

THE ROLE AND PLACE OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY IN A PONTIFICAL UNIVERSITY/INSTITUTE

Ferdinand NWAIGBO*¹

Abstract

The article concerns the role and place of systematic theology in Pontifical University. The problem is that the value of Systematic Theology in ecclesiastical Faculties of theology had been strongly denied and mightily diminished. In point of facts, the absence of the light of Systematic Theology in Pontifical University has been the reason of darkness of the mystery of our apostolic faith, especially in ecclesial, secular and public life. The objective of the article is to demonstrate that Systematic Theology has a role and a place in a Pontifical Institute, using the method of correlation, and the methodological questions, which include, what is theology? Has Systematic Theology a role or a place in a Pontifical University? The argument of the article is that we cannot easily bracket the role of Systematic Theology in a faculty of theology and ignore its place as a unifier in the curriculum of theological studies in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Another important aspect of its role is that Systematic Theology sheds a great light on the mystery of God (a mystery which is to be approached through inquiry - faith seeking understanding). The article contributes to the flourishing of the greenhouse of faith in Pontifical University, by laying aside all fundamentalists' misunderstanding that twisted the meaning and Catholic origin of Systematic Theology in the early Church. Keywords: University, Pontifical, Theology, revelation, faith, culture.

Keywords: Systematic Theology, Pontifical University, Institute, Role, Place

¹ *Professor of Systematic Theology, Department of Systematic Theology, Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Tel.: 08037071785. Email: ferdynwaigbo@yahoo.com

1. Introduction

The Foreground and background of the problem are located in the dogmatism and prevalent fundamentalists' view of Systematic Theology. Often, the term *Systematic Theology* has been misconstrued and misconceived completely in relation to its dents with Protestant theology. In this conjecture, the biblical, historical, ecclesial and cultural aspects of Systematic Theology are easily discarded and thrown to dogs *per se* to the barks of dogmatism. The meaning of dogmatism can be expressed in two ways (1) as an absolute opinion: an immovable assertion of opinion especially when it is uncalled for (2) a tendency to hold tenaciously to a personal belief as if it were a universal reality. Dogmatism leads to a double tendency: dogmatism is the tendency to lay down principles as undeniably true, without consideration of evidence or the opinions of others. Another significant tendency is that dogmatism leads to the incapability of seeing the certainty of the truth of the divine revelation through the light of philosophical or scientific reasoning, especially the use of terminological and methodological procedures. Dogmatism is afraid to examine our Christian faith in the light of cultivated reasoning and is scarred away of using any available forms of human knowledge and methods, in approaching the mystery of faith. It is also necessary to take into consideration that dogmatism does not pay "close attention to certain findings of the human sciences."² Paying close attention to certain findings of human science, Systematic Theology plays the role of freeing a Pontifical University from the virus of dogmatism, by using "developments in science and technology and the world-wide information revolution to examine the mystery of faith anew, with the energy, audacity and insights which characterized the early Fathers of the Church, theologians, saints and persons, who often did their work in times of trouble and change, such as ours."³

The portion of our dogmatism here in Nigeria is the problem of neo-orthodoxy or theological cop-out. Many are overcharged with the old

² Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Marialis Cultus*, February 2 , 1974, paragraph 34.

³ Synod of Bishops. Tenth Ordinary Assembly. The Bishop Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Hope of the World (Rome, September 30 to October 27, 2001), paragraph 25.

wine of dogmatism. In this dogmatic excess, there lurks a residual of Gnosticism, neo-Pelegianism and neo-Orthodoxy: "Gnosticism intoxicates us with the poison of subjectivism... neo-Pelegianism intoxicates us with the presumption of a salvation earned through our own efforts."⁴ Over and above, dogmatism is a kind of dogmatic fault, a dogmatic error in itself. In point of fact, one can easily get outstripped by the culture of "dogmatism"⁵ even those who claimed to be the beckons of the Catholic faith. The negative trait of dogmatism is taking over the role of Systematic Theology, by focusing more on the structural and restricted understanding of the term *dogma*, that is, by stressing on the egalitarian nature of dogma rather than on the prophetic understanding of the role of dogma in the life of a believer. It is only in the context of systematics that one can fully grasp the prophetic meaning of the term *dogma*. In the context of systematics, *Systematic* theology plays a public and prophetic role.

