



# THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION: RECONSTRUCTING THE NIGERIA'S POLITICAL SPACE FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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## ABSTRACT

The paper maintains the central thesis that theological education could serve as a veritable instrument for socio-political reconstruction that would engender authentic national development in Nigeria. The work has the objective of demonstrating how theological education can be optimized into a functional mechanism for national transformation. The research utilizes a spectrum of philosophical methods in its unravelling of the consequential issues associated with the thesis. Three maxims are recommended in this work for cultivation and development by Theologians in the bid to revamp Nigeria's political turf. The paper admits that for theological education to become socio-politically functional, there is an urgent necessity to rejig the curricula and reconceive theology as a framework for socio-political emancipative transformation whereby the divine will impinge on every facet of the social and the goodness of God will translate to good governance which is the *condition sine qua non* for authentic national development.

**KEY WORDS:** Theology, Education, Politics, Authentic, Development

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## INTRODUCTION

The pivotal thrust of this paper is to weave a nexus between Theological education, Nigerian politics and National development. To justify the afore-stated aim, the work shall be segmented into different parts. The first part shall focus on terminological analysis, the second part shall delve into a historical discourse of the convergence between theology and politics. The third section will pose three challenging theses that theological education must develop for it to serve as a veritable instrument for the reconstruction of our nation's political space. Part four will narrate the concept of development and

argue in defence of the proposition that theological education is essentially indispensable for authentic and transformative national development. This will be followed by a concluding statement.

## THE CONCEPTS OF THEOLOGY AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Etymologically, the term "theology" is defined as a derivative of two Greek roots: *theos*, meaning *God* and *logos*, meaning *discourse* or *word*. Literally therefore, Theology means "discourse about God" in much the same way as Geology (from the Greek roots, *geo*, meaning *earth* and *logos*, meaning *discourse*)



means discourse about the earth. However, the growing influence of Latin as a universal language in the mediaeval era saw the introduction of the Latin noun *scientia*; from where the term *science* is derived, as an umbrella descriptive concept for all cognitive enterprises which are capable of yielding systematic knowledge. Thus, "theology" is also considered in some quarters as a "science of God".

Since the mediaeval universe was saturated with the aura of the sacred and the divine, learning in that universe was carried out under a sacred canopy and teleologically focused on God as the *terminus a quo* (beginning) and the *terminus ad quem* (end) of every knowledge pursuit. This knowledge orientation in the mediaeval era culminated in the accordance of primacy to Theology as *the queen of the sciences* in Western European universities from the 12<sup>th</sup> through the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Thus European universities, such as Paris, Bologna and Oxford in that era generally had four faculties; namely, arts, medicine, law and theology. In these institutions, Theology being *the queen of the sciences* was revered as the paradigm of authentic knowledge and all disciplines were subjected through the theological tribunal for doctrinal corrections.

Explaining the rationale behind this structuring of knowledge under the Queenship of Theology, Gavin D'Costa avers that mediaeval educators assumed that all the disciplines were founded on a common unifying principle that creation was from God, ordered for the good of man and to be used as such. Thus all branches of knowledge were designed to work in harmony in fulfilling the ultimate purpose of rendering service to God, the Church and the civil society (*Theology in the Public Square: Church, Academy, and Nation* 10-11)

The installation of Theology as a measuring rod in epistemological matters necessitated the further extension of the subject matter of Theology to include not only God but the entire domain of the sacred and the divine. Consequently, Theology became widely

reckoned as a scientific discipline whose intellectual crust covers and is confined to the realm of the sacred transcendental. This explains in a great measure why the history of the development of theological education in the Christian world is tied to the patronage of the church. *Theological education* in this context refers to the complex academic and pedagogical approaches instituted for the furtherance, systematization and deepening of the knowledge of God, the sacred and the divine among humanity.

