

The Correlation and Separation of Academic Theology and the Local Church

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Abstract

This article provides an overview of the historical correlation between the church and academic theology as well as a brief account of its demise. In assessing the correlation it is demonstrated how, for the first 1 500 years of Christian history, a correlation between academic learning and the church was the norm. A brief outline of the demise of this tradition is shown to allow the reader to comprehend how the correlation faded. At a time when the future of academic theology is under great discussion, this article provides a somewhat forgotten history that can add great weight to the current debate on church and the academy.

Keywords: theological education; academics; church; historical overview; pastor-theologian

Introduction

Historically, the greatest theologians have also been pastors and vice versa (Hiestand and Wilson 2015, 22). However distant this statement may sound to the current reality, there is a long-standing tradition in which the greatest pastors have been deeply involved in theological reflection and the greatest theologians have been deeply involved in the local church. In fact, for the first 1 500 years of Christianity, this was the norm (cf. Hiestand and Wilson 2015, 23). Yet, following the Reformation, the correlation started to change. This article, over six chronological sections, aims to demonstrate this norm and to provide an account of its



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demise.¹ The focus is on the long-standing line of influential pastors or theologians who were also deeply involved in the respective other. This article will not concern itself with theologies, but show that despite theological diversity, a strong correlation between church and theology remained. The worth of this is found in the vision it presents for the current situation in South Africa.

The history of theology matters to the nature of academic theology today (McGrath 2001, 144). While various phenomena have seriously affected the historic correlation, the tradition should not be forgotten nor should theology be practised as if it were invented yesterday (McGrath 2001, 145; cf. Oden 1990, 13). It is the aim of this article to thus provide a brief historical overview² which is beneficial to current discussion around academic theological education. Recent research by Womack (2017) shows that a disconnect between academic theology and the local church exists, which is detrimental to the nature of both institutes. For that research 28 interviews were conducted, which showed a perceived disconnection between pastors and academic theologians. Amongst the church leaders only 25 per cent of respondents felt academic theology was relating to the needs of their ministry. With regards to theological education, it had become commercialised (see Hadebe 2017; Naidoo 2017), irrelevant (see Balcomb 2015; Hendriks 2014; Naidoo 2012) and Eurocentric (see Duncan 2016; Maluleke 2006; Naidoo 2016). As such an appreciation of the historical tradition, as well as an awareness of its demise, is greatly needed in the current context. The historic sketch in this article can provide a well of information for the current debate.

According to Farley (1983, 32), theology has two distinct, yet overlapping histories: "... a history of the church's claim that faith facilitates an individual cognitive act and ... a history of interpretation"; meaning theology has been an act of church worship and the individual's faith discovery, and also a sustained rational interpretation/study. During the apostolic era theology³ was practised informally when the early Christians preached, sang, gossiped and persevered together (Bevans 2009, 208). Christian theology, then, was birthed through the faith and intellectual struggles of the early church; through the correlation between the local church and academic theology. From the start believers were correlating a rational reflection (theology) with a personal faith within the local church⁴ and it is this correlation which needs to be (re)appreciated today.

1 Hiestand and Wilson's (2015, 21–41) exploration into the historic relation between clerics and their theological involvement, and vice versa, will form a significant basis for this article. However, while they focused specifically on the clerical theologian, this article will have a more general approach; specifically to demonstrate the tight connection between the local church and academic theological reflection.

2 The brief nature of historic overview has led to the key examples all being male. These individuals were chosen as it was felt they personified the relationship well. This by no means should be taken as an implication that female theologians or pastors were not influential in exemplifying the tradition this research is aiming to demonstrate.

3 In regards to theology, the term would not come into use within the Christian context until c.200CE (Wright 1988b, 680)

4 While it would take another 1200 years for Anselm's "faith seeking understanding" to be penned as a definition for theology, this is exactly what was taking place in the first century of Christianity.

Patristic Period

Stretching from roughly 100CE to 300CE, this period is characterised by the emergence of formalised reflections on faith and the development of set forms of church order. The key theologians for this section are Justin the Martyr and Irenaeus of Lyon.