The fundamentalists claimed that Systematic Theology is the property of Protestant theology. Even also that Systematic Theology originated from Protestant stock. The term *fundamentalist* is used in a general way to describe anyone from any religion who takes a literary approach to religious dogmas.⁶ The virus of fundamentalism is strongly affecting the place of Systematic Theology in a Pontifical University. Actually, fundamentalism is an obstacle to the place of Systematic Theology in a Pontifical University. At the first sight, placing Systematic Theology in Pontifical Universities in Nigeria may seem strange or unusual to those accustomed to the structure of traditional Catholic theology in ecclesiastical seminaries. One may even think that placing Systematic Theology in a Pontifical University is a displacement or diminishment of the popular theology we do in our ecclesiastical seminaries. The other may conceive it as a non-standard practice of the Roman Catholic

⁴ Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter, *Desiderio Desideravi*, Rome, 29 June, 2022, nos. 19 & 20.

⁵ Ikenga K. E. Oraegbunam, "Relevance of African Philosophy to African Integral Development" in *West African Journal of Philosophical Studies*, (Volume 10, December, 2007), 19.

⁶ Philip Romain, *Catholic Answers to Fundamentalists' Questions* (Missouri: St. Paul's, 2021), 13.

NWAIGBO: *The Role and Place of Systematic Theology in a Pontifical University/Institute*

theology. This raises the question of how Systematic Theology finds its place in a Pontifical University. Generally speaking, "the growth of the universities and the advancement of the liberal arts had a decisive impact on the development of theology, particularly systematic theology."⁷ The rise of universities in the Middle Ages offered a place to Systematic Theology in Catholic Universities. From a historical point of view, Systematic Theology is a university theology. Realistically, Systematic Theology, as we know it to be since the time of Origen, and its framework in a Pontifical University, namely, in an ecclesiastical faculty of theology, where all the categories of the People of God (the clergy, religious and laity) participate in theological studies is quite different from seminary theology which is studied in ecclesiastical seminaries, where only students for priestly ordination is strictly involved.

Recently, this is how the geography of Systematic Theology in a Pontifical University looks like. The investment of theology comprises: in the first perspective, Systematic Theology utilises biblical doctrines/sources, relating them to the issues of human community today. The second perspective, Systematic Theology absorbs the contents of the Christian doctrines, creeds, confessions of faith, Church Councils, dogmatic statements and authorities. In the third instance, Systematic Theology in a Pontifical University gives major attention to the Christian Experience in the *modern Areopagus*,⁸ to the signs of the times, social, economic and political issue of today. Fourthly, Systematic Theology in a Pontifical University gives priority to the contemporary cultures as its sources.

2. Prolegomena

We are to lay down and develop two statements that surround the word *systematics*. The first is that the concern of systematics is related to the dogmas of the Church. The statement answers the question of the subject matters of systematics. The whole event of the mystery of faith is contained in systematics. The second is the relation of systematics to

⁷ Francis Schuessler Fiorenza and John Galvin, *Systematic Theology. Roman Catholic Perspectives*, Volume one, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 18.

⁸ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, The Mission of the Church (Rome, December 7, 1990), paragraph 37.

theology. Strictly speaking the whole debate of the place of systematics in a Pontifical University is contained in these statements. The argument falls into two parts – the Catholic and non-Catholic perspectives.

First, a kind of historical prolegomena offers some comments on the method of systematics. In principle, in searching for a systematic procedure, technique or mode of inquiring, in order to develop a theological position, systematic theologians basically address the issues of theological methods at the beginning of their treatise, known as *prolegomena*.⁹ A theological principle that guides us in this procedure is correlative method in Systematic Theology. The *prolegomena* includes such methodological questions as: What is theology? Is theology a science? What forms the foundation of the role of theology? What constitutes the proper way of constructing a theological system? What is dogma of the Christian revelation and how can it be legitimately studied and integrated into the context of Systematic Theology? How is the scripture-in-tradition a method in Systematic Theology? And what are we to say about the word *Systematic Theology* and its indispensable role and place in a Pontifical University?

Second, to understand the role of Systematic Theology as *Lumen Gentium* in a Pontifical University, we have to go deep into the meaning of the Church's dogma and its connection to Systematic Theology. The role of Systematic Theology in a Pontifical University is to be the foundation on which the dogmas of the Christian faith are built. The word *dogma* is derived from *doxa*. *Doxa* or *dogma* is a Greek word, referring to (1) that which seems reasonable and correct to a person, strictly speaking what a person thinks to be true (2) that which a person sets forth as his/her conviction and seems to be right (3) that which has a binding character or force of authority and in the contemporary understanding (4) those beliefs which unite us together in the one faith of the one Church of Christ, bind us inseparably together as one Body of Christ, shape us into a community of faith, hope and charity and definitively mark us as members of the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic

⁹ James Garrett, *Systematic Theology* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1990), 1.

