

An Essential Guide to  
Research Methodologies in

# Theology and Religious Studies

**Isaac Boaheng (PhD)**

Foreword by: Rev. Prof. Yaw Adu-Gyamfi

Introduction by: Rev. Prof. Fred Mawusi Amevenku

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# An Essential Guide to Research Methodologies in Theology And Religious Studies

ISAAC BOAHENG

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Tel: +23353142920

## **DEDICATION**

To my mother, Mad. Mary Ampomah and  
father (posthumously), Mr. Noah Nti.

To my wife, Mrs. Gloria Boaheng and children,  
Christian, Benedict, Julia, Kalix and Myjiloy.

To my siblings

To all my students across the globe



## SCHOLARLY ENDORSEMENTS

This book serves as an indispensable compendium that not only simplifies the intricacies of research within the fields of biblical, theological, and religious studies but also assembles a diverse array of methodologies tailored specifically for these disciplines. With meticulous attention to detail, Rev. Dr Isaac Boaheng skillfully navigates through the complexities of academic research and offers practical insights and strategies drawn from his experience as an African scholar. Boaheng synthesises different methodologies and approaches, this book provides students with a comprehensive toolkit to engage in rigorous research and scholarly writing. The book empowers students to explore diverse avenues of inquiry, from historical-critical analysis to hermeneutical interpretation, from ethnographic fieldwork to comparative religious studies. This multifaceted approach not only enriches students' understanding of theological and religious phenomena but also equips them with the analytical tools necessary to critically evaluate and contribute to academic discourse in these fields. As such, the book is not only a roadmap for successful academic endeavors but also a gateway to intellectual exploration and scholarly excellence. It is against this backdrop that I wholeheartedly endorse this invaluable resource to all students undertaking research in biblical, theological, and religious studies.

***Rev. Prof. Jonathan Edward Tetteh Kuwornu-Adjaottor***

*Associate Professor of New Testament and Mother Tongue*

*Biblical Hermeneutics*

*Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana*

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With more than a decade and a half of experience in teaching the Old Testament in a seminary and a public university, I am delighted with the release of this very important book by Rev. Dr Isaac Boaheng. Written with an African audience in mind, the book serves as an important resource for students of religion in general, and students of theology in particular in their journey through the uneven landscapes of research in

the study of religion and theology. I am more delighted with the fact that this book will help theology students, particularly Bible students to navigate the two worlds of social science research and research in theological studies. The book is also practical and useful to non-academics and any person with an interest in a careful and structured investigation into theological issues.

***Prof. Kojo Okyere***

*Associate Professor of Old Testament Studies  
University of Cape Coast, Ghana.*

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This book is a comprehensive and indispensable resource for scholars and students dealing with the fascinating subject of research, particularly within religious studies and theological disciplines. The book is a treasure trove for those engaged in theological research, providing tailored methodologies for the diverse sub-disciplines within the field. Each chapter is dedicated to a specific area—biblical studies, systematic theology, practical theology, missiology, and church & society. It offers nuanced and contextually relevant approaches to ensure that researchers can engage authentically with their unique contexts. Boaheng’s insightful guidance and practical advice make this book an essential tool for anyone aspiring to excel in academic research within religious studies, theology and other fields of study.

***Rev. Dr. Kwaku Boamah***

*Senior Lecturer, Department for the Study of Religions  
University of Ghana.*

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The book titled *An Essential Guide to Research Methodologies in Theology and Religious Studies* by Rev. Dr Isaac Boaheng is a unique contribution to theological and religious studies in Africa. Each chapter delves into a specific methodology, providing a clear overview, step-by-step guidance, and practical examples to help students formulate research questions that align with their chosen framework. The book

also offers valuable insights on negotiating between the biblical text and contemporary context, emphasising the importance of maintaining the core Christian message regardless of the setting. Whether studying Biblical Studies, Systematic Theology, Practical Theology, Missiology, or Church and Society, Dr Boaheng equips you with the tools to conduct academically rigorous and culturally sensitive research in Africa and beyond. The book is, therefore, not just a valuable resource but an investment in your academic and professional growth. Its accessible writing style, thematic organisation, and illustrative examples make it an essential companion for anyone embarking on a research project in the field. I strongly recommend it to students, lecturers, and all who are interested in conducting research in theology and religious studies.

***Apostle Dr Christian Tsekpoe***

*Head of Department, Ministerial Formation and Training,*

*Pentecost University, Ghana;*

*A Member of the Faith and Order Commission,*

*World Council of Churches*

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This book focuses on theology and religion and for the researchers in Africa, where such books on research are often from other continents, thereby not speaking the African language as this book does. The book is written in a simplified language, and it has practical steps that will further trigger the readers' creativity and stretch their thinking as they work through their research journey. In this book, Dr Boaheng's passion for teaching comes across in his simple way of explaining complex scholarly methods and techniques for students and scholars to produce a credible academic research project. This is also a book Africa needs to equip students and researchers with tools that will not only guide them to write credible scholarly work but will also guide them to critically engage issues that are affecting Africa, such as poverty, unstable politics and governments. Therefore, Africa needs clergy persons, scholars, and researchers who will have the tools to be critical and offer solutions that will not only take the Church or religious institutions forward but also the African continent's religion. I therefore endorse this book as a long-

awaited and worthwhile contribution to theology, religion, and other disciplines.

***Rev. Dr Jacob Mokhutso***

*Acting Head of Department,*

*Department of Religion Studies*

*University of the Free State, South Africa;*

*Ordained Minister in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.*

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The most critical subject in the age of science and technology is methods, approaches, and principles that guide the execution of a specific task. Rev. Dr Boaheng's *An Essential Guide to Research Methodologies in Theology and Religious Studies* considers a wide range of methods and guidelines for Academic Religious Research that can be scientifically proven. It is up-to-date, accessible and a rich resource not only for early career scholars but also for the established scholars in the field of theology and Religious studies.

***Rev. Dr Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh***

*Faculty of Theology,*

*Perez University College Ghana;*

*Faculty of Theology and Religion,*

*University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa;*

*Department of Biblical Studies,*

*Trinity Theological Seminary, Ghana.*

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## FOREWORD

It has been said that the centre of Christianity has shifted to Africa. Africans have embraced the Christian faith with much enthusiasm. There are churches everywhere in Africa and there are pastors and ministers all over the place. One major problem, however, of Christianity in Africa is the place and role of the Bible. The Bible is supposed to be the authority of the church's beliefs and practices. But that is not the case in the contemporary Church in Africa. There are beliefs and practices among African churches that make one doubt the authenticity of some churches and their ministers.

The crux of the matter is a misinterpretation and misapplication of the biblical text. Incorrect interpretation naturally leads to incorrect application. This has been the principal challenge of the church in Africa. Unfortunately, many of Africa's pastors are untrained and so lack the required ability and skills to interpret and apply the Bible correctly. Much worrying, however, is the fact that many of those who claim to have received theological and religious training from universities and seminaries are found wanting when it comes to the interpretation and application of the Bible. Is it a lack of relevant and high-standard resources for both instructors and students?

This book by Rev. Dr Isaac Boaheng is timely. It offers an answer to the above question. Boaheng, in this five-chapter, well-researched and brilliantly discussed book addresses how to do research and provides the various methods and approaches to research in theological and religious studies. This book seeks to put back on track, the derailed misinterpretation and misapplication of the biblical text and to facilitate the contextualisation of the gospel to the African community.

The book is structured into six chapters, each accompanied by review questions to reinforce understanding. Chapter one examines Biblical Studies within theology. It discusses various tools and methodologies employed in biblical scholarship. Chapter two deals with discourse analysis, text linguistics and Bible translation studies. The next chapter outlines research methods in historical and systematic theology, encompassing both Western and African approaches such as

the Gardener-Theologian Approach. The fourth chapter addresses research methodologies in practical theology. Chapter fifth delves into missiology and church and society research approaches. Boaheng completes the book with a discussion on the evangelical theological framework for the contextualisation of the Christian faith.

Without any doubt, this book will contribute positively to the concerns about academic research and writing in theological and religious studies. It puts research (in general) in the correct perspective. It is a must-read for all readers and teachers of the Bible, especially, those in universities and seminaries.

**Rev. Prof. Yaw Adu-Gyamfi**

*Dean of the Faculty of Humanities,*

*Christian Service University, Ghana;*

*Research Fellow,*

*University of the Western Cape, South Africa*

## PREFACE

My nearly ten-year journey of researching and publishing, along with teaching Research Methodology and examining postgraduate research projects across various institutions in Africa, has highlighted the urgent need for a comprehensive research and writing guide tailored to theology and religious studies students. This recognition arises from a clear gap in current literature that fails to adequately address the unique challenges these students encounter in their research endeavours. The impetus for writing this book was further solidified by a recent invitation to teach a research methodology course at an East African institution.

The lecture notes I prepared for the course yielded two manuscripts which were subsequently published as *A Guide to Academic Research and Writing in Theology and Religious Studies* and *An Essential Guide to Research Methodologies in Theology and Religious Studies*. The purpose of these volumes is to bridge the existing gap and equip students with the skills needed for effective research. Students are advised to read both volumes together, even though each book can be studied independent of the other.

The present volume, *An Essential Guide to Research Methodologies in Theology and Religious Studies*, consists of six chapters. The book discusses diverse methodologies within theological research across different sub-disciplines, including biblical theology, systematic theology, historical theology, practical theology, mission, church, and society. Generally, each methodology begins with an overview, followed by the steps involved and an example to illustrate how it may be used to formulate the research questions for a given topic. This approach aims to empower students to discern and pose research questions aligned with a chosen methodological framework. Additionally, review exercises are included to further solidify understanding and application.

Chapter one focuses on methodologies in biblical studies; including historical-critical method, socio-rhetorical interpretation, socio-scientific method, and many others. The chapter illustrates how scholars utilise tools and methodologies like biblical criticism, archaeology, exegesis, text linguistics, and hermeneutics to extract

fruitful insights from the sacred text. The second chapter completes the discussions on biblical studies by focusing on discourse analysis, text linguistics and Bible translation studies. The third chapter focuses on the methods employed in historical and systematic theology research, highlights a spectrum of approaches ranging from traditional Western methodologies to indigenous African methods like the Gardener-Theologian Approach. Each methodology offers unique insights, enriching historical and theological inquiries and contributing to the advancement of knowledge. The fourth chapter navigates through the terrain of Practical Theology research to bridge the gap between theory and practice. The chapter discusses various methodologies such as Osmer's, Browning's, and *Lekgotla's* methods, among others, and offers researchers a repertoire of options to address real-world issues effectively. In chapter five, the focus expands to Missiology and Church and Society research to underscore the importance of the church's interaction with wider societal contexts. This interdisciplinary domain explores themes such as the mission work of the church, evangelisation, and cross-cultural communication of the Christian gospel. The chapter proposes integrative research methods to facilitate dialogue and collaboration between faith communities and societal contexts. The last chapter proposes a unique approach to understanding the gospel and its interaction with recipient cultures. While acknowledging the nuanced debate surrounding evangelicalism, the chapter emphasises the importance of maintaining a high view of Scripture as the word of God, which is fundamental to evangelicalism.

I cannot say that I have mastered every methodology covered in the book. However, my educational career and work experiences have exposed me to nearly all the methodologies discussed. This exposure has equipped me with the knowledge and understanding necessary to compile comprehensive notes on these approaches.

Though the book is written with African students in mind, its value extends to students globally. It is written in a non-technical style to ensure accessibility for all readers. Each chapter is organised thematically with sub-headings and ends with a summary of key points and review questions to facilitate reflection and comprehension before progressing to the next chapter. There are suggested topics for research

which can be modified to meet contextual demands. There are over 700 suggested research topics at the end of the book.

Universities and seminaries will find this book beneficial for both undergraduate and postgraduate programs. I hope that it will empower researchers to navigate the complex terrain of theological and religious studies with insight, sensitivity, and rigour.

***Isaac Boaheng, PhD***

*Senior Lecturer in Theology and Ethics*

*Department of Theology,*

*Christian Service University, Ghana;*

*Research Fellow,*

*Department of Biblical and Religious Studies*

*University of the Free State, South Africa*

*June 2024.*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first of all thank the Almighty God for making this project a reality. With God all things are possible. I am a living testimony to this assertion.

I am immensely thankful to my academic mentors and advisors, whose guidance, wisdom, and encouragement have been invaluable throughout this journey. You have played diverse roles to shape my academic career. In this regard, I owe a huge gratitude to Prof. Sam Afrane (President, Christian Service University, Ghana), Rev. Prof. John D.K. Ekem (Vice President, Methodist University, Ghana) and Dr Samuel B. Adubofour (Dean of Graduate Studies, Christian Service University, Ghana) for their mentorship. I am extremely grateful to Rev. Prof. Yaw Adu-Gyamfi, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities (Christian Service University) for writing the foreword to this publication after reviewing the manuscript. Rev. Prof. Fred Mawusi Amevenku (Trinity Theological Seminary, Ghana) needs special appreciation for his mentorship and for graciously writing an introduction to this volume.

As noted in the preface there are two books in this series—*A Guide to Academic Research and Writing in Theology and Religious Studies* and *An Essential Guide to Research Methodologies in Theology and Religious Studies*. I express much gratitude to Rev. Prof. Jonathan Edward Tetteh Kuwornu-Adjaottor (Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana), Prof. Kojo Okyere (University of Cape Coast, Ghana), Apostle Dr Christian Tsekpoe (Pentecost University, Ghana), Rev. Dr Kwaku Boamah (University of Ghana), Rev. Dr Daniel Nii Aboagye-Aryeh (Perez University College, Ghana), Rev. Dr Jacob Mokhutso (University of the Free State, South Africa), Rev. Dr John Ayo Oladapo (President, Institute of Family Life and Societal Development, Nigeria), Rev. Dr Michael F. Wandusim (Postdoctoral Research Associate, University of Münster, Germany), Very Rev. Dr Joseph Atuahene (Ordained Minister, Methodist Church Ghana), Very Rev. Dr Emmanuel Twumasi Ankrah (Christian Service University), Rev. Dr Solomon Nortey (Ordained Minister, Methodist Church Ghana) and Rev. Carine Amo-Nyampong for their support in

writing these volumes. These scholars (generally) read the manuscripts, offered useful suggestions and endorsed one of these books.

I also express a profound gratitude to Dr Kevin Smith, the Principal of South African Theological Seminary (SATS). My interactions with Kevin and his publications inspired me a lot as I wrote this book. I also thank Dr Eskinder Tadesse (Director, African Institute for International Studies [AIIS], Addis Ababa, Ethiopia). Drs. Cornelia van Deventer (Academic Dean—SATS), Caswell Ntseho (Vice Principal, Operations—SATS), Jesse F. Kipimo (Head of Program Delivery Team-SATS), and Robert Falconer (Coordinator for masters and doctoral research—SATS) are also appreciated for ways in which they contributed directly and/or indirectly to the publication of the two volumes.

I also thank Reverends Ebenezer Asibu-Dadzie Jnr, Paul Asante-Bonnah, Kwadwo Antwi, Isaac Nyanful, Isaac Oduro-Boateng, Evelyn Ayisi Mensah and Jonathan Amankwaa Oppong (all ordained ministers of the Methodist Church Ghana) and Emmanuel Misiame for their encouragement.

I also thank my family for their unwavering support, understanding, and patience during the writing process. Your love and encouragement sustained me through the challenges and triumphs of this endeavor. My wife Gloria Boaheng and our five children are appreciated in a special way. I owe profound gratitude to my parents, Mad. Mary Ampomah and the late Mr. Noah Nti, for their care, love and support. I pray that my mother will enjoy the fruit of her labour. May God richly bless my siblings, Yaw Boahen, Kofi Boachie, Samuel Boahen, Hayford Kyeremeh Ampaabeng, Collins Frimpong, and Solomon Amoh for their encouragement and support. I salute you all!

I further express my gratitude to all lecturers in the Department of Theology (Christian Service University, Kumasi) especially Rev. Baffour Awuah, Pastor Paul Kang-Ewala Diboro, Pastor Joseph Gyanvi-Blay, and Pastor Charles Agyemang. Mr. David Kwao-Sarbah is appreciated for his kind words of encouragement to me. Finally, my gratitude goes to the publisher, editors, and reviewers who worked tirelessly to ensure that the book got to this standard.

***Soli Deo Gloria!* — To God alone be the glory!**

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## INTRODUCTION

Embarking on the journey of academic research and writing, especially in the fields of theology and religious studies, can be both an exhilarating and a daunting task. The landscape of research is vast and often complex, demanding a clear understanding of methodology, ethical considerations and effective communication. It is in this context that Dr Isaac Boaheng's *An Essential Guide to Research Methodologies in Theology and Religious Studies* emerges as timely and essential resource to aid research practice in religion and theology. This book meticulously maps out the terrain of academic research to assist researchers to navigate their scholarly pursuits.

The book is organised into six chapters. Each chapter ends with a set of review questions intended to help the reader practice and implement the ideas learnt in the chapter. The first chapter shows that Biblical studies as a sub-discipline to theology, focuses on the critical analysis and interpretation of the Bible from historical, literary, linguistic and doctrinal perspectives. It includes biblical criticism, archeology, exegesis and hermeneutics. Various tools and methods have been employed to exemplify how scholars study the Bible to produce fruitful results. Chapter two is a sequel to one. It deals with discourse analysis, text linguistics and Bible translation studies.

The burden of chapter three is to explain different methods by which historical and systematic theology research may be carried out. Each of these methods offers unique insights and angles to historical and theological inquiry. These include well known Western approaches and unique African models, such as the Gardener-Theologian approach by the author. These are all intended to help researchers who specialise in historical and systematic theology, to make the most of their research opportunity both for self-improvement and contribution to knowledge. In chapter four, the author sets out to discuss research methods in practical theology to help researchers address real world issues in specific contexts. The purpose of Practical Theology is to bridge the gap between theory and practice, to explore how theological beliefs might inform individual lives, Christian ministry and social engagement on daily basis. Osmer's, Browning's, Swinton's and Mowat's, *Lekgotla's*

models, as well as the Ethical Triadic approach, the Zerfass method, the EDNA and RIBOS models, in addition to the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach have all been discussed and exemplified. These offer options from which researchers may choose.

Chapter five covers research methods in missiology and church and society. Under this subcategory are the important themes of the mission work of the church, the task of evangelisation and cross-cultural communication of the Christian gospel. The church exists and operates in society and therefore its engagement with the wider society ought to constitute an important research interest in theological studies. Because of the many issues involved, research methods in missiology and church and society, usually employ an interdisciplinary and integrative approach. The author proposes different models from which the researcher can choose, with the ultimate aim of achieving integration between faith communities and the societal contexts in which they operate.

The final chapter explores the importance and application of evangelical presuppositions to theological research in Africa. The aim is to help the researcher formulate an Indigenised, Africanised, contextual evangelicalism that constitutes a suitable framework for investigating and analysing biblical texts and the contexts in which they are engaged in Africa. There is a sense in which this chapter proposes a special approach to the gospel and its recipient culture. The author admits the nuanced debate regarding the meaning of evangelicalism but insists that cultivating a high view of Scripture as the word of God is integral to evangelicalism of any form, but especially in Africa.

The book stands as a useful resource for those conducting academic research in theology and religious studies. It equips readers with the essential tools and knowledge needed to conduct rigorous and impactful research. Whether you are a novice researcher or an experienced scholar, this book is designed to enhance your research skills and contribute meaningfully to the body of knowledge in theology and religious studies.

**Rev. Prof. Fred Mawusi Amevenku**

*Director of Graduate Studies & Associate Professor of New Testament  
Studies and African Biblical Hermeneutics*

*Trinity Theological Seminary, Ghana*

*Research Fellow*

*Stellenbosch University, South Africa.*



## CHAPTER ONE BIBLICAL STUDIES

Biblical studies is an academic discipline that focuses on the critical examination, interpretation, and analysis of the texts, history, and teachings found within the Bible. This field of study consists of a wide range of topics, including biblical theology, textual criticism, biblical languages (such as Hebrew and Greek), historical contexts of the biblical narratives, biblical archaeology, text linguistics, biblical hermeneutics/exegesis and others. Biblical scholars seek to understand the origins, composition, and transmission of biblical texts, as well as their significance and impact on religious beliefs, practices, and cultural traditions throughout history. They employ a variety of approaches to interpret and apply the Bible to real-life situations.

In this chapter, I outline some key methodologies in biblical studies. The models examined are Historical-Critical Method, Social-Scientific Interpretation, Socio-Rhetorical Analysis/Interpretation, the Tri-Polar Interpretive Method, Contextual Bible Study Method, Inductive Bible Study Method, the Four-legged Hermeneutical Stool Model, and African Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics. Before considering these approaches, let us examine the scope of Christian theology to enable us appreciate the various sub-disciplines of theology explored in this book.

### 1.1 Definition and Scope of Theology

The term “theology” originates from the Greek words “*theos*” (meaning “God”) and “*logos*” (meaning “discourse” or “speech”).<sup>1</sup> Therefore, theology essentially entails discourse or discussion about God—that is, the study of God. This term was initially used by ancient Greek poets in relation to myths concerning pagan gods. In

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<sup>1</sup> Isaac Boaheng, “Doing African Christian Theology: Some Non-negotiable Essentials,” *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 7(12) (2021): 215-228, 215.

that context, those who delved into such narratives were referred to as “*theologoi*” or “theologians.”<sup>2</sup> In Christian literature, Clement of Alexandria was the first to use “theology” to denote the pursuit of true knowledge about the one true God.<sup>3</sup> Since then different Christian scholars have given their own definition of what Christian theology is.

Christian theology has developed over the centuries and various sub-disciplines have emerged in the academic circles. There is no consensus across various institutions regarding the classification of the theological sub-disciplines. For the sake of convenience, I have adopted a four-fold categorisation as follows. The first sub-discipline is **Biblical theology/studies** which focuses on the content, themes, and messages of the Bible. It explores the historical, social, rhetorical, literary, and theological dimensions of biblical texts.

Another theological sub-discipline is **Systematic theology** which seeks to organise and synthesise the teachings of the Christian faith into coherent and comprehensive systems. It addresses topics such as God, creation, humanity, sin, salvation, and eschatology, among others.

**Historical theology** is the branch of theology that investigates the development and history of Christian doctrines, beliefs, and practices over time. It examines how theological ideas have evolved from the early church through various historical periods, including the Apostolic era, Patristic era, Medieval era, the Reformation, Post-Reformation era, and modern times. The primary focus of historical theology is to understand how interpretations of Scripture, theological debates, cultural influences, and ecclesiastical decisions have shaped the doctrines and beliefs held by the Christian faith. In this book, I combine Systematic and Historical dimensions of theology as one.

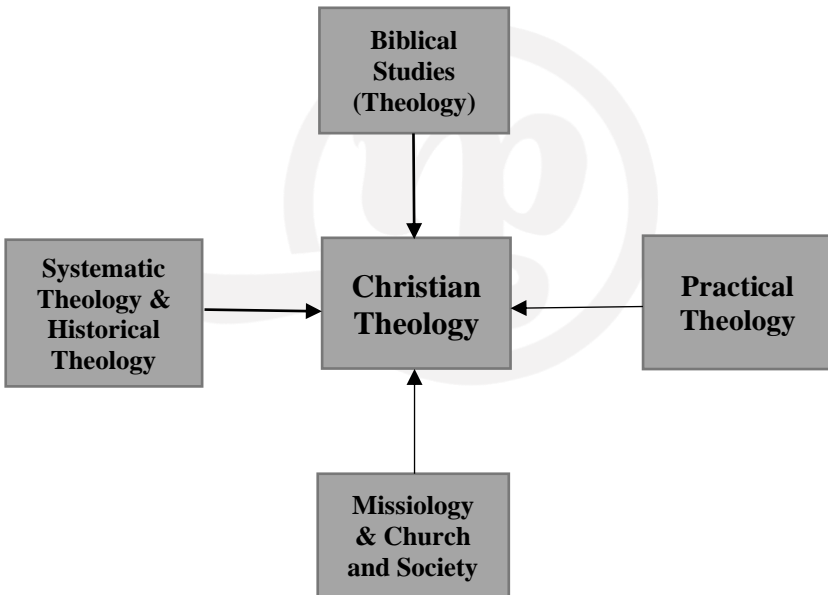
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<sup>2</sup> Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology* (Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers, 2012), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, 1.

The sub-discipline of **Practical theology** deals with the application of theological principles to everyday life and ministry. It includes areas such as pastoral care, preaching, worship, Christian education, and others.

The last sub-discipline is **Missiology and Church & Society**. Missiology deals with the study of mission, particularly within the Christian tradition. **Church and Society Studies** examine the relationship between the Christian church and broader societal contexts. I treat these two as one category. The foregoing can be diagrammed as follows.<sup>4</sup>



*Fig. 1.1: Theological Subdisciplines*

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<sup>4</sup> I am aware of the debate regarding how to classify the sub-disciplines of theology. I have adopted the above for the purpose of the discussions in this book.

Not all research projects may be considered as theological research. At least two factors need to be considered.<sup>5</sup> First, for research to be theological, it must be based on the Bible. Theological research must have theological and biblical value. Second, theological research contributes to the overall growth of the church and the development of its mission. In other words, theological research must be of special significance to the church and its mission.

Concerning the task of theology, Kevin Gary Smith outlines the following four recurring actions.<sup>6</sup> Firstly, **theology is hermeneutical**. Theology is built on biblical teachings and so biblical interpretation lies at the heart of theological work. Secondly, **theology is critical**. Theology involves the critical evaluation of doctrines and beliefs, assessing their validity, coherence, and consistency. This critical aspect ensures that theological claims are not accepted uncritically but are examined rigorously. Critical evaluation in theology means scrutinising theological propositions for logical soundness, comparing them with biblical evidence, and considering their broader implications. Thirdly, **theology is dialogical**. Theology is inherently dialogical, not a monologue. The Bono-Twi maxim *Nyansa nni baakofɔɔ tim* (“wisdom is not the exclusive possession of one person”) underlines the need to have others as conversation partners in doing theology. Both past and present theologians must be engaged. Finally, **theology is correlational**. Theology involves comparing and correlating different theological perspectives and integrating them into a coherent framework. This comparative process ensures that theology remains comprehensive and relevant.

With this background, I proceed to outline specific methodologies tailored to the unique sub-disciplines of theological research. The presentation generally gives an overview of the methodology, the steps involved in applying it and an illustrative

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<sup>5</sup> Johannes Malherbe, “Church and Society,” Unpublished Article, 2017: 1-17, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Kevin Gary Smith, *Integrated Theology: Discerning God's Will in Our World* (Johannesburg: South African Theological Seminary Press, 2013), 45.

example comprising a topic, main research question and subsidiary questions. The reader is advised to read carefully and apply each methodology to a chosen topic.

## 1.2 Biblical Exegesis

The English word “exegesis,” rooted in the Greek word “*exegeomai*,” means “leading out of.”<sup>7</sup> It involves interpreting texts by uncovering their intended meanings. Essentially, exegesis entails an interactive journey to grasp the original context of a text. Generally speaking, exegesis aims to discern the author's intended meaning within their historical, cultural, grammatical, rhetorical, and religious contexts.<sup>8</sup> This process often involves close reading of the text, comparison with other biblical passages, consideration of scholarly research and commentaries, and reflection on the teachings of religious traditions. Once identified, these insights are then applied to contemporary situations—a process known as **hermeneutics**. Hermeneutics explores the theories, methods, and principles of interpreting texts and applying them to the modern context.

There are different ways of going about biblical exegesis. These approaches are discussed in this chapter. After using the appropriate exegetical approach to determine the meaning of the text, there is a need to put the findings together. This is what we refer to as **exegetical synthesis**. The key task in the process of synthesising the results revolves around discerning the author’s intended message to the readers through the text. To this end, the researcher needs to consider addressing the following questions.

- i. What are the primary concerns or themes addressed within the passage?
- ii. How does the interplay of genre, literary devices, and structural elements influence the passage’s meaning?

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<sup>7</sup> Frederick M. Amevenku and Isaac Boaheng, *Biblical Exegesis in African Context* (Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2021), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Lucretia Yaghjian, *Writing Theology Well: A Rhetoric for Theological and Biblical Writers* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 146-147.

- iii. What connections exist between the motifs and themes presented in the passage?
- iv. How do these motifs and themes relate to the historical context of the book?

The exegetical synthesis is usually presented in thematic form. The synthesis enables the researcher to move a step further to deduce the significance of the text for the church, the academy and the society. For *theological Significance*, the exegete has to explore the doctrinal themes presented in the passage. There is also the need to consider universal truths or principles conveyed by the passage and how the passage aligns with the broader teachings of Scripture. Also, one has to consider the contribution the passage makes to Christian doctrine. For *practical application* the exegete must offer at least one application of the passage to contemporary Christianity. The exegete needs to focus on the central idea expounded in the passage. There is the need to consider the target audience and how the message of the text applies to their present-day circumstances.

The procedure outlined above; namely, exegesis (including contextual analysis and close reading of the text), exegetical synthesis and application, is considered the basic steps in using exegetical methodology for conducting a research. This, however, may vary from one topic to another and based on the approach used. In other word, the way to conduct the close reading to arrive at the meaning of the text before synthesising the finds may differ based on the exegetical model one chooses. Therefore, whilst the above gives a general framework for exegetical procedure, it may not be considered as a model in itself.

In what follows I outline some common exegetical (hermeneutical/critical approaches) to reading the Bible.

## 1.3 Historical-Critical Method

### *Overview*

Historical-Critical Method (or historical/higher criticism) is an interpretive model that seeks to understand biblical texts by examining them within their historical, cultural, and literary contexts.<sup>9</sup> In other words, historical criticism is a branch of literary criticism that investigates the origins of ancient text in order to understand “the world behind the text.”<sup>10</sup> The term “historical-critical” denotes its reliance on methods drawn from historical and literary criticism to interpret the Bible. This approach acknowledges that whilst the Bible conveys the Word of God, it is also an ancient document authored by multiple individuals across an extensive historical timeframe in antiquity.

The primary aim of this approach is to unearth the text’s genuine meaning within its original historical context (including such aspects as the time and place in which the text was written, its sources, and the events, dates, persons, places, things, and customs that are mentioned or implied in the text).<sup>11</sup> This means the interpreter using the historical-critical approach attempts to reconstruct the historical circumstances of the author and intended audience of the text through an objective, scientific study of the text.<sup>12</sup>

The historical approach to biblical studies emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries within the context of the Enlightenment and the rise of modern historical and literary scholarship. It, however, gained prominence and gained popular recognition in the 19th and

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<sup>9</sup> W. Randolph Tate, *Handbook for Biblical Interpretation: An Essential Guide to Methods, Terms, and Concepts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 197.

<sup>10</sup> R. Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (3rd ed., rev. and expanded. ed.) (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 78.

<sup>11</sup> Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 79.

<sup>12</sup> Mark A. Powell, “The Bible and Modern Literary Criticism,” Summary of Proceedings of ATLA, 43<sup>rd</sup> meeting (1989), 79.

20th centuries.<sup>13</sup> It embodies the following principles informed by the Enlightenment: (1) the belief in a consistent and universal reality, (2) the assertion that reality is within the reach of human reasoning and inquiry, (3) the recognition of the interconnection and comparability of all historical and natural occurrences through analogy, and (4) the notion that humanity's present-day encounter with reality offers objective benchmarks to evaluate the plausibility of past events.<sup>14</sup>

Whilst the historical-critical approach is noted for making the reader appreciate the biblical world and hence understanding the text from the viewpoint of the biblical writer, it has been criticised for some reasons. First, critics argue that historical-critical exegesis can sometimes reduce the biblical text to purely historical or literary artefacts, overlooking its religious and spiritual significance. It is also argued that this approach may fragment the biblical text into discrete historical or literary components, potentially obscuring its overarching theological themes and messages. Also, some scholars approach historical-critical exegesis with scepticism, questioning the reliability and trustworthiness of biblical texts and their accounts of miraculous events. Critics further argue that historical-critical exegesis may prioritise historical context to the detriment of other interpretive approaches, such as theological or spiritual readings.

The historical-critical analysis involves a multiplicity of methods and procedures. As Joseph G. Prior states, historical criticism “is a collection of exegetical procedures and techniques applied to biblical texts to determine their literal sense. This literal sense has been described in various ways in the history of biblical interpretation from the obvious sense, to the author's intention, to the meaning expressed in the words of the inspired author.”<sup>15</sup> The

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<sup>13</sup> Miracle Ajah, *Biblical Criticisms* (Abujah: National Open University of Nigeria Press, 2021), 26.

<sup>14</sup> Ajah, *Biblical Criticisms*, 26.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph G. Prior, *The Historical Critical Method in Catholic Exegesis* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1999), 354.

various approaches that make up the historical-critical method include textual criticism, form criticism, source criticism, redaction criticism, grammatical criticism, and structuralist criticism. These methods are further explained later in this chapter.

### ***Methodological Steps***

The historical-critical method employs two preliminary steps, borrowed from classical philology; namely, contextual analysis and textual criticism. These are further examined as follows.

#### **Step 1: Contextual Analysis**

The first step addresses all pertinent aspects concerning the historical and literary contexts of the text under study.

### ***Historical Context***

*In what historical, sociopolitical and cultural context was the text written?*

Under the historical contextual analysis the exegete looks for information regarding issues of authorship, date of composition, audience (recipients), occasion and purpose of a text as well as the socio-cultural, political, economic, and religious circumstances surrounding the creation, production, and reception of that text during the time it was written. It encompasses the broader environment in which the text originated, including events, ideologies, customs, and beliefs prevalent at the time.

The analysis at this point is premised on two ideas: firstly, that social, political, and cultural environments influence the genesis of any literary piece; and secondly, that the interpretation of literature can evolve over time alongside changes in these contexts.<sup>16</sup> Because of these premises, historical criticism scrutinises not only the eras depicted within the narrative but also the era in which the narrative originated.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 173.

<sup>17</sup> Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 173.

Understanding the historical context is crucial for interpreting the text accurately, as it provides insights into the motivations of the author, the intended audience, and the significance of the content within its contemporary setting. When readers consider the historical context, they are better equipped to grasp the meaning and implications of the text within its original framework.

All these initial inquiries aid in comprehending biblical writing as emanating from a specific literary context, era, and location in ancient times. The next section focuses on literary context.

### ***Literary Context***

*What is the relationship between the text and other texts surrounding it?*

Literary context has to do with the literary material that surrounds a text. Literary contextual analysis is based on the fact that every word is part of a sentence; every sentence is part of a paragraph; every paragraph is part of a book; and every book is part of the whole of Scripture.<sup>18</sup> Analysing the literary context helps readers understand how the specific passage relates to the broader narrative or argument, as well as the stylistic choices employed by the author. Three levels/kinds of literary context may be identified; namely, immediate context, book context and canonical context.

The immediate context is the literary material that immediately precedes or follows the text under study. For instance, the immediate context of the story of Nicodemus in John 3 includes John 2 and 4. Also, the immediate context of Deuteronomy 15:1-11 includes 14:22-29 which talks about laws on tithing and 15:12-18 which outlines the law on the release of slaves. The immediate context significantly shapes the meaning of a text, exerting the

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<sup>18</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 75 and J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 122.

greatest influence. Therefore, the precision of exegetical findings hinges largely upon the exegete's comprehension of this immediate context. Consequently, one should refrain from interpreting a text within a broader context until its meaning within the immediate context is established.

When dealing with the book context, attention is given to the structural aspects of the book, including its organisation and flow of thought. How an interpreter perceives the overall structure and argument of the book influences their understanding of the passage's meaning. The canonical context of a biblical text has to do with its inclusion within the Bible and its arrangement within the Old Testament or New Testament. Understanding the canonical context involves considering the relationship the text has with other texts within the same religious or literary canon (that is, intertextuality), as well as the historical processes involved in its selection and inclusion. This context provides insights into the significance, interpretation, and influence of the text within its broader tradition.

## **Step 2: Textual Criticism**

*What is the original text?*

Textual criticism is a scholarly discipline within the field of biblical studies (though it is also applicable to other ancient texts) that aims to determine the most accurate or original form of a text based on surviving manuscripts.<sup>19</sup> Scholars compare different manuscript versions, examine textual variants, and assess the reliability of the textual witnesses to establish the most accurate text of the Bible.<sup>20</sup> The procedure seeks to answer such questions as: In what manuscripts does one find the best form of the transmitted text? What are the best families of manuscripts? Do any of the ancient versions

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<sup>19</sup> Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 192. For more on textual criticism consult Amevenku and Boaheng, *Biblical Exegesis in African Context*, 7-16.

<sup>20</sup> Isaac Boaheng, *Is the Bible Really the Word of God?* (Accra: Noyam, 2024), 141.

contain readings that attest to a text superior to the transmitted Greek or Hebrew text? <sup>21</sup> The procedure involved are as follows.

- i. **Identification of variants:** Textual criticism begins with identifying variations among different manuscripts of the same text. These textual variants could be differences in wording, spelling, grammar, or even entire passages.
- ii. **Evaluation of variants:** Once variants are identified, textual critics evaluate them to determine which reading is most likely to be original. They consider factors such as the age, geographic origin, and textual characteristics of the manuscripts.
- iii. **Criteria for evaluation:** Textual critics use various criteria to assess the likelihood of each variant reading. These criteria include manuscript age (older manuscripts are generally considered more reliable), textual coherence (the reading that best fits the context and style of the text), and textual attestation (the number of manuscripts supporting a particular reading).
- iv. **Reconstruction of the original text:** Based on their evaluation of variants, textual critics attempt to reconstruct the original form of the text. This involves creating a critical edition that presents the most reliable reading of the text, often with footnotes or apparatuses indicating variant readings and manuscript evidence.
- v. **Application to interpretation:** The reconstructed text resulting from textual criticism provides a more reliable basis for interpretation and analysis. Scholars can better understand the author's original words and intentions, as well as the historical and cultural context in which the text was written.

### Step 3: Close Reading of the Text

Along these two initial investigations that the biblical text undergoes, there are other methods (procedures) that have become associated with the historical-critical method. Whilst not strictly historical

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<sup>21</sup> J. A. Fitzmyer, "Historical Criticism: Its Role in Biblical Interpretation and Church Life," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 244-259, 251.

criticism per se, these are critical approaches that ultimately influence the historical assessment of a text. Therefore, they are usually used in historical-critical approaches. One may have to select one or more of these approaches for a research work (and not apply all of them) because of time and space limitations.

### *Literary Criticism*

Literary criticism is the examination of the literary forms, structures, and themes present in biblical texts. It entails identifying the various literary genres employed, such as narrative, epistle, parable, allegory, poem, apocalypse, oratory, wisdom, and prophecy. Each text is crafted using a specific literary form, and the interpreter is tasked with discerning this form to interpret the text effectively.

The role of a literary critic is to assess the language of a text, delving into the nuances and shades of meaning within words, as well as patterns of meaning spanning from phrases to paragraphs, chapters, and sections. The critic (or the exegete) uses philological and stylistic analysis to work out its precise meaning and determine its possible written sources. Analysing these elements often requires a study of the original language's grammar, including word arrangement and morphological changes (inflexion or accidens). Here, the exegete examines how words are used in the passage, their meanings (lexical analysis), and their relationships (grammatical analysis). Lexical analysis is also done to determine the significance of keywords and phrases. Grammatical analysis is also conducted to appreciate key grammatical elements in the passage, such as verb tenses, genitive phrases, and conditional clauses.

Furthermore, the exegete analyses the relationship between different parts of the passage, using techniques like sentence diagrams or semantic structure analyses. Also, the stylistic elements of the text that may affect its meaning (including compositional techniques like figures of speech, repeated words, catchphrases, and markers of emphasis) are also examined.

### ***Source Criticism***

Source criticism is a method used in biblical studies to analyse and identify the sources behind the biblical texts, particularly in cases where the texts appear to be composed of earlier written or oral traditions.<sup>22</sup> The goal of source criticism is to understand the literary and historical origins of the biblical texts, as well as the processes of their composition and transmission.

In this process, scholars analyse the stylistic elements of a text, such as changes in style, vocabulary, and repetitions, to infer the potential sources employed by a biblical author. Source critics are interested in such issues as the origin of the data on Moses' death (Deut. 34:5-8), familiarity with the monarchy in a pre-monarchical period (Gen. 36:31-39) and the use of such expressions as "until this day" (Gen. 35:4 LXX; Deut. 34:5-6).

### ***Form Criticism***

Form criticism analyses the literary forms or genres found within the biblical texts<sup>23</sup> and also attempts to trace each type to its period of oral transmission. The primary focus of form criticism is to understand the oral and written traditions behind the biblical texts and to uncover the social and religious contexts in which these forms originated and functioned.<sup>24</sup> The procedure is based on the assumption that parts of the early Judeo-Christian traditions circulated as individual oral units (pericopae; singular =pericope) before they were collected and put together.

This approach emerged in reaction to perceived doubts about the historical reliability of the gospel narratives.<sup>25</sup> It adopts an evolutionary perspective on the evolution of gospel stories during the

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<sup>22</sup> Ajah, *Biblical Criticisms*, 30; Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 105.

<sup>23</sup> Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 56.

<sup>24</sup> I. Howard Marshall (ed.), *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), 165-166.

<sup>25</sup> Samuel Adjei-Boadi, *The Historical-Critical Method and its Assessment of Jesus as a Historical Being or a Mythical Figure* (MPhil Thesis: KNUST, 2013), 30.

period referred to as the oral tradition of the early church.<sup>26</sup> In the context of Gospel analysis, form criticism seeks to uncover the influences that shaped the oral transmission of gospel narratives prior to their transcription. The findings indicate that due to the specific purposes served by oral traditions, they solidified into distinct “forms” that persist in the gospels to this day.

These forms comprise various narrative types, including miracle accounts, the passion narrative, pronouncement stories (such as those culminating in well-known sayings of Jesus, like “the Sabbath is made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath”), parables, sayings, and legends. In doing the work, form critics identify the general and specific genre of the passage and its influence on interpretation. For instance, in Matthew 8:18-22, the general genre is “gospel,” whilst the specific genre is “pronouncement story.”

### ***Redaction Criticism***

Redaction criticism “seeks to lay bare the theological perspectives of a Biblical writer by analysing the editorial and compositional techniques and interpretations employed by him in shaping and framing the written and/or oral traditions at hand.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, redaction criticism investigates how certain biblical writers, using traditional materials, have modified, edited, or redacted the sources or whatever they might have inherited from writers or communities before them to suit their own literary goal or purpose. It seeks to understand the theological and literary motivations behind the editing process, as well as the distinctive perspectives and emphases of the redactors (editors) responsible for shaping the final form of the text.<sup>28</sup>

This procedure builds upon the results of source criticism. Redaction critics work also with the results of form and tradition

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<sup>26</sup> Adjei-Boadi, *The Historical-Critical Method and its Assessment of Jesus as a Historical Being or a Mythical Figure*, 30.

<sup>27</sup> Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 158.

<sup>28</sup> Ajah, *Biblical Criticisms*, 50.

criticism. It involves analysing specific traditions within a text by comparing them with parallel passages to identify shared and distinct phrases and words. This analysis extends to examining the entire gospel in relation to other gospels. Unique elements signal the narrative direction whilst recurring phrases indicate emphasis and particular themes. Ultimately, the individual traditions within the gospel interact to convey the intended message as the narrative unfolds.<sup>29</sup>

The application of all the aforementioned criticisms serves a singular purpose: to uncover the intended meaning of the text as conceived by the human author who crafted it in the distant past.

### ***Illustrative Example***<sup>30</sup>

**Topic:** A Historical-Critical Analysis of Romans 13:1-7: Implications for Church-State Relations in DR Congo

**Main research question:** How might a historical-critical study of Romans 13:1-7 inform the church's relationship with the state in DR Congo?

#### **Subsidiary research questions**

- i. What is the context of Romans 13:1-17?
- ii. What exegetical teachings can be gleaned from Romans 13:1-7 regarding church-state relations?
- iii. What is the socio-political situation of DR Congo?
- iv. What implications does Romans 13:1-7 have for the contemporary church in DR Congo?

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<sup>29</sup> David A. Black and David S. Dockery (eds.), *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 208-211.

<sup>30</sup> In most cases, examples are given to help the reader better grasp the concepts. These examples show how research questions may be crafted in line with the methodological steps discussed.

## 1.4 Social-Scientific Interpretation

### *Overview*

Social-scientific criticism is an interpretive approach that delves into the original social and cultural context of a text using cues within the text itself, its rhetoric, and additional ancient sources for analysis.<sup>31</sup> J.H. Elliott defines social-scientific criticism as a phase of the exegetical task that analyses the social and cultural dimensions of texts, along with their environmental contexts, by employing perspectives, theories, models, and research from the social sciences.<sup>32</sup> Unlike narrative criticism which focuses on the individual author, the socio-scientific method accentuates the social *milieu* in which the author lived and communicated. This approach considers meaning as a product of social construction.

This approach helps readers understand biblical texts in their original social and cultural contexts, making the message of the Bible more relevant and applicable to contemporary issues. The method acknowledges the diversity of human experiences reflected in biblical texts and allows readers to connect with the struggles, joys, and aspirations of the biblical characters and communities. However, the socio-scientific approach may reduce the spiritual and theological dimensions of biblical texts to purely social or cultural phenomena, overlooking their religious significance. This approach may be influenced by ideological or political biases, leading to selective interpretations of biblical texts that align with certain social agendas.

In applying this methodology, the exegete is expected to cover some perspectives/dimensions of the text. Details of these

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<sup>31</sup> To find out how this method may be used consult, Seth Kissi, *Social Identity in Hebrews and the Akan Community of Ghana* (PhD Dissertation: University of Pretoria, 2017); Jo-Marí Schäder, *A Literary-Exegetical and Social-Scientific Analysis of the Book of Jonah: An Exposition of its Ancient Social Values* (PhD Dissertation: University of Pretoria, 2016); Steven Hugh Mathews, *A Social-Scientific Interpretation of Fasting in the New Testament as a Critical Analysis of Fasting in Contemporary Evangelicalism* (PhD Dissertation: University of Pretoria, 2017).

<sup>32</sup> J.H. Elliott, "On Wooing Crocodiles for Fun and Profit: Confessions of an intact admirer," In: J.J. Pilch (ed.), *Social scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible: Essays by the Context Group in Honour of Bruce Malina*, pp. 5-20 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 11.

dimensions are found below. The order in which they have been presented is not critical. One simply have to consider all or as many as possible or applicable without necessarily following any order.

### ***Methodological Framework***

#### **Dimension 1: Honour and Shame**

Socio-scientific reading of a text requires a consideration of the concepts of honour and shame. The exegete needs to read the text through the lens of honour and shame in the biblical world. Honour refers to the sense of respect, esteem, and dignity accorded to individuals or groups based on their actions, achievements, or adherence to social norms and values. Shame is “a claim to worth that is publicly denied and repudiated.”<sup>33</sup> In socio-scientific interpretation “honour and shame” refers to the cultural values and norms surrounding reputation, respect, and dignity within a society. In the biblical world where honour and shame are significant, individuals and groups are motivated to uphold their honour and avoid shame through their actions and interactions. Analysis of honour and shame dynamics can reveal insights into social structures, power dynamics, and cultural values within a particular society or historical context.

In the biblical context, men and women are usually situated at opposite ends of the honour-shame spectrum. In public contexts, men are expected to assert their honour, whilst women are tasked with safeguarding their honour in private domains. This means women are often confined to the domestic sphere, with their bodies reserved solely for the intimate relationship with their husbands. Any ventures women make into public spaces are usually restricted, with regulations imposed on their attire and conduct. In cases where a woman experiences “shame,” such as through an instance of rape, ancient cultures often placed the blame on her male relatives,

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<sup>33</sup> Schäder, *A Literary-Exegetical and Social-Scientific Analysis of the Book of Jonah*, 312.

particularly her husband or father, considering them the primary victims.

This dynamic is evident in biblical narratives, such as the story of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13, where her brother Absalom's honour is impugned by her violation, leading to dire consequences within the family and the wider community. A key aspect of honour and shame that may be of interest to contemporary Africans is the issue of clothing. In ancient Israel, clothing symbolised honour as it distinguished individuals of status or position through their attire or ornamentation. For example, purple-coloured clothing was worn by kings (Judges 8:26), priests (Exod. 28:4-6; 39:1, 28-29; 1 Macc. 10:20; 11:58), and nobles at court (Ezek. 23:6; Est. 8:6; Dan. 5:7).

## **Dimension 2: Group Identity vs. Individual Identity**

Another lens which the exegete uses to study the text is social identity (with group and individual dimensions). Group identity (or group-oriented personality) refers to the sense of belonging and identification with a larger social group, such as a family, tribe, community, or nation. In many societies, group identity holds significant importance and can influence individual behaviour, values, and beliefs. For example, in the Old Testament, the twelve tribes of Israel exemplify strong group identity. Each tribe descended from the sons of Jacob, had distinct roles and responsibilities within the community (Gen. 49). This collective identity fostered solidarity and cooperation among the Israelites.

Related to the group identity is the concept of dyadism deals with the dynamics of interpersonal relationships between pairs of individuals within social contexts. Dyads, characterised by their intimacy and mutual dependence, play a fundamental role in social interaction and exchange. In the Ancient Near East, people were dyadic, meaning they depended on others for their sense of identity.<sup>34</sup> This can link well with the African communal sense of life where

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<sup>34</sup> Schäder, *A Literary-Exegetical and Social-Scientific Analysis of the Book of Jonah*, 316-317.

people's identity and personhood are intrinsically tied to their relationship with others.

Individual identity encompasses the unique traits and experiences that distinguish one person from another. It reflects personal beliefs, values, and aspirations, shaping how individuals perceive themselves and interact with the world around them. The New Testament features narratives of individuals grappling with their identities in the context of their faith. For instance, the Apostle Peter's journey from impulsive disciple to steadfast leader illustrates the development of individual identity within a larger religious community (Matt. 16:18; Acts 2).

### **Dimension 3: Social Status and the Limited Good**

Socio-scientific approach also involves reading the text through the perspective of social status and the limited good. In the ancient world, one's social status was determined by their place within the hierarchical structure of society. This was often informed by factors such as wealth, lineage, occupation, and religious affiliation. The Bible portrays a stratified society where individuals and groups occupy different social ranks and roles. For instance, kings, priests, and prophets are depicted as occupying positions of authority and privilege, whilst peasants, slaves, and marginalised groups experience varying degrees of social disadvantage and vulnerability. At the summit stood the ruler, followed by the retainer class, including scribes and soldiers, then priests and merchants. These groups comprised only a small fraction, approximately 2-5%, of the population. The remaining 95-98% consisted of artisans, peasants, and marginalised individuals such as slaves, prostitutes, beggars, and the disabled.<sup>35</sup> Literacy and wealth were predominantly concentrated among the upper echelons, comprising scribes, priests, and the ruler. To maintain their status, rulers naturally assumed responsibility for the populace during times of crisis. It was customary, for instance,

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<sup>35</sup> Mathews, *A Social-Scientific Interpretation of Fasting*, 38.

for rulers to distribute bread and adjudicate the grievances of the destitute who lacked other legal recourse. Such benevolence endeared the wealthy to their local subordinates and mitigated potential social tensions.

Limited good theory posits that resources, opportunities, and benefits in society are perceived as finite or scarce, leading to competition, conflict, and inequality.<sup>36</sup> In the competitive space, peasants are powerless to augment their share of these resources; they are only able to defend it against potential diminishment resulting from someone's gains. Since honour serves as the primary currency of social exchange in the New Testament era, it holds significant weight within the framework of the limited good perspective.<sup>37</sup> Many of Jesus' conflicts, not only with the Pharisees and Sadducees but also with other factions such as his neighbours and within his circle of disciples were rooted in the belief that honour is a finite resource.

#### **Dimension 4: Kinship**

The socio-scientific exegete also has to consider the kingship aspect of the text. Kinship refers to the network of familial relationships, including biological, marital, and adoptive ties that shape the social organisation and identity.<sup>38</sup> Within kinship systems, individuals are connected through bonds of blood, marriage, or adoption, and these relationships influence roles, responsibilities, and obligations within families and communities. An understanding of kinship ties can serve as a key to understanding how all the members of a household got converted simultaneously (cf. Acts 1:14-15; 31-34).

The kingship dimension also rules governing marriage, descent, and inheritance. Kinship systems vary widely, ranging from bilateral systems where descent is traced through both parents equally, to patrilineal or matrilineal systems where descent is traced

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<sup>36</sup> Mathews, *A Social-Scientific Interpretation of Fasting*, 38.

<sup>37</sup> Mathews, *A Social-Scientific Interpretation of Fasting*, 38.

<sup>38</sup> V. H. Matthews, *Studying the Ancient Israelites: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 124.

exclusively through one parent. Kinship relations are often intertwined with systems of power and authority within a society. For example, kinship ties may determine access to resources, land, and social status, shaping patterns of privilege and inequality.

### **Dimension 5: Purity, Pollution, Ritual, Sacrifice**

In socio-scientific interpretation, texts are also considered from the dimensions of purity, pollution, ritual and sacrifice. In this context, purity (sacred/holiness) signifies cleanliness, sanctity, and moral uprightness, whilst pollution represents contamination, impurity, and moral degradation. God is holy and so expects his people to be pure and holy all the time. The prominence of ritual purity in ancient Israel was evident through its significant influence on daily life.<sup>39</sup> This influence is exemplified by the meticulous organisation of the Jerusalem temple, where symbolic divisions delineated progressively more sacred spaces. As one approached the holy of holies, each successive court restricted entry to fewer individuals, reflecting the heightened sanctity and purity required in closer proximity to the divine presence.

In ancient Israel, pollution (profane) could arise from such sources as exposure to disease or a diseased individual, natural bodily emissions, personal or collective sin, intermarriage with foreigners, or exile to foreign lands. Even the presence of a foreign deity's statue within the temple could defile the sacred space. Pollution or impurity was dealt with through purification rituals. For example, the Israelites practised purification rituals after contact with bodily emissions, diseases, or corpses (Lev. 15 and Num. 19). These rituals aimed to restore purity and maintain the sanctity of the community. The purification rituals required sacrifices.

For example, on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16) the High Priest offered animal sacrifices for his sins and the sins of the community in order to make the people ceremonially clean to

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<sup>39</sup> Craig Blomberg, Robert Hubbard and William W. Klein, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 81.

continue going into the presence of YHWH.<sup>40</sup> The sacrifices included “a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering” (Lev. 16:3). Additionally, there were two goats involved in a unique ritual: one was designated as the scapegoat and released into the wilderness, symbolically carrying away the sins of the people, whilst the other goat was sacrificed as a sin offering (vv. 6-8). Therefore, in total, there were two bulls and two goats sacrificed on the Day of Atonement.

