

**Theological Education as Tool for Change In Nigeria**

by

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the role of Theological Education Theological Education as Tool for Change in Nigeria. The focus is to bring to the fore how theological Education can be used to bring about Socio – ethical transformation that in turn will pave the way for national cohesion, peace and justice which are essentials for national development. Past administrations (military and civilian) have to a large extent failed to address squarely the many political and socio – economic problems facing the Nigerian nation at large. The current administration led by the President Mohammad Buhari came on board with the “*Change Mantra*” during their electioneering campaign. Unfortunately majority of the electorates are yet to see the said “*change*”. Against this background, the current topic adopts analytical and phenomenological approaches to explore and study the concept validity of every relevant dimension of the subject under consideration. The work notes that so much depends on the input of the theological educators in terms of teaching by example than by precepts only. It further asserts that the ‘evangelical boom’ being experienced by Christianity in the nation, particularly in the southern part, offers hope through what the Bible says, but despair through the lavish life style of the preachers of the gospel today leaves much to be desired. The paper recommends amongst other things that theological educators should emphasize the ethical teachings of the scripture and while using the same to rebuke, correct and train in righteousness to the end that the citizens will work assiduously in becoming positive agents for national development.

**Introduction:** Theology is that branch of learning which concerns the science of God. Theology is a word derived from two Greek words: *qeov* (theos) and *logoV* (logos). It basically means an account of or discourse about gods or God. The word *theology* is sometimes used in a broad sense, meaning not only the study of doctrine, but also biblical studies and church history, as when one speaks of a faculty of theology in a university. More often, however, theology means systematic theology—the sense in which it has been discussed in this article—that is, the ordered exposition of the beliefs of a religious faith as a whole<sup>1</sup>. Christian systematic theology is subdivided into the doctrine of God (theology in the strictest sense); Christology, the doctrine of the person of Christ; soteriology, the doctrine of salvation; anthropology, the doctrine of

humanity; pneumatology, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit; eschatology, the doctrine of the “last things,” or the end of time; and ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church<sup>2</sup>. Further divisions are sometimes made, but truly systematic theology always emphasizes the unity and mutual implication of the various parts.

There is also the distinction between natural theology, which is based on reason and common experience, and revealed theology, which is based directly on revelation. Similarly, a distinction should be made between apologetics—the attempt to state religious belief while taking note of, and responding to, objections and criticisms—and dogmatic, the straight exposition of beliefs. Some theologians<sup>3</sup>, however, reject apologetics, because it seems to allow their opponents to set the agenda, arguing that the best apologetic is simply a clear statement of belief.

The rise and development of religious doctrines is the subject of historical theology, which has important implications for current theological speculation. Somewhat less central to the theological enterprise are several disciplines in which insights are derived from systematic theology but applied to various specialised problems<sup>4</sup>. In moral theology, the insights of faith are applied to questions of moral conduct. Because of the variety of these issues, moral theology tends to become an interdisciplinary task. When the problems are connected with social and institutional aspects of human life, one may speak of social theology and even political theology. Pastoral, or practical, theology has to do with the exercise of ministry in matters such as counselling and the cure of souls.

Although the Bible contains much theological material, it is obviously not a textbook of systematic theology. Paul's Epistle to the Romans is perhaps the nearest approach to a theological treatise in the New Testament; beginning with the sinful human condition, Paul develops a doctrine of justification by faith and sketches a scheme of universal salvation. As has already been mentioned, theology began among the Greeks as a scientific discipline, and it was the convergence of Greek philosophy and biblical faith that gave rise to the great age of patristic theology<sup>5</sup>. Although German theologian Adolf von Harnack lamented the “Hellenization” of the Gospel, most theologians would agree with Tillich that biblical faith had to respond to the intellectual challenge of Greek philosophy<sup>6</sup>.

Theology, attempts to express the content of a religious faith as a coherent body of propositions. Theology is narrower in scope than faith, for whereas faith is a total attitude of the individual, including will and feeling, theology attempts to bring to expression in words the elements of belief that are explicitly or implicitly contained in faith. Not every verbal expression of faith is theology. The first verbalisations of faith were naive and mythological. Theology arose out of reflection upon these first naive utterances. For instance, in the New Testament the disciple Thomas exclaims to Jesus, “My Lord and my God!” but a long process of reflection and speculation came between that simple confession and the theological declaration, made by the Council of Nicaea (AD 325), that Jesus Christ is “one in substance with the Father”<sup>7</sup>. This example demonstrates the tendency to move from concrete language “Lord” to conceptual language “substance”.