### THE HISTORICAL CONVERGENCE OF THEOLOGY AND POLITICS

Historically, the nation of Israel can be instantiated as a practical example of a country in which Theology provided the guiding principles and light for good governance. The political history of the people of Israel as evidenced in the Old Testament can be said to revolve around the God of Israel as the key player. Walter Brueggemann, in his examination of the political narrative of ancient Israel observes that: the God of Israel impinges on every facet of the political; or conversely, Israel's self-presentation is inescapably a *political theology*...in which the God of Israel is intensely engaged with questions of power and with policies and practices that variously concern the distribution of goods and access. In Israel's self-presentation, there is no politics not theologically marked, no theology not politically inclined. ("Scripture: Old Testament" 9)

One of the models for Israel's political theology can be located in the Biblical Exodus narrative where the God of Israel interrupts the politics of Egypt and the rulership of Pharaoh to procure emancipation for the people of Israel. This Exodus story projects the crystal point that God's participation in human politics is always aimed at the emancipation of the oppressed people in history. The suffering, pain and gnashing of teeth experienced by the Israelites under the draconian and abusive tyranny of Pharaoh, magneted God's empathy to interfere and

topple the malicious agenda of Pharaoh against the people of Israel.

Didactically, the Exodus episode of God's emancipatory politics underpins a salient irrefutable fact that divine power does not intervene in human affairs without the active cooperation of human agency. This is where theological education becomes an essential instrument needed for the authentic pedagogical nurturing of God's people in the knowledge of God so as to prepare them for active participation in God's divine purpose of emancipation of the oppressed.

This Exodus' liberative discourse has lucidly highlighted the fact that God's intervention in human affairs requires the active participation of human agents. Moses and his cohorts had to become actors in their own history in order to fulfil the divine plan for Israel. Thus, when God said to Moses "So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt" (3: 10), it was an invitation for partnership in the actualization of God's will for humanity. The New Testament Christocentric emancipatory mission is correspondingly replete with instances which underpin the essentiality of human cooperative commitment as a fundamental factor in the actualization of the divine mandate. Christ's birth, baptism, earthly evangelism, tortuous journey to the cross, resurrection and holy commission to the disciples all expose the crucial necessity of human cooperation in the realization of the divine plan. The vital question to be asked at this juncture is: ***Can A Human Being Actively Participate in the Fulfilment of God's Divine Mandate Without a Requisite Knowledge of Who God Is?*** The overarching answer is **No!** Since the systematic study of the being, nature and purpose of God is the exclusive preserve of Theology, then we do not need to re-emphasize that theological education is a *conditio sine qua non* for effectuating God's plan for humanity. The current state of human decadence can be traced to the underlying cause that we have not accorded theological education the prime place it has to occupy in

directing the conduct of human affairs. Like objects experiencing abysmal descent, we have severed knowledge from its ultimate source (God) and hence wander in a purposeless and directionless pursuit of vanity. The *God* has been detached from the *good* therefore the exponential growth in knowledge acquisition is paralleled by a corresponding astronomical increase in immorality, human barbarity and miseries. Theological education should then be focused on recapturing the *good* from the abyss of decadence back to the ultimate source of Goodness-God.

**i. The Contrast between the two Kingdoms and the Confluence between Theology and Politics**

One of the early Christian theologians who worked out the distinctions between two cities; the city of men and the city of God, was St. Augustine. In his *The City of God*, part 11, book XI St. Augustine begins his discourse on the origins and ends of the two cities by noting that the city of men or the earthly city originates from our turning away from love and its source (God) toward will-fulness and the pursuit of mundane power. The causal root of all human calamities, for Augustine, is this primordial 'turning away'. The city of God or the heavenly city is derived from a turning towards God's will and this serves as the causal spring for authentic peace and human development. Contrastively, whereas the citizens of the heavenly city abide by the standards of the spirit, the citizens of the city of men accord their lives to the standard of the flesh. Metaphorically, Augustine refers to the Church as the heavenly city on earthly pilgrimage with a mandate of forging together diverse people under the authority of God to live according to the standards of the spirit. The theological significance of the Church in this context is to serve as a melting pot for transforming and channelling of citizens of the two kingdoms to the true God. Theological education plays the critical role of furnishing the Church with intellectual sophistication and practical guide for the actualization of the mandate of the Church on earth.

