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**THE RELEVANCE  
OF SYSTEMATIC  
THEOLOGY FOR  
MINISTRY IN THE  
CARIBBEAN**

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**Introduction**

*No one book of scripture can be understood by itself, any more than any one part of a tree or member of the body can be understood without reference to the whole of which it is a part.*

Charles Hodge

The debate associated with and the issues pregnant within Systematic Theology have been central to Christianity for the past millennium and a half. It is an area that preoccupies the minds of theologians but has significant impact on the lives of Christians and indeed all of humankind. Within the ambit of this study, the purpose of Systematic theology will be expounded and a more comprehensive understanding of it pursued. The truth is, theology permeates every part of our lives and cannot be separated from the whole person. It is a separation that cannot be clinically done because any attempt to divorce theology from our lives would be an attempt to sever and destroy the completeness of the total person. This is why it is important to understand and reflect on the usefulness of systematic theology.

The questions asked may be: To what extent is this true, does this pervasiveness and connection really exist? What part does Systematic theology play in answering the universal questions of life - the questions we all ask and the questions we may be specifically asking as a Caribbean people? Does Systematic theology answer them comprehensively enough or is it deficient in its rhetoric? As the paper examines Systematic Theology's history, it will also explore some of these concerns and the reader will be left to weigh it in the balance, using this as a guide to draw her/his own conclusions. As we try to explore this important subject and its relevance, it is only fitting to define our main term. What then is Systematic Theology?

## What is Systematic Theology?

### *Theology Defined*

“A good preliminary or basic definition of theology is the study or science of God” (Erickson 1998, 22). The word theology is a combination of two Greek words, *theos* meaning God and *logos* which can be translated ‘idea’ or ‘study’. Combined, we have the idea that theology is the study of God. Some have referred to theology as any talk about God. There are questions and experiences that people have had about God and once they begin talking about Him they are ‘doing’ theology. Theology then is an everyday activity, done consciously and/ or subconsciously. It is those who consciously or deliberately spend time to organize or espouse these thoughts that are called theologians.

Paul Enns puts it this way: theology is a “discourse about God” (Enns 1989, 147). To this idea of discourse, Thomas Oden adds that it is a “reasoned [one]...gained either by rational reflection or by response to God’s self-disclosure in history” (Oden 1987, 5). Public Theologian, Dr. Garnet Roper, whilst agreeing that theology is a reflection upon God, goes further with the definition by saying that it is not only done broadly historically but that it is done [particularly] in a given context and a given culture” (Roper 2012, 25).

The common thread however that runs in these definitions is that they are general definitions of theology to which theologians of other faiths would generally agree. More specifically however, when we talk about a Theology that is Christian we are referring to “that discipline which strives to give a coherent statement of the doctrines of the Christian faith, based primarily on the scriptures, placed in the context of culture in general, worded in contemporary idiom, and related to issues of life” (Erickson 1998, 23).

If one is not careful, theology can be about “thought” and “talk” as opposed to the practical action that many in the past and today have argued for. Protestant Theologian Paul Tillich’s definition moves it a bit further from idea to life. “Theology”, he says, “must serve the needs of the church”. He continues, “Theology moves back and forth between two poles, the eternal truth of its foundation and the temporal situation in which the eternal truth must be received” (Tillich 1951, 1:3). Theology for him must be eternal and at the same time temporal; theology has a context. But is that context limited to just the church? Am I to understand Tillich to be saying theology is for the called out ones only? One can agree with this only if, according to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “the Church [is] her true self...when she exists for

humanity” (Bonhoeffer 1953, 166). In this sense Paul Tillich is right and makes himself clear a few years after in another of his works when he says “the situation to which theology responds is scientific and artistic, the economic, political, and ethical forms in which they express their interpretation of existence, the totality of man’s creative self-interpretation in a special period” (Tillich 1967, 3). That inter-connection with reality is the benchmark of true theology.

