Impacts of Alexandria Catechetical School's Sacred-Secular Education and its Implications for Theological Institutions in Nigeria

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Abstract

This article explores how the Alexandria Catechetical School educational system which combined sacred and secular learning can be applied in theological institutions in Nigeria. The study adopts a qualitative research approach, utilizing historical analysis and literature review to explore the historical context and educational practices of the Alexandria Catechetical School. Major findings from the study reveal that such holistic approach to education did not only enrich the theological understanding of students but also equipped them with practical and contextualized skills for engaging with the secular world. The study also highlights how theological institutions in Nigeria can apply similar system such as interdisciplinary training, contextualization and community engagement, spiritual and moral values, discipleship through godly leadership by example and development of entrepreneurship skills in order to produce all-round competent manpower to address current challenges confronting the Nigerian church and society. The study recommends that theological institutions in Nigeria should consider incorporating elements of the Alexandria Catechetical School's educational system to better prepare students for the challenges of the modern world. These include integrating more secular subjects into the curriculum, providing practical training opportunities, and fostering a culture of intellectual curiosity and critical thinking. With holistic approach to education, theological institutions in Nigeria will not only be better in equipping their students to engage with the complexities of the contemporary world, but will also attract public relevance while remaining rooted in their sacred missions.

Key Words: Alexandria Catechetical School, Sacred—Secular education, Theological Institutions, Impacts and Implications.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The ancient pioneer Christian theological institution "Alexandria Catechetical School" has an impressive significant history of Christian theological education. Established in the second century AD, this school played a crucial role in the development of Christian theology particularly in the context of the sacred-secular education. However, despite its historical importance, there is a lack of comprehensive research on the impacts of the Alexandria Catechetical School's sacred-secular education system and its implications for theological institutions in Nigeria. As the Nigerian educational system continues to grapple with issues of quality and relevance, there is a growing need for theological institutions in Nigeria to adapt their curricula and teaching methods that should maintain a balance between faith and reasoning to meet the needs of a changing society. The impacts of the Alexandria Catechetical School's sacred-secular education and its implications for theological institutions in Nigeria therefore, represent a significant gap in the existing literature which this article intends to explore in order to provide valuable insights for the future development of theological institutions in Nigeria.

Against this background, this article seeks to study this timely issue through the lens of three major research questions: Firstly, how did the Catechetical School effectively integrate sacred and secular subjects into its educational model? Secondly, what are the impacts of Catechetical School on the church and society in the Roman Empire? Thirdly, what are the historical implications of Catechetical School educational model for theological institutions in Nigeria? These research questions were attended to in sections three, four and five respectively. To achieve these, the study employs a historical research analysis approach exploring primary data from early Christian writings and historical records alongside the secondary literatures on Church history from scholarly materials such as books, journals, internet resources and so on. It is hoped that this article, apart from providing valuable insights for the future development of theological institutions in Nigeria, will also be appreciated as a contribution to the existing knowledge in the field of theological education which is paramount for the development of the church and society.

Definition of Key Terms

Key terms used in the paper are defined to establish clear focus of this article for the readers as follows: Firstly, the term "*Alexandria Catechetical School*" in this study refers to an ancient pioneer Christian theological institution that was established in 2nd century in Alexandria, Egypt during the early Christian era which Oliver (2016:85) alluded to as the "Didaskaleion" from Greek root word "διδασκαλεÖον" referring to a school or place of learning. Secondly, "*Sacred-Secular Education*" in the context of this research is a concept that involves the integration of religion with secular studies. It emphasises the harmonious coexistence and interconnectedness of both faiths in God and human reasoning on the realities of life. Thirdly, the term "*Theological Institutions*" in this article have to do with educational establishments or organizations that are dedicated to the study and teaching of theological programs and