Church.¹⁰ In effect, the word *dogma* has its strongest root in the terminology of late Greek philosophy that used the term *dogma* to designate the official views of a particular philosophical school. The word *dogma* was earlier used only in philosophy with reference to philosophical doctrines. In the cultural Greek world-view "that shaped the Roman Empire, stoicism was an admired and widespread ideal. This system of philosophy valued serene, reasoned responses to all life's situation and considered passion as obstacle to that life."¹¹ Later, the Christian theology took over this usage to the same degree that it was felt under the influence of the Hellenistic spirit. Just as there are the dogmas of the Stoics, or the Cynics, there are the dogmas of the Christian faith. Theologically, later, these Christian dogmas assumed a position as the scientifically familiar way of expressing the Christian message of salvation, occupying an eminent place next to kerygma, which itself lacked *systematic* formulations.

3. Origin of Systematics in Catholic Tradition

The early Fathers of the Church did give a privileged place to *systematics* as the Church spread around and beyond its Hellenistic environment. The origin of the tradition of systematics in the Catholic Church is found in the writings of Irenaeus and Origen, who are the roots of *systematics* in the Catholic tradition. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, "one can say that Saint Irenaeus emerges as the first Church great theologian who created systematic theology; he himself speaks of system of theology, that is, of the internal coherence of all faith."¹² As the Church continued to grow, a further impetus in *systematics* developed in the works of the early Fathers of the Church, especially in work of early theologians like Origen, "Origen's work *On the First Principles (Peri Archon)* makes a threefold contribution to a systematic presentation of the Christian faith. First, Origen attempted to give a foundation for the scientific exegesis of the Scriptures. Second, he developed a systematic theory of religious

¹⁰ Guy Mansini, "DOGMA" in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology* (New York: Herder&Herder, 2000), 239.

¹¹ Mary Ann, Zimmer, *Mary. Tradition and Influence* (Ligouri: Ligouri Publications, 2010), 55.

¹² Pope Benedict XVI, *Church Fathers from Clement of Rome to Augustine* (Bangalore: Asian Publishing Cooperation, 2008), 23.

knowledge. Third, he gave a systematic presentation of theology that indeed has earned him the label of the first systematic theologian. Origen's *On the First Principles* published in 220, has been traditionally seen as a first attempt to bring the truths of the Christian faith into a theological synthesis."¹³ From the perspective of this understanding, it will be a good thing to keep the following points in mind:

- (a) Systematic theology comprehensively looks at the divine truths of the Christian revelation in terms of order and coherence.
- (b) Systematic Theology is a synthetic theology. As it perceives the truths of the divine revelation of the Christian faith, it sees them as a whole/holistically rather than in parts and parcels/separately. It prefers to take it all in and admire their beauty together rather than breaking them into pieces. It is the role of creativity, beginning with the awareness that God saw all that He made and admired their goodness and beauty (Genesis 1:31).
- (c) Systematic Theology looks at the revealed truths of the Christian faith in terms of connectivity and relationships. The divine truths are not perceived linearly but connectively. It's role is not structural but familial. Systematic Theology plays the role of a mother in the family. She sees her children equally. She sees the differences in each divine truths of the Christian faith but the differences do not make one doctrine more important than the other or less important. The important thing for her(Systematic Theology) is right relationship of one doctrine to another, cohesiveness to keep them going and their growth in their relationship and service to the People of God.

The explications of word *systematics* yield two characters - the systematic and theological characters. In its systematic character, the word *systematics* is an adjective derived from a Greek verb that literally means to set up together, to line up in a row in a correct order. To be able to do that one must first analyses a given object of thought - split it up in a number of different components -- in order then to combine those elements in such a way as to make visible both their unique qualities and their interconnections with each other. This double operation of

¹³ Francis Schuessler Fiorenza and John Galvin, *Systematic Theology. Roman Catholic Perspectives*, Volume one, 10.

**NWAIGBO: *The Role and Place of Systematic Theology in a
Pontifical University/Institute***

separating and combining of analysis and synthesis is a typically intellectual activity. It underlies everything we call science. The concern of science is the intellectual examination of illumination of all reality known to us.¹⁴ In points of facts, the aim of Systematic Theology is to attain intellectual clarity by ordering the given materials systematically. At this stage, we see the term *systematics* with the suffix *theology*. At this point, one raises pretty questions. How was the word *theology* joined to *systematics*? What is the relationship between systematics and theology? Can Catholic theology be regarded as systematics? The response can be given from two viewpoints – Catholic and non-Catholic perspective. In the Catholic perspective, the word *theology* after the term *systematics* comes from the nature of theology as a science of faith. Today, theology can be called science as theologians such as Thomas Aquinas and Karl Rahner had earlier called it, "in the sense that it involves classified or systematized knowledge."¹⁵ The Roman Catholic Church took official position at the Second Vatican Council, by encouraging scientific research in Pontifical Universities (Vatican II, GE nos. 10, 11), and this step strategically placed Systematic Theology at the core of a Pontifical University.