In summation, a definition of Theology, then, must bear a few things in mind, five of which Millard Erickson outlines about what theology is or ought to be. When one theologizes one must be:

1. Biblical, drawing on the Old and New Testament as primary sources along with the tools and methods of biblical research.
2. Systematic, relating the various portions of the entire bible in a coherent whole.
3. Scientific . . . pulling from other disciplines since all truth is God’s truth.
4. Contemporary, using language, concepts and thought forms to communicate those past eternal and timeless truths clearly today.
5. Practical, that is theology must relate to living rather than merely to belief. (Erickson 1998, 23-24)

### **Functions of Theology**

There are many ways that theologians have tried to do theology over the years. Systematic Theology is one of those many ways postulated. It is a narrower sense that endeavors to treat the specifically the *doctrinal* character of the Christian faith. There are other disciplines which have in view other specific tasks. Biblical theology deals with matters which “give special attention to the teachings of individual authors and sections of scripture and to the place of each teaching in the historical development of scripture” (Grudem 1994, 22).

Historical Theology pertains to historical studies of the church or how Christians in different periods have understood the doctrine of the church (Grudem 1994, 21). Philosophical Theology can be that aspect of theology that, according to Grudem, analyses “theological topics largely without the bible but using philosophical reasoning through observation of the universe” (Ibid, 22). Erickson has a different, or might I say, additional, understanding of this discipline. He defines philosophical Theology as having to do with practical studies, that is, the theory and practice of ministry (Erickson 1998, 25). Don Thorsen makes a

distinction between Philosophical Theology and Practical Theology (Thorsen 2008, 9) while Erickson does not.

Contextual Theology is another division of how theology is done. Erickson does not mention this discipline since it might be assumed in his area of Philosophical theology. According to Dr. Garnet Roper “Contextual Theology is theology that is articulated in response to the lived experience of the people. It is an attempt to engage with...the context in light of the word of God” (Roper 2012, 26). These are all the different functions of theology and one should appreciate each since they all help us to understand the multifaceted way in which theology can be done. No one way of doing theology is complete and one would be wise to recognize this and value the contribution of each. Each is either a response to, or makes up for deficits found in another.

#### *A Systematic Way*

Our area of focus for this paper is Systematic Theology: a discipline used extensively by many scholars and taught in many seminaries. Christians have found great advantage in the systematization of Theology as it helps to understand the teachings of scripture. Systematic Theology “arranges Christian beliefs, values and practices in an orderly and comprehensive manner” (Thorsen 2008, 9). The word ‘Systematic’ comes from the Greek verb *synistano* which means to stand together or to organize. Therefore, the business of Systematic Theology is to put theology in a system of categories (Enns 1989, 147). One can easily see why this over the years seems to be the preferred way of doing theology. Generally speaking, people think in a logical and systematic way. It helps them to grasp concepts when they are so ordered. This is one of the benefits of Systematic Theology. We will be mentioning this point again when we look at the need for a systematic Theology.

According one Theologian, Systematic Theology is the “collecting, scientifically arranging, comparing, exhibiting, and defending of all facts from any and every source concerning God and his works” (Chafer 1947, 1:6). It must be pointed out that Systematic theology is concerned with not just the Bible as source but wherever truth about God can be obtained and therefore organized consistently with scripture. These sources of knowledge about God can be obtained from nature as declared by the psalmist David in Psalm 19, from Christian history, from tradition, especially as seen in the creeds, and also from reason as guided by the Holy Spirit. This reason must however be submitted to the supernatural (Enns 1989, 150-151).