### **Dimension 6: Reciprocity (Covenantal Exchanges and Patron-Client Relationships)**

Another dimension to consider for a socio-scientific analysis of a text is reciprocity. Linguistically, reciprocity falls within the semantic domain of patronage and clientage, encompassing concepts such as grace, favour, faith, covenant relationships, love, mercy, loyalty, obedience, friendship, and kinship. In other words, the concept of reciprocity refers to the mutual exchange of goods, services, or obligations between individuals or groups, which forms the basis of social interactions and relationships. The *lex talionis* (“eye for an eye”) principle in ancient Israeli law (e.g., Exod. 21:24; Lev. 24:20), for instance, is based on reciprocity.<sup>41</sup>

Z.A. Crook provides a model for understanding exchanges in biblical times which I have adopted in this book.<sup>42</sup> Broadly, there are two kinds of exchanges based on whether the parties involved in the exchange are relatives or not. They are kinship-based and non-kinship-based exchanges. In the kinship-based system, there is

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<sup>40</sup> For more on this consult Isaac Boaheng, “A Christological Reflection on Yom Kippur from an Akan Christian Perspective,” *Scriptura* 123 (1) (2024): 1–18 and Isaac Boaheng and Ebenezer Asibu-Dadzie Jnr, “The Jewish Yom Kippur (Lev. 16:11-22) and its Relationship with Effutu Aboakyer Festival: A Theological Reflection,” *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies (ERATS)* 10(2) (2024): 132-146.

<sup>41</sup> Matthews, *Studying the Ancient Israelites*, 153.

<sup>42</sup> Z.A. Crook, “Reciprocity: Covenantal Exchange as a Test Case,” In: P.F. Esler (ed), *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in its Social Context*, pp. 78-91 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

familial exchange, involving exchanges within households, between households in clans, and between clans in tribes. It includes transactions such as sharing resources, labor, and responsibilities within households, between extended family members, or among clans and tribes. Examples are inheritance, dowry, bride price, and support for family members in need.

The non-kinship-based exchange has three categories. The first one is the **symmetrical exchange** (egalitarian) which refers to the exchange between two parties of balanced social status and balanced value of exchange. Examples include gift exchange, loan and loan repayment, buying/selling, and trading. These exchanges typically involve mutual benefit and reciprocity, where both parties contribute and receive goods, services, or favours of comparable value.

Another type of **asymmetrical exchange** is marked by unequal power, status, or value between participants. In asymmetrical exchanges, one party holds greater social, economic, or political influence and provides support, protection, or resources to the other in exchange for loyalty, service, or tribute. Here, repayment is not in kind. Examples are Patronage (patron-client, king-subject, village elder-sojourner), Benefaction (imperial benefactions, euergetism), and Covenantal exchange (treaties, oaths). The third kind which is the **negative exchange** refers to an exchange characterised by conflict, exploitation, or harm. Negative exchanges often involve the violation of social norms, trust, or ethical principles, resulting in harm or loss for one or more parties involved. Examples are bartering, cheating, stealing, and other forms of deception or coercion.

### ***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** A Socio-scientific Reading of the Epistle to the Hebrews from an Akan Perspective: Implications for African Social Life

## **Main research question**

What implications might the socio-scientific reading of the Epistle to the Hebrews from an Akan perspective have for African social life?

## **Subsidiary research questions**

- i. What is the social, religious and political background of the Akan people?
- ii. What is the background of the Epistle to the Hebrews?
- iii. What issues of social identity, ethnicity and personality are found in the Epistle to the Hebrews?<sup>43</sup>
- iv. How do social identity, ethnicity and personality inform Akan life and thought?
- v. What implications do the findings have for African social life?

## **1.5 Socio-Rhetorical Analysis/Interpretation**

### **Overview**

Socio-rhetorical interpretation combines elements of both socio-scientific and rhetorical methods for studying Scripture.<sup>44</sup> This interpretive framework is specifically suitable for investigating “values, convictions and beliefs”<sup>45</sup> and for bringing out the rich resources of modern rhetorical analysis, anthropology and sociology to the interpretation of texts.<sup>46</sup> This is evident in the derivation of the expression “socio-rhetorical.” The prefix “socio” indicates a quest for an anthropological and sociological understanding of the society

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<sup>43</sup> Note that the dimensions used here are simply by choice. You are not restricted to use them. However, the reading scenario(s) chosen at this point should agree with what will be chosen for the context (here, Akan) as I have done in the fourth question.

<sup>44</sup> To find out how this method may be applied consult, Philip B. Mortell, *A Socio-rhetorical Interpretation of Paul's Theology of Christian Suffering in 1 Corinthians* (PhD Dissertation: Mary Immaculate College, 2020); Frederick Mawusi Amevenku, *The Reinterpretation of the Law in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount: Exploring its Contextual Interpretation among the Ewes of Ghana* (PhD Dissertation: Stellenbosch University, 2019); Isaac Boaheng, “A Socio-Rhetorical Reading of the Matthean Beatitudes.” *Biblical Studies Journal* 2(4) (2020): 22-37.

<sup>45</sup> Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 1.

<sup>46</sup> David Brion Davies, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 14.

that produced the biblical text.<sup>47</sup> The term “rhetorical” refers to the role of language in facilitating communication among people, encompassing the subjects, topics, thoughts, speech, stories, and arguments present in a text.<sup>48</sup>

Vernon K. Robbins, who formulated this exegetical approach, argued for the examination of a text through five distinct perspectives or “textures”, namely, the inner texture, the intertexture, the social and cultural texture, the ideological texture, and the theological/sacred texture. These textures, forming the interpretive framework, are explained further below.<sup>49</sup> The order in which I have presented them in my outline below does not matter as long as one covers all of them. There are even cases where the researcher may not cover all of them because of time and space limitations, for example. After examining the textures, one gleans the necessary information from them and this can be done regardless of the order in which they were presented or covered.

## ***Methodological Framework***

### **Perspective 1: Inner Texture**

A socio-rhetorical reading of a text require a consideration of the inner texture. The inner texture focuses on the structure, style, language, rhetoric, and literary devices used in the text to understand its deeper meaning and implications within its social and historical context. Here, the exegete has to look out for such elements as the repetition of specific words, the crafting of introductions and conclusions, the alternation between speech and narrative, and the stylistic qualities that give the text its distinctive aesthetic. Robbins identifies six types of inner textures that can be explored in a text,

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<sup>47</sup> Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 1.

<sup>48</sup> Mack cited in Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 1.

<sup>49</sup> The methodological framework has been extrapolated from Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 7-170 and Amevenku and Boaheng, *Biblical Exegesis in African Context*, 47-57.

namely repetitive, progressive, opening-middle-closing, narrational, argumentative, and sensory-aesthetic textures.

1. **Repetitive texture:** This refers to the occurrence of words or phrases multiple times within a unit, including grammatical, syntactical, verbal, or topical phenomena. Here, the exegete looks out for inclusio, ring composition, and chiasm, among others. As an example, one finds repetition texture occurs in the Matthean Beatitudes where the word “blessed” is repeated nine times (vv. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11).
2. **Progressive texture:** This aspect focuses on the sequence of words throughout a unit, requiring the reader to identify unfolding sequences along repetitive elements. For instance, in James 1:2-8, key ideas progress from joy/trials to complete/lack to asking/giving to faith/doubting to receiving/not receiving.
3. **Opening-middle-closing texture:** This dimension analyses the structure of the beginning, body, and conclusion of a unit, particularly in narratives where it often corresponds to the plot's structure or a speech's organisation.
4. **Narrational texture:** This part considers narrative elements such as characters, actions, settings, and events. It distinguishes between various narrative roles like real author, implied author, narrator, characters, narratee, implied reader, and real reader.
5. **Argumentative texture:** This focuses on the nature of argumentation within a unit. It can be deductive or inductive and relies on social logic. Examples include deductive argumentation in Matthew 6:24 and inductive argumentation in Acts 19.
6. **Sensory-aesthetic texture:** This texture identifies and groups aspects of a text that refer to parts of the body, including the range of senses evoked and how they are evoked. It distinguishes three “body zones”: emotion-fused thought, self-expressive speech, and purposeful action, each associated with different body parts and types of language.

## **Perspective 2: Intertexture**

Another perspective through which the exegete examines the text is the intertexture. This refers to the interconnectedness and interplay between a biblical text and other texts, both within the biblical canon and external to it. This concept acknowledges that biblical texts are not isolated entities but are part of a larger network of literary and cultural influences. The exegete needs to observe recitation, recontextualisation, reconfiguration, and thematic elaboration.

Recitation involves transmitting a story, either orally or in writing, using the exact words. This can range from replicating exact words to Summarising previous texts. For instance, the statement “Do not murder” in Matthew 5:21b is an exact recitation of Exodus 20:13.

Recontextualisation entails presenting wording from previous texts without explicitly acknowledging their existence in another text. An example is 1 Peter 2:3, which recontextualises Psalm 34:8. Reconfiguration involves restructuring an antecedent tradition to describe a later event in a way that suggests foreshadowing. An example is the Adam-Christ typology in Romans 5:12-20.

Narrative amplification extends a brief narrative into a longer, more complex form, often integrating recitation, recontextualisation, or reconfiguration. Thematic elaboration expands on a theme or issue from an earlier text by employing rhetorical argumentation. An example is Paul’s discourse on death and resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15.

Cultural intertexture pertains to the logic of a particular culture, focusing on insider knowledge readers have about society and culture. Historical intertexture deals with events occurring at specific times and places, including their social, cultural, and ideological backgrounds. Social intertexture concerns the meaning and effects of social practices common to an entire society.

### **Perspective 3: Social and Cultural Texture**

Socio-rhetorical interpretation also requires the consideration of the social and cultural text of the text. Social and cultural texture refers to ways in which the text reflects society and culture by reflecting social structures and norms, cultural norms and attitudes, historical events, and religious practices prevalent at the time the text was produced. For example, when Ruth's husband died the custom of the time required that the brother of the deceased husband marry her (see Deut. 25:5-6). Biblical concern for justice, fairness, and equality demonstrated in the calls to care for the poor and marginalised, and to seek justice for the oppressed also come under this texture (e.g., Micah 6:8, Isaiah 1:17).<sup>50</sup>

Social and cultural texture also includes values, worldviews, and beliefs pertinent to the era when biblical texts were written. The exegete needs to consider such cultural issues as honour, shame, legal contracts, economic exchange, and purity codes prevalent in first-century Greco-Roman society. Ephesians 4:11 mentions ministry gifts that also reflect common social and cultural themes. For instance, the term "apostle" held significant meaning in the first-century church, referring to messengers or envoys. The term had various connotations, from fleet dispatches to philosophical messengers, all rooted in the socio-cultural context of the time. The exegete should also be interested in the system of attitudes and norms supported by powerful social structures across a broad region. The opposition to the most established norms and values needs to be considered too.

### **Perspective 4: Ideological Texture**

Another dimension for socio-rhetorical interpretation of the ideological texture. The concept of ideological texture focuses on how both the author and readers position themselves in relation to other individuals and groups. In this step, the exegete looks for the

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<sup>50</sup> For more on this texture, see Tate, *Handbook for Biblical Interpretation*, 415.

specific alliances and conflicts fostered and elicited by the language of the text and its interpretation, as well as how the text itself and its interpreters align themselves with others. Each text and interpretation carries its own ideology, reflected in the alliances and conflicts suggested by the language used. Understanding ideological texture entails considering how the text and its readers perceive themselves in relation to others.

To analyse the ideological texture of a text, the exegete needs to pay attention to the social and cultural context of the implied author, the power dynamics within the text, and the mode of discourse employed. This also requires paying attention to the reader's individual position, their relations to groups within the text, modes of intellectual discourse, and spheres of ideology. Ideological analysis begins with people and suggests that self-awareness is crucial for honest interpretation.

### **Perspective 5: Sacred/Theological Texture**

Sacred/theological texture is also considered in this interpretive framework. The theological or sacred texture refers to the underlying religious beliefs, theological themes, and sacred symbolism within a text. Here, the exegete focuses on sacred aspects and divine attributes. To discern this texture, the exegete must identify references to deities, holy figures, spiritual beings, divine history, human redemption, religious community, and ethical principles. For instance, Revelation 8 portrays God as the ultimate judge over creation, as evidenced by the imagery of the heavenly throne room scene and the unleashing of trumpet plagues in response to the prayers of the saints.

With this background, I proceed to offer an example to illustrate how one may apply the framework.

### ***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Romans 5:12-21: Implications for Contemporary Zambian Soteriological Discourse

## **Main research question**

What implications might a socio-rhetorical reading of Romans 5:12-21 have on contemporary Zambian soteriological discourse?

## **Subsidiary research questions**

- i. What is the prevailing social, religious and political context of Zambia?<sup>51</sup>
- ii. What is the state of Christian soteriology in Zambia?
- iii. What soteriological teachings can be gleaned from a socio-rhetorical interpretation of Romans 5:12-21?
- iv. How should the findings in (iii) above inform contemporary Zambian soteriology?

## **1.6 The Tri-Polar Interpretive Method**

### ***Overview***

In general terms, African Bible study or biblical interpretation in Africa involves three key elements, horizons or poles: the pole of the biblical text, the pole of the African context, and the pole of appropriation. This is what the South African biblical scholar, Jonathan Draper, refers to as the **Tri-Polar approach**. The historical evolution and conceptualisation of the Tri-Polar model, along with similar frameworks, emerged from the politically charged environment of apartheid-era and post-apartheid South Africa. Here, the imperative to address contemporary contextual issues was of utmost importance.

The Tri-Polar approach is a three-staged exegetical horizon common to what today is known broadly as contextual exegesis. It expresses biblical exegesis in terms of distantiation, contextualisation, and appropriation.<sup>52</sup> Whether distantiation and

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<sup>51</sup> You can see that the questions formulated here are not dealing with the individual steps outline above as it is the case for other methodologies in the subsequent chapters. The first two questions are meant to provide contextual data for the research. The third question is meant to capture all the various textures I outlined earlier.

<sup>52</sup> Jonathan Draper, "Old Scores and New Notes: Where and What is Contextual Exegesis in the New South Africa?" In: *Towards an Agenda for Contextual Theology: Essays in*

contextualisation come first is not that important as long as each receives proper consideration. One may commence with the text, the context, or questions pertinent to the faith community's formulation of its beliefs. Although questions regarding appropriation can instigate the exegetical process, they must not preempt it. What follows is an outline of the methodological steps for the Tri-Polar model.<sup>53</sup>

In what the section below, I present the methodological steps for this approach.

### ***Methodological Steps***

#### **Step 1: Distantiation (Letting the text be the other)**

*What does the text mean in its original context?*

The Tri-polar approach requires the exegete to first allow the text to speak for itself before engaging in dialogue with the contemporary context. The reader acknowledges that the text was originally intended for audiences such as Jews, Greeks, and others, not specifically for their (contemporary) society. Therefore, the first task is to extract the message conveyed by the text. This involves examining the text within its original context.

The researcher needs to allow the text to stand apart from their own perspective and to speak for itself by creating space or critical distance between themselves and the text. Care should be taken not to be influenced by one's own presuppositions, ideologies, values, beliefs, cultural/theological formations, and prejudices. The Bible comprises ancient writings, each of which originated within specific socio-historical circumstances.

The objective of distantiation is to discern the unique, ancient voice of each text within its original socio-historical setting. This entails placing the text within its historical context using historical-

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*Honour of Albert Nolan* edited by M. T. Speckman and L. T. Kaufman (Cluster: Pietermaritzburg, 2001).

<sup>53</sup> I have extrapolated the steps from Draper, "Old Scores and New Notes: Where and What is Contextual Exegesis in the New South Africa?"

critical methods and then situating it sociologically within a specific social framework. Thus, the researcher considers the context, origins, and structure of the text, as well as its rhetorical techniques for conveying meaning and influencing the reader. The step helps us to hear the voice of the text rather than our own echo.

### **Step 2: Contextualisation (examining the reader's situation)**

*What is the situation of the contemporary reader?*

Another dimension of the Tri-polar approach is contextualisation. This step focuses specifically on the examination and assessment of the context of the present-day reader/listener. It entails understanding our role in the dialogue, our circumstances, and how we connect with the message conveyed by the text. We must grasp our identity as readers and identify the questions we bring to the text.

All the investigations conducted at this point are geared towards comprehending ourselves as individuals with historical roots in a particular time and location. For example, in the African context, one may consider such issues as poverty, diseases, political instability, human rights abuse, high religiosity and others as part of what identifies the reader. The researcher needs to know their position in the discourse, what their situation is and they can relate to the communication offered by the text.

### **Step 3: Appropriation**

*What is the significance/implication of the text for the contemporary context?*

The third step (which climaxes the interpretive process) in the Tri-polar interpretive framework facilitates a dialogue between the text and the context. Appropriation entails a dynamic interaction and exchange in which both the Bible and the context play roles in shaping and forming the ideological and theological standpoint of individual interpreters. It involves fusing the horizon of the text and its community with the horizon of the reader and their community to facilitate a new awareness that guides and yields a new praxis. Thus,

the interpreter has to determine the nature of the communication occurring and accept the significance and implications for the contemporary context. The research may engage the community in reading the text to determine how they understand it in their situation.

### *Illustrative Example*

**Topic:** Deuteronomy 15:1-11 and its Appropriation in the Kenyan Context

**Main research topic:** In what ways can Deuteronomy 15:1-11 be appropriated within the contemporary Kenyan context?

### **Subsidiary research questions**

- i. What is the context of Deuteronomy 15:1-11?
- ii. What did Deuteronomy 15:1-11 mean to its original audience?
- iii. What is the context of contemporary Kenya?
- iv. How should Deuteronomy 15:1-11 be understood in the contemporary Kenyan context?
- v. What are the implications of Deuteronomy 15:1-11 for the contemporary Kenyan context?

## **1.7 Contextual Bible Study Method**

### *Overview*

The Contextual Bible Study (CBS) method was designed by South African scholar Gerald West to facilitate contextual biblical-theological formulations. It emerged in the context of the apartheid system in South Africa and thus aims to address contextual issues related to oppression, injustices, and the like. It is a transformative approach to studying the Bible that begins with the lived realities of people, particularly those who are marginalised, oppressed, or disadvantaged. Unlike traditional Bible study methods that may focus solely on understanding the text, CBS places a strong emphasis on engaging with the text in the context of community and social justice. At the heart of CBS is a commitment to reading the Bible critically. This means not only understanding the historical and cultural background of biblical passages but also interrogating them

in light of contemporary issues and challenges faced by the community.

One of the key principles of CBS is its focus on reading the Bible in the community. As participants study biblical texts together, they are encouraged to share their diverse perspectives, experiences, and interpretations. This communal approach not only fosters dialogue, empathy, and solidarity among participants but also leads to a deeper understanding of the text and its implications for their lives.

Moreover, CBS is not just about intellectual engagement with the Bible; it is also about personal and social transformation. As participants grapple with the biblical text and its relevance to their own lives, they are challenged to confront their own biases, prejudices, and privileges. This process of self-reflection and introspection can lead to profound personal growth and spiritual renewal.

The CBS is characterised by five key steps which are outlined briefly below.<sup>54</sup>

### ***Methodological Steps***

#### **Step 1: Contextual Analysis (Identifying Community Concerns)**

*What are the primary issues or themes affecting the local community?*

CBS begins with the reality of the local community, focusing on the issues or themes relevant to that specific community. Established groups often have a clear understanding of the challenges they face, whilst newly formed groups may need assistance in conducting a

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<sup>54</sup> These steps were extrapolated from Gerald West, *Doing Contextual Bible Study: A Resource Manual* (Ujamaa Centre for Biblical and Theological Community Development and Research, 2005), 5-8; Gerald West, "Contextual Bible Study," In: *Contextual Bible Study Manual on Young People: "Let the Children Come to Me"* edited by Ezra Chitando and Nyambura J. Njoroge pp. 11-25 (Harare: The Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative and Advocacy, 2017); read also Gerald West, "Contextual Bible Study as a Form of Contextual Theology: An Early Conceptual History," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 48(2) (2022):1-17.

social analysis of their context. This initial step is crucial as Contextual Bible Study always starts with the community's contextual concerns.

## **Step 2: Selecting Relevant Biblical Text(s)**

*Which biblical text(s) can address the identified themes or issues within the community?*

Once the themes are identified, the planning of the Bible study can commence. The next task is to find a biblical text that addresses these themes. One may consider these two main principles. Consider texts chosen by the community and also introduce the community to less familiar texts and resources. This involves reading familiar texts in new ways or exploring neglected or forgotten texts. By doing so, participants engage with parts of the biblical tradition they may not have encountered before, establishing connections between their context and these lesser-known aspects of the Bible.

## **Step 3: Constructing the Bible Study Questions (Criticality)**

*How can we formulate questions that encourage deep engagement with the biblical text and relate it to the participants' context?*

CBS revolves around contextual questions that establish the framework for the study. These questions are referred to as **community consciousness questions** because they tap into the collective resources of the community (that is, their lived experiences and embodied theologies). Additionally, exegetical questions are asked to compel the group to engage deeply with the biblical text. These are termed **critical consciousness questions**, as they leverage the systematic and structured insights derived from biblical scholarship. To formulate questions, the study facilitator employs hermeneutical tools of exegesis, which involves uncovering the meaning of the biblical text within its historical and social context, and interpretation, which entails reading the biblical text from the perspective of the participating and interpreting community.

The following steps provide further insights into what goes on at this stage.

- i. **Slow down the reading process:** Encourage participants to take their time with the text, allowing for a more thoughtful and reflective reading experience. This can be facilitated by using critical consciousness questions that promote deeper engagement.
- ii. **Use contextual questions:** Begin and end the study with questions that draw on the participants' lived experiences and community perspectives. These questions frame the study and help connect the text to the participants' context.
- iii. **Formulate textual questions:** Develop questions based on biblical scholarship that encourage participants to engage closely with the text. These questions should address three dimensions:
  - a. **Behind the text:** Explore the socio-historical context that produced the text.
  - b. **On the text:** Focus on the text itself as a literary composition.
  - c. **In front of the text:** Consider the meanings the text projects towards the reader.
- iv. **Encourage multiple perspectives:** Start with participants' initial impressions of the text, then move to a detailed examination of the text, and finally, explore the socio-historical context. This approach allows participants to see the text from various angles and deepen their understanding.
- v. **Facilitate close reading:** Use literary questions to slow down the reading process, encouraging careful and close examination of the text. This helps participants enter and engage with the narrative world.

After exploring the text in its own context (both the world within the text and the socio-historical world that produced it), the researcher should then allow the text to address the present context anew. Thus, CBS combines contextual questions with textual questions, merging community consciousness with critical consciousness. This fusion

enables the text to resonate with contemporary realities, offering fresh insights and relevance to the participants' lives.

#### **Step 4: Articulating and Owning Critical Study (Conscientisation)**

*How might we create a safe and empowering environment for participants to articulate and own their theological understandings?* CBS aims to raise awareness about the issues central to the community. It tends to approach the Bible with a hermeneutic of trust rather than suspicion, seeking solutions through its teachings. One of the goals of CBS is to highlight how the Bible and other sources of sacred knowledge can serve as tools for both justice and liberation as well as exclusion and oppression. This approach shows how certain texts can be used either to silence questions or to foster dialogue and moral discernment on challenging issues.

Typically, church-goers find their embodied theologies only partially engaged, affirmed, articulated, and enacted within their local church. This often leads to disconnect between their lived faith and church practice. The Contextual Bible Study process addresses this gap by providing a space where participants' theologies can be fully engaged, affirmed, articulated, and enacted, fulfilling a deep need that is often unmet in regular church settings.

Therefore, after designing the questions, the CBS takes on a life of its own, belonging to the group. This process empowers participants to articulate and own their theological understandings of their context. The combination of contextual and textual questions helps establish connections between the biblical text and participants' local theologies. A safe and affirming environment encourages participants to share their lived theologies, fostering a collective ownership of the emerging theology. This process provides a rare opportunity for participants from marginalised contexts to test and affirm their embodied theologies, addressing a deep need often unmet in their regular church experiences.

## **Step 5: Developing and Implementing an Action Plan for Change**

*What action plan might we develop to enhance individual and societal transformation?*

The aim of Bible study is not to acquire the text as an object of study, but rather to transform through engaging with the biblical text and fellow participants. In essence, Bible study serves to pave the way for both personal and social transformation among its participants. Therefore, CBS concludes with action. Each group, both small and large, must develop an action plan. This approach is not just about interpreting the Bible; it is about using biblical insights to bring about change in the world, aligning with the vision of God's kingdom on earth. The empowerment gained from articulating and owning local theologies enhances the group's capacity to act. Whilst certain actions may be constrained by the local context, some form of action should always be planned.

Participants are encouraged to plan actions that extend beyond the Bible study group into the public realm, impacting the church and society. Since CBS alone cannot achieve this, participants are provided with additional resources from NGOs, government agencies, and community organisations to support their initiatives.

### ***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** Addressing Economic Inequality in Liberia Through the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16)

**Main Research Question:** How might the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard inform and empower the Liberian society to address economic inequality?

### **Subsidiary Questions**

- i. What are the main socio-economic challenges faced by the contemporary Liberian society?
- ii. How does the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard relate to the challenges facing contemporary Liberia?
- iii. How can we design study questions that connect the parable to the socio-economic challenges facing contemporary Liberia?

- iv. How can the Bible study process help participants articulate their understandings of economic justice?
- v. What actions (inspired by the parable) can the Liberian community take to address economic inequality?

## 1.8 Inductive Bible Study Method

### *Overview*

An Inductive Bible Study (IBS) is a method that emphasises direct engagement with the biblical text. David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina define IBS as “a comprehensive, holistic study of the Bible that takes into account every aspect of the existence of the biblical text and that is intentional in allowing the Bible in its final canonical shape to speak to us on its terms, thus leading to accurate, original, compelling, and profound interpretation and contemporary appropriation.”<sup>55</sup> This method emerged from concerns regarding the predominant focus on higher criticism, which often led to confusion and a lack of clarity in understanding the Bible's significance for Christian faith and ministry. The fundamental principle of IBS is to prioritise the study of the Bible's final form before delving into historical or critical analysis of the text.

Bauer and Traina define induction as the “commitment to move from the evidence of the text and the realities that surround the text to possible conclusions (or inferences) regarding the meaning of the text.”<sup>56</sup> Its main concern is “the meaning of the final form of the text”<sup>57</sup> and “the concern with the final form of the text leads to an emphasis upon the study of the biblical book as, in most cases, the basic literary unit in the Bible's final form.”<sup>58</sup> Thus, this interpretive framework emphasises the final form of the text because everything leading up to it converges towards its ultimate expression. As the

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<sup>55</sup> David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2011), 6.

<sup>56</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 55.

<sup>57</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 3.

<sup>58</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 4.

worldwide church affirms the final form of the text as canonical Scripture, IBS provides both biblical scholars and laypersons with the necessary tools to delve into the layers and implications of the Scriptures. At its essence, IBS is a hermeneutical approach centred on observing, interpreting, and applying the text of Scripture.

IBS has several notable strengths that distinguish it as a valuable method of engaging with Scripture. Firstly, IBS facilitates a direct and palpable study of biblical texts, allowing students to engage with the Scriptures themselves rather than relying solely on secondary sources. This emphasis aligns with the Reformation principle of “*Sola Scriptura*,” highlighting the foundational importance of the Bible in Christian faith and practice. Secondly, IBS prioritises evidence-based interpretation, encouraging students to carefully observe the text and draw conclusions grounded in solid evidence. It values evidence and thus discourages rash interpretations or biased readings; it therefore promotes responsible hermeneutics and logical reasoning among students. Further, IBS fosters an openness to future corrections and new evidence, unlike deductive approaches that may rigidly adhere to predetermined conclusions. This flexibility allows for ongoing conversation and collaboration, ensuring that interpretations remain nuanced and informed by the latest research. More so, IBS complements other methods of biblical study by integrating evidence from diverse sources such as archaeology and linguistics. This interdisciplinary approach enhances the depth and reliability of biblical interpretation; this enriches students’ understanding of the text. Another strength of IBS lies in its emphasis on interpretation before application. It therefore promotes responsible pastoral care and application of biblical teachings, guarding against misinterpretation and misapplication.

Nonetheless, it has some flaws. Firstly, whilst IBS advocates for its approach, it fails to adequately address the potential merits of a deductive approach to Bible study. This lack of balanced consideration raises questions about whether deductive methods are entirely unsuitable for engaging with scripture. Secondly, whilst IBS

promotes the virtues of being evidential and text-centred, there is a risk of becoming overly reliant on these aspects, potentially to the detriment of faith and spontaneity. Moreover, given the vast temporal and cultural distance between the biblical era and contemporary times, Christians must exercise caution even in their commitment to being evidential and text-centred. Whilst these principles are essential, they should not preclude ongoing engagement with other interpretative methods, including deductive approaches. Cross-investigation and dialogue with alternative methodologies can enrich biblical understanding and guard against narrow interpretations rooted solely in textual analysis.

Here are the steps typically involved in this approach.<sup>59</sup>

### ***Methodological Steps***

#### **Step 1: Observation**

*What does the text say?*

Observation, the first step in IBS, has to do with reading a biblical text to discover what it says in its context. Observation involves not only physical sight but also keen mental awareness of a text. One has to read carefully, repeatedly, patiently, purposefully, inquisitively, and prayerfully to be able to see things the way they really are. Interpreting and applying texts without sufficient observation is one of the main causes of misinterpretation and wrong application. At the same time, faulty observation will almost always lead to erroneous interpretation and inappropriate application; therefore, one must take observation seriously. Prejudices and partiality must be avoided because they may lead to reading elements “into the text” and consequently observing things that are not really there. For example, without careful observation, one will read Psalm 91:7 as “A thousand may fall at your **left**, ten thousand at your right hand...” when the text really says “A thousand may fall at your **side**, ten thousand at

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<sup>59</sup> I have extrapolated these steps from Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 75-326.

your right hand...” (NIV). One may also say that three magi visited baby Jesus when the text actually does not give the number of magi (cf. Matt. 2:1-12).

The kinds of observation to be carried out include terminal observation, grammatical observation, logical observation, contextual observation, literary observation, and atmosphere.<sup>60</sup> Terminal observation deals with all observations related to individual terminologies/words in the text, including areas such as the lexical form of words, inflexions of words (as indicative of case, gender [masculine, feminine or neuter], number [singular or plural], tense [past, present, future and so on], person, mood, voice) and the type of the term (whether literal or figurative). Terms define the meaning of a text and they are usually repeated. For example, the word “Spirit” appears repeatedly in Romans 8.

Grammatical observation involves the syntax of words and phrases within a sentence (for example, as a subject, object, prepositional phrase, modifiers, connectives, and verbs, among others). Here, it is important to consider grammatical structure which has to do with literary structural relationships (such as contrast, substantiation, inference and so on) in paragraphs, sentences, and clauses. For example, the word “Therefore” in Colossians 2:16 introduces a logical conclusion derived from the previous discussions. In Hebrews 12:1 and Ephesians 4:1, the biblical writers used “Therefore” to signify a shift from doctrinal arguments to the application of the word to life matters. “And” connects two statements; “But” signifies a contrast with the previous statement; “For” and “Because” supply reason(s) for what precedes; “If” introduces a conditional statement; “In order that” or “that” introduce purpose statements. Observing the structure helps the reader to appreciate the progression and development of ideas and themes and to maintain a proper relationship between the passage and the surrounding texts.

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<sup>60</sup> Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 160-162.

Logical observation deals with the logical role played by a word or a statement. Here, one may talk of scope (for example, “all pastors” is inclusive in scope, “some pastors” is partial in scope and “no pastor” is exclusive in scope), extent, action, location, actor, situation, attitude, and negative/positive.

Contextual observation has to do with taking critical note of the text that comes before and after the text under consideration (literary context) and the historico-cultural milieu within which the text emerged (historical context). A word is studied in the context of a sentence, a sentence in the context of a paragraph, a paragraph in the context of a chapter, a chapter in the context of a section or the entire book, and a book in the context of the whole Bible. The immediate context has the greatest influence on the meaning of a text. To determine, for example, what “faith” means in Jude 3 or what “justify” means in Romans 3:28 and James 2:24, it is important to study these words in their contexts. The historical context includes the background of the text itself, its author, the persons, and things mentioned or alluded to in the text and others. Data on these areas are available in study Bibles and Bible Commentaries.

Literary observation has to do with the literary genre of the text under study. Each literary form (including historical narrative, gospel, apocalyptic, epistle, poetry, prose, didactic, parable, and others) has a set of rules for its interpretation. It is important to note literary structures of comparison (eg. Matt. 6:28-30), contrast (Matt. 6:25), repetition (Galatians: grace, law; 2 Thessalonians: Suffering, Second Coming), problem (Rom. 1-3: sin) and solution (Rom. 3—5: redemption); cause and effect (Rom. 1:18-32).

The atmosphere of a text has to do with the underlying tone, mood, and the emotional response which it causes. Examples of atmosphere include doubt (Mark 16:9-14); joy (Ezr. 3:10-13); anger (Num. 16:12-15); and sorrow (Luke 8:49-52). Sensing the right atmosphere of a text enhances the reader to have close identification with the biblical writer and first audience to promote an appropriate response by the contemporary reader.

To sum up, key questions to ask at the observation stage include: (1) Who is talking or being talked about? (2) What subject is being discussed and what comes before and after the text? (3) Where is the activity or discussion taking place? (4) When is the activity or discussion taking place? (5) Why is the activity or discussion taking place? (6) How are the people involved responding? To conclude, the reader must avoid engaging in premature interpretation at the observation stage. Specific and descriptive observation, rather than quoting and paraphrasing, is what is needed at the observation stage; observations must be clear and explicit.

## **Step 2: Interpretation**

*What does the text mean?*

After a thorough and careful observation comes the interpretation of the text which aims at discovering the author's intended meaning of the text. Some questions to ask and answer include: What does this mean? (Acts 8:30-31); What is the significance of this? (Rom. 9:10-13); Why did God include this? (Rom. 8:28); What is the purpose of this passage? (1 Cor. 6:1-8), among others.

The following guide is noteworthy. **Interpret literally, taking words phrases, and sentences in their usual, natural, customary sense, unless there is a very strong reason to do otherwise.** The natural/literal meaning of a term is determined by its basic definition, how it has been used elsewhere in Scripture or extra-biblical literature, or by the context in which it appears. Beside the plain literal is the figurative literal which uses figures of speech or symbolisms to convey a clear idea or meaning. The metaphorical statements “Herod is a “fox” (Luke 13:31-32) and “Judah’s sin is engraved with an iron tool” (Jer. 17:1) are to be understood figuratively. Allegorical interpretation or spiritualising (which looks for the secret or hidden meaning of texts) stands in direct contrast to literal reading of texts. I have heard people spiritualising texts that are to be read literally. For example, some preachers say that the five

(5) stones that David picked in his fight against Goliath (1 Sam. 17) represent Jesus because the name “Jesus” has five (5) letters. Whilst this works for the English name “Jesus”, it does not work for the Hebrew name “*Yeshua*”, the Greek version “*Iēsous*” or the Akan version “*Yesu*”. Obviously, such “spiritualisation” of the five (5) stones is hermeneutically unwarranted. Another example is the suggestion that the sin of Adam and Eve (in Gen. 3) was sexual intercourse. The fact that God put Adam and Eve into marriage union (Gen. 2:24-25) and blessed them to be fruitful (Gen. 1:28) before the Fall, makes this interpretation unacceptable.

**Interpret a text within its context.** A text without a context is a pretext. Without contextual considerations, one may conclude that the Bible says “*There is no God.*” (Psa. 14:1). However, if one puts this text in its immediate context the person realises that it is the fool who says so: “*The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’*” (NIV). The paragraph, chapter, book, and the entire canon in which a text is located are key elements in contextual interpretation. The reader has to think forward, think backwards, and think through the passage before arriving at any valid interpretation.

**Interpret a text in view of its history and culture,** considering its authorship, date, purpose of writing, audience as well as political, economic, social-economic, legal, and ethical backgrounds. Every cultural practice and tradition must be measured against the general teaching of God’s word (Mark 2:18-21). To determine the applicability of a practice/teaching in today’s context one has to ask these questions: (1) What was the purpose of the cultural practice or teaching? (2) Would that practice/teaching have the same significance today? (2) If not, is there a timeless principle that could be practiced today differently? The contemporary reader must assume every practice/teaching applies to today’s world unless the context restricts it, or it is overruled by later revelation, or it contradicts other Scripture(s), or it is clearly unique to the biblical culture.

In culturally conditioned texts there is usually a “practice” and a “principle.” The practice in Romans 16:16 may be taken as the “holy kiss” whilst the principle (what the practice signifies or what the practice is to achieve) is fellowship. In Jonah 3:8 the practice is “the wearing of sackcloth” and the principle is repentance, and sorrow, among others. In almost all cases, the principle is transferable to every culture but the practice may be culturally bound. For example, the practices of wearing sackcloth (Jonah 3:8) and of holy kissing (Rom. 16:16) do not apply to most African contexts, more so the Ghanaian context because they do not give the intended principles (repentance/sorrow and fellowship respectively). Holy kiss has a sexual connotation in most African cultures. However, as stated earlier, the principle inherent in practice is mostly transferable. Therefore, the Ghanaian reading of these texts must find a Ghanaian practice which expresses the same principles as expressed in the biblical culture. Wearing funeral clothes (Akan: *ayitoma*, mourning cloth) and handshaking (respectively) seem more culturally acceptable for the two practices stated above. This principle may serve as a hermeneutical key for dealing with issues like head covering (1 Cor. 11:6) and braided hair (1 Tim. 2:9-10; 1 Pet. 3:3-4), among others.

**Interpret a text in accordance with the hermeneutical rules for its genre.** Different literary genres are interpreted differently. The way to interpret a narrative differs from how one would interpret a prophecy. The reader therefore needs to identify carefully, the principal genre, of the passage under investigation, along with the stylistic features that are associated with that particular genre (or sub-genre). For example, whilst one can apply general rules of interpretation to a prophetic text, one has to carefully consider special features inherent in such a text. It is important to note that narratives are mainly descriptive rather than prescriptive.

**Interpret a text in the light of other parts of Scripture.** The Bible was revealed progressively. Often the interpretation of a passage of Scripture is given somewhere else in the Scriptures. For

example, the meaning of the parable of the sower (Matt 13:3-9) is given in (verses 19-23). In accordance with this interpretive principle, one must (a) note that the Bible never contradicts itself; (b) prefer a simple, natural meaning to a complex one; (c) interpret unclear texts in the light of plain and clear ones, among others. Since it is clear that God knows even what is hidden in human hearts (1 Sam. 16:7), the reader must know that he knew (implicitly) where Adam was when he asked “Adam, where are you?” (Gen. 3:9). This analysis illustrates the use of a clear passage to interpret an unclear one.

### **Step 3: Application**

*What shall we do?*

The ultimate goal of studying God’s word is to apply it to life situations. Application (obedience) must be complete, not partial; it must be a decision, not an emotion. The reader has to ask these questions. In this text is there: a principle to apply? Or a command to obey? A sin to confess? A habit to start or to stop? A truth to believe? A promise to claim? An example to follow? A person to forgive? A danger or an error to avoid? The goal of the application is to bring one’s life, attitudes, actions, beliefs, and values, into conformity to God’s word. This can only be achieved through commitment, determination, and reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit.

### ***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** Applying Paul’s Ethics in Roman 12:1-2 to the Contemporary Addis Ababa context: An Inductive Bible Study Approach.

### **Main research question**

How might we apply the ethical teachings in Romans 12:1-2 to contemporary Addis Ababa?

### **Subsidiary research questions**

- i. What ethical issues need attention in contemporary Addis Ababa?

- ii. What ethical teachings can be gleaned from Romans 12:1-2 through and Inductive Bible study approach?<sup>61</sup>
- iii. What are the implications of the ethical teachings in Romans 12:1-2 for contemporary Addis Ababa?

## 1.9 The Four-Legged Hermeneutical Stool Model

### Overview

In *African Hermeneutics*, Elizabeth Mburu discusses several ways by which Africans can make meaning out of the Bible with their cultural framework.<sup>62</sup> The four-legged hermeneutical stool model suggests that African hermeneutics should incorporate four key components, each representing a leg of the stool (illustrated in Figure 1 below).<sup>63</sup> The application of the text forms the seat of the stool, supported by these foundational elements.

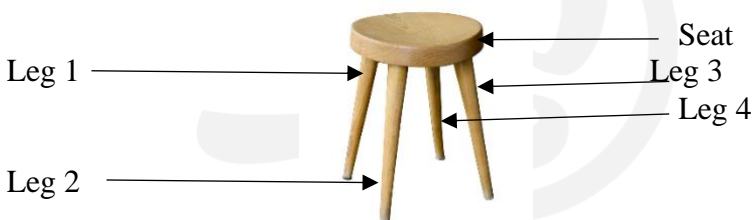


Fig. 1.2: The Four-Legged-Hermeneutical Stool

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<sup>61</sup> Here, steps 1&2 outlined above will be used in answering question (ii). Question (i) is meant to reveal contextual issues that the study needs to attend to. Each of the questions may be answered in a chapter, so that when the introductory and concluding chapters are added, the work can be done in five chapters.

<sup>62</sup> My presentation here has been gleaned from Elizabeth Mburu, *African Hermeneutics* (Carlisle: HippoBooks, 2019), 65-89.

<sup>63</sup> This image of the stool was retrieved from <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=4+legged+stool+#vhid=3xcBWZFWsUcHeM&vssid=1> on 3/5/2024.

## ***Methodological Legs (Steps)***

### **Leg 1: Parallels to the African Worldview**

*What parallel worldviews can be observed between the African and biblical worlds?*

The first leg of the hermeneutical stool emphasises the importance of contextual parallels to the African experience. It suggests that Africans should initiate the interpretive process by identifying theological, cultural, social, political, and geographical factors that shape their worldview. This approach enables readers to begin their search for meaning from a familiar standpoint and to recognise any gap between their context and the biblical narrative. It underscores the need to prioritise the biblical worldview over personal or cultural perspectives, using it as a lens through which to interpret African reality. This perspective helps guard against syncretism.

Furthermore, this leg encourages readers to view the biblical text as a narrative that facilitates interaction between the ancient narrator and contemporary audiences. Common areas of interest serve as points of connection. For example, stories like those of Sarah (Gen. 11:30) or Hannah (1 Sam. 1:6) experiencing barrenness resonate with African experiences, aiding in understanding the biblical narrative. However, dissimilarity between biblical accounts and African beliefs may arise and hence require readers to align their understanding with the biblical worldview. For instance, whilst the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) supports the concept of life after death, it challenges the African belief in reincarnation. In such cases, readers are urged to correct their assumptions based on biblical teachings.

### **Leg 2: Theological Context**

*What theological data can be gleaned from the text?*

Next comes the theological context, representing another leg of the hermeneutical stool. This aspect focuses on the theological emphasis of the biblical text within its literary framework. Unlike in Western hermeneutics, where theological emphasis might not be prioritised at

this stage, in the African context, theological considerations typically precede historico-cultural ones. This preference is rooted in the religious nature of Africans, who often seek to understand the text's teachings about God and everyday life before delving into its historical background.

During this phase, readers may begin to contemplate applications of the text, although these should be validated later in the hermeneutical process and not treated as final at this point. The theological context involves the dynamic interaction between two horizons: the biblical context and the reader's own context. This interaction operates under the premise that the meaning of a text to its original audience remains relevant to contemporary readers. Therefore, a text cannot convey a meaning to a reader that it did not convey to its initial audience.

Theological deductions drawn from the text are informed by the similarities and differences identified in the first leg. However, deductions from this theological leg should not dictate the understanding of other aspects of interpretation. Whilst interpretations must align with the theological themes expressed in the text, assumptions about the theology of specific passages or entire books should not override consideration of other contextual factors. A holistic approach to interpretation is recommended.

### **Leg 3: Literary Context**

*What is the literary context of the text?*

The third component focuses on the literary genre present in the passage being studied. Each biblical passage falls within a specific genre chosen to convey distinct messages. Just as humans use different genres to convey specific types of information, the Bible employs various genres depending on the intended message. Identifying the genre is essential for determining the appropriate interpretive approach, as the interpretation of a narrative differs significantly from that of poetry. Clues from everyday life can aid in interpretation. For example, African daily life, rich with proverbial

statements, facilitates an appreciation for books like Proverbs. Similarly, a book like Ruth can be easily understood as an African story.<sup>64</sup> The chosen literary genre dictates the hermeneutical principle to be applied, much like how specific rules govern the interpretation of each genre, including attention to literary techniques, language, and narrative flow. At this stage, initial conclusions drawn from earlier steps are confirmed or adjusted based on insights gained from analysing the literary genre.

#### **Leg 4: Historical and Cultural Context**

*What historical, economic and cultural situation gave rise to the text?*

The fourth aspect pertains to the historical, economic, and cultural contexts that influenced the emergence of the text. Every biblical text is rooted in a historical and cultural context, which must be taken into account during interpretation. Whilst the historical-critical method, developed by Western scholars, prioritises understanding the historical context before considering theological ideas, African approaches often prioritise theological insights first.

The historical and cultural contexts aid readers in shaping deductions made during the exploration of the first three components. It should be noted that the Bible cannot be understood in isolation from its historical and cultural contexts. A fundamental goal of biblical study is to comprehend what the text meant in its original context, necessitating an immersion into the world of the author to guide understanding.

#### **Seat: Application**

*How might we apply the text to our context?*

The ultimate aim of following the four-step process outlined above is to reach a suitable application of the text. Application refers to the

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<sup>64</sup> For more on how Ruth can be read as an African story consult Isaac Boaheng, “Reading Ruth as an Akan Story: A Proposal for an Alternative Akan Mother-Tongue Translation of Ruth 1:1,” *The Bible Translator* 2(3) (2021): 313–330.

relevance of the text to contemporary readers, answering the question: “What action should I take?” This answer constitutes the application of the text. For an application to be valid, all four components must align and support it. Any application not grounded in these components is deemed invalid.

Throughout the interpretive process, readers may formulate tentative applications as they engage with the text. The final step, represented by the seat, serves to validate these tentative applications. Application occurs subconsciously from the moment engagement with the text begins, encompassing not only mental and emotional responses but also practical ones. This step confirms how the text is expected to impact readers’ lives.

Whilst the meaning of the text typically aligns with the author’s intended meaning, the application can vary widely. The distinction between the meaning and significance of a text is evident in African folktales, where the narrator elucidates the lessons derived from the story after its telling. When applying the text’s meaning to the African context, it is essential to distinguish between the trans-contextual content of Christianity and its expressions in African culture. This involves disengaging non-cultural doctrines of Christianity from biblical cultural forms and reframing these universal truths in African cultural expressions. For instance, whilst the command to honour one’s parents holds trans-contextual significance, the specific actions demonstrating honour may vary across contexts. Hence, readers must consider how these principles apply within their specific cultural context.

### ***Illustrative Example***

An African reading of the Book of Ruth and its Relevance for the African Socio-Political Situation

#### **Main research question**

How might an African reading of the book of Ruth help in addressing Africa’s socio-political situation?

## **Subsidiary research questions**

- i. What are the continuities and discontinuities between the socio-political situation in contemporary Africa and in ancient Judah as depicted in the book of Ruth?
- ii. What theological data can be gleaned from the book of Ruth?<sup>65</sup>
- iii. How might the theological data obtained in (ii) be applied to the African context?

## **1.10 Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics**

### ***Overview***

Mother Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics (MTBH) is one of the areas within biblical studies that has recently gained scholarly attention. Pioneered by such scholars as Professor Emeritus Kwesi Abotsia Dickson (1929–2005), MTBH focuses on the use of indigenous language and hermeneutical tools to understand the message of the Bible. Dickson's student, John David Kwamena Ekem, defines MTBH as the use of "viable tools for the scientific analysis of the phonetic, phonological, morpho-syntactical and semantic component" of a mother tongue in the process of interpreting the Bible for the society.<sup>66</sup> In his Professorial Inaugural Lecture, Ekem set an eight-fold agenda for MTBH.<sup>67</sup>

- i. Intensive study of the ancient biblical languages, namely, Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek;
- ii. Preparation of context-sensitive Study Bibles in local Ghanaian/African languages
- iii. Introduction and development of Septuagint (*LXX*) Studies. Students will be offered the opportunity to explore this important document which traces its origins to Alexandria in

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<sup>65</sup> In this example, the question posed here covers legs 2, 3, and 4. Discovering the theology embedded in the text requires one to determine the genre and context of the text. With this understanding, I will have space to ask other questions relevant to the topic without having too many questions.

<sup>66</sup> John D. K. Ekem, "Professorial Chair Inaugural Address," *Journal of Mother Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics* 1 (2015): 158-174, 166.

<sup>67</sup> Ekem, "Professorial Chair Inaugural Address," 164-165.

Egypt and therefore emerges from an African context and serves as a vital transition to the New Testament.

- iv. Introduction and development of Targum Studies, whereby students will be guided to critically examine the Aramaic foundations of some New Testament documents with particular reference to the Gospels.
- v. Promotion of academic analysis of biblical texts in the various Ghanaian/African mother tongues, using the highest standards of biblical scholarship
- vi. Dramatisation of biblical message as a logical sequel to its academic analysis
- vii. Use of the mother tongue to reflect, from a biblical perspective, on relevant socioeconomic, religio-cultural, and political issues confronting the communities today
- viii. Equipping people at the grassroots to arrive at an informed understanding of burning theological issues that confront the Church today.

Other Ghanaian and African scholars have also contributed to the development of this hermeneutical framework.<sup>68</sup> Despite the

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<sup>68</sup> The following works are note-worthy in that regard: J. D. K. Ekem, "Interpreting 'The Lord's Prayer' in the Context of Ghanaian Mother-tongue Hermeneutics," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 10(2): (2007): 48-52; J. E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "African Biblical Hermeneutics: A Methodology for Mother Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics," *ERATS* 2015 (vol 1) 1-24: 17-18; Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh, "Inductive Biblical Interpretation and Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics: A Proposal for Pentecostal/Charismatic Ministries in Ghana Today," *The Journal of Inductive Biblical Studies*: 3(2): (2016): 140-16 (Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/jibs/vol3/iss2/6>); Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh, "The Relevance of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics in the Ghanaian Context," *Journal of Applied Thought* 3(2) (2014): 282-301; P. T. Laryea, "Reading Acts 14:8-17 and 17:22-31 in Gã: A Critical Examination of the Issues, Meanings and Interpretations Arising from the Exegesis in the Mother Tongue," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 5(1) (2002): 35-43; Frederick M. Amevenku, "An Ewe Interpretation of the use of 'Logos' in John's Gospel: A case for Mother-Tongue Hermeneutics" (MTh Thesis: Trinity Theological Seminary, 2007); Isaac Boaheng and Justice Korankye, "An Nzema Mother-Tongue Commentary on the Matthean Beatitudes," *Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics and Theology (MOTBIT)* 6(2), (2024): 9-18 and Isaac Boaheng, "An Akan

intense scholarly efforts at developing MTBH, the methodology for undertaking this task is still evolving.

Kuwornu-Adjaottor's approach to MTBH is a nine-step framework. The various steps are outlined briefly below.<sup>69</sup>

- i. Identify a biblical text which you think has been wrongly translated into your mother tongue;
- ii. Discuss why the translation is problematic in your culture.
- iii. State the methodology you will use, and the proponents.
- iv. Do a study (an exegesis) of the text, using Bible Study resources-Dictionaries, Commentaries, Encyclopedias, Word Study helps, etc.
- v. Find out what scholars have said about the text, how they interpret it and reasons for their interpretations.
- vi. Discuss the usage of the concept in your language/culture; interview Indigenous speakers of your mother tongue for deeper insights into the concept you are researching. Use local terminologies in your writing and explain them in English.
- vii. Compare the text in your mother tongue with other Ghanaian translations you can read and understand.
- viii. Analyse the mother-tongue translations; what do they mean? How are the meanings of the text similar to that of the Hebrew/Greek? How are they different? What might have accounted for the differences in translation?
- ix. Come out with a new translation of the text that fits into your culture.

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Mother-Tongue Reading of Matthew's Version of the Lord's Prayer (Bono-Twi Translation) in Dialogue with Akan Libation Prayers," *African Journal of Religion, Philosophy and Culture* 2(2) (2021): 41-58.

<sup>69</sup> What follows was taken from J. E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "African Biblical Hermeneutics: A Methodology for Mother Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies (ERATS)* (vol. 1) 2015: 1-24.

Developing Kuwornu-Adjaottor's approach further, Frederick Mawusi Amevenku and Isaac Boaheng proposed a five-step approach, outlined below.<sup>70</sup>

### ***Methodological Steps***

#### **Step 1: Identification of the Problem**

*What problem exists in the existing translation of the text?*

The first step in MTBH involves identifying inaccurately translated words, phrases, or sentences in a given mother tongue. Once a problematic passage is identified, the researcher must clearly articulate the nature of the problem. It is imperative to discuss why the identified issue is problematic or insufficient within the cultural context of the recipients.

#### **Step 2: Exegetical Study of Text (or Word Study)**

*What insights can be gleaned from an exegetical study of the text?*

The second step entails conducting a comprehensive study of the background of the problematic word or expression to attain a thorough understanding of its original context. This typically involves exegetical analysis, which includes word study. Obtaining a thorough grasp of the expression is crucial for determining how to effectively convey the concept to the receiving culture. The exegetical process should reflect a dynamic interaction between the biblical culture and traditional African culture, as both exert significant influence on African Christians.

#### **Step 3: Comparative Study of Mother-tongue Translation of the Text/Word**

*What insights can be gleaned from a comparative study of the text in selected indigenous translations?*

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<sup>70</sup> I have extrapolated what follows from Amevenku and Boaheng, *Biblical Exegesis in African Context*, 89-96.

The third step is to examine how the text or word being considered has been translated into other mother tongues that the researcher is capable of reading and understanding. If necessary, assistance from someone proficient in a language the researcher cannot comprehend may be sought. The comparative analysis seeks to uncover how different cultures have adapted the biblical text to their own context.

#### **Step 4: Searching for a Culturally Appropriate Term**

*What culturally appropriate expression might address the existing problem?*

A thorough comprehension of the text in mother tongues enables the researcher to seek a terminology or expression that aligns with the cultural context and effectively conveys the message of the biblical author into the researcher's mother tongue. This quest requires empirical research method(s) to engage with individuals proficient in the language, including linguists, community leaders such as chiefs and their spokespersons, and other traditional figures, to gather insights and ideas.

#### **Step 5: An alternative translation**

*What alternative translation might we propose?*

The culmination of the study occurs at this juncture, where the researcher, drawing from the findings of earlier stages, suggests a culturally precise rendition of the text being examined. There might exist multiple methods of conveying the idea, yet the researcher must select the most suitable one and justify this choice. The study must conclude by addressing the implications of the proposed rendition on the theology of the recipients.

