologians towards it.
 - E.g., Foday-Khabenje, Aiah Dorkuh. 2020. An Analytical Biography of Byang Henry Kato (1936-1975): His theological legacy and contribution to biblical hermeneutics, African Christian identity and Evangelical Theological Education PhD SATS
- **Philosophical Theology:**
 - Discipline of Systematic Theology which explores theological concepts using philosophical tools and concepts, such as logic, metaphysics, and epistemology rather than drawing solely from Scripture.
 - E.g., Faircloth, K. 2019. An Examination and Application of Rule Theory for Addressing the Theological Question Regarding the Fate of the Unevangelized: A Reformation Proposal. PhD. University of Bristol.
- **Dogmatic Theology:**
 - Branch of Systematic Theology which emphasizes the importance of defining and defending specific theological doctrines and beliefs.
 - E.g., Langdon, Adrian. 2009. God the eternal contemporary: Trinity, eternity and time in Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. PhD McGill University

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Disciplinary Branches in Systematic Theology

- **Confessional Theology**
 - Study of religious texts and the formulation of statements of faith or creeds from a specified denominational or religious movement's perspective
 - E.g., Raburn, Michael 2013. Convincing the World: Pentecostal Liminality as Participation in the Mission of the Paraclete; PhD, Duke University
- Homiletics – Theory of Preaching
- Christian Ethics – Theory and Practice of Christian Behaviour and Decision Making
- Liberation Theology – Theology from the perspective of justice & liberation of oppressed
- Analytic Theology – Theology employing procedures from analytical philosophy
- African Christian Theology – From African historical, cultural and existential perspective
- Theological Education: Theological theory and practice in theological education
- Cybertheology – Study of intersection of religion, theology, and digital technology.
- Ecotheology - Relationship between religion, spirituality, and the natural world

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Subjects in Evangelical Systematic Theology

- Anthropology
- Bibliology
- Christology
- Cosmology
- Ecclesiology
- Eschatology
- Hamartiology
- Pneumatology
- Soteriology
- Spiritual Formation
- Theology Proper

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The major attractions (or daunting challenge) of researching in Systematic Theology are the Multiplicity of Approaches, Varieties of Methods, Wide ranges of Subjects & Flexibility to choose to engage particular Theologians

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Approach vs Method

- Method is the stepwise procedures adopted for investigating the problem
- Approach is combination of the method and also the perspective and objectives which motivate the choice and manner in which the method is implemented.
- Exegetical Theology is a Method whereas a Comparative Exegetical Theological Analysis of two biblical authors is an Approach involving Exegetical Theological Method

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Categories of Approaches in Systematic Theology

- **Dialogical:**
 - Engaging in dialogue with different authors' viewpoints.
- **Comparative:**
 - Analysing similarities and differences between different view points
- **Complementary:**
 - Harmonising different theories or opinions by into a logically coherent whole.
- **Epistemological:**
 - Critical evaluation of the philosophical basis of an argument
- **Polemical:**
 - Apologetically engaging and arguing against a theory or idea
- **Analytical:**
 - Careful dissection and evaluation of a theory or a concept by engaging its logical components
- **Synthetic:**
 - Bringing together unrelated concepts to form a new model.

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Comparison of Approaches in Biblical Theology		
Approach	Description	Examples
Historical Description	Historical account of a theological theme in a book, corpus, testament or whole Bible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Israel's Exile in Isaiah • Kingdom of heaven in Matthew • Temple Theology in historical books of OT
History of Salvation	Investigation of progressive unfolding of specific theological themes related to salvation, Israel and the Christ Event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Election in the Bible or NT • Comparison of covenants • Abrahamic covenant in the NT • Tithing in Malachi and Hebrews
Narrative Theological	Theological analysis of a book or corpus from a narrative perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theology of Vengeance in Esther • Theme of Prayer in Luke's Gospel
Canonical Approach	Theological analysis of themes based on relationships and contrasts within the biblical canon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparison of theme of faith and works in Paul and James • Epiphany Christology in Pastoral Epistles
Theological Construction	Critical Engagement of a modern or historical theologian or a theological construct from biblical perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of Augustine's "City of God" from Perspective of Hebrews • Evaluation of Bediako's Bibliology from Perspective of 2 Tim 3:16-17 • Ecotheology from Gen 1 & Galamsey
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What would you do if you get an idea to research on an influential African Theologian?