Although theology ultimately concerns God, many theologians maintain that concepts of God necessarily fall short.<sup>8</sup> In the Judeo-Christian tradition, God is often described in negative terms such as *invisible* or *incorporeal*. If this negative theology is not to become sheer agnosticism, it has to be supplemented by indirect ways of speaking about God (involving analogy, symbolism, and metaphor) so that the language of theology never becomes purely conceptual, instead retaining some of the imagery from the pre-theological stage of belief.<sup>9</sup> A careful analysis of theological language is a necessary prelude to the theological enterprise. It reveals a language that employs both images and concepts and that is both critical and confessional.

The oldest theology of all—that of the Greek philosophers, who invented the word *theology*—was based on rational reflection on God, the world, and human life. These philosophers explicitly contrasted the rational theological approach to the problem of God with the mythological stories of the gods told by the Greek poets. The rational approach has continued to have many adherents, such as Aquinas<sup>10</sup>, but the appeal to revelation as the source of theological truth has also been strong in the Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and several Eastern traditions. These religions are traced back to founders who offered some new and striking insights into the questions of God and human destiny. Subsequent generations of theologians reflected on the content of these illuminations, drew their implications, applied their insights in new situations, and tested and criticized the interpretations that had been previously offered. The distinctive insights of the founders, whether or not the word *revelation* is used, have been stamped on the theologies of the different religions, and it is a testimony to the depth and richness of these insights that so much has been drawn from them and that they still seem inexhaustible.

There is no single, universally recognised method in theology. Method varies from one theologian to another and largely depends on the degree of importance attached to the various sources. Eleventh-century theologian Saint Anselm<sup>11</sup> is a good example of a theologian who used the method of rigorous logical argument. In his *Proslogion*, Anselm sought to prove the existence of God from the concept of a perfect being (the ontological argument)<sup>12</sup>, and in *Cur Deus Homo* he argued that, given the existence both of a benevolent God and of the sinfulness of humanity, the Christian doctrines of incarnation and atonement may be deduced by logical necessity. Few theologians<sup>13</sup> have been as rigorously logical as Anselm, but most have aimed at logical coherence. A minority, however, including 2nd-century church father Tertullian and 19th-century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard<sup>14</sup>, have denied that theology can be conceived as a rational system and have held that the human experience of God reveals discontinuities and paradoxes.

A rather different method can be observed among Reformation and post-Reformation Protestant theologians, who have attempted to base theology on the Bible alone. In its crudest form, this has meant a constant appeal to the Bible to prove theological assertions. With the development of biblical studies, however, this type of theology has become much more sophisticated. The method is, first of all, to establish the biblical text from the manuscripts and variant readings and, next, to subject this text to the closest

scrutiny, taking note, for example, of linguistic considerations, literary sources, and historical background. This constitutes the work of exegesis, which aims at ascertaining as far as possible the meaning that the writer intended. The theologian must then go on to ask how the original meaning of the text has been developed in the course of doctrinal history, and what it might be taken to mean in the theologian's own time and cultural situation. This step involves hermeneutics, the science of interpretation<sup>15</sup>. Some hold that interpretation is itself a creative, innovative act, not just the transposition of meaning from an ancient to a modern context. Even a transposition intended to reproduce the exact meaning of the original text may result in substantial changes. Twentieth-century German theologian Rudolf Bultmann<sup>16</sup> advocated a method of “demythologising” on the assumption that the essential meaning of the New Testament is an understanding of human existence that must be disengaged from the mythological language current at the time when the New Testament was written. Bultmann's project involved the translation of this “essential meaning” into the language of modern existentialist philosophy.

Formally similar to the biblically based theologies of Protestant writers are those of Roman Catholic writers who have tried to develop theologies based on the dogmatic pronouncements of the church<sup>17</sup>. This was done somewhat naively in the older handbooks, but it is now recognized that hermeneutical questions are as relevant to dogma as they are to scripture, and that even the most venerated dogmas periodically need reinterpretation and may lead to new insights.