Systematic Theology is, as we saw from Millard Erickson, one way of treating with the doctrinal character of the Christian faith. Grudem says “It treats biblical topics in a carefully organized way to guarantee that all important topics will receive thorough consideration” (Grudem 1994, 24). Doctrine and doctrinal rectitude are the focii of this discipline. Doctrine is the resulting feature of the systematic process and these doctrines are those that feature commonly in scripture (Ibid, 25). These doctrines are as follows:

- a. Bibliology- doctrine or teaching of the word of God
- b. Paterology (Theology Proper)- doctrine of God
- c. Anthropology- doctrine of Humanity
- d. Christology- doctrine of Christ
- e. Pneumatology- doctrine of the Holy Spirit
- f. Soteriology- doctrine of Salvation
- g. Harmiatology- doctrine of Sin
- h. Ecclesiology- doctrine of the Church
- i. Eschatology- doctrine of the Last days

So we see that Systematic theology, unlike the other ways of doing theology,<sup>1</sup> takes into consideration the whole of scripture and carefully orders the teachings found within into various categories. It certainly has a place not just in academia but in life and ministry.

### **The Need for Systematic Theology**

#### *A Brief History*

An understanding as to the historical value of systematizing theology will give us an appreciation for its need today. Information to find the history of Systematic Theology was strangely hard to come by since none of my major sources had a section that focused on its genesis. However Theopedia, a website which focuses on theological matters, states that

The systematic presentation of the Christian faith is not a new concept. Wolfhart Pannenberg writes that "systematic theology ... emerged long before the term came into common use. Materially the systematic presentation of Christian teaching is very much older. It was already the object of Gnostic systems in the 2nd century, and although it remained merely implicit in the works of the early Apologists, and anti-Gnostic fathers like Irenaeus, Origen presented his work on origins (*peri-archon*)

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, Biblical Theology being the one exception.

in the form of a systematic presentation of the Christian doctrine of God." (Theopedia)

Origen has been credited to be the first inventor of theology as science. He, because of his vocation, did not make his work academic but instead pastoral. As Hans Kung writes "he invented the appropriate praxis for this kind of theology, and a methodological theory which it needed" (Kung 1995, 49). Origen's purpose for setting out his theology was seemingly polemic. His innovation of steeping the biblical message in systematic theology was "presumably in response to criticism which had been expressed ... [by the Greeks and Gnostics of his day]" Kung 1995, 49). This work of systematizing theology was called *On the Principles* (Greek *Peri archon*, Latin *De Principiis*) which deals with the basic principles of being, knowledge and Christian Doctrine (Ibid. 49).

### **The Relevance of Theology in a System**

Christians need to know the whole counsel of the word of God. Jesus instructed his disciples not just to go into all the world but to teach disciples to observe all things. I want to believe he meant all of Scripture (cf. Matt 4:4; Luke 4:4). In short, he meant evangelize all the world and edify with all the Word. Systematic Theology aids in the effecting of this mandate. "The basic reason," says Wayne Grudem, "for studying systematic Theology, then, is that it enables us to teach ourselves and others what the whole bible says, thus fulfilling the second part of the Great Commission" (Grudem 1994, 27-28).

There are various reasons why a systematic theology is necessary today. Paul Enns in Moody's *Handbook of Theology* presents three reasons. First, Systematic Theology is a way of explaining Christianity. As a religion and world view Christianity has to be explained or made explainable in a logical and orderly way. The discipline of Systematic theology gives a researched and studied explanation as well as a systematic organization of the doctrines that are foundational and necessary to Christianity. The scriptures were not written or outlined propositionally but instead through narratives, poetry, parables and other forms of literary devices. This is why Systematic Theology is needful, that is, to give a clear understanding about the beliefs of the entire Bible and therefore the Christian faith (Enns 1998, 149). It aids in making the whole of scripture plain.

Second, systematized theology acts as an apologetic for the Christian faith, though in and of itself it is not apologetics. It however draws on the discipline of apologetics to present and

defend the doctrines of the Bible. In the early Christian church Systematic theology was used to address opponents and unbelievers (Enns 1998, 149). Today there are many alternatives and competitors of Christianity. The systemization of doctrines helps in refuting claims of other worldviews, religions and cults since it is not enough nor is it easy to determine which view is false without a knowledge of Christianity's teachings. Just like a banker being able to decipher between a counterfeit note and a genuine one by first studying the real currency, so one must make his knowledge of Christian doctrine paramount (Erickson 1998, 31).