Thomas Aquinas is another prominent scholar in the annals of theology who demonstrated the contrast in relationship between the Kingdom of God and the worldly Kingdom. He anchored his discussion on the concept of the Truth to drive home the political theological axiom that truth as embodied in God and incarnate in Christ Jesus is stronger than earthly kings. As contained in his works; *Quaestiones de Quodlibet* and the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas threshes the discussion by comparing and contrasting the strength of the various causes of change in human heart. He identified four causes, namely, wine, woman, a king and the truth. Wine may cause change in human action by altering the physical chemistry of our body, woman causes change by appealing to our pleasurable emotion, a king causes change by commanding the human being to obey rules and truth causes change by making the mind to assent to belief. The first three causes only act on the behaviour of humans while truth affects the human will. And since it is easier to cause behavioural change than to cause a change of mind, Aquinas argues that truth is stronger and more potent than the other causes (*Summa Theologica* 2-2.47.2 ad 1). Aquinas conceives truth in this manner because he was of the opinion that truth is synonymous with God. Since truth conveys the power of God and in theological education, the God who possesses this truth is studied, then theological education should furnish the *educands* with the knowledge and the power of truth and hence empower them to speak truth to any earthly power. This was exactly what Jesus did, being a quintessential theological educator, when he confronted the temporal truth-less power of Pilate by telling him that He is an embodiment and witness to the truth and hence He is a King to all who bear witness to the truth (John 18: 36-37). Speaking truth to power is always a herculean task because it demands not only focusing the searchlight of truth on civil authority to purge it of ungodliness but also a commensurate inward beaming of the light of truth on the

ecclesiological activities of the Church, to purify the Church of all the trappings of worldliness. This task of external cum internal criticism is expressive in the reformation accomplished by the revolutionary German theologian, Martin Luther, who through his *Ninety-five Theses* challenged the doctrine of the exchange of indulgences for money by the Church as a remission for sins. Luther's unwavering criticism of the Church brought about the introduction of the five *solas* the underlying principles of the reformation. These include *solascriptura*; which affirms dependence on the scripture alone as the only inspired word of God, *sola fide*; which asserts that justification comes through faith in Christ alone, *sola gratia*; which upholds that salvation comes by divine grace, *solus Christus*; which holds that Christ is the sole mediator between God and man and *Soli Deo Gloria*; which admonishes that every aspect of the Christian life should glorify God and not man. The disruption which Luther's critical theology brought to bear within the Church birthed the idea of democratic equality within the Church whereby "all men and women come on equal terms to appropriate God's grace, effecting that appropriation through a direct and individual relationship with God" (Andrew Bradstock, "The Reformation" p 63) without resorting to any human channel to serve as a mediator. Aside the reformatory impact of his theology on the Church, Luther also admonished secular authorities by enjoining that "God's word will not be guided and twisted to suit princes; rather it is princes who are to be guided by his Word" (Höpfel 36).

The inquisitive retort of the Mediaeval Theologian, Tertullian, *what has Jerusalem to do with Athens?* Which questioned the rapprochement and coalescing between divine and mundane knowledge can be rearticulated to read: what has Theological education to do with politics – and by extension – national development? Saul Newman, in a thought provocative rhetorical answer asserts that "the political relies upon a theological moment to give it shape. This

suggests a deeper engagement between politics and theology" (*Political Theology: A Critical Introduction*. p. 33).

The next section will present three challenging theses for theological education to reconstruct our nation's political turf and the accompanying succeeding session will illuminate and demonstrate how theological education is a necessity for national development.

### THREE THESES FOR CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY IN RECONSTRUCTING THE NATION'S POLITICAL SPACE

My objective in this section is to invite theological educators and their educands to a challenge by marshalling out some theses, maxims or propositions which Christian theological education must cultivate and develop as *sine qua nons* for revamping the Nigerian political sphere.

