

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND DISCIPLESHIP: PANACEA TO NIGERIAN CHURCH CHALLENGES

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***Abstract:** Christian theological education and discipleship have been veritable mediums for instilling the appropriate spiritual virtues and characters in new converts. Previous scholarships on Christian theological education in the African context have underpinned the contributions and possibilities of theological education in African contexts to exploring the connectivity between Christian theological education and discipleship to underscore what they portend for resolving the church's challenges and engendering development and transformation. Using analytical and historical approaches, the paper discusses the significance, challenges, and prospects of Christian Theological Education in Africa. It highlights the failures of the Church and how theological education, and discipleship can serve as a panacea in tackling them. Finally, it argues for repositioning of theological education towards mission, socio-economic and justice dimensions, especially in the Church and the state.*

Key Words: Christian Theological Education, Discipleship, Mission, Nigerian Church.

Introduction

In the last three decades, Nigerian Christianity has witnessed waves of revivalism that culminated in the proliferation of churches, particularly in its Pentecostal and Charismatic strands.¹ While it is expected that the revival would be occasioned by genuine repentance and search for authentic salvation, the explosion of Pentecostal faith rode on the waves of 'imported' Prosperity gospel which struck a welcome chord in the hearts of economically disfranchised masses in the nation.² Adedibu avers that the abysmal collapse of social, economic,

¹ Asukwo Oko and Aniefiok Umanah, "Proliferation of Churches in Nigeria and its Implications for Development," *Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies* 5, no. 2 (2022): 261-273; Kate Meagher, "Trading on Faith: Religious Movements and Informal Economic Governance in Nigeria," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 47, no. 3 (2009): 397-423.

² M. Nel, "The Prosperity Message as a Syncretistic Deviation to the Gospel of Jesus," *Religions* 14 (2023): 346; M. Nel, *The Prosperity Gospel in Africa: An African Pentecostal Hermeneutical Consideration* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2020); Babatunde Adedibu, "Gospel of Materialism, Commodification and Ethical Challenges of Probity and Accountability amongst

and political institutions in Nigeria in the 80s offered veritable socio-economic backdrops to “an unprecedented resurgence and rapid proliferation of new religious movements, particularly new Christian movements with Pentecostal and charismatic persuasions.”³ The increasing explosion of Pentecostal faith and ideologies, which embers spread like wildfire to all streams of Nigerian Christianity, is contemporarily characterised by lopsided Christian faith with its insatiable desires for wealth, fame and earthly security above all else. Commenting on this, Adedibu further argues that:

In the face of the changing religious façade of Nigerian Pentecostal leaders, there has been a shift in ascetic notions previously associated with apocalyptic subscriptions of this Christian tradition that has now shifted to world accommodating stance of most of these churches. The import of the shift in the ideal has transformed most of these churches to an amphitheatre of prosperity and self-seeking opportunists of which some of these church leaders commodify their adherents with a lot of religious ingenuity and creativity.⁴

As such, in a bid to build large congregations and proliferate several churches, Christian leaders jettisoned the long-age discipleship programme of the church and resorted to quasi-prosperity gospel based on instant gratification, consumerism and materialism. The ensuing products in terms of Christian characters, images and figures in society are individualistic Christians who are often driven by the contemporary forces of consumerism and materialism. The need to re-invent the church’s programme of discipleship and education has therefore not been greater, dire, and urgent.

For in the past, theological education and discipleship have been veritable mediums for instilling the appropriate spiritual virtues and characters in new converts. The two could be regarded as the church curriculum for spiritual formation and holistic development of humanity.

African Neo-Pentecostal Churches,” in *African Pentecostalism: Probity and Accountability*, ed. Kehinde Ayantayo, Babatunde Adedibu and Ohihon Benson Igboin (Akungba - Akoko, Adekunle Ajasin University Press, 2019), 52-65.

³ Babatunde Adedibu, “Nigerian Pentecostal Megachurches and Development: A Diaconal Analysis of the Redeemed Christian Church of God,” *Religions* 14 (2023): 70. Adedibu, “Gospel of Materialism,” 115.

⁴ Babatunde Adedibu “Corruption Conundrum: A Call for Awakening the Prophetic Voice of Nigerian Pentecostal Church Leadership,” in *Corruption: A New Thinking in the Reverse Order*, ed. B.S. Igboin (Oyo: Ajayi Crowther Press, 2018), 115.