From the Protestant perspective, the reformers criticized Roman Catholic understanding of dogmas. They saw Catholicism of the Reformation period as seriously distracted by the principles of dogmas and this was the main point they added the term *theology* to the original ancient word *systematics*. Nevertheless, some of the Churches that developed out of the Reformation maintained as strong reverence to the belief that Christ alone is the source of salvation, including the doctrinal/creedal statement that Christ "was born of the Virgin Mary."¹⁶ The word *theology* was added to *systematics* by the Churches which developed out of Reformation, and for this reason, the Catholics neither readily admitted the term *Systematic Theology*. They turned their back completely and abandoned Systematic Theology as their property. Let me ask an honest question in this discussion. If I bought a watch and used it for a long time

¹⁴Hendrikus Berkhof, *Introduction to the Study of Dogmatics* (Michigan: Eardmans, 1985), 10.

¹⁵ James Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 6.

¹⁶ Mary Ann, Zimmer, *Mary. Tradition and Influence*, 60.

and one day an opponent rubbed it, and added a golden band on it, if I eventually caught him with the watch, will I leave for him because he added a band on it? No. I will claim my watch back. Such a response played a great role in understanding the place of Systematic Theology in the twentieth century Catholicism.

In the twentieth century, the tradition of *systematics* in Catholic Christianity was lively revitalized by the contemporary theologians, such as Rahner and Ratzinger. The massive works of Roman Catholic theologians during the twentieth century had given birth to systematic theologies. An example is the elaborate work of the Jesuit Theologian Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, 17 volumes. Today, the Catholics are claiming back those ancient words and practices lost with the wave of Reformation. An example of such concept is salvation history, "the whole story of human beings and their world seen as a drama of redemption, running from creation to *parousia* and linking its centre in Christ (Eph 1: 3-14, Col 1: 15-20), developed by Protestant scholars like Johann Konrad von Hoffman. The Second Vatican Council used the theme salvation history, understanding it as practically synonymous with the history of revelation (Vatican II *Dei Verbum*"¹⁷ The theme of salvation history is at the heart of Systematic Theology. Systematic theology is not solely and restricted intellectual rationale exercises, but is primarily preoccupied with the history of revelation of God, stretching from creation (and the fall) and the end times, theologically called the *eschaton*.

Today, we do not perceive again the dark side in the Catholic tendency to identify Systematic Theology with Protestantism or even with the Protestant clergy. In our age, Catholics do not think themselves only as dogmatists. The Catholic perspective on Systematic Theology shows that we do not have to fear the word *Systematic Theology*, even when on account of the term "dogmatism used it as a weapon of its own and fundamentalists pride themselves on not believing in the authority of the

¹⁷ Gerald O'Collins, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2000), 234.

Pope."¹⁸ Systematic Theology can be done in any place. In point of fact, recent works on *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives* (published in 1991) by Francis Schuessler Fiorenza and John Gavin) has demonstrated the current Catholic orientation to Systematic Theology.

4. Systematic Theology and Christian Revelation/the Mystery of Faith

The term *revelation* is derived from the Latin term *revelatio*, which translates the Greek term *apokalypsis*, meaning unveiling of a mystery.¹⁹ Paul clearly made known that there is and has been a revelation of God through the created universe (Romans 1:20). The created universe embodies the manifestation or revelation of God (Psalm 19:1-4).

First, we have revelation in and through the created universe. The word *revelation* occupies a basic place in the present-day theology. The word *theology* comes from the two Greek words *theo*, meaning God and *logos*, reason, order, word.²⁰ In this sense, theology is a reasonable, ordered study of God. According to the interpretation of Mueller, theology is a talk or discourse (*logos*) about God(*theos*). The word *theology* had been in usage in Greek language for centuries before Christianity appropriated the terminology to discourse about the revelation of God in history or the mystery of faith. In the Greek milieu, the word *theology* designated a talk about their natural deities, because of this non-Christian religious meaning and coloring from the Greek world-view the Christians were unwilling to adopt the terminology in the context of speaking about their belief in the True God of their own religion.