Third, systematic theology helps in the maturation of the Christian. Correct doctrine is important in Christian maturity. Put another way, right belief will help in right behavior. Enns articulates it biblically when he says "[the apostle] Paul normally builds a doctrinal foundation in his epistles before he exhorts believers to live correctly" (Enns 1994, 149). Indeed orthodoxy will impact on orthopraxy.

There is a fourth reason why doing theology systematically is necessary. Erickson makes the point that truth and experience are related. If one is not living according to scriptures now, it does not mean that that person is living righteously because "the truth will come with crushing effect on our experience...[eventually] the truth of the Christian Faith will have ultimate bearing on our experiences; we must [therefore] come to grips with them"(Erickson 1998, 31). Systematic Theology helps us to know this truth.

I find Grudem's second benefit to life quite instructive as another reason why Systematic Theology is important. "It helps us to be able to make better decisions on new questions of doctrine that may arise" (Grudem 1994, 28). Sam Sharpe would have used a systematic approach to formulate a Christology that helped him to conclude that "no man can serve two masters at the same time" and in so doing broadsided the colonizers. This point refutes, though partially, the argument of Caribbean theologians who call for almost a doing away of "North Atlantic Theology" - a designation that makes reference to Systematic Theology and other theologies (Palmer 2013, 156).

While one would agree that Systematic Theology has some shortfalls (a matter to be dealt with next), it certainly has aided in the past, even for those oppressed. Sam Sharpe would have done his own systematization of what his oppressors taught him and what he read, and therefore come to an all important decision about



slavery. This was due to a systematic theology (even if on his own) that told him that Jesus was Lord and his only master.

Finally, it is in systematizing that the rigorous work is done by scholars for the benefit of all. A systematic theology acts as a handy tool summarizing the whole of scripture into propositions that can be helpful to the common man.

Though as a teaching facility Systematic Theology is quite useful as we have seen, it has deficiencies in many areas. Garnett Roper, at a Baptist World Alliance forum in Ocho Rios, makes the point that "There is a need for Bible study to be used as an instrument of catechism to the church, but, more importantly, as a tool of consciousness-raising. Bible study must awaken and sharpen God's people in relation to things as they are" (Ethics Daily July 5, 2013). So as an instrument of teaching dogma, systematized theology is effective; however, it is in the area of 'consciousness-raising' and reality check that Systematic Theology seems to many to be weighed in the balance and found wanting.

### **The Deficiencies of Systematic Theology**

A good place to commence in looking at the weaknesses of Systematic Theology is with one of its own proponent's critique or should I say observed critique of this mode of theologizing. Wayne Grudem in his book, *Systematic Theology* (ST), raises two objections to studying ST which he ably refutes. The first objection he cites is that others have said that the conclusions drawn in Systematic Theology are too neat to be true. The charge continues "[it] must be squeezing the Bible's teachings into an artificial mold, distorting the true meaning of scripture to get an orderly set of beliefs.

The second objection made by opponents of this neatly arranged theology is that the choice of topic dictates the conclusion, that is, if we decide to start with divine authorship of Scripture then we will believe in the inerrancy of scripture. However, if we start with human authorship then we will end up believing that there are errors in the Bible and so on. One's belief, then, will determine the outcome of one's searching of scripture. Systematized theology has then a bias in this view. But Grudem is able to delineate the biblical findings that lead to the doctrine of scripture as outlined in his *Systematic Theology* (pp. 29-108!).

One finds it interesting that Grudem was only able to cite just two objections when so many other arguments have been made by scholars against Systematic Theology. We will now look at a few of these other refutations.