courses to prepare manpower for the church and society. Fourthly, the word "*Impacts*" in this context refer to the far-reaching effects that the school had on the education and worldview of its students, as well as its influence on the broader society. Finally, the word "*Implications*" refer to the potential consequences or significance resulting from a phenomenon or an act worth considering for future actions and developments.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF ALEXANDRIA CATECHETICAL SCHOOL
The Alexandria Catechetical School, one of the earliest Christian theological institutions, has a rich historical context that spans several centuries. The city of Alexandria According to (Oliver 2015:11th July, 2024), was founded by Alexander the Great between 331- 332 BC and named after his name Alexandria. The city of Alexandria was a major center of culture, learning, and trade in the ancient world. Baur (2005:22) opines that, Alexandria at its peak of glory, became a center of Greek scholarship and science under the Ptolemaic dynasty 323-30 BC and home to many schools including (Catechetical School) and the famous Library of Alexandria, which housed a vast collection of texts from various disciplines, including philosophy, science, and religion.

2.1 The Rise of the Alexandria Catechetical School: Alexandria Catechetical School emerged during a period of significant cultural and religious transformation in the Roman Empire in the 2nd century AD, during the reign of Ptolemy I Soter (306-285 BC). Oliver cited Eusebius of Caesarea who maintains that, the school is believed to have been founded by Saint Mark, the apostle who was traditionally credited with bringing Christianity to Egypt (Oliver 2015:11th July, 2024). He further notes that although El Masri concurred with Eusebius that Mark founded the school, but she also thought that Mark appointed Athenagoras as the first head of the school (Nd 29-30). While there is limited historical evidence to support this claim, early Christian writings provide some insight into the origins of the school to have been headed by outstanding early Christian scholars including Philo, Clement of Alexandria and Origen, who sought to provide a comprehensive education that integrated Christian theology with classical learning i.e. "science and philosophy." This approach enabled Christians to engage with the intellectual and cultural contexts of their time, fostering a deeper understanding of their faith and its relationship to the world around them.

2.2 Leadership of Alexandria Catechetical School: From Eusebius point of view, the school's first recorded leader was Athenagoras, a Stoic philosopher who was converted to Christianity (Eusebius, 1995:134). However, based on the historical records by Oliver, the list of prominent heads of the Catechetical School of Alexandria who contributed to the development of the institutions is as follows:

> Athenagoras (176) was the first dean of the school, who may have been appointed
> by Mark. Pantaenus (181) a student of Athenagoras, he became head of the

school and was succeeded by Clement of Alexandria. Clement of Alexandria (190) was a student of Pantaenus and wrote numerous works for the benefit of those who could not attend his lectures. Origen (203) was a student of Clement and is considered the father of theology and was also active in the field of commentary and comparative Biblical studies. Heraclas (231) a student of Origen and his successor as head of the school. Dionysius (231-247) a student of Heraclas and his successor as head of the school. Other notable scholars associated with the school include: Gregory Thaumaturgus, Didymus the Blind, Jerome and Basil (Oliver 2015:1st June, 2024).

Some outstanding figures worth commenting among the listed leaders are Clement of Alexandria and Origen. Clement of Alexandria, who served as its head in the late 2nd century was indeed famous. In his writings, Clement emphasised the importance of education and intellectual inquiry in the Christian faith. He believed that knowledge of the Greek philosophical tradition could be used to deepen one's understanding of the Christian message. Osborn Eric posits that "Clement of Alexandria's integration of Greek philosophy and Christian theology significantly contributed to the development of the Alexandria Catechetical School" (2020: 123). Clément's approach to education laid the foundation for the school's reputation as a center of theological scholarship. Another influential figure in the history of the Catechetical School of Alexandria according to Schaff, Philip was Origen a student of Clement, who succeeded Clement as the head of the school in the early 3rd century. Origen was a prolific writer and theologian, known for his exegetical work and defense of Christian doctrine whose teachings attracted students from across the Roman Empire, making the school a hub of theological debate and discussion (Schaff, Philip, 1893).

2.3 The Decline of Alexandria Catechetical School: By the fifth century AD, the school had fallen into decline and eventually ceased to exist. One of the remote causes for the decline of the Alexandria Catechetical School was the rise of theological controversies within the Christian church. As noted by (Smith, 2005:15), the school was known for its intellectual rigor and theological depth, but it also became embroiled in theological disputes that divided the Christian community. In a similar assertion by (Quasten, 1960:19), the school was embroiled in theological debates, such as the Arian controversy, which weakened its unity and reputation of the institution. In addition to the above factor, was the shift in theological trends and priorities within the Christian church. With the rise of scholasticism in the Middle Ages and the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, the focus of Christian theology shifted away from the philosophical and apologetic traditions of the Alexandrian school. As a result, the school lost its prominence and influence within the broader Christian community.