#### ***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** A Study of the Translation of 7777 into Fante: Towards an Alternative Model for Akan Mother-Tongue Bible Translations

**Main Research Question:** What alternative translation might we propose to address the problems associated with the Fante rendering of ʔʔʔʔ?

### **Subsidiary questions**

- i. What problems exist in the existing translation of ʔʔʔʔ into Fante?<sup>71</sup>
- ii. What insights can be gleaned from an exegetical study of the term ʔʔʔʔ?
- iii. What insights can be gleaned from a comparative study of the translation of ʔʔʔʔ in selected indigenous languages?
- iv. What culturally appropriate expression might address the existing problem in the Fante translation of ʔʔʔʔ?
- v. What alternative translation might we propose for ʔʔʔʔ in the various Akan dialects?

### **1.11 Conclusion**

The disciplines of biblical exegesis and Bible translation play integral roles in the study, interpretation, and dissemination of the Scriptures. Through rigorous exegetical analysis, scholars delve into the historical, cultural, linguistic, and literary aspects of biblical texts, seeking to uncover their original meanings and contexts. Critical methodologies provide invaluable tools for evaluating and interpreting the Bible within its historical and literary frameworks, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of its rich theological themes and narratives.

Moreover, the process of Bible translation bridges the gap between ancient texts and contemporary audiences, facilitating access to the Scriptures in diverse languages and cultures. Bible translation studies, text linguistics and discourse analysis are examined in the next chapter. Generally they are classified under

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<sup>71</sup> Answering this question may require the researcher to collect data on the Fante people and their culture. This may be done through empirical or non-empirical means. One may add some questions to cover that aspect of the work. For example one may ask: How does the name of a deity relate to their nature within the Fante religious tradition?

biblical studies. I have treated them in a separated chapter to limit the size of the present chapter.

### **1.12 Review Exercise**

1. What is the primary objective of biblical exegesis?
2. How do scholars use critical methodologies in the study of the Bible?
3. What role does historical criticism play in understanding biblical texts?
4. Explain the significance of cultural context in biblical interpretation.
5. What distinguishes socio-scientific methods from other approaches in biblical studies?
6. How do socio-scientific methods incorporate social science theories into the interpretation of biblical texts?
7. Discuss the role of cultural anthropology in socio-scientific biblical interpretation.
8. How does socio-rhetorical criticism analyse the persuasive strategies employed in biblical texts?
9. Explain how socio-rhetorical methods integrate social context and rhetorical analysis in biblical interpretation.
10. What insights can socio-rhetorical criticism offer about the intended audiences of biblical texts?
11. What is discourse analysis, and how does it differ from other linguistic approaches?
12. How does discourse analysis contribute to our understanding of language use in various contexts?
13. Explain the concept of microstructure in discourse analysis. Why is it important?
14. Provide examples of real-life applications of discourse analysis in fields such as linguistics, sociology, and communication studies.
15. What is inductive Bible study, and how does it differ from other approaches to biblical interpretation?

16. Describe the steps involved in conducting an inductive Bible study.
17. How does observation play a crucial role in the inductive Bible study method?
18. Provide examples of tools and techniques used in inductive Bible study to aid in observation, interpretation, and application.
19. Discuss the significance of relational clues and their impact on the interpretation of discourse.
20. How does the inductive approach help individuals engage more deeply with the biblical text and apply its teachings to their lives?
21. What are some common pitfalls to avoid when conducting an inductive Bible study, and how can they be overcome?
22. How does inductive Bible study promote personal growth and spiritual development?
23. Share your experience of conducting an inductive Bible study and its impact on your understanding of Scripture.
24. What are some common methods used in discourse analysis, and how do they help researchers uncover meaning?
25. Describe the role of thematic elements and organisational clues in discourse analysis.
26. How do syntactical features aid in identifying unit boundaries within a text during discourse analysis?
27. What is contextual Bible study, and how does it differ from other methods of biblical interpretation?
28. Describe the importance of understanding the historical, cultural, and social context when studying the Bible.
29. How does contextual Bible study seek to bridge the gap between ancient biblical texts and contemporary issues?
30. Explain how discourse analysis can shed light on social, cultural, and ideological aspects embedded in language.
31. Discuss the significance of hermeneutics in contextual Bible study. How does it shape the interpretation process?

32. Provide examples of how contextual Bible study can help address social justice issues and promote community empowerment.
33. What are some challenges encountered when applying contextual Bible study, especially in multicultural or cross-cultural settings?
34. Share insights gained from engaging in contextual Bible study and its impact on your perspective of Scripture.
35. How can contextual Bible study inform ethical decision-making and guide Christian praxis in today's world?
36. In what ways does socio-rhetorical criticism enhance our understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics within biblical communities?
37. Describe the key principles of historical-critical methods in biblical studies.
38. How does historical criticism examine the historical context and authorship of biblical texts?
39. Discuss the limitations and challenges associated with applying historical-critical methods to the study of ancient texts.
40. How does literary analysis contribute to our understanding of the Bible?

### **1.13 Suggested Research Topics**

1. The Jubilee and Debt Relief (Deut. 1:1-7): A Socio-Economic Analysis in Biblical and Contemporary Ugandan Context
2. God's Attitude Towards the Marginalised in Deuteronomy: A Call to Social Justice and Care in Modern Society
3. Job 4:12-21 and the Centrality of God: A Theological Examination of Divine Sovereignty and Human Suffering
4. A Socio-Scientific Reading of 1 Samuel 28: A Yoruba Christian Response to Divination and Witchcraft
5. The Concept of Messiah in the Old Testament and its Relevance for African Christianity

6. Head Covering in 1 Corinthians 11: Implications for the African Church
7. A study of the Matthean Jesus's Genealogy and its Relevance for the African Family Relations
8. A Socio-Rhetorical Reading of Job 1: An African Reflection on Theodicy
9. The Mission Statement of Jesus in Luke 4:18-19 and its Application among the Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches in South Africa
10. Ephesians 6:12-18 and its Implications for Spiritual Warfare and Belief Systems
11. Genesis Creation Story and African Creation Stories: A Comparative Study of Origins and Worldviews
12. An Exegetical Study of Deuteronomy 22:5 and its Significance For Adornment Theology in the African context
13. Biblical Teaching on Human Sexuality: Exploring Gender, Identity, and Relationships
14. A Discourse Analysis of Jonah 1: Implications for Christian Mission in Liberia
15. Reading Levirate Marriage in Ruth from an African Perspective: Addressing Sexual Health Concerns in Traditional Practices
16. Social Justice in Amos 5 and its Implications for the Igbo Context
17. A Study of 'ādām-'ādāmāh Relations in Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:7, 15 and its Implications for Environmental Care among Yoruba Christians
18. Ethics and Empire: Exploring Imperial Critique in Psalm 72 and Its Contemporary Implications
19. A Socio-Rhetorical Reading of the Matthean Beatitudes: Implications for the contemporary Zulu Society
20. An Exegetical Study of Romans 5:12-14: Implications for the Contemporary Debate Over the Origin of Sin

21. Oral Tradition and Biblical Interpretation: Exploring Indigenous Hermeneutics in African Contexts
22. Exploring the Theology of Creation in Genesis 1-2 and Its Implications for Environmental Ethics
23. An Eco-Theological Reading of Genesis 1: Creation Care and Environmental Ethics in the Context of Kenyan Conservation Efforts
24. The Historical-Critical Method and its Assessment of Jesus as Historical Being or a Mythical Figure
25. The Prophetic Voice of the Clergy in Lesotho on Nation Building: An Exegesis on Jeremiah 1:5-10
26. The Amos Concept of Justice and Righteousness (Amos 5:7, 15-24) and its Implication for the Church in Ghana
27. A Study of Romans 1:26-27: A Biblical Response to Homosexual Practices in some Communities in Ghana
28. A Study of Mark 16:14-18: Its Implication for Missionary Work in Limuru, Kenya
29. A Comparative Study of Mark 3:13-19 in the Greek New Testament and the Asante-Twi Bible Implications for Christian Discipleship
30. A Study of the Translation of Alpha and Omega in Selected Akan Mother-Tongue Translations
31. An Examination of Necromancy in Deuteronomistic Theology and its Translation in Dangme Thought: The Case of 1 Samuel 28:3-25

## CHAPTER TWO

# DISCOURSE ANALYSIS, TEXT LINGUISTICS AND BIBLE TRANSLATION STUDIES

This chapter is a sequel of chapter one, both chapters deal with biblical studies. The focus of the present chapter is to explore the fields of discourse analysis, text linguistics and Bible translation studies. By the end of the chapter, readers will understand how discourse analysis and text linguistics can inform and improve Bible translation. The chapter will also equip translators with the tools to produce linguistically accurate, culturally resonant, and theologically sound translations.

### 2.1 Discourse Analysis and Text Linguistics

#### *Overview*

Discourse analysis is a research method used to investigate language in use. George Guthrie defines it as “a process of investigation by which one examines the form and function of all the parts and levels of a written discourse, with the aim of better understanding both the parts and the whole of that discourse.”<sup>72</sup> It examines how sentences and spoken words combine to form texts and interactions and investigates how these texts and interactions are situated within our socio-cultural environment.<sup>73</sup>

In the process of analysing the text one is expected to engage the following three levels of relationship: (1). The structure within the narrative itself; (2). The discourse between the original author and the original audience (that is, the message delivered to the original recipients of the text); and (3). The discourse between the text (or the original author) and the modern reader.

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<sup>72</sup> George Guthrie, “Discourse Analysis” In: *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues* Edited by D. A. Black and D. S. Dockery pp. 253-271 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 255.

<sup>73</sup> Tate, *Handbook for Biblical Interpretation*, 123.

Discourse analysts can adopt either a critical or descriptive approach. Descriptive discourse analysts typically employ an inductive method, wherein they identify noteworthy aspects within a text and subsequently assess their societal implications, progressing from the micro to the macro level. Conversely, critical discourse analysts utilise a deductive approach, commencing with the identification of social issues or inequalities and then scrutinising discourse practices that either reflect or perpetuate those issues, moving from the macro to the micro level. According to Dipesh Patel critical discourse analysis “integrates an inner study of language with the outward study of its context – how social practices and relations affect the text.”<sup>74</sup> It can be used to “expose power relationships, and how certain groups can be marginalised.”<sup>75</sup>

In conducting discourse analysis, aspects of grammar, rhetoric, and linguistic theory often intersect. This analysis can employ quantitative or qualitative techniques to explore various linguistic features such as sentence structure (grammar), conceptual frameworks/worldviews, genre, and more. This involves interrogating how language usage within a particular context contributes to connections/disconnections, identities, politics, practices, relationships, sign systems, and knowledge. It is a multidisciplinary subject drawing from linguistics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and communication studies, to gain insights into communication processes and their broader implications.

Text linguistics has to do with the way a text fits together linguistically. Text linguists primarily focus on the structural aspects of text, often neglecting contextual elements emphasised by discourse analysts. According to Michael A.K. Halliday, the text

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<sup>74</sup> Dipesh Patel, “Scope and Usage of Discourse Analysis as a Research Method in English Studies,” *International Journal for Innovative Research in Multidisciplinary Field* 6(3) (2020): 234-238, 236.

<sup>75</sup> Patel, “Scope and Usage of Discourse Analysis as a Research Method in English Studies,” 236.

comprises all meaningful elements within a specific context, representing a continuous process of semantic choice. He writes: “By text, then, we understand a continuous process of semantic choice.”<sup>76</sup> Deborah Schiffrin argues that within discourse analysis, both text and context contribute to the communicative content of utterances.<sup>77</sup> In this framework, text refers to linguistic content, whilst context pertains to the environment in which utterances are produced, influencing their meaning during interaction. Discourse analysis investigates both text and context as its subject matter. Consequently, text linguistics is viewed as a subset of discourse studies with the former prioritising the study of textual aspects over contextual ones.<sup>78</sup>

On the other hand, some scholars view the relationship between text linguistics and discourse analysis as an evolutionary progression, with text linguistics evolving into discourse studies.<sup>79</sup> Laura Alba-Juez cites van Dijk as exemplifying this evolution. According to Alba-Juez, Van Dijk, initially focused on describing the grammatical structure of texts but later recognised the importance of macrostructures and coherence in understanding text meaning.<sup>80</sup> His (van Dijk’s) interest in power and ideology led him to Critical Discourse Analysis. Other text linguists introduced concepts like socio-cultural knowledge and mental models, prompting analysts to consider broader contexts beyond the text itself, including social, psychological, and cognitive factors.<sup>81</sup> This shift transformed the view of text from a structural unit to a functional one, prompting the development of process models to understand discourse participants’ activities in interactive settings and real-time situations.

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<sup>76</sup> Michael A.K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), 137.

<sup>77</sup> Deborah Schiffrin, *Approaches to Discourse* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994), 363.

<sup>78</sup> Laura Alba-Juez, “Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics: Their Scope and Relation,” *Russian Journal of Linguistics* 20(4) (2016): 43-55, 44.

<sup>79</sup> Alba-Juez, “Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics,” 45.

<sup>80</sup> Alba-Juez, “Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics,” 45.

<sup>81</sup> Alba-Juez, “Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics,” 45.

I do not intend to argue for any view beyond the presentation given above. However, it should be noted that whichever position one takes on the issue this is clear: Text linguistics and discourse analysis are so closely related that it will not be proper (if not impossible) to study one without studying the other.

When approaching language analysis from a discourse analyst's perspective, scholars typically adhere to four key assumptions.

- i. Language exhibits ambiguity, allowing one word or sentence to convey various meanings and interpretations.
- ii. The meaning of language is inherently tied to its context—"where, when, and what"—comprising the situational factors of its use and its intended function.
- iii. Our language usage is intimately connected to our identity and affiliations with diverse social groups.
- iv. Language is inherently multimodal, with speakers/writers and listeners/readers integrating linguistic elements with non-verbal cues such as tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, typography, visual layouts, and graphical representations.

Discourse analysis can involve examining either a portion or the entirety of a text. However, conducting a comprehensive analysis of an entire text can be challenging within the confines of a single research project due to the multitude of textual features. Researchers must, therefore, be selective in their approach. They need to focus on specific aspects of the text whilst inevitably neglecting others. This necessitates clear documentation of the research methodology and the choices made by the researcher regarding what to include and what to exclude. In what follows, I present a five-fold approach to discourse analysis for the researcher to consider which steps are relevant to and possible to be included in their study.<sup>82</sup> In practice,

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<sup>82</sup> These steps are largely informed by Guthrie, "Discourse Analysis," 260; Noah W. Kelley, *Discourse Analysis and the New Testament: An Introduction With Illustrations From The Book Of Colossians* (Paper submitted in partial fulfilment of Independent Study

the process often appears more fluid than outlined here, as the steps may not always follow a clear and linear sequence. Nonetheless, this overview provides a sense of the fundamental progression associated with this method.

### ***Methodological Steps (Dimensions)***

#### **Step 1: Basic Reading of the Whole Text (Microstructure)**

The first phase of discourse analysis involves conducting a fundamental examination of the text, termed as “microstructure” study. This approach focuses on the text’s raw data, as it is the only means to access larger structures within it. The objective is to comprehend the basic flow of the text to develop a broad understanding of its contents. Achieving this involves repeatedly reading through the text, initially in a cursory manner and then with increased attention to detail. During this process, the analyst aims to become acquainted with the text, addressing unfamiliar terms, investigating significant text-critical concerns, and noting any apparent situational features present in the text.

#### **Step 2: Identify Tentative Unit Boundaries (Macrostructure)**

Following the basic reading, the next stage involves scrutinising the text to discern indications of unit boundaries. This step aims to tentatively pinpoint the major divisions within the text. This can be achieved by:

- i. Considering the text structure. Here, the analyst looks for natural breaks or transitions in the text, such as changes in topic, changes in genre, shifts in perspective, or introductions of new themes or ideas. These can indicate potential boundaries between units.
- ii. Paying attention to transition devices. This phase focuses on transition devices. These are linguistic or structural elements

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on Discourse Analysis, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 12-17 and Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 151-152.

that signal shifts or connections between different parts of the text. These devices include such transitional words and phrases as “however,” “in contrast”, and “therefore.”

- iii. Looking out for repetition. The analyst has to note recurring patterns or motifs within the text that may suggest thematic groupings or sections. Repetition of keywords or ideas may indicate the beginning or end of a unit should also be noted.
- iv. Tracking shifts in cohesion dynamics—such as changes in temporal (time) references, topic (narrative frame), or thematic focus. This provides valuable insights into the structural organisation and thematic development of the text, helping to refine the analysis and clarify the overall structure.

The analyst has to compare how different Greek New Testaments, translations, and commentaries have segmented the passage. This comparison helps identify areas of consensus or disagreement regarding unit boundaries.

### **Step 3: Colon Analysis (Microstructure)**

The third phase requires a thorough examination of syntactical features using colon analysis. The tentative divisions identified in the previous step offer a basic framework for the book that allows for a detailed examination of the microstructure within the context of the entire discourse. Here, the text is analysed in terms of “cola,” (singular: colon) which serves as the fundamental unit for analysis. Each colon comprises a subject, predicate, and any dependent or subordinate elements. Even if grammatically part of the same sentence, any subject, and predicate that stands independently or coordinates with the colon as a whole is considered a separate colon. The analyst examines the cola to determine the main idea and the function of each of its components and additions.

#### **Step 4: Analyse Relations Between Cola, Paragraphs, and Sections (Macrostructure)**

Here, the analyst conducts a closer study to gain a more precise understanding of the overall structure and the progression of the discourse. This includes identifying thematic groupings and boundaries among the units. During this stage, several features of the text are of interest to the analyst. Firstly, the genre of the text is considered, as a change in genre can often indicate a unit boundary. Within narrative genres, aspects such as time, place, type of action, and participants are examined. Similarly, within non-narrative genres, factors like situation, reference, and action are considered. Changes in these dimensions, particularly when multiple changes occur simultaneously, may signify a unit boundary.

Grammatical devices are instrumental in identifying thematic elements within a text. These devices, categorised as “clues,” fall into three groups: referential clues, organisational clues, and relational clues. “Referential clues,” or “spans,” denote aspects of continuity in the text. Four types of spans are considered: grammatical spans, which focus on continuities in grammatical features like person, number, tense, and voice; lexical spans, involving continuities in words or related terms; informational spans, covering continuities in participants, concepts, events, and settings; and teleological spans, representing continuities in purpose, such as informative, persuasive, and emotive intentions.

The identification of organisational and relational clues aids in understanding thematic continuity within a text. To analyse relationships between discourse units, the cola is initially examined to form paragraphs, which are then scrutinised to discern how they relate to form sections, eventually leading to the identification of the book's theme. A dual approach involves studying cola structures for surface clues whilst employing a modified semantic structural analysis based on the main thoughts identified in the previous step, rather than reducing the text to propositions. This approach helps uncover higher-level semantic features within the text.

## **Step 5: Exegete and Exposit Units (Microstructure)**

Once the connections among the different units of the discourse have been examined, the theme and framework of the book should become clear. Subsequently, the analyst can proceed to interpret and explain the passage based on the discourse structure.

What I have presented above may be regarded as the general approach to discourse analysis. There are specialised approaches as well. In the following sections (1.12 to 1.13), I examine what may be considered specialised approaches to discourse analysis and/or approaches to textual linguistics.

## **2.2 Speech Act Theory**

### ***Overview***

Speech acts refer to actions carried out whilst speaking, which are not fully accounted for by traditional divisions of grammar such as phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics, or by general theories of action. The theory of speech acts centres on understanding the purpose behind language use. Within this framework, language is conceived as a mode of action. Words are viewed as tools through which actions are executed. For instance, in the statement “I promise that I will give you the money tomorrow,” the act of making a promise is performed through speech. It is not merely about conveying information; rather, it involves committing to a future action. Thus, speech acts emphasise the active role of language in performing actions within communication.

This theory, developed by philosophers like John L. Austin and further expanded by J.R. Searle, focuses on how utterances perform actions in social contexts.<sup>83</sup> It examines not just the literal meaning of words but also the intentions behind them and the effects they have on listeners.<sup>84</sup> In discourse analysis, speech act theory

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<sup>83</sup> For more on this consult, Napoleon M. Mabaquiao Jr., “Speech Act Theory: From Austin to Searle,” *Augustinian: A Journal for Humanities, Social Sciences, Business, and Education*, 19(1) (2018): 35-45; Tate, *Handbook for Biblical Interpretation*, 420.

<sup>84</sup> Mabaquiao Jr, “Speech Act Theory: From Austin to Searle,” 35.

helps to understand how language is used to accomplish specific functions and achieve social goals within interactions.

### ***Locution, Illocution and Perlocution***

According to the English philosopher, John L. Austin, all expressions of language must be reviewed as acts. He distinguished three kinds of action within each utterance:<sup>85</sup> Each of these is outlined briefly below.

#### ***The Locution (The Locutionary Act)***

This refers to the (simple) physical act of producing an utterance.<sup>86</sup> It deals with the literal or surface meaning of an utterance and thus, focuses on what is actually said, including the words used, their grammatical structure, and their phonetic properties.<sup>87</sup> For example, if someone says “It is raining,” the locutionary act is the physical act of producing the words “It is raining” and their literal meaning, describing the weather condition.

#### ***The Illocution (the Illocutionary Act)***

This refers to the real action which is committed or performed by producing an utterance.<sup>88</sup> It may be considered as the intention or the force behind what is said.<sup>89</sup> It deals with the intended communicative

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<sup>85</sup> I have gleaned the following information from M.M. Poluzhyn and T.T. Vrabel, *Lectures and Method-Guides for Seminars on the Course for Choice: Basic Problems of Speech Act Theory* (English Department: Uzhhorod National University, 2005), 5; Richard Nordquist, “Locutionary Act Definition in Speech-Act Theory: The Act of Making a Meaningful Utterance,” (2019) (<https://www.thoughtco.com/locutionary-act-speech-1691257>); Samy Tioye, *Lecture Notes on Pragmatics* (Limuru: St. Paul’s University, 2019).

<sup>86</sup> Che An Bint Abdulghani and Muhammad Abubakar Abdullahi, “The Meaning and Scope of Pragmatics,” *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)* 5(5) (2021): 102-105, 103.

<sup>87</sup> Poluzhyn and Vrabel, *Lectures and Method-Guides for Seminars*, 5

<sup>88</sup> Abdulghani and Abdullahi, “The Meaning and Scope of Pragmatics,” 103; Tate, *Handbook for Biblical Interpretation*, 421.

<sup>89</sup> Poluzhyn and Vrabel, *Lectures and Method-Guides for Seminars on the Course for Choice*, 5.

function or purpose behind an utterance. It goes beyond the literal meaning to capture what the speaker intends to accomplish by making the statement. Illocutionary acts can include (i). **Assertives:** These are speech acts that express beliefs, opinions, or statements of fact. (ii). **Directives:** These are speech acts that request, command, or advise the listener to perform a certain action. For example, if someone says “Could you pass the water?” the illocutionary act is the request for the water. (iii). **Commissives:** These are speech acts that commit the speaker to a future course of action, such as promises, vows, or pledges. (iv). **Expressives:** These are speech acts that convey the speaker's attitudes, emotions, or feelings. (v). **Declarations:** These comprise speech acts that bring about a change in the external world simply by being uttered, such as pronouncing someone married or declaring a meeting adjourned.

### *Perlocution (Perlocutionary Act)*

The perlocutionary act refers to the effect or impact that an utterance has on the listener or recipient or the reaction that comes up as a result of the utterance.<sup>90</sup> It focuses on the response or reaction elicited by the speech act. Perlocutionary acts are not directly under the control of the speaker and can vary depending on factors such as the listener's interpretation, beliefs, emotions, and intentions. For example, if someone says “I am sorry,” the perlocutionary act could be comforting the listener, causing them to feel understood or forgiven. The following example illustrates the three acts outlined above: In the statement “Could you close the door” the locution is the production of the utterance, depending on the situation and the tone of the speaker, the illocution may be a request or a command (an order), and the perlocution could be that the addressee closed the door or that the addressee replies that he/she is not a servant.

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<sup>90</sup> Poluzhyn and Vrabel, *Lectures and Method-Guides for Seminars on the Course for Choice*, 5; Abdulghani and Abdullahi, “The Meaning and Scope of Pragmatics,” 103; Tate, *Handbook for Biblical Interpretation*, 422.

## 2.3 Pragmatics

### *Overview*

Pragmatics, a relatively recent branch of linguistics, traces its roots back to ancient Greece and Rome, where the term “**Pragmatics**” was first found in the late 70s.<sup>91</sup> The term, meaning “practical” in both Latin and Greek, gained modern usage and refinement through the influence of the American Philosophical Doctrine of Pragmatism.<sup>92</sup> Its origins lie in Philosophy, particularly the philosophy of language. In its modern usage, the term “pragmatics” is attributed to Charles Morris in 1938, who initially focused on signs of semiotics and distinguished three branches of inquiry: syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic.<sup>93</sup> Morris later defined pragmatics as the study of signs in relation to interpreters. In 1946, he further expanded pragmatics to include the study of the origin of sign use. Since then, pragmatics has continued to evolve as an emerging branch of linguistics. Noam Chomsky’s standard theory in 1965 contributed to modern interpretations of pragmatics, which remain subject to ongoing refinement and redefinition.<sup>94</sup>

Pragmatics refers to “the study of the aspects of meaning and language use that are dependent on the speaker, the addressee and other features of the context of utterance.”<sup>95</sup> It investigates how speakers use language in specific situations to convey meaning, express intentions, and achieve communicative goals. In discourse analysis, pragmatics helps to uncover implicit meanings, illocutionary acts, and conversational implicatures within discourse.

Pragmatics may be classified as general pragmatics or applied pragmatics. General pragmatics explores the principles that regulate how language is used for communication, particularly within conversational contexts.<sup>96</sup> These principles might be examined as

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<sup>91</sup> Abdulghani and Abdullahi, “The Meaning and Scope of Pragmatics,” 102.

<sup>92</sup> Abdulghani and Abdullahi, “The Meaning and Scope of Pragmatics,” 102.

<sup>93</sup> Abdulghani and Abdullahi, “The Meaning and Scope of Pragmatics,” 102.

<sup>94</sup> Abdulghani and Abdullahi, “The Meaning and Scope of Pragmatics,” 102.

<sup>95</sup> Abdulghani and Abdullahi, “The Meaning and Scope of Pragmatics,” 102.

<sup>96</sup> Abdulghani and Abdullahi, “The Meaning and Scope of Pragmatics,” 105.

potential universal guidelines or focused on analysing the communicative practices of particular languages.

Applied pragmatics, on the other hand, deals with the various domains where pragmatic principles hold potential significance.<sup>97</sup> These include literature analysis, communication research, public speaking, and diverse forms of discourse. Moreover, applied pragmatics finds utility in fields such as computer programming and the development of computer languages.

### ***Fundamental Principles of Pragmatics***

There are four fundamental cornerstones of pragmatic analysis.<sup>98</sup> Firstly, communication involves complex intentions. These intentions may include informing, persuading, entertaining, or establishing social bonds. Understanding these intentions is crucial for interpreting the meaning behind communication acts.

Secondly, these communicative intentions have to be inferred. Unlike explicit statements, communicative intentions are often implicit and need to be inferred by the listener or reader. In other words, understanding what someone is trying to convey often requires reading between the lines and considering context, tone, body language, and other contextual cues.

Thirdly, communication is governed by principles/maxims. These maxims shape how individuals interact with each other. They include the maxims of quantity (providing just enough information), quality (being truthful), relevance (staying on topic), and manner (being clear and concise). Adhering to these maxims helps ensure effective and cooperative communication.

Fourthly, there is a fundamental distinction between explicit and implicit conveyance of information. Whilst explicit information is directly stated, implicit information relies on inference and context for interpretation. Recognising and understanding this distinction is

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<sup>97</sup> Abdulghani and Abdullahi, "The Meaning and Scope of Pragmatics," 105.

<sup>98</sup> I got these points from Tioye, *Lecture Notes on Pragmatics*.

essential for accurately comprehending the meaning conveyed in communication acts.

Pragmatics examines how context influences the interpretation of meaning. Context has to do with the various elements: the speaker, the uttered sentence, the intended action, and the listener.

### ***Kinds of Contexts***

In pragmatics, four types of context are distinguished:<sup>99</sup>

- (i) **Physical context:** This refers to the location, situation, and timing of a given utterance, aiding in the comprehension of words.
- (ii) **Epistemic context:** Epistemic context pertains to the speakers' knowledge about the world. It includes shared background knowledge that informs understanding.
- (iii) **Linguistic context:** Linguistic context relates to what has been previously stated in the conversation. It helps determine the referents of pronouns and clarifies ambiguous expressions.
- (iv) **Social context:** Social context concerns the interpersonal relationships between speakers and listeners, influencing communication dynamics and expectations.

### ***Scope of Pragmatics***

The scope of pragmatics refers to the various areas of linguistic study. Here, I consider the following: deixes, conversational implicature, conversational maxims, presupposition, and speech acts.<sup>100</sup>

### ***Deixes***

According to Stephen Levinson deixes has to do with “the ways in which language encodes features of the context of utterance and thus

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<sup>99</sup> I got these points from Tioye, *Lecture Notes on Pragmatics*.

<sup>100</sup> I have treated speech acts in a separate section and so I will not deal with it here (see section 2.2 above).

also concerns ways in which the interpretation of utterance depends on the analysis of that context of utterance.”<sup>101</sup> It may be described as “verbal pointing” by the use of language.<sup>102</sup> It refers to the phenomenon where the interpretation of certain words or phrases depends on the context of the utterance, particularly the location, time, and participants involved in the communication. Essentially, deixis involves words or phrases that point to specific entities or situations within a given context.

There are four kinds of deixis: **Personal deixes**, place/spatial deixes, time/temporal deixes and social deixes.<sup>103</sup> Personal deixis (such as it, this, these books) are used to point out things and animals (including persons). **Spatial (place) deixis** are expressions (such as here, there, near that) which are used to point to a location. **Temporal (time) deixis** are expressions (like now, then, last year) that are used to indicate time. **Social deixis** are terms of address (such as “sir,” “madam,” “Mr.,” “Mrs.,” “Dr.,” etc.) and titles (like “President,” “Professor,” “Boss,” “His Royal Majesty,” “Excellency” etc.) used to convey social status and power dynamics within a conversation or used to show social relationships between interlocutors (that is, convey information about the relative status, familiarity, or roles of the participants in a conversation).<sup>104</sup>

The word “today” in Matthew 6:11 is a temporal deixis (referring to the present day); the expression “you” in John 14:27 is a personal deixis (directly addressing the disciples); the word “Rabbi” in Matthew 26:25 is a social deixis, reflecting the social relationship between Judas and Jesus as teacher and disciple. In Genesis 13:14-15, spatial deixis is evident in the directional references “north,” “south,” “east,” and “west,” which indicate specific orientations relative to Abram’s location.

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<sup>101</sup> Levinson as cited in Abdulghani and Abdullahi, “The Meaning and Scope of Pragmatics,” 103.

<sup>102</sup> Levinson as cited in Abdulghani and Abdullahi, “The Meaning and Scope of Pragmatics,” 103.

<sup>103</sup> Abdulghani and Abdullahi, “The Meaning and Scope of Pragmatics,” 103.

<sup>104</sup> Tioye, *Lecture Notes on Pragmatics*.

### *Conversational Implicature*

Implicature is an element of speaker intention that contributes to the meaning of an utterance beyond its explicit content.<sup>105</sup> It emerges within the context of conversation, where listeners infer additional meanings whilst upholding the expectation of cooperative communication.<sup>106</sup> Since implicature forms part of the communicated message rather than the literal statement, speakers can disavow intent to convey such meanings.

Two biblical examples are given below. In Luke 23:34, Jesus asks God to forgive those who crucified him. Whilst the explicit meaning is a request for forgiveness, the conversational implicature here could imply Jesus' immense compassion and forgiveness even towards those who have wronged him, highlighting his divine love and mercy. Also, in John 21:15-17, the explicit conversation between Jesus and Peter revolves around Peter's love for Jesus and Jesus' instruction to feed his followers. However, the conversational implicature here could imply Jesus' reinstatement of Peter's role as a leader and shepherd of his followers, despite Peter's previous denial of Jesus.

Grice formulated a theory of conversational implicatures which proposes that speakers and listeners engage in cooperative communication. This theory is referred to as the **Cooperative Principle**. Grice posited that communication is inherently cooperative, with participants striving to make their contributions relevant and informative. The principle asserts that all communication takes place in a situation where people are cooperative. When people communicate they assume that the other person will be co-operative and they themselves wish to co-operate.

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<sup>105</sup> Abdulghani and Abdullahi, "The Meaning and Scope of Pragmatics," 104.

<sup>106</sup> Abdulghani and Abdullahi, "The Meaning and Scope of Pragmatics," 104.

## Conversational Maxims

Grice identified four maxims that underpin the Cooperative Principle:<sup>107</sup>

- i. **Maxim of quantity:** Speakers should provide an appropriate amount of information, neither too much nor too little. This may be Paul's point when he says, "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Col. 4:6, NIV). Here, Paul encourages believers to speak with grace and wisdom, suggesting that they should provide sufficient information (without being excessive) and respond appropriately to others' inquiries.
- ii. **Maxim of quality:** Speakers should be truthful and provide information that is supported by evidence. Proverbs 10:21, for example, highlights the importance of speaking truthfully and wisely, in line with the maxim of quality, which emphasises honesty and avoiding falsehoods.
- iii. **Maxim of relation:** Speakers should make their contributions relevant to the ongoing conversation. For example, 1 Peter 3:15 underscores the need for relevance in communication, advising believers to provide answers that directly address the inquiries of others whilst maintaining gentleness and respect.
- iv. **Maxim of manner:** Speakers should communicate clearly, avoiding ambiguity and unnecessary complexity. Ephesians 4:29 encourages believers to speak with clarity, kindness, and appropriateness, in line with the maxim of manner, which advocates for clear, constructive, and considerate communication.

## Presuppositions

Presupposition in linguistics refers to an underlying belief or assumption implicit in an utterance, which the speaker and listener

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<sup>107</sup> Abdulghani and Abdullahi, "The Meaning and Scope of Pragmatics," 104.

are presumed to share for effective communication within a given context. This assumption remains essential regardless of whether the utterance is framed as an assertion, denial, or question. Often tied to particular words or grammatical structures, presuppositions provide contextual cues that contribute to the overall meaning of the communication. Presuppositions are considered intricate predispositions evident in linguistic usage. They emerge through statements, questions, and commands issued by individuals.

For example, Genesis 1:1 presupposes the existence of God and the concept of creation *ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing), which are foundational beliefs in many monotheistic religions. John 3:16 also presupposes the Christian belief in the divine nature of Jesus Christ and the concept of salvation through faith in him.

## 2.4 Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

### *Overview*

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a linguistic framework that views language as a social semiotic system—a system for expressing meaning in social contexts.<sup>108</sup> Originally conceived by Michael Halliday in the 1960s, SFL has evolved into a comprehensive theoretical framework that influences various fields within applied linguistics.<sup>109</sup> These include educational linguistics, multimodality studies, and critical discourse analysis.

It analyses language at three levels: lexico-grammar (grammar and vocabulary), semantics (meaning), and context of situation (social context). In discourse analysis, SFL provides tools for analysing how language structures contribute to the organisation and coherence of texts, as well as how language functions to enact social actions and roles within discourse.

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<sup>108</sup> Meg Gebhard and Kathryn Accurso, “Systemic Functional Linguistics,” In: M Vande Berg, R. M. Paige and K. H. Lou (eds.), *Student learning abroad: What our Students are Learning, what they’re not and what we can do about it* pp. 1037 (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2012), 1029; Richard Nordquist, “Overview of Systemic Functional Linguistics,”

(<https://www.thoughtco.com/systemic-functional-linguistics-1692022>)

<sup>109</sup> Gebhard and Accurso, “Systemic Functional Linguistics,” 1029.

### ***Principles for Functional Linguistics***

Functional linguistics asserts the following principles.<sup>110</sup> Firstly, language use is functional. Functional linguistics views language as a functional system that serves various social and communicative purposes. Language is not only a means of expressing ideas but also a tool for achieving social goals and interacting with others

The second principle is that the function of language is to make meanings. Language functions as a tool for constructing and conveying meaning. Through language, individuals create and interpret messages, shaping their understanding of the world and their interactions with others. Language is used not only to convey information but also to negotiate social relationships, express attitudes and emotions, and perform various speech acts.

The third relates to the second; namely, these meanings are influenced by the social and cultural context in which they are exchanged. This means that language is not static but is shaped by the social and cultural context in which communication occurs. Societal norms, cultural values, power dynamics, and historical factors all influence the interpretation of linguistic messages.

The fourth principle is that the process of using language is a semiotic process, a process of making meaning by choosing. Language use involves a semiotic process, wherein individuals make choices about linguistic forms (such as words, grammar, and discourse structures) to convey specific meanings. These choices are not arbitrary but are guided by communicative goals, social norms, and contextual constraints.

## **2.5 Bible Translation**

### ***Overview***

Bible translation is the process of rendering the text of the Bible from its original languages (such as Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) into another language, making it accessible to speakers of that

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<sup>110</sup> These have been taken from Nordquist, "Overview of Systemic Functional Linguistics."

language.<sup>111</sup>This process involves linguistic and cultural considerations to ensure accuracy and clarity in conveying the original meaning of the biblical text.<sup>112</sup> Bible translation has been a significant endeavour throughout history, with numerous translations produced to make the Bible accessible to people around the world. It involves scholarly research, linguistic analysis, and careful interpretation of the source text to faithfully communicate its message in the target language. Roman Jakobson distinguished between three types of translation as follows

- i. *Intralingual translation or Rewording*: Translation within a language which would involve explaining it in words of the same language.
- ii. *Interlingual translation or Translation proper*: Translation from one language into another language.
- iii. *Intersemiotic translation or Transmutation*: Translation from one linguistic system to another or the transference of meaning from a verbal to a non-verbal system or from one medium to another.<sup>113</sup>

In the context of Bible translation, linguistic studies play a crucial role in understanding the linguistic features of the original biblical languages and translating them accurately into other languages whilst preserving the nuances and cultural context of the text. Linguistic studies involve the scientific study of language and its structure, including its phonetics, semantics, syntax, and morphology. Linguists analyse various aspects of language to understand how languages are structured, how they evolve over time,

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<sup>111</sup> Isaac Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators* (Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2022), 4; Babatunde Adekunle Ogunlana, “Exploring Best Approaches to Bible Translation for Native and Non-Native English Speakers,” *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies (ERATS)* 8(7) (2022): 201-21, 202.

<sup>112</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 4-5.

<sup>113</sup> Roman Jakobson, “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation,” *Language in literature* edited by Krystina Pomorska and Stephen Rudy, pp. 428–435 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1987), 429.

and how they are used in communication. Linguistic studies encompass a wide range of subfields, including sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, historical linguistics, and computational linguistics. It draws from such fields as cultural anthropology, psychology, sociology, and computer science to explore the intricacies of human language and communication.

### ***Overview of the Translation Process***

As a translator, I know the relevance of knowing the various stages that finally yield the Bibles we use. Therefore, this section gives an overview of the translation process, focusing on its key stages and considerations.

### ***Socio-Linguistic Survey***

Before the actual translation of the text begins, the responsible translating agency conducts a socio-linguistic survey to understand the social and cultural context in which the translation will occur.<sup>114</sup> This survey provides insights into the culture of the community receiving the translation and helps determine the target audience and the type of translation required, such as literal or free translation.<sup>115</sup> Factors such as the population speaking the language, sub-dialectical differences, and other considerations are also taken into account. The survey results play a significant role in guiding decisions related to the translation project.

### ***Composition of the translation team***

The next stage after the assessment of the translation needs of the receptor community is the composition of the translation team. Bible translation is a collaborative effort, with individuals with specialised skills working together as a team.<sup>116</sup> Typically, a translation team includes several key roles, such as (a). the Translation Consultant,

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<sup>114</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 23.

<sup>115</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 23.

<sup>116</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 23.

responsible for ensuring linguistic and theological accuracy; (b). the Computer-Assisted Publishing (CAP) officer, overseeing technical aspects of translation software and publishing tools; (c). an exegetical advisor, providing guidance on biblical interpretation and context; (d). a team of translators, responsible for translating the text into the target language; and (e). a review team, tasked with evaluating the translated text for accuracy, coherence, and quality.<sup>117</sup>

### ***Drafting of text***

During the drafting stage of Bible translation, each translator in the team is typically assigned a specific book or set of books to work on, ensuring consistency in style.<sup>118</sup> After conducting background research and exegetical study, the translator carefully considers the translation of the entire passage, making necessary revisions before sharing it with other team members for review.<sup>119</sup> Drafts are prepared section by section, including headings, footnotes, cross-references, and glossary entries as needed.

### ***Harmonisation***

After drafting, team review (known as harmonisation) takes place. During harmonisation, the translation team reviews and revises the draft manuscripts produced by each translator.<sup>120</sup> Various checks are conducted, including assessing the naturalness of the language, ensuring exegetical accuracy, and verifying proper names and biblical key terms, among others.<sup>121</sup> The team discusses suggestions for improvement, incorporating those that enhance the translation in terms of spelling, grammar, and usage.

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<sup>117</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 23.

<sup>118</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 31.

<sup>119</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 32.

<sup>120</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 33.

<sup>121</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 33.

### ***External Review***

Each translation project includes an external team of reviewers from various denominations and locations.<sup>122</sup> These reviewers, typically educated individuals, church leaders, and appointed members from local churches, represent a diverse community cross-section, including men and women, well-educated and less educated individuals, Bible scholars, and non-Bible scholars, all proficient in the receptor language. They receive training to perform their tasks effectively.<sup>123</sup>

After harmonisation there is external review which includes thorough testing to ensure the translation is accurate, clear, and natural. The team checks spellings, grammar, outdated terminology, dialect use, style, and adherence to the translation brief. Reviewers may either receive draft copies to provide written feedback or meet together for a verse-by-verse analysis, sometimes using a slide projector for group reviews.<sup>124</sup>

### ***Consultant's Check***

During this stage, the Translation Consultant (TC) evaluates the exegesis, translation approach, content, and supplementary materials of the work.<sup>125</sup> A verbal or written back-translation is conducted by the translators as the TC examines the translated text verse by verse, chapter by chapter, and book by book, comparing it to the source text to ensure accuracy and consistency before publication.<sup>126</sup> This task demands extensive knowledge of the source language and translation experience, prompting the TC to use various resources.

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<sup>122</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 34.

<sup>123</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 34.

<sup>124</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 34.

<sup>125</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 34.

<sup>126</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 34-35.

## ***Publication***

Throughout the process, the manuscript undergoes meticulous checks for accuracy, consistency, and completeness.<sup>127</sup> After revisions prompted by the Translation Consultant, it is sent to the CAP officer for further assessment and preparation for publishing.<sup>128</sup> This includes ensuring consistent use of key terms, uniform translation of parallel passages, maintaining formatting, and selecting supplementary materials. ParaText software assists in these checks. Finally, the translators conduct a final proofreading before submission for publication.

## ***Major Approaches to Bible Translation***

There are various approaches to Bible translation, each with its own methodology, goals, and considerations. Some of the key approaches include the following.

### **Formal Equivalence (Word-for-Word Translation)**

This approach prioritises accuracy and fidelity to the original text, aiming to translate each word and phrase as literally as possible.<sup>129</sup> This approach strives to maintain the original structure, grammar, and vocabulary of the source language, aiming for a high degree of fidelity to the original words and phrasing. Examples of formal equivalence translations include the King James Version (KJV) and the English Standard Version (ESV).<sup>130</sup> This translation model is guided by the following principles.

- i. **Literal translation:** The primary goal is to translate the text as literally as possible, preserving the exact words and phrases

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<sup>127</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 35.

<sup>128</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 35.

<sup>129</sup> Ogunlana, “Exploring Best Approaches to Bible Translation for Native and Non-Native English Speakers,” 203.

<sup>130</sup> Translators do not use only one approach throughout their work. The examples are given on the basis that these versions are predominantly guided by formal equivalence theory.

used in the original language. This involves maintaining the original syntax and grammatical structure whenever feasible.

- ii. **Structural fidelity:** Formal equivalence emphasizes the preservation of the original text's form. This includes sentence structure, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references, even if they might be less familiar or more challenging for the target audience to understand.
- iii. **Minimizing interpretation:** The translator's role is to provide a direct translation of the text with minimal interpretive influence. This approach aims to allow readers to engage with the text more directly and make their own interpretations.
- iv. **Faithfulness to the original:** The focus is on maintaining a close adherence to the original text, providing readers with a translation that closely mirrors the source material in terms of vocabulary and structure.

### **Dynamic Equivalence (Thought-for-Thought Translation)**

Dynamic equivalence focuses on conveying the meaning and intent of the original text rather than adhering strictly to the wording.<sup>131</sup> Translations following this approach include the New International Version (NIV) and the New Living Translation (NLT). It is guided by the following principles.

- i. **Priority of meaning over form:** The primary goal of dynamic equivalence is to translate the meaning of the original text, even if this means altering the form or structure. The emphasis is on conveying the thought or intent behind the words rather than adhering strictly to the original syntax or vocabulary.
- ii. **Natural expression:** Translations should read naturally and fluently in the target language. This often requires the translator to use idiomatic expressions and contemporary language that the target audience can easily understand.

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<sup>131</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 92.

- iii. **Contextual relevance:** Dynamic equivalence considers the cultural and situational context of both the source and target languages. This means that translators might adapt cultural references or idiomatic expressions to be more relevant or understandable to the target audience.
- iv. **Audience understanding:** The translator aims to evoke the same response or understanding in the target audience as the original text would have in its original audience. This involves considering the audience's cultural background, language proficiency, and contemporary usage.

### **Skopos Theory**

The Skopos theory, derived from the Greek word for “aim” or “purpose,” proposes a functional approach to translation.<sup>132</sup> At its core, the Skopos theory suggests that translations should prioritise the intended purpose or impact of the source text over strict adherence to its original wording or linguistic style. In other words, the primary goal of translation is to effectively convey the intended message, values, expectations, life experiences, and cultural norms of the target audience.<sup>133</sup> This means that translators should consider the specific needs and preferences of the target audience when determining how to translate a text.

### ***Approaches to Translation Studies***

Translation Studies refers to the theory and practice of translation.<sup>134</sup> It examines the phenomenon and application across diverse languages and cultures. It is an interdisciplinary field that draws from such disciplines as comparative literature, cultural studies, linguistics, and philosophy.<sup>135</sup> This discipline explores cultural, economic, political, and ethical aspects impacting translation and

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<sup>132</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 96.

<sup>133</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 96-97.

<sup>134</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 49.

<sup>135</sup> Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 49.

fosters skills in analysis, practice, evaluation, aesthetics, and exposition. It also emphasises the development of research and practical translation skills, as well as strategies for navigating complex linguistic and cultural challenges in translation. Whilst translation activities have a long history, Translation Studies as an academic discipline is relatively new.

J. S Holmes delineates translation studies into two main perspectives: pure and applied.<sup>136</sup> The applied aspect encompasses practical endeavours such as translator training, translation aids, and translation criticism. On the other hand, the pure dimension consists of theoretical and descriptive studies. Descriptive studies within the pure dimension encompass product-oriented, process-oriented, and function-oriented approaches, whilst the theoretical dimension encompasses general and partial studies. These categorisations provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the diverse methodologies and foci within the field of translation studies.

My focus here is on Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS). DTS is a branch of pure translation studies that describes the phenomena of translating and translation. As mentioned earlier, three sub-divisions are identified in DTS. Product-oriented translation studies focus on analysing individual translations, conducting comparative assessments of multiple translations of a single source text (whether in the same language or across different languages), and describing larger collections or corpora of translations.<sup>137</sup> In other words, it examines existing translations, often involving a comparison between a translated text and its original counterpart. This approach aims to provide detailed descriptions of translated texts, examining variations, similarities, and patterns within and

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<sup>136</sup> J. S. Holmes, "The name and nature of translation studies," L. Venuti (Ed.) *The Translation Studies Reader* pp.172-185 (New York: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>137</sup> Alexandra Assis Rosa, "Descriptive Translation Studies–DTS," *Handbook of Translation Studies* edited by Yves Gambier and Luc van Doorslaer pp. 94-104 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2016), 95.

across translations to gain insights into translation practices, strategies, and outcomes.

Process-oriented studies systematically examine the cognitive processes occurring in the translator's mind during translation.<sup>138</sup> That is, deals with the psychology of translation, aiming to understand the cognitive processes occurring in the mind of a translator. This approach also encompasses the examination of conscious decision-making processes, the selection of overarching strategies, and the organisation of translation services.

Function-oriented Translation Studies investigate contextual factors instead of focusing solely on translated texts. It entails studying the role, impact, and significance of translation within the target context, mapping translation activities, and analysing how translation affects the context itself.<sup>139</sup> Thus, it studies the contextual factors surrounding translation activities, analysing aspects such as when and where books were translated and the influences they exerted.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has underlined the importance of discourse analysis and text linguistics in general and in the field of Bible translation studies in particular. Discourse analysis, with its focus on language use in context, allows translators to grasp the subtleties and nuances of biblical narratives, ensuring that the intended meanings are accurately conveyed in the target language. Meanwhile, text linguistics offers valuable insights into the organization and coherence of texts, which are critical for maintaining the integrity and readability of translations. These insights are useful in the interpretation of Biblical texts.

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<sup>138</sup> Rosa, "Descriptive Translation Studies–DTS," 95.

<sup>139</sup> Rosa, "Descriptive Translation Studies–DTS," 95.

## **2.7 Review Exercise**

1. What challenges do translators face in translating the Bible into different languages?
2. How does the concept of “skopos” influence Bible translation?
3. Discuss the importance of accuracy and fidelity in Bible translation.
4. Reflect on the impact of biblical exegesis and translation on contemporary religious practices and beliefs.
5. Discuss the four perspectives historical criticism typifies.
6. What is discourse analysis, and why is it important in the context of Bible translation?
7. How does text linguistics differ from discourse analysis, and what unique contributions does it make to Bible translation?
8. What are some key concepts in discourse analysis that can enhance the accuracy of Bible translations?
9. Explain the role of thematic progression in discourse analysis and its impact on Bible translation.
10. What is referential cohesion, and why is it crucial for maintaining the integrity of biblical texts during translation?
11. How can rhetorical structures in biblical texts influence translation decisions?
12. Discuss the challenges that translators face when applying discourse analysis and text linguistics to Bible translation.
13. How do the case studies presented in this chapter illustrate the practical application of discourse analysis and text linguistics in Bible translation?
14. In what ways can discourse analysis and text linguistics contribute to producing culturally resonant Bible translations?
15. Reflect on the overall impact of integrating discourse analysis and text linguistics on the practice of Bible translation.

## **2.8 Suggested Research Topics**

1. Exploring Thematic Progression in Biblical Narratives: A Discourse Analysis Approach to Bible Translation

2. Referential Cohesion and Translation Fidelity: A Text Linguistics Study of Bible Translations
3. Rhetorical Structures in Biblical Discourse: Implications for Translation Theory and Practice
4. Applying Discourse Analysis to Gospel Narratives: Case Studies in Translating Synoptic Gospels
5. Text Linguistics and Cultural Relevance: Enhancing Bible Translation for Contemporary Audiences
6. Thematic Progression and Narrative Coherence: Strategies for Translating Psalms and Prophetic Literature
7. Referential Cohesion in Philippians: Challenges and Solutions in Bible Translation
8. A Study of Rhetorical Strategies in Romans
9. Translating Parables: A Text Linguistics Study of Narrative Cohesion and Coherence
10. Applying Discourse Analysis to Wisdom Literature: Insights for Translating Proverbs and Ecclesiastes
11. Analysis of John 1:1-18: Translating the Prologue and Exploring Cultural Adaptation and Theological Significance
12. Translation and Hermeneutics of Psalm 23: Exploring Shepherd Imagery and Its Interpretation in Jewish and Christian Traditions
13. Translation Theory and Practice in Translating 1 Corinthians 13: Understanding Challenges and Strategies in Rendering the Love Chapter
14. Analysing Translation Choices in Acts 2:1-13: Exploring Linguistic and Theological Themes in Different Versions of Pentecost
15. Exegetical Study and Translation of Philippians 2:5-11: Investigating Christological Themes and Cultural Adaptation in Translation
16. Theological Interpretation and Translation of Revelation 21:1-8: Examining Eschatological Imagery and Theological Implications Across Versions

17. Translation and Interpretation of Exodus 20:1-17: Exploring the Ten Commandments and Their Cultural Relevance in Selected Contemporary Contexts
18. Comparative Analysis of Matthew 6:9-13: Translating the Lord's Prayer and Its Interpretation in Different Cultural and Denominational Settings
19. Textual Criticism and Translation of Romans 3:21-31: Examining Variant Readings and Translation Choices in Different Translations
20. Cultural Adaptation and Translation of Mark 10:17-31: Exploring the Rich Young Ruler Narrative and Its Contemporary Relevance
21. Translation and Theological Implications of Galatians 5:22-23: Investigating Paul's Vision of the Fruit of the Spirit Across Cultural Contexts
22. Hermeneutical Insights and Translation Challenges in Genesis 3:1-24: Examining the Fall Narrative and Its Interpretation in Various Traditions
23. Translating the Book of Ruth: Analysing Linguistic and Cultural Choices in Rendering the Story of Ruth and Naomi
24. The Impact of Gender-Inclusive Language in Translating Romans 16:1-16: Exploring Linguistic Choices and Theological Implications in Addressing Female Leaders
25. Cultural Adaptation and Translation of Matthew 25:31-46: Analysing the Rendering of Judgment Imagery and Its Communicative Strategies
26. Theological Interpretation and Translation of Isaiah 53: Investigating Messianic Prophecy and Interpretive Challenges Across Traditions
27. Lexical Ambiguities in Translating James 2:14-26: Examining Semantic Range and Interpretation in Different Versions

## CHAPTER THREE

### SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY & HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

As noted earlier, systematic theology is a branch of theology that seeks to organise and interpret the teachings of a Christian tradition coherently and systematically.<sup>140</sup> This theological sub-discipline typically involves the analysis and synthesis of various theological topics, such as God, creation, humanity, salvation, and eschatology, into a unified framework. It often draws upon insights from scripture, tradition, reason, and experience to develop theological doctrines and address theological questions. Different scholars have developed different approaches to the study of this field of theology.