A breakthrough came in the eleventh century, when Anselm of Canterbury scholarly lifted the ancient meaning of the term *theology* above its Greek context and made the word *theology* universally acceptable, by providing a definition that pierced the impenetrable walls of Scholastic theology in his times: *fides quaerens intellectum* - faith seeking understanding. In Anselm's definition, faith is a knowledge that

¹⁸ Richard Rohr and Joseph Martos, *Why Be Catholic? Understanding Our Experience and Tradition* (Mumbai: ST PAULS, 1999), 66.

¹⁹ James Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 43.

²⁰ James Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 3.

finds fulfillment through reasonable, logical and systematic understanding.²¹ The knowledge is not merely intellectual but is based on a living faith. The concept of *revelation* embodies the idea of God's self-disclosure to humanity. In the study of theology, the community of faith discourses and understands God, reasonably, logically and systematically. As a result, the primordial source and principal theme of Systematic Theology begins with God. God is the primordial source of Systematic Theology: in the beginning God created the world with order, in the midst of chaos God brought in order (Genesis 1:1-11). God is not God of disorder, but God of order (1Cor. 14:33).

The same is true of Systematic Theology. Fundamentally, Systematic Theology is rooted in order. Systematic Theology follows the method of God's order in bringing order out of chaos. In dealing with the truths of the divine revelation, Systematic Theology follows the dynamic divine order in creation in organizing the non-thematic and unscientific data of the Christian faith. As it is God's intention that the world be an organized and orderly place provided with all that human and beasts need to live together in unity and harmony, so it is the intention of systematics to organize and coherently order theological understanding of the dogmas of creation, redemption, salvation, grace (and so on) into unity.

Principally, in accordance with this theological principle, "systematics is, rather a feasible intellectual exercise because it is the case that God in history himself has revealed his all-round relations with the world. God has thus enabled the race of reason on the intelligible to be unified by the influence of His Spirit around the centre that is, his incarnate Word in all cultures of the world."²²In this sense, Systematic Theology is basically a fundamental organization of theological understanding of the unity and harmony of the divine truths of the Christian faith, usually around unifying concepts, such as salvation, in a systematic way. The characterization supplies the necessary role of Systematic Theology in a Pontifical University.

²¹ J.J. Mueller, "Systematic Theology" in *The Modern Catholic Encyclopaedia* (Ed.), Michael Glazier (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004), 834.

²²Aidan Nicholas, *Chalice of God. A Systematic Theology in Outline*(Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012), 8.

NWAIGBO: *The Role and Place of Systematic Theology in a Pontifical University/Institute*

What, then, are the roles of Catholic Systematic Theology that have bearing upon Pontifical University? The initial role of Systematic Theology in Pontifical University is to create the presence of God in a Pontifical University, as an ecclesial community. A wholesome and necessary counterweight of the role of Systematic Theology in a Pontifical University is to provide a relation of human beings to God. In doing theology, we come into personal contact with the presence of God. The critical role of Systematic Theology is to dispel the darkness of error of the knowledge of God, the darkness of a sort of *Deus Absconditus* - the hidden God, in every field of scientific inquiry.

Second, in Jesus Christ the Father is revealed, through Christ's effective reconciliation of humanity with God, making peace, for to say that a University is Pontifical is to say that it is established by the Pope. To go all the way with this view, Pope Benedict XVI underlined in his speech to Catholic educators at the Pontifical Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, on 17 April 2008, when he said: First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth. The Pontiff highlighted how this personal encounter with Christ in Catholic educational institutions must be followed by knowledge and witness (par. 2-3). The role of Systematic Theology in a Pontifical University comes, first of all from Jesus Christ, from the divine revelation of God that He was in history and from the Good News or the Gospel He communicated to humanity.

Third, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is also the revelation in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit as the divine agency in humanity's reception of the divine revelation is specifically and activity involved in believing or faith of a Pontifical University. The role of Systematic Theology embraces the Holy Spirit who energizes the environment and greenhouse of a Pontifical University, by nurturing it with different gifts and charisma. The appellations of the Holy Spirit, in the Scripture are the breath of God and the Lord and Giver of life. The Holy Spirit perfectly forms the oxygen of a Pontifical University. The Holy Spirit forms the breath and oxygen (Systematic Theology) of a Pontifical University. Rightly stressed, the Holy Spirit spoke through the prophetic teaching of

the theologians, by employing human languages, including our keywords and concepts in systematizing the divine revelation. The true unity of the Pontifical University lies in the divine Spirit himself, impelling staff and students to the ever experience of culture of life.