Another remote cause for the decline of the Alexandria Catechetical School was the political instability in the region. According to (Chadwick 1967:54), the school faced political instability and persecution under Roman emperors like Diocletian (284-305 CE) and Constantine (306-

337 CE). Also pointed out by (Jones 2010:23), Alexandria was a cosmopolitan city that was home to a diverse population of Christians, Jews, and pagans. The city was also a center of political intrigue and conflict, which had a negative impact on the school's ability to attract students and maintain its academic standards. The school's location in this volatile environment made it vulnerable to disruptions and interruptions that hindered its ability to function effectively.

Other immediate factors were the rise of other centers of Christian learning, such as Antioch and Constantinople. These schools began to attract students and scholars away from Alexandria, leading to a decline in enrollment and resources for the school. Furthermore, the school also faced financial difficulties, as noted by (Brown 2008:42). The decline of the Roman Empire and the economic challenges facing the region meant that the school struggled to secure funding and support from wealthy patrons. According to (White 2012:31), the school depended on the patronage of wealthy donors to support its operations. Finally, the rise of Islam in the region was another significant factor. In 641 CE, Alexandria was conquered by the Arab forces led by Amr ibn al-As according to (Butler 1978:45). He further noted that this led to a significant shift in the city's political, cultural, and religious landscape. With the Arab conquest of Egypt in the 7th century, the Christian community in Alexandria faced persecution and suppression, leading to the decline of the school.

3.   THE CURRICULUM OF ALEXANDRIA CATECHETICAL SCHOOL

This section is an attempt to answer the first research question of this paper. How did the Catechetical School effectively integrate sacred and secular subjects into its educational model? Exploring the nature of the school curriculum, the teachings of the Catechetical School characterised key important areas of emphasis which include: hermeneutics, soteriological theology, apologetics, ecumenical spirit, penance and repentance, philosophy, gnosis, and deification. In the aspect of biblical studies, the school's curriculum emphasised thorough knowledge of the Scriptures, including the Old and New Testaments. The teachings of the Catechetical School of Alexandria had a unique hermeneutic approach that emphasised allegorical interpretation of scripture. This approach sought to uncover deeper spiritual meanings in biblical texts rather than focusing solely on their literal or historical significance. (Oliver 2015:1st June, 2024) advocates that "The roots of algorism lay in the Jewish rabbinical treatment of Old-Testament texts as well as in the Greek philosophy of Alexandria." Citing Schaff, he added that, "Philo was a greater supporter of mystical and allegorical interpretations than of literal meaning. He was really good at allegory and was 'tagged' by some scholars as the master, even inventor." From all indications, the Alexandrian school emphasised an allegorical approach to Scripture interpretation, seeking to uncover deeper spiritual meanings beyond the literal sense.

Theologically, the curriculum focused on the teachings of the early Church Fathers, including Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Clement of Alexandria (Chadwick 1966:45). Students explored topics like Christology, soteriology, and ecclesiology. The Catechetical School of Alexandria

placed significant importance on the doctrine of salvation (soteriology). They believed in the concept of salvation through faith and works, emphasising the cooperation between God's grace and human effort. Origen, a theologian associated with the school, discussed the concept of salvation in his work "On First Principles." According to Faye Eugene, Origen argues that human beings have the freedom to choose between good and evil and that salvation is attained through a process of purification and restoration of the soul. Faye opines further that Origen also emphasised the role of Christ as the means of salvation, stating that "salvation...comes through Him, who voluntarily assumed the form of sinful nature and became man." (Faye 1926:124-126).