#### 1. Deepening of the Christian anthropology of *imago Dei*(image of God)

A realistic analysis of the Nigerian political terrain can best be phrased as analogical to Thomas Hobbes' description of the state of nature as "a state of war of all against all", in which all forms of development are oriented toward a cul-de-sac. The political oddities are but a microcosm of the seismic extremities that characterise the larger entity called Nigeria. Prevalent in our country are parallels of opulence and indigence, intensifying religiosity and crippling immorality, overarching political sensitization contradicted by decreasing national consciousness, proliferating ivory towers dwarfed by the babel of bad leadership. It cannot be gainsaid that our prevailing socio-political state is a far departure from the scriptural rendition of man as the bearer of the "image" and "likeness" of God.

This Nigerian predicament can be traced to the fundamental problem which our former President, Olusegun Obasanjo captures thus: "The fundamental wrong in man is his Godlessness, his autonomous conduct, which is decided without reference to God" (Quoted in *This House has Fallen: Nigeria in Crisis*

p.251).Consequently, the critical challenge which theological education must surmount in order to reconstruct the Nigerian political terrain is to recapture the Nigerian man from this condition of Godlessness to that of Godliness through the deepening of the Christian anthropology of *imago Dei* in the consciousness of Nigerians.It is only in the context of being an *imago Dei* that God predicated man's legitimacy to governance. This much is contained in Genesis 1: 26-28 which says "let us make man in our own image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the animals, all the earth and creatures that crawl on the earth". Thus man's authority to rule was conditioned on his possessing the image and likeness of God. Though the terms, *image* and *likeness*, have been subjected to tons of interpretations, Vincent Anigbogu, explains that *image* refers to the character attributes of God which man must possess for effective leadership while *likeness* connotesthe appropriation and display of God's functionality in the conduct of human affairs. He enumerated some of the godly character attributes to include faith/confidence, integrity, knowledge, self-control/moderation, patience/perseverance, strategic life, kindness and goodwill to all and cited vision casting skills, creating enabling environment, infrastructure building, strategic planning, success, leadership development and succession, continuous development, emergency preparation and customer focused-benefits (90).

#### 2. Cultivation of the Theology of Peace to replace a culture of war

The personification of our saviour Jesus Christ as the Prince of peace (Isaiah 9:6) is directly contradictory to the present belligerent state of nation which is beleaguered by violence whereby every emerging day breaks with an explosion of a canister of violence. The Nigerian socio-political turf is replete with news of terrorist attacks from the North East, secessionist threat from the South East, militant scare from the South South, kidnapping and banditry across the entire



landscape of our dear country. The reality of violence cannot be grimmer and the imperative of replacing this culture of violence with a culture of peace cannot be more urgent. It is my proposition that Theological education can issue out an abatement to this bellicosity by entrenching the pedagogy of peace in the consciousness of Nigerians.

### **3. An Intensification of Theological Ecumenism to Banish the Politics of Ethnic and Religious Jingoism**

Ecumenical theology is a theological reflection oriented towards the purpose of unity: the unity of faiths, the unity of humankind and the unity of creation in the perspective of God's kingdom (Mary Tanner. "Ecumenical Theology" in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*. p 556). However, I wish to challenge theological educators to scale up ecumenical theology by enlarging the unification agenda of ecumenism to embrace the agglutination of ethnic and religious differences. Such ecumenism across ethnic and religious lines will foster the politics of inclusive pluralism, which is the bedrock for the democratic principles of: equality, majority rule and minority rights and popular sovereignty, and will to that degree banish the politics of ethnic and religious chauvinism in our country to the refuse bin of history.

### **THE ESSENTIAL INDISPENSABLITY OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The task of this section of the discourse is to demonstrate that theological education is not only essential but indispensable for the actualization of national development.