Fourth, the scriptures are potential sources of God's revelation in the universe and in his Son Jesus Christ in history. The role of Systematic Theology in a Pontifical University is to provide the knowledge of the scripture, especially the Word of God made flesh, to guide the daily living of the members of a university family, to increase their knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith and to derive lessons on how to be better Catholics. In their daily living, they search the Scriptures to find how to be better parents in their families, in their lecture halls, and to be honest business men and women and politicians with heart and integrity. In this role, using Scriptures as source of its theology, Systematic Theology helps us to resolve the unresolved problem of the accusations of the Catholic Church as unscriptural Catholicism.

Theologically, the scripture is the *norma normans*, the first principle of Systematic Theology - *principium theologiae*. The Christian Scripture is the starting point and source of systematic process of the revelation of God, One and Three, mainly, the scriptural revelation of God in Christ in which the faith of the Church is interpreted and made intelligible. The Scripture is the ultimate arbiter of matters systematical and the particular place in which God reveals himself to his people, in history. The Scripture is the first place of authenticity and authority in all matters of Catholic faith as dealt by systematics. From a broader and wider approach "the Scriptures themselves are not simply sources for theological reflection but themselves are embodiment of theological reflection."²³

We now turn to the Christian/ecclesial tradition, as a method of systematics, for example, the Christian creeds, confession of faith, conciliar statements, and Christian dogmas – as keys for method in Systematic Theology. Systematic Theology considers the Christian

²³ Francis Schuessler Fiorenza and John Galvin, *Systematic Theology. Roman Catholic Perspectives*, volume one, 7.

NWAIGBO: *The Role and Place of Systematic Theology in a Pontifical University/Institute*

Tradition as key hypothesis for its research programme and as an extremely part of its role in a Pontifical University. The role of Systematic Theology comes from the Christian tradition, from the creedal formulas, from conciliar definitions, from theological knowledge of the Magisterium, from insights of theologians, from the faith of the people of God through almost 2023 years and from the dogmas of the Church.

Fifth, revelation involves both the Revealer and the recipients of the revelation, the community of faith. There is in this statement an essential character of Systematic Theology that is relevant for its place in a Pontifical University. How does theology relate to Pontifical University? Why do we connect theology with a Pontifical University? Where do we find theology in a Pontifical University? A Pontifical University lives in two worlds- the world of faith and the world of scholarship.

A Pontifical University lives in a faith-community in which the materials and foodstuffs by which she is nurtured are provided for her from the sources of the divine revelation. At the same time, a Pontifical University is intimately connected with the field of scientific research or we say to the fields of natural sciences, characterized by industry and technology. The role of Systematic Theology is to join together the human tools of reasoning and science to the truths of the divine revelation of the Christian faith. In the context of systematics, the name of God is spoken among his people and God's presence and activities around a Pontifical University are interpreted.

In principle, a Pontifical University needs the framework of theological discipline. Systematic Theology can be adequately placed or situated "in theological Institute. In practice, the issue has been resolved in very different ways. In Germany, Switzerland, Denmark and other countries, systematics is simply taught at universities, Church sponsored graduate schools in theology, in special universities like University in Amsterdam and the Catholic University Nijmegen." ²⁴ The reason for Systematic Theology today is that there are new problems surrounding the Christian faith that didn't exist in earlier times in the Church, which can be

²⁴ Hendrikus Berkhof, *Introduction to the Study of Dogmatics*, 41.

approached through free individual inquiry rather than the earlier view of straight forward defender of the mystery of faith. In effect, Systematic Theology emphasizes free individual inquiry into the mystery of our faith.

5. Systematic Theology and Christian Experience

The role Systematic Theology in a Pontifical University is to offer salvation, conceived particularly in terms of spiritual and material development and growth of a human person. At this juncture, we highlight the ecclesial role of Systematic Theology. Fundamentally, Systematic Theology focuses on the Scripture and our living tradition, and organized them coherently for the salvific utility of an ecclesial community united together in communion and mission and nourished and formed in the participation in one faith of the Apostles. The Christian dogmas are propositions, expressing the contents of the divine revelation, publicly proposed as such by the Church and is received in faith by communion of the entire People of God. Characteristically, the divine revelation is the revelation of the salvation of humanity. In its character dogmas have participative understanding. In the sense of the participative character of dogmas, we see this in God's Self-communication in his Son for the sake of our redemption and salvation of humanity. In the Person of Christ this reaches its zenith in Jesus Christ. In a religious sense, "the nucleus of God's saving history of the world began with creation rises in the Person, life and destiny of Jesus, God's beloved Son and accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit."²⁵

Systematic Theology is an orderly and coherent tool of organizing the truths of the divine revelation, and "also attempts to identify and understand those shared truths that are essential to salvation."²⁶ A theological principle which guides us in this process affirms that everything we need to know in order to be saved has already been

²⁵ Elizabeth Johnson, *Truly Our Sister. A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 103.