Justin the Martyr

Justin, originally a pagan philosopher, later in life became disillusioned with Platonism and converted to Christianity (Hiestand and Wilson 2015, 25). His philosophical background, though, still had a strong impact on his theological reflections. Viewing Christianity as the only “safe and profitable” philosophy, he employed Hellenistic reason in defence of the gospel (Evans, McGrath, and Galloway 1986, One:26–27). Justin treated scripture as the norm and was not afraid to depart from his philosophical training when it disagreed with his new-found faith (Evans et al. 1986, One:28). He used reason to serve God and defend the church. As can be seen from the opening of his *First Apology* (section 1-3) he implored the Emperor to listen to the reasonable defence of the Christian faith, and instead of following the traditional pattern of persecution, used reason to see the truth of Christianity and cease persecuting believers.⁵ As such, Justin was one of the first to combine faith and reason in defence of the gospel (Backhouse 2011, 14). He used his position as a leader in theological reflection to try and help the local congregation in its daily struggle. In this combination he shows the early root of academic theology, as well as its birth from and commitment to a church context.

Irenaeus of Lyon

Irenaeus’s combination of academic output and serving as bishop means he was one of the earliest examples of the pastor-theologian (see Strachan 2015, 71). He was influential in establishing the bishop as the head and guide of the church and also worked on an ecumenical level to mend bridges between estranged congregations (Backhouse 2011, 15). Irenaeus’s main “theological” output was the writing of *Against Heresies*. Influenced by the theology of Justin the Martyr, it came to have a sustained impact on the church (Hiestand and Wilson 2015, 26). The aim behind the work was the edification of the congregation by defending them from the threats of spurious teachings (Gonzalez 1989, 30). In its writings one can see a strong defence of the church as the guarantor of the truth: “... it is not necessary to seek the truth among others which it is easy to obtain from the church” (*Against Heresies*, 3.4.1).⁶ Further, Irenaeus encouraged the church to study and come to know the apostolic faith: “It is within the power of all, therefore, in every church, who may wish to see the truth, to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the whole world” (*Against Heresies*, 3.3.1). As such, Irenaeus exemplifies a strong correlation between academic reflection and the church; between the life of the local congregation and the thoughts of a Christian theologian.

5 Translation here is by M. Dods, G. Reith, and B. P. Pratter and found in *The Church in the Roman Empire* (Morrison 1986, 3: 7–8)

6 Translations of Book Three of *Against Heresies*, unless otherwise stated, are taken from *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, found in *The Church in the Roman Empire* (Morrison 1986, 3: 230–34).

Summarising the above, it can be said that it is relatively impossible to draw a distinction between theology and the church, compared to the contemporary situation where the pastor and theologian are seen as two separate individuals (see Vanhoozer and Strachan 2015). While theology had begun to emerge as a discipline in its own right, its location and direction was always the church. While not formalised to today's standards, the "theologians" of the early church studied scriptures in depth and saw themselves as teachers of God's people responsible for biblical doctrine (Strachan 2015, 71). This role took place within the community, not separate from it. As such, theology can be seen to be both a reflection of a higher intellectual level as well as a general practice taking place amidst the church. In the words of Kannengiesser (1989, 127), at this time "theological creativeness is bound up with the vital needs of the pastoral church community." Moving into the post-Constantine era of Christianity the institutionalisation of the church reached its completion, but little changed in the correlation between the church and academic theology.

Post Constantine

The effects of Constantine's incorporation of Christianity into the Roman Empire can scarcely be underestimated. Within a decade Christians had gone from experiencing one of the worst periods of persecution⁷ to becoming the official faith of the Roman Empire.⁸ With the popularisation of the Christian faith, Christian theology and the church gained the freedom to become formalised institutions. While theology and the local church became more distinct phenomena, they remained correlated. For now, there was no distinction between theologians and pastors. The life of the theologian at this period in time is summed up wonderfully by Gregory of Nazianzus who stated, according to Hill (2003, 69), that he knew only two roads from his lodgings, the one to the church and the one to the library.