While theological education does not focus on the knowledge of God in its manifold complexities and details, it is about “faith seeking understanding” through Christian praxis.⁵ In other words, theological education arises from the obligation and responsibility of the church to inquire about its faith in God systematically and coherently.⁶ It is therefore action-oriented and transformative in its content as each context and generation has the responsibility to explore the concept of having faith in God and expressing that faith within their socio-cultural environment. The *telos* of all this is to generate holistic liberation of human communities. In this regard, the possibilities and potentialities of theological education could orchestrate the emancipation and liberation of any human society.⁷ Moreover, Kaunda notes further that “theological education can ensure the liberation and creation of a community where humanity and the entire creation can celebrate life in all its fullness.”⁸ As such, liberation could be constructed as an effect of authentic theological education.

Following the above line of thought, discipleship aims at the same purpose as theological education though the latter appears to be more systematic, complex, and philosophical in its scope and dimension. However, discipleship here may be constructed as a social practice in which human interaction occurs that binds two or more persons in a hierarchical relationship to transmit religious, cultural, or other types of information.⁹ It is such a relation in which “transmission of knowledge and learning take place in descending fashion, originating with the hierarchically superior participant and addressing the hierarchically inferior one.”¹⁰ Such a relationship does not connote a mere hierarchical exchange of information within a particular social context. Rather, the key nucleus of the discipleship structure involves the transmission of learning and guidance between parents and children,

⁵ J. J. Lee, “The Mission and People of God: Rethinking Theology and Theological Methodology in Asia,” *Missiology* 52, no. 2 (2024): 195-211; Patricia O’Connell Killen and John de Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 2001), 12.

⁶ Chammah Kaunda, “Imagining a Just and Equitable African Christian Community: A Critical Analysis Of The Contribution of Theological Education Fund/Ecumenical Theological Education (1910-2012)” (PhD Thesis submitted to Kwaza Zulu University, South Africa, 2013), 2.

⁷ Kaunda, “African Christian Community,” 3.

⁸ Kaunda, “African Christian Community,” 2.

⁹ Martin S. Jaffee, “A Rabbinic Ontology of the Written and Spoken Word: Discipleship, Transformative Knowledge, and the Living Texts of Oral Torah,” *JAAR* 65 (1997), 525-549.

¹⁰ Marcel V. Măcelaru, “Discipleship in the Old Testament and Its Context: A Phenomenological Approach,” *Pleroma* 132 (2011), 11-22.

teachers and students, and religious leaders, and adherents in a socio-religious context.¹¹ As it is with theological education, discipleship in the Christian context aims at the transformation of individuals to become like Jesus to their neighbour.¹² Thus, both Christian theological education and discipleship do not simply aim at developing consciousness about social challenges but develop and nurture a consciousness that leads to Christ-life praxis, lifestyle and perspective in the community. The exact thrust of both similar phenomena is to perpetuate a context “where learners are enabled to become faithful bearers of emancipating truth and empowered to serve as agents of liberation for their society.”¹³ In such context, emphases are placed on personal development and spiritual formation, two major ingredients that are sorely lacking in contemporary Churches.

While previous scholarship on Christian theological education has several volumes, articles, and chapters in books, on the significance and repositioning of theological education in the African context,¹⁴ their findings have repeatedly underpinned the contributions and possibilities of theological education in African contexts. Also, attention and searchlight of emerging scholars have repeatedly considered the need to reposition theological education in its context and perspectives to be more culturally malleable and missiological oriented.¹⁵ Yet, at no time has sufficient attention been paid to exploring the connectivity between Christian theological education and discipleship to underscore what they portend for resolving the church’s challenges and engendering development and transformation. Based on the

¹¹ Măcelaru, “Discipleship in the Old Testament,” 12.

¹² Kaunda, “African Christian Community,” 2.

¹³ Kaunda, “African Christian Community,” 2; B. S. Shabayang, “The Relevance of Theological Education in Forming Religious Leaders of Conscience in Africa,” *JORAS* 10 (2020): 157-175.

¹⁴ J.M. Womack, G. Duncan, and J. Pillay, “The Relevance and Necessity of Contextualising Theological Education and Ministerial Formation in South Africa,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 41, no. 1 (2020): 1-12; A.O. Dada, “Repositioning the Use of the Bible Towards a Mission-Oriented Theological Education,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34, no. 1 (2013): 1-6.