Philosophically, the Catechetical School of Alexandria had a close relationship with philosophy, particularly Neoplatonism and curriculum which included the study of classical philosophy, particularly Platonic and Stoic thought (Chadwick 1966:46). This exposure helped students develop critical thinking skills and contextualize Christian theology within the broader intellectual landscape. (Oliver 2016:109) asserts that Athenagoras, the teacher of Pantaenus, can be considered to have been the first Christian known to have had a tendency towards philosophy. As the School made use of encyclopedic teaching, there was a clear interest in science and philosophy. It was believed that the study of philosophy and rhetoric were the two main ways to accomplish a complete education. Clement of Alexandria and Origen both incorporated philosophical ideas into their theological teachings. Clement believed that philosophy could serve as a preparation for the Christian faith, stating that "philosophy serves as a preparatory training to those who aspire after the truth, and are desirous of believing" (Edward 2021:6-10). The curriculum also included the study of classical literature, such as the works of Homer, Aristotle, and Cicero (Chadwick 1966:47). This exposure helped students develop their language skills, critical thinking, and cultural understanding.

Apologetically, the Catechetical School of Alexandria had a strong tradition of apologetic theology, defending the Christian faith against philosophical and pagan critiques. One of the most famous apologetic works from the school is Clement of Alexandria's "Exhortation to the Greeks," where he presents arguments for the superiority of Christianity over pagan religions. In this work, Clement addresses various philosophical concepts and mythologies, seeking to demonstrate the rationality and truth of the Christian faith. He argues that Christianity is the fulfillment of ancient philosophical wisdom and that the gods of pagan religions are merely human inventions (Clement of Alexandria 2015:6th July, 2024). Students learned to articulate and defend Christian doctrine against pagan critics and heretics (Eusebius 1995:134). This training prepared them for evangelism, debate, and leadership roles in the Church.

Ecumenically, the Catechetical School of Alexandria fostered an ecumenical spirit by engaging with diverse theological and philosophical traditions. (Oliver 2015:11th July, 2024) cited El-Abbadi who mentioned a letter from a well-connected Roman Christian to Christians in Alexandria, indicating the role played by the Alexandrian School as a link between the Egyptian Christians and those elsewhere in the world. That letter referred to 'Papa Maximus',

the bishop of Alexandria and therefore signiûed, according to El-Abbadi, the recognition by Christians elsewhere of the bishop's status as head of Egypt's Christians. Clement of Alexandria, for instance, believed that truth could be found not only within Christianity but also in other religions and philosophies. In his work "Miscellanies," (Clement 2004:306) states, "all things are God's" and "wherever truth may be found, it belongs to us as Christians." This inclusive approach aimed to facilitate dialogue and bridge gaps between different intellectual traditions.

4.   IMPACTS OF ALEXANDRIA CATECHETICAL SCHOOL

The second research question is "What are the impacts of Catechetical School on the church and society in the Roman Empire?" This section explores the landmark impacts of this great theological institution on the church and society in the era of its existence. At the peak of its fame, according to Oden (2007:42-60), the School became a center of theological, biblical, educational, spiritual, and evangelistic activity that shaped the foundation of early Christian community.

4.1 Theological Impacts: One of the key theological impacts of the Catechetical School of Alexandria was its emphasis on the study of scripture and the development of Christian doctrine. According to Tertullian (1960:105), the school's theologians, such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen, played a key role in articulating the concept of the Trinity as three distinct persons in one Godhead. Origen (1995:212) in particular, emphasised the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit while also acknowledging their distinct roles within the Godhead. Similarly, Rahner (1999:45) argues that the Alexandria Catechetical School's emphasis on the unity and diversity within the Trinity was a crucial step in the development of the doctrine. Rahner further noted that the school's theologians were among the first to grapple with the complexities of the Trinity and to articulate a coherent understanding of the relationship between the three persons of the Godhead. The Alexandria Catechetical School also made significant contributions to the development of Christology, the study of the person and work of Jesus Christ. The school's theologians, such as Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria, played a key role in defending the divinity of Christ against various heresies, such as Arianism and Nestorianism. (Athanasius 1977:72) advocates that Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man, a formulation that became central to orthodox Christian belief. African theologians have also recognized the importance of the Alexandria Catechetical School in shaping Christian theology. (Bediako 2004:98) highlights the school's role in shaping the theological thought of early African Christians. He further noted that the school's emphasis on the unity of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ resonated with African Christians, who saw in these doctrines an affirmation of the dignity and worth of all people. This formulation of the Trinity laid the foundation for later Christian theologians to further develop and refine the doctrine.