As a concept, *development* is a polysemous term that is not susceptible to any one-sided reductionistic definition. Corroborating the multidimensional nature of development, Walter Rodney in his *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*(9) records that development can take place at the human and material levels. At the individual level, development has to do with increase in skills and capacity, more liberty, creativity, self-discipline and

material well-being while material development is said to occur when members of a society jointly increase their scientific and technical knowledge in improving their material conditions. Reinforcing Rodney's view above, Nnoli O. defines development as a dialectical phenomenon in which the individual and the society interact with their physical, biological and inter-human environments, transforming them for their own betterment and that of humanity at large and becoming transformed in the process. The lessons learned and the experiences acquired in this process are passed on to future generations, enabling them to improve their capacities to make further valuable changes in their inter-human relations and their ability to transform nature. ("Introduction: Intellectual Aspects of the Struggle for Nigerian Development" p. 8)

This holistic view of development rendered by Nnoli offers a deep insight into the understanding of development by introducing the notion of transformation as a defining component of development. Transformation connotes the possibility of yielding positive change. It was in an effort to underscore the quality of transformative change as an integral embodiment of authentic development that the *United Nations Commission on Environment and Development*, which is widely known by the name of its Chair-lady, Gro Harlem Brundtland, introduced the concept of sustainability into the idea of development, thus, "Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland 1987, 41). In this definition, sustainability is conceived as a normative term which is analogical to transformation and conveys the equivalent idea that development should generate positive intergenerational changes. The UN's capsular definition of development above was subsequently decomposed at the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002 at Johannesburg into what is



called the three components of sustainable development, viz; economic, social and environmental

objectives. Extrapolatively, Omare in Ntamu et al (p. 310) views national development as the process and ideologies where national governments articulate and implements policies and programmes which are beneficial to the present generation without jeopardising the prospects of future generations. National development can be conceived as the sustainable transformative actualization of the potentials of a country in all the sectors and dimensions of the country ranging from the social, economic, moral, infrastructural to the political facet.

These holistic overviews on development go a long way to remedy the anomaly embedded in most economic oriented theories of development which absolutize economic progression as the sole end of development. Contrary to the conception of development contrived by these economic theories, Amartya Sen observes that "An adequate conception of development must go much beyond the accumulation of wealth and the growth of gross national product and other income-related variables. Without ignoring the importance of economic growth, we must look well beyond it" (*Development as Freedom* p. 14).

One most critical role that Theological education must play to ensure effective national development in our country, is to rescue the concept of development from the quagmire of definitional quandary. As Christians, it is imperative to understand that God created the earth and gave man the authority to replenish, subdue and have dominion over it (Check Genesis 1:26). By implication, it can be deduced that God accorded man the responsibility of developing the earth. Thus, man is the prime actor and focal object of development. Pope John Paul VI, in his Encyclical on development reinforced this human-centered idea of development when he said that sound development programmes must have "in the last analysis, no other raison d'être than the

service of man. Such programmes should reduce inequalities, fight discriminations, free man from various types of servitude and enable him to be the instrument of his own material growth" (*Populorum Progressio*, 1967).

The dislodgement of man as the focal point in whose good every development programme ought to be conducted and the imposition of greed and avaricious materialism constitute the greatest hurdle to authentic, sustainable and transformative national development. The Bible clearly cautions that a people could be destroyed due to lack of knowledge (See Hosea 4:6) and the present state of mal-development in Nigeria can be traced to our lack of knowledge on how to develop the country. Since God is the ultimate source of knowledge, I think theological education can unbundle the concept of development and reposition our country on the part of true, authentic and transformative development.

At this juncture, let me elucidate the concept of development a bit more by making reference to the postulations of Vincent Anigbogu (159-162) on the three typical steps and stages involved in achieving national development. Using Singapore under Lee Kuan Yew as a model of a nation that developed by taking the three steps and passing through the three stages of development, he enumerates the steps to consist of:

#### **Stage 1: The Wilderness Stage or Third World Nation**

This stage is individuated by the litany of multifarious social, economic and political issues such as poverty, unemployment, ailing education and health systems, lack of infrastructure and absent of basic amenities which make the state to experience a wilderness condition. Singapore was in this wilderness condition when Lee Kuan Yew gained power in 1959. President Lee attributed the abysmal condition in his country to corruption, and what he did to change that wilderness condition was to take an irreversible and irrevocable stand against corruption by instilling the rule of law,

competence and integrity in public governance.