¹⁵ Paul Jegede Oyeboade and Kallah Abare, “Christian Education in the 21st Century Nigerian Churches: Challenges and Solutions,” *Sapientia Foundation Journal of Education, Sciences and Gender Studies* 4, no. 2 (2022): 241-252; Shabayang, “The Relevance of Theological Education,” 157-175; John O. Enyinnaya, “Theological Education Fit for Purpose: The Contours of Relevance in the Training of Ministers for Today’s Church,” *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion* 21 (2016): 27-40.

above, the next section of the article explores the concept of Christian theological education and discipleship.

Definition of Christian Theological Education and Discipleship

Theological Education has been severally defined in various contexts. For instance, Mugambi defines theological education as the institutionalised process through which the theologians of a particular religion are trained.¹⁶ Wingate however views it as a lifelong process which does not end till one leaves the earth and it involves a critical combination of context, tradition, skill, and experience.¹⁷ While Mugambi and Wingate might have defined theological education from the perspective of learning and religion, Ewool and Diboro recently defined theological education as the rational and systematic study of God and religious belief,¹⁸ which is an academic discipline in most Bible Colleges, Seminaries and Universities.

Streamlining their thought on Christian education, Ewool and Diboro argue that theological education is a subset of Christian education.¹⁹ Furthermore, Ewool and Diboro citing Wolterstorff and Stronks, posit that the church like any other religious organisation and community with a distinct perspective and lifestyle needs to educate its converts. In their own right, Wolterstorff and Stronks define Christian education as a form of education by the Christian community for the Christian community.²⁰ In this regard, Ewool and Diboro assert that theological education focuses and deals with the aspects of Christian education that beam its searchlight on God, man, his environment, and their interrelationship.²¹ From the foregoing, theological education as faith-seeking understanding through Christian praxis, critical

¹⁶ J. N. Mugambi, *The Biblical Basis for Evangelization: Theological Reflections Based on an African Experience* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 69.

¹⁷ A. Wingate, "Overview of the History of the Debate about Theological Education," *International Review of Mission* 94 (2005): 235-247.

¹⁸ S. A. Ewool and P. K.-E. Diboro, "The Relevance and Practice of Theological Education: A Case Study of Charismatic Churches in Santasi-Heman, Ghana," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 11 (2021): 157-174.

¹⁹ Ewool and Diboro, "Relevance and Practice," 160.

²⁰ N. Wolterstorff and G.G. Stronks, *Educating for life: Reflections on Christian Teaching and Learning* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 1-10.

²¹ Ewool and Diboro, "Relevance and Practice," 157.

reasoning and inspiration of the *pneuma* is important for the health of the church.

While Christian theological education is deemed to be an ambit of Christian education, this study examines the nexus between it and the concept of discipleship. For the concept of discipleship within Christian scriptures and traditions presupposes a master-student relationship which the former transmits his accumulated learning patterns and worldview alongside the spirit behind into the student in a more informal context. The dichotomy between Christian theological education and discipleship is that whilst the former is systematic, rigorous, philosophical, and abstract at times, the latter is informal, life-inclusive, and relatable always.

A historical exploration of the root of Christian theological education would convince us that it began as a sort of discipleship programme within the text and histories of the Old Testament. Theological education has been traced to the Old Testament times. It is apt to posit that theological education in the Old Testament is all-embracing and inclusive. Every Israelite was exposed to education of the Torah which according to Dada is based on two constants: theological constant and sociological constant.²² The first has God as its linchpin as the principal and authentic educator as in the case of Exod. 12:25-27 and the second has the family as the essential basic sociological institution as a medium of Torah education. Other sociological media through which this education is channelled are religious specialists such as priests, prophets, wise sages, and scribes.

Therefore, what Dada, Amolo and even Preiswerk conceptualised as theological education in the Old Testament was the informal Torah education that was taught to all Israelites from cradle to the grave.²³ Such educational pattern as revealed within the texts and histories of the Old Testament is informal, holistic, life-relatable, and enduring. Discipleship at this time was largely a subset and a higher form of this informal education. The idea of teaching (*lamad*, meaning instruct,

²² Dada "Theological Education," 43.