4.2 Biblical Impacts: The biblical impact of the Catechetical School can be seen in the work of Origen, another influential figure associated with the institution. Origen's scholarly approach

to the interpretation of scripture, as demonstrated in his "Hexapla" and "Commentary on the Gospel of John," helped to establish the foundations of biblical exegesis and hermeneutics in the early Church (Origen 1995:215). Another key contributions of the Alexandria Catechetical School to Biblical studies was its emphasis on allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures. This approach, championed by scholars such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen, sought to uncover deeper spiritual meanings in the text beyond the literal sense (Clement of Alexandria 1994:15). This allegorical method of interpretation influenced later Christian theologians and exegetes, shaping the way the Bible was understood and interpreted in the centuries that followed. Pelikan (1971:34) discusses the impact of the Alexandria Catechetical School on Biblical interpretation, highlighting the school's role in promoting allegorical exegesis. Pelikan argues that the allegorical method of interpretation developed at the school had a lasting influence on Christian theology and Biblical studies. Furthermore, Bruce (1988:123) explores the history of the Christian canon and the role of the Alexandria Catechetical School in shaping it. He argues that the scholars of the school played a crucial role in determining which books were accepted as part of the New Testament canon, influencing the development of Christian orthodoxy and doctrine.

4.3 Educational Impacts: The school plays a significant role in shaping sacred-secular education in the Roman Empire. Ferguson (2003:215-218) discusses the school's curriculum, teaching methods, and influence on early Christian thought. In terms of education, the Catechetical School of Alexandria provided a rigorous and comprehensive curriculum that trained students in theology, philosophy, and rhetoric. Brown (2012:567) opines that the school's teachings continue to shape educational practices in the modern world. Similarly, Mbeki examines the role of the Catechetical School of Alexandria in the development of Christian education in Africa, highlighting its influence on sacred-secular curriculum and pedagogy. He argues that the school's teachings continue to shape educational practices in the African continent (Mbeki 2016:345). The school's emphasis on intellectual inquiry and debate helped to produce a generation of well-educated Christian leaders who were able to engage with the intellectual challenges of their time.

4.4 Spiritual Impacts: Spiritually, the Catechetical School of Alexandria fostered a deep sense of piety and devotion among its students and faculty. The school's emphasis on prayer, asceticism, and the pursuit of holiness helped to cultivate a strong spiritual foundation for the Christian community. The rigorous intellectual training provided at the school helped students develop a deep understanding of Christian doctrine and theology. This intellectual discipline according to (Origen 1995:219) was complemented by a strong emphasis on moral and ethical conduct, with students being expected to live out the teachings of Christ in their daily lives. In his work, (McGuckin 2006:46) highlights the importance of spiritual discipline in the formation of Christian leaders at the Alexandria Catechetical School. He added that the school's emphasis on asceticism and self-discipline helped students cultivate a strong spiritual foundation

that enabled them to lead lives of holiness and virtue. The Alexandria Catechetical School also had a significant impact on the spiritual transformation of its students. The school's emphasis on intellectual rigor and moral discipline helped students deepen their relationship with God and the development of the "inner man" (Clement of Alexandria 1994:22).

4.5 Evangelistic Impacts: Finally, the evangelistic impact of the Catechetical School of Alexandria can be seen in the missionary efforts of its graduates. Many of the school's students went on to become missionaries, bishops, and theologians who spread the Christian message throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. This contributed to the spread of Christianity throughout Africa (Sanon 2017:156). The school's emphasis on apologetics and evangelism helped to influence the development of Christian apologetics and to equip these early Christian leaders with the knowledge and skills needed to engage with non-believers and defend the faith (Quasten 1960:17).