Historical theology, as noted earlier, is the study of how Christian doctrines, beliefs, and practices have developed and evolved over time. It examines the progression of theological ideas from the early church through the Medieval era, the Reformation, and into modern times. The primary goal of historical theology is to understand how interpretations of Scripture, theological debates, cultural influences, and church decisions have shaped the beliefs and doctrines of the Christian faith.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline some key methodologies employed in the study of systematic theology and historical theology. As with the other sub-disciplines, the focus will be on methodologies that are deemed evangelical. This chapter details methodologies such as Osborne's Methodology, Integrative Theology Methodology, Architectonic Theology Methodology, the Gardener-Theologian Approach, Historical Retrieval and Reappropriation Methodology, Hegelian Dialectic Methodology, Semiora Methodology, and Ware's Evangelical Theology Model.

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<sup>140</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: Introduction to Biblical Doctrines* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 21.

### **3.1 Osborne's Methodology**

#### ***Overview***

Grant R. Osborne's methodology for theological research integrates historical theology and biblical exegesis to facilitate a critical dialogue with diverse perspectives and theological traditions to achieve a more balanced theological approach. The emphasis on Scripture makes this methodology evangelically-oriented. However, it does not allow for contextual analysis. Therefore, the researcher may have to modify it to include a step that would cater for their contextual realities. The methodology comprises four main steps, each of which is briefly outlined below.<sup>141</sup>

#### ***Methodological Steps***

##### **Step 1: An Examination of Historical Theology**

*What have theologians said about the topic?*

In this step, the researcher conducts a comprehensive literature review of the works of influential theologians and scholars on the topic throughout the history of the church. This includes the views of both past and contemporary theologians/scholars. The sources of information may be the books, sermons, and teachings of these theologians and scholars. It ends with a summary and synthesis of key themes, debates, and developments in historical theology related to the topic.

##### **Step 2: Examination of Key Biblical Texts**

*What does the Bible say about the topic?*

The second step involves an in-depth study of relevant biblical passages and texts related to the topic. The outcome of the exegetical analysis of Scripture is presented in the form of biblical theology to provide a biblical-theological framework for the research.

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<sup>141</sup> I have gleaned what follows from Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 374-406.

### Step 3: Theological Formulation

*How might we formulate a theology of the topic?*

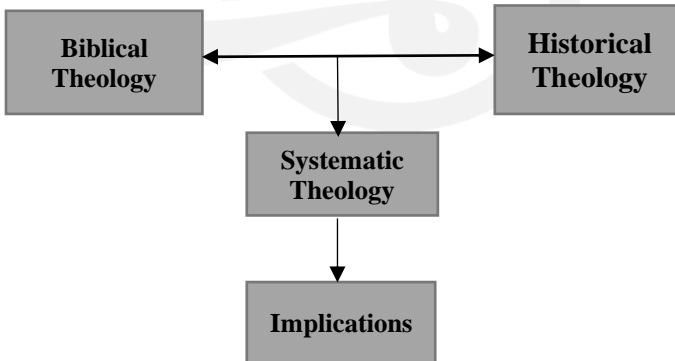
Using the historical and biblical theologies as a contextual framework, the third step presents organised, logical and systematic theological concepts and doctrines related to the topic. Theological questions and tensions that may arise from synthesising the historical and biblical perspectives are addressed at this stage.

### Step 4: Application (Theological/Practical Implications)

*What are the theological and practical implications of the theological formulation?*

The last step requires the researcher to reflect on the theological insights gained and identify theological and practical implications for individuals, communities, and society. It may also include developing recommendations for how theological insights can inform decision-making, ministry practices, and social engagement.

The steps outlined above can be integrated and represented diagrammatically as shown below.<sup>142</sup>



*Fig. 3.1: Osborne's Methodology*

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<sup>142</sup> The double arrow connecting biblical theology and historical theology represents the interaction between these two in order to yield a systematic theological formulation.

### ***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** A Theology of Poverty for Contemporary Ghana

**Main research question:** How might a contextual theology of poverty function to contribute to the understanding and alleviation of poverty among Christians in Ghana?

#### **Subsidiary questions**

- i. What have theologians said about poverty throughout the history of the church?
- ii. What is the biblical teaching on poverty?
- iii. How might we formulate a theology of poverty for contemporary Ghana?
- iv. What are the implications of the above theology of poverty?

## **3.2 Integrative Theology Methodology**

### ***Overview***

Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest's methodology integrates historical, biblical, systematic, apologetic, and practical dimensions to provide a comprehensive framework for theological research. The integrative theology methodology emphasises grounding theological formulations in historical and biblical contexts whilst also addressing contemporary relevance and defending against potential objections. Whilst this method gives an interdisciplinary and comprehensive treatment to theology it is very broad and so may not allow in-depth study. Also, it may consume a lot of resources. There are five main methodological steps in this approach; each of these is outlined below.<sup>143</sup>

### ***Methodological Steps***

#### **Step 1: Historical Hypotheses**

*What are the major historical hypotheses?*

The first step is an examination of existing historical hypotheses related to the topic under investigation. This step involves a

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<sup>143</sup> I have gleaned the following steps from Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (three vols. In one) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996).

comprehensive review of historical interpretations, theories, and perspectives relevant to the subject matter.

## **Step 2: Biblical Examination**

*What does Scripture say?*

In the second step, the researcher selects relevant scriptural passages and conducts a thorough exegesis to appreciate their contributions to and implications for the topic. Adhering to established hermeneutical principles, the researcher engages with scholarly commentaries to interpret the texts. The step ends with a synthesis of the exegetical findings into a coherent biblical theology.

## **Step 3: Systematic Formulation**

*How might we develop a systematic theological formulation?*

This step serves as the linchpin around which others revolve. It builds upon the foundation laid in Steps 1–2 and guides the subsequent Steps 4–5. This is the phase where the researcher presents a comprehensive theological response to the identified problem. It involves weighing historical perspectives against biblical evidence and synthesising biblical teachings into a coherent whole. Moreover, in formulating a systematic theology, the researcher interacts, where appropriate, with insights and theories from various scientific disciplines.

## **Step 4: Apologetic Interaction**

*How might we apologetically defend the systematic theological formulation from objections?*

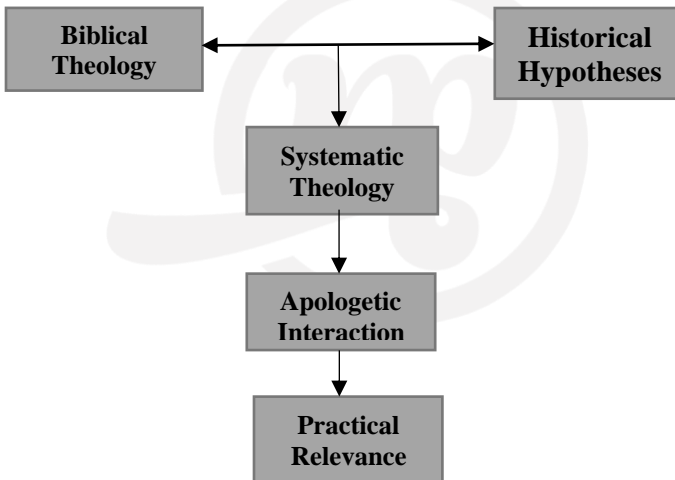
In this step, the researcher offers apologetic arguments and responses to defend the formulation against anticipated objections. The step also requires the researcher to demonstrate the superiority of their formulation over alternative hypotheses. This entails establishing the logical consistency, factual adequacy, and existential viability of their interpretation.

### Step 5: Practical Relevance

*What is the practical significance of the systematic theological formulation?*

The final phase deals with the practical implications of the theological stance adopted, exploring its relevance for individuals, churches, and ministries. It investigates how embracing the proposed theological framework could impact faith and practice, both at the individual and communal levels, within the context of a biblical worldview. Whilst empirical research into contemporary beliefs and practices may enrich this exploration, it is not a prerequisite.

The steps outlined above can be integrated and represented diagrammatically as shown below.<sup>144</sup>



*Fig. 3.2: Integrative Theology Methodology*

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<sup>144</sup> The double arrow connecting biblical theology and historical hypotheses represents the interaction between these two dimensions in order to produce a systematic theological formulation.

### ***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** An Integrative Theological Enquiry into the Extent of Christ's Atonement

**Main research question:** How might formulate, defend and apply an integrative theology of the extent of Christ's atonement?

#### **Subsidiary questions**

- i. What are the key alternative views on the extent of the atonement?
- ii. What might an exegetical analysis of a suitable biblical passage(s) reveal about the extent of the atonement?
- iii. How might we formulate a systematic theology on the extent of the atonement?
- iv. How might we defend the theological formulation above from objections?
- v. What practical implications does the above systematic formulation have for the church and society?

### **3.3 Architectonic Theology Methodology**

#### ***Overview***

Architectonic Theology methodology was formulated by an architect and theologian, Robert Falconer. This method of theological research reimagines systematic/public theology as a transformative and creative endeavour by drawing inspiration from the characteristics and design principles of architecture. This theological model emphasises the authority of Scripture in theological formulations. It is adaptable across diverse theological disciplines (systematic theology, public theology and practical theology) and socio-cultural settings. However, its procedure is intricate and demanding, thus more suitable for extensive theological research projects. Architectonic Theology methodology involves five key steps.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> The methodological steps have been extrapolated from Robert Falconer, "Architectonic Theology," *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 100 (2019):1–10.

## ***Methodological Steps***

### **Step 1: Exploration of Context in the Current Environment**

*What is the context in the current environment?*

The first step involves thoroughly exploring the context of the current environment, drawing parallels from architectural methodology. This exploration encompasses three key aspects: socio-economic, cultural, and physical. For theologians developing an Architectonic Theology, a similar approach is taken, identifying and interpreting relevant contextual aspects to inform theological engagement. These may include religious, cultural, philosophical, political, social, and economic dimensions. Whilst empirical research is optional, a comprehensive literary study is necessary to provide a rich description of the environment. If empirical research is pursued, it can take various qualitative approaches such as grounded theory, ethnography, narrative analysis, phenomenology, or case studies, either individually or in combination.

### **Step 2: Exploration of Context in Historical Theology**

*What does historical theology teach us?*

The second step requires the researcher to explore the context of historical theology, similar to an architect studying existing built environments before designing a new structure. The theologian can employ two approaches: synchronic (focusing on specific eras, theologians, or traditions) and diachronic (studying the development of Christian thought over time). Within the diachronic approach, two perspectives, relativist (highlighting diversity and development) and essentialist (asserting a core Christian theology), emerge.

Historical theology provides context and guidelines for biblical exegesis, which remains foundational. It aids in distinguishing the enduring truth of the gospel from temporal expressions. Historical theology is crucial for the present and future of the church, offering insights into orthodoxy, Biblical interpretation, examples of faith, and theological development. Once the contextual exploration is complete, the theologian begins

constructing the theological foundation, akin to displaying a beautifully articulated object rather than burying it.

### **Step 3: Construction of the Foundation in Exegesis and Biblical Motifs**

*What might an exegetical analysis of key Scriptural texts reveal about relevant Biblical motifs?*

The third step involves laying the groundwork in exegesis and biblical motifs. This includes thoroughly understanding the context, and historical theology, and engaging with biblical texts. The process begins with exegetical analysis, examining the passage's historical, verbal, and literary aspects to uncover its original meaning. Then, attention shifts to identifying and exploring biblical themes and motifs relevant to the topic at hand, ensuring they are situated within the broader biblical narrative. This involves careful consideration of historical context and contemporary relevance. The goal is to allow biblical motifs to speak in both literary and historical ways, supporting a comprehensive understanding and application of scripture in contemporary contexts. Ultimately, this process aims to deepen commitment to preaching, teaching, and living out biblical truths in today's world.

### **Step 4: Construction of 'Order and Space' in Dialectic Synthesis**

*How might we construct a dialectic synthesis?*

In architecture, order establishes a connection between building elements, introducing logic into decision-making. Space organisation involves geometry, function, social factors, and proportions. The architectural design process involves synthesis, iteratively refining towards a final design, considering elements like space, light, materials, and stakeholders' input.

Architectonic Theology similarly employs dialectic movements between different theological traditions or philosophies, such as the Kuyperian tradition and African philosophical thought. Step 4, constructing "order and space" through dialectic synthesis, is

a theological statement for a contemporary context, engaging with diverse theological perspectives. This involves three tasks:

1. Describing the thesis, identifying the initial theological problem and its significance.
2. Describing the antithesis, the reaction to the problem, and its significance.
3. Developing a synthesis reconciling the tension between the thesis and antithesis, aiming for a solution. This involves juxtaposing different theological perspectives until a workable solution is reached, which should be both innovative and biblical, as informed by step 3.

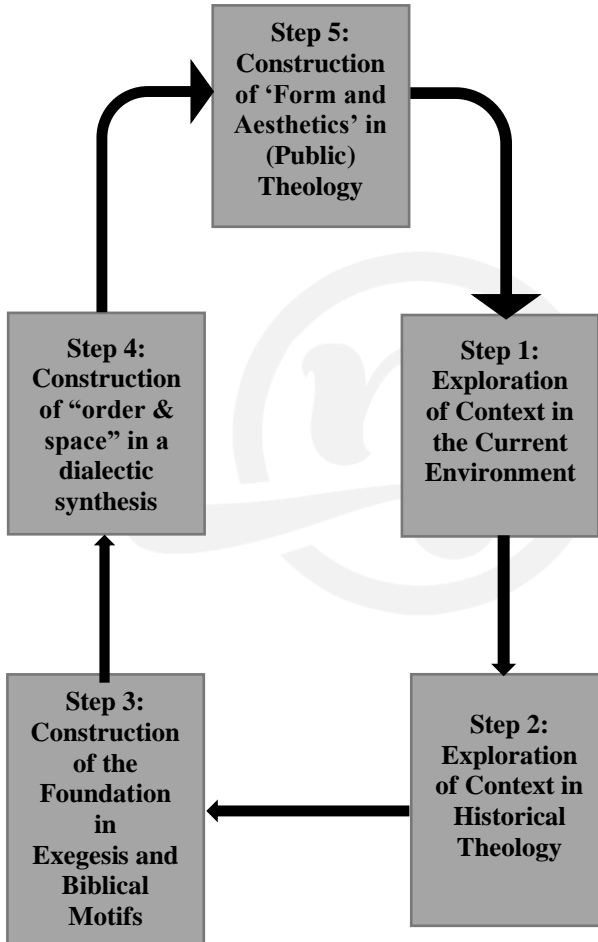
### **Step 5: Construction of ‘Form and Aesthetics’ in (Public) Theology**

*How might we construct a (Public) Theology?*

Architectonic Theology, with its emphasis on form and aesthetics, weaves these elements throughout all five steps, ultimately aiming to craft a theology that is not only functional but also visually appealing for public engagement. In the final step, particular attention is given to the significance and practical applicability of the proposed theology within public life, with the goal of constructing a comprehensive Biblical worldview for Christians and their communities. This step involves thoughtful consideration of both contemporary and historical contexts, drawing inspiration from the beauty and expansiveness of the heavens. Architectonic Theology endeavours to create theological frameworks that resonate with human culture and address pressing societal concerns. By reflecting elements of the kingdom of God into cultural and public spaces, it seeks to imbue theological discourse with a sense of grandeur and reverence whilst remaining responsive to the needs of the current environment. In this way, the fifth step of Architectonic Theology circles back to the initial step, forming a cohesive and integrated approach that synthesises theological depth with aesthetic appeal,

engaging both the intellect and the senses in the pursuit of understanding and embodying the divine.

The steps outlined above can be integrated and represented diagrammatically as shown below.



*Fig. 3.3: Architectonic Theology Methodology*

### ***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:**<sup>146</sup> An Examination of the Biblical Motifs of Blood and Breath: Towards a Public Theology of Reconciliation in the Body of Christ in Israel and Palestine

#### **Main research question**

In what ways might an examination of the biblical motifs of blood and breath concerning human life make a fresh contribution towards a public theology of reconciliation in the Body of Christ in Israel and Palestine?

#### **Subsidiary research questions**

1. How has the political and social climate of Israel and Palestine contributed to a hostile environment for reconciliation in the Body of Christ in Israel and Palestine?
2. What do historical and contemporary theology reveal about a theology of reconciliation?
3. What would an exegetical study reveal about the blood and breath motifs concerning human life?
4. How might we construct a theological synthesis of the biblical motifs of blood and breath?
5. How might we develop a theology of reconciliation for members of the Body of Christ in Israel and Palestine, with special reference to the biblical motifs of blood and breath in human life?

## **3.4 The Gardener-Theologian Approach**

### ***Overview***

Isaac Boaheng's Gardener-Theologian Approach is based on striking parallels between the roles of a gardener (or farmer) and a theologian. The motivation behind this approach stemmed from Boaheng's concern over the marginalisation of Scripture in theological

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<sup>146</sup> This example (including the topic and questions) was taken from Lisa Loden, *An Examination of the Biblical Motifs of Blood and Breath: Towards a Public Theology of Reconciliation in the Body of Christ in Israel and Palestine* (Master of Theology Thesis: South African Theological Seminary, 2023), 15.

discourse, particularly in liberal institutions. To address this issue, the Gardener-Theologian Approach metaphorises Scripture as the seed in theological formulation, hence emphasising its essential role and safeguarding against liberal tendencies.

Originally designed for public theology, it can also be adapted for other theological disciplines such as systematic theology and practical theology. The strengths of this model are its evangelical focus and accessibility to the African audience (most of whom are familiar with farming activities). Its main limitation is that the gardener metaphor does not work well for crops that are planted directly on the field without a nursery. This approach entails five key methodological steps as follows.<sup>147</sup>

### ***Methodological Steps***

#### **Step 1: Exploration<sup>148</sup> phase (Contextual analysis)**

*What socio-political environment needs to be addressed?*<sup>149</sup>

The first step of the Gardener-Theologian Approach involves thoroughly examining and readying the selected socio-political context. Here, the Gardener-Theologian examines the societal, political, religious, economic, and philosophical aspects of the (sociopolitical) environment. This step equips the researcher with essential insights into the community in which the theological inquiry will take place, so as to facilitate effective engagement with the context. Information for this phase can be gathered through literary research or empirical investigation.

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<sup>147</sup> I have extrapolated these steps from Isaac Boaheng, “Doing Evangelical Public Theology: The Gardener Approach as a Methodology,” *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies*, 9(8) (2023): 351-367. <https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.2023981>

<sup>148</sup> The term “exploperation” has been coined from the words “exploration” and “preparation” to denote the two main activities that take place in the first step of gardening; namely, exploration of the land and the preparation of the soil/land to receive the crop.

<sup>149</sup> In the original article, the questions for each methodological step leaned towards the gardening enterprise. In the present study, they have been formulated to lean more towards theologising than gardening.

## **Step 2: Planting phase (Biblical theology)**

*What might an exegetical study of relevant theological seed (Scriptural text[s]) reveal about the socio-political issue to be addressed?*

This phase (stage/step) pertains to the biblical aspect of the study, involving the identification and examination of relevant biblical passages to establish a credible biblical theology on the topic. The selection of texts should be guided by the socio-political context that has already been explored. This step also entails the Gardener-Theologian delicately nurturing and transferring the theological seed into the socio-political field.

The process of theological transplantation necessitates bridging cultural, literary, and grammatical gaps between the biblical context (nursery bed) and the socio-political context involved (gardening field). The outcome of this step is coherent, logical, well-arranged and organised theological motifs suitable for addressing the socio-political needs of the receptor community.

## **Step 3: Maintenance phase (Historical theology)**

*How have people maintained this theological crop within their socio-political milieu?*

The third phase underscores the importance of incorporating insights from historical theology into modern theological constructs. Here, the Gardener-Theologian delves into historical theological perspectives, either by examining a specific historical period or tracing the evolution of the subject throughout church history. This phase aims to glean lessons from past theologians for contemporary formulation, allowing for refinement and avoidance of previous errors in theological discourse. Here, the Gardener-Theologian is required to re-engineer both historical and contemporary theological practices.

#### **Step 4: Harvesting phase (Theological formulation)**

*How might a theological fruit be produced to address the needs of the socio-political environment?*

Using the socio-political context, biblical theology, and historical theology as contextual foundations, the fourth phase entailed crafting a theology capable of meeting the socio-political requirements of the receptor community. The resulting theological framework must be clear, logically organised and coherent. The interdisciplinary character of public theology parallels the cross-pollination observed in certain crops, fostering the cultivation of fruitful outcomes.

#### **Step 5: Distribution and Consumption Phase (Implications)**

*What implications has the theological fruit for consumers?*

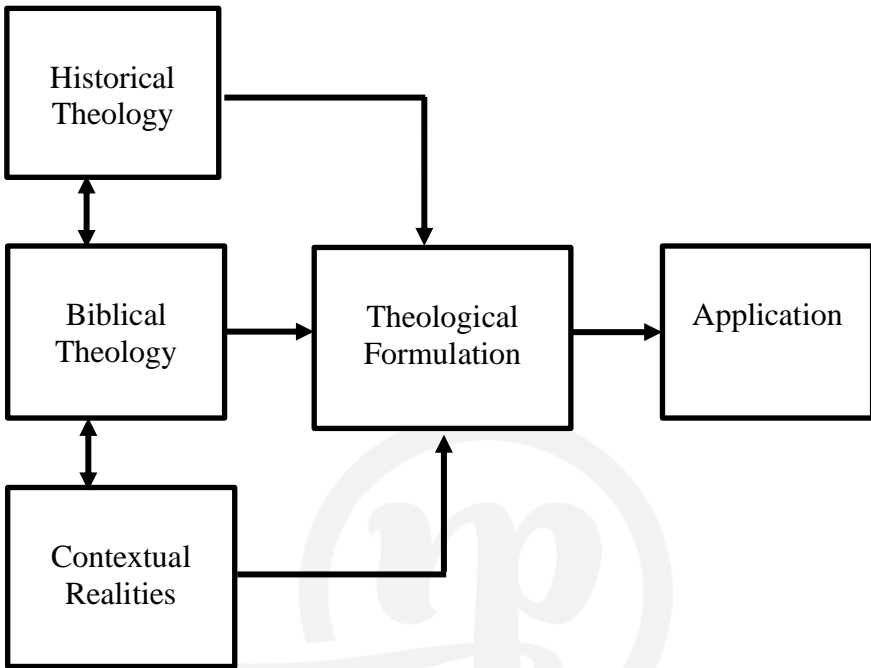
The last phase involves deducing (theological and practical) implications of the theological formulation for individuals, organisations, and institutions, akin to the distribution of a farmer's produce for public consumption.

This task entails articulating a political strategy for societal progress and delineating the responsibilities of various entities in executing this strategy fully. It involves clearly defining the roles of individuals, churches, society, and government in the process.

The interactions among the various partners and the processes involved in the formulation, and distribution of the theological fruit for consumption as depicted in the Gardener Approach (analysed above) can be represented diagrammatically as follows.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> The two-directional arrow between the theological seed and the socio-political soil shows that each of these factors affects the other. The soil type determines the kind of seed one can cultivate; yet, once the seed has been selected, it also informs how the land/soil should be prepared for cultivation. Similarly, the interaction between the theological seed/crop and the theological cultural practices is represented by the two-directional arrow between these two partners. The centrality of the theological seed (biblical data) is depicted by the middle position it occupies, located between historical theology and contextual realities. The contribution of each of the three partners to the formation of the theological fruit is also shown by the arrows from the partners to the theological fruit. At this point (theological fruit), the three partners do not stand individually but “form part” of



*Fig. 3.4: The Gardener-Theologian Approach*

***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** A Theology of Salvation for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and its Implications for Contemporary Ethiopian Christianity

**Main research question:**

What implications does a theology of salvation formulated for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church have for contemporary Ethiopian Christianity?

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the resulting fruit. The fruit is then distributed for consumption as depicted by the single-headed arrowed line.

### **Subsidiary research questions**

- i. What is the socio-political environment of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church that informs their understanding of salvation?
- ii. What might an exegetical analysis of relevant texts reveal about the theology of salvation for the socio-political environment of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church?
- iii. How have theologians throughout church history developed their theology of salvation in light of their socio-political milieu?
- iv. How might we formulate a contextual theology of salvation for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church?
- v. What are the implications of the contextual formulation of the theology of salvation for contemporary Ethiopian Christianity?

### **3.5 Historical Retrieval and Reappropriation Methodology**

#### ***Overview***

Historical theology deals with the evolution of doctrine throughout Church history, focusing on influential figures and theological milestones that shape the understanding of believers across denominations. In contrast, church history examines the church's journey within the broader context of world history, emphasising notable ecclesiastical events and their societal backdrop. George Coon developed the Historical Retrieval and Reappropriation Methodology for historical theology research.<sup>151</sup>

Coon's methodology aims at (1) rectifying misinterpretations and misconceptions of historical progressions; (2) highlighting overlooked or insufficiently explored individuals, references, topics, or periods deserving of attention; (3) facilitating discourse between

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<sup>151</sup> I obtained information about this methodology from Robert Falconer (ed.), *Research Methodologies: For the Master's and Doctoral Programmes* (Johannesburg: South African Theological Seminary, 2024), 76-80. The methodological steps are taken directly with some modifications, simplifications and/or minor editing.

pivotal figures who have not been juxtaposed previously; and (4) employing insights from past individuals, topics, or periods to address contemporary challenges.

### ***Methodological Steps***

#### **Step 1: Exploration of Context and Background**

*What is the context and background of the study?*

The first step involves an exploration of the context and background (of the theologian, theological subject, or ecclesiastical formulation/subject). This exploration is often done through an extensive review of related literature with the aim of refining the topic, justifying the inquiry, and establishing the social, theological and ecclesiastical contexts for the study. For a biographical thesis, this stage must situate the individual within their cultural, ecclesiastical, and theological milieu, and provide any relevant background information to contextualise the theological description and analysis. For a thesis on doctrine, this step must elucidate the broader theological themes or doctrines influencing the doctrine under scrutiny, along with delineating the various contexts (historical, ecclesiastical, and possibly political) within which the chosen doctrinal point will be examined.

#### **Step 2: Examination of the Doctrinal Development**

*How did the doctrine develop?*

The second step focuses on the development of a person's theology, a particular doctrine across denominations, or a particular doctrine in a particular denomination. The way to go about it depends on the nature of the subject under study. For a thesis on a personality, this stage examines the development of their theological viewpoints, including an examination of their biblical interpretation, theological formulation, expression, and engagement with contemporary discourse partners. If the thesis focuses on a doctrine, this stage elucidates the progression of the doctrine across defined timeframes, such as the Apostolic, Patristic, Medieval, Reformation, Post-

Reformation, Modern, or Post-Modern periods. Additionally, the evolution of the doctrine in question may be explored within a specific denomination or movement throughout history or within specific epochs.

### **Step 3: Analysis of Doctrinal Implications**

*What were the doctrinal implications?*

The third step derives doctrinal implications or consequences within the chosen individual, subject matter, or historical epoch. For a study on an individual theologian, this phase involves an exhaustive exploration of the individual's impact and legacy, and an elucidation of any controversies sparked or potentially resolved by their contributions. It also highlights the influence exerted on ecclesiastical factions or movements, as well as the contemporary reception of the theologian's position (whether embracing or rejecting). If the research is on a doctrinal issue, this step extends the preceding analysis into the contemporary era and traces the trajectory of the doctrinal discourse up to the present day. Here, the researcher conducts a comprehensive review of any lingering arguments or debates surrounding the doctrinal topic. This step also assesses the enduring impact of the doctrine on current theological discourse, church policies and practices.

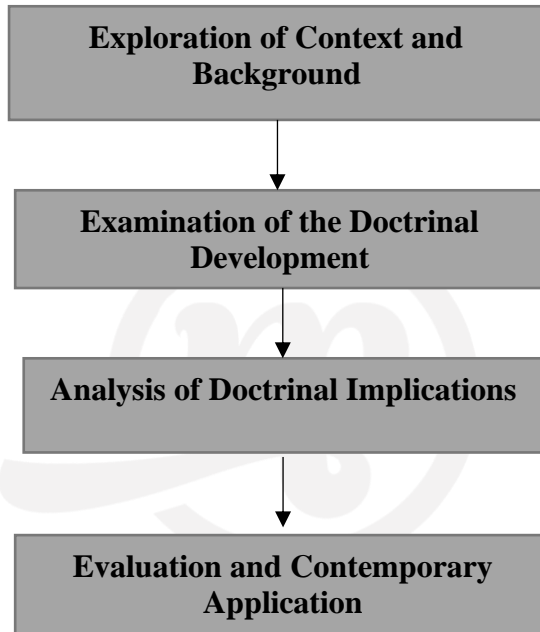
### **Step 4: Evaluation and Contemporary Application**

*How might we apply the doctrine in the contemporary church and/or society?*

The final step requires the researcher to link the outcomes of the investigation with the current era, offering an assessment of the analyses conducted in the preceding stages. This involves identifying areas of consensus and contention, as well as discerning strengths and weaknesses, supported by credible evidence. Such an evaluation reflects a sincere and thorough examination of the individual and doctrinal issue under consideration, addressing the pivotal question of relevance. Ideally, the assessment will delineate potential

advancements for contemporary scholarship (yielding original insights) and propose practical applications of the study within the church community.

The steps outlined above can be integrated and represented diagrammatically as shown below.



*Fig. 3.5: Historical Retrieval and Reappropriation Methodology*

***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** A Study of John Wesley’s Political Theology and its Implications for Contemporary Zambia

**Main research question**

What implications does John Wesley’s political theology have for contemporary Zambian society?

### **Subsidiary research questions**

- i. What was the context of John Wesley's society?
- ii. How did John Wesley's political theology evolve and develop?
- iii. What are the key aspects of John Wesley's political theology?<sup>152</sup>
- iv. What was the key impact of John Wesley's political theology?
- v. How does John Wesley's political theology apply to contemporary Zambia?

### **3.6 Hegelian Dialectic Methodology**

#### ***Overview***

“Dialectics” is a method of philosophical argument involving contradiction between opposing sides. It is an interpretive method where the contradiction between a proposition (thesis) and its opposing counterpart (antithesis) is resolved at a higher level of understanding (synthesis). The Hegelian dialectics refers to the specific dialectical method of argument developed by the 19th-century German philosopher, G.W.F. Hegel.<sup>153</sup> This method, like other dialectical approaches, involves a contradictory process between opposing forces, primarily illustrated through the conflict between the Self and the Other, often manifesting in problematic violence. This approach is not new; its origin goes back to ancient times (including such scholars as Zeno, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle).<sup>154</sup> Plato used this in his dialogues, where Socrates challenged his interlocutors' views.

Even though it emerged from a philosophical context, dialectics can be applied to Christian theology. In the context of theology, dialectics methodology refers to the use of structured

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<sup>152</sup> This question does not flow directly from the steps. However, I deem it necessary to explore the key tenets of the doctrine in question.

<sup>153</sup> Hassiba Boukhatem, “Hegelian Dialectics Applications in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Politics,” *Akofena* 8(1) (2022): 275-284, 275.

<sup>154</sup> George Russell Seay Jr., *Theologian of Synthesis: The Dialectical Method of Martin Luther King, Jr. as Revealed in his Critical Thinking on Theology, History, and Ethics* (PhD Dissertation: Vanderbilt University, 2008), 46.

dialogue or reasoned argument to explore, understand, and develop theological concepts. Key principles employed in the dialectic approach are critical examination, dialogue and engagement with opposing views, openness to revision and refinement, consideration of multiple perspectives (scriptural, historical, and philosophical) and emphasis on clarity and precision in theological language. This methodology helps theologians: (i). develop well-reasoned and nuanced theological positions; (ii). engage with diverse perspectives and traditions; (iii). refine their understanding of complex theological issues; (iv). articulate their ideas with clarity and precision.

Hegel's dialectic is usually presented in three stages of development: a thesis that leads to its reaction; an antithesis that contradicts or negates the thesis; and the tension between the two is resolved by a synthesis. This approach equips theologians with tools to navigate complex theological issues and develop a more nuanced understanding of different positions. There is a need to ground the process and debate in biblical theology. Without the biblical component, this method may led to liberal tendencies. The dialectical movement takes the following path: thesis – antithesis – synthesis. These steps are further explained below.<sup>155</sup>

## ***Methodological Steps***

### **Step 1: Thesis**

*What is the theological claim being made?*

First, the researcher presents a theological proposition (thesis) or statement of belief. The thesis serves as the initial assertion or position on a theological issue, laying the groundwork for subsequent analysis. One has to state the theological objectives and theological/practical relevance of the thesis and bring in the view of other theologians who share similar ideas (where applicable). This may be achieved through an extensive review of literature related to the subject under consideration.

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<sup>155</sup> I extrapolated these steps from Seay Jr., *Theologian of Synthesis*, 46; Boukhatem, "Hegelian Dialectics Applications in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Politics," 278.

## **Step 2: Antithesis**

*What theological viewpoint opposes the first theological position?*

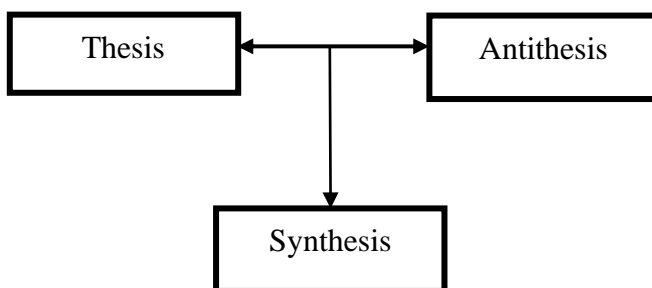
The second step in the dialectic process presents a counter-proposition (antithesis) to the thesis. This involves introducing an argument that challenges or opposes the thesis, and bringing in alternative viewpoints or objections. The antithesis highlights the limitations, contradictions, or conflicts inherent in the thesis. The objectives and theological/practical significance of the antithesis are discussed. An extensive review of literature is suitable to achieve the purpose of this step.

## **Step 3: Synthesis**

*How can the insights from both the thesis and antithesis be integrated to form a more coherent theological understanding?*

The third step aims to achieve a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the theological concept, moving beyond simple affirmation or negation. The researcher is required to resolve the tension between the thesis and antithesis by integrating the insights gained from both sides to form a new, more comprehensive, and mature theological position. The synthesis transcends the initial conflict and creates a higher level of understanding that incorporates elements of both the thesis and antithesis.

The steps outlined above can be integrated and represented diagrammatically as shown below.



*Fig. 3.6: Hegelian Dialectic Methodology*

### ***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** A Dialectical Analysis between Calvinism and Arminianism on the Subject of the Extent of Christ's Atonement

#### **Main research question**

How might we reconcile Calvinism and Arminianism on the extent of Christ's atonement?

#### **Subsidiary research questions**

- i. What is the Calvinist position on the extent of Christ's atonement?
- ii. What is the Arminian position on the extent of Christ's atonement?
- iii. How can the insights from both the thesis (Calvinism: limited atonement) and antithesis (Arminianism: unlimited atonement) be integrated to form a more coherent theological understanding of Christ's atonement?
- iv. What are the implications of the theological synthesis for contemporary theology of atonement?

## **3.7 Semiora Methodology**

### ***Overview***

Theological discourses around oral data, images, cultural artefacts, figures, or symbols are relevant to the holistic development of theology in every human society, more so the African society. The

lack of an authoritative research model for theological formulations based on such data prompted the formulation of the Semiora methodology.

The word “semiora” was coined from semiotics and orality (oral). Isaac Boaheng designed the semiora methodology approach for theological reflections on semiotic (symbolic) and oral data. Oral theology denotes reflections about God through oral means like sermons, teachings, prayers, discussions, songs, conversations, witnessing, or testimonies, rather than written texts.<sup>156</sup> Semiotic (or symbolic) theology refers to the use of artefacts, dramatic expressions, symbols, rituals, colours, dress, church furnishings, and worship styles to express one’s belief in God.<sup>157</sup> This approach is evangelically-oriented but it can be inaccessible by those without strong sociocultural and sociolinguistic expertise. The Semiora methodology has four methodological steps, each of which is briefly outlined below.<sup>158</sup>

### ***Methodological Steps***

#### **Step 1: Background Analysis**

*What is the background of the artefact under study?*

The first step is a study of the context within which the artefact (oral or semiotic data) emerged. For instance, when examining a song or cultural symbol, one must investigate the background of the composer, the circumstances prompting its creation, its intended purpose, and its societal impact. Similarly, for prayers, understanding the context of the individual offering the prayer, the occasion it was uttered, and its influence on the Christian community is crucial. Exploring the worldview of both the community and the individual involved is paramount.

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<sup>156</sup> Richard J. Gehman, *Doing African Christian Theology: An Evangelical Perspective* (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1987), 28.

<sup>157</sup> Boaheng, “Doing African Christian Theology: Some Non-negotiable Essentials,” 223.

<sup>158</sup> The methodological steps were extrapolated from Isaac Boaheng, “The Semiora Methodology: A theological approach for studying semiotic (symbolic) and oral theology,” Unpublished Article, 2024.

## **Step 2: Sociocultural Analysis**

*What does a sociocultural study of the artefact reveal?*

The second step is a sociocultural study of the artefact—that is, the lyrics of the song, the content of the prayer or the symbol. If it is an oral document, this step entails analysing key linguistic elements such as words, phrases, and sentences, and assessing how they resonate within the societal framework. Furthermore, attention is given to literary devices, rhetorical strategies, and stylistic nuances. This analysis is contextualised within the previously examined worldview. If it is a cultural symbol, the meaning of the symbol is studied in the context of the society in which it is used. This step reveals the natural theology inherent in the object of study, whilst also identifying potential parallels between contemporary and biblical worldviews for further examination.

## **Step 3: Theological Appraisal and Formulation**

*What biblical theology can be formulated from the artefact?*

This step offers a critique of the natural theology discovered in the previous step through the lens of biblical theology. Here, the biblical perspective is used as a lens to assess the contemporary worldview. The aim is to align the natural theology inherent in the artefact—whether it be a song, prayer, or symbol—with biblical principles to maintain theological soundness. Ultimately, this step must yield a theological formulation derived from the contextual analysis, natural theology inherent in the object and biblical theology which is the normative perspective on the subject. There are two ways to go about this. The socio-linguist analysis and the theological critique may be done separately, followed by the theological formulation. Another approach is to critique alongside the sociolinguistic study.<sup>159</sup>

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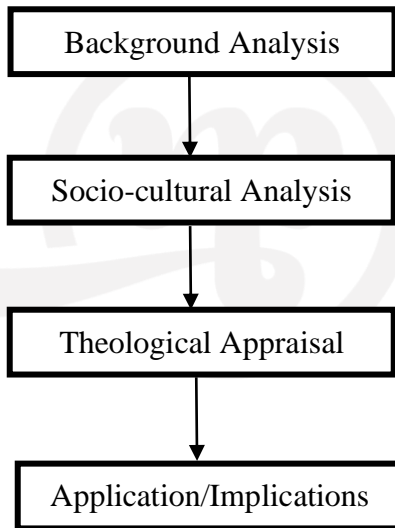
<sup>159</sup> Consult the following publications for example of these approaches. These publication do not strictly follow the Seniora methodology. However, there are some elements of it in them. These works contributed to the development of the Semiora Methodology. Isaac Boaheng, “Oral Theology in the African Church: An Examination of Divine Attributes in the Song ‘Yehowa’ by Suzy and Matt,” *Conspectus: Journal of South African Theological Seminary*, 37 (2024): 24-40; Isaac Boaheng, “Adaka-Teaa Eschatology: Daddy Lumba and

#### Step 4: Implications and Application

*What are the implications of the theological formulation?*

The final step deduces practical theological insights from the theological formulation established in the previous stage. The implications for individuals, the church, and society at large. By drawing out actionable conclusions, this step bridges the gap between theoretical analysis and real-world application by providing guidance for living out the theological principles encapsulated within the artefact.

The steps outlined above can be integrated and represented diagrammatically as shown below.



*Fig. 3.7: Semiora Methodology*

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Alexander the Great in a Theological Conversation,” *Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics and Theology (MOTBIT)* 5(4) (2023): 43-57; Isaac Boaheng and Leticia Adomako, “A Costume Christology of Ghana’s Most Beautiful Reality Show,” *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review*, 6(4) (2023): 271-283; Isaac Boaheng, “A Christological reflection on Papa Yaw Johnson’s *Fa wo Ntoma Bebo me dee Ano*,” *Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics and Theology (MOTBIT)* 4(3) (2022): 57-70.

### *Illustrative Example*

**Topic:** A Theological Reflection on the Hymn “And can it be”:  
Implications for the Namibian Context

#### **Main research question**

What implications does a theological reflection on the hymn “And can it be” have for the Namibian society?

#### **Subsidiary research questions**

- i. For what socio-political and religious context was the hymn “And can it be” composed?
- ii. What data can be gleaned from a sociolinguistic study of the hymn “And can it be”?
- iii. What theological themes can be developed from the hymn “And can it be”?
- iv. What is the socio-political and religious context of contemporary Namibia?
- v. What implications does the theology of hymn “And can it be” have for the Namibian society?

### **3.8 Ware’s Evangelical Theology Model**

#### ***Overview***

Bruce Ware’s model for evangelical theology was formulated to emphasise the authority of God’s special revelation through Scripture. In a lecture available at <https://www.biblicaltraining.org>, Ware underscores the importance of observation in the theological enterprise. He argues that just as scientific studies rely on observation, the act of theologising also requires careful observation—careful Bible study. Theology builds from reading the Bible correctly. The approach, whilst attempting to use theology to address contemporary issues, fails to give room for contextual analysis. It also does not cover the historical dimension of theory. One may modify it to include an analysis of contextual issues and historical theology (church tradition).

Ware outlines four criteria for assessing theological formulations. The first one is **quantitative criterion**. This

underscores that theological formulations should not cherry-pick scriptures that align with pre-existing theological convictions whilst ignoring contradictory texts. Rather, every effort should be made to consider all relevant data. However, since it's not feasible to examine every passage, researchers must acknowledge the potential for changes in their positions as additional texts are studied.

The second criterion is **qualitative criterion**. This criterion implies that each datum (individual piece of data) should be allowed to speak for itself, conveying its true meaning. It is essential to let every passage express what it genuinely intends to communicate without imposing preconceived interpretations.

There is also **consistency criterion**. This criterion implies that theological formulations should demonstrate internal consistency, with all propositions aligning logically and harmoniously with one another. True theology represents God's mind, and if it represents God's mind then it will not have internal inconsistencies. Any contradictions or inconsistencies within the formulation should be addressed and resolved. However, it should be noted that logical consistency is not a guarantee for authentic and credible theology.

The last measure is the **coherence criterion**. By this Ware means theological formulations should exhibit coherence by effectively integrating all relevant data into a unified and cohesive framework. The theological model should clarify the relationships among different elements and provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic at hand. It emphasises the beauty, glory and wonder of the theological truths discovered.

Ware makes the point that the reason there are many theological alternatives is that the data do not tell us how they fit together and so people are able to use the same set of data to formulate different models. He concludes that theology is a mixture

of science, art, and faith, seeking to understand God's revelation. Ware's method has four steps, outlined below.<sup>160</sup>

### ***Methodological Steps***

#### **Step 1: Compile Scriptures Relevant to the Topic**

*What are the relevant biblical texts regarding the topic under consideration?*

The first step involves identifying and compiling all scriptures that address the chosen topic. This is essential to ensure the credibility and thoroughness of the research. By accounting for all relevant biblical data, the researcher establishes a solid foundation for their analysis and conclusions. Here, it is imperative to avoid cherry-picking scriptures that support a preferred outcome whilst disregarding conflicting ones, as this could undermine the integrity of the research. Cherry-picking undermines the principles of *sola scriptura* (scripture alone). Depending on the scope of the project, it may be necessary to delimit the study to specific categories of scriptures or sections of the Bible to facilitate a more manageable analysis.

#### **Step 2: Analyse Each Scripture to Determine its Meaning**

*What does each biblical text reveal about the topic under consideration?*

The purpose of this step is to conduct an inductive and exegetical study of each selected text. The researcher should use any appropriate exegetical approach to carefully study the selected texts. The quality of the theological formulation depends largely on the quality of the exegetical process. Therefore, it is essential to develop exegetical

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<sup>160</sup> These steps were gleaned from Bruce Ware, "Method of Evangelical Theology," *Biblical Training*. (Audio lecture available at: <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/learn/institute/th503-systematic-theology-i/th503-02-method-of-evangelical-theology>; accessed 19-05-2024); Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 47-49.

skills, including proficiency in Hebrew and Greek for sound theological inquiry.

### **Step 3: Deduce Timeless Principles from Groups of Scriptures**

*What major theological themes can be gleaned from the exegetical analysis?*

The next step involves distilling the abundance of data into a concise set of timeless truths or propositions. The aim here is to identify major themes by categorising and summarising the individual observations into generalisations. This deductive process involves deduction; that is, deriving necessary generalisations from the inductively observed (or established) facts, allowing for the synthesis of key principles taught by groups of scriptures. It moves from general to specific, applying universal truths to particular situations.

### **Step 4: Theory/Theological Construction**

*What theory/theology might we formulate based on the relevant data observed in the steps above?*

The final step involves constructing a comprehensive theory or model that cohesively integrates all the data. The construction of the theology or theory from the biblical data involves retroduction which John Warwick Montgomery defines as “the creative ordering of relevant data into a conceptual fabric that exposes the relationships among those data in a way that enhances their native meanings.”<sup>161</sup> Retroduction involves a backward reasoning process from observed data to underlying principles or causes. In this method, the researcher progresses from specific to general, aiming to elucidate particular phenomena or observations. This approach entails creatively organising the pertinent data into a conceptual framework that unveils their relationships. Ultimately, the objective is to construct a theological model that not only encompasses all the data but also

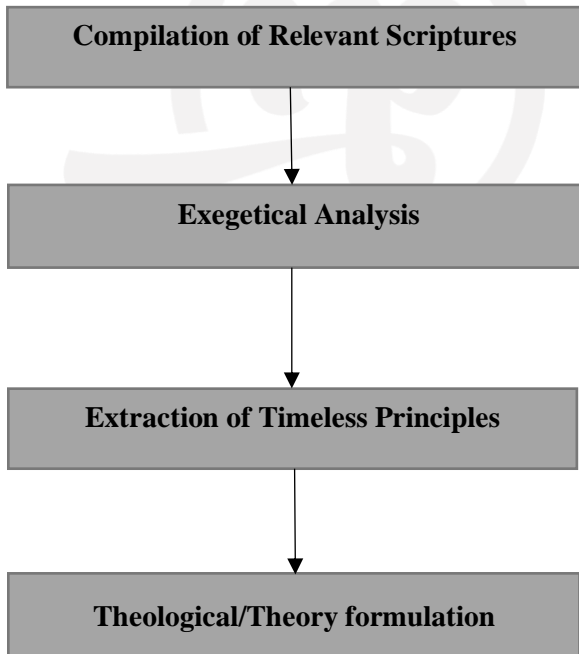
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<sup>161</sup> Warwick as cited in Ware, “Method of Evangelical Theology.”

illuminates their interconnectedness, thereby enriching their intrinsic significance.

Constructing such a model is an iterative process, beginning with formulating a tentative theory based on the data, followed by a critical evaluation of its coherence, consistency, and ability to account for all evidence. Discrepancies prompt revisiting and refining the model until it fully represents the data. This iterative approach acknowledges that data alone do not dictate interpretation. The task of the systematic theologian task is to objectively analyse data and develop a model that synthesises all evidence, revealing their cohesion.

The steps outlined above can be integrated and represented diagrammatically as shown below.



*Fig. 3.8: Ware's Evangelical Theology Model*

### ***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** A Systematic Theological Examination of the Doctrine of the Trinity

#### **Main research question**

How do the relevant biblical texts contribute to our understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity?

#### **Subsidiary research questions**

- i. What are the relevant biblical texts regarding the doctrine of the Trinity?
- ii. What theological insights can be gleaned from the exegetical analysis of each biblical text on the doctrine of the Trinity?
- iii. What major theological themes emerge from the exegetical analysis of the relevant scriptures?
- iv. What theological model or theory can be formulated based on the relevant biblical data?

### **3.9 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I elucidated diverse methodologies formulated for systematic theology research. Each of these models offers unique insights and approaches to theological inquiry. For example, from Architectonic Theology's adaptability to different cultural contexts to the practicality and accessibility of the Gardener-Theologian Approach, researchers are equipped with a spectrum of tools to navigate the complexities of theological investigation. In the next chapter, attention will shift to methodologies within practical theology, further expanding the discourse on theological research methodologies and their implications for addressing real-world issues and contexts.

### **3.10 Review Exercise**

- i. How do researchers in systematic theology select and apply methodologies to engage with foundational theological doctrines and concepts?

- ii. What role do historical approaches play in systematic theology methodologies, and how do researchers navigate the complexities of historical context and tradition?
- iii. What is the role of tradition in systematic theology according to the Gardener-Theologian approach?
- iv. How do systematic theologians balance the tension between maintaining theological fidelity to tradition and adapting methodologies to address contemporary theological questions and challenges?
- v. Can systematic theology methodologies effectively incorporate insights from diverse theological traditions and cultural contexts? How do researchers ensure inclusivity and sensitivity in their approach?
- vi. In what ways do qualitative and quantitative research methods intersect within systematic theology methodologies, and how do researchers leverage these methods to deepen theological understanding?
- vii. How do theological hermeneutics and biblical exegesis inform systematic theological formulations?
- viii. What role does interdisciplinary engagement play in systematic theology research methodologies, and how do researchers draw upon insights from fields such as philosophy, sociology, and psychology?

### **3.11 Suggested Research Topics**

1. Exploring African Christian Perspectives on Stewardship and Ecotheology
2. Healing and Deliverance Ministries in African Christianity: A Systematic Theological Critique
3. The Image of God and Unity of the Human Race: A Systematic Theological Investigation
4. Theological reflections on the Ordination of females from an African perspective

5. *Ubuntu* and Christian Ethics: Integrating African Communal Values into Moral Theology
6. Liberation Theology in Africa: Examining Theological Responses to Socio-Political Oppression
7. Postmodernism, Secularisation, and African Christianity: Assessing Challenges and Opportunities
8. *Christus Victor* and the Atonement: Revisiting African Theological Understandings
9. Witchcraft and Spiritual Warfare: Theological Responses to Supernatural Beliefs in Zambia
10. Pneumatology of Power and African Cosmology: A Theological Reflection
11. Disability Theology in African Christianity: Exploring Theological Perspectives on Disability and Inclusion
12. *Ubuntu* Theology: Rediscovering African Communal Identity in Christian Theology
13. The Prosperity Gospel in Africa: Theological Critiques and Responses to Materialistic Theologies
14. African Traditional Medicine and Healing: Integrating Indigenous Healing Practices with Christian Theology
15. Interfaith Dialogue in Africa: Theological Approaches to Religious Pluralism and Coexistence
16. Karl Barth's Theology of the Atonement: An African Perspective
17. Land Rights and Theology: Examining Theological Perspectives on Land Ownership and Justice in Africa with reference to 1 Kings 21
18. Poverty and Third World Christianity: Theological Reflections on Social Justice in Africa with Particular Reference to the Book of Amos
19. LGBTQ+ Rights and African Christianity: Theological Reflections on Sexuality and Inclusivity in African Churches
20. John Calvin in a Theological Conversation with Martin Luther on Christ's presence in the Eucharist

## CHAPTER FOUR PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

Practical theology is a theological sub-discipline that focuses on addressing real-life issues and inquiries pertinent to a faith community.<sup>162</sup> It may be defined as “the empirically oriented theological theory of the mediation of the Christian faith in the praxis of modern society.”<sup>163</sup> In other words, practical theology seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice by exploring how theological beliefs and traditions can inform and enrich everyday life, ministry, and social engagement. In essence, practical theology is the theory of praxis, where praxis means “action, activity,” not practice.<sup>164</sup>

This theological sub-discipline explores how the faith community maintains and safeguards its identity.<sup>165</sup> Within this field, the term “pastoral theology” pertains to the church’s practice primarily focused on the care of souls and the theology of ministry.<sup>166</sup> Practical theology is an interdisciplinary field that draws from scripture, tradition, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and education. It includes a wide range of topics, including pastoral care, homiletics, worship, ethics, spirituality, church leadership, and social justice. As we shall see, models for research in practical theology mostly cover three dimensions: “interpretation of human action in the light of the Christian tradition (the hermeneutical perspective), the analysis of human action with regard to its factuality and potentiality (the empirical perspective) and the development of action models and

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<sup>162</sup> Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 6.

<sup>163</sup> Heitink, *Practical theology*, 6.

<sup>164</sup> Arthur Roger Tucker, *An Investigation of the Development of the Cell Church Concept in the Western Cape* (PhD Thesis: University of Pretoria, 2003), 2.

<sup>165</sup> David J. Atkinson and David F. Field (eds.), *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics & Pastoral Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academics, 1995), 46.

<sup>166</sup> Atkinson and Field (eds.), *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics & Pastoral Theology*, 46.

action strategies for the various domains of action (the strategic perspective.”<sup>167</sup>

Some key methodologies for doing practical theology research are considered in this chapter.

## 4.1 Osmer’s Methodology

### *Overview*

The methodology that has come to be known as Osmer’s methodology was developed by Richard R. Osmer (an American theologian) with congregational needs in mind. Osmer’s methodology offers a comprehensive and systematic approach to practical theological inquiry and guides practitioners to critically about the complexities of human life and action in diverse contexts. The model focuses on four key questions: What is going on in a given context? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on? And, How might we respond? These questions respectively correspond to four essential tasks: the descriptive-empirical task, the interpretive task, the normative task, and the pragmatic task.

Osmer’s model is firmly rooted in evangelical theology, with its biblical and theological focus, and its emphasis on discerning God’s will. Particularly in an African context, it serves as a valuable tool for guiding African Church leaders and congregations through the complexities of local challenges. However, this approach demands extensive empirical research and theological reflection which can make it expensive to use. Its failure to cater for the retrospective dimension of the research problem is also a setback. Each of these tasks is outlined briefly below.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Heitink cited in Noel Woodbridge, “The EDNA Model of Doing Research in Practical Theology: A Biblical Approach,” *Conspectus: Journal of South African Theological Seminary* 17, no. 1 (2014): 89-121, 95.

<sup>168</sup> I have gleaned the methodological steps from Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008).

## ***Methodological Steps***

### **Step 1: Descriptive Phase (Present Situation)**

*What is going on?*

This step entails understanding the current situation of individuals, families, and congregations. It is about describing what is happening, who is involved, and what is at stake. This task helps you understand the complexity of the situation and identify patterns, trends, and themes. The researcher needs to choose between qualitative, quantitative, or a mixed-methods approach. Osmer outlines six distinct types of research methodologies that may be employed: (a) narrative research, which involves recounting individual stories; (b) case study research, focusing on an in-depth examination of a small number of cases; (c) ethnographic research, aiming to describe the characteristics of a cultural or social group; (d) grounded theory research, which aims to develop theories within the context of a specific phenomenon; (e) phenomenological research, which seeks to uncover the essence of activities or experiences for a particular group of individuals; and (f) advocacy research, aimed at fostering social change, often with an explicit political agenda. The researcher makes a choice based on the aim of the research, available resources, and expertise, among others.