Theologians who are reluctant to begin with an appeal to authoritative texts, whether biblical or dogmatic, begin the task from the opposite end, analysing human experience and its problems, and then asking how traditional wisdom might illuminate or resolve these problems. Twentieth-century German theologian Paul Tillich<sup>18</sup> has used the expression “method of correlation” to describe this procedure in theology. He and others have made much use of phenomenology in their analysis of human experience.

The principal types of theological method are obviously capable of being combined in different ways. Every major theologian has a method that in its detail is unique, but that nonetheless involves many procedures similar to those of other theologians. It is also important to notice that many of the methods of theology are the same as those employed by historians, students of language and literature, philosophers, and others.

**Education:** The word education is from the Latin word, ‘*educo*’, ‘*educare*’ meaning “I direct”. It is a process which involves a systematic system of training. In education, behaviour is originated and changed. It is the development of knowledge. Education also is a universal practice engaged in by societies at all stages of development. According to John Dewey “education is the reconstruction of experience.”<sup>19</sup> Thus the reconstruction of experience leads to a change in behaviour which is regarded as when learning has actually takes place. Education is equally equipping for life. It is a process by which one generation transmits its culture to the succeeding generation. There are basically two main forms of education; formal and informal education.

From a philosophical point of view, not all learning can be defined as education. Okeke<sup>20</sup> identified three characteristics that distinguish true education Irvin such things as rote learning purely mechanical training and indoctrination said that education:

- deals with knowledge that is recognizably worthwhile and capable of achieving a voluntary and committed response from the learner.
- leads to a quality of understanding that gives rise to new mental perspectives in the learner
- uses methods that encourages the exercise of judgment by the learner and the use of his/her critical facilities

In a sense, education is a society's cultural reproductive system. By Education, society reproduces itself, passing on its main characteristics to the next generation. The result is that each generation is different from that from which it sprang, yet preserves a family likeness that in the short term is unmistakable. In this sense it is education that keeps the society alive. That is the process of socialization of every given society.

**Theological Education:** In the light of the above assertion Igbari' says: theology is the study of the word of God, whose task involves its origin its content and its interpretation, for the purpose of discovering and knowing more about God the creator of heaven and earth.<sup>21</sup> In an attempt to defend the integrity of God, Gbonigi observed man's incapability of making God an object of our reflection, knowledge, research and speech in the sense in which natural sciences understand the words by putting forward hypotheses, through which they devise experiments, measuring and calculating<sup>22</sup>. This however does not preclude the fact that believers seek to understand God through various media that are available to them.

In view of this, Gbonigi quoting Karl Barth ranked theology among the field of human endeavour traditionally classified as sciences because theology seems to signify a special science, whose task is to apprehend, understand and speak of God<sup>23</sup>. Rowan William sees theology as a Phenomenon to be studied and capable of changing every man. According to him theology begins when something in the human world and human lives has struck at such depth that we need language more than just the conventional language of human agency and historical forces<sup>24</sup>. In essence, theology arises when the world looks new. The impulse to do theology arises when the world looks different from what we thought it was.

For a comprehensive understanding of the discipline, the field of theological education had evolved into various theologies namely: Biblical Theology, systematic Theology, Liberation Theology, Evangelical Theology, Pastoral Theology, Dogmatic Theology Experiential Theology, Islamic Theology, Historical Theology and Feminist Theology". As there are many theologies, 'it also manifested many disciplines, which is the reason why Alan Richardson and John Bowden described theology as a branch of rational account given of the Christian faith, as furnished by series of sub-disciplines such as Biblical Studies, Church History, Systematic Theology, Ethics and Pastoral Theology<sup>25</sup>. Therefore, theology is a wide area of study, which when properly utilised, has become vast avenue for better character formation of the populace. As vast as Christian theological education is, there is the need to mention that it possesses within it the power of information as well as that of transformation". The existence of this stimulated Rowan William to attempt differentiating between a theologically educated person and someone who simply knows a great deal about the Bible or history of doctrine. According to him, to be theologically educated involves the capability of engaging in the task of innovative interpretation of the scriptures and in ability to recognize holy lives<sup>26</sup>. In essence a

theologically literate person agrees totally with consciously addressing the mind to both the study, application and internalizing the words therein into daily life's expressions. This is the stage at which a person is said to have had the fruit of the spirit.