4.6 Political Impact: One of the key ways in which the Alexandria Catechetical School influenced politics in the Roman Empire was through its close relationship with political leaders. The school's scholars, known for their expertise in theology and philosophy, often advised emperors and other high-ranking officials on matters of state. For example, Clement of Alexandria, a prominent figure at the school, was known to have had discussions with Emperor Severus Alexander on ethical and moral issues (Ferguson 2003:112). This close relationship between the school and political leaders allowed the teachings of the school to have a direct impact on the policies and decisions of the Roman government. Another notable aspect was its cosmopolitan nature, fostering an environment that attracted diverse intellectuals and students. This cosmopolitanism allowed the school to function as a melting pot for various religious and cultural traditions, facilitating dialogue and exchange of ideas. According to Frend, "The school's emphasis on education and openness attracted students from various backgrounds, including gentiles, Christians, Jews, and converts" (Frend 1988:104). This commitment to inclusivity influenced political discussions and promoted a climate of tolerance within the Roman Empire.

4.7 Social Impact: In addition to its direct influence on political leaders and the general populace, the Alexandria Catechetical School also had a broader impact on society through its promotion of Christian values and ethics. The school's teachings on love, compassion, and social justice had a transformative effect on the moral fabric of Roman society, leading to a greater emphasis on charity and community service (Brown 2008:75). This shift towards a more compassionate and egalitarian society had far-reaching political implications, as it challenged the traditional power structures and hierarchies of the Roman Empire. In a related perspective, (Osei 2015:78) says that the school's social role in promoting cross-cultural dialogue and intellectual understanding in the ancient world was exceptional. The teachings of the Catechetical School emphasised caring for the poor, widows, and orphans, encouraging their students to actively participate in social contribution to the welfare of the less privileged persons and contribute to the development of society within the Roman Empire.

4.8 Economic Impact: The Catechetical School of Alexandria had significant economic ramifications. Alexandria was a bustling commercial hub, and the school's presence attracted students and scholars from far and wide. This influx of intellectuals stimulated economic growth and the exchange of ideas, ultimately contributing to the city's prosperity. According to the historian Charles George Herbermann, "The Catechetical School's reputation as a premier intellectual institution attracted students, scholars, and visitors, boosting commerce and trade in Alexandria" (Herbermann 1912:54). Consequently, the school played a vital role in facilitating economic exchange and creating a favorable climate for commerce in the Roman Empire.

4.9 Philosophical Impact: The Catechetical School of Alexandria had a profound philosophical impact within the Roman Empire. Under the guidance of figures like Origen, the school incorporated elements of Greek philosophy, particularly Platonism, into Christian theology. According to (Smith 2010:60) the integration of sacred and secular knowledge enabled the school play a crucial role in bridging the gap between religious and academic learning in the Roman Empire. (Thompson 2017:112) asserts that the school's teachings continue to influence theological and philosophical discourse in the modern world. The Alexandria Catechetical School's impacts on society within the Roman Empire were vast and enduring. It shaped intellectual thought, provided a rational foundation for Christian beliefs, fostered education and scholarship, and played a significant role in biblical studies and textual criticism. The school's influence transcended geographical boundaries, making it a crucial institution in shaping the wider Roman society.

From all indications, the Alexandria Catechetical School's model is a suitable foundation worthy of emulation in the Nigerian context due to its emphasis on integrating theology and philosophy, which can help address the complex socio-cultural and economic challenges facing Nigeria today. Additionally, the school's focus on producing well-rounded individuals who are equipped to engage with the world around them aligns with the needs of the Nigerian church and society. The Alexandria Catechetical School's model also provides a framework for contextualizing theology, which is essential for the Nigerian context where Christianity intersects with traditional religions and cultures. Furthermore, the school's emphasis on the importance of Scripture, tradition, and reason in theological inquiry can help promote a more nuanced and informed understanding of Christianity in Nigeria. Overall, the Alexandria Catechetical School's model offers a valuable framework for theological education in Nigeria that can help produce leaders who are equipped to address the complex challenges facing the church and society today.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

Having examined the curriculum and the impacts of Alexandria Catechetical School in sections three and four as response to the first two research questions respectively, this section focuses on the third research question, "What are the historical implications of Catechetical School educational model for theological institutions in Nigeria?" According to Alaka-Osinowo, "In

the 21st century, religious education in Nigeria continues to experience problems ranging from the implementation of irrational educational policies by the constituted authorities particularly against educational system, poor funding, mismanagement and misappropriation, political instability, bad governance, just to mention a few. It is not a dispute that these lingering issues have indented the place of religious education and its values in the educational system which has been debased" (2024). However, if theological institutions in Nigeria would holistically adopt workable steps identified below, they will be able to produce competent manpower that will address the current challenges and realities confronting the Nigerian church and society.