### **Step 2: Interpretive Phase (Questioning the Present Situation)**

*Why is this going on?*

The interpretive phase involves analysing the data and information gathered during the descriptive phase. The central question shifts to understanding the essence of the observed phenomenon. In this stage, the researcher needs to discern the inherent issues within the observed episodes, situations, and contexts, drawing upon existing theories to aid in comprehension. It is about interpreting the underlying reasons, causes, and motivations behind what is happening. This task helps the researcher to understand the perspectives, values, and beliefs of the people involved and how they

shape the situation. Osmer refers to this task as (requiring) *sage wisdom*.

### **Step 3: Normative Phase (Preferred Scenario)**

*What ought to be going on?*

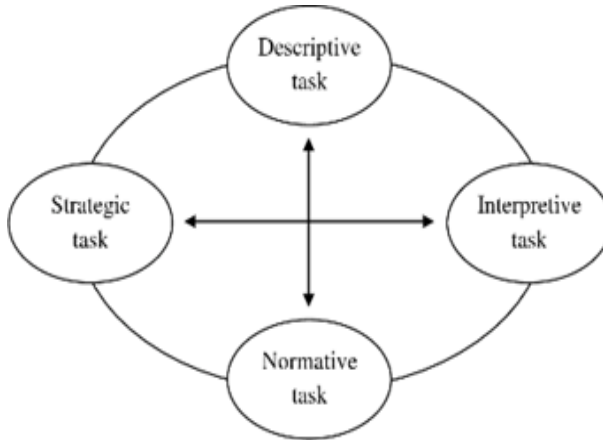
This task is about determining what should be happening, what is desirable, and what is faithful to the Christian tradition. The researcher needs to select and study relevant texts to discern God's will as revealed in and interpreted from Judeo-Christian scriptures regarding the appropriate actions to be taken under the prevailing circumstances. Osmer refers to this task as *prophetic discernment*. Prophetic discernment employs three approaches to uncover God's guidance for the present moment: theological interpretation, ethical reflection, and good practice.

### **Step 4: Pragmatic Phase (Practical Suggestions)**

*How might we respond?*

This phase aims to formulate strategies for addressing the situation based on insights gained from the preceding phases. Here, the researcher needs to suggest pragmatic ways by which the situation can improve. It is about determining what actions, decisions, and policies would best align with Christian values and principles. This task helps you think creatively about how to lead and shape the context in a way that is faithful to the Christian tradition and promotes the common good.

The steps outlined above can be integrated and represented diagrammatically as shown below.



*Fig. 4.1: Osmer's Methodology*

### ***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** Assessing the Gospel on the Socio-Economic Development of the Zion Church in South Africa

### **Main research question**

How does the gospel affect the socio-economic development of the Zion Church in South Africa?

### **Subsidiary research questions**

- i. What is the current situation regarding the influence of the gospel on the socio-economic development of the Zion Church in South Africa?
- ii. Why are things the way they are regarding the influence of the gospel on the socio-economic development of the Zion Church in South Africa?
- iii. What does the bible teach about how the gospel should impact the receivers' socio-economic development?
- iv. What pragmatic steps can be taken to let the gospel impact the Zion Church in South Africa the way it should be?

## 4.2 Browning's Methodology

### *Overview*

Don S. Browning's methodology seeks to bridge theory and practice within the realm of practical theology, particularly in the context of the church and society, through the application of practical reason. This approach emphasises the interconnectedness of theory and practice, highlighting the significance of integrating theoretical insights with practical applications. The method also seeks to establish a symbiotic relationship between theology and the social sciences, allowing them to inform and complement each other.<sup>169</sup> Browning's method serves as a critical and reflective approach to pastoral care, counselling, preaching, liturgy, and social action ministries, among others.

This methodology aligns with evangelical theology, especially in constructing theology from Scripture. Whilst suitable for African contexts, sensitivity to local nuances may be needed. Researchers should address potential limitations in empirical research skills before collecting and analysing data.

Browning's approach is a four-dimensional research model comprising descriptive theology, historical theology, systematic theology and strategic practical theology. These tasks translate into research questions as follows: (1) What is the current situation? (2) What does Christianity (Scripture and Theology) say? (3) How might we construct a biblical contextual model for the current situation? And (4) How might we strategically implement a practical theology? Each of the methodological steps is outlined briefly below.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Mark Hestenes, "The early Browning: Pastoral care in a pluralistic age and the method of practical moral inquiry," *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 68(2), Art. #1211, (2012): 1-7, 1. (<http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v68i2.1211>)

<sup>170</sup> I have gleaned this methodology from Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

## ***Methodological Steps***

### **Step 1: Descriptive Theology**

*What is the current situation?*

The first step is a description of contemporary theory-laden practices that give rise to practical questions that generate all theological reflection. Here, the researcher provides a comprehensive depiction of the situation under study. The use of empirical research tools may be more appropriate, but not a requirement.

### **Step 2: Historical Theology**

*What does Christianity (Scripture and Theology) say?*

The objective of this step is to discern the implications of our actions when we honestly confront “normative texts” that are deeply entrenched within our historical context. According to Browning, these normative texts include Scripture and other significant Christian classics. The expression “historical theology” comprises church history, history of doctrine, and biblical theology. Therefore, this step gathers data from biblical exegesis (biblical theology), church history and history of doctrine to address questions raised by descriptive theology (that is, questions raised by our praxis and experience). The researcher may do this by examining the subject matter through both historical and biblical lenses.

### **Step 3: Systematic Theology**

*How might we construct a biblical contextual model for the current situation?*

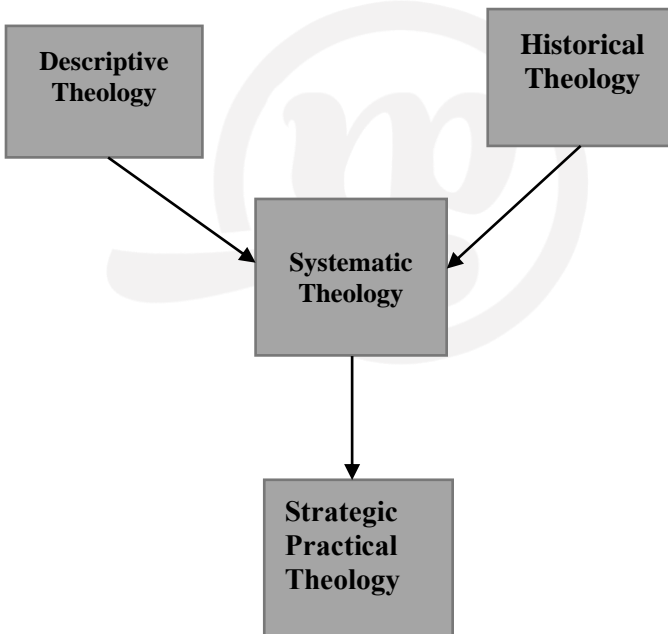
This step synthesises the horizons of contemporary praxis and experiences and that of the normative Christian texts. Essentially, it provides a novel interpretation of the Christian faith tailored to the modern context by correlating descriptive theology and historical theology. This step also offers a defence for the validity and appropriateness of the contextual model of what God’s word teaches for your contemporary situation. This step, therefore, has both theological and apologetic dimensions.

#### **Step 4: Strategic Practical Theology**

*How might we strategically implement a practical theology?*

The final step is essentially a movement from a theological formulation to a practical application. This step calls for a reflection on the situation in which one must act, what our praxis should be in that situation, how the chosen praxis may be defended and what means, strategies and rhetoric should be used under the given circumstance. The consideration of these questions should result in the formulation of a theory of action.

The steps outlined above can be integrated and represented diagrammatically as shown below.



*Fig. 4.2: Browning's Methodology*

### ***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** A Practical Theology for Widow's Care for the United Methodist Church in Liberia.

### **Main research question**

What practical theological strategies can be formulated for the United Methodist Church in Liberia with respect to widow's care?

### **Subsidiary research questions**

- i. How are widows being currently cared for in the United Methodist Church in Liberia?
- ii. What does the Bible teach about caring for widows?
- iii. What does church history teach us about caring for widows?
- iv. How might we construct a biblical contextual model for caring for widows in the United Methodist Church in Liberia?
- v. How might we strategically implement the practical theology formulated?

## **4.3 Swinton and Mowat's Methodology**

### ***Overview***

Swinton and Mowat's Methodology, designed for practical theology and qualitative research, was adapted by John Swinton and Harriet Mowat in their *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. The approach consists of an analysis of the situation, an analysis of the cultural/contextual factors, an examination of scripture and a formulation of revised practices. It requires researchers to maintain reflexivity and interact with diverse sources of knowledge to attain a more profound comprehension of the situation. One benefit of this methodology is its engagement with the disparity between theological and qualitative research ontological and epistemological assumptions. However, a limitation lies in its reliance on examples from a Western perspective. These methodological steps are further explained below.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> I have gleaned this methodology from John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (London: SCM Press, 2016).

## ***Methodological Steps***

### **Step 1: The Present Situation**

*What is the present state of affairs?*

The first step requires the researcher to enter into the prevailing situation to gain a deep understanding of the situation. The researcher examines the current situation by reviewing existing literature on the subject matter. This step should also explore the various factors that have contributed to the current situation and the parties involved. Both empirical and non-empirical data-gathering techniques may be used, though the former is preferred.

### **Step 2: Cultural/Contextual Analysis**

*What cultural/contextual factors are at play?*

The next step is an examination of cultural/contextual dynamics, including the social, religious, economic and historical context of the locality under study. Information for this step may be obtained through interviews, focus groups, and/or participant observation.

### **Step 3: Theological Reflection**

*What insights do Scripture and theology offer?*

The third step encompasses theological reflection, where the researcher contemplates the findings from steps 1 and 2 in light of biblical texts and theological traditions. The researcher prayerfully considers how theological and biblical perspectives can inform the situation under study. Embracing diverse theological viewpoints and staying receptive to perspectives that challenge preconceptions is imperative.

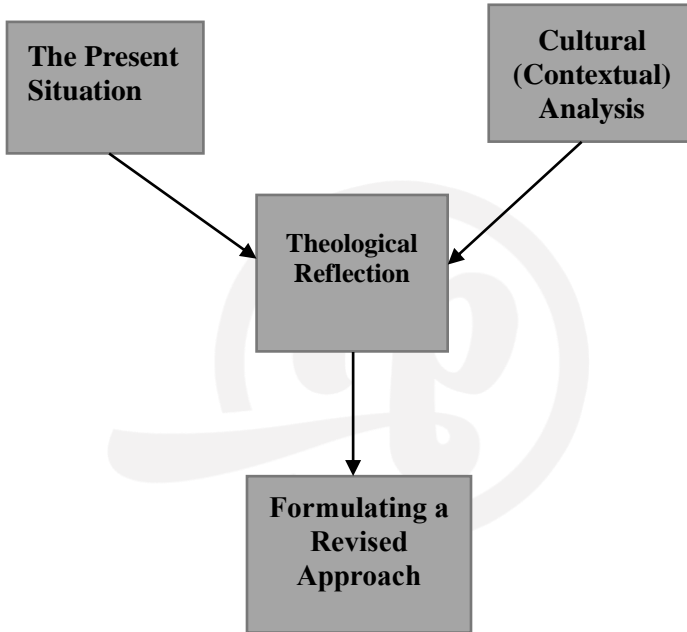
### **Step 4: Formulating a Revised Approach**

*How can we refine our praxis?*

The final stage involves crafting a revised approach based on the preceding steps. Here, the researcher revisits the initial praxis and proposes an updated form informed by insights gleaned in the previous phases/steps. Here, the researcher must consider the

practical implications of their findings and their applicability to the situation at hand. To be successful, the research is also expected to remain open to feedback from stakeholders and maintain reflective practice throughout the process.

The steps outlined above can be integrated and represented diagrammatically as shown below.



*Fig. 4.3: Swinton and Mowat's Methodology*

### ***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** Towards Practical-Theological Congregational Leadership Development Policy for the Presbyterian Church of Sudan

### **Main research question**

How can congregational leadership development initiatives effectively enhance the leadership capacity within the Presbyterian Church of Sudan?

## Subsidiary research questions

- i. What are the current leadership development practices within congregations of the Presbyterian Church of Sudan?
- ii. What is the culture and/or context of selected congregations of the Presbyterian Church of Sudan?
- iii. What do Scripture and theology teach about congregational leadership development?
- iv. How might we formulate a revised policy on congregational leadership development to enhance the leadership capacity within the Presbyterian Church of Sudan?

## 4.4 *Lekgotla* Research Methodology

### *Overview*

The *Lekgotla* research methodology was designed by South African scholar, Abraham Modisa Mkhondo Mzondi, for practical theology. Mzondi employed a blend of the theory of social constructivism and *Legolta* principles rooted in the African *Ubuntu* philosophy to arrive at his model.<sup>172</sup> Social constructivism is a theoretical perspective that emphasises the role of social interaction and cultural context in shaping individual understanding and knowledge construction.<sup>173</sup> According to social constructivism, knowledge is not discovered or transmitted passively from an external reality, but rather actively constructed by individuals through their interactions with others and their environment. This perspective highlights the importance of social processes, language, culture, and historical context in shaping human cognition and perception.

*Lekgotla*, an ancient oral African Indigenous Knowledge System, remains prevalent in diverse communities across Southern

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<sup>172</sup> Abraham Modisa Mkhondo Mzondi, "Lekgotla and Magadi: Ubuntu oriented Practical Theology Research Methods," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 103(1) (2022): 1–17, 1. (<https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.10328>).

<sup>173</sup> R. J. Amineh and H. D. Asl, "Review of Constructivism and Social Constructivism," *Journal of Social Sciences, Literature and Languages*, 1(1) (2015): 9-16, 13.

Africa.<sup>174</sup> It is a traditional gathering or meeting in African cultures, particularly in Southern Africa, where community members come together to discuss and address various issues affecting the community. The ontological, epistemological, and practical dimensions of *Lekgotla*, which may vary from society to society, are rooted in the community's involvement in addressing socio-economic and political challenges.<sup>175</sup> *Lekgotla* is characterised by its participatory nature, with all members having the opportunity to voice their opinions and contribute to the discussions. It reflects the *Ubuntu* values of community solidarity, consensus-building, and collective responsibility prevalent in many African societies.

The *Lekgotla* approach follows a four-step process: praxis, theory, theory-praxis, and praxis-theory. It begins with Describing the Situation, transitions to Participation, then progresses to Consensus, and finally culminates in Presentation. Throughout this process, there is an interrelated movement between Participation and Consensus, emphasising reflection on and adherence to oral traditions, norms, and praxis passed down through generations. It follows the cycle of Action-Reflection-Action. This approach is rooted in an African practice and so, suits the African context very well. However, it requires consensus build which may be difficult to arrive at when dealing with sensitive and controversial issues. The methodological steps are outlined below.<sup>176</sup>

### ***Methodological Steps***

#### **Step 1: Describe the Situation (Praxis)**

*What is happening?*

The first step involves elucidating the situation at hand. It also entails identifying and articulating the context, challenges, and implications

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<sup>174</sup> Mzondi, "Lekgotla and Magadi: Ubuntu oriented Practical Theology Research Methods," 3.

<sup>175</sup> Mzondi, "Lekgotla and Magadi: Ubuntu oriented Practical Theology Research Methods," 4.

<sup>176</sup> I have extrapolated this methodology from Mzondi, "Lekgotla and Magadi: Ubuntu oriented Practical Theology Research Methods," 1–17.

of the matter at hand. Therefore, one is not only required to investigate what is happening but also to explore the context (social, political, religious dimensions) in which the situation can be found as this is required for the subsequent phases of the research. The researcher may employ such methods as interviews, surveys, and participant observation to gain first-hand insights into the current scenario. The use of secondary data such as published articles and books can also be used.

### **Step 2: Ensure Participation (Theory)**

*How does participation enhance our understanding of the prevailing situation?*

The Participation step aims to foster inclusivity and democratic decision-making by allowing everyone to attend and have a voice in the resolution process. It allows the researcher to deepen their understanding of the situation based on information gathered from diverse perspectives. It aims to ensure maximum involvement and contribution from all relevant stakeholders. The researcher can achieve this by employing purposeful sampling, random sampling, or snowballing techniques to select a representative sample of participants for the study. Additionally, researchers may engage as observers, taking notes or recording proceedings with the consent of the participants. Ultimately, this step plays a pivotal role in fostering inclusivity and gathering varied viewpoints, crucial for developing a comprehensive understanding of the issue and devising a meaningful resolution.

### **Step 3: Facilitate Consensus (Theory-Praxis)**

*What is the recommended approach to resolve the situation?*

The Consensus step focuses on reaching a collective agreement among the participants regarding the resolution of the matter or concern. It emphasises the importance of achieving unity and harmony within the community through mutual understanding and agreement. This necessitates active involvement from all parties

engaged in the process. The consensus-building process towards a solution to the problem can be enhanced by drawing from African Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and existing literature. Essentially, the objective of this phase is to cultivate a collaborative and inclusive environment wherein the input of all individuals is esteemed and considered, culminating in a consensus-driven resolution that addresses the concerns of all stakeholders involved.

#### **Step 4: Make a Presentation (Praxis-Theory)**

*In what ways is the recommended approach theologically and biblically sound?*

Following the attainment of consensus, the Presentation step concludes the *Lekgotla* process. It involves invoking God's blessing on the outcome, signifying the finality of the decision-making process. This requires the researcher to scrutinise the proposed solution through a biblical lens and engage in rigorous theological reflections to deepen the understanding of the issue. Selected biblical texts are studied using appropriate exegetical tools and resulting biblical data is used to critique the consensus reached earlier. Ultimately, the objective of this step is to ensure that the research process is guided by divine wisdom and that the proposed solution is firmly rooted in sound biblical principles and enriched by critical theological reflections. In the end, the resulting praxis theory is expected not only to be biblically grounded by also sensitive and relevant to the context involved.

The steps outlined above can be integrated and represented diagrammatically as shown below.<sup>177</sup>

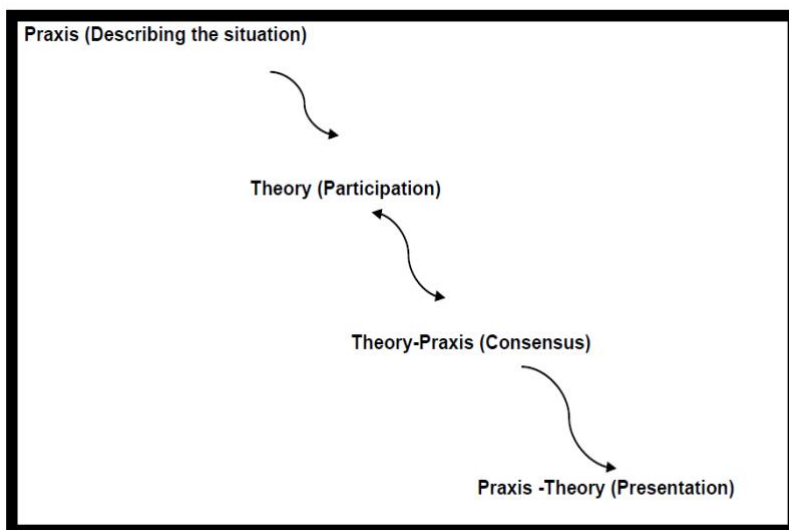


Fig. 4.4: *Lekgotla Research Methodology*

### ***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** A Study of the Mass Exodus of Youth from the Catholic Church to Pentecostal churches in Tanzania

### **Main research question**

How may we respond to the mass exodus of the youth from the Catholic Church to Pentecostal churches in Tanzania?

### **Subsidiary research questions**

- i. What is the current situation of the movement of the youth from the Catholic Church to Pentecostal churches in Tanzania?
- ii. What understanding of the situation do we gain through communal (participatory) analysis of the situation?

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<sup>177</sup> This diagram was taken from Mzondi, “Lekgotla and Magadi: Ubuntu oriented Practical Theology Research Methods,” 8.

- iii. What solution does the participatory decision-making process yield for the mass exodus of youth from the Catholic Church to Pentecostal churches in Tanzania?
- iv. How theologically and biblically sound is the recommended solution for the mass exodus of youth from the Catholic Church to Pentecostal churches in Tanzania?

## 4.5 The Ethical Triadic Approach

### *Overview*

The Ethical Triadic Approach was formulated primarily for research in Christian ethics in the African context. It may, however, be adopted for theological research in any given context. Before considering the various dimensions of the methodology, I must outline what African Christian ethics entails. Christian ethics may be considered as the system of moral principles, values, and guidelines derived from Christian Scriptures. Christian ethics becomes African when done in conversation with the African ethical framework.

African Christian ethics has at least three conversation partners. Firstly, like Christian ethics for any given context, African Christian ethics must have a solid biblical and theological foundation provided by the biblical indicative and imperative structure.<sup>178</sup> The ethicist is expected to weave biblical and theological principles intricately into the fabric of the African moral compass and ethical framework. In doing this, the foundational premise lies in the Trinitarian God's decisive act through Christ to liberate humanity from the grip of sin and its pervasive influence.<sup>179</sup> The essence and attributes of God must hold central importance in shaping ethical conduct, serving as the quintessential model and benchmark for moral living.

Secondly, African Christian ethics must have a global dimension to effectively address the diverse ethical challenges facing

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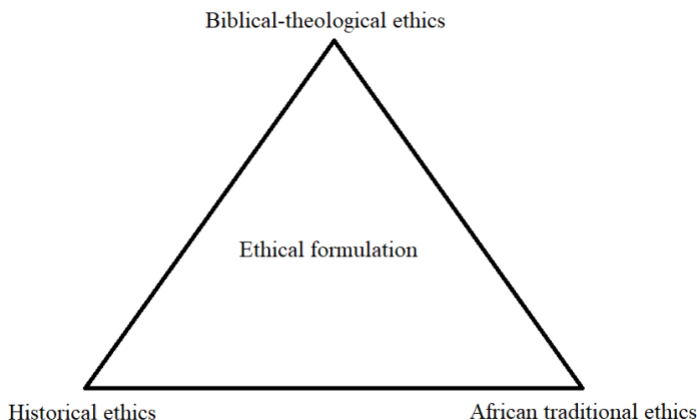
<sup>178</sup> James Nkansah-Obrempong, *Foundations for African Theological Ethics* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2013), 118.

<sup>179</sup> Nkansah-Obrempong, *Foundations for African Theological Ethics*, 118.

African societies within the broader context of the global Christian community. At the global level, African Christian ethics engages with universal moral principles and ethical frameworks that transcend cultural and geographical boundaries. It participates in global dialogues on ethical issues such as human rights, social justice, environmental stewardship, and peacebuilding, contributing African perspectives to the global discourse and drawing insights from the collective wisdom of the global Christian community. In an attempt to participate at the global level, African ethicists must dialogue with both present and past ethicists from other parts of the world. This underscores the need to have a historical dimension of the ethical discourse.

Thirdly, African Christian ethics also embraces its local dimensions, recognising the unique cultural, social, and historical contexts of African communities. This entails the use of traditional ethical traditions as a means of giving contextual expression to the ethics formulated for the African context. African ethics cannot be formulated without considering the traditional African worldview.

Given the foregoing, a suitable methodological model for ethical formulation for the African context needs to facilitate interactions among the three parties—the biblical-theological dimension, global historical ethical tradition, and African ethical tradition. These three cardinal poles are interrelated with the biblical-theological dimension possessing the highest authority. They are represented diagrammatically as shown below.



*Fig. 4.5: The Ethical Triad*

In the following section, I outline each methodological step.<sup>180</sup>

### ***Methodological Steps***

#### **Step 1: Biblical-Theological Ethical Tradition (Biblical Ethics)**

*What does the study of relevant biblical texts reveal about the ethical issue under consideration?*

The first task is to conduct a thorough examination of biblical passages that address the ethical issue under investigation. The researcher is expected to identify such moral concepts as love, justice, compassion, hospitality, interdependence, sharing, and human dignity as they relate to the ethical question. The premise is that God is the model and power for the moral life of the Christian. Therefore, the Christian cannot determine what is ethical or not without finding out what God has to say.

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<sup>180</sup> This methodology was designed by Isaac Boaheng.

## **Step 2: Historical Ethical Tradition (Historical Ethics)**

*What insights can be gleaned from the historical teachings and practices of the Christian tradition?*

The second step examines the historical ethical perspective on the topic by exploring the writings of theologians, church leaders, and historical documents to understand how the Christian tradition has addressed similar ethical dilemmas. This step also requires an exploration of contemporary Christian practices and ethical frameworks within various denominations and theological traditions. Consider how different Christian communities interpret and apply ethical principles in their contexts. In order to facilitate a conversation with the global Christian community, it is important to examine the views of scholars who lived in different geographical contexts. This step helps the researcher to connect with global ethical tradition—traditions from Europe, Asia, North America and other parts of the world.

## **Step 3: African Tradition and Experience (African Ethics)**

*What do the African worldview and experience have to say about the issue under consideration?*

The third step examines the African worldview about the use under consideration; including religious, ethical, philosophical, and cultural traditions.<sup>181</sup> The researcher also needs to explore the community's collective experience with God and how this experience may inform their ethical decisions. This means examining how Christianity has impacted the ethical tradition of the community under study.

## **Step 4: Ethical Formulation**

*How might we formulate African Christian ethical principles to address the issue?*

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<sup>181</sup> This step may come first even though the biblical-theological data is to have the highest authority.

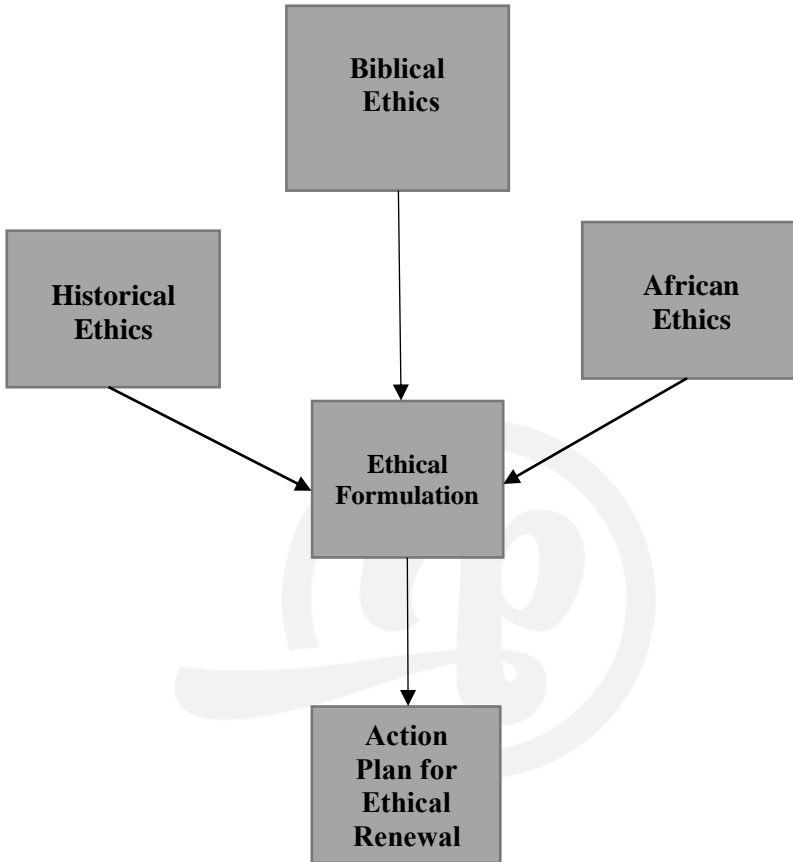
In the fourth step, the researcher synthesises insights from the previous steps into a coherent ethical framework that is relevant to the African context. This involves integrating biblical-theological principles, historical ethical perspectives, and African traditions and experiences to develop ethical guidelines and principles that address the specific ethical issue under investigation.

### **Step 5: Action Plan for Ethical Renewal**

*What are the implications of the ethical formulation?*

The final step involves deducing the ethical and practical implications of the formulation for the receptor society. This includes developing a detailed plan for ethical renewal that outlines how the newly developed ethical principles can be applied in real-world situations. The researcher must assess the potential impact on the community and propose actionable steps for implementation. This ensures that the ethical framework not only addresses theoretical concerns but also provides concrete guidance to positively influence and renew the community's ethical practices. By focusing on practical application, the plan for ethical renewal aims to foster a transformative impact on the community, aligning everyday practices with the developed ethical principles.

The steps outlined above can be integrated and represented diagrammatically as shown below.



*Fig. 4.6: Ethical Triadic Methodology*

***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** An African Christian Ethical Response to Transgenderism

**Main research question**

How might Africans respond to the issue of transgenderism from a Christian ethical perspective?

### **Subsidiary research questions**

- i. What biblical-theological moral principles does a study of relevant biblical texts reveal about gender identity and transgender experiences?
- ii. How have historical and contemporary Christian teachings and practices shaped attitudes towards transgenderism?
- iii. What insights can be gained from engaging with transgender individuals, their families, and communities to understand their lived experiences and ethical perspectives within an African context?
- iv. How might we formulate ethical principles to respond to the issue of transgenderism from an African perspective?
- v. What are the implications of the above ethical formulation?

### **4.6 Zerfass' Methodology**

#### ***Overview***

The Zerfass' methodology was introduced by Rolf Zerfass in 1974 as a fundamental framework for practical theological research. It emerged as a response to the growing complexity of societal issues confronting religious organisations. The effectiveness of this model lies in its capacity to connect the enduring theological principles of a faith community with the dynamic changes of society, ensuring a balanced response to contemporary issues. The Zerfass' model inter-relates theological tradition, praxis, situation analysis, practical theological theory and redefined praxis.

The methodology demonstrates compatibility with evangelical theology, owing to its conservative philosophical foundation and capacity to accommodate various doctrinal and ecclesiological assumptions. Its major limitation lies in its potential to overshadow spiritual aspects of theological inquiry with its emphasis on empirical data. Also, its action-oriented nature may prioritise empirical growth, neglecting God's alternative agendas and spiritual development.

The diagram below represents this model.<sup>182</sup>

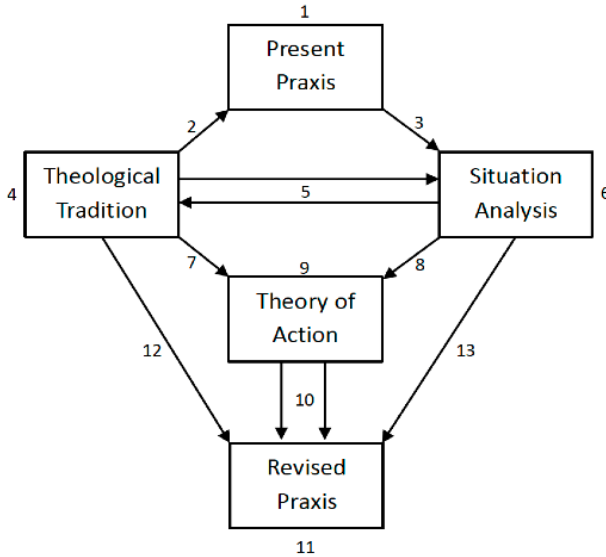


Fig. 4.7: Zerfass' Methodology

The following points need to be noted about the diagram above. The situation as found presently as a concrete Christian and ecclesiological praxis is represented as 1.<sup>183</sup> Arrow 2 represents the influence that the theological tradition of the faith community (4) has on the current praxis (1). Arrow 3 is the research procedure required to arrive at an empirical situation analysis (6) whilst arrow 5 shows the influence that the theological tradition (4) has on the current situation (1) and vice-versa. Arrows 7 & 8 are the influences that the theological tradition (4) and the current situation (1) have on the construction of a new practical theological theory (9). Arrow 10 is the influence that 9 has on the new praxis (11). Finally, arrows 12 &

<sup>182</sup> Taken from Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 73.

<sup>183</sup> Rolf Zerfass, "Practical Theology as a Science of Action" In: *Practical Theology Today* edited by Ferdinand H. Klosterman and Rolf Zerfass. Translated by Roger A. Tucker, and Schwär Walter pp. 164–177 (München: Kaiser Grünewald, 1974), 167.

13 are the testing required of the new praxis against both the theological tradition (4) and the current situation (1) and the influence that the new praxis may have on both.

The central aspect of the model revolves around a triangular structure comprising theological tradition, situational analysis, and operational influence.<sup>184</sup> This trio is set in motion by the development of a practical theological theory, serving as a self-regulating, heuristic “control” mechanism akin to a servomechanism.<sup>185</sup> Consequently, praxis, the interpretation of theological tradition, and situational analysis continuously evolve to meet the demands of the current circumstances through their interconnectedness.<sup>186</sup>

Zerfass’ model interrelates theological tradition, praxis, situation analysis, practical theological theory, and redefined praxis. The methodological steps are outlined below.<sup>187</sup>

### ***Methodological Steps***

#### **Step 1: Theological Tradition**

*What are the fundamental beliefs of the faith community?*

The first step involves presenting the fundamental beliefs of the faith community and addressing the issue at hand. It encompasses elements of missional, historical, and systematic theology, as well as ethical principles, core values, and liturgical givens.

#### **Step 2: Situation Analysis**

*What contextual situation informs the current scenario?*

This step integrates descriptive and interpretive methods to construct the socio-cultural, political, and economic landscape that is currently influencing the praxis of the faith community. The result of this step

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<sup>184</sup> Tucker, *An Investigation of the Development of the Cell Church Concept in The Western Cape*, 33.

<sup>185</sup> Tucker, *An Investigation of the Development of the Cell Church Concept in The Western Cape*, 33.

<sup>186</sup> Tucker, *An Investigation of the Development of the Cell Church Concept in The Western Cape*, 33.

<sup>187</sup> Taken from Smith, *Integrated Theology*, 74-75.

helps the researcher to appreciate emerging challenges and opportunities, as well as their potential impact on the issues identified in Step 1.

### **Step 3: Critical Correlation**

*What is the relationship between Steps 1 and 2?*

This phase, the most crucial aspect of this methodology, entails critically correlating the research findings with the normative traditions of the faith community. It involves engaging in interpretive dialogue to explore significant connections. It also involves a thorough assessment of the coherence between theological tradition and empirical observations within the context. The researcher participates in reflective conversations to discern how theological perspectives can guide responses to real-world circumstances.

### **Step 4: Theory Construction**

*How might we refine existing praxis?*

In this step, the researcher draws from theological and empirical insights to formulate a theory of action aimed at improving current praxis. This theory elucidates underlying assumptions and establishes the boundaries of its authority.

### ***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** An Investigation of the Development of the Cell Church Concept in Lusaka, Zambia

#### **Main research question**

How might we formulate a practical theology to improve the development of the Cell Church concept in Lusaka, Zambia?

#### **Subsidiary research questions**

1. What are the theological foundations and traditions influencing the adoption and development of the Cell Church concept in Lusaka?

2. What current social, cultural, and religious landscape informs the development of the Cell Church in Lusaka?
3. What is the correlation between the theological traditions and contextual realities regarding the development of the cell church in Lusaka?
4. Based on the research outcomes, what practical theological theories or strategies can be proposed to enhance the development and sustainability of the Cell Church concept in Lusaka?

## **4.7 The EDNA Model**

### ***Overview***

Noel Woodbridge's EDNA model was designed for research in Practical Theology from a biblical perspective. The EDNA model The four areas of research in the proposed model are represented by an acronym that spells out the name EDNA: Exploratory (Investigation), Descriptive (Information), Normative (Interpretation), and Action (Implementation). As with many other practical theology models, the EDNA model aims to elucidate a practical scenario, understand it through an interaction between cultural and theological viewpoints, and ultimately transform the situation through renewed action.

Based on the dimensions enumerated above, the EDNA model consists of the following four research areas:

- i. Exploratory research asks: "What has led to the present situation?"
- ii. Descriptive research asks: "What is happening now?"
- iii. Normative research asks: "What should be happening?"
- iv. Action research asks: "How should we respond?"
- v. The methodological steps are outlined briefly below.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> I have extrapolated these methodological steps from Woodbridge, "The EDNA Model of Doing Research in Practical Theology," 99-113.

## ***Methodological Steps***

### **Step 1: Exploratory Research**

*What has led to the present situation?*

The exploratory phase requires the researcher to gain insight into a situation, phenomenon, community, or individual under study. It allows the researcher to appreciate the magnitude or extent of a specific phenomenon, problem, or behaviour, thus serving as a preliminary investigation before more in-depth research. In this stage, the researcher also endeavours to provide explanations for observed phenomena, identifying causal factors and outcomes. In addition, this stage should establish general trends in activities within a given context, without necessarily focusing on a single issue. The review of relevant literature and the use of empirical research tools to gather data are both acceptable.

### **Step 2: Descriptive Research**

*What is happening now?*

The task of the descriptive phase is to record, explain, and interpret the conditions of the present situation. This involves examining a phenomenon occurring in a specific place and time and collecting information to identify patterns and dynamics within the current context. It requires thorough observation and description of all aspects of the present situation. Furthermore, the goal is to reconstruct a particular topic within this context by utilising both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Additionally, the descriptive phase aims to describe the contemporary theory-laden practices that give rise to the practical question at hand. Surveys—preferably questionnaires and interviews (personal and by telephone)—may be used to collect the needed information. Literary research approaches may also be used.

### **Step 3: Normative Research**

*What should be happening?*

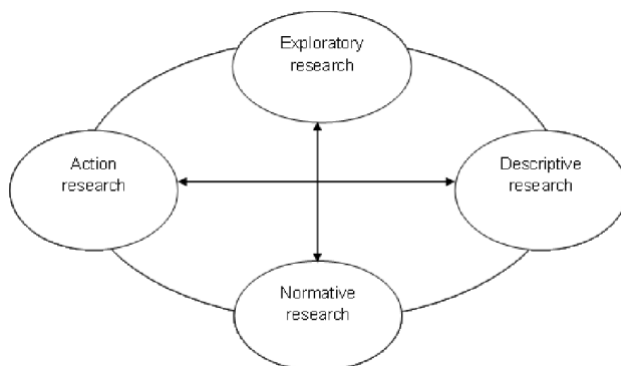
The normative task aims at defining how things ought to be. This involves the dynamic process of bridging timeless wisdom encapsulated within scripture and church tradition with the ever-evolving challenges and opportunities present in contemporary church life. Here, the research is required to study/interpret selected scriptures carefully to discern their relevance to the current structure, practices, ethics, and pastoral care within the church. Also, it involves a critical reflection on existing church practices through the lens of scripture and tradition to promote faithful application to the present circumstances. Through this holistic approach, the normative task seeks to foster a vibrant and responsive church community grounded in the timeless truths of its faith tradition yet adaptive to the challenges of the contemporary world.

### **Step 4: Action Research**

*How should we respond?*

The action phase involves formulating and implementing concrete measures aimed at transforming existing practices within the church community based on good practice, whether from the past or present. This transformational process is facilitated by providing congregational leaders with practical guidance to navigate through the complexities of change. A key aspect of this phase is a credible dialectical dialogue between the situation at hand and theological reflection drives the evolution of new and challenging forms of practice, ultimately leading to the transformation of the initial conditions. As new practices are implemented under the guidance of reflective practitioners, they initiate a progressive spiral of change, responsive to interpretations of normative sources from scripture and tradition, thus perpetuating ongoing modifications and transformations within the church community.

The relationship between the above steps/dimensions of research is represented diagrammatically as shown below.<sup>189</sup>



*Fig. 4.8: The EDNA Model*

### ***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** Towards a Practical Theology of Poverty Reduction among the Christian Women in Akwadwaa

#### **Main research question**

What practical theology might we formulate to effectively reduce poverty among Christian women in Akwadwaa?

#### **Subsidiary research questions**

- i. What has led to the present economic state of Christian women in Akwadwaa?
- ii. What is the present state of poverty among Christian women in Akwadwaa?
- iii. What does the Scripture say about poverty?
- iv. What should we do to arrest the poverty situation among Christian women in Akwadwaa?

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<sup>189</sup> The diagram was taken from Woodbridge, “The EDNA Model of Doing Research in Practical Theology,” 97.

## **4.8 The RIBOS Model**

### ***Overview***

The RIBOS model was developed by two Ghanaian scholars, Solomon Nortey and Isaac Boaheng for research in Practical Theology, Missiology and Pentecostal Studies. The acronym RIBOS stands for the stages/phases involved in the model: Retrospective-evaluative analysis, Introspective-exploratory analysis, Biblical-imperative analysis, Operational-inspective analysis and Strategic planning and implementation. The model's holistic approach, grounded in contextual sensitivity, biblical integration, and practical application, makes it uniquely suitable for addressing the complex and multifaceted challenges faced by African societies. It embodies a synergistic blend of inquiry and action and offers a transformative framework for engaging with contemporary pastoral and missiological challenges within African contexts. The steps in this model are outlined below.

### ***Methodological Steps***

#### **Step 1: Retrospective-Evaluative Analysis**

*What is the historical and cultural perspective on the issue at hand?*

The first step involves examining the historical and cultural perspective on the issue at hand within the given context. Here, the researchers delve into historical documents, oral traditions, and cultural practices to understand how the issue has been perceived, interpreted, and addressed over time. This requires textual or literary research based on published works and archived documents in addition to surveys (such as questionnaires, and interviews). Through the retrospective evaluation, the researcher gains insights into the cultural norms, traditions, and historical events that have shaped attitudes and responses to the issue. This provides a foundational understanding for further analysis.

## **Step 2: Introspective-Explanatory Analysis**

*What is the present state of affairs? What factors account for the current state of affairs?*

The second step deals with the present state of affairs related to the issue under investigation. The research is required to employ descriptive and empirical methods to gather data on the current realities, practices, and challenges faced by individuals, communities, and institutions. This involves conducting surveys, interviews, observations, and statistical analyses to generate a comprehensive picture of the issue's impact and manifestations in society.

This step also seeks to interpret the findings from the descriptive-empirical task by identifying and analysing the underlying factors that account for the current state of affairs. The research draws from sociocultural, economic, political, and psychological frameworks to explore the root causes, dynamics, and complexities shaping the issue. This interpretive analysis provides deeper insights into the underlying forces driving the issue and informs subsequent stages of the research process.

## **Step 3: Biblical-Imperative Analysis**

*What are the biblical imperatives concerning the situation at hand?*

The fourth step involves examining the biblical imperatives concerning the situation at hand and deriving prescriptive insights for addressing the issue from a theological perspective. Here, the researcher studies relevant biblical texts, theological literature, and moral principles to discern ethical guidelines, values, and teachings that inform Christian responses to the issue. The study of biblical texts must be from a practical-theological perspective. Detailed exegesis should be avoided; the theological concepts from the texts should be emphasised. The biblical-theological wisdom gathered in this step serves as a key partner in developing a response to the situation at hand.

#### **Step 4: Operational-Inspective Analysis**

*How are other churches in the same context handling the issue at stake?*

At this point, the researcher will study how other churches in the same context go about the issue at stake. The researcher looks for models of successful initiatives implemented by other churches. Through both literary exploration and empirical investigation, the researcher seeks to identify key features of these initiatives that have contributed to their success. This involves a comparative study between the church under study and one or two in the same context. This comparative study allows for a nuanced understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities faced by churches in the African context and provides a basis for identifying best practices and lessons learned that can be applied to the church under study.

This methodological step is important in an African context because it recognises the value of contextual knowledge and the importance of learning from local experiences and practices. By studying how other churches in the same context address similar issues, the researcher can gain valuable insights into effective strategies and practices that are culturally relevant and sensitive to the needs and dynamics of the local community. Additionally, this approach fosters collaboration and knowledge sharing among churches within the same context, promoting a sense of solidarity and collective learning. These steps foster ecumenism and also ensure dialogue with other Christian denominations.

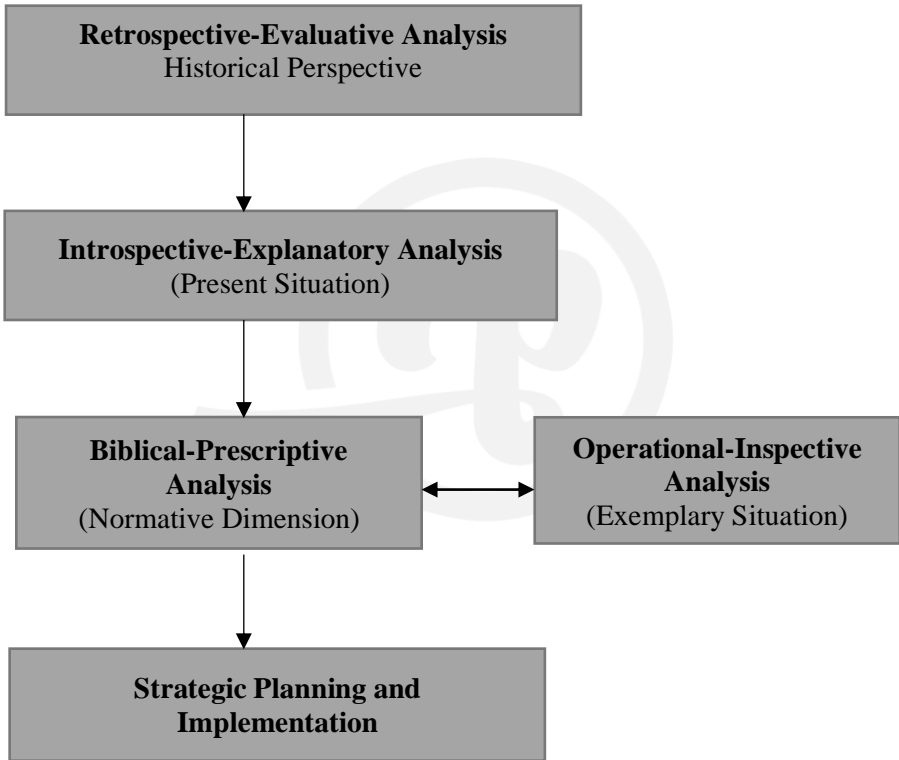
#### **Step 5: Strategic Planning and Implementation**

*How might we address the situation at hand in a biblically grounded, contextually relevant and historically informed way?*

In this final step, the focus shifts to strategic planning and implementation, aiming to address the situation at hand in a biblically grounded, contextually relevant, and historically informed manner. It requires the researcher to collaborate with stakeholders, including community leaders, church officials, and local organisations, to

develop strategic plans and action steps that align with biblical principles, resonate with the cultural context of Africa, and draw from historical insights. This involves identifying key objectives, setting measurable goals, and outlining practical strategies for intervention and change.

The steps outlined above can be integrated and represented diagrammatically as shown below.



*Fig. 4.9: The RIBOS Model*

***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** A Study of Church Growth Patterns in the Methodist Church Ghana (1961-2021)

### **Main research question**

What specific strategies might the Methodist Church Ghana develop to address her growth challenges?

### **Subsidiary research questions**

1. What is the historical and cultural perspective on church growth patterns within the Methodist Church Ghana?
2. What is the present state of church growth within the Methodist Church Ghana, and what factors account for the current patterns of growth or decline?
3. What biblical imperatives and theological teachings should inform approaches to church growth?
4. What lessons can be learnt from the way other churches in Ghana address church growth challenges?
5. How might the Methodist Church Ghana address church growth to achieve this goal?

## **4.9 Appreciative Inquiry (AI)**

### ***Overview***

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an approach to organisational development and change management that focuses on identifying and amplifying an organisation's strengths, successes, and positive aspects rather than solely addressing its problems or weaknesses. It was not initially formulated for theological research. Yet, its principles are compatible with theological research approaches, especially practical theology, missiology and studies in church and society. AI focuses on improving an organisation by focusing on its strengths to deal with its weaknesses. Similarly, research works in Practical Theology, Missiological and Church and Society are meant to provide a more effective praxis.

AI involves a collaborative and participatory process where individuals within an organisation come together to inquire into and appreciate what is working well, envisioning the organisation's desired future, and co-creating strategies to achieve that future. It emphasises a positive and strengths-based approach to organisational

change, aiming to inspire and empower individuals and teams to unleash their full potential and create meaningful, sustainable change. The AI process involves four stages which have been labelled discovery, dream, design, and destiny known as the 4-D Cycle.<sup>190</sup>

### ***Methodological Steps***

#### **Step 1: Enquiry**

*What is the best of what is?*

The first step requires participants to reflect on and discuss the best of what is concerning the object of inquiry. It begins with a collaborative effort to develop appreciative interview questions and construct an interview guide. These questions are formulated to elicit affirmative responses from the organisation's positive core in selected topic areas. They serve to elicit stories, enrich organisational imagery and internal dialogue, and bring the positive core into sharper focus.

#### **Step 2: Dream**

*What might be?*

The dream phase is an invigorating journey into "what might be," encouraging individuals to explore their aspirations and visions for their work, relationships, organisation, and the broader world. It provides an opportunity for collective brainstorming, urging participants to think expansively beyond past limitations. Participants conduct interviews to identify strengths and positive aspects of the organisation. The goal of this phase is to identify and propagate constructive, affirmative, and optimistic visions of the future. For theological research, this stage requires a biblical-

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<sup>190</sup> I have gleaned what follow from Gervase R. Bushe, "Appreciative inquiry: Theory and critique," In: David Boje, Bernard Burnes, and John Hassard (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Organisational Change*, pp. 87-103 (Oxford: Routledge, 2012); Edwin C. Thomas, "Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Approach to Change" (<http://canatx.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/3-Appreciative-Inquiry-A-Positive-Approach-to-Change.pdf> 1-5-2024)

theological study of the subject matter. The results are what the community dreams of or what is normative for the organisation/community. During this stage, participants are prompted to envision the optimal state of their group, organisation, or community. Efforts are made to discern the shared aspirations among system members and represent these aspirations symbolically in some form.

### **Step 3: Design**

*What should be?*

The Design phase establishes the structural framework necessary to realise the future vision conceived in the Dream phase. It outlines the fundamental structural components such as leadership and reward systems, generating principles and propositions that form the basis supporting projects and activities. Essentially, participants translate their narratives, aspirations, concepts, and future visions into aspirational statements of potential outcomes for the organisation to realise their dreams. These statements or propositions are crucial as they serve as guiding principles, even motivating factors, for elevating the system's existing collaborative capacity to unprecedented levels in pursuit of the collective vision.

The Design phase is a deliberate process of restructuring or transformation aimed at aligning systems, structures, strategies, processes, and images with the organisation's positive past (Discovery) and its highest potential (Dream). Through discussion, possibilities and dreams begin to form and are expressed as a vision of a better world, a powerful purpose, and a compelling statement of strategic intent.

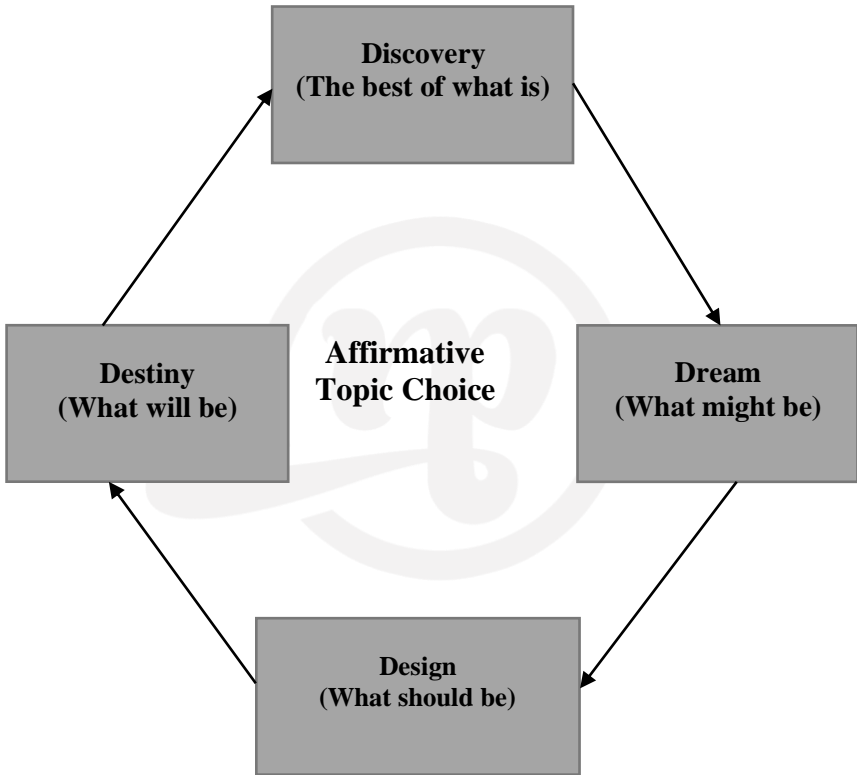
### **Step 4: Destiny**

*What will be?*

The Destiny phase marks the beginning of inspired actions aimed at fostering ongoing learning and innovation—or “what will be.” Whilst change is inherent throughout the entire 4-D cycle, the

Destiny phase specifically focuses on individual and organisational commitments and pathways forward, resulting in tangible changes to organisational systems, structures, processes, or procedures.

The steps outlined above can be integrated and represented diagrammatically as shown below.



*Fig. 4.10: Appreciative Inquiry*

***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** An Appreciation of The Zambian Understanding of Creation and the Authority of Scripture, with Special Reference to the New Creation: Towards Christian Hope and Environmental Awareness

### **Main research question**

How might a positive Zambian understanding of creation together with scripture bring about a fresh understanding of Christian hope of a new creation and thus also environmental awareness?

### **Subsidiary questions**

- i. How do Zambians understand creation?
- ii. How might Scripture offer hope to Zambians of new creation?
- iii. In what ways might missionaries in Zambia use scripture and the Zambian understanding of creation to promote effectively a theology of new creation?
- iv. In what ways might a theology of new creation bring about religious hope and environmental awareness to the people of Zambia?

### **4.10 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has provided an exploration of methodologies for practical theology research. Whilst each approach has its strengths and limitations, collectively they contribute to a rich and multifaceted understanding of practical theology research. By drawing upon biblical, theological, and empirical insights, researchers are equipped to navigate the complexities of contemporary challenges and pursue transformative action grounded in faith and practice. Moving forward, continued reflection and innovation in methodology will be discussed with reference to missiology and studies in church and society.

### **4.11 Review Exercise**

1. What distinguishes practical theology from other theological disciplines, and how do its methodologies reflect these distinctions?
2. How do practitioners in practical theology select and apply methodologies to address real-world issues and challenges faced by individuals and communities?