Augustine

Due to the proliferation of pastor-theologians in this era, it will suffice to give a detailed example from just one individual; Augustine of Hippo. While initially unimpressed with the Christian faith,⁹ Augustine, through the influence of Bishop Ambrose, later came to appreciate its worth (see Conf. 5.13–14).¹⁰ After his conversion Augustine found himself thrust into the position of Bishop of Hippo. In daily leading the church through its struggles the occasion for Augustine's works arose (Bevans 2009, 227). The Donatist controversy, Arianism, the fall of Rome; all these lead to the construction of Augustine's theological works and show the correlation between academic theology and the church. In Letter 73

7 The Diocletian persecution started in 303 and, despite his abdication in 305, persisted until 313 and the issuing of the Edict of Milan by Constantine. Under this persecution Diocletian attempted to wipe out Christianity and ordered the burning of scriptures, the destruction of churches and the torture of clergy (Backhouse 2011, 25).

8 In 380CE an edict was issued by Theodosius I that made Christianity the official religion of Rome and deviation from the Nicene Creed illegal (Backhouse 2011, 31).

9 In his *Confessions*, Augustine writes how he was unimpressed with the Bible and found it "unworthy" in comparison to philosophical writings (Conf. 3.5.9) and thus strayed into "the devil's snare" of Manicheism (Conf. 3.6.10; see Mikkelsen 2011, 419).

10 All references to *Confessions*, unless otherwise stated, have been taken from Chadwick's (1991) translation.

(c.404) Augustine writes: “Whatever abilities I may have for such study, I devote entirely to the instruction of the people whom God has entrusted to me.”¹¹ Augustine’s sermons provide a further example of this commitment to employ his academic ability in service of the church. A key example of this, and favourite metaphor for Augustine, was to represent Jesus Christ as the doctor who had come to heal his people (Sypert 2015, 30). Another key source in demonstrating this correlation is the *City of God*. “A great and arduous work” (COG. 1. pref),¹² it was not just a grand theological thesis for the intellectuals, but also helped the Christian community continue to function amidst the fall of Rome (cf. Hall 2005, 209–10). In Augustine, then, we have a clear demonstration of the correlation between the church and theology.

Augustine by no means stood alone in his correlation of academic and the local church. Already mentioned briefly is Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (c.339–397). Forced into the priesthood, Ambrose originally pursued an administrative career in the Roman empire (Brown 2000, 71; Keith 1988, 15–16). As bishop, Ambrose employed his education in service of the gospel, using platonic logic and oratory skill in his sermons which were influential in the conversion of Augustine (Brown 2000, 73; see conf. 5.13.23). Another brief example is Gregory of Nazianzus (c.329–390). Also known as Gregory the theologian, he expounds the classic understanding of the Trinity and was deeply involved in the struggles of the Eastern church, even serving as Bishop of Constantinople (Noble 1988, 281). Continually, then, we see a minister with a high level of education dealing with the daily struggles of the congregation, and pioneering academic theology to the benefit of both institutes. While the institutionalisation of Christianity had allowed more dedicated studies of theology to emerge, theology remained correlated with the local church.

Monastic

After the fall of the Roman Empire, a power vacuum ensued, changing life in Europe drastically. In relation to education, while it did not cease, it did decline with centres such as Carthage (where Augustine himself once taught [cf. Conf. 5.8.14]) closing all its formal institutions for a while (Evans et al. 1986, One:52). Yet, thanks to the institutionalisation of the Christian faith, monasteries had begun to emerge. In the sixth century, monasteries soon found they grew tremendously in popularity (Backhouse 2011, 44–45). Benedict, with the help of his twin sister, Scholastica (c.480–543), was influential in establishing Western monasticism (Bevans 2009, 231). The *Rule of Saint Benedict* formed the basis for the majority of Monastic Orders throughout the Middle Ages (Wright 1988a, 85). Benedict held no clerical position, but, through his work, allowed an education of clergy to continue, thus he further exemplifies the connection between academic theology and the church. It was through monasteries that theological education continued (Bevans 2009, 231). This period was characterised by preservation and intense theological debate over scripture and the

11 Letter 73, Chapter 2, paragraph 5, addressed to Jerome. The translation used here is taken from Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (Schaff 1887) (accessed 9 April 2017).

12 The translation here is copied straight from Brown’s (2000, 301) use. Bettenson (1972) in place of “great” uses “long.”

church fathers. Here the correlation between church and theology is seen predominantly in the movement from a monastic education to church occupation.