5.1 Emphasise Critical Thinking: Theological institutions in Nigeria play a crucial role in training manpower for the church and society. However, there is a growing need for these institutions to integrate and inculcate critical thinking skills in their students, similar to the approach taken by the Alexandria Catechetical School in the early Christian era. According to Paul and Elder (2006:13), critical thinking is "the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action." Although Chimakonam in his exploration of African philosophy emphasises the importance of critical thinking as a means to challenge Western epistemological dominance, he defines critical thinking as the ability to reason, evaluate ideas, and engage in reflective judgment (Chimakonam 2021: xv). Critical thinking is essential for individuals to engage with complex theological and societal issues, and to develop a deeper understanding of their faith. One way theological institutions in Nigeria can integrate critical thinking is by incorporating it into their curriculum. This can be done by including courses that focus on logic, reasoning, and analysis of theological texts. By exposing students to different perspectives and encouraging them to question and evaluate information, theological institutions can help develop their critical thinking skills.

5.2 Foster Holistic and Interdisciplinary Training: Interdisciplinary training involves the combination of knowledge and methodologies from different disciplines to address complex issues. Foshay (2016:43) argues for a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to curriculum design emphasising that such training enables students to make connections across different subjects and develop a broader understanding of knowledge. Mosima shares similar perception of Foshay in his emphasis on the need for holistic and interdisciplinary training in Africa to address the challenges of sustainable development arguing that such training equips individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary for interdisciplinary problem-solving (Mosima 2019:68). In the context of theological education, this means incorporating insights from fields such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, economics, political science and so on into the curriculum. In order to effectively integrate and inculcate interdisciplinary training, theological institutions in Nigeria must take a proactive approach. This includes revising their curricula to

include courses from a range of disciplines, hiring faculty with diverse academic backgrounds, and providing opportunities for students to engage in interdisciplinary research and projects.

5.3 Promote Contextualization and Community Engagement: As the challenges facing the Africa continent continue to evolve, it is imperative that these institutions adapt an innovation in order to effectively address the needs of the communities. One way in which theological institutions can achieve this is through the integration and promotion of contextualization and community engagement in their training programs. (Falola et al. 2017:18) emphasise the significance of community engagement within African philosophical thought advocating that African philosophy is inherently communal, emphasising the interconnectedness of individuals within their cultural and social contexts. Another scholar advocating similar consideration is Peter Block also emphasising the importance of contextualisation and community engagement in fostering meaningful relationships and creating positive social change (Block 2008:23). In the context of theological institutions in Nigeria, this means recognising and incorporating the unique challenges and opportunities facing the Church and society in the country. To effectively integrate and promote contextualization and community engagement in their training programs, theological institutions in Nigeria must take a proactive approach. This may involve revising their curriculum to include courses on contextual theology, community development, and social justice.

5.4 Develop Godly Leadership and Mentorship Skills: The national development of Nigeria to some large extent depends on the provision of sustainable good governance through godly leaders and mentors. (Munroe 2003:45) asserts that godly leadership and mentorship skills are essential qualities for individuals to fulfill their potential and make a positive impact in their communities. On another perspective, Maxwell defines godly leadership as the ability to inspire and influence others through ethical and moral principles, emphasising the importance of mentorship in developing effective leaders (Maxwell 2007:89). To effectively integrate and develop godly leadership and mentorship skills within theological institutions in Nigeria, several strategies can be implemented. Firstly, theological institutions can incorporate courses and workshops specifically focused on leadership and mentorship training into their curriculum. These courses can cover topics such as ethical leadership, effective communication, conflict resolution, and mentorship best practices. Secondly, theological institutions can invite experienced leaders and mentors to serve as guest lecturers or mentors for students. These individuals can provide real-world insights and guidance to students, helping them develop practical skills and knowledge that can be applied in their future roles as leaders within the Church and society.