1. Systematic Theology starts with the idea/text rather than the experience and where people are. Stephen Hebert, in an online article, asserts that for him Systematic Theology “smacks of proof-texting, ignorance of context and genre and other literary concerns”. He further goes on to criticize in particular Wayne Grudem’s Systematic Theology text but cites no basis for his charge.
2. It misses the metanarrative, that overarching and ‘big’ storyline. John Hobbins in answering the question ‘What’s wrong with Systematic Theology’ says “the problem with systematic theologies, is that they are systematic. God’s revelation to us in the Bible is not systematic. It’s messy, it’s complicated, it tells the story of people who mess up, of God who gets involved in the life of his creation and redeems it. The Bible narrative is compelling; sometimes exciting, sometimes complicated but it is not systematic. God did not give us a system, he gave us a story” (Kouyanet February 5, 2008).
3. Cultural bias- the systematic theologian is charged with being biased. Says John Hobbins, “they draw threads together to make into a system but some bits do not fit in their system... the system they choose is determined by their own background” (Ibid February 5, 2008). Now, you might take a weighty systematic theology book and read through and think that it contains everything that you might ever want to know about God and the Bible. But as a challenge, look up the section on the theology of ancestors. You probably won’t find one. Yet, the Bible has tons to say about ancestors; think about the chapter upon chapter of *begetting* in the Old Testament. A systematic theology written by an African or an Asian might well have pages and pages on ancestors – but it doesn’t fit the system here in the West. So then context affects our theologizing and therefore the questions both asked and answered. We cannot then mistake the system for the message of the Bible. Important things like ancestors are left out because they are a misfit for a particular system and other things get systematized extensively and lose the relational aspect that breathes life into the Scriptures. The big question is who tells theologians what questions to ask? The

interests will vary from context to context and culture to culture.

4. Too polemical- When systematic theology becomes normative, in the sense seen in Dr. Henry's quotes above, the result will be that *theology becomes polemics*. We are always setting theology over against errors. Please do not misunderstand me. The church has always had to correct errors and good theology is vital in doing this. But a constant polemic is not healthy nor does it produce godliness in the church. This approach to theology will spiral out of hand in no time. It will perpetually ask: "What does the whole Bible say about this topic (fill in the blank)?" It then turns to *philosophical reflections* upon all the texts that are assembled and the truths that are stated as *God's absolute truth in perfect humanly devised propositions*. The danger is that once we know the truth about everything the Bible teaches about a given subject, say the doctrine of election as one illustration, then we can make war against all those who oppose this truth. We do not kill each other, as we once did, but we will kill the reputations and good name of each other. We are always sowing the seeds of our own destruction by becoming "heresy-hunters" par excellence.
5. Two deficits of Systematic Theology which falls into his designation 'Western Theology' has been cited by a Caribbean author. First, he believes that it is too dogmatic in its approach and it is perceived as a straightjacket methodology (Palmer 2013, 156). This for him is too humanistic and as he explains "human ingenuity to formulate and articulate the mind of God tends to come to the fore" (Ibid. 156). This is what Wayne Grudem might have responded to- A too-neat-to be true process. It misses the metanarrative.
6. Secondly, Palmer cites the sentiments of some Majority world theologians that many of their North Atlantic counterparts are too much engaged in "excessive specialization and ivory tower reflection" (Palmer 2013, 156). This theology seems to be better suited for academia. In keeping with this thought ST becomes too abstract and otherworldly to be of any value to Majority world Christians. In this sense then, Palmer believes it is particularistic (Ibid. 156).

7. Because of its otherworldly nature, it fails to connect with the *Am ha arets* an (Hebrew expression for everyday people) or laity in their natural environment (*sitz em leben*). Palmer quotes Harold Sitahal who says that this kind of theologizing is not a theology of, for, by, nor with the people since its “reflection [does not appear to] ... eschew theological reflection on the supernatural for its own sake (Ibid. 156). It is not about transformation and practicality. The charge then of many is that Systematic Theology is very highfaluting in nature and needs to be grounded.