²³ Dada, "Theological Education," 4; Hope Amolo, "Repositioning Theological Education in Nigeria for a Wholistic Development," *Knowledge Review* 18, no. 1 (2008), 1-7; M. Preiswerk, *Education in the Living World: A Theological Framework for Christians* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987).

learn, skilful, teach) conveys the basic concept of discipleship in the Old Testament.²⁴ That idea suggests “walking in the ways of another.” Interestingly, such walking can be the following good examples (Jud. 2:17; 2 Chr. 20:32) or bad examples (2 Kgs 21:21).²⁵ There are varying examples of notable personalities in Israel’s history – Samuel (1 Sam. 19:20–24), Elisha (2 Kgs 4:1, 38; 9:1), Isaiah (Isa. 8:16; 50:4), Jeremiah (Jer. 36:32) and Ezra (Ezra 7:6, 11) – that are patterns and models worthy of following as we have it in the concept of discipleship. The problem with this ‘discipleship pattern’ as narrated in the stories of the figures is that it is not always clear how formalised the relationship between model and follower was.²⁶ Therefore, when we attempt to conceptualise the idea of theological education and discipleship within the Old Testament texts, what we have is an informal, holistic, life-relatable and non-philosophical learning of Yahweh and His ways as evident in the Torah.

In the New Testament and the early Church, there are elements of theological education within Jesus’ programme of discipleship. Ewool and Diboro note that “in many instances in the gospels, the disciples of Jesus received further secret explanation systematically on His teachings.”²⁷ Also, the first four centuries of the Christian Church witnessed a linear growth regarding interest in theological education. Ewool and Diboro note:

Initially (in the early Church), there was little concern about formal theological training because the apostolic age was characterized by the prevalence of charismatic gifts and the nature of the charismatic ministry of the early church fathers. In the first part of the second century when moniscopacy started springing up, it brought some level of attention to formal ministerial training. Sub-divisions in the clerical orders also led to the regularization of clerical training where one needed to be tested and proven before being promoted to a higher order.²⁸

As it can be deduced from above, the evolution of theological education within the ecclesiastical operations of the Christian church was

²⁴ Strong, James *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 60.

²⁵ Măcelaru, “Discipleship in the Old Testament,” 15.

²⁶ Măcelaru, “Discipleship in the Old Testament,” 15.

²⁷ Ewool and Diboro, “Relevance and Practice,” 160.

²⁸ Ewool and Diboro, “Relevance and Practice,” 161.

occasioned by the need to train her main armed forces, the clergy in the business of the ‘kingdom of God’ on earth and as well combat the forces of heresies and persecution. Ewool and Diboro add that “by the second century the need for formal theological education grew along the second century where the church was troubled by scholarly debates from pagans, Jews and heretical schools like the Gnostics and it needed to have a strong acknowledgement of its doctrines and the canon of scripture.”²⁹ As such bishop Demetrius founded the first Catechetical school of Alexandria, and it was led by Origen. Accordingly, its domain was summarised as encyclopaedic teaching, presenting in the first place the whole series of profane sciences, and then rising to moral and religious philosophy, and Christian theology finally, set forth on the sacred books in the form of a commentary.”³⁰ Such was the significance placed on theological education from the third century onward that Rowdon reports that bishop Cyprian of Carthage did not promote anyone without an examination.³¹

In the early medieval era (500 AD - 1000 AD), the Christian Church faced the task of converting other surrounding nations and as such organised monasteries as centres for learning.³² By the Middle Ages (1000 AD - 1500 AD), priests and bishops could teach in towns and villages, universities began to spring up and most of these universities focused on theological education. Their emergence was occasioned by the teaching responsibilities of priests and bishops and the need to further provide systematic clerical training.³³ The reformation period witnessed the emergence of Calvin’s Academy, Cambridge, and other notable universities with theological education. There were smaller seminaries providing general education whereas the greater ones supported ministerial training. Theological education continued till the 19th century when theological colleges began to emerge, and more complexity and variant approaches were employed in teaching theology around the world.³⁴ It could be said that for a while, theology in

²⁹ Ewool and Diboro, “Relevance and Practice,” 161.

³⁰ James Aruma Ilarius, “Theological Education as a Tool for Social Emancipation: Challenges and Implications on South Sudanese Society,” *Trinitarian International Journal of Arts and Humanities* 1, no. 1 (2021), 2-3; H. H. Rowdon, “Theological Education in Historical Perspective,” *Vox Evangelica* 7 (1971): 75-87.

³¹ Ilarius, “Theological Education,” 2-3; Rowdon, “Theological Education,” 76-78.

³² Ilarius, “Theological Education,” 2-3.

³³ Ilarius, “Theological Education,” 2-3.