5.5 Emphasise Spiritual and Moral Development: In recent years, there has been a growing concern for theological education to balance her focus on academic knowledge and the development of character and values that are essential for addressing the complex challenges facing the Church and society in Nigeria. For Desmond Tutu, spiritual and moral development

is a transformative process that empowers individuals to live with compassion, justice, and integrity in a diverse and interconnected world (Tutu 2004:76). One of the important ways in which theological institutions in Nigeria can integrate and emphasise spiritual and moral development training is by incorporating courses and programs that specifically focus on ethics, morality, and spiritual formation. (Kohlberg 1981:24) outlines theory of moral development, which suggests that individual's progress through various stages of moral reasoning and development is influenced by socialization, cultural factors, and personal experiences. Based on this, these courses can help students develop a strong foundation in ethical principles and values that will guide their decision-making and actions as they navigate the challenges of the modern world. Furthermore, theological institutions can also provide opportunities for students to engage in practical experiences that allow them to apply their knowledge and skills in real-world settings. This could include internships, fieldwork, and community service projects that enable students to put their faith into action and make a positive impact on their communities.

5.6 Develop Entrepreneurship Skills: The integration and development of entrepreneurship skills training in theological institutions in Nigeria is crucial in equipping manpower to effectively address the current challenges of unemployment and poverty rate. It is important to recognise the changing landscape of the African Church and society, which is increasingly characterised by economic challenges, social issues, and technological advancements. In order to effectively address these challenges, theological institutions need to equip their students with practical skills that go beyond traditional theological education. (Ries 2011:45) asserts that entrepreneurship skills development is a process of testing ideas, adapting to feedback, and iterating quickly to build sustainable and successful businesses in a competitive market. This means entrepreneurship skills training can provide students with the tools and knowledge needed to navigate these challenges and make a positive impact in their communities. The integration of entrepreneurship skills training in theological education can also benefit students in a number of ways. Firstly, it can help students develop a mindset of innovation and creativity, which are essential for addressing complex problems in the Church and society. Additionally, entrepreneurship skills training can equip students with practical skills such as business management, financial literacy, and marketing, which can help them establish sustainable and impactful initiatives in their communities.

6.   CONCLUSION

Having explored how the Catechetical School effectively integrated sacred and secular subjects into its educational system, its impacts on the church and society in the Roman Empire and the historical implications for theological institutions in Nigeria, the following facts were discovered: Firstly, the Catechetical School of Alexandria played a crucial role in the growth and development of the early Christian Church in the Roman Empire as it became a center of

theological, biblical and spiritual thoughts of global Christian community. Secondly, the studies reveal that the Alexandria Catechetical School's system of education which integrated sacred and the secular disciplines enabled it to make political, social, economics, educational, and philosophical impact tremendously in the entire Roman society. Thirdly, the impact of Catechetical School of Alexandria in the Roman Empire had by implications, offered practical landmark lessons for modern-day theological institutions in Nigeria to emulate. The study recommends that theological institutions in Nigeria as a matter of urgency need to review their curriculum to reflect an integrative theological education that will be holistically and contextually relevant to engage the challenges confronting the church and society in Nigeria as follows: Firstly, theological education that will prepare ministers who are competent to preach and teach a theology that must be truly Christian and also African in context and expression. Secondly, theological education that will empowered Christians with political understanding to enable them represent Christ and the interest of the voiceless citizen on national issues. Thirdly, theological education that will be relevant to address socio-economic issues confronting the church and society in the nation. Finally, theological education that will produce godly leaders and managers of church and national resources. The researcher is optimistic that if these recommendations are taken into consideration, theological institutions in Nigeria will not only make significant impacts in addressing national issues, but will effectively fulfill their great commission mandate to the nations as salt and light of the World and Nigeria in particular.

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