**The Importance of Theological education a tool for change in Nigeria:** Though there are many theological disciplines in the field of theological studies, Gbonigi made a clarification on the importance of each subject. In his presentation, we are furnished with the necessity of appreciating the richness of the field of theology. Generally, three major areas were identified which are necessary for our discussion.

First to be identified is the area of Academics, which embraced the liberal or classical studies of the Bible. It comprises fields such as the Old Testament and New Testament Literature, systematic theology dogmatic theology, historical theology, philosophical theology etc.

These are classed as the theological education which characterises the theoretical speculative and technical exercises. The academics embark on the task of reading and critical study of the Bible, with particular emphasis on understanding the biblical languages with the goal of identifying the mind of the divine from the immediate environment to the present day.

The second identified is the pastoral study. This involves the liturgical theology and homiletics, pastoral theology, evangelism, missiological studies etc.; they are the professional or vocational areas of theological education. This area is not usually taught in the Universities but a very important aspect of training in the seminary or theological schools.

The third aspect of theological education which he considered as the main is the devotional; it is the most important aspect of theological education because it deals with ministerial formation for men and women being prepared for Church ministry. It is also important because of its commitment to spiritual issues focused on transforming the person involved in theological education<sup>27</sup>. Having completed the task, he affirmed that the three aspects of theological education and ministerial formation are inseparably linked together.

As such, for theological education to exert the necessary impact on the society, the professional and devotional areas must have the academic disciplines as foundation, to agree with Thomas Aquinas' thought that: theology is taught by God, teaches of God and leads to God.<sup>28</sup>

**The Task of Theological Education in Changing Nigeria:** After remarking the triangular shape on which theological education is built, i.e. academic disciplines, ministerial formation and devotional life, it is pertinent to note that the three identified areas have collectively thrown great challenges to theologians and theological educators. In the area of academics, Rowan William tasks the theologians on speculating about the supposed impact that theology should make on those who engage in the discipline. While expressing his view, he understood theology as a practical discipline, which has the task of acquiring skills for living, skills that are shaped by a whole set of heritage of narratives, perspectives, images, metaphors, each of them traceable to some great upheaval in human understanding. This requires a responsibility, with the purpose of creating a sense of obedience in those who are affected by them<sup>29</sup>. Therefore, theology is

about personal transformation, holiness and obedience, in order to make the Bible the primary record of the difference that God makes, and to enable it serve as the instrument towards attaining the purpose of the Church in the society. The course of theological discipline enhances authentic development in education, which in turn led to one being educated to respect and promote the values of authentic humanism. Leaders who would emerge within the course of theological integration, therefore, explore theological standpoint to develop an inner set of values which assist in evolving guidelines that help them make some vital decisions. These decisions are guided by different strands of experiences.

Paul Tillich observed that experience is the medium through which God speaks to us<sup>30</sup>. The experiences are not rigid or static, rather they are diverse and influenced by various situations. One is poised to agree with Stanko to lay claim that these experiences range from family examples, mentoring relationships, religious teachings, life failures, suffering through tough times, watching other leaders whom they admired and watching other leaders whom they did not admire<sup>31</sup>. These diverse experiences constitute the veritable sources through which theological education exert the necessary influence on the society. These values are integrated into a body of life, packaged towards attaining the true image of God in humanity, which itself is made up of personal and interpersonal relationship.

The African concept of a person is an all-inclusive one based on a combination of factors such as metaphysical, physical and social relations. As a matter of fact, it evolves the objectives of providing a framework such as the New Christian conception of man by which the African man can be described. Within this set goal, theological educators assiduously labour to frantically dissipate energy towards finding the relevance of theological education with specific assignment of evolving coherent and contextual languages that would showcase the living standard which Christ advocated as stipulated in the scripture.

**The Pastoral Aspect of Theological Tasks:** The task of the pastoral training becomes enormous in view of the challenges created by the sphere of academics as enumerated above. Recognising the existing interwoven and interlocking relationship among the key players, the major relevance of the pastoral wing is the task of training the professionals who have direct contact with the society.