³⁴ Rowdon, “Theological Education,” 82.

Europe was the queen of science and it was not until the 19th century that it began to take the back seat among courses offered in universities and colleges around the world.³⁵ Nonetheless, the relevance and significance of theological education remain fundamental and essential for spiritual formation and holistic transformation of human societies.

Scope and Dimension of Christian Theology Education in Africa

Christian theological education was introduced to Africa in the pre-colonial period. Its approach and scope are distinctly steeped in a Western detached and objective approach to the bible. This traditional theology, which dominated the colonial period, is not adequate to address the various social, religious, economic, and political problems prevalent in the African continent.³⁶ In the 1960s, the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches published a report titled “Issues in Theological Education 1964-965,” in which they noted the continued dependence of theological seminaries in these continents on curriculum developed in the west.³⁷ They noted that such situation propelled the theological institution to produce “students who are not conversant with the nature of the church or dynamics of ministry at home.”³⁸

The report indicated that efforts were being made in the 1960s by these theological schools across the continents to reform their programmes not just in addition of new courses but in fundamental approach. However, prior to this finding, the scope and dimension of theological education in Nigeria as well as other African countries had been altered to suit the sociocultural demands of African cultures. The alteration begun from the African Indigenous churches which started springing up in the 1930s. The incorporation of African thought life and identity into process of ecclesiastical engagements and biblical interpretations found its robust voice as early as 1920s and by 1950s,

³⁵ A.O. Adebo, “Theological Education as a tool for the Reformation of Church and Society,” in *Theological Education and Christian Ministry in the Modern Day*, ed. Dapo Asaju (Abeokuta: Crowther Publishers, 2015),78.

³⁶ Womack, Duncan and Pillay, “The Relevance and Necessity,” 1.

³⁷ Enyinnaya, “Theological Education,” 28.

³⁷ Enyinnaya, “Theological Education,” 28.

³⁸ Enyinnaya, “Theological Education,” 28.

³⁸ Enyinnaya, “Theological Education,” 28.

there were plethora of Indigenous churches who championed the propagation of the gospel using Afrocentric cultural dimensions.

Within the established Christian educational institutions, the drive to ‘decolonise’ theological education as it was and is known gathered pace in the 1960s. Bowers identified two precipitating events in the 1960s that occasioned the indigenization process of theological education in Africa.³⁹ According to him, the first event emanated from within Catholic francophone Africa, and it is a derivative of the principal mid-century events of African’s intellectual life. The second event can be traced to Protestant anglophone African and that functioned as the cutting edge of the century-old quest for an effective indigenisation of African Christianity. Subsequently, a wide spectrum of publications were issued out to address the reconfiguration of theological education towards Africanisation and African-based issues from African perspectives. Notable among the early publication was an article published in 1963 by Sundkler Vincent Mulago of Congo/Zaire titled *Un visage africain du Christianisme* and Bolaji Idowu in 1965 on *Towards an Indigenous Church*. In the 1970s, some magisterial theological books that are Afrocentric includes Mbiti’s *African Religion and Philosophy* (1969), *Concept of God in Africa* (1970) and *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background* (1971).⁴⁰

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed rapid expansion of theological discussions that are germane to the flourishing of theological education in Africa. The expansion placed emphasis on various methodologies and point of discussions. The notable theologians of this era include Kato, Nyamiti, Pobe, Dickson, Tienou, Ela, Ukpong, Eboussi Boulaga, Oduyoye, Mugambi among others. By the 1990s, theological education and discussions gained sophistication and depth. Of significant interest in this era is the production of Kwame Bediako’s work on *Theology and Identity* (1992) in which he conducted a comparative analysis on the role of culture within second-century Christian thoughts and Modern African Christian thoughts emphasising the latter’s drive for theological self-understanding.⁴¹ From then onward, various methodologies and approaches have been invented and

³⁹ Paul Bowers, “African Theology: Its History, Dynamics, Scope and Future,” *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 21 (2002): 115-117

⁴⁰ Enyinnaya, “Theological Education,” 27-40.

⁴¹ Enyinnaya, “Theological Education,” 27-40.

currently in use within the scope of African theological education. It may be asserted that the future of theological education appears bright as there are concrete efforts to reposition it towards mission and existential challenges facing the continent.