3. What role do interdisciplinary approaches play in practical theology methodologies, and how do they contribute to a holistic understanding of religious practices and experiences?
4. How do practical theologians navigate the tension between theoretical frameworks and practical applications in their research methodologies?
5. Can methodologies in practical theology effectively integrate insights from diverse religious traditions and cultural contexts? How do researchers ensure sensitivity and inclusivity in their approach?
6. In what ways do qualitative and quantitative research methods intersect within practical theology methodologies, and how do researchers navigate the strengths and limitations of each?
7. How do practical theology methodologies engage with ethical considerations, particularly in research involving vulnerable populations or sensitive religious issues?
8. What role does reflexivity play in practical theology research methodologies, and how do researchers navigate their own biases, assumptions, and subjectivities?
9. How do emerging technologies and digital methodologies influence research practices in practical theology, particularly in the context of religious education, pastoral care, or community engagement?
10. How do practical theology methodologies contribute to the ongoing dialogue between academia, religious institutions, and broader society, and what implications do they have for shaping religious practices and beliefs in contemporary contexts?

#### **4.12 Suggested Research Topics**

1. Christian mission in a Poverty-Stricken Context: Challenges, Strategies and Prospects

2. A comparative study between Church Growth Strategies in the Early Church and in the Contemporary Church
3. Crisis Management and Disaster Response: Assessing Churches to Provide Support in Times of Crisis
4. Digital Discipleship in Contemporary Africa: Formulating Pastoral Strategies to Nurture Individuals in the Online Space
5. Community Development Initiatives in Africa Initiated Churches: Formulating Pastoral Measures for Churches to Address Poverty, Homelessness, and Inequality
6. Restorative Justice Practices: Formulating Pastoral Measures for Healing and Reconciliation Processes within Congregations and Communities
7. Disability Inclusion in Church: Formulating Pastoral Measures for Creating Welcoming and Accessible Spaces for People with Disabilities
8. Addressing Unique Challenges and Opportunities in Urban Contexts in Addis Ababa
9. A Pastoral-Theological Reflection on Social Media Ethics from the Kenyan Context
10. Ecclesial Leadership in Times of Crisis: Formulating Contextual Strategies for Pastors and Church Leaders for Effective Crisis Management and Spiritual Care in Ghana
11. Towards a Christian Response to Refugees Crisis: A Gambian Perspective
12. Confronting Abuse of Power in Gambia: A Pastoral Approach
13. A Practical-theological Analysis of Church Growth in African Christianity in the Last Century
14. Exploring Biblical Imagery of Sports: Implications for Spiritual Life and Growth
15. The Role of Sports in Promoting Health, Community, and Spiritual Formation: A Pastoral Analysis
16. Using Sports as a Platform for Evangelism and Discipleship: The Case of Zimbabwe

17. Towards a Liturgical Theology for Maundy Thursday for the African Church



## CHAPTER FIVE MISSIOLOGY & CHURCH AND SOCIETY

Missiology is a theological sub-discipline that focuses on the study of missionary work, evangelism, and cross-cultural engagement.<sup>191</sup> Simone Twibell defines missiology as “the systematic study of the activity of the Church, guided by the activity of the Triune God, facilitating the understanding of the world which continually seeks to engage, reach, and transform with the good news of Jesus Christ through a multidisciplinary and integrative approach.”<sup>192</sup> Missiology encompasses a broad range of topics related to the theory, history, and practice of missions, including the theology of mission, missionary methods and strategies, intercultural communication, contextualisation, and the impact of Christianity on diverse cultures and societies.

Church and society is a theological discipline that explores the dynamic interplay between the Christian church and the broader societal context in which it exists. It examines how the church interacts with and influences society, as well as how societal forces shape the life and mission of the church. Studies in church and society differ from practical theology. Research in church and society tends to be descriptive, focusing on depicting and understanding various aspects of the church’s interaction with society.<sup>193</sup> On the other hand, research in practical theology is often informative and can even be transformative, offering guidance, models, or tools for putting theological insights into practice.<sup>194</sup>

Johannes Malherbe lists church history, ministry context, community studies, congregational studies, church and mission as

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<sup>191</sup> For more on Missiology consult John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith and Justice Anderson (eds), *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1998).

<sup>192</sup> Simone Twibell, “Missiology as a Discipline: Its Dimensions and Scope,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* Vol. 57 no. 3 (2021): 6-8, 8.

<sup>193</sup> Malherbe, “Church and Society,” 2-3.

<sup>194</sup> Malherbe, “Church and Society,” 6.

fields under church and society.<sup>195</sup> Church history deals with the historical development, events, figures, movements, and doctrines within Christianity. Ministry context refers to the specific ministry God has assigned one and the setting in which one operates. Community studies involve the examination and analysis of a particular community or group within a broader societal context. Community studies may focus on topics such as community dynamics, social structures, identities, relationships, and issues of concern within specific populations. Church and mission studies deal with the relationship between the Christian church and its mission or purpose in the world.

In this chapter, I consider some of the methodologies that can be used to undertake research in these theological sub-disciplines.

## 5.1 Praxis Matrix Methodology

### *Overview*

The praxis matrix (or mission cycle) methodology is a research framework that integrates seven dimensions to facilitate a holistic and reflective approach to praxis, with Spirituality at its core. The model was developed for studies in Christian missions and for planning missionary outreach programs. The history of its development goes back to the 1980s when scholars at the Department of Missiology at the University of South Africa (UNISA) introduced the “dimensional” model in a first-year undergraduate course in missiology.<sup>196</sup> With the original idea coming from David Bosch, other scholars such as Inus Daneel, Willem Saayman, Bongani Mazibuko, and Johannes N. J. Kritzinger have all contributed to the development of this methodology.

The initial idea was a 14-point “grid” designed to delineate each of the seven identified mission “models” at that time. This initial

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<sup>195</sup> Malherbe, “Church and Society,” 6.

<sup>196</sup> Zuze Banda and Willem Saayman, “A Perspective on the African Renaissance from Christian Mission Praxis,” *Missionalia* 43:2, 131–152, 135.  
([www.missionalia.journals.ac.za](http://www.missionalia.journals.ac.za) | <http://dx.doi.org/10.7832/43-2-91>).

framework was later simplified into the three-dimensional See-Judge-Act approach which later yielded Holland and Henriot's (1982) four-dimensional pastoral circle of Insertion-Analysis-Reflection-Planning.<sup>197</sup> Subsequently, some members of the department expanded upon it, creating a five-point “cycle of missionary praxis”<sup>198</sup> and eventually a seven-point “praxis matrix.”<sup>199</sup>

The seven dimensions include 1) Spirituality (at the centre), 2) Agency, 3) Contextual understanding, 4) Ecclesial scrutiny, 5) Theological interpretation, 6) Strategic planning, and 7) Reflexivity. This approach was designed as a tool to facilitate the collaboration of committed Christians in effecting transformation within their specific context.<sup>200</sup> It can also aid in examining the transformative practices (both theoretical and practical) of individuals or groups. The cycle can also serve as an analytical framework for researching the transformative efforts of others.<sup>201</sup>

Kritzinger proposes that we consider each aspect of mission—encompassing various dimensions of God's mission such as evangelism, earthkeeping, and liberation—as a type of praxis. This entails viewing mission as a collaborative effort aimed at promoting

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<sup>197</sup> Banda and Saayman, “A Perspective on the African Renaissance from Christian Mission Praxis,” 136.

<sup>198</sup> Banda and Saayman, “A Perspective on the African Renaissance from Christian Mission Praxis,” 136.

<sup>199</sup> Banda and Saayman, “A Perspective on the African Renaissance from Christian Mission Praxis,” 136; see also Kritzinger, “‘Mission as ...’ Must we choose? A dialogue with Bosch, Bevans & Schroeder and Schreiter in the South African context,” 50. See footnote 11; J. N. J. Kritzinger and Willem Saayman *David J. Bosch: Prophetic Integrity, Cruciform Praxis* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2011)

<sup>200</sup> JNJ Kritzinger, “Mission as ...” Must we choose?: A dialogue with Bosch, Bevans & Schroeder and Schreiter in the South African context, *Missionalia* 39:1/2 (April/August), 2011: 32-59, 51; see also Albert Kabuya Banza, *Transforming Africa: The Role the Church in Developing Political Leaders* (PhD Dissertation: University of South Africa, 2013), 33.

<sup>201</sup> Kritzinger, “Mission as ...,” 51; Kasebwe Timothee Luc Kabongo, *A missional approach to school dropout in a poor urban area of South Africa* (PhD Dissertation: University of Pretoria, 2018), 10.

transformation within a particular community. Within this context, mission is comprised of a dynamic interplay of ideas and practices that continually interact, shaping the specific mission praxis. The cycle is shown diagrammatically below as a flower with a stamen and petals.

I found Albert Kabuaya Bansa's doctoral thesis *Transforming Africa: The Role of the Church in Developing Political Leaders* (2013) and Kasebwe Timothee Luc Kabongo's doctoral thesis, *A Missional Approach to School Dropout in a Poor Urban Area of South Africa* (2018) very helpful in terms of the use of this methodology in a way that makes one appreciate the various aspects of the cycle. Their works and other documents underline that the Praxis model allows for several research methods. As each of the dimensions focuses on something different, the researcher needs to choose the most suitable research method for each step (dimension). The research can be literature-based, empirical, narrative, case-study, or ethnographic in nature.

The praxis matrix is designed to guide individuals and communities in their pursuit of meaningful and impactful action, ensuring a deep connection between faith, context, and action. The seven dimensions do not have a fixed starting point. One can start with any point of the matrix, as long as none of the dimensions is left out. Therefore, what I present below should be considered as a fixed order of applying this methodological framework.<sup>202</sup>

### ***Methodological Steps (Dimensions)***

#### **Step 1: Spirituality (At the Centre)**

*To what extent is the mission praxis in the community motivated and directed by Christian spirituality?*

The praxis matrix emphasises the centrality of spirituality in any missionary involvement and the importance of a deep connection with the divine in guiding our actions and decisions. Spirituality in

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<sup>202</sup> I have gleaned the methodological steps from Banda and Saayman, "A perspective on the African Renaissance from Christian mission praxis," 131–152.

this sense means “contemplative, sacramental and devotional ‘faith seeking understanding.’”<sup>203</sup> This dimension is intended to distinguish the Christian mission from other forms of transformative praxis and activism in the community. The purpose of this aspect of the research is to find out what spirituality informs a particular mission praxis. To this end, the researcher needs to examine how individuals or groups experience divine presence and guidance. It also involves investigating how the spirituality of the people serves as both a source of motivation and guidance for their mission endeavors.

### **Step 2: Agency**

*How does the societal status of the actors in the mission inform their interactions with the receivers of the mission and their fulfilment of their missionary calling?*

The Agency dimension focuses on understanding the individuals involved within the specific context under study and assessing their positions within the community and how it affects their interactions with their interlocutors. It also entails analysing their interactions with receivers from varying social classes, and understanding their fundamental sense of identity as they engage in their missionary vocation.

### **Step 3: Contextual Understanding**

*How do the agents of mission understand the social, political, economic and cultural factors that influence the situation in which they live and work?*

At this stage, the researcher explores how mission agents within a community interpret their surroundings, including the social, political, economic, and cultural factors influencing their lives and work. The step also deals with how these agents perceive and interpret the “signs of the times,” distinguishing between positive and negative forces at play within their society. Furthermore, the

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<sup>203</sup> Banda and Saayman, “A Perspective on the African Renaissance from Christian Mission Praxis,” 136.

researcher investigates the analytical methods employed by mission agents to understand their context and whether they can articulate their biases and interests, as well as acknowledge how these factors influence their understanding of the context.

#### **Step 4: Ecclesial Scrutiny**

*How has the church's past missions influenced the current situation and how the church relate with churches that are active in the community?*

This step involves examining the historical context of missionary activities within a particular region or community. Researchers investigate how past actions of churches and religious communities have shaped the present landscape of mission outreach. They assess the awareness of mission agents regarding the history of churches and religious groups in the area and analyse how this awareness influences their current approach to mission work. Finally, researchers explore the relationships between mission agents and active churches within the community to understand the dynamics of collaboration, influence, and engagement. This phase facilitates a more profound comprehension of the church's role within the community.

#### **Step 5: Theological Interpretation**

*How do mission agents' interpretations of Scripture and Christian tradition, shaped by their context, identity, agency, and ecclesial scrutiny, inform their contextual theology of mission?*

The step underscores the need to subject missions to theological scrutiny. This scrutiny entails investigating how mission agents interpret Scripture and the Christian tradition within their specific context. It also involves analysing how their sense of identity and agency, contextual understanding, and ecclesial examination influence the development of their contextual theology and the formation of their "local" theology of mission.

### **Step 6: Strategic Planning**

*How might mission agents plan and execute missionary activities to transform the society and to relate rightly with other groups in the community?*

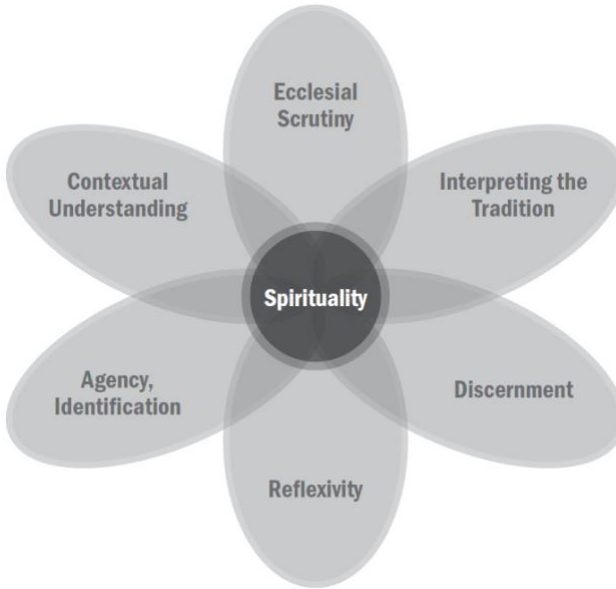
This dimension questions the methods, activities, and projects strategi by mission agents within their context, as well as their planning and strategizing processes for this purpose. Based on findings it then provides a plan, strategy and policy to address challenges and bring about transformation within the community through improved missionary endeavours. It involves implementing tangible faith-based initiatives aimed at improving the situation in the society. Here, there is the need to set goals, identify resources, and develop strategies for achieving their objectives. This step also explores the relationships between mission agents and other religious groups and non-governmental organisations in their community, and the diverse aims pursued, including personal transformation, church establishment or expansion, and societal transformation.

### **Step 7: Reflexivity**

*How does a reflection on the group's past successes and failures help them to adapt their praxis effectively?*

This step involves examining the interplay between various dimensions of the group's mission praxis. Key issues to explore include the cohesion of these dimensions within the mission praxis and the success of mission agents in maintaining this cohesion. Additionally, the step entails investigating how mission agents reflect on past experiences and adjust their praxis based on lessons learned from both failures and successes. Engaging in this step aids in cultivating a more profound comprehension of the community and its involvement therein.

The diagram below shows this methodology.<sup>204</sup>



*Fig. 5.1: Praxis Matrix Methodology*

### ***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** A study of the Mission Policy of the Church of Pentecost in Sunyani: Implications for Contemporary Christian Missions in Ghana

### **Main research question**

What missiological implications does the missionary policy of the Church of Pentecost have for contemporary Ghanaian Christianity?

### **Subsidiary research questions**

- i. To what extent is the mission praxis of the Church of Pentecost in Sunyani motivated and directed by Christian spirituality?

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<sup>204</sup> This diagram was taken from Banda and Saayman, "A Perspective on the African Renaissance from Christian Mission Praxis," 135.

- ii. How does the societal status of the actors in the mission of the Church of Pentecost inform their interactions with the receivers of mission and their fulfilment of their missionary calling?
- iii. How of the Church of Pentecost understand the social, political, economic and cultural factors that influence the situation in which it ministers?
- iv. How has the Church of Pentecost's past missions influenced the current situation and how it relates to churches that are active in Sunyani?
- v. How do the Church of Pentecost's interpretations of Scripture and Christian tradition, shaped by its context, identity, agency, and ecclesial scrutiny, inform its contextual theology of mission?
- vi. How might the Church of Pentecost in Sunyani plan and execute missionary activities to transform the Sunyani community and to relate rightly with other groups in the community?
- vii. How does a reflection on the Church of Pentecost's past successes and failures help them to adapt their praxis effectively?

## **5.2 Sankofa-Historian Methodology**

### ***Overview***

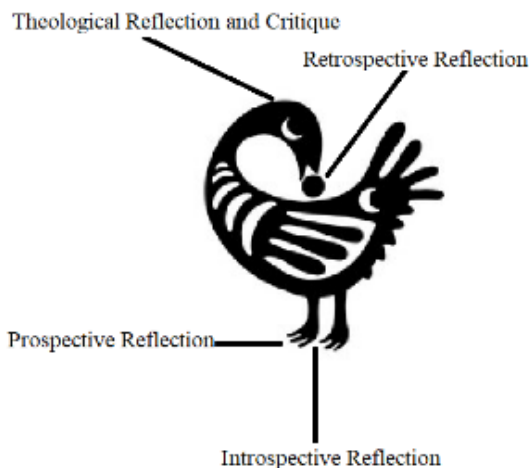
Interpreting and retelling the story of the church enables us to understand our present and prepare for our future. Consequently, there arise occasions when scholars find it necessary to undertake research on specific churches or denominations within a given area spanning across time. The *Sankofa*-historian methodology was developed for such purposes.

*Sankofa* (*Sankɔfa*), a word in the Twi language of Ghana, means “go back and fetch it” or “look back to move forward.” It is an Akan (Bono) cultural symbol that emphasises the need to learn from the past as we move forward. The literal translation of the name

of this cultural symbol comes from the Akan (Bono-Twi) proverb “*Se wo were firi na wosane kɔfa a benkyiri,*” meaning, “It is not taboo to go back for what you forgot (or left behind).” The expression “*Sankofa*-historian”, therefore, refers to a historian with a *Sankofa* mentality; a historian who writes based on *Sankofa* principles.

The *Sankofa*-historian methodology, designed by Isaac Boaheng, was first used in writing the history of a local church that celebrated its centenary in 2023. It is based on a four-dimensional reflection meant to look back and move forward towards the desired destination. The reflections are: Retrospective Reflection (Where have we come from?), Introspective Reflection (Where are we now?), Theological Reflection and Critique (Where should we have gotten to?), and Prospective Reflection (How do we get there?). Through this method, researchers can glean valuable lessons from the past, informing present-day practices and guiding future endeavors within the church context.

The *Sankofa* symbol (in relation to the methodology under consideration) can be represented as shown below.



*Fig. 5.2: Sankofa from the Historian Perspective*

In this diagram, the bird's backwards-turned head with its beak grasping a valuable egg symbolises the act of reclaiming what has been left behind—the cherished heritage of the past. The introspective (inward) reflection takes place at the current position of the bird representing where the church/organisation under study has gotten to.

The pinnacle of the *Sankofa* symbol is the bird's head, analogous to the word of God, which holds supreme authority in all matters. Serving as the seat of wisdom, the head allows for effective critique. Lastly, the bird's forward-facing feet signify the prospective dimension—progressive movement forward. Each step is explained below.<sup>205</sup>

### ***Methodological Steps***

#### **Step 1: Retrospective Reflection (Looking Backwards)**

*What significant events, people, and experiences have shaped the church's history and identity?*

The first step requires the *Sankofa*-historian to look backwards to see what has gone on before the present time. For research on the history of a church, this step looks back to discover what has gone on or what our forebears have done in the past. This step will give an account of the socio-political and religious climate from the pre-Christian till the establishment of the church in question. The person(s) and circumstances surrounding the establishment of the church are to be studied.

Data for this step may be obtained from historical documents (e.g., church records, minutes, and newsletters), archival materials (e.g., photos, videos, artefacts), oral histories and interviews with long-standing members and former leaders and scholarly works and publications on the history of the church.

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<sup>205</sup> I have gleaned this from Isaac Boaheng, "The *Sankofa* Research Methodology: An African Approach to the Study of Church History" (Unpublished Article, 2024).

## **Step 2: Introspective Reflection (Looking Inward)**

*What is the current state of the church's mission and ministry?*

In the second step, the *Sankofa*-historian analyses of the current state of affairs. For the history of a given church, this step examines the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of the church in the present time. Ongoing projects and activities are also considered at this stage.

The discussions at this stage must be done in relation to local and global contexts. Primary data collected through interviews, questionnaires, observation, church documents and secondary data from scholarly publications can all be used.

## **Step 3: Theological Critique (Looking Outward)**

*To what extent do the experiences and praxis align with biblical-theological teachings?*

In this step, the *Sankofa*-historian examines biblical texts related to the subject matter to determine how discoveries of steps 1 and 2 collaborate with or deviate from God's will and purpose revealed in the scriptures. This requires selecting and studying relevant texts and using the outcome to critique the current state of affairs. This draws from an Akan saying that "The one cutting the path does not know that his/her path is crooked" unless they are told.

The biblical-theological data serves as a plumb line to indicate where the path is straight and where it is crooked so that the necessary remedy can be found to address the crookedness. In other words, the *Sankofa*-historian contemplates and critiques the findings from steps 1 and 2 in light of biblical texts and theological traditions.

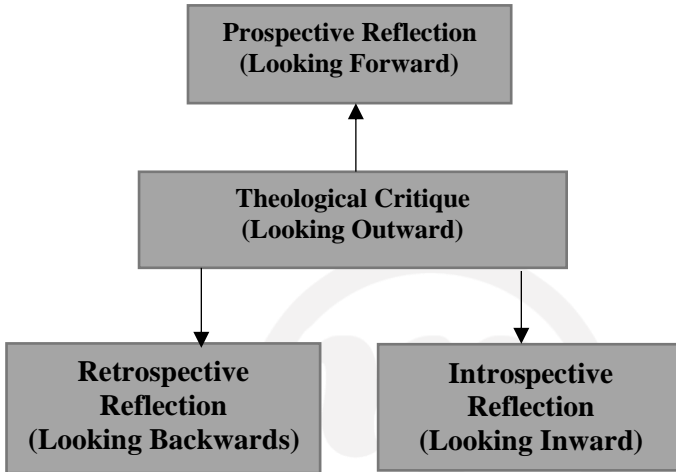
## **Step 4: Prospective Reflection (Looking Forward)**

*How might we refine our approach to enhance our journey towards the desired destination?*

Using the findings from the first three steps as a contextual framework, the *Sankofa*-historian gives innovative responses and strategies to move the church on the path to the desired future. There

is a need to consider the SWOT analysis conducted earlier as one tries to propose strategies and policies.

The steps outlined above can be integrated and represented diagrammatically as shown below.<sup>206</sup>



*Fig. 5.3: Sankofa-Historian Methodology*

### ***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** A Century of Methodism at Dormaa-Akontanim (1925-2025): Achievements, Challenges and Prospects

### **Main research question**

How might a study of the achievements, challenges and prospects of the past 100 years of Methodism at Dormaa-Akontanim prepare the Methodist Church for the years ahead?

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<sup>206</sup> The arrows theological critique are pointing downwards to underline that the use of biblical/theological data as the lens for interpreting both the past and present situations.

### **Subsidiary research questions**

- i. What significant events, people, and experiences have shaped the history and identity of Methodism at Dormaa-Akontanim in the past 100 years?
- ii. What is the current state of Methodism at Dormaa-Akontanim?<sup>207</sup>
- iii. How do the experiences and praxis of the Methodist Church at Dormaa-Akontanim align with biblical-theological teachings?
- iv. How might the Methodist church at Dormaa-Akontanim refine its ministry to better fulfil its biblical mandate within its context?

### **5.3 Pentecostal Praxis Missiological Model**

#### ***Overview***

The Pentecostal Praxis Missiological Model was crafted by Jesse Fungwa Kipimo, a Congolese scholar, to examine the missions undertaken by Spirit-oriented churches.<sup>208</sup> Kipimo's approach draws from the five features of Pentecostal spirituality enumerated by Anderson and Hollenweger, including liturgical, narrative, participatory, Pneumatocentric and contextual dimensions. Like, Anderson and Hollenweger, Kipimo also emphasises the centrality of spirituality in Pentecostal praxis. Therefore, Kipimo's approach also centralises spirituality in the research process.

The seven dimensions of the Pentecostal Praxis Missiological Model are ecclesial analysis, Pentecostal spirituality, narrative theological analysis, maximum participation, contextual analysis, holistic approach to life issues and reflexivity. Kipimo's model not only serves as a fundamental missiological instrument but also

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<sup>207</sup> The achievements, challenges and prospects will be studied when answering this question.

<sup>208</sup> This approach was used in Jesse Fungwa Kipimo, *Studying Pentecostalism Missiologically: The Congo Evangelistic Mission in Katanga Province, Democratic Republic of Congo* (PhD Dissertation" University of South African, 2014).

enables the evaluation and scrutiny of Pentecostal/charismatic community missions to ensure their alignment with the mission of God.

Kipimo's choice of seven dimensions is informed by these reasons. First, the nature of the Pentecostal movement, with its multifaceted spirituality, necessitated a comprehensive exploration. Second, Kipimo's interaction with other authors influenced the decision, as some existing literature identified key dimensions to be considered. Additionally, considering the distinctive characteristics of Pentecostalism, particularly within the African context, where spirituality is central to Pentecostal mission, seven dimensions were deemed sufficient to capture the breadth and depth of Pentecostal spirituality and its implications for missions.

Each of the seven steps in the Pentecostal Praxis Missiological Model is briefly explained below.<sup>209</sup>

### ***Methodological Steps***

#### **Step 1: Ecclesial Analysis**

*What informed the formation or establishment of this local Pentecostal church?*

In the dimension of ecclesial analysis, the researcher prioritises understanding the historical background and development of the Pentecostal community under study. This includes investigating the church's origins, its reputation in the community, leadership structures, and organisational dynamics. Ecclesial analysis serves as a foundational step in employing the Pentecostal Praxis missiological approach, aiming to discern how these factors shape the church's approach to mission.

#### **Step 2: Pentecostal Liturgical Spirituality**

*How does liturgical spirituality fit into Pentecostal missiology?*

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<sup>209</sup> I extrapolated the steps from Jesse Fungwa Kipimo, "Towards a Pentecostal Praxis Missiological Model," Unpublished Article, n.d.

Pentecostal liturgical spirituality places spirituality at the centre of the missiological approach. This dimension emphasises the pivotal role of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal mission, viewing spiritual experiences, particularly the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as the catalyst for mission. Through exploring Pentecostal worship practices, prayers, songs, and sacraments, researchers seek to understand how the Holy Spirit is encountered and how spiritual experiences inform the church's missional identity. This dimension also delves into individuals' experiences of Spirit baptism and the manifestation of spiritual gifts, shedding light on their impact on mission and Christian life.

### **Step 3: Theological Reflection (Pentecostal Narrative Dimension)**

*What might a theological reflection on people's experiences in light of Scripture, living faith, church, social teaching, and tradition reveal?*

In the theological reflection dimension of the praxis cycle, individuals' societal experiences are examined through the lens of Scriptures, living faith, church social teachings, and traditional resources. However, within a Pentecostal missiological model, Pentecostal experiences are viewed as manifestations of God's presence and intervention. These experiences serve as insights into how God operates among His people, with Scripture being utilised to validate Pentecostals' testimonies of encountering God. Instead of seeking answers from the Scriptures, Pentecostals employ them to affirm and authenticate their spiritual encounters, emphasising the significance of testimonies and preaching in shaping Pentecostal theology.

### **Step 4: Contextual Analysis**

*What might a socio-cultural analysis reveal?*

In the praxis cycle, social analysis involves investigating the root causes, examining the outcomes, establishing connections, and identifying key participants. Similarly, within the Pentecostal Praxis

Missiological Approach, this dimension mirrors that of the praxis cycle. Here, the focus lies on delving into the underlying causes and effects of societal challenges. To gain a deeper understanding of the context, it is crucial to address the following inquiries: How do members of the local Pentecostal congregation analyse their social environment? What are the predominant concerns within their community? And how do political, social, economic, and cultural factors impact their mission as Pentecostals?

### **Step 5: Evaluating Maximum Participation**

*What is the maximum participation of members?*

The dimension of “maximum participation” centres on assessing the involvement of each member in addressing community needs identified through contextual analysis, aligning with the mission of God outlined in the Great Commission. This dimension also entails examining Pentecostal mission strategies and their effects on communities, with a specific focus on the contributions of women, men, youth, singers, and cell groups to these efforts.

### **Step 6: An Exploration of Holistic Approaches to Life Issues**

*What might an exploration of practical actions by Pentecostals in their community reveal?*

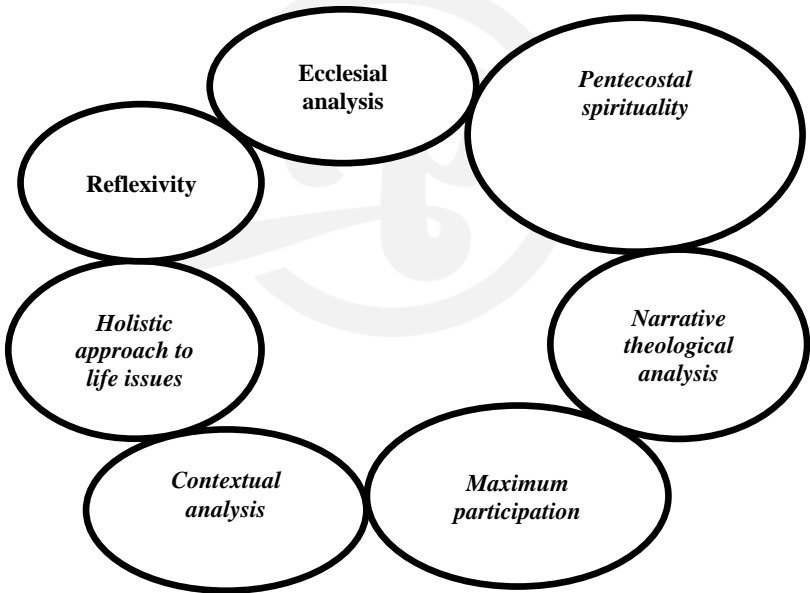
What insights can be gained from examining the practical initiatives undertaken by Pentecostals within their community? In this phase, you will delve into the various strategies employed by Pentecostals to address community needs comprehensively. This aspect may intersect with the "maximum participation" dimension, as Pentecostal agents of change utilise diverse methods to fulfil their mission. As you analyse the endeavours of these agents, it's essential to engage in critical reflection on their methodologies.

### Step 7: Reflexivity Evaluation

*How might we evaluate the outcome and results of the Pentecostal mission?*

How do we assess the outcomes and achievements of Pentecostal missions? Reflexivity plays a pivotal role in the praxis framework, prompting inquiries into whether community change agents reflect on the results of their efforts, glean insights from their experiences, and adapt their approaches accordingly. This dimension serves as a valuable tool for appraising the effectiveness of Pentecostal missions.

The diagram for the Pentecostal Praxis Missiological Model is shown below.<sup>210</sup>



*Fig. 5.4: Pentecostal Praxis Missiological Model*

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<sup>210</sup> This diagram was taken from Kipimo, “Towards a Pentecostal Praxis Missiological Model.”

### ***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** A Study of Mission and Church Growth of First Pentecostal Assembly of God Church: Implications for Contemporary Sierra Leonean Christianity

#### **Main research question**

What implications have the mission strategies and growth pattern of the First Pentecostal Assembly of God Church for contemporary Sierra Leonean Christianity?

#### **Subsidiary research questions**

- i. What informed the formation or establishment of the First Pentecostal Assembly of God Church?
- ii. How do the mission strategies and growth patterns of the First Pentecostal Assembly of God Church fit into Pentecostal missiology?
- iii. What might a theological reflection on the First Pentecostal Assembly of God Church's experiences in light of Scripture, living faith, church, social teaching, and tradition reveal?
- iv. In what socio-cultural context does the First Pentecostal Assembly of God Church operate?
- v. What is the maximum participation of members in the First Pentecostal Assembly of God Church?
- vi. What might an exploration of practical actions by Pentecostals in the Sierra Leone context reveal?
- vii. How might we evaluate the outcome and results of the Pentecostal mission of the First Pentecostal Assembly of God Church?

## **5.4 The LIMM Model**

### ***Overview***

The LIMM model was developed by South African scholar Pieter Hendrik Johannes Labuschagne for missiological research. The LIMM model builds on the LIM model that was developed by Michael Cowan (a Roman Catholic from the Loyola Institute of Ministry; LIM) for doing practical theology. Labuschagne adopted

the “LIM” and added another “M” to represent missional action. Each step of the model was renamed to match the LIMM acronym: L=Life-situation; I=Interpret the life-situation; M=Model preferred scenario and M=Missional action (see Fig. 5.5 below<sup>211</sup>). The LIMM model is built on three missiological concepts—*missio Dei*, Christocentricity, and Contextuality (MDCC)—which guide the research from the definition of the problem to practical recommendations for improved ministry. The LIMM model is similar to Osmer’s model. However, the former is applied in the context of MDCC. The LIMM model comprises the following steps.<sup>212</sup>

### ***Methodological Steps***

#### **Step 1: Life-Situation**

*What is the current state of mission in the light of MDCC principle?*  
In the first phase, MDCC principles are applied to examine, evaluate, and formulate the research in missiological terms. The researcher should assess and acquire an adequate understanding of the extent to which the *missio Dei* is promoted or neglected in the community. The researcher must also evaluate whether the situation sufficiently focuses on the proclamation of Christ, determining how the research will further this proclamation effectively. It is also essential to identify and analyse the differences between their context and the research context, considering how these differences influence their view of the topic. This phase concludes with a clear formulation of the research in MDCC terms, establishing a solid foundation for the subsequent phases of the study.

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<sup>211</sup> The diagram was taken from Pieter Hendrik Johannes Labuschagne, “The LIMM Model: Paradigm for Missiological Research,” *Ecclesial Futures* 4(2) (2023): 74-93, 89. (DOI: 10.54195/ef13329)

<sup>212</sup> These methodological steps were extrapolated Labuschagne, “The LIMM Model: Paradigm for Missiological Research,” 87-88. The research question for each step is my own based on my understanding of the focus of each step.

## **Step 2: Interpret the Life-Situation**

*How might we interpret the current state of mission within the framework of MDCC?*

At this stage, the researcher gathers data to interpret the life situation by categorising it into three areas: the actual situation, its development, and the reasons behind it. The personal experiences described in Step 1 are scrutinised through research based on MDCC principles to understand the missiological deficiencies that led to the situation. Interpreting the life situation involves examining the research problem elements formulated in Step 1 within the context of MDCC. MDCC serves as both a tool for understanding the current situation and discovering possible solutions. Suitable methods for this stage include descriptive research using literary and empirical methods, and historical surveys of published works, archived records, and interviews.

## **Step 3: Model the Preferred Scenario**

*What does the analysis of relevant biblical texts reveal about what ought to be the state of mission?*

In this step, the researcher envisages the situation as it should be from a biblical and theological perspective. This involves identifying insights from the Bible and theology relevant to the research topic, developing an applicable contextual theology, and determining how MDCC principles can best be applied to align the research topic with God's mission and methods. In other words, the researcher searches for biblical and theological guidance related to the life situation under investigation and seeks biblical and theological support that will promote MDCC principles.

## **Step 4: Missional Action**

*What missional action should be taken to advance the MDCC?*

Missiological research serves a greater purpose than mere academic inquiry; it must serve as a catalyst for active participation in sharing the good news across borders to all of humanity. If the outcome of

missiological research does not advance MDCC, then its impact is diminished. This might involve aligning with the *missio Dei*, ensuring effective proclamation of Christ's message of hope in specific contexts, and developing contextual theology that guides practical action tailored to the needs of diverse communities.

The steps outlined above can be integrated and represented diagrammatically as shown below.<sup>213</sup>

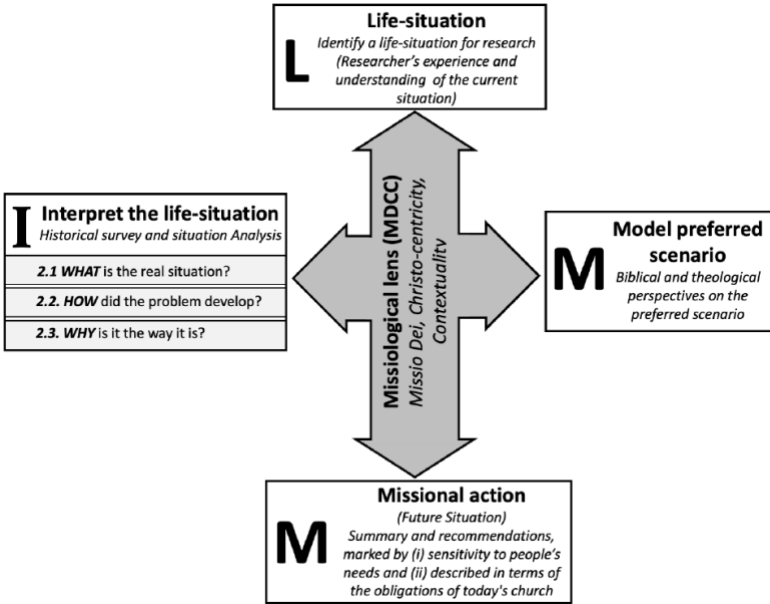


Fig. 5.5: The LIMM Model

**Illustrative Example**

**Topic:** Assessing the Effectiveness of Cross-Cultural Evangelism Strategies in Contemporary Botswana

<sup>213</sup> Taken from Labuschagne, “The LIMM Model: Paradigm for Missiological Research,” 89.

## **Main research question**

How might cross-cultural evangelism be improved in contemporary Botswana?

## **Subsidiary research questions**

- i. How effectively do current cross-cultural evangelism efforts in Botswana align with the foundational principles of MDCC?
- ii. What are the key factors contributing to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of cross-cultural evangelism initiatives within the framework of MDCC?
- iii. What biblical and theological insights can guide the development of more effective cross-cultural evangelism strategies in accordance with MDCC principles?
- iv. What practical steps can be implemented to ensure that cross-cultural evangelism efforts actively advance MDCC principles and effectively proclaim Christ's message of hope in the digital age?

## **5.5 Cruciform Missiological Methodology**

### ***Overview***

The Cruciform Missiological Methodology offers a comprehensive approach to research, informed by the principles of cruciformity including, incarnational, kenotic, sacrificial, and redemptive actions. Firstly, the incarnational aspect emphasises the importance of embedding the research within the local context, mirroring Jesus' embodiment in human form.

Secondly, the kenotic dimension encourages researchers to empty themselves of preconceptions and biases, similar to Jesus' self-emptying (Phil. 2:5-8). Thirdly, the sacrificial element underscores the willingness to dedicate time, energy, and resources to the research and the local community. Finally, the redemptive aspect highlights the aim of bringing about redemption and transformation to the local community through research endeavours.

This methodology approaches missiological research from four distinct dimensions: contextuality, cruciformity, social action, and transformation, thereby providing a robust framework for comprehensive engagement with the research process. The steps involved are outlined briefly below.<sup>214</sup>

### ***Methodological Steps***

#### **Step 1: Contextual Analysis**

*What does a contextual analysis reveal about the missiological problem at hand?*

Missiological research begins with the study of the context under study. Here, the researcher needs to acquire an adequate understanding of the social, religious, cultural, economic, and political context of the community for which the research is being undertaken. It may require listening to the voices, stories, and experiences of the local community. This pole of the research should also inform the researcher about the missiological needs of the community which should inform the subsequent aspects of the research.

This step should also account for the history of mission and ministry in the given context. The impact of the missionary activities on the socio-political and religious traditions of the people in the given context should be noted. Two cruciform principles must be applied here: Incarnational: Embody the research in the local context, as Jesus incarnated in human form. Kenotic: Empty yourself of preconceptions and biases, as Jesus emptied himself (Phil. 2:5-8). Sacrificial: Be willing to sacrifice time, energy, and resources for the sake of the research and the local community.

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<sup>214</sup> The methodological steps have been gleaned from Isaac Boaheng, "Cruciformity as mission research model," unpublished article, 2024.

## **Step 2: Cruciform Analysis**

*What does the cross reveal about the missiological problem at hand?*

The cross—Jesus Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection—assumes a profound significance for understanding the purpose, nature, and implications of mission. At its core, the cross represents God's redemptive love and the ultimate expression of divine solidarity with humanity in its brokenness and sinfulness. The cross must serve as a theological foundation that shapes the understanding of mission as participation in God's reconciling work in the world. The second pole/dimension/step, therefore, requires a reflection on the missiological problem identified in the light of the cross.

It is important to state that the cross in this sense is Trinitarian in essence, reflecting the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the work of salvation. In Christian belief, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, willingly offered himself on the cross as a sacrifice for humanity's sin, in accordance with the will of the Father and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Rather than considering mission as initiated and conducted by the church, the cruciform dimension of missiology considers mission as God's own activity. In the *missio Dei* (God's mission), God sends his Son and the Spirit to the world, and through them sends people to the ends of the earth. At the same time, God is the sender and the content of the sending. This step requires the researcher to study selected texts that speak to the missiological issue at stake.

## **Step 3: Mission Theology**

*What theology of mission can be formulated for the given context?*

In this step the focus shifts to mission theology, aiming to formulate a theology of mission tailored to the specific context under study. This step involves a deep exploration of the theological principles, beliefs, and frameworks that underpin mission work within the given context and are modelled after the biblical missionary principles. The researcher needs to take into consideration the unique challenges,

opportunities, and cultural dynamics present in the context (based on the contextual analysis conducted earlier).

Here, the difference between mission and missions is important. Mission pertains to the redemptive plans and endeavours of a sending God, who initiates all missionary endeavours to deliver a people, whilst simultaneously pledging to bring his salvific initiatives to fruition globally by establishing his kingdom in the eschaton.<sup>215</sup> Missions on the other hand are situated within this framework of God's activity and denote the particular ways in which the Church embodies the life of God in the world and engages in his overarching mission.<sup>216</sup> Missions depend on mission (the *missio Dei*).

#### **Step 4: Missiological praxis**

*How should the church respond to the situation to promote transformation?*

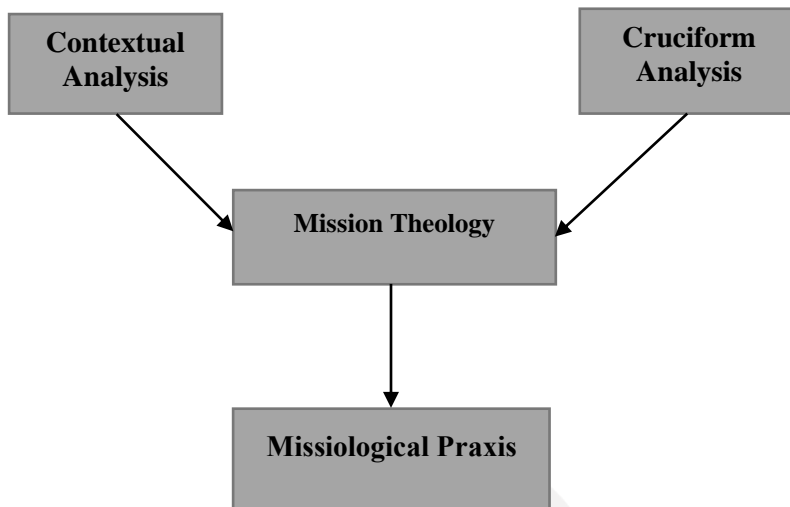
This step applies the redemptive character of the cross to bring redemption and transformation to the local community through the research. The approach should be holistic transcending beyond spiritual needs to address physical, social, and relational aspects of life. Some of the key issues that may feature here include social justice, fostering peace, promotion of human rights, cosmic redemption, and reconciling communities.

The steps outlined above can be integrated and represented diagrammatically as shown below.

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<sup>215</sup> Twibell, "Missiology as a Discipline: Its Dimensions and Scope," 6.

<sup>216</sup> Twibell, "Missiology as a Discipline: Its Dimensions and Scope," 6.



*Fig. 5.7: Cruciform Missiological Methodology*

***Illustrative Example***

Topic: Towards a Contextual Cruciform Theology of Mission for the Congolese context.

**Main research question**

What contextual theology of mission can be formulated for the Congolese society based on the principles of cruciformity?

**Subsidiary research questions**

- i. What missiological challenges are present in the Congolese context?
- ii. What does the cross reveal about the missiological problems present in the Congolese context?
- iii. What theology of mission can be formulated for the present in the Congolese context?
- iv. How should the church respond to the situation to promote transformation present in the Congolese context?

## 5.6 Participatory Action Research (PAR)

### *Overview*

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a research approach that emphasises collaboration and active involvement of participants throughout the research process.<sup>217</sup> In PAR, researchers and community members work together to identify issues or problems of concern, develop research questions, design the study, collect and analyse data, and take action based on the findings. This collaborative approach empowers participants to contribute their knowledge and expertise, ensuring that research outcomes are relevant and meaningful to the community.

PAR aims to create positive social change by addressing issues identified by the community, promoting equity and social justice, and building capacity for collective action and decision-making. It is characterised by its emphasis on democratic principles, reflexivity, and the transformation of both individuals and communities through the research process.

Earlier I mentioned action research under the social science research approaches. Here, I give further details for this kind of research with respect to practical theology, mission, church, and society studies. Theological Action Research has the following key characteristics:

### *Participative*

Everyone involved takes ownership of the research and contributes to it. It's not about academics studying church members, but rather about communities of faith researching and reflecting on their own questions, with input from academics and others.

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<sup>217</sup> Flora Cornish et.al, "Participatory action research," *Nature Reviews Methods Primers* 3(34), (2023): 1-14, 1-2. (<https://doi.org/10.1038/s43586-023-00214-1>); Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, "Participatory Action Research: Practical Theology for Social Justice," *Religious Education* 101(3), (2006):321-329. DOI: 10.1080/00344080600786435

### ***Attentive***

Participants practice careful and open listening to each other, to themselves, and to their faith tradition, including the Holy Spirit. It involves learning through respectful conversations, even when there are different viewpoints and areas of expertise.

### ***Praxis-oriented***

PAR recognises the inseparability of theory and practice. The focus is on putting faith into practice through various actions. These actions reveal our underlying beliefs and theology, and they also provide opportunities to apply what we have learned through reflection in new ways.

### ***Spiritual***

The methods and processes used in theological action research are rooted in the Christian tradition of discerning the Spirit's guidance in the world and in the church.

### ***Iterative and cyclical***

Each cycle of questioning and reflection leads to new insights and questions for further reflection. This process allows communities to continually engage in discernment and reflection, leading to ongoing growth and learning.

### **Advantages**

- i. Engagement in participatory action research alters individuals' self-perceptions and expands their perceived capabilities.
- ii. Abilities acquired through action research extend into various aspects of researchers' lives.
- iii. Participating in action research can facilitate the dismantling of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic divides.
- iv. Action research aids in enhancing individuals' comprehension of the factors shaping their experiences.

- v. Community-based participatory action research has the potential to propel communities towards beneficial societal transformations.

### **Disadvantages**

- i. Participatory action research (PAR) can be time-consuming due to its collaborative nature and iterative process.
- ii. Decision-making in PAR can be prolonged or contentious, given the diverse perspectives and interests of participants.
- iii. Resource constraints, including funding and technical expertise, may limit the implementation of PAR initiatives.
- iv. The contextual specificity of PAR may limit the generalisability of findings beyond the specific community or context.
- v. Resistance to change may impede the implementation of action plans or recommendations arising from PAR initiatives

### ***Methodological Steps (Framework)***

The PAR typically follows a cyclical process that involves several key stages/steps. Throughout the PAR process, there is an emphasis on collaboration, empowerment, and social justice, to create meaningful and sustainable change within the community.

#### **Step 1: Identifying the Problem**

The process begins with identifying a specific issue or problem of concern within the community. This may involve academics and practice group leaders/representatives brainstorming to discern an appropriate question for research. At best, this is done in consultation with church/community members.

#### **Step 2: Planning and Designing the Study**

Once the problem is identified, the researcher and community members collaboratively plan and design the research study. This

includes determining research questions, selecting appropriate methodologies and data collection techniques, and establishing timelines and roles for all involved stakeholders.

### **Step 3: Data Collection**

In this stage, data is collected through various methods such as interviews, surveys, focus groups, observations, or participatory workshops. Community members actively participate in data collection, often as co-researchers alongside the academic researcher.

### **Step 4: Data Analysis**

Once data is collected, it is analysed collaboratively by researchers and community members. This may involve coding qualitative data, statistical analysis of quantitative data, or other methods of data interpretation.

### **Step 5: Reflection and Interpretation**

After analysing the data, the researcher and community members reflect on the findings to interpret their meaning and relevance. This stage often involves critical dialogue and reflexivity to understand the implications of the findings for the community.

### **Step 6: Action Planning**

Based on the findings and interpretations, the researcher and community members develop action plans for addressing the identified issue or problem. This may involve advocacy, policy recommendations, community organising, or other forms of action.

### **Step 7: Implementation**

Action plans are implemented in collaboration with community members, with the researcher providing support and guidance as needed. This stage focuses on enacting change and making a positive impact within the community.

## **Step 8: Evaluation and Reflection**

Finally, the process is evaluated to assess the effectiveness of the actions taken and to reflect on lessons learned. This stage informs future iterations of the PAR process and contributes to ongoing learning and improvement.

### ***Illustrative Example***

**Topic:** Revitalising Youth Participation in Liturgical Practices within the Anglican Church of Nigeria through Participatory Action Research

#### **Main research question**

How can youth participation in liturgical practices within the Anglican Church of Nigeria be revitalised and enhanced through participatory action research methodologies?<sup>218</sup>

#### **Subsidiary research question**

1. What are the current levels of youth participation in liturgical practices within the Anglican Church of Nigeria, and what factors contribute to these levels of engagement?
2. How do Anglican youth in Nigeria perceive and experience liturgical practices?
3. What barriers or challenges do Anglican youth face in fully participating in liturgical activities?
4. What innovative approaches or strategies can be developed to enhance youth engagement and meaningful participation in liturgical practices within the Anglican Church of Nigeria?
5. How can the Anglican Church of Nigeria empower youth to take on leadership roles and contribute to the planning and implementation of liturgical activities in a way that reflects their values, interests, and cultural context?

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<sup>218</sup> This example has five questions which together cover the key aspects of the steps outlined above.

## 5.7 Conclusion

I have explored various methodologies in missiology and church and society research to offer valuable insights into the dynamic relationship between faith communities and the broader social contexts in which they operate. Each methodology provides unique tools for understanding, analysing, and engaging with the multifaceted dynamics of church and society interactions. This chapter brings us to the end of our discussions on the various methodologies in theological and religious studies research. In the next chapter, I will give a brief guide regarding how the biblical text and our context should relate in order to ensure that our theological formulations are credible and evangelical.

## 5.8 Review Exercise

1. What are the key components of the Praxis Matrix Methodology, and how does it facilitate the integration of theory and practice in missiological research?
2. How does the *Sankofa*-Historian Methodology utilise the concept of “*Sankofa*” to explore historical perspectives in missiological studies, and what are its implications for understanding the past in relation to the present?
3. Describe the Pentecostal Praxis Missiological Model and its approach to missiological research within Pentecostal contexts. How does this model incorporate both theological reflection and practical action?
4. What is Participatory Action Research (PAR), and how does it empower communities to actively engage in the research process? Provide examples of how PAR has been used in missiological studies to address real-world issues.
5. Compare and contrast any three methodologies discussed in this chapter in terms of their underlying principles, approaches to research, and practical applications in missiological studies.

6. How do these methodologies contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between church and society, and how can they inform effective strategies for community engagement and transformation?
7. Reflect on the strengths and limitations of two of the methodologies discussed in this chapter.
8. Consider the ethical considerations involved in conducting missiological research using these methodologies. How can researchers ensure ethical practices and respectful engagement with communities and participants?
9. Imagine you are planning a research project in a specific missiological context. Which of these methodologies would you choose, and why? How would you apply the principles and techniques of your chosen methodology to address the research questions and objectives effectively?
10. Discuss the role of reflexivity and self-awareness in research in Church and Society studies. How can researchers critically reflect on their own biases, assumptions, and positionalities to ensure rigour and integrity in their studies?

### **5.9 Suggested Research Topics**

1. Generational Differences in Church Attendance: Exploring Attitudes and Motivations across Age Groups in Ethiopian Orthodox Church
2. The Relationship between Church Leadership Styles and Membership Retention: A Study of Selected Churches in Sudan
3. Strategies for Revitalising Declining Churches: A Case Study of Selected Churches in Benin
4. Assessing the Impact of Colonialism on Indigenous Spiritual Practices: A Case Study of Methodist Missionary Activity in Ghana
5. Exploring the Role of the Catholic Church in Promoting Religious Tolerance in Togo

6. Analysing the Contribution of Anglican Church Movements to Social Change in South Africa
7. Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Missionary Work: Assessing Challenges and Opportunities in Missionary Baptist Churches in Seychelles
8. Assessing Church of Christ Responses to Indigenous Land Rights Movements in Central African Republic
9. Assessing the Role of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Addressing Climate Change and Environmental Degradation in Uganda
10. Exploring Methodist Church Responses to Global Migration Challenges in Rwanda
11. Investigating the Impact of Technology on Contemporary Missionary Outreach in Senegal, with a focus on the Assemblies of God Church
12. Addressing Issues of Gender, Race, and Identity in Worship among the Tigrinya-speaking Churches in Eritrea
13. Towards a Common Understanding of the Lord's Supper among the Shona and Ndebele Churches in Zimbabwe
14. Examining the Transformative Power of Ritual Time among the Xhosa-speaking Churches in South Africa
15. Investigating Presbyterian Church-Led Initiatives for Economic Development and Poverty Alleviation in Tanzania
16. Reimagining Missionary Paradigms from Postcolonial and Indigenous Perspectives in Ghana, with a Focus on the Anglican Church in Ethiopia

## CHAPTER SIX

### AN EVANGELICAL FRAMEWORK FOR CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

The methodologies presented in this book are generally characterised by biblical-theological components and contextual components. Theological formulations generally involve an interaction between the biblical text and the context of the study. So, a key question to ponder is: “How can the church in Africa affirm its uniqueness (in terms of the African identity and experiences) and at the same time remain faithful to the gospel message?”<sup>219</sup> Attempts to answer this question have yielded a number of approaches, including Indigenisation, Africanisation, and Contextualisation, among others. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theological framework for navigating the gospel (text, theology) and cultural encounters. Since my focus is on evangelicals, I begin with a sketch of what evangelicalism is.