### **How Does Systematic Theology Facilitate Life and Ministry?**

#### *Questions of Life*

In his book *Worldviews in Conflict*, Ronald Nash gives five components of a worldview and questions we ask pertaining to these five areas. The five areas are God, Reality, Knowledge, Morality, and Humankind. He outlines under each component questions that people seek answers for, even the atheists.

1. A view of God- Does God even exists? What is the nature of God? Is there only one true God? Is God a personal being who can know love and act? Or is God an impersonal force or power?
2. A view of Reality- What is the relationship between God and the universe? Is the existence of the universe a brute fact? Is the universe eternal? Did an eternal, personal, omnipotent God create the world? Are God and the world eternal and interdependent? Is the world best understood in a non-purposeful way? Or is there a purpose? Is the universe closed? Or can a supernatural reality act causally within nature?
3. A view of Knowledge - Is knowledge of our world possible? Can we trust our senses? What are the proper roles of senses and experiences in knowledge? Is truth relative or must truth be the same for all rational beings? Is knowledge about God possible? Can God reveal himself to human beings?
4. A view of Ethics - Are there moral laws that govern human conduct? What are they? Are these moral laws the same for all human beings? Is morality totally subjective or objective? Are moral laws discovered or constructed by human beings? Is morality relative to individuals or to cultures or to historical periods? Does it make sense to say that the same action may be right for people in one culture

or historical epoch and wrong for others? Or does morality transcend cultural, historical and individual boundaries?

5. A view of Humankind- Are human beings free or are they pawns of deterministic forces? Were all the religious and philosophical thinkers correct who talked about the human soul or who distinguished the mind from the body? What is the human soul and how is it related to the body? Is there conscious, personal survival after death? Are there rewards and punishment after death? Are Christian teachings about heaven and hell correct? (Nash 1992, 26-30).

Charles Colson formulates these questions into three areas and believes that a person's worldview will seek to address and must answer questions of Creation or Where did we come from and who we are. Fall... meaning what has gone wrong with the world?, and Redemption... What can we do to fix it? (Colson 1999, xiii). These are questions, whether as summarized by Nash or Colson, that universally concern people and questions that Systematic theology helps to answer in its categories of Bibliology, Theology Proper, Anthropology, Christology and Pneumatology. But are these the questions that the Caribbean man is asking? Are there completely different realities that Caribbean people are experiencing that is so foreign to a theology that is systematized?

### **Concerns of the Caribbean Person**

Already we have seen what some theologians from the Caribbean believe about Systematic Theology or "North Atlantic Theology"- that it is far removed from reality and mainly designed for academia. In my section on the history of Systematic Theology (found above) Origen's attention to praxis and theory refutes this claim. Origen, Kung writes, "was not primarily interested in a method or a system, but in basic human attitudes before God and in life in the Christian spirit" (Kung 1995, 48). However he saw where the one- theory-facilitated the other- praxis.

One of the questions the Caribbean man is said to have is one of identity. Dr. Garnet Roper in his book *Caribbean Theology as Public Theology* asserts this and proceeds to say "Caribbean Theology therefore seeks to respond to this interiorization of oppression which has led to the distortion of identity" (Roper 2012, 18). In a telephone interview with Dr. Roper he was asked what in his view are the questions or concerns of the Caribbean man. His prompt response consisted of five questions, one of which has to do with identity. The questions are as follows:

1. What kind of God exists?
2. What is God's response to matters of justice?
3. What is the identity of the Caribbean man?
4. Is Jesus different from the cane cutter?
5. Is salvation for soul only or body as well?

He outlines these thoughts in his book in a more extensive way, stating them not as questions but themes of Caribbean Theology. The themes, including the problem of identity, are as follows;

- Resistance against injustice, idolatry and seductive snares in faithfulness to God.
- God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and Lord of History.
- Caribbean Christology- Jesus incarnate in the poor, embodying the love of God, vanquishing the powers through His cross and saving by His blood and His resurrection.
- The Caribbean Church as the basic ecclesial community, a servant and a prophetic community (Roper 2012, 18)

The themes above, and the questions before, find themselves in at least one area of Dogmatics (i.e., Systematic Theology 1: Bibliology, Theology Proper, Anthropology, Christology and Pneumatology).