Gregory the Great

Gregory himself was trained in a Benedictine order. He had intended on living a monastic life but in 590 was elected to the Papacy (Bevans 2009, 232). Serving as pope, Gregory had a missional focus and is famous for sending 40 bishops to England (Bevans 2009, 232). Also, through his own written works, Gregory assured the success of the Benedictine order. In this continual exchange between monastery and church, the correlation is again personified. Furthermore, his *Pastoral Care* “significantly shaped clerical understanding throughout the Middle Ages” (Hiestand and Wilson 2015, 31). The climate Gregory worked in meant his theological output was somewhat different to previous decades (see Gonzalez 1989, 110–11). Yet, through his practical involvement, Gregory still shaped the theological outlook, further demonstrating a strong correlation between church and theology.

Anselm of Canterbury

Jumping towards the end of this period, Anselm of Canterbury provides another example of a clerical figure, trained through a monastic order, paving the way in theological reflections. Anselm is perhaps most well-known for depicting theology as “faith seeking understanding.” For Anselm, it was only from a point of faith that academic theology could be attempted: “For I do not seek to understand so that I might believe, but I believe so that I might understand” (*Proslogion*, chapter 1).¹³ This understanding was not privatised knowledge, but for the faith community. The production of *Proslogion* itself happened at the insistence of the monastic community and Anselm’s desire to distil ideas from an earlier work into a more accessible form (Hogg 2010, 310). Anselm was also deeply involved in the local community and produced many of his works, such as *Why God Became Man*, amidst great political strife (Hiestand and Wilson 2015, 32). Thus, Anselm is a further example of a clerical figure who was deeply involved in theological matters, even pioneering new approaches to theology, yet also deeply committed to church life.

Summarising this section, it can be said that although theological reflection was changing in nature, its correlation with the church remained. While the monastery developed as an institute of learning, it did not separate itself from the church. “Both church and the monasteries saw the monasteries as an extension of the church and an aid of the church’s mission” (Hiestand and Wilson 2015, 30). Thus, the correlation between “academic learning” and the local church remained.

Rise of the University

The development of the university as a centre for dedicated learning significantly affected the nature and practice of theology. However, these effects would be drawn out taking almost

13 Translation here is taken from “Anselm” in *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy* (Hogg 2010, 313).

600 years to develop.¹⁴ The key effects which the rise of the university had were to move theology out of the church and to place emphasis on the use of reason. Through its place in the university, theology developed into a more distinct discipline with an expanded study focus (Farley 1988, 34; McGrath 2001, 138). However, this did not result in a complete break from the church. In fact, the first universities were chartered by the pope or a local clerical representative (Olesko 2003). So, while this period is characterised by a growth in the use of reason and speculation, theology as an academic discipline remained linked to the church. Stephen Tempier (c.1210–1297) and Robert Kilwardby (c.1215–1279) both provide examples of clerics who exercised control over the university and were able to help guide its reflection (Hiestand and Wilson 2015, 34–35). Both issued a series of condemnations directed at the University of Paris and Oxford (respectively), compelling the institutions to adjust their curriculum (Hiestand and Wilson 2015, 34–35).

Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas was educated through a selection of monasteries and universities and spent most of his life teaching (Hiestand and Wilson 2015, 33–34). His career revolved around the university. However, this did not make his work detached from church needs. His book, *Summa Contra Gentiles* aimed to explore the relationship between divine revelation and reason to prove the intellectual coherence of the Catholic Church (Hiestand and Wilson 2015, 34). His most famous book, *Summa Theologica*, clearly demonstrated the importance of reason but always held revelation above this.

Sacred doctrine surpasses other speculative sciences ... It is more certain since the certainty of other science depends on the natural light of human reason, which is liable to err, whereas its own certainly is founded on the light of divine knowledge (1.5.2).¹⁵

Aquinas held that there could not be a contradiction between the truth of faith and the truth of reason (Pfurtner 1989, 140). He re-established the idea that Christian theology could employ secular philosophy without being absorbed by it (Bevans 2009, 247). As such, Aquinas (re)established that faith and reason could work together.