Idea to Research on “influential African Theologian”



Quick investigation to establish whether this person is widely recognized, has made huge contributions in literature, and has distinctive angle to be engaged



Literature survey to assemble and synthesize their contribution, preferably a theory in a particular subject

e.g., Bediako’s Christological contribution OR
Asamoah-Gyadu’s on Charismatic Christianity in Africa
Mensa-Otabil’s on theological anthropology***



Is there Scope to study this “influential African Theologian?”

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Options for Critical Engagement of Theologian

- **Analyse:**
 - divide their theory into components and investigate each in full against a Biblical text or theme
- **Compare:**
 - What are similarities and differences between their contribution and another theologian in a similar tradition
- **Criticise:**
 - Critically evaluate the merits and demerits of their contribution, usually from particular perspective

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Finding Problems from “Gaps”

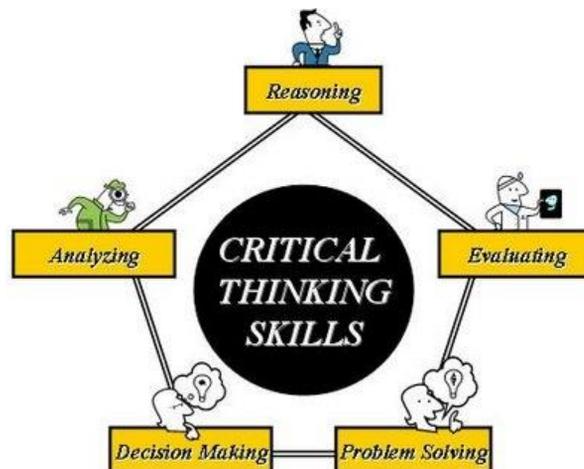
Six types of Gaps:

1. **Gap in Knowledge** – what is not known about the subject
2. **Gap in Relationship** – what is not known about links or relationship between various elements of the subject
3. **Gap in Theory** – what is not known about how a theory may function in a different context
4. **Gap in Method** – what is not known about how a particular method could be used for another scenario
5. **Gap in Application** – How an established knowledge may be applied to solve another problem
6. **Gap in Analysis** – investigating a phenomenon using a particular analytic approach

What does it mean to Criticize a theologian?

Four Minimum Elements of Criticality

1. Clear statement of the claim
2. Fair explanation of the basis and methodology behind the claim
3. Insightful assessment of the claim, whether (a) correct, (b) wrong, or (c) partially correct and why
4. Additional defence or statement of alternative or modification of claim



Common Methods in Systematic Theology

1. Osborne's Method
2. Lewis and Demarest's Method
3. Historical Theological & Hegelian Methods
4. Philosophical Analytical Method
5. Contextual Theology Method
6. Biblical Theology Methods**

Osborne's Method

1. What have Theologians said? – Historical Theology of the Topic
2. What does the Bible Say? – Biblical Theology of the Topic
3. How might we formulate a theology of the Topic?
Systematic Theology
4. What are the theological/practical implications?
Application

Evaluation of Osborne's Method

- **Merits**

- Bible-based Evangelical Method
- Takes biblical context seriously
- Pays attention to Application in Church & Society

- **Criticism**

- Straight-jacket and not amenable to addressing certain questions
- Others criticize it to be too open ended

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Lewis and Demarest's Method

1. What are the major historical hypotheses?
2. What does Scripture Say?
3. How might we develop a systematic theological formulation?
4. How might we apologetically defend the systematic theological formulation from objections?
5. What is the Practical relevance of the systematic theological formulation?

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Evaluation of Lewis & Damarest's Method

- **Merits**
 - Builds on Osborne's Method
 - Interdisciplinary and therefore comprehensive
 - Integrated theology for integrating practitioners
- **Criticism**
 - Very broad and open to lack of in-depth analysis
 - Consumes far more time on methodology than the problem

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Summary

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Questions?