#### 6.1 A Sketch of Evangelicalism

The word “evangelicalism” presents a challenge due to the diverse ways and contexts in which the term has been used—including political, social, ecclesial, and theological circles.<sup>220</sup> He notes that “evangelicalism” derives from the New Testament Greek word *euangelion*, which translates to “the gospel” or “good news” of Christ (cf. Mark 1:1; Rom. 1:16).<sup>221</sup> Used as an adjective, “evangelical” denotes a commitment to the message of Christ, the gospel.<sup>222</sup> The noun “evangelical” refers to an individual who belongs to a community dedicated to the gospel of Christ which summons us to repentance, offering forgiveness of sin and liberation

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<sup>219</sup> Amevenku and Boaheng, *Biblical Exegesis in African context*, xv.

<sup>220</sup> Isaac Boaheng, “Theology of the Cross in African Evangelicalism: Implications for Contemporary Christianity,” *Social Sciences, Humanities and Education Journal (SHE Journal)*, 3(2), (2022): 207–221, 208. (DOI: 10.25273/she.v3i2.12686.)

<sup>221</sup> Boaheng, “Theology of the Cross in African Evangelicalism,” 208.

<sup>222</sup> Boaheng, “Theology of the Cross in African Evangelicalism,” 208.

from eternal judgment.<sup>223</sup> It exalts Christ in the believer's soul through the declaration and reaffirmation of the cross and the promise of resurrection.

A careful study of the concept of “evangelical” comprises, at least, the following tenets.

### 1. **The Authority and Primacy of Scripture**

Firstly, to be evangelical means to acknowledge God’s special revelation—that is, the divine communication of truth and knowledge directly from God to humanity, typically through extraordinary means beyond natural observation or human reasoning.<sup>224</sup> Unlike general revelation (which comprises God's self-disclosure through nature, conscience, and reason), special revelation involves specific, targeted communication from God to individuals or groups. Here, one may argue for the uniqueness of God’s revelation through Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16) with its climax in God’s self-disclosure through Christ (cf. Heb. 1:1–4).<sup>225</sup> Evangelicals, therefore, maintain the authority of Scripture as the primary and ultimate source guiding matters of faith and practice because it is the only written revelation from God to humankind.<sup>226</sup> This means that the biblical worldview should be the lens through which we interpret other worldviews and not the other way around.<sup>227</sup>

### 2. **The Sinfulness of Humanity**

Secondly, to be evangelical means to be aware of the grievous impact of sin.<sup>228</sup> Sin has a devastating effect on the universe. Paul highlights sin’s impact by describing creation as being subjected to futility and

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<sup>223</sup> Boaheng, “Theology of the Cross in African Evangelicalism,” 208.

<sup>224</sup> Manyika, “The Negative State of Evangelical Theology in Africa.”

<sup>225</sup> Manyika, “The Negative State of Evangelical Theology in Africa.”

<sup>226</sup> R. E. Olson, *How to Be Evangelical without being Conservative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 24.

<sup>227</sup> Aiah Dorkuh Foday-Khabenje, *Byang Kato: The Life and Legacy of Africa’s Pioneer of Evangelical Theology* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Monographs, 2023), 298.

<sup>228</sup> Manyika, “The Negative State of Evangelical Theology in Africa.”

bondage to decay as a result of sin (cf. Rom. 8:19–21). Here, sin has far-reaching effects, not only on humanity but on the entire created order, which groans in anticipation of redemption. The solution to the sin problem required Christ to overcome sin, Satan and death in order to liberate humanity from their bondage (Col. 2:13–15). Given the foregoing, the evangelicals are “the product of a divine act where God in Christ has won the victory over the malevolent Satan, the corrupting power of sin and the terminating sting of death.”<sup>229</sup> In other words, to be an evangelical is to be a dynamic signpost that signals both that *Christus victor* motif—the triumphant victory of Christ—and the lordship of Jesus to the glory of God the Father. The evangelical’s awareness of what God did on their behalf motivates them to love him and their neighbour.

### 3. The Need for Personal Conversion

Thirdly, to be evangelical means to insist on the necessity of personal conversion—that is, coming to a profound faith in the completed work of Christ.<sup>230</sup> The act of expressing faith in Christ for salvation is inherently personal and cannot be undertaken on behalf of another individual. It is incumbent upon the individual who seeks salvation to personally articulate and demonstrate this faith. Manyika argues that this personal salvation originates not in subjective experience but in God’s love and mercy (John 3:16; Rom. 3:22–26; Tit. 3:3–7).<sup>231</sup> The conversion experience is a spiritual rebirth (referred to as being “born-again”) that leads to justification and the beginning of an ongoing process of sanctification.<sup>232</sup> Thus, the evangelical faith is not

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<sup>229</sup> Batanayi I. Manyika, “Etching Evangelical Nomenclature for Public Theological Engagement in the Global South,” Academic Dean’s Address presented on 4<sup>th</sup> February, 2022 (Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ar3xDgv6uvY>)

<sup>230</sup> Manyika, “Etching Evangelical Nomenclature for Public Theological Engagement in the Global South.”

<sup>231</sup> Batanayi I. Manyika, “The Negative State of Evangelical Theology in Africa.” (<https://sats.ac.za/blog/2023/03/27/37163/> accessed: 1-05-2024)

<sup>232</sup> B. Harris, “Beyond Bebbington: The Quest for Evangelical Identity in a Postmodern Era,” *Churchman* 122 (3), (2008): 201–219, 202.

merely a passive agreement with doctrinal statements but rather an active and dynamic personal relationship with the crucified and risen Christ.<sup>233</sup>

#### 4. **The Sufficiency of the Cross**

Fourthly, the sufficiency of the cross holds paramount significance in evangelicalism. Evangelicals affirm that the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross is entirely sufficient for the redemption and reconciliation of humanity with God. This belief stems from the understanding that through Christ's atoning sacrifice, all sin, guilt, and condemnation are fully dealt with, and salvation is made available to all who place their faith in him. Evangelicals emphasise that there is no additional work or merit required on the part of individuals to secure their salvation, as the work of Christ on the cross is complete and perfect. This belief stands in contrast to any notion of human effort or achievement contributing to salvation, emphasising instead the grace of God as the sole basis for reconciliation with him. It is in line with this that Manyika says "A true evangelical glossary flows from and points to the Christ event."<sup>234</sup>

#### 5. **Commitment to the Great Commission**

Fifthly, to be evangelical means to be committed to evangelism, teaching, and discipleship in fulfilment of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).<sup>235</sup> This involves not only instructing and equipping believers but also a commitment to activism.<sup>236</sup> From the evangelical perspective, being a believer is inherently linked with activism, as conversion often sparks a fervent desire to lead others to Christ. Thus,

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<sup>233</sup> Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 72.

<sup>234</sup> Manyika, "Etching Evangelical Nomenclature for Public Theological Engagement in the Global South."

<sup>235</sup> Manyika, "The Negative State of Evangelical Theology in Africa."

<sup>236</sup> Boaheng, "Theology of the Cross in African Evangelicalism: Implications for Contemporary Christianity," 208.

evangelicals recognise the transformative power of the cross of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing about spiritual renewal and sociopolitical transformation in believers' lives. Such a dimension of evangelicalism is important in any context, but more so in the global south, especially Africa which is full of various sociopolitical challenges.

## 6. Eschatological Hope

Sixthly, being evangelical entails living with steadfast anticipation of the return of Christ (Acts 1:11), God's judgment of both the living and the dead (1 Pet. 4:5), and the future establishment of the New Heavens and New Earth (Isa. 65:17; Rev. 21:1).<sup>237</sup> Thus, evangelicals eagerly await the fulfilment of God's promises and the ultimate restoration of all things. Evangelicals emphasise the tension between the "already" and the "not yet," as believers experience the presence of God's kingdom in the here and now whilst eagerly anticipating its full realisation in the future. This eschatological hope not only provides evangelical Christians with comfort, assurance, and motivation in the present but also shapes their perspective on suffering, injustice, and the challenges of life.

With the above overview of evangelicalism, I now proceed to offer guidelines for credible contextualisation of the Christian faith in the African setting.

## 6.2 A Theological Framework for Contextualisation

### *Defining Contextualisation*

Contextualisation means different things. However, in the context of theology, contextualisation means making the Christian faith relevant and understood in the African context.<sup>238</sup> Ross Langmead defines contextualisation as "the dynamic, ongoing encounter between Word and world in a concrete context, at some cultural

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<sup>237</sup> Manyika, "The Negative State of Evangelical Theology in Africa."

<sup>238</sup> Yusufu Turaki, *Engaging Religions and Worldviews in Africa: A Christian Theological Method* (Carlisle, Cumbria: HippoBooks, 2020), 45.

depth, taking a new shape in each situation.”<sup>239</sup> In essence, contextualisation explores the dynamic interaction between the Gospel and culture across geographical boundaries and throughout history. It is a concept that continually evolves, focusing on how the Gospel and the church connect with and adapt to their specific local environments. This means that the process of contextualisation facilitates the interaction between two key partners, namely, the Christian gospel and the African culture. The obvious question that comes to mind is: Which party (gospel or context/culture) should the theologian emphasise in the contextualisation process? Some theologians emphasise the text whilst others emphasise the context (culture).<sup>240</sup>

I subscribe to the view that context should be subject to the scrutiny of the text. In other words, the gospel should be used as the lens through which culture is interpreted. It is this view that I will unpack and defend in the subsequent pages. Based on the above understanding, I define contextualisation in the context of theologising as the strategic adaptation of theological doctrines and practices to specific cultural *milieus* whilst emphasising the primacy of the gospel over cultural norms. The contextualisation of the Christian gospel operates under the premise that the message of Christ needs to adapt to the unique characteristics of each culture, recognising the incarnational nature of the Good News.<sup>241</sup>

The main aim of contextualisation is that “the church be enabled in a particular time and place, to witness to Christ in a way that is both faithful to the gospel and meaningful to men, women, and children in the cultural, social, political, and religious conditions of

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<sup>239</sup> Ross Langmead, “Mission and Contextualisation,” *Journal of Tribal Studies*, 2(1), (1998): 45-61, 49.

<sup>240</sup> For more on this consult Turaki, *Engaging Religions and Worldviews in Africa*, 45.

<sup>241</sup> Isaac Boaheng, “Early Christian Missions in West Africa: Implications for Rethinking the Great Commission,” Emmanuel Asante and D. N. A. Kpobi (eds.) *Rethinking the Great Commission: Emerging African Perspectives* (Accra: Type Company Limited, 2018), 214ff.

that time and place.”<sup>242</sup> Hitherto, the desire to make the gospel meaningful and relevant must not overshadow the need to maintain the core aspect of the gospel. In this process, the gospel serves as the ultimate standard by which cultural contexts are scrutinised and evaluated. This ensures that theological truths remain paramount and unadulterated despite cultural variations. Contextualisation, therefore, upholds the superiority of divine revelation over human customs and traditions.

How are we to achieve this? A few suggestions are made below.

### ***Seek Adequate Understanding of Contextual Realities***

Studies of various world religions have established similarities between human culture and religion. This underscores the religious nature of humanity. The religious character of human beings is noted in the following quote: “There is within them (humankind) the pressure of the ultimate, the direction towards God, a compulsion to get back to their Creator... But there is a direction towards God within every human being and God Himself is actively drawing all men and women to Himself.”<sup>243</sup> From an African perspective, this statement resonates deeply with many traditional African beliefs and spiritual practices. Many African societies believe in a Creator or a higher power who is intimately involved in the lives of individuals and communities. This belief is often manifested in rituals, prayers, and ceremonies that seek to maintain harmony with the spiritual realm. The notion that God is actively drawing all people to himself reflects the belief in divine providence and guidance present in many African religions. In African cosmology, there is a belief in a benevolent deity who is concerned with the well-being of humanity and who actively intervenes in human affairs.

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<sup>242</sup> C. Thomas Wright, “Contextual Evangelism Strategies” in John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith and Justice Anderson (eds), *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1998), 453.

<sup>243</sup> Ken Gnanakan, *The Pluralistic Predicament* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1992), 216.

The same can be said of many other human cultures. The quest for God is, therefore, universal. This quest may be corrupted by Satan; yet, we should be careful to attribute the quest itself to Satan.<sup>244</sup> Given this understanding, it is wrong to view the human desire to know God “entirely negatively,” especially against the backdrop of the biblical teaching that God “operates universally within his creation despite the fall of humanity.”<sup>245</sup> This means that the quest to reach God through African Traditional Religion was a manifestation of human religiosity.

Therefore, it is not wrong to study the African Traditional Religion and then identify commonalities or similarities with Christianity. The religious worldview of the receptor community cannot be ignored if we want to properly contextualise our message. There is a need to have an adequate understanding of the contextual realities in the community for which theology is formulated. What is wrong, however, is to draw conclusions that distort or contradict the biblical message. Gnakan asserts “We need to be clear that in developing our implications of the universality of the redemptive activity of Jesus Christ we do not justify the existence of sinful structures, even though sincerely made by men and women but hindered by sin and Satan's deception.”<sup>246</sup>

An example to illustrate the above point is the African chieftaincy institution. This traditional form of leadership was instituted time immemorial to cater for the leadership needs of the people. Closely related to the chieftaincy institution is the worship of lower divinities. Traditional leaders have traditional priests who counsel them just as the priests of God gave spiritual direction to the kings of ancient Israel. Whilst one can draw similarities between the chieftaincy institutions in biblical Israel and Africa, one has to be careful not to justify the African version simply because a similar thing is found in the Bible. Who is the power behind the chieftaincy

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<sup>244</sup> Turaki, *Engaging Religions and Worldviews in Africa*, 439-440.

<sup>245</sup> Turaki, *Engaging Religions and Worldviews in Africa*, 440.

<sup>246</sup> Gnanakan, *The Pluralistic Predicament*, 216.

institution in the Bible and Africa? Who is the object of worship in either case (the biblical case and the African case)? To whom is the leader accountable in either case? To whom is the prayer offered when the king sits in counsel? Or who is consulted in the decision-making process? Sincere answers to these questions will lead to the conclusion that one cannot simply assume that an aspect of African Traditional Religion or African sociopolitical life and practices can be accepted in the context of Christianity simply because a similar thing is found in the Bible.

Yet, one has to be careful not to draw hasty conclusions when dealing with cultural issues. The African theologian needs to study the worldview and cultural practices of the receptor community. There is a need to have an adequate understanding of everything that affects the lives of the people, especially the religious aspects. A proper understanding will help the theologian to make biblically sound and contextually relevant conclusions so that whilst God's word is maintained as the standard, contextual realities can also be addressed. African theologians are encouraged to incorporate such aspects of the African communal worldview as interconnectedness, interdependence, sharing, and respect for elders, into their theology. African practices for atonement should be viewed through the lens of the cross to determine how they may be used in soteriologising in the African context. This guiding principle should be considered: Context is one of the key authorities in every theological formulation. However, any suggestion that theology owes a debt to cultural context inevitably triggers concerns.

### ***Maintain the Core of the Gospel Message***

Authentic contextualisation of the gospel ensures that none of the fundamental truths of the Christian gospel are forfeited during the adaptation process. There is, therefore, the need to understand the gospel message and maintain it throughout the theological formulation regardless of the context involved. There is no scholarly consensus regarding what constitutes the key elements of the gospel.

My opinion, however, is that the core message proclaimed by the early church included at least seven components, namely, “the sinfulness of humanity and the need for repentance, prophecies about the coming Messiah, the miracles and teaching of Jesus, the Christ, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross of Calvary, Jesus’ physical resurrection, the sending of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of the *Parousia*.”<sup>247</sup> This view derives from the description of evangelicalism given earlier in this chapter.

Each of these dimensions of the gospel must be preserved in a manner that remains relevant across all cultures.<sup>248</sup> This approach finds support in biblical precedents, such as Peter’s uncompromising proclamation of the gospel on the Day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:14-42; 10:34-43). Similarly, Paul upheld these essential gospel truths in his defence before Agrippa (Acts 26:1-29) and admonished the Corinthians to remain steadfast in them (1 Cor. 15:1-5). The biblical antecedents underline the need to uphold and transmit accurately the core tenets of Christianity (as outlined in the Holy Scriptures) even as one strives for relevance within the context of the intended recipients.

The expression “Christianity as outlined in the Holy Scriptures” needs further comment. This expression underscores the need to dichotomise what is biblical Christianity and what is cultural, especially regarding the Christian tradition inherited from Western and American missionaries. For example, the Ordinance marriage, though widely accepted in Africa (at least in Ghana) as a Christian model, is more cultural than religious. It is a form of marriage based on Western culture. The Bible nowhere prescribes a single way to contract marriage. The mode of contracting marriage depends on the

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<sup>247</sup> Isaac Boaheng, “Cross-Cultural Christian Mission in the Ghanaian Context: Challenges, Strategies and Prospects,” *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 1(1) (2020): 16-26, 20. These seven dimensions of the gospel can be deduced from the sketch of evangelicalism given earlier in this chapter.

<sup>248</sup> Boaheng, “Cross-Cultural Christian Mission in the Ghanaian Context: Challenges, Strategies and Prospects,” 20.

culture of the people involved not on a biblically sanctioned method. The Ordinance marriage though is strictly monogamous and so may be considered as a biblical model, allows divorce when “(1) one party commits adultery; (2) one party behaves in a manner that the other cannot reasonably be expected to live with that party; (3) there is desertion for a continuous period of at least 2 years; (4) the parties have not lived together continuously for 2 years or more and they both consent to the dissolution or that parties have not lived together as husband and wife for at least 5 years.”<sup>249</sup> Except for (perhaps) the first reason, which is even subject to debate, the other conditions which allow for divorce are not biblically warranted. The Ordinance marriage is therefore not inherently biblical/Christian. Therefore, it should not be imposed on African Christians. The point is that what the theologian upholds as a Christian requirement should be based on credible biblical theology, not simply on what was inherited from Christian missionaries.

The ministerial vestment is also another area that needs to be looked at. It is important to note that whilst one has to wear decent attire to preach there is no biblical warrant to force Africans to adopt the ministerial vestments that were introduced by missionaries. The choice of these vestments was informed by some sociopolitical and cultural conditions that may not be found in the African setting. The choice of suit and tie and black clerical shirt, gown, or cassock helps ministers in the West to keep themselves warm. In Africa, where the weather is hot, there is the need to adopt what is contextually relevant. Obviously, there is a need for religious emancipation through a critical dichotomisation between what is religious (biblical/Christian) and what is cultural (Western or American). The point, again, is that it is only what is biblical that should be considered superior to the African culture when there is a conflict.

By what is biblical, we are not simply referring to what is found in the Bible. Something may be found in the Bible but may be

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<sup>249</sup> Frederick Mawusi Amevenku & Isaac Boaheng, *African Biblical Christianity and Contemporary Ethics* (Accra: Noyam Publishers, 2020), 10.

culturally conditioned and so may not apply directly to our context. A credible biblical theology will distil the universal principles from the cultural aspects. The following steps may help translate biblical commands from one culture and time to another.<sup>250</sup>

1. Discern as accurately as possible the principle behind the given behavioural command.
2. Discern whether the principle is timeless or time-bound. Since most biblical principles are rooted in God's unchanging nature, it seems to follow that a principle should be considered to be transcultural unless there is evidence to the contrary.
3. If a principle is transcultural, study the nature of its behavioural application within our culture. Will the behavioural application given be appropriate now, or will it be perceived as out-of-date or odd? However, remember that the criterion for whether a behavioural command should be applied in our culture is not whether it conforms to modern cultural practices but whether or not it adequately and accurately expresses the God-given principle that was intended.
4. If the behavioural expression of a principle should be changed, suggest a cultural equivalent that would adequately express the God-given principle behind the original command. For example, a handshake in place of a holy kiss.
5. If after careful study the nature of the biblical principle and its attendant command remain in question, apply the biblical principle of humility.

There may be occasions when even after careful study of a given principle and its behavioral expression, we still may remain uncertain about whether it should be considered transcultural or

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<sup>250</sup> Roy B. Zuck (ed.), *Rightly Divided: Readings in Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 1996), 242-243.

culture-bound. If we must decide to treat the command one way or the other but have no conclusive means to make the decision, the biblical principle of humility can be helpful. After all, would it be better to treat a principle as transcultural and be guilty of being overscrupulous in our desire to obey God? Or would it be better to treat a transcultural principle as culture-bound and be guilty of breaking a transcendent requirement of God? The answer should be obvious.

In the case of a difficult or obscure text, the theologian must endeavour to apply the appropriate exegetical tools to understand it and break it down for easy comprehension “without losing its true meaning.”<sup>251</sup> If the context proves difficult, the theologian has to study it carefully to have an adequate understanding and then determine how the gospel can effectively be transmitted into that context.<sup>252</sup>

Maintaining the message of the gospel requires one to guard against syncretism and to be cautious about folk religion. The next section explains this further.

### ***Be Cautious of Syncretism and Folk Religion***

C. Thomas Wright identifies two major dangers that may affect the impact of the gospel in the process of contextualisation, namely, syncretism (that is, “blending former religious or cultural practices which results in a diluted gospel”) and folk religion (“traditional activities and religious practices that are created by humans trying to find God”).<sup>253</sup>

The inclination to blend traditional religious customs with the Christian faith is a pervasive phenomenon across various human societies. Folk religions often introduce additional requirements beyond faith in the atonement of Christ for salvation; they project

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<sup>251</sup> Turaki, *Engaging Religions and Worldviews in Africa*, 45.

<sup>252</sup> Turaki, *Engaging Religions and Worldviews in Africa*, 45.

<sup>253</sup> Wright, “Contextual Evangelism Strategies,” 453-454.

outward rituals over inward transformation.<sup>254</sup> For instance, the practice of polygamy among certain African Christians exemplifies a syncretistic lifestyle. Despite professing faith in Christ, individuals may still adhere to African cultural norms that permit polygamous marriages. Moreover, whilst many African Christians acknowledge the redemptive power of Christ's sacrifice, some continue to engage in traditional practices, such as consulting traditional priests and making offerings to idols, in pursuit of power, wealth, protection, and deliverance from malevolent forces. The use of imprecatory prayers among contemporary African Christians borrows from imprecatory practices in African Traditional Religion.<sup>255</sup>

These syncretistic behaviours challenge the authenticity of biblical teachings and the Christian faith. For example, the use of imprecatory prayer is not rooted in a holistic biblical teaching of prayers. Jesus sheds light on personal prayers (by David and other Psalmists) when he (Jesus) exhorts believers to pray for (the welfare) of their enemies as the benevolence of their Father in heaven is expressed towards both the righteous and the wicked (Matt. 5:43ff). The theologian is expected to preserve the integrity of the gospel message in order to expose and combat heresy and syncretic tendencies.<sup>256</sup>

Also, the theologian should guard against "acquiescing to dominant cultural values" which contradict the gospel. This acquiescence can occur at both individual and collective levels, wherein individuals or groups adopt the values and behaviours endorsed by the dominant culture, often without questioning their validity or considering alternative perspectives. Appealing to the example of the biblical prophets, Douglas John Hall calls for a theology that is "inherently suspicious of dominant values and

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<sup>254</sup> Wright, "Contextual Evangelism Strategies", 453-454

<sup>255</sup> For more on this consult Frederick M. Amevenku and Isaac Boaheng, "Use of Imprecatory Prayers in Contemporary African Christianity: A Critique," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 1(2) (2015): 86-104.

<sup>256</sup> Boaheng, "Cross-Cultural Christian Mission in the Ghanaian Context," 21.

trends,” is characterised by “neither a priori approval nor a priori disapproval of society,” and seeks engagement or dialogue with society.<sup>257</sup> Syncretic tendencies can be dealt with by ensuring that the Bible remains the highest authority in the theological formulation. African traditions are important, but they must always come under the scrutiny of the Scriptures. In this regard, Byan Kato serves us well in saying that “The principle of continuity is present in the sense that God’s image in humans is not obliterated, and God continues to reveal himself generally. Nevertheless, running parallel to this is also discontinuity, in the sense that God is now producing a new person, in the formation of the body of Christ and that the Bible alone is the final infallible rule for faith and practice” within this new community.<sup>258</sup>

### ***Link Contextual Theology with Global Theology***

In contextualising our message, we need to dialogue with the global church. Our theology should speak the same language as those brewed in other parts of the world. The core message should resonate with what is said elsewhere. The way the core message is applied is what may differ from context to context. The fidelity of African Christian theology to the core tenets of the Christian faith renders it universally relevant, and applicable to the global church.<sup>259</sup> Therefore, whatever renders African Christian theology authentically Christian also renders it universally applicable. Whether originating from an African or Western perspective, theological beliefs must align with fundamental truths such as human sinfulness, the death and resurrection of Christ, salvation through grace by faith, the anticipation of Christ's return, and others. Koyama serves us well with this quote: “Latin American liberation theology is a responsible

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<sup>257</sup> Douglas John Hall, *Thinking the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 114-115.

<sup>258</sup> Kato cited in Foday-Khabenje, *Byang Kato*, 298.

<sup>259</sup> Isaac Boaheng, “Doing African Christian Theology: Some Non-negotiable Essentials,” *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies (ERATS)* 7(12) (2021): 215-228, 222.

theological effort to indigenise theology within the Latin American political and economic situation and at the same time carries a relevant message about the global situation of humanity today.”<sup>260</sup> Koyama’s point is that theological formulation for a given context must be relevant to “the global situation of humanity.” So as a guide: A theological formulation that contradicts relevant aspects of the global Christian faith must be reworked.

Taking African Christology as an example, one can consider the dual nature of Christ, his death and resurrection, and his salvific ministry, among others as globally accepted dimensions of the person and works of Christ. One should be cautious not to Christologise in a way that undermines, for example, the dual nature of Christ. Such Christology falls outside evangelicalism. Any analogy from any part of the world that undermines any of these core truths about the person and works of Christ cannot be accepted in the name of contextualisation. In this regard, African functional Christology needs to be relooked as it fails to provide a balanced perspective of Christ’s humanity and divinity. The point is that, unless theological formulations are connected with the global theological network, they will become narrowly focused upon specific social settings and potentially fall away from orthodoxy.<sup>261</sup>

### ***Be Careful not to take Shadows for the Reality***

The fact that God has revealed himself to people of all cultures is undeniable. Through general revelation, people of every context know of the existence of God. General revelation refers to the revelation of God through nature, human conscience, and history. The Bible attests to the availability and validity of general revelation as a means of gaining knowledge about God (cf. Job 12:7-10; Psa. 19:1-2, Acts 14:17 and Romans 1:20).

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<sup>260</sup> Koyama as cited in Boaheng, “Doing African Christian Theology,” 222.

<sup>261</sup> Douglas John Hall, *Thinking the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 84.

Nonetheless, whilst general revelation has divine origin, it does not have salvific value in the same sense as special revelation—the specific revelation of God through Scripture and Jesus Christ. General revelation, though can provide insight into God’s existence, attributes, and moral law, is not sufficient for salvation on its own. Salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, which is made known through special revelation. However, general revelation can serve as a pointer or precursor to special revelation, leading individuals to seek further knowledge of God and ultimately encounter the gospel message. The beauty and complexity of the natural world are often interpreted as evidence of a higher power or spiritual force at work. For instance, the rhythmic patterns of rainfall and the cycles of planting and harvesting may be viewed as expressions of divine providence.

The religious and cultural ideas of African religious tradition, like those of all other human religious traditions in the world, arose out of general (or natural) revelation. In Romans 1:18-23), Paul indicates that the general revelation of God is available to all but has not been able to offer salvific value due to the corruption of the mind and heart. The first Commandment of God makes a clear distinction between humankind’s religion and true faith in God (Exod. 20:3-6). Yusufu Turaki concludes from the above that “African Traditional Religion was self-made.”<sup>262</sup> He argues further that “after the attempted building of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11), God rejected all such self-made religions, and all humanity languished under God’s universal wrath. Judgement, and curse. Thereafter God’s strategy for dealing with rebellious humanity necessitated God’s final and special revelation in Jesus Christ that brings salvation and redemption for the whole world.”<sup>263</sup>

This means that many aspects of the African traditional belief system were typologies of the true revealed about God and his salvation, through divine special revelation. In the context of

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<sup>262</sup> Turaki, *Engaging Religions and Worldviews in Africa*, 441.

<sup>263</sup> Turaki, *Engaging Religions and Worldviews in Africa*, 441.

Christianity, typology involves identifying and understanding symbolic connections between people, events, or institutions in the Old Testament (the type) and their fulfillment or counterpart in the New Testament (the antitype).

Before Christ Israel observed rituals that foreshadowed the reality found in Christ. A few examples of Pauline typological teachings will help at this point. In 1 Corinthians 5:7, Paul uses typological language to convey a deeper spiritual truth. He refers to Christ as “our Passover lamb,” drawing a symbolic connection between the Old Testament Passover lamb and the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Just as the Passover lamb was sacrificed to deliver the Israelites from bondage in Egypt (Exod. 12), so Christ, through His sacrificial death on the cross, provides liberation from sin and spiritual bondage. This typological interpretation highlights the continuity between the Old Testament Passover and the New Testament reality of Christ’s atoning sacrifice.

In Colossians 2:16-17, Paul underlines that the religious observances prescribed in the Old Testament, such as dietary restrictions and festival celebrations, were shadows or types that pointed forward to the reality found in Jesus Christ. The dietary laws, festivals, New Moon celebrations, and Sabbaths were all part of the Old Covenant system that foreshadowed the redemptive work of Christ. By fulfilling these types, Christ rendered them obsolete, highlighting his superiority and sufficiency as the fulfilment of God’s redemptive plan.

As Christians, our relationship with the shadows of the Old Testament, now that the reality of Christ has come, should be one of understanding, appreciation, and proper perspective. Whilst the Old Testament shadows, such as rituals, festivals, and sacrifices, served as types and foreshadowings of Christ and his redemptive work, they are no longer necessary for salvation or spiritual fulfilment. Instead, they point us to the reality found in Jesus Christ himself.

We should recognise that Christ is the fulfilment of all Old Testament prophecies and symbols (Matt. 5:17). Therefore, our focus

should be on him and his finished work on the cross rather than on the shadows themselves. Hebrews 10:1 tells us that the law, with its shadows of the good things to come, can never make perfect those who draw near to worship. It is only through faith in Christ that we find true salvation and fulfilment.

The principles of recognising shadows and reality are important to evangelical theological engagement with various contexts. Christ (God) and his work are the only reality we know as far as God's salvific plan is concerned. Any other entity, practice, or person does not have salvific value. Therefore, as far as our salvation is concerned nothing should be allowed to compete with Christ. He is the finality of God's revelation (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:1-3), the only mediator between God (1 Tim. 2:5) and humankind, and the perfect sacrifice for the complete redemption of humankind.<sup>264</sup> The finality of Christ's sacrifice should in never be compromised.

### 6.3 Final Words

The obvious conclusion from the foregoing is that, as the gospel is introduced into a new context, it must perform a purificatory function; meaning the gospel "purifies" relevant aspects of the culture. It does so by affirming and maintaining what is good and true whilst also confronting and rectifying cultural dimensions considered immoral or sinful. This perspective operates under the assumption that whilst the gospel can adapt to any cultural setting, it ultimately surpasses all cultures. Under no circumstance should "the transcending character of the gospel or the power of faith to criticise and transform culture"<sup>265</sup> be denied. All that I am saying is that African Christian theology should not centralise any belief and/or practices that only point to Christ. To give salvific value to any

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<sup>264</sup> Isaac Boaheng, "A Soteriological Reflection on Priestly Christology from an Akan Perspective," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 9(1) (2023): 1–18, 15. (DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17570/stj.2023.v9n1.a16>)

<sup>265</sup> Robert Schreiter, "Inculturation of Faith or Identification with Culture?" *Christianity and Cultures: A Mutual Enrichment*, edited by Norbert Greinacher and Norbert Mette (London: SCM, 1994), 16.

traditional belief or practice is to dethrone Christ from his mediatorial kingly throne.



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## APPENDICES

### **Appendix I: Suggested Thesis/Dissertation Topics**

Below are over 700 suggested topics for thesis/dissertation. Some of them are topics were gathered from past research works (mostly) with modifications. Others are entirely new. Students are entreated to go through, make their own selection and modify it to suit the contextual needs. The topics have been categorised into various theological sub-disciplines. However, the categorisation should not be taken as perfect or a straitjacket. As noted earlier in this book, the way theological sub-disciplines are considered differ across different institutions.

#### ***Suggested Topics I (Biblical Studies)***

1. The Jewish Yom Kippur (Lev. 16:11-22) and its Relationship with Zulu Traditional Festivals: A Theological Reflection
2. Exegetical and Theological Analysis of Psalm 51:1-12: Lessons for Contemporary Malawian Christians
3. The Relationship between the Seals, the Trumpets and the Bowls in Revelation 6-16: Consecutive or Concurrent?
4. Sin, Divine Righteousness and the Cross: An Exegetical Study of Romans 3:21-26
5. A Critical Analysis of Selected Issues in the Book of Daniel: Implications for Contemporary Christianity
6. New Testament Principles of Church Financing in Nigeria: Implications for the Bono People Ghana
7. A Comparative Analysis of Melchizedek and Levitical Priesthood: Perspectives from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church
8. Contextual Bible Interpretation among the Luo Community: Investigating how Luo Cultural Contexts Shape the Interpretation of Biblical Texts
9. Soteriology as Empowerment in Luke's Gospel: Implications for Contemporary Zambian Soteriological Discourses

10. Oral Traditions and Biblical Exegesis among the Zulu: Analysing the Impact of Zulu oral literature on biblical interpretation
11. Ancestor Veneration among the Xhosa and Biblical Interpretation: Studying how beliefs in ancestral spirits influence Xhosa interpretations of Scripture
12. Cultural Influences on Biblical Interpretation among the Tswana: Examining how Tswana cultural practices shape biblical understanding and application
13. Translating Scripture into Amharic: Addressing cultural nuances and linguistic challenges in translating the Bible for the Ethiopian community
14. Vernacular Bible Translation and Community Impact among the Hausa: Assessing the social and cultural implications of translating Scripture into Hausa
15. Discourse Analysis of Jesus' Conversation with the Samaritan Woman: Insights from African Scholars
16. Honouring the Name: A Social-Rhetorical Examination of the Holiness Legislation (Lev. 17-26)
17. A Socio-Historical Appraisal of the Mode and Motivation of Christian Leadership in 1Peter 5:1 - 11 in Its Greco-Roman Context for Northern Ghana
18. A Postcolonial Study of Land Conflict in 1 Kings 21:1-16: Towards a Theological Response to Land Clashes in Nigeria
19. A Social-Scientific Reading of Jeremiah 35:1-19: Towards a Social-Cultural Fight Against Corruption in Kenya
20. Paul's Perspective on Widowhood (1 Cor. 7:39-40): A Case Study of the Challenges of Widowhood in the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Kisii County, Kenya
21. Re-Reading Luke 18:1-8 in the Angolan Context Through the African Hermeneutics of Liberation Towards the Quest for Social Justice in Luke's Gospel Re-reading Joshua 1 & 2: Insights from a Postcolonial Perspective.

22. The Parable of the Good Samaritan and Negative Ethnicity: A Social-Scientific Reading of Luke 10:25-37 for the Ethiopian Context
23. Jeremiah 8:18-9:22 Post-Apartheid Reading: Approaches for Intergenerational Healing
24. Reading Proverbs 31:10-31 from a Akan Womanist Perspective: An Inculturation and Liberation Hermeneutic
25. A Call for Youthful Remembrance of Their Creator: A Study of Ecclesiastes 12
26. Biblical Law and Traditional Law: Analysing the Integration of Christian and Igbo Legal Systems
27. Isaiah's Influence on Ephesians 6:13-17: Reception and Interpretation
28. Circumcision in the Old Testament and Akan Traditions: A Comparative Study
29. The Golden Calf in Exodus 32: Analysing the Relational Dynamics
30. Prophetic Development in the Book of Hosea: Connections and Progressions
31. Reconstructing the Kingship of Jehu: Historical Inquiry and Analysis
32. Shame and Guilt in Psalm 32: A Biblical-Theological Exploration
33. A Contextual Reading of Psalm 23: Lessons for Contemporary Ghanaian Christian Living in the Context of Economic Hardship
34. Re-constructing the Image of Potiphar's Wife in Genesis 39 for Elimination of Bias Against Wives in Sexual Relations in Angola
35. A Social Reading of Judges 5 and Its Implications on the Church's Role in Eradicating Negative Ethnicity in Ghana
36. Proverbs 31:10-31: A Contextual Reading from a Shona Perspective
37. Vicarious Suffering in Old Testament Wisdom Literature: A Traditio-Historical Approach in the Context of the Akan People

38. Contextual Bible Interpretation among the Ndebele: Investigating how Ndebele cultural contexts shape biblical interpretation
39. Traits of Leadership Succession in Deuteronomy 31:1-3, 14, 23 and Matthew 16:13-20: Their Reflection on Seventh Day Pentecostal Assemblies
40. A Study of Matthew 19:1-6 and its Implications for Traditional Marriage in Abura Dunkwa in the Central Region of Ghana
41. Translation Problems in John 21:15-17 and its Implications For Asante-Twi Bible Readers in Kumasi
42. Genesis 1:26-28, 2:18-24 and Gender Equality: Implications for Christians of Akan Culture
43. John 9:1-3 and its Implications for the Ministry of Healing and Deliverance: A Case Study of Selected Prayer Centers in the Church of Pentecost
44. The Pentecost Event in Acts 2:1-13 and its Implications for Christianity in Contemporary Lesotho
45. Re-reading Luke 18:1-8 in the Gambian Context Through the African Hermeneutics of Liberation Towards the Quest for Social Justice in Luke's Gospel
46. Psalm 139: A Redactional Perspective with Insights from the Yoruba Tradition
47. Antitheses in the Book of Malachi: Syntax, Style, and Content Analysis.
48. An Ideological-Critical Interpretation of Justice and Righteousness in Amos 5
49. The Decalogue in Ancient Israel: Searching for Contemporary Relevance among the Maasai Community
50. Imprecatory Psalms and Negative Ethnicity in South Africa: Exploring the Effects on the Zulu People
51. Psalm 104 and the Religious Traditions of Aten and Baal: Insights from the Ndebele Community
52. Images of God in Ecclesiastes: A Comparative Study with Yoruba Concept of the Divine

53. The Symbolic and Theological Significance of the Olive Tree in the Ancient Near East and Hebrew Scriptures: A Reflection in the Context of the Congolese Tradition
54. Malachi's View on Temple Rituals and Ethical Implications: A Comparative Examination with Yoruba Religious Practices
55. The Hattat Ritual and the Day of Atonement in Leviticus: Insights from the Maasai Tribe of Kenya
56. Exploring the Symbolic World of Proverbs 10:1–15:33 with a Focus on 'The Fear of the Lord': Perspectives from the Yoruba Community
57. Christians' Engagement with Political Governance in Nigeria: Insights from Romans 12:14-13:10
58. Community Ideation in John 15:1–16:3: A Study with Relevance to African Belief Systems
59. Economic Justice in Luke 19:1-10: Addressing the Land Question in South Africa
60. Reading John 11:1-45 in Post-Normal Times: Perspectives from Contemporary Africa
61. Shaping Christian Households in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16: A Social Identity Complexity Perspective
62. Social Networks in Early Christianity: Insights from Luke-Acts
63. Eschatological Events in Matthew 24:1–15 and the COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria: An African Interpretation
64. Interpreting the Red Cow in Numbers 19 through the Lens of African Rituals and Symbolisms
65. Isaiah 2:1–4 and Insecurity in Nigeria: Towards a Non-violent Society in Africa
66. Prayerful Persistence in Luke 18:1-8: A Study of Resilience.
67. Building Community Unity: Reading Johannine Concept of Unity from an Akan Perspective
68. The Glory of Christ in 2 Corinthians 2:14-4:6: An African Perspective
69. Twisting the Gospel: Misinterpretation in 2 Timothy 2:15 by Selected African Pastors

70. New Testament Perspectives on Sustainable Economy: Lessons for Nigeria
71. A Socio-Rhetorical Reading of 1 Kings 12:1–16: Relevance to Gambian Society
72. Irony of Ability and Disability in John 9:1–41: An Akan Contextual Analysis
73. Theology of Hope in John 20:1–29: Normal, Post-normal, and New Normal Perspectives
74. Oneness in John 17:1–26: Implications for Ecumenism in Africa
75. Intercultural Criticism of Spiritual Warfare in Ephesians 6:10–20: Significance for the African Christian View on Spiritual Warfare
76. Biblical Teaching on Sex for Angolan Christian Couples: Insights from 1 Corinthians 7:1–5
77. Analysing the Application of Shepherd Imagery in Christian Ministry through Psalm 23
78. Investigating the Implications of Creation Narratives in Genesis 1–3 for Environmental Ethics
79. A Study of Selected Apocalyptic Themes in Daniel 9 and its Significance for the Angolan Context
80. The Role of Women in the Early Christian Community: A Comparative Study of Acts 16:11–15 and Traditional Malawian Societal Roles
81. The Christological Significance of the Johannine Prologue (John 1:1–18) for Modern Sudan
82. Exploring Paul’s Theology of Salvation and Justification in Romans 1
83. Examining the Practical Applications of Love as Described in 1 Corinthians 13
84. Investigating Eschatological Imagery and Hope in Revelation 21–22
85. Interpreting the Covenantal Relationship between God and Israel in the Book of Exodus

86. Analysing the Role of Wisdom Literature in Understanding Human Existence: A Study of Proverbs 1-9
87. Exploring the Theology of Suffering and Redemption in the Book of Job
88. Investigating the Messianic Prophecies in Isaiah 7:14 and Their Interpretation in Early Judaism
89. Examining the Theme of Justice and Social Responsibility in the Minor Prophets: A Focus on Amos 5
90. Interpreting the Concept of Kingship in Israel through the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7
91. Investigating the Themes of Faith and Covenant in the Life of Abraham: A Study of Genesis 12-22
92. Analysing the Rituals and Symbolism of Atonement in Leviticus 16: The Day of Atonement
93. The Theology of Redemption in the Book of Ruth: A Comparative Analysis with Traditional Gikuyu Practices
94. The Significance of Water Imagery in the Gospel of John and Its Relevance to Contemporary African Rituals and Symbolism
95. Exploring the Concept of Covenant in the Book of Jeremiah and Its Application to Modern Nigerian Socio-Political Contexts
96. Divine Justice and Mercy in the Story of Jonah: Reflections on Contemporary South African Justice Systems
97. The Concept of Wisdom in Proverbs and its Application to Indigenous Igbo Philosophies of Life
98. Rituals of Purity in Leviticus and Their Parallels in Traditional Yoruba Cleansing Practices
99. The Exodus Narrative and Its Impact on African Liberation Theology: A Case Study of Nelson Mandela's Use of Biblical Imagery
100. Sin and Human Accountability in Second Temple Judaism: A Comparative Study with Igbo Traditional Beliefs

***Suggested Topics II (Systematic & Historical Theology)***

1. A Contextual Political Theology for Gambia: Implications for Realisation of Africa's Agenda 2063
2. Divine Omnipresence and Human Suffering: Philosophical-Theological Exploration
3. Reformation Atonement Theory of Penal Substitution: An Assessment of its Coherence with Divine Justice
4. Transhumanism and Theosis: Exploring Eternity and Human Enhancement
5. Theology of Social Transformation for the Sudan Context: Perspectives from Jurgen Moltmann
6. A Theological Appraisal of the Recapitulation and Ransom Theories of Atonement
7. The Doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers and its Implications for "New Prophetic" Churches in Africa
8. A Theological Reflection on Yom Kippur from an Ethiopian Christian Perspective
9. Exegetical and Theological Study of John 10:1-18: Implications for Contemporary African Leadership
10. A Theological Study of Romans 8:1-8: Towards a Pneumatological-Ecclesiology
11. The Incidence of Corruption in Contemporary Chad: A Liberation Theological Response
12. John Wesley's Economic Theology and its Implications for Poverty Alleviation in Ghana
13. Aesthetic Theology and its Impact on Liturgical Engagement among Catholics in Kenya
14. Igbo Christologies: Exploring Indigenous Igbo Perspectives on the Person and Work of Jesus Christ
15. Pentecostal Movements among the Akan People: Analysing the role of the Holy Spirit in Akan Christian communities
16. Comparing Maasai Creation Narratives with Biblical Accounts.
17. A Critique of the Satisfaction Theory of Atonement

18. Assessing the Role of the Holy Spirit in Ewe Christian Communities of Ghana and Togo
19. A Comparative Analysis of the Christologies of Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas
20. Theology and the Virgin Mary: Analysing the Veneration of Mary as a Goddess among Selected Communities Sudan
21. Eternal Life in John's Gospel: A Theological Perspective from the Kikuyu Community in Kenya
22. Theodicy Through Art and Aesthetics: Examining How Creative Expression Explores the Problem of Evil
23. A Theological Responses to Ecological Suffering in Pretoria
24. Hope in Theodicy: Investigating the Interconnection Between Hope and the Problem of Evil
25. Exploring Martin Luther's Perspective on Suffering and Evil
26. Human Responsibility in Theodicy: Assessing the Role of Human Co-Creation in Addressing Evil
27. The Impact of Theodicy on Ethical Debates in Biotechnology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century
28. Aesthetics of Evil: Analysing the Role of Beauty in Addressing the Problem of Evil
29. Theodicy in Cinema: Analysing Representations of Suffering and Evil in Selected Nollywood Movies
30. The Doctrine of the Trinity: Exploring the Nature and Relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
31. Examining Philosophical and Theological Approaches to Understanding the Existence of Evil in a World Created by a Good God
32. A Critique of the Theological Foundations of Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination
33. Ecclesiology in Calvin's Thought: Exploring Calvin's Vision of the Church and its Relevance for Contemporary Ecclesial Practices
34. Calvin's Political Theology and its Significance for Contemporary African Sociopolitical Discourse

35. Calvin's Influence on Reformed Theology: A Study of Selected Theological Issues
36. Wesleyan Holiness Theology and its Public Relevance for Contemporary Gambia
37. Theological Perspectives on Slavery and its Relevance to Modern-Day Discussions on Human Trafficking in East Africa
38. Wesleyan Sacramental Theology and its Significance for Contemporary Ethiopian Christian Worship and Life
39. The Role of the Concepts of Heaven and Hell in Moral Decision Making: A Study of the Maasai People of Kenya
40. Life After Death: Comparing Traditional Beliefs of the Bono People of Ghana with Christian Eschatology
41. Gnostic Influences on Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity: Historical and Theological Perspectives
42. Prosperity Gospel in African Pentecostalism: Analysing the Theological, Social, and Economic Implications for African Public Morality
43. The Role of Priests in Religious Practices: A Comparative Study of Sangomas in Zulu Culture and Christian Clergy
44. Baptism and Initiation Rites: Assessing Parallels between the Luo People's Traditions and Christian Practices
45. Sanctification, Salvation, and Temptation: Perspectives from Ghanaian Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements
46. A Historical and Theological Analysis of Schisms in the Basotho Christian Community
47. Christian Creeds and Confessions: Their Role in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church
48. Toward a Theology of Terrorism for Nigeria
49. A Reflection on the Doctrine of the Incarnation from a Xhosa Perspective
50. The Concept of God in Akan and Christianity: A Comparative Study
51. Theodicy in the Writings of Augustine and Aquinas: A Comparative Analysis

52. Examining the Impact of Gustavo Gutiérrez on African Liberation Theology
53. Exploring the Relationship Between Faith and Reason in Theology
54. The Concept of Atonement in Christian Theology: Perspectives from African Independent Churches
55. Exploring the Doctrine of Sacraments in Catholic Theology
56. Mystical Theology in the Writings of John of the Cross: Relevance to the Sufi Traditions in North Africa
57. Assessing the Impact of Martin Luther's Theology on Protestantism
58. Environmental Theology and Stewardship: Assessing Perspectives from the Maasai and Yoruba Peoples
59. The Concept of Heaven and Hell in Christian Theology: A Comparative Analysis with African Eschatological Beliefs
60. Theological Perspectives on Mental Health and Wellness
61. A Theological Response to Africa's Underdevelopment
62. Formulating a Theology of Hospitality for the Ethiopian Community
63. Theological Reflections on God's Love from an African Christian Perspective
64. Comparing Theological Views on Animal Rights
65. Theology of Technology and its Impact on the Ghanaian Society
66. Theological Interpretations of the Problem of Divine Hiddenness: Insights from African Philosophers
67. The Biblical-theological Assessment of the Practice of Baptism Amongst Selected Churches in Africa
68. Eucharistic Theology and Ecumenical Dialogue: Towards a Common Understanding of the Lord's Supper among the Shona and Ndebele Churches in Zimbabwe
69. Theology of Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Implications for Rwanda and South Africa
70. Theological Implications of Artificial Intelligence: African Perspectives

71. Theological Perspectives on Immigration and Refugees
72. The Concept of Grace in Christian Theology: A Comparative Study with African Traditional Beliefs
73. The Political Evolution of the Church: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives in Africa
74. A Comparative Study of Atonement in the Theology of Athanasius and Agikuyu Traditional Religion
75. Theological Reflections on Suffering and Hope: Examining Religious Discourses on the Meaning of the COVID-19 Crisis
76. The Socio-Political Function of Grace in Wesleyan Theology and Praxis
77. Theological Principles for Ecological Sustainability and Human Flourishing
78. Aristotelian Political Philosophy and its Implications for Contemporary Uganda
79. A Theological and Ethical Reflection on Digital Ecclesiology from a South African Perspective
80. Theology of the Cross in African Evangelicalism: Implications for Contemporary Christianity in Liberia
81. Divine Sovereignty, Human Responsibility and God's Salvific Plan: An African Perspective
82. Theological Perspectives on the Afterlife: Comparative Study of African and Western Beliefs
83. The Concept of Original Sin in Different Religions: Insights from African Christian Theology
84. Theological Views on Capital Punishment: Perspectives from South African and Kenyan Religious Leaders
85. Theological Perspectives on Human Sexuality from African Pentecostal Churches
86. Analysing the Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom from African Philosophical Theological Perspective
87. A Study of the Concept of Predestination in Reformed Theology
88. A Christian Anthropological Reflection on Robotics from an African Perspective.