Relevance of Theological Education and Discipleship in Nigeria

The relevance of theological education for discipleship and spiritual formation of both clergy and laity within the Churches in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. In Nigeria, most of the Christian churches have theological colleges such as Emmanuel College Theological Seminary, Ibadan, Trinity Theological College, Umuahia, Peter and Paul Major Seminary, Ibadan, Seat of Wisdom Seminary, Owerri, Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN), Bukuru, Missionary Seminary of St Paul, Abuja, The Redeemed Bible College, Mowe, and a host of others. These theological colleges act as training centres for pastors, ministers, evangelists, and other categories of church workers.⁴²

They are in affiliation with some departments of religious studies/theology in various universities in the nation. They train the fundamental workers in the church. As such, theological education is involved in personnel training for Christian Churches. Therefore, it can be gathered that theological education is crucial for building and training personnel for practical Christian ministry. Theological education is often seen as a solution to existential issues, but this perspective is often criticized for its potential to hinder the church's mission and outreach. Largely, theological education has been viewed as a one-side affair. Many perceived theological educations as mere academic exercise that has no bearing or concrete effect on holistic transformation of the society. Those who viewed theological education as profitable have erroneous notion that it is to be used for promotion in the church and only few still held the belief that it is a veritable medium for discipleship and spiritual formation. The essentiality and focus of this discourse are to reposition theological education to be mission-oriented, transformative-based, and practical focused.

Theological education has the potentialities and possibilities of engendering spiritual formation and transformation in a way that can

⁴² P. E. Nmah, "Theological Education and Character Formation in Nigerian Christianity: A Reflection," *An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia* 7, no. 1 (2013): 34-36.

produced a church that is spiritually growing with over-extended influence over the sociocultural and political terrains of the nation. The historical evidence of this is the reformation of the fifteenth century. The reformation was orchestrated by robust theological education which had its root in the renaissance. The outcome of the monumental event was the reconstruction of the Western societies in a profound manner that have lasting influence. Within the structure and praxis of theological education in modern times, emphases have been placed on the spirituality and spiritual formation of the Christian ministers and workers. From the experiential perspective most theological institutions seems to pay lip service to spiritual formation in theory and practice as many of these institutions lay more emphasis on doctrinal stance of their denomination than discipleship.

Examining the idea of bearing Christ's cross (Matt. 16.24–26) is a crucial component of discipleship. As students and learners, his disciples must embrace the same journey that the Messiah himself underwent, symbolised by the crucifixion (Luke 9.18–22). This way of living with the cross cultivates a disciplined spiritual life that transforms Christians so that they might become reflections of the divine light. It emphasises that the gospel of the cross must come first if people genuinely want to align themselves with God's will. However, it is instructive that emphasis on spirituality must permeate every aspect of the seminaries programme in such a way that the relationship dynamics and lives that will make them veritable agent of social change in the ecclesial and their homes.

But it must be stated that the role of theological education is never limited just to the training of Christian ministers. With all legitimate attention and emphasis on ministerial formation, the road and inclusive approach emphasising theological education as a process of renewal and formation for all God's people always needs to be kept in mind. Theological education is not only serving the building up of the church, but also creating social awareness, political discernment, social involvement, and Christian participation in transformation processes of societies. Thus, investing in theological education is a direct

investment also into social and political development and transformation of society and the raising of its educational levels.⁴³

Finally, it is agreeable that theological education remains a strongly traditioned discipline. The variant components of theology offer resources and substance to the understanding of Church's heritage, identity, tradition, reason, and history. For instance, systematic theology, though a byproduct of western theology offers reflection on Christian doctrine and engages the creedal basis of key theological ideas such as the Christology, God, revelation, ecclesiology among others. The resources offered by theological education are germane for disciple-building in any ecclesiastical contexts. It is therefore crucial that any serious church turns to its theological centre for correct interpretation and balancing of its doctrinal perspectives in this present age.

Repositioning Christian Theological Education and Discipleship

It has been established that Christian theological education in Africa, especially in Nigeria, need a significant repositioning. The clarion call for repositioning of theological education has been raised by various scholars since the 1960s. Some scholars have faulted the existing approaches in theological education in Africa for being Western-oriented and lacking proper grappling with the sociocultural context of African society.⁴⁴ As such, scholarly campaigns are on for the need to use the emerging hermeneutical approaches such as the inculturation approach for reading theological texts, especially the Bible in most seminaries.⁴⁵ Other scholars in their views have criticised the limit and scope of theological education in the aspect of providing answers to existential socioeconomic challenges in Africa.⁴⁶ As such several proposals have been made on how to reposition theological education to meet the needs of the church. Some of the urgent views are enumerated below.