²⁶ Stephen Rehrauer, *Theology for Today's Catholics* (Mumbai: St Pauls, 2006), 34.

NWAIGBO: *The Role and Place of Systematic Theology in a Pontifical University/Institute*

revealed. Then a person who takes out his or her time to do theology is systematically and thoroughly reflecting on salvation.

In the curriculum of studies, Systematic theology is a thorough and systematic reflection on the beliefs that lead to salvation. In the first place, the concept of the presence of God as salvation is the primary role of Systematic Theology in a Pontifical University. This raises the question of salvation from (1) its spiritual and religious dimensions and (2) from its material, social, economic and political dimensions. In its material dimension this salvation is seen as support from liberation from spiritual, cultural, economic and political oppressions.

In a theological perspective, the integrity of a human person needed a liberation, "from myriads of problems such as political instability, economic disequilibrium, open bribery, endemic corruption and fraud of varying species and degrees, high crime rate, neglect of rural development, inadequate healthcare, poor quality education, poor infrastructural facilities, domestic fragmentation, social discrimination, exaggerated ethnicity and poverty in the midst of plenty."²⁷ In our country Nigeria, life is threatened, insecure and in a great danger, leading to displacement and diminishment of integrity of human life. One may not forget the adverse relation of humanity of men and women to their environment, namely, the issue of ecological justice and integrity of creation in the country. God's plan for the integrity of creation and of all life is compromised and sacrificed at the altar of violence, corruption and injustice.

How do we confront our situation and myriads of problems? To confront our situation with integrity, we will have to be credible, honest and prophetic. Are we concerned about the integrity and need of the human person? Are we prepared to confront ourselves with the questions of integrity? Are we seeking for justice? In response to our questions, Systematic Theology partners with Pontifical University to bring in justice, peace, coherent order and organization to fractured humanity in

²⁷ Ikenga K.E. Oraegbunam, "Doing Liberation Theology in Nigeria Today in the light of *Octogesima Adveniens*" *JOURNAL OF INCULTURATION THEOLOGY* (Vol. 7. No.2. Dec. 2006), 108.

chaos. As our living dogmas continue to grow in different cultures and human situation, the role of Systematic Theology is to respond to the new problems that did not exist in the earlier times of the Church. In our times, Systematic theology reads the signs of the times and plays a public and prophetic role, by witnessing to a consistent respect for the integrity of human person and respect for human life, and to the spiritual nature of humanity and the entire creation.

6. Systematic Theology and Inculturation

Time has proven that the Catholicity of the Church has been immensely enriched in its faith and scholarship through a systematic thinking and weaving of the unity and the plurality of cultures. In this perspective Systematic Theology uses the resources of the contemporary cultures to provide answers to the major questions posed in the culture of Africa by drawing from the Christian revelation of God, for example the revelation of the Ten Commandments. In contemporary African theology, there is an attempt to direct the movement of the Gospel towards culture, taking up the theme of inculturation. Systematic Theology plays the great role of bridging the gap between the Gospel and culture, by examining the mystery of faith, with the energy and tools that characterized early systematists of the Catholic Church. The Gospel of Jesus Christ can be lived in every culture, including in our African culture. Inculturation is a style of life based on the words of the Gospel: the word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1-14).

A contemporary biblical scholar remarked that Origen is a pioneer of systematic theology, "as a *theosophical* systematist, Origen remains a giant in the history of inculturation of Christian theology and mission, which Sub-Saharan African theologian should emulate."²⁸ Origen's systematic enterprise began with his great work *De Principium - On First Principles*, Origen explains the concept of the title of his book to mean the inner man who is said to be reasonable - *interior homo...qui et rationalis dicitur*. *On the Principles* covers the revelation of the truth of the Christian doctrine from creation to eschatology. What made

²⁸ Ukachukwu Chris Manus, "The Greek Background of Origen's Leonides' Thought: Implication for Contemporary Inculturation Theology" *JOURNAL OF INCULTURATION THEOLOGY* (Vol. 7. No.2. Dec. 2006), 191

Origen a giant systematist in his application of one of the principles of Systematic Theology, namely, the philosophical principle, by adapting Aristotelian, Stoic and Platonic elements his inheritance of Hellenistic intellectual rationalism. He advanced both philosophical theological ideas, by using a non-bipolar method. Origen married Platonic philosophy with Christian faith, this charts a way for African theologians to wed/espouse African philosophy with the Christian revelation of God.