#### *Bibliology- The Word of God*

In Roper's theme of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and Lord of History, dealt extensively in chapter 6 of his text, he has a high view of the scriptures saying "that the Bible is, becomes and contains the word of God" (Ibid. 169). This is a comprehensive view of the different schools on inspiration of scripture. However, he says that "Caribbean Theology is a narrative theology that reads scripture in the light of the lived experience of the people". "Scripture", he continues "is normative; it is the bread for the journey of life. It is to be studied, believed and obeyed" (Ibid. 169).

Many Systematic theologians will agree generally with Roper because they too treat the Bible as God's word which should be believed and obeyed. It is a standard for life and godliness and "we are to think of the Bible as the ultimate standard of truth, the reference point by which every other claim to truthfulness is to be measured" (Grudem 1994, 83). Systematic Theology, like Caribbean Theology, holds up the scriptures as a standard, therefore, for life and ministry in the Caribbean where the Bible

plays a significant role. Says Roper, “the bible has remained central to the life of the community [even] after emancipation” when the enslaved received 50,000 bibles from their enslavers (Roper 2012, 169). What the systematic theologian can do and learn from the Caribbean theologian in the context of our region is to not just exegete the *Word* of God but exegete the *World* of Caribbean people so that he or she might be able to read scripture in the light of the lived experience of the people.

#### *Theology Proper*

Another of Caribbean Theology’s key tenet is God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and Lord of History. He is the God who is in touch with and involved in human affairs. It is he who has brought the Caribbean into being. He made human beings in his own image and likeness. A God of justice on whom we depend in our lived experience, where justice is either denied or delayed. All persons are equal before this God. According to Roper, these are the “dominant and most discussed ideas about God that emerge in prayers and testimonies within the communities of faith” (Roper 2012, 169).

Systematic theologians see this matter of justice of God as one of his communicable attributes. But this justice that the Systematic theologian concerns herself with relates mainly to God. It is God who is the victim and the one whom we sin against. Grudem writes, “it is necessary that God punish sin, for it does not deserve reward” (Grudem 1994, 204). The man to man justice is overlooked. This seems to be the concern of the Caribbean man who wants his due recompense.

Whilst God is the one who ultimately is sinned against when we wrong our fellow man, God acts or will act on man’s behalf. Roper, who cites Devon Dick in his book, *The Cross and the Machete*, quotes a verse that Bogle and Gordon were preoccupied with from Isaiah 30:18 - ‘the Lord is the God of justice: blessed are those who wait for Him’ (Roper 2012, 169) . God looks out not just for himself but for men. The context of the Caribbean is taken up with what is just, since from the time of slavery inequality and inequity have been the reality.

#### *Anthropology*

The understanding of self has been a haunting issue that the Caribbean man grapples with. Who is he really? Is he second class to the other ethnic races – the Caucasian, for example? Where does he come from? In whose image was he created? Is Jesus different from who he is? Does salvation in Jesus equate to acting like the

white man? Is it a white man's salvation only? Is God concerned about the Caribbean man?

These are questions that preoccupy the mind of the Caribbean theologian as s/he understands his/her people. Caribbean theology therefore seeks to respond to questions about self-identity and self-determination. It is believed by some theologians that this identity has suffered distortion because the Caribbean person has been subjected to a system of oppression, seen in slavery for example. "Caribbean theology also seeks to be part of the process of self-determination by taking responsibility for itself theologically" (Roper 2012, 18). The theologian therefore takes upon himself the responsibility of helping the Caribbean man to see himself for who he is - to view himself as being equal to all human beings and not in any way inferior. The Caribbean person must accept that all human beings are equal in the sight of God as a theological truth.