⁴³ Nmah, "Theological Education," 35.

⁴⁴ M. Naidoo, "Overcoming Alienation in Africanising Theological Education," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72, no. 1 (2016), 6.

⁴⁵ B. A. Adedibu and O. Ajayi, "The Role of Theological Training in Sustainable Ministerial Performance amongst Nigerian Pentecostal Churches," *Spectrum: Journal of Contemporary Christianity and Society* 1 (2016): 59-81.

⁴⁶ W.P. Wahl, "Towards Relevant Theological Education in Africa: Comparing The International Discourse With Contextual Challenges," *Acta Theologica* 33, no. 1 (2013): 266-293.

Theological Education Must Be Mission-Oriented

The need for theological education to be mission-oriented has been put forward by some scholars. Notably, Dada writes that “it has been projected that by 2025, 71% of two billion Christians will be living in the global south.”⁴⁷ The implication of these statistics for Africa, especially south of the Sahara where we are located is that there is going to be an upward swing in the population of Christians. The logic is that if there is going to be an increasing explosion in the population of Christians then there is a need for theological education to be mission-focused for the sake of continuous evangelism and discipleship to sustain and maintain the Christian presence. According to Dada, mission-oriented theological education has two dimensions: vertical dimension and horizontal dimension.⁴⁸

The vertical dimension enables people to understand rightly (though certainly not perfectly) the Triune God and to relate properly to him. The horizontal dimension causes the believers to understand rightly and to relate properly to both their environment and others. As such this mission-oriented theology is crucial for the spiritual formation and discipleship of God’s people. However, he adds that for theology to be mission-oriented that theology must be Christological in character, contextual in orientation and holistic in perspective.

Theological Education Must Be Socio-Economic, and Justice Conditioned

Agbiji argues that the Nigerian Church is indicted in aspects regarding to environmental and economic crisis that bedevilled the nation.⁴⁹ He believes that the church, through her respective structures, was not able to respond to the issues of the dumping of toxic waste by multinational companies in several affected communities.⁵⁰ The church has not decisively raised its voice regarding the ongoing economic crises but to a large extent has used the situation to peddle prosperity gospel which has inflated the numbers of churches

⁴⁷ Dada, “Repositioning the Use of the Bible,” 2.

⁴⁸ Dada, “Repositioning the Use of the Bible,” 2.

⁴⁹ O. Agbiji, “Religion and Ecological Justice in Africa: Engaging ‘Value For Community’ as Praxis for Ecological and Socio-Economic Justice,” *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71, no. 2 (2015).

⁵⁰ Agbiji, “Religion and Ecological Justice,” 4.

geometrically. This has elicited the need to reposition theological education to that which engages germane issues regarding environmental and economic issues and how to resolve them. African ecumenical theology of environment must be introduced in which search light is beamed on challenges of environment and ecological concerns. Agbiji avers that

...to articulate a theology that could provide both an ideological and a praxis-oriented ecclesiastical engagement with issues relating to environmental and economic justice, the concept of community and humanly-oneness embedded in African cultural traditions must be incorporated into our theological apprehensions and approaches.⁵¹

Theology Education Must Be Practical Learning

Amolo suggests that “theological education in Nigeria is supposed to focus on people-centred development, relief system, conflict resolution, poverty relief system, conflict resolution, adult literacy and education, disaster preparedness, right to life, freedom of religion, the dignity of persons as created in the image of God.”⁵² All these issues are practical issues that are fundamental answers to the endemic existential problems of our nation. Our theological education must transcend the borderline of theoretical arguments and exercises. Attempts must be made to ensure that practical theology offering veritable insights and answers to rural and urban problems must be taught using African-based methodologies in our seminaries.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, the need for theological education to be holistic and pervading in tackling the Church's challenges and being a springboard for reformation, restoration, and renewal is urgent. The significance of theology lies in its capacity to equip individuals for mission, ministry, and discipleship by addressing both real-world and theological matters rather than remaining theoretical. Thus, theological education should not be pursued solely for its own sake. Therefore, Nigerian theological education should ultimately lead to practical and

⁵¹ Agbiji, “Religion and Ecological Justice,” 4.

⁵² Amolo, “Repositioning Theological,” 1-7.

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selfless service to humanity, a goal best achieved within the framework of missions and discipleship.

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