89. Arminianism and Calvinism on the Doctrine of Election: Can they be Reconciled?
90. The Doctrine of Creation and Environmental Ethics: A Theological Response to Climate Change
91. Neuroscience and Theology: Understanding the Soul-Body Relationship
92. Theological Anthropology and the Reality of Disability: Rethinking Human Dignity and Inclusion
93. Reimagining Incarnation Theology: African Perspectives on the Embodiment of God in Human Experience
94. Interfaith Dialogue and the Doctrine of Salvation: A Theological Inquiry
95. The Search for Social Justice: A Pneumatological Approach
96. Digital Sacraments: Theological Perspectives on Online Communion and Baptism in Post-Covid-19 Ecclesiological Tradition
97. The Role of Angels and Demons in Contemporary Theology: Myth or Reality?
98. Assessing the Impact of Christian Eschatology on Congolese Christianity
99. The Theology of Martyrdom: Historical Perspectives and Modern Perspectives
100. Artificial Intelligence and Eschatology: Imagining the Future from a Theological Perspective

***Suggested Topics III (Pastoral Theology)***

1. Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: Assessing the Major Issues and Finding Pastoral-Theological Solutions
2. The Impact of Persistent Violence on the Church in Nigeria: A Case Study of the Christian Community in Kaduna State
3. Preacher's Family Lifestyle and Church Growth: A Study of the Kikuyu Community in Kenya
4. Apostasy and Church Growth: A Study Among the Bakongo People of the Democratic Republic of Congo

5. An Examination of Factors Responsible for Divisions in the Churches: A Case Study of Selected Churches in Kenya
6. Youth Lifestyle and Church Growth: A Case Study of the Zulu People of South Africa
7. Christianity as a Way of Life: Perspectives from the Buganda Kingdom in Uganda
8. The Influence of Christianity on Burial Rites in Nigeria: A Case Study of the Nkanu People in Enugu State
9. The Impact of Narrative Preaching on Congregational Engagement and Spiritual Formation: A Case Study of Yoruba-Speaking Churches in Nigeria
10. Exploring the Use of Technology in Contemporary Sermon Delivery: Opportunities and Challenges in Urban Congregations in South Africa
11. Examining the Role of Female Preachers in Shaping Religious Discourse among the Akan Community in Ghana
12. The Influence of Cultural Context on Preaching Styles and Content: A Comparative Study of Shona and Ndebele Preaching Traditions in Zimbabwe
13. Preaching and Social Justice: Strategies for Addressing Contemporary Societal Issues from the Pulpit in the Context of the Xhosa-speaking Churches in South Africa
14. The Art of Persuasion in Preaching: Rhetorical Techniques and Their Efficacy in Communicating Spiritual Truths among the Luo Community in Kenya
15. Sermon Series Planning and Design: Best Practices for Creating Coherent and Impactful Preaching Series in the Context of the Amhara Orthodox Church in Ethiopia
16. Theological Reflections on Preaching: Integrating Biblical Scholarship and Practical Theology in Sermon Preparation among the Tswana-speaking Churches in Botswana
17. A Study of the Impact of Christian Festivals on Spiritual Formation of Christians in Liberia

18. Exploring the Role of Music in Shaping Liturgical Practices and Religious Experience: A Study of the Role of Drumming and Chanting in Ewe Worship in Ghana
19. Ritual Innovation in Contemporary Worship: Examining Trends and Implications for Liturgical Studies in the Context of the Hausa-speaking Churches in Nigeria
20. Liturgical Language and Inclusivity: Addressing Issues of Gender, Race, and Identity in Worship among the selected churches in Eritrea
21. Liturgical Seasons and Spiritual Formation: Exploring the Transformative Power of Ritual Time among selected Xhosa-speaking Churches in South Africa
22. Environmental Ethics and Liturgical Practices: Towards a Pastoral Theology of Creation Care in Worship among the Bulsa Community in Ghana
23. Sacred Space and Architectural Design: Examining the Influence of Built Environments on Worship Experience in Selected Churches in Senegal
24. Liturgical Renewal in Global Contexts: Case Studies of Adaptation and Innovation in Non-Western Churches, with a Focus on the Amhara Orthodox Church in Ethiopia
25. Preaching and Mental Health: Exploring the Role of Sermons in Promoting Emotional Well-being and Resilience in the Igbo-speaking Churches in Nigeria
26. Exploring the Evolution of Liturgical Practices: A Historical Analysis of Church Liturgy from Early Christianity to the Present Day
27. The Impact of Liturgical Renewal Movements on Contemporary Church Worship: A Comparative Study of Selected Churches in Swaziland
28. Ritual and Symbolism in Church Liturgy: Assessing the Significance of Traditional Practices
29. The Role of Music and Chanting in Enhancing the Liturgical Experience: A Study of Sacred Music in Church Worship

30. Reimagining Church Liturgy for the Digital Age: Exploring Virtual Worship Spaces and Online Communion
31. Liturgical Diversity and Unity in Contemporary Christianity: Assessing Differences in Worship Practices among Different Denominations in Angola
32. Gender Dynamics in Church Liturgy: Examining the Role and Representation of Women in Worship Rituals
33. Liturgical Architecture and Sacred Spaces: Exploring the Impact of Church Buildings on Worship Experience
34. Eco-Liturgy: Integrating Environmental Consciousness into Church Worship for Ecological Justice and Stewardship
35. Formulating Strategies to Address Mental Health Challenges Among Young People in the Methodist Church Ghana
36. Role of Churches in Crime Management: Case Studies from Nigeria and South Africa
37. Do Churches Contribute to a Better Quality of Life in Society? A Reflection based on Case Studies from Kenya and Ghana
38. Towards a Pastoral Theology for Church Welfare System for Eden Methodist Society, Mpatasie, Kumasi
39. Assessing the Factors Leading to the Rise of Mediocre Church Cults: Case Studies from Lesotho
40. Can a Christian Become a Chief? A Pastoral-Theological Response from the Ghanaian Perspective
41. Assessing the Impact of the Rise of False Evangelism: Case Studies from Selected African Pentecostal Churches
42. A Pastoral Reflection on Aspects of Contemporary Christian Worship: Case Studies from African Churches
43. A Pastoral-Theological Study of Disability from the Tswana Perspective
44. Applying Biblical Financial Management Principles to Church Administration: A Study of Churches in Ghana
45. Are Churches Selling False Hopes to a Desperate Majority? A Pastoral Analysis of Prosperity Theology in Nigeria

46. The Link Between Christian Principles and Wealth Creation: Case Studies from the Fante People of Ghana
47. Assessing the Role of the Church in Preventing Premarital Sex: Case Studies from Seychelles and Botswana
48. The Commodification of Christianity: A Critical Analysis of Megachurches in Nigeria and Ghana
49. Examining the Role of Music in Worship and Spirituality: Comparative Study of Zulu and Igbo Churches
50. Pastoral and Theological Implications of Near-Death Experiences: Perspectives from African Religious Communities
51. The Contemporary Church as a Comfort Zone for Sinners: Issues and Way Forward in the Ewe Community of Ghana
52. Conflict Management in the 21st Century Church: Assemblies of God Church in Focus in Tema
53. The Church in Liberia and Mentoring of Future Leaders: A Study of the Hausa Christian Community in Tamale
54. The Impact of Boko Haram Insurgency on Christian Communities in Nigeria: Pastoral Responses and Challenges
55. Christian Identity and Cultural Integration: Examining the Impact of Luo Traditions on Christian Life and Witness in Kenya
56. Denominational Diversity and Unity in the Nigerian Church: Lessons from Igbo Community Dynamics
57. Church-Run Educational Institutions and Societal Development: Evaluating the Influence of Methodist University on Ghanaian Culture and Values
58. Youth Engagement in a Growing Church Landscape: The Impact of Church Proliferation on Efik Youth in Nigeria
59. Ethical Leadership in Nigerian Churches: Addressing Misconduct and Ensuring Integrity Among Urhobo Congregations
60. The Economic Impact of Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria: A Pastoral and Socioeconomic Analysis

61. Christian Social Responsibility in Local Communities: Assessing the Role of Churches in Sudan
62. Exploring the Theology and Practice of Pastoral Visitation in Selected Churches in Sierra Leone
63. Pastoral Formation Through Ritual and Symbol: Examining the Significance of Liturgical Practices in Spiritual Growth
64. The Art of Liturgical Preaching: Preparing and Delivering Sermons within the Context of Worship
65. Liturgical Seasons and Spiritual Formation: Assessing the Impact of the Church Calendar on Discipleship and Renewal
66. Integration of Spirituality in Counseling: Exploring the Intersection of Psychology and Theology
67. Counseling Couples in Crisis: Formulating Pastoral-Biblical Principles as Marital Therapy
68. Towards a Trauma-Informed Pastoral Counseling for a Post-War Society
69. Analysing the Effects of Digital Tools on Liturgical Experience in Light House Chapel International, Ghana
70. Examining the Role of Social Support in Therapeutic Practices: A Study of Cases from the Namibian Context
71. Preaching Hope in Times of Crisis: A Pastoral Study of Sermonic Messages During the Covid-19 Pandemic
72. Pastoral Approach to Nurturing Faith in Professional Settings in Togo
73. Addressing Burnout Among Clergy: Formulating Self-Care Strategies for Sustainable Pastoral Ministry
74. Formulating Strategies for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation within Congregations
75. Christianity and the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Pastoral and Theological Reflection from the Ghanaian Context
76. The Impact of Trauma on Spiritual Formation: A Pastoral Theological Exploration
77. A Theology of Care: Exploring the Intersection of Pastoral Care and Systemic Justice

78. The Role of Lament in Pastoral Care: A Biblical and Theological Analysis
79. Pastoral Theology and Mental Health: An Exploration of the Intersection of Faith and Mental Wellbeing
80. Theological Reflection in Pastoral Practice: A Grounded Theory Study
81. Theological Anthropology and Pastoral Care: An Exploration of the Human Condition and the Gospel
82. Theology and Practice of Pastoral Supervision: A Qualitative Study
83. Theological Ethics and Pastoral Practice: An Exploration of the Relationship Between Theology and Ethics in Pastoral Care
84. Grief and Loss: A Pastoral Theological Exploration of the Impact of Bereavement on Faith
85. Mental Health and Spirituality: A Qualitative Study of the Experiences of Individuals with Mental Illness
86. Forgiveness and Reconciliation: A Theological and Psychological Analysis of the Process of Forgiveness in Counseling
87. Trauma and Resilience: A Pastoral Theological Exploration of the Impact of Trauma on Spiritual Formation
88. Addiction and Recovery: A Theological and Psychological Analysis of the Role of Spirituality in Recovery
89. Marriage and Family Therapy: A Pastoral Theological Exploration of the Intersection of Theology and Family Systems Theory
90. Play Therapy and Children's Spirituality: A Qualitative Study of the Use of Play Therapy in Pastoral Counseling with Children
91. Disability and Inclusion: A Theological and Ethical Analysis of the Inclusion of Individuals with Disabilities in the Church
92. Gender and Sexuality: A Pastoral Theological Exploration of the Intersection of Theology and Gender/Sexuality in Counseling

93. Crisis Counseling and Disaster Response: A Theological and Psychological Analysis of the Role of Pastoral Care in Crisis Situations
94. The Role of Storytelling in Sermons: An Exploration of Narrative Preaching
95. Preaching and the Kingdom of God: A Theological Analysis of the Sermons of Jesus
96. The Use of Rhetoric in Sermons: An Examination of the Relationship Between Rhetoric and Homiletics
97. Preaching and the Emerging Church: A Study of the Homiletical Practices of Emerging Churches
98. The Impact of Culture on Preaching: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Sermons
99. A Theological Exploration of the Relationship Between the Holy Spirit and Homiletics
100. Examining the Impact of Worldview of Christian Ministry: the Case of Dormaa Municipality

***Suggested Topics IV (Missiology and Church & Society Studies)***

1. The Role of Church Leaders in Growth and Survival of a Church: A Study of the Akamba Community in Kenya
2. The Role of Religion in Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution: Case Studies from Nigeria and South Africa
3. Migration and Mission: A Study of Philip's Ministry in Samaria (Acts 8)
4. The New Pastoral Counselling Issues Posed by Insurgency of Boko Haram Terrorism in Nigeria: A Case Study of Adamawa North
5. The Christian Life and Society: A Case Study of the Luo People of Kenya
6. The Effect of Denominational Practices on the Growth of the Church: A Study of Selected Churches in the Igbo Community in Nigeria

7. Impact of Church Administration on Effective Management of Church Sponsored Schools: A Case Study of Covenant University, Ota, among the Yoruba People
8. Church Proliferation and Its Effect on Youths: A Study of the Anglican Church in Sunyani
9. Analysing the Impact of the Ministry of Selected Pentecostal Churches on the Nigerian Economy
10. A Study of the Impact of Christian Ethics on Church Growth: A Case Study of Selected Churches in Lagos State
11. An Assessment of Church Human Resource Development in the Church: A Case Study of Selected Christ Apostolic Churches in Techiman
12. An In-Depth Study of Human Intercession and Divine Intervention: A Case Study of Some Selected Christian Intercessors in Dormaa-Ahenkro
13. Deployment of New Technology in Dissemination of the Gospel: A Case Study of Deeper Life Bible Church in Kumasi
14. Pastoral Ministry and Challenges of Moral Upbringing of Pastors' Family: A Case Study of Selected Churches in Benin
15. An Ethical and Pastoral Assessment of the Practice of Speaking in Tongues in the Pentecostal Churches in Lagos State
16. Christianity and Peace Building: The Case of Chad
17. Child Evangelism and Church Growth Sustainability: A Case Study of Christ Apostolic Church in Cape Town
18. The Impact of Class Separation on the Development of Children Ministry and Church Growth: A Case Study of Selected Methodist Churches in Accra
19. The Impact of Sectarian Crisis on the Church in Nigeria: A Case Study of Churches in Kaduna State
20. A Study of the Factors Responsible for the Division of Churches in Some Churches in Ethiopia
21. An Examination of the Effect of Parental Curses on the Spiritual Growth of Children: A Case Study of Kwadaso Municipality

22. The Challenge of Moral Upbringing of Pastor Children: A Case Study of United Missionary Church of Africa (UMCA), Niger State
23. The Impact of Church Leadership on Church Growth: A Case Study of Selected Churches in Ogun State
24. The Impact of Servant Leadership as a Model for Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (1979-2019): Lessons for Political and Religious Leaders in Africa
25. Leadership Styles and Welfare Programmes as Determinants for the Well-being of Widows: A Study of Selected Cases from Rwanda
26. The Role of the Church in State Politics: Implications on the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) in Lagos State.
27. The Impact of Minister's Family Relationship on the Spiritual Growth of the Church: A Case Study of Assemblies of God Church in Abuja Main District
28. Church Planting in Contemporary Lesotho: Challenges, Prospects and Lessons for Christian Missionaries in Africa
29. The Influence of Pentecostal Churches on the Development of Education: A Case Study of Living Faith Pentecostal Church (Winners Chapel) among the Yoruba People
30. An Analysis of Factors Contributing to the Growth and Expansion of Pentecostal Churches Across Africa
31. The Gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 and their Usage: A Study of Selected Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches in Addis Ababa
32. Gender Equality in Classical Pentecostal Churches in Ghana: Assemblies of God and the Church of Pentecost as a Case Study
33. Charismatic Renewal and Indigenous Spirituality: Exploring the Syncretic Nature of Pentecostalism in African Contexts
34. Pentecostalism and Social Transformation: Investigating the Role of Pentecostal Churches in Addressing Societal Challenges and Promoting Development in Africa

35. Gender Dynamics in African Pentecostalism: Examining Women's Leadership and Empowerment in Pentecostal Churches Across Africa
36. Women's Roles in Religion: A Comparative Study of Christianity and Traditional Beliefs among the Igbo People of Nigeria
37. Psychology, Theology, and Spirituality in Christian Counseling: A Case Study of the Bono Region in Ghana
38. Postcolonial Perspectives on Missionary Legacies: Revisiting Historical Narratives from a Decolonial Lens in Zimbabwe, with a Focus on the Evangelical Lutheran Church
39. Towards a Servant Leadership Model in Ghanaian Pentecostal Churches based on Matthew 20:20–28
40. Addressing Gender-Based Violence in the Neo-prophetic Movement: An Ubuntu Pentecostal Perspective
41. The Role of Ubuntu in Combating Gender-Based Violence within Nigeria's Neo-prophetic Movement
42. The Role of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal Theological Education in Africa: Bridging Doctrine and Practice
43. The Development of a Theology of the Holy Spirit within Zulu Pentecostalism: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives
44. The Evolution of Pentecostal Universities in African: Historical Context and Theoretical Foundations
45. Models of Theological Education and Pastoral Formation Among the Kikuyu: Insights from Pentecostal Practices
46. Integrating Academic Rigor and Spiritual Formation in Pentecostal Theological Education: The Case of Pentecost University, Ghana
47. Pentecostal Theology and Gender Justice: An Ubuntu Approach to Gender-Based Violence in South Africa
48. Addressing Gender-Based Violence from a Pastoral Care Perspective
49. Developing Pastoral Interventions for Migrant Women Facing Gender-Based Violence During Lockdowns

50. A Comparative Analysis of Pentecostal and Roman Catholic Church Growth Dynamics in Ghana
51. Assessing the Ministry of Prophets in Some Selected Churches in the Sunyani Municipality in the Light of Amos 6:8
52. A Study of Discipleship and its Impact on the Growth of the Church of Pentecost, Sunyani Area
53. Youth Engagement and Mission: Formulating Strategies for Engaging Young People in Anglican Church and Society in Zambia
54. Evaluating the Contribution of United Methodist Churches to Healthcare Delivery in Developing Countries, with a Focus on Ghana
55. Addressing Urban Challenges and Opportunities for Anglican Church Engagement in South Africa
56. Indigenous Theologies and Missional Practice: Exploring Indigenous Perspectives on Faith and Mission in the Roman Catholic Church in Kenya
57. Interreligious Dialogue and Peacebuilding: Examining Church of Christ Initiatives for Interfaith Harmony and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria
58. Towards an Understanding of Churched Emerging Adults and their Relationship with God and the Local Church
59. Pentecostal Leadership Disputes in Zimbabwe: A Pastoral Challenge
60. Gender Based Violence Perpetrated against Migrant Women During Lockdowns: A Pastoral Care Challenge
61. A Praxis-Based Approach to Liberating Theological Education: A Cape Town Case Study
62. Towards the Development of Inclusive Missional Congregations: Biblical Hospitality as a Paradigm for Building Hospitable Communities of Faith
63. Lutheran homiletics and Francophone African contexts: how to connect Lutheran orthodoxy with African culture
64. A Study of the Trinitarian Missiology of Jonathan Edwards

65. The Impact of Globalisation on Family Dynamics in Africa: A Pastoral Counseling Narrative
66. Shifting Gender Roles in African Homes: A Pastoral-Theological-Psychological Implications
67. Addressing Gender-Based Violence Against Migrant Women from a Pastoral-Theological Perspective
68. Liberating Theological Education: A Praxis Approach for the Contemporary Ghana
69. Youth Ministry and Mainline Church Attrition: A Pastoral Reflection
70. Ethical Considerations in End-of-Life Care: A Practical-Theological Perspective on Bioethical Dilemmas
71. Integrating Practical Strategies into Environmental Stewardship and Creation Care for Modern Zimbabwe
72. The Role of Rituals and Sacraments in Shaping Christian Identity and Community Engagement
73. Exploring the Dynamics of Multicultural Worship: Challenges and Opportunities for Inclusive Church Practices
74. Narrative Preaching and its Impact on Faith Formation and Spiritual Growth in Congregations
75. Transformative Leadership in Religious Organisations: Strategies for Fostering Positive Change and Community Development
76. A Comparative Study of Healing Practices in the Bible and among Ewe Traditional Healers
77. The Impact of Heaven and Hell on Society: A Case Study of Kikuyu Beliefs in Kenya
78. The Legacy of Early Christian Missionaries: Impact on Indigenous Cultures and Religious Practices
79. Cross-Cultural Missions in the Global South: Challenges and Prospects in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century
80. Assessing the Impact of Colonialism on Indigenous Religious Beliefs and Christianisation Efforts

81. Missions and Modernity: Exploring the Interaction Between Christian Missions and Colonial Expansion
82. Revival Movements and Indigenous Christianity: Case Studies from Selected African Society
83. The History of Christian-Muslim Relations: Lessons for Contemporary Interfaith Engagement
84. Contextualisation and Inculturation in Missionary Work: Challenges and Successes in Communicating the Gospel Across Cultures
85. Exploring the Role of Christianity in Coping with the Psychological Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Study of Cases from Ghana
86. Digital Divides in Religious Communities: Assessing the Impact of Online Worship Services and Virtual Community Engagement during COVID-19
87. Christian Responses to Vaccination: Exploring the Role of Christian Communities in Vaccine Distribution and Acceptance during the COVID-19 Pandemic
88. Impact of COVID-19 on Religious Practices: Analysing Changes in Worship Styles, Rituals, and Communal Gatherings in Response to Public Health Measures
89. Faith-Based Organisations and Pandemic Relief Efforts: Assessing the Contribution of Religious Groups to COVID-19 Relief and Support Initiatives
90. Digital Religion in the Age of COVID-19: Investigating the Use of Technology for Religious Communication, Education, and Community Building during the Pandemic
91. Virtual Community, Real Communion: Exploring the Pastoral Implications of Online Church Gatherings in Digital Ecclesiology
92. Digital Discipleship: Examining the Formation of Faith and Spiritual Practices in Online Church Environments

93. Ecclesial Authority and Digital Platforms: Investigating Issues of Leadership, Governance, and Accountability in Online Church Communities
94. Nominal Christianity: An Examination of its Rise and Implications for Church Engagement
95. The Role of Modern Technology and Social Media in Shaping Church Attendance Trends: A Pastoral Response
96. The Impact of Secularism on Church Membership and Participation in Contemporary Sudan
97. Missionary Approaches in the Context of Urbanisation: Case Studies from Kenyan Cities
98. The Use of Mobile Apps for Evangelism and Discipleship in Kenyan Churches: A Case Study of the Church of Pentecost
99. The Role of Bi-Vocational Ministry in Church Growth Among the Xhosa: A Pastoral and Practical Approach
100. Addressing the Challenges of Religious Syncretism in Ghanaian Missions: A Pastoral-Theological Reflection

***Suggested Topics V (Christian Ethics)***

1. An African Christian Ethical Response to Postmodernism
2. Formulating Principles of Sexual Stewardship for African Christian Singles
3. A Theological and Ethical Reflection on Witchcraft from a Ghanaian Christian Perspective
4. Rethinking Development in Africa: Agenda 2063 and John Wesley's Socio-Political Ethics
5. A Theological and Ethical Reflection on Drug Addiction in the Context of the Methodist Church Ghana
6. Theological and Ethical Reflections on Surrogacy from an African Perspective
7. An Ethical Response to Female Genital Mutilation
8. Evaluating the Ethical Teachings of the Sermon on the Mount and its Implications for the Angolan Society

9. Can a Christian Operate a Hotel? A Response from an African Christian Ethical Perspective
10. An Ethical Response to the Use of Alcohol among Christians
11. Exploring the Contextual Implications of Kwame Nkrumah's Socio-political Ethics for Contemporary Ghana
12. Theological and Ethical Reflections on Care for Widows from an African Christian Perspective
13. Theological and Ethical Reflections on Surrogacy from an African Perspective
14. The Doctrine of Imago Dei and the Challenge of Euthanasia
15. The Christian Hope and the Problem of Evil in the 21st Century
16. Applying Paul's Theological and Ethical Teachings in Romans 12:1 to the Zimbabwean Context
17. Religion and Medical Ethics: Perspectives from Nigeria and South Africa
18. Ethics of Genetic Engineering in Religion: African Theological Perspectives
19. Ethical and Theological Reflections on End-of-Life Issues: Case Studies from Kenya and South Africa
20. Ethical and Theological Interpretations of Love: Case Studies from African Christian Communities
21. Religion and Bioethics: Cloning and Stem Cell Research in African Contexts
22. Bioethics and Genetic Modification: An African Ethical Analysis
23. Ethical and Theological Reflections on LGBTQ+ Issues: Case Studies from South African Churches
24. Theological and Ethical Implications of Climate Change: Perspectives from African Theologians
25. Moral Decadence in the Contemporary Church: The Catechetical Role of the Clergy in Anglican Parochial Ministry in the Bantu Communities of South Africa

26. Exploring Artificial Intelligence Development Ethics in the Context of the Bono Tribe: Analysing Challenges and Opportunities
27. Critiquing Genetic Engineering Ethics within the Maasai Community: Evaluating Impacts on Traditional Practices
28. Addressing Ethical Challenges of Globalisation in the Swazi Society
29. Examining the Impact of Technological Surveillance on Community Values in the Shona Society
30. African Perspectives on Environmental Stewardship: Theological and Ethical Reflections on Climate Change
31. Exploring the Intersection of Faith and Mental Health: Christian Responses to Depression and Anxiety in African Contexts
32. Revisiting the Ten Commandments: Theological and Ethical Insights for Contemporary Congolese Christians
33. Ethics of Migration and Hospitality: Biblical and Theological Perspectives in the Context of African Refugee Crises
34. Engaging with Traditional Healing Practices: Christian Responses to Indigenous Medicine in Sub-Saharan Africa
35. Rethinking Poverty and Prosperity Theology: Theological and Ethical Critique from an African Liberation Perspective
36. Navigating Power and Authority: Theological and Ethical Reflections on Leadership in African Pentecostal Churches
37. Exploring Sacredness in the Digital Age: Theological and Ethical Considerations of Online Worship Communities
38. Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa: Theological and Ethical Dialogue for Interfaith Understanding and Peacebuilding
39. Healing and Wholeness in African Christianity: Integrating Traditional Medicine with Western Biomedical Practices
40. Ethical and Theological Perspectives on Environmental Conservation in African Sacred Spaces
41. Ethical Reflections on Governance and Corruption in African Nations

42. Interrogating Patriarchy in African Christianity: Theological and Ethical Challenges to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
43. The Ethics of Wealth and Poverty in the Prosperity Gospel Movement
44. Ethics of War and Conflict: Exploring Just War Theory and Humanitarian Intervention in Modern Conflicts
45. Navigating Surrogacy Ethics: Addressing Legal, Social, and Moral Implications of Reproductive Technology
46. End-of-Life Ethics: Examining Assisted Suicide, Euthanasia, and Palliative Care Practices
47. Ethical Reflections on Economic Inequality, Redistribution, and Social Justice in Africa
48. Work and Material Ethics: Exploring Ethical Consumption, Labour Rights, and Environmental Sustainability
49. Ethical Implications of Artificial Intelligence: Addressing Automation, Job Displacement, and Data Privacy
50. Ethics of Genetic Engineering: Assessing Moral Concerns and Potential Benefits in Biotechnology
51. Digital Ethics: Examining Online Privacy, Cybersecurity, and Ethical Conduct in the Digital Age
52. Ethical Dilemmas in Criminal Justice: Examining Punishment, Rehabilitation, and Restorative Justice in Contemporary South Africa
53. Ethics of Globalisation: Addressing Labour Exploitation, Cultural Imperialism, and Fair Trade Practices from the Namibian Christian Perspective
54. Ethics of Digital Media: Addressing Misinformation, Online Harassment, and Digital Citizenship from the Christian Perspective
55. Ethical Implications of Biomedical Research for the Gambian Society
56. Ethical Reflections on Equity, Justice, and Quality Care in Tanzanian Communities

57. Ethical Dimensions of Refugee Protection in Rwandan Society: Examining Hospitality, Solidarity, and Human Dignity
58. Ethical Reflections on the Sanctity of Life from the Pentecostal Perspective
59. Contraception in Catholic Ethics: A Reflection from the South African Context
60. Human Reproductive Technology in Wesleyan Moral Theology: Navigating Infertility Treatments and Ethical Guidelines
61. Investigating the Moral Ambiguities of Betting and Gambling: A Christian Ethical Analysis
62. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Christian Ethics: Exploring Ethical Frameworks for AI Development and Implementation
63. African Traditional Ethics and Environmental Care: A Christian Reflection
64. Applying Christian Ethics in Contemporary Zambian Political Engagement and Decision-Making
65. Ethical Implications of Capital Punishment: An African Christian Analysis
66. Human Rights and Christian Ethics: A Critical Analysis
67. Christian Values and Integrity in Corporate Governance, Responsibility, and Accountability: A Tanzanian Perspective
68. Affirming Dignity, Inclusion, and Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities: An Ethical Analysis
69. Ethical Approaches to Understanding, Support, and Care for Mental Well-Being
70. Virtue Ethics: An Exploration of the Relationship Between Virtue and Morality in Christian Ethics
71. The Ethics of War: A Christian Perspective on the Morality of War and Peace
72. Economic Inequality in Namibia: A Christian Ethical Reflection
73. Ethical Consumption in a Globalised World: Exploring Christian Approaches to Fair Trade, Ethical Sourcing, and Responsible Consumerism.

74. Can a Christian Work in a Hotel? A Christian Ethical Analysis
75. A Study of the Political Ethics of Desmond Tutu and its Implications for Contemporary South Africa
76. Technology and Addiction: Christian Perspectives on Ethical Engagement with Social Media, Gaming, and Digital Dependency
77. Christian Ethical Perspectives on Abortion
78. The Use of Performance-Enhancing Drugs in Sports: A Moral Evaluation
79. Healthcare Systems and Christian Ethics: Addressing Moral Dilemmas in Medical Practice
80. A Christian Ethical Analysis of Students Group Work at the Tertiary Level
81. Political and Socioeconomic Disparities Among Nations: A Christian Ethical Analysis
82. The Ethical Side of Motorsports: Christian Perspectives on Safety, Competition, and Stewardship
83. Christian Ethical Perspectives on Social Media: Principles, Challenges, and Applications
84. Consumer Ethical Judgment and Avoidance of Controversial Advertising on Social Media: A Christian Analysis
85. Guidance for Business Entrepreneurs on Managing Ethical Responses on Social Media: A Christian Approach
86. Assessing Information Credibility in Online Communities: A Christian Ethical Perspective on Social Media
87. Exploring Business Ethics in Social Media from a Christian Perspective
88. Analysing Corporate Firing for Questionable Social Media Posts: A Christian Ethical Approach
89. The Role of Christian Ethics in Achieving Responsible Business Practices on Social Media
90. The Impact of Christian Ethics on Business Practices in Social Media

91. Christian Ethics and Journalism on Social Media: Analysing Professional Standards and Practices
92. Philo of Alexandria's Ethical Teachings and Their Impact on Early Christian Thought
93. A Comparative Study of Aristotle's and Aquinas' Virtue Ethics: Implications for Modern Christian Moral Theology
94. Pannenberg's Eschatological Ethics: The Role of Hope in Christian Moral Decision-Making
95. Philo's Allegorical Interpretation of Scripture and Its Ethical Implications for Contemporary Christian Hermeneutics
96. Pannenberg's Theology of Love: Ethical Implications for Social Justice and Christian Community
97. Aristotle's Ethics of Friendship and its Application to Christian Concepts of Fellowship and Community
98. The Convergence of Aristotelian Natural Law and Christian Ethics in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas
99. "The City of God" and the Ethics of Citizenship: A Christian Ethical Analysis of the Thought of St. Augustine
100. Pannenberg's Doctrine of Creation and its Ethical Implications for Environmental Stewardship in Christianity

***Suggested Topics VI (Bible Translation and Textual Linguistics)***

1. The Role of Women in Early Christian Communities: Comparative Study with African Traditional Societies
2. Accessibility of Bible Translations in Wolof: Evaluating the readability and relevance of existing translations for the Wolof community
3. Socio-Cultural Impact of Translated Scriptures among the Bambara: Investigating how translated Bibles influence beliefs, practices, and social dynamics among the Bambara
4. Gender Sensitivity in Bible Translation among the Akan: Ensuring inclusivity and gender equality in translated Scriptures for the Akan

5. Biblical Themes in Bono Oral Traditions: Identifying parallels between biblical narratives and Bono proverbs, folktales, and songs
6. Transformation of Spiritual Practices through Bible Translation among the Luhya: Examining changes in religious rituals and beliefs due to access to translated Scriptures
7. Bible Translation and Kikuyu Identity: Exploring how translated Bibles contribute to the preservation and promotion of Kikuyu cultural heritage
8. Discourse Analysis of Biblical Texts in Igbo: Exploring Linguistic Features and Cultural Implications in Translated Scriptures
9. Pragmatic Analysis of Speech Acts in Swahili Bible Translations: Examining Communicative Functions and Cultural Nuances
10. Sociolinguistic Dynamics in Bible Translation among the Zulu: Investigating Language Variation and Social Factors in Translated Scriptures
11. Textual Linguistics in Bible Translation: A Comparative Study of Lexical Choices and Syntactic Structures in English and Arabic Versions
12. Discourse Patterns in Gospel Narratives: Analysing Narrative Strategies and Communicative Purposes in the Synoptic Gospels
13. Translation Strategies in Multilingual Bibles: Assessing Adaptation Techniques and Cross-Cultural Communication in Translated Scriptures
14. Discourse Analysis of Biblical Parables: Understanding Rhetorical Devices and Interpretive Strategies in Parabolic Literature
15. Pragmatic Analysis of Biblical Prayers: Investigating Speech Acts, Politeness Strategies, and Interpersonal Dynamics in Prayer Texts

16. Textual Variation in Bible Manuscripts: A Comparative Study of Textual Criticism and Editorial Practices in Ancient Manuscripts
17. Discourse Analysis of Biblical Conversations: Examining Dialogue Structures, Turn-Taking Patterns, and Discourse Markers in Biblical Discourse
18. Translation Theory and Practice: Exploring the Application of Translation Theories in Bible Translation Projects
19. Textual Criticism and Bible Translation: Assessing the Impact of Textual Variants on Translation Choices and Interpretation
20. Discourse Analysis of Biblical Poetry: Investigating Poetic Devices, Figurative Language, and Semantic Patterns in Hebrew Poetry
21. Translation Ethics in Bible Translation: Addressing Issues of Accuracy, Faithfulness, and Cultural Sensitivity in Translating Sacred Texts
22. Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Bible Translation: Examining Language Ideologies, Identity Politics, and Power Dynamics in Translation Processes
23. Translation and Exegesis of Psalm 1: Exploring Linguistic Nuances and Theological Implications in Different Versions
24. Theological Interpretation and Translation of John 1:1-18: Analysing Logos Theology and Christological Implications Across Translations
25. A Linguistic Analysis of Matthew 5:1-12
26. Translation and Interpretation of Genesis 22: Examining Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac and Its Interpretation in Jewish and Christian Traditions
27. Translation Theory and Practice in Translating Isaiah 53: Examining the Challenges and Strategies in Rendering the Suffering Servant Passage
28. Analysing Translation Choices in Romans 8:28-39: Exploring Theological Themes and Linguistic Considerations in Different Versions

29. Exegetical Study and Translation of Ephesians 2:1-10: Investigating Pauline Soteriology and Cultural Adaptation in Translation
30. Theological Interpretation and Translation of Revelation 1:1-20: Examining Apocalyptic Imagery and Eschatological Themes Across Versions
31. Translation and Interpretation of Proverbs 31:10-31: Exploring the Ideal Woman and Gender Dynamics in Different Cultural Contexts
32. Comparative Analysis of Luke 15:11-32: Translating the Parable of the Prodigal Son and its Interpretation in Various Cultural Settings
33. Textual Criticism and Translation of Mark 16:9-20: Examining Variant Readings and Editorial Decisions in Different Translations
34. Cultural Adaptation and Translation of Exodus 20:1-17: Exploring the Ten Commandments and Their Relevance in Contemporary Contexts
35. Translation and Theological Implications of Galatians 3:28: Investigating Paul's Vision of Equality and Unity in Christ Across Cultural Boundaries
36. Hermeneutical Insights and Translation Challenges in Job 1:1-22: Examining theodicy and Suffering in Ancient Near Eastern Literature and Modern Interpretations
37. Translating the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7): Analysing Linguistic Choices and Hermeneutical Approaches in Various Versions
38. The Impact of Gender-Inclusive Language in Translating Genesis 1:1-2: Exploring Linguistic Choices and Theological Implications
39. Cultural Adaptation and Translation of Exodus 3:1-15: Analysing Rendering of Divine Names and Communicative Strategies

40. Theological Interpretation and Translation of Daniel 9:24-27: Investigating Eschatological Prophecy and Interpretive Challenges
41. Lexical Ambiguities in Translating Romans 5:12: Examining Semantic Range and Interpretation in Different Versions
42. Dynamic Equivalence vs. Formal Equivalence: A Comparative Analysis of Matthew 6:9-13 in Contemporary English Translations
43. The Use of Discourse Analysis in Translating John 3:16: Understanding Communicative Structure and Pragmatic Meaning
44. Translating Paul's Use of *Πιστις* in Galatians 3:23-25: Exploring Semantic Range and Theological Implications
45. Ideological Bias in Modern Translations: A Critical Analysis of Rendering Proverbs 31:10-31
46. The Challenge of Cultural Sensitivity in Translating Leviticus 18:22: Addressing Homosexuality and Social Contexts
47. Metaphorical Language in Translating 1 Corinthians 13:1-13: Exploring Figurative Expressions and Conceptual Metaphors
48. Translating the Names of God in Psalms: A Study of Transliteration, Equivalence, and Theological Significance
49. Semantic Pragmatic Analysis of Translating Mark 1:15: Investigating Speech Acts and Communicative Intentions
50. The Impact of Syntax on Translation Choices: A Corpus-Based Study of Matthew 28:18-20
51. Cultural Translation Strategies in Rendering Parables: Analysing Luke 10:25-37 Across Cultures and Languages
52. Translating Complex Theological Concepts: A Case Study of Ephesians 1:3-14
53. Lexical Borrowing and Loanwords in Bible Translation: Examining Psalm 23 in Cross-Cultural Contexts
54. The Role of Intertextuality in Translating Isaiah 7:14: Exploring Quotations, Allusions, and Interpretive Choices

55. Translating Idioms and Colloquialisms in Matthew 5:13-16: A Cross-Cultural Comparison
56. Translation Challenges in Revelation 22:18-19: Understanding Apocalyptic Genre and Linguistic Ambiguities
57. Semantic Domains and Conceptual Metaphors in Translating Ephesians 5:22-33: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach
58. Syntactic Patterns and Discourse Structure in Translating Acts 2:1-13: A Functional Linguistic Analysis
59. Theological Implications of Translation Choices in Romans 1:18-32: Exploring Lexical, Grammatical, and Conceptual Dimensions
60. Translating Eschatological Terminology in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18: A Comparative Analysis of Rapture Theology
61. Translation and Theological Controversies: A Study of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and Gender Roles in Church Leadership
62. Corpus Linguistics and Translation Studies: Analysing Lexical Frequencies and Semantic Patterns in Philippians 2:1-11
63. Theological Perspectives on Translation Theory: A Comparative Study of Dynamic and Formal Equivalence in Hebrews 1:1-4
64. Translating Names and Titles of Jesus in John's Gospel: A Socio-Cultural and Theological Analysis
65. Translation of Deictic Expressions in Acts 1:1-11: Understanding Spatial and Temporal Reference in Narrative Discourse
66. Textual Criticism and Translation of 1 Peter 3:18-22: Addressing Variant Readings and Editorial Decisions
67. Translating Narrative Tenses in Genesis 12:1-9: A Functional Approach to Temporal Expressions and Storytelling Techniques
68. A Pragmatic Analysis of Politeness Strategies in Translating Luke 2:1-20: Exploring Speech Acts and Cultural Appropriateness in Nativity Narratives

69. Semantic Shifts and Conceptual Metaphors in Translating Psalms 23: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach to Shepherd Imagery
70. Deixis in Translation: An Examination of Indexical Expressions in John 14:1-14 and Their Implications for Cross-Cultural Communication
71. Speech Act Theory and Translating Directives in Matthew 7:7-12: A Pragmatic Analysis of Imperatives and Requests in Sermon on the Mount
72. Skopos Theory and Functional Equivalence in Translating Romans 12:1-2: Assessing Translation Strategies and Target Audience Reception
73. Translation and Relevance Theory: A Study of Communicative Effectiveness in Rendering Ecclesiastes 3:1-8
74. Cultural Adaptation and Skopos in Translating Exodus 20:1-17: Negotiating Cultural Specificity and Universal Norms in the Ten Commandments
75. Speech Acts and Politeness Strategies in Translating Proverbs 15:1-7: A Comparative Analysis of Pragmatic Expressions and Sociolinguistic Variation
76. Deictic Expressions in Translation: Investigating Spatial and Temporal Reference in Acts 2:1-13 and Its Implications for Reader Orientation
77. Translating Implicatures in James 1:1-18: A Pragmatic Analysis of Conversational Implications and Contextual Meaning
78. The Role of Intertextuality in Translating Isaiah 53: Exploring Quotations, Allusions, and Intertextual References in the Suffering Servant Passage
79. Semantics and Translation: A Cognitive Linguistic Study of Word Meaning in John 1:1-18 and Its Implications for Translational Equivalence
80. Deixis and Translation Choices in Mark 14:22-26: Investigating Demonstratives, Person Pronouns, and Spatial Reference in the Last Supper Narrative

81. Speech Act Theory and Translating Commands in Exodus 3:1-15: A Pragmatic Analysis of Divine Imperatives and Communicative Authority
82. Translating Figurative Language in Revelation 21-22: A Cognitive Semantic Approach to Apocalyptic Imagery and Symbolism
83. Deixis and Cultural Variation in Translating Genesis 12:1-9: Exploring Spatial Reference and Conceptualisation in Abraham's Call Narrative
84. Pragmatic Analysis of Speech Acts in Philippians 2:1-11: Understanding Communicative Functions and Rhetorical Strategies in the Kenotic Hymn
85. Skopos Theory and Translating Subjunctive Mood in Matthew 6:9-13: A Functional Approach to Rendering Petitions and Supplications in the Lord's Prayer
86. Translating Cultural Concepts in Acts 17:22-34: An Intercultural Pragmatic Analysis of Paul's Address at the Areopagus
87. Deictic Expressions and Translation Strategies in John 20:1-18: Examining Temporal and Spatial Deixis in the Resurrection Narrative
88. Pragmatic Implicature in Translating 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18: Exploring Communicative Implications and Interpretive Significance in Eschatological Texts
89. Skopos Theory and Target Audience Analysis in Translating Revelation 1:1-20: Assessing Communicative Effectiveness and Reader Response
90. Translation and Cognitive Stylistics: A Study of Metaphor, Simile, and Conceptual Blending in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12
91. Skopos Theory and Cultural Adaptation in Translating Acts 10:1-48: Negotiating Cross-Cultural Communication in Peter's Vision Narrative
92. Translation and Stylistic Variation: A Corpus-Based Study of Lexical Choices and Syntactic Structures in Ephesians 2:1-10

93. Interpreting Genesis 28:10-35:15: A Narrative Analysis with a Focus on the Dinah Episode
94. Analysing Discourse Connectivity and Its Impact on Relevance in Indigenous African Languages
95. Understanding Discourse Features in African Sign Languages: A Case Study of Ghanaian Sign Language
96. Investigating the Genitive Construction of Possession in a Sub-Saharan African Language: A Case Study of KiSwahili
97. Thematic Cohesion in the Pauline Epistles: A Text Linguistic Analysis
98. Discourse Markers in Biblical Hebrew: A Text Linguistic Approach to Jonah 1
99. Speech Acts in the Sermon on the Mount: A Pragmatic and Text Linguistic Study
100. Intertextuality and Textual Allusion in the Book of Revelation: A Text Linguistic Perspective

***Suggested Topics VII (Additional Topics for Each Theological Sub-discipline)***

1. A Historical and Theological Examination of the Development of Trinitarian Doctrine
2. A Critical Evaluation of the Role of Faith, Works, and Grace in the Salvation Process
3. A Study of the Relationship Between Christ's Divine and Human Natures
4. An Exploration of the Holy Spirit's Work in Regeneration, Sanctification, and Empowerment
5. A Philosophical and Theological Analysis of the Mind-Body Problem and its Implications for Christian Anthropology
6. A Historical and Theological Examination of the Development of Hamartiology
7. A Study of the Church's Essence, Purpose, and Mission in the World

8. A Critical Evaluation of the Different Eschatological Views and their Implications for Christian Living
9. A Philosophical and Theological Analysis of the Relationship between Faith, Reason, and Knowledge
10. A Systematic Theological Analysis of Selected Aspects of the Second Coming of Christ
11. The Church as the Body of Christ: A Theological Examination of Ecclesiology
12. A Biblical and Theological Case for Female Ordination
13. The Doctrine of Original Sin: A Systematic Theological Analysis
14. The Concept of Grace: A Comparative Study of Reformed and Wesleyan Perspectives
15. The Relationship between the Universal Church and the Local Church: A Theological Examination
16. A Theological Analysis of the Role of Women in Ministry and Leadership
17. A Theological Examination of the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Justice
18. A Systematic Theological Examination of the Relationship between Evolution and Christian Theology
19. The Nature of Humanity: A Theological and Scientific Analysis of the Mind-Body Problem
20. A Theological and Scientific Examination of the Implications of Emerging Technologies
21. The Historical Reliability of the Gospels: A Critical Evaluation
22. The Literary Structure of the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Analysis
23. The Theology of the Book of Job: A Study of Suffering and Sovereignty
24. A Critical Examination of the Theology and Ethics of the Book of James
25. A Study of Apocalyptic Imagery and Eschatological Significance of Selected Passages in the Book of Revelation

26. The Doctrine of God in the Old Testament: A Study of the Names and Attributes of God
27. The Theology of the Atonement in John's Gospel: A Study of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ
28. The Concept of Covenant in Genesis: A Theological Analysis
29. The Relationship between Law and Gospel in the Bible: A Theological Examination
30. The Theme of Redemption in Leviticus: A Study of its Historical and Theological Development
31. The Exegesis of Romans 9-11: A Study of Paul's Theology of Election
32. The Theology of the Holy Spirit in Acts 1-4: A Study of the Spirit's Work in the Life of the Believer
33. A Study of the Theology and Literary Structure Psalm 19
34. The Prophetic Ministry of Jesus: A Study of its Historical and Theological Significance
35. The Epistles of John: A Study of their Theology and Ethical Teaching
36. The Theology of the Book of Isaiah: A Study of its Historical and Eschatological Significance
37. The Concept of the Kingdom of God in the Bible: A Theological Analysis
38. The Theology of the Book of Hebrews: A Study of its Christology and Soteriology
39. The Book of Ezekiel: A Study of its Theology and Apocalyptic Imagery
40. The Theology of the Book of Daniel: A Study of its Historical and Eschatological Significance
41. Assessing the Impact of Short-Term Missions on Long-Term Church Growth
42. A Comparative Study of Different Missionary Strategies in the 21st Century
43. Assessing the Role of the Holy Spirit in Empowering Missionaries for Effective Ministry

44. The Relationship between Mission and Evangelism: A Theological Examination
45. Assessing the Challenge of Cultural Adjustment for Missionaries in Foreign Fields
46. Assessing the Role of Small Groups in Promoting Church Growth and Discipleship
47. A Comparative Analysis of Different Church Growth Strategies and Models
48. Assessing the Relationship between Church Growth and Community Outreach and Service
49. The Mission of the Church in the 21st Century: A Theological and Practical Examination
50. Assessing the Role of Prayer in Mission and Church Growth
51. Assessing the Impact of Technology on Mission and Church Growth
52. Assessing the Challenge of Reaching Unreached People Groups with the Gospel
53. The Role of the Church in Mission and Church Growth: A Theological and Practical Examination
54. An Examination of the Impact of Church Planting on Church Growth and Mission on Human Development
55. The Relationship between Mission and Discipleship: A Theological Examination
56. The Pastor as a Teacher: A Theological and Practical Examination
57. An Examination of the Role of Pastoral Ministry in Times of Crisis and Trauma
58. An Examination of the Challenge of Providing Pastoral Care in a Digital Age
59. An Examination of the Importance of Collaboration in Pastoral Ministry
60. An Examination of the Relationship between Pastoral Ministry and Congregational Development

61. The Pastor as a Spiritual Director: A Theological and Practical Examination
62. Assessing the Challenge of Balancing Pastoral Care and Administrative Responsibilities
63. A Study of the Relationship between Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Growth
64. Assessing the Importance of Self-Care for Pastors
65. Assessing the Relationship between Pastoral Ministry and Community Outreach
66. The Role of Empathy in Pastoral Care: A Theological and Psychological Examination
67. A Study of the Relationship between Pastoral Care and Spiritual Formation
68. The Challenge of Providing Pastoral Care in a Multicultural Context: A Pastoral Analysis
69. The Importance of Active Listening in Pastoral Care: A Theological Appraisal
70. The Relationship between Pastoral Care and Congregational Health
71. The Morality of Divorce: A Christian Ethical Examination
72. The Morality of Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research: A Christian Ethical Examination
73. Christian Ethics and the Issue of Hunger and Food Security: A Response
74. The Ethics of Disaster Relief and Humanitarian Aid: A Christian Perspective
75. Christian Ethics and the Issue of Gender Identity
76. The Morality of Autonomous Weapons: A Christian Ethical Examination
77. A Christian Ethical Analysis of Global Economic Systems
78. The Ethics of Space Exploration and Colonisation: A Christian Perspective
79. Christian Ethics and the Issue of Immigration Policy

80. The Morality of Animal Research and Experimentation: A Christian Ethical Examination
81. The Challenges of Translating Biblical Idioms and Metaphors
82. A Comparative Analysis of Formal Equivalence and Dynamic Equivalence Translation Approaches
83. The Role of Cultural Context in Bible Translation
84. The Impact of Theological Bias on Bible Translation
85. The Use of Technology in Bible Translation: Tools and Challenges
86. The Importance of Understanding the Source Language in Bible Translation: A Critical Study
87. The Challenge of Translating Biblical Genre: Poetry, Prophecy, and Wisdom Literature
88. A Critical Evaluation of the Use of Gender-Inclusive Language in Bible Translation
89. The Relationship between Bible Translation and Mission
90. The Impact of Bible Translation on Church Growth and Discipleship
91. The Challenge of Translating Selected Biblical Concepts into Bantu Languages
92. A Study of the Use of Paratextual Features in Bible Translation
93. The Importance of Collaboration in Bible Translation
94. The Impact of Bible Translation on Scripture Engagement and Memorisation
95. A Critical Evaluation of the Use of Archaic Language in Bible Translation
96. The Challenge of Translating Biblical Humor and Irony
97. The Relationship between Bible Translation and Literary Style
98. The Structure of Narrative Texts: A Linguistic Analysis
99. A Study of Cohesion and Coherence in Written Discourse
100. The Role of Pragmatics in Understanding Textual Meaning
101. A Study of the Role of Inference in Textual Comprehension
102. The Linguistics of Textual Irony and Sarcasm

## **Appendix II: Tools for Biblical Research**

In methodology, tools refer to the techniques, approaches, instruments, or resources used to conduct research, analyse data, or achieve specific objectives within a particular field of study. These tools can vary widely depending on the nature of the research and the methodologies employed. Some common tools for biblical research are as follows:

### ***Bible Software***

Programs like eSword, Logos Bible Software, Accordance Bible Software, and Olive Tree Bible Study provide extensive digital libraries, search capabilities, and study tools.

### ***Bible Concordance***

Books or online resources that list every occurrence of a word in the Bible, such as Strong's Concordance.

#### **Example**

James, Strong (ed.). *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: With Main Concordance, Appendix to the Main Concordance, Topical Index to the Bible, Dictionary*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997.

### ***Lexicons***

Dictionaries that provide definitions and explanations of the original languages used in the Bible, such as Greek and Hebrew lexicons.

#### **Examples**

Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

Brown, Francis (ed.). *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament: With an appendix containing the Biblical Aramaic, based on the lexicon of William Gesenius*.

Translated by Edward Robinson. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.

Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004.

Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner and J. J. Stamm. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. 2 vols. Study Guide Edition. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie. 1996. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1996.

Moulton, J.H. and G. Milligan. *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1995.

William L. Holladay (ed.). *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: Based upon the Lexical Work of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner (Eerdmans Language Resources (Elr))*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.

### ***Commentaries***

Books or online resources written by scholars or theologians offer explanations and interpretations of biblical passages. Use academic commentaries and avoid devotional ones.

### **Examples**

Adeyemo, Tokunboh (ed.), *African Bible Commentary*. Nairobi: WolrdAlive, 2006.

Aymer, Margaret, C. B. Kittredge and D. A. Sánchez (eds.). *Fortress Commentary on the Bible*. Study Edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014.

Carson, DA. *The Pillar New Testament Commentary*. Grand

Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002.

Dunn, JDG and J. W. Rogerson (eds.), *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003.

Gaebelein, FE (ed.). *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan

Brown, RE, J. A. Fitzmyer and R. E. Murphy (eds.). *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. London: Burns and Oates.

### ***Study Bibles***

Bibles with additional notes, explanations, maps, and other study aids to help readers understand the text.

#### **Examples**

AMG Publishers. *The Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2015

Zodhiates, Spiros (ed.). *Hebrew Greek Key Word Study Bible NIV (Key Word Study Bibles)*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2009

### ***Archaeological Resources***

Books, journals, and websites that provide information on archaeological discoveries related to biblical times and places.

#### **Examples**

Hoerth, Alfred. *The Kregel Pictorial Guide to Old Testament Archaeology: An Exploration of the History of Civilisations of Bible Times (Essential Bible Reference)*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010.

Kennedy, Titus. *Excavating the Evidence for Jesus: The Archaeology and History of Christ and the Gospels*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2022

Kramer, Joel P. *Where God Came Down*. Brigham City, UT: Sourceflix, 2020.

### ***Historical and Cultural References***

Books and articles that delve into the historical and cultural context of the biblical world, helping to interpret the text within its original setting.

#### **Examples**

Boaheng, Isaac. *An African Background to the Old Testament*. Accra: Noyam Publishers, 2021.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Exploring the Relationship between the Mosaic Code and the Hammurabi Code." *All Nations University Journal of Applied Thought*, 8(1) (2020): 77-89.

Bright, John. *A History of Israel*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000.

Coogan, Michael D. (ed.). *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2001.

Ferguson, Everett. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003.

Jeffers, James S. *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999.

Keener, Craig S. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014.

Matthews, Victor Harold. *Old Testament Parallels (New Revised and Expanded)* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2007.

Provan, Iain, V. Philips Long and Tremper Longman III. *A Biblical History of Israel*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.

Sanford, William L, Hubbard, David A and Bush, Fredric W. *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.

Vanderkam, James C. *An Introduction to Early Judaism*. Grand

Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000.

### ***Original Language Grammar***

Grammar books, syntax guides, and other resources for studying the original languages of the Bible, such as Hebrew and Greek.

#### **Examples**

- Blass, Friedrich, Albert Debrunner, and Robert Walter Funk. *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.
- Garrett, Duane A., and Jason S. DeRouchie. *A Modern Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020.
- Joüon, Paul and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*. Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2011.
- Pratico, Gary D., and Miles V. Van Pelt. *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007.
- Robertson, Archibald T. *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*. 2014 (Kindle edition)
- Tov, Emanuel. *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*. 3rd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022.
- Waltke, Bruce K., and M. O'Connor. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990.
- Wallace, Daniel B. *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996.

### ***Digital Resources***

Online databases, websites, and forums where scholars and enthusiasts discuss and share research findings, manuscripts, and resources. (Biblical Studies.org.uk, Bible Gateway, Blue Letter Bible)

### ***Maps and Atlases***

Resources providing geographical and historical maps to help visualise the locations and movements described in the Bible.

#### **Examples**

Beitzel, Barry J. *The New Moody Atlas of the Bible*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009.

Kraeling, Emil G. (ed.). *Historical Atlas of the Holy Land*. New York: Rand McNally, 1959.

May, Herbert G. *Oxford Bible Atlas*. London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Pritchard, James B. *HarperCollins Atlas of Bible History*. New York: HarperCollins, 2010.

Rasmussen, Carl G. *Zondervan Essential Atlas of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013.

### ***Encyclopedias, Dictionaries and Word books***

References that provide comprehensive information on biblical people, places, events, and concepts.

#### **Examples**

Botterweck, G. Johannes., and Helmer Ringgren (eds.). *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Translated by David E. Green (15 vols.). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006

Elwell, W.A. (ed). *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001.

Harris, R. L., Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (eds). *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody Press, 2003.

Joel, B. G. *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: A-C Volume 1*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006.

Kittel, Gerhard, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey W. Bromiley (eds.). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Abridged in one vol.). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985.

- Mangum, Douglas, Derek R. Brown, Rachel Klippenstein, and Rebekah Hurst (eds.). *Lexham Theological Wordbook*. Bellingham: Lexham, 2014.
- Renn, Stephen D. (ed.). *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing Inc, 2014.
- Silva, Moisés (ed.). *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014.
- VanGemenen, Willem. A. (ed.). *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012.
- Verbrugge, Verlyn D. (ed.). *NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000.
- Vine, WE. *Vines Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Word*. Edited by Kulakowski, T. Np: Reformed Church Publications, 2015.

### ***Textual Criticism Tools***

Resources for comparing different versions of biblical texts, analysing manuscript variations, and understanding the textual history of the Bible.

#### **Examples**

- Anderson, Amy, and Wendy Widder. *Textual Criticism of the Bible*. Edited by Douglas Mangum (Vol. 1, rev. ed.), Lexham Methods Series. Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2018.
- Black, David Alan. *New Testament Textual Criticism: A Concise Guide*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994.
- Brannan, Rick, and Israel Loken. *The Lexham Textual Notes on the Bible*. *Lexham Bible Reference Series*. Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2014.
- Brotzman, Ellis R., and Eric J. Tully. *Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction*. 4th ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016.

- Comfort, Philip Wesley, and David P. Barrett. *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts*. Wheaton: Tyndale House, 2001.
- Metzger, Bruce Manning, United Bible Societies. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies 'Greek New Testament'; 4th rev. ed.)*. London: United Bible Societies, 1994.
- Omanson, Roger L., and Bruce Manning Metzger. *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger's Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006.
- Wasserman, Tommy, and Peter J. Gurry. *A New Approach to Textual Criticism: An Introduction to the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method* (Vol. 80). SBL Press, 2017.

## **Bible Translation**

Books, articles, theses/dissertations on Bible translation.

### **Examples**

- Barnwell, Katherine. *Bible Translation: An Introductory Course in Translation Principles* (4th ed.). Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 2020.
- Boaheng, Isaac. *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*. Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2022
- Noss Philip A. and Charles S. Houser (eds.). 2019. *A Guide to Bible Translation. People, Languages, and Topics*. Swindon: Xulon Press.
- Noss, P.A. and C. S. Houser, eds. *A guide to Bible translation*. Miami: United Bible Societies, 2019.
- Noss, Phil A. (ed.). *A History of Bible Translation* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2007.

Wendland, Ernst R. *Translating the literature of Scripture: A literary-rhetorical approach to Bible translation*. Dallas: SIL International, 2004.

Wilt, T. and Ernst R. Wendland. *Scripture Frames & Framing: A Workbook for Bible Translators*. Stellenbosch, South Africa: SUN Media Press, 2008.



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## **ABOUT AUTHOR**

Isaac Boaheng holds a PhD in Theology from the University of the Free State, South Africa. He is a Senior Lecturer in Theology and Christian Ethics at the Christian Service University College, Ghana, and a Research Fellow at the Department of Biblical and Religion Studies, University of the Free State, South Africa. He has over one hundred academic publications.