Having themselves been transformed towards becoming transforming agent in Nigerian history and to determine what areas of Nigerian life God requires to be transformed. Transformation theoretically emphasises the message of the gospel against the ills in the society and substantially, by using the agency of the Church, to compliment the effort of the government. This is done by addressing neglected areas like social services and other areas currently seeking attention. The devotional life challenge of the task is equally enormous, in that it affects the frame of mind of the theologian. For a proper framing of the mind, the player is consciously being transformed into a devotee of the gospel for a pragmatic appreciation and application to personal living for the purpose of internalising its content.

Gbonigi commends the effect of this area as the most important aspect of theological education as a needed discipline to express the relevance of theological education. He opines that this in turn enables the candidate to be an effective servant of God in

ministering the gospel of Christ to the spiritual and material needs of God's people in his or her professional or vocational calling<sup>32</sup>. Rowan William agrees with Gbonigi that theological education becomes a finished product, for a guide that educates the Christians on what he/she needed to know and do, as a doctrinal regulation for all living<sup>33</sup>. The level of internalising the scripture confirms the assertion of Apostle John that the word became flesh,<sup>34</sup> without which the effect of the scripture is nothing.

**Theological Education *viz a viz* Socio-Political concerns of Nigeria:** Adeolu Adegbola was inclined to re-examine the theological distinction between the sacred and secular nature of Nigeria. According to him, while the term multi-religious or pluralism sound more accurate and helpful towards defining religious responsibility for change and progress in Nigeria, hence the term secularism, inhibit religious involvement in efforts towards mass mobilization<sup>35</sup>. In view of the above, theological relevance could rather be sought in the Latin phrase: “*status confessio*” meaning ‘the status of confession’. Alan Richardson defined confession as: a form of declaration of religious conviction<sup>36</sup>. Practically observed, contemporary theology recognises and acknowledges that for an increasing number of Christians, considerable subjects of social political, economic or secular nature are capable of assuming a status of firm declaration of religious conviction<sup>37</sup>. For example, Desmond Tutu articulated issues such as anti-racism and apartheid, and considered them not merely a cultural or political option, rather of a deeply religious imperative based on firm theological convictions<sup>38</sup>. Current issues in Nigeria such as hot having respect for human lives, kidnapping, cultism in Institutions of higher learning, problems in the Niger Delta, terrorism, corruption, should not be classed as merely cultural or political matters but of religious importance based on firm theological concept. Having attached the status of confession on such issues, then theological relevance is sought by way of discussion, where moral depravity that smeared the image of the country are itemized, and such moral impunity in every segment is condemned in totality. Otherwise, theological solutions must be sought through the instrumentality of the scripture for further suggestions toward articulating the values to instil new moral imperatives by which the image of Nigeria would get an enhancement.

**Theological Education as Change Agent:** Theological education and change are two *podia* that must work hand in glove towards attaining moral purity and image enhancing of Nigeria. One does not doubt that as the realm of theology dealt with what concerns the spiritual sphere of the Nigerian society, change as a motto has the goal of creating awareness on Nigerian populace, towards rejuvenating in them the virtues that would represent the Nigerian people as respectable and reputable citizens in the world. Invariably it does imply that both are committed to imbibe the principles of moral discipline; however, by implication, it involves forming ethical values with goals of making people have new orientation geared towards a new life. As such theological values are obtained in the fact that Christian programmes have mobilizing powers on its adherents. The mobilizing strategies of Theological Educators make the programme become imperative. Scholars have discovered the mobilizing power in religion that makes theological perspectives inevitable in an exercise of this magnitude.

Change from the theological stand-point involves radical approach and this goes beyond concentrating on the physical. Therefore it needs the mobilizing strategy such as exists in

Theological Education. Social groupings are veritable avenues where mental orientation that makes one develop the thinking faculty for critical value judgment. Values such as fairness, courage and justice are reassessed virtues in human behaviour which is a product human deployment.

Scholars have discovered the existence of grades of people within any existing social groupings and that each group respond differently to issues. The peasants is a group that lived within the purview of their income, their major concern is to make life continue within any reviling situation. Essentially, they are indifferent to socio-political changes whether positive or negative. Also there are the elitist group who are educated. To a large extent, they control a percentage of the economy, and they are susceptible to change as such they have their perception directed towards social reforms. Also there is an aristocratic group who belong to the ruling class. Their activities determine largely the fate of the educated and the peasants, their daily decisions make or mar the condition of the economy.