Man created in the image of God is also a tenet proposed in Systematic theology. It is clearly taught in scriptures that all human beings are created in the likeness of God. The *Imago Dei* means the human is like God and in many ways represents God (Grudem 1994, 443). This places a high value on humans regardless of the ethnicity or race to which they belong. Wo/man is like God and different from the rest of creation because of their moral, spiritual, mental, relational and physical aspects. (Ibid. 446-448).

This doctrine is important for life, ministry to communities and the Caribbean person for it is in this teaching that we get our sense of great dignity as bearers of God's image. (Ibid. 449). As it pertains to our fallen nature, all humanity is fallen. However, "sinful man has the status of being in God's image. This has profound implications for our conduct towards others. It means that people of every race deserve equal dignity and rights" (Grudem 1994, 449-450). The systematic theologian and Caribbean theologian agree in totality on this. However the latter makes this his/her focus.

### *Christology*

It is long believed that our Caribbean region has suffered tremendously and have failed to progress, like other regions such as North America--socially, economically and politically. This inadequacy in the social and economic climate has been difficult to overcome because of the legacy of persistent poverty bequeathed by the plantation system and plantation economy. Political



independence has taken an incremental approach to changing the social and political realities of the newly independent nations. It is with this in mind that Dr. Roper's third tenet finds credence. In it, he portrays Jesus incarnate in the poor, embodying the love of God, vanquishing the powers through his cross and saving by his blood and his resurrection. The Caribbean man, a poor man, finds comfort in the incarnation of Jesus who identifies himself as a "cane cutter, the enslaved, the indentured labourer and a martyr who is killed taking a stand for justice" (Ibid. 169 – 170). In Roper's view Caribbean Christology touches the reality of the Caribbean people.

Jesus is liberator, and accomplishes a salvation for his people which is here and not yet here, another common theme prevalent in Caribbean and Systematic Theology. Systematic theology, though recognizing Jesus as man emphasizes his Deity whilst Caribbean theology shows greater appreciation for his humanity. Grudem accepts that Jesus could be hungry, tired, or lonely- all common features of humanity. However, he is quick to point out that Jesus could not have sinned because he was God (Grudem 1994, 538). Systematic theologians have attempted to reduce his humanity, choosing instead to deify him almost presenting a docetic Christ.

### **Conclusion**

There is great relevance in taking a Systematic approach to theology and therefore much that can be appreciated. Paramount in its contribution is the way things can be structured and organized as a way to enhance understanding of sometimes complex topics or themes in the bible. Other advantages are the apologetic and heuristic nature of this approach. These reasons were what sparked the idea of systematizing the common belief of the church at that time.

Systematic theology, like all other theologies, has its weaknesses and biases but the value it has given to the church over the centuries should not be discounted. Although it is different from a Caribbean theology it has been used as a platform and can be used as a spring board to further the cause of life and ministry even in the Caribbean context. One must admit that it has come short of focusing on specific areas but this is not a fault of the theology itself but rather the users thereof. Theologians may therefore need to view this approach in a complementary way to the other forms practiced than to think that it need to stand alone or be the only way suitable to go forward.

The writer wishes to make the following recommendations:

- ❖ Theologians should value and appreciate what systematic theology (ST) has historically set out to do
- ❖ The theologian/pastor must understand the catechistic use of a systematic theology for the maturation of the congregant.
- ❖ The theologian must realize ST's deficiencies and therefore pull from other theologies.
- ❖ Theologians must ground the doctrines in everyday living, thereby making it more personal and practical
- ❖ Those theologians opposed to a systematic theology must realize that even in other ways of doing theology systematization is unavoidable.
- ❖ Systematic theology must be open to other areas of discipline.
- ❖ Theologians should not only exegete scriptures but exegete society- that is, world and word.

If these recommendations are understood and adopted by theologians, I believe we would have a more comprehensive theology and therefore this would result in a muting of a sense of arrogance and exclusiveness sometimes associated with closely held beliefs.

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