### **Stage 2: The Fruitful Field Stage or Middle World Nation**

This is the stage where a country has to invest heavily in the transformation of the cultural, scientific and technological values of the nation to ensure compliance to universal quality and standards. This will have the ultimate effect of positively changing the global perception of the international community about the nation. Once a nation has achieved a high positive global perception rating, then the country will begin to experience fruitfulness; economically and otherwise, and hence joins the comity of second-world middle-income nations. This was achieved by President Lee by aggressively scaling up the quality and standards inputted into the cultural, scientific and technological outputs of his country to commensurate with global requirements.

### **Stage 3: The Forest Stage or the First World Nation**

This is the stage of paradigm shift which is accomplished through intensive training, re-education and re-orientation of the citizens to propel the people and make the nation to leap and switch from the traditional local ill-system of rendering service to a world standard paradigm of quality service. It is the stage where every facet of the country is forested with quality service which will inevitably and compulsively draw the attention of the entire world to the country and make the country to become an unbeatable destination that pulls the greatest quantum of investment portfolio and capital from the world economic net. This has been achieved in Singapore with exactitude.

If Singapore; a former third world country, who got independence almost at the same time with Nigeria, can achieve national development, then we need to re-assert that Nigeria can achieve national development. What we have to do to achieve that is to study, internalise and operate with the three steps methodology as expatiated above.

The most crucial aspect of our national life where theological education must play a leading role is in the area of revamping and overhauling the moral content of Nigerians. The ethical compass of a good number of our country men and women has become insensitive to moral rectitude but gravitates more rapidly towards the direction of immorality, viciousness and despondency. Authentic national development has eluded our country for this long because every national development plan in Nigeria is mangled on the altar of corruption. Corruption is just one of the awful progenies of the odious state of moral decadence that characterises our existence as a nation. Immorality has become so omnibus in our country to an extent of invincibility. Every counter approach adopted by successive governments to reverse the trend of moral debacle and rescue the country from the precipice of demise is not only attaminated but stifled by the increasing irrepressibleness of immorality. Our last hope of respite, therefore, lies with theological education. Nigerian Theologians owe Nigerians the sacred duty of pathfinding a robust and formidable national ethics for Nigeria that emanates directly from the originator of all goodness-God. Any development plan that is not erected on a staunch moral foundation, is bound to collapse. Hence the Psalmist says, "if the foundation be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Psalms 11:3) Once God becomes the source of our morality, then our moral consciousness will be revived to be sensitive to godliness, goodness and virtue.

It is pertinent to restate once again that the academic programmes in theological institutions must be designed to enhance the capacity of its beneficiaries to serve as the bastions of truth who can muster the audacity to confront cases of misuse and abuse of public office in Nigeria. Theological education should not be aloof to the sufferings, yearnings and aspirations of Nigerians. There is an urgent need to contextualise theology to address the predicament of the Nigerian situation. The Nigerian literary icon, Chinua



Achebe, had long ago arrived at the sizzling conclusion that:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership. (*The Trouble with Nigeria*, 1)

Just like liberation theology was developed with a particular bias for the poor and the downtrodden, I hereby place a clarion call on Nigerian theologians to develop a theology to confront the Nigerian predicament of bad governance.

### CONCLUSION

I wish to assert that the prevailing state of mal-development in Nigeria is not an ineluctable divine or metaphysical fate whose occurrence was inevitable, our development as a nation collapsed because of the actions and inactions of our leaders which drove the country into a debacle. The quality of development engendered in any country invariably correlates with the quality of governance of the country. Since God is the source of all goodness, the good governance which is a necessary pre-requisite for national development can only be achieved if our development policies are rooted in God. This is where Theology being the study of the being of God has a fundamental role to play in furnishing us with a systematic knowledge of God which will have a reconstructive impact on the nation's political space and ultimately serves as the foundation for authentic national development in Nigeria. Hence, this paper submits that theological education is essentially indispensable for authentic national development in Nigeria.

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