**How would Theological Educators influence Nigeria?** Theological education is however the weapon of the Church to positively affect the populace and inoculate the virtue of good moral disposition in them. Whereas social class portrays a tendency to dichotomize between the rich and the poor and often is the cause of stratification and class differentiation, Theological Education is an avenue that comprises the rich and the poor in the society. The scripture is the original instrument of capturing their mind, and the medium of gaining their loyalty; it is an avenue which limits social grouping. Theological education exercise major control over thinking and behaviour. The combination affords theological educators to be properly informed about the state of mind of people at various strata of the economy, since he interacts with both rich and poor. Such understanding that moved the 8th century prophets like Amos, Micah, Hosea and Isaiah to cry for justice when they observed that many of the small farms of the peasants had been absorbed into large landed estates or farms of a new aristocracy of a ruling body of nobles. Theological educators should operate through Christian Institutions, such as schools, seminaries, Church-based Universities, hospitals, clinics, orphanages, rehabilitation centres, leprosy centres, business enterprises, social welfare. They should also work through the Associations like Christian Association of Nigeria, Boys' Brigade, Girls' Brigade, Fellowship of Christian Students, Scripture Union, etc. they should also labour through programmes such as catechism, evangelism, revivals, crusades, workshops, retreats, camps, seminars and symposia.

**Conclusion:** Corruption is growing because, the law enforcement agencies, police, Independent corrupt Practice Commission (ICPC) the Economics and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and other related offences commissions have become mere toothless bulldogs. Theological education should enable the populace to confront the ills of the nation. The politicians that amass and flaunt wealth and rogues who should be rotting in jail but walk freely as heroes on the streets should be denounced. Common sense does not prevail in social issues because a large part of the populace is illiterate who and does not know its rights. Religions have been corrupted. The church has lost the prophetic voice because leaders had compromised their call, had lost their essence, had received selective favours from government and is in league with mal-administrators and

tyrants. The church has joined the race for vanity and materialism at the expense of the oppression and impoverishment of the citizens. The Church has become a part of the problem of the nation. Indeed, *“the corrupt church has become a challenge to the nation”*. The resultant effect of this state of disorientation, falsehood and meaninglessness is poverty lack of appreciation for human labour and dignity, poverty of good minds and ideas for progress, poverty of healthy physical and social environment conducive for peaceful co-existence etc. This is the environment where theological education must flourish and become a veritable tool to change Nigeria.

Theological institutions should be able to train and empower men and women in the society to be the real instruments for change. Theological Education programmes are poorer if they do not empower students for all-inclusive development of Nigeria, Africa and beyond. Therefore, since Theological education is a comprehensive exercise that exposes theologians to the theoretical and applied area of the scripture, it is a task whose major assignment is to primarily and consciously engage in the medium of information at two different levels; spiritual and physical for the purpose of making the *“Word to become Flesh”*.

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Education, in the sense above mentioned, was at all times highly esteemed, and educated persons were treated with great respect, and, were called "sons of the noble," and allowed to take precedence of others at table. The same authority deploras the degeneracy of later times in this respect (Mishna, Sotah, 9:15, volume 3, 308, Surenhus). Chardin, *Voyages*, 4:224, Langles; Olearius, *Travels*, page 214, 215; Pietro della Valle, *Viaggi*, 2:188). Smith, s.v. On the subject generally, see Jahn, *Bibl. Arch.* § 106, 166; Ursini, *Antiquitt. Hebr. scholst. acad.* (Hafn. 1702; also in Ugolini *Thesaur.* 21); Dumor, *De scholis et academ vett. Hebr.* (Wirceb. 1782 ; uncritical); McClintock and Strong *Encyclopaedia*, Electronic Database. Copyright © 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc.

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Storr, Schleiermacher, Baumgarten-Crusius; also Kling, in Herzog, *Real-Encyklop.* 12: pp.600-606). Theology thus becomes the science of the unfolded, objective self-manifestation of the Divine Spirit in the phenomenal kingdom of God — a practical science which develops progressively and side by side with that kingdom. But it is nonetheless a positive science also through its relation to the kingdom

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