

## What is Systematic Theology?

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*The Oak Room with in-class and distance learning students in attendance*

How was the first week of class at [Unification Theological Seminary](#) (UTS)? I picked Systematic Theology, a course which is taught by [Dr. Theodore Shimmyo](#) to find out more. It is a significant course; the UTS registrar, Mrs. Ute Delaney (UTS'10) says it is required for the [Master of Divinity](#) (MDiv) program, and for the "traditional" [Master of Religious Education](#) (MRE) program, though not required for the [Master of Arts in Religious Studies](#) or the MRE in Interfaith Peacebuilding. (pp [15-19 UTS Catalog](#)).

I hoped to overcome my own apprehensions. What is systematic about theology? As a search in the dictionary showed:

Systematic: presented as a coherent body of ideas or principles

Theology: the study of religious faith, practice, and experience especially the study of God and of God's relation to the world.

One can deduce that Systematic Theology puts Christian theology in order. Wikipedia expands: "[Systematic theology](#) is a discipline of [Christian theology](#) that formulates an orderly, rational, and coherent account of the [doctrines](#) of the Christian faith. It addresses issues such as what the Bible teaches about certain topics or what is true about God and his universe. It also builds on biblical disciplines, [church history](#), as well as [biblical](#) and [historical theology](#)."

We turn to Dr. Shimmyo to learn more about his course. He explains, "The course teaches the Christian understandings of God, revelation, providence, fall, redemption, Christology, Trinity, church, eschatology, etc. in a systematic way. It would be useful for many people for the following reasons:

Because it can help us to humbly realize that there is no absolute theology as it is only a human discourse about God who alone is absolute and eternal;

Because that realization can paradoxically help us to become more aware of the real presence of God, thus leading us to a great possibility of ecumenism and interfaith;

Because we can learn how to present our viewpoints, whether they are Catholic, Protestant or Unificationist, heading for a higher point of universality;

Because this kind of learning can be beneficial for our work with UTS partners like [American Clergy Leadership Conference](#) (ACLC)."

Research takes us deeper, "systematic theology organizes truth under different headings and there are ten

basic areas (or categories), although the exact list may vary slightly." [Wikipedia](#) lists these:

[Theology proper](#) – The study of the character of God

[Angelology](#) – The study of angels

[Biblical theology](#) – The study of the Bible

[Christology](#) – The study of Christ

[Ecclesiology](#) – The study of the church

[Eschatology](#) – The study of the end times

[Hamartiology](#) – The study of sin

[Pneumatology](#) – The study of the Holy Spirit

[Soteriology](#) – The study of salvation

[Theological anthropology](#) – The study of the nature of humanity.

Students who have previously taken the course with Dr. Shimmyo are surprised by what they were able to learn. [Emmanuel Ndupu](#), an MDiv student from Nigeria confirmed how much he had gained studying with Dr. Shimmyo, and how useful this knowledge has been in thinking about his faith and in informing his conversations with others.

[Ron Pappalardo](#), an MRE student, taking Systematic Theology this semester says, "When I first learned that I must take a required course in Systematic Theology, I felt kind of intimidated by what I thought would be a very complex subject. My view has quickly changed as I've come to understand what Systematic Theology actually is. I now view it as a tool that can actually save me lot of time. If I want to understand what the Bible has to say about a particular topic, I don't have to read the entire Bible to do so. Systematic Theology has already done that for me. It goes through the entire Bible, finds the scriptures that are related to a specific topic, and then puts them all together in a way that I can understand."

Interestingly, Ron takes the course from his home in Cary, North Carolina. UTS uses the Zoom meeting platform to deliver the class into his home office.

Robert Pumphrey, UTS Director of Information Technology said, in the recent article [Theology meets Technology](#), "Zoom is one of the best online meeting platforms. The online meeting industry was started by Skype: 'Grandpa step back' ...there are new platforms on the market and Zoom is rising above them."

Zoom is a web-based video conferencing tool with a local, desktop client and a mobile app that allows users to meet online, with or without video. Zoom users can choose to record sessions, collaborate on projects, and share or annotate on one another's screens, all with one easy-to-use platform.

Robert Pumphrey is also taking the Systematic Theology course this semester. Robert says, "It's a good class." For a professor to hear that from a tech guy that is indeed high praise.

To explore Systematic Theology further, we can view an [interview with a professor from the Department of Theology at Nottingham University](#). The video provides historical context and valuable insights about learning, through dialogue and conversations. This accentuates what Dr. Shimmyo has said, that "it (theology) is ...a human discourse about God."