In this connection Oraegbunam promptly recalls a quotation from Oladipe: "African philosophy is to put philosophy in the service of human well-being through a critical and reconstructive scrutiny of the ideas we live by."²⁹ Such ideas include the ideas of dynamic enterprise of human culture. Oraegbunam developed a philosophical software that evolved out of African culture and spurred philosophical thoughts that fleshed (*sarkos*) out ideas that moved African method of Systematic Theology of inculturation - philosophical thoughts that is consistent and compatible with the true requirements of revelation of God's truth in African culture. According to him, "African philosophy is incarnated (*ensarkos*) in the religious conception, symbolisms, worldview, and lived ritual practices of the ethnic African."³⁰ The method of African inculturation theology depends on enterprising philosophy in the understanding of revealed doctrine of faith in a particular culture. In relation to Pontifical Universities in African soil, it will be a good thing to keep the following ideas in mind, "the existence of African philosophy must be predicted on its being a discipline taught in universities by some trained philosophy scholars with some mapped out curriculum of study."³¹ A discipline from which systematics expects help is philosophy. The sole purpose of enterprising philosophy in African Pontifical Universities has been to broker salvation and to set the minds of communities and individuals free from narrow-mindedness and dogmatism. But it may be sufficient to say that Systematic Theology

²⁹ Ikenga K. E. Oraegbunam, "Relevance of African Philosophy to African Integral Development" in *West African Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 11-12.

³⁰ Ikenga K. E. Oraegbunam, "Relevance of African Philosophy to African Integral Development", 8.

³¹ Ikenga K. E. Oraegbunam, "Relevance of African Philosophy to African Integral Development", 8.

needs such philosophy, in order to play its vital role successfully in a Pontifical University.

7. Conclusion

By way of summary and conclusion, we must for a moment return to the beginning. The proposal was to understand the role of Systematic Theology within the context of Pontifical University. In the prevailing era of the indomitable place of science in Pontifical Universities, there is a lesser drive for a Department or Faculty of Systematic Theology. The question whether Systematic Theology is entitled to a recognized place in a Pontifical University setting is of great importance for the University herself. Placing a Systematic Theology of God within the curriculum of the framework of Pontifical University has a double advantage. It profoundly connects the faith of a Pontifical University with that of other Pontifical Universities of the world and secondly, it allows the imagery of God to play a guiding role in the life of the University.

Among the specific role of Systematic Theology, it has the capability of appropriating both the Christian experience and African culture, and the religious experience and cultures of people of other living faith. What is most encouraging in the capacity of Systematic Theology is the provision of African voice in the Catholicity of the Church. If African theologians are to live, witness and defend the one faith of the Apostles in today's African Church and environment of our theologians are to be equipped with a deep knowledge of the Christian faith and African culture, and equally they have to possess the scientific and philosophical tools enhance their theological-philosophical enterprise.

What is our contribution? We have contributed to the green gas of faith in a Pontifical University. A Pontifical University is like a family that is housing various forms of life, the house includes human beings. The atmosphere of the University contains oxygen (a Pontifical University) to support and nurture the green life of the University. A Pontifical University contains a gas/oxygen, that is called Systematic Theology, which forms the atmosphere of the University. Cumulatively, the role of Systematic Theology in this discussion is that, it is like oxygen to the life of a Pontifical University: one cannot imagine a world without an

**NWAIGBO: *The Role and Place of Systematic Theology in a
Pontifical University/Institute***

oxygen. The presence of Systematic Theology in a Pontifical University is to give life/oxygen to the greenhouse of faith.

Our recommendation? We recommend that Systematic Theology be adequately situated in the curriculum of theological studies in our Higher Education Institutions of Africa (HEIs). In principle, the issue has been resolved in very different countries of the world, such as in Germany and Switzerland. This is also the case in India, Ireland Catholic University in Nijmegen and United States of America where the study of Systematics has been entrusted to Pontifical Universities that enjoy close relationship with the Holy See.

And our conclusion? The Pontifical Universities in Africa are called to a Systematic Theology, to a method/way of systematizing, organizing, and expanding in a coherent, in a unified perspective and in an orderly manner/method the main Christian doctrines and beliefs of the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church, by paying relational attention to methodology, terminology, the use of philosophical principles and to the issues concerned with the conditions of our times, or in the provision of *Sapientia Christiana* to address the critical issues that face the Church in our times, and to engage in debate about these issues in a productive way/method, namely with academic inquiry.