Aquinas's use of reason led to a new age of theological speculation; an age where reason was employed to draw out and contemplate theological truths in a much broader sense. However, not all agreed with Aquinas's positive assessment of reason, and the likes of John Duns Scotus (c.1266–1308) and William Ockham (c.1224–1274) developed theologies which emphasised the transcendence of God (see Bevans 2009, 254–55). In this cauldron of intellectual reflection, scholasticism developed a negative habit of debating on speculative matters away from church needs (see Vos 1988, 621–23). In opposition to this, theologians such as "John Gerson (1363–1429) begged colleagues 'not to waste time on such philosophical disputes which had little connection with the challenges of Christian life, or the urgent needs of the church'" (Bevans 2009, 255).

14 It would not be until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century that the university itself would become the principal institution for the development and preservation of organised forms of knowledge (Olesko 2003).

15 Translations of *Summa Theologica*, unless otherwise stated, come from Fairweather's (1954) translation.

The rise of the university was starting to change the traditional focus of theological reflection. Amidst this time the university had not completely taken over as the centre for learning and the flow of intellectuals was still towards the church (Hiestand and Wilson 2015, 35). However, a definite change had taken place and the theological discipline would never be the same. From here on, it started to develop sub-disciplines and faculties. While this broadening in nature changed the scope of theology, its focus still remained predominantly upon the church.¹⁶

The Reformation

The reformation changed the landscape of Christianity in the West in a vast and rapid way. This was a time of immense theological and ecclesiological reflection and change. Yet, despite this vast and varied change, the correlation between church and theology remained. Martin Luther and John Calvin provide clear examples from the first and second generation of the Reformation through which to demonstrate this correlation.

Martin Luther

Luther was born the son of a working-class family. After a short pursuit of the study of Law, he began studying in an Augustinian monastery at Erfurt and then later taught at the University of Wittenberg (see McGrath 2012, 76–77).¹⁷ Between 1513 and 1517, Luther distilled his understanding of sin and grace, and the concept of *Sola Gratia* emerged (Gonzales 1975, 28–29). Thus, when the sale of indulgences,¹⁸ seen as a form of “cheap” grace, reached Wittenberg, Luther was outraged and published his *95 Theses* starting a chain-reaction that would propel him and his theological thought to fame (see McGrath 2012, 78–79). It was thus through the correlation between academic theology and the church that Luther came to champion the Reformation.

In the life of Luther we see a strong correlation between church and academic theology. He himself, though, was not a pastor. At Wittenberg, Luther’s friend, Johannes Bugenhagen, was the local pastor. Yet Luther did not confine himself to academics. He was deeply involved in the church, regularly preaching,¹⁹ training and participating in ecclesial debates (Hiestand and Wilson 2015, 38–39). Luther also had a high regard for education, seeing it as a vital means by which believers could distinguish the true faith (see Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535).²⁰ Yet education was not simply a matter of rational, as Luther writes:

16 Farley (1983, 36) comments how, although the rise of the university was developing an association of learning about God away from faith development, at this point it was still the norm to view theology as knowledge of God which was associated with prayer, virtues and a yearning for God.

17 This movement from the university to the monastery again exemplifies the point made above about the church being the desired aim for intellectuals and the university not abolishing the church as a sight for intellectual reflection.

18 It was not only the sale of indulgences which brought Luther and the Roman Catholic Church into contention; issues such as the authority of the pope and the importance of scripture were also key. Yet it was the sale of indulgences in Wittenberg which was the catalysis in prompting the publication of the *95 Thesis*.

19 “Between 1510 and 1546, Luther preached approximately 3 000 sermons to the laity” (Hiestand and Wilson 2015, 39).

20 Translation here has been taken from *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings* (Lull and Russell 2012).

Doctors of Arts, of Medicine, of Law ... may be made by popes, emperors, and the universities; but ... a Doctor of the Holy Scriptures can be made by none but the Holy Ghost (Luther's address to the German nobility, 1520).²¹

Thus we can see a strong correlation between a committed learning of theology and the church. Within the works of Luther a distinction between the realm of academic theologian and church pastor is not permissible (Hiestand and Wilson 2015, 39).

John Calvin

Calvin joined the reformation cause through what he describes as a sudden conversion,²² within a year going from being a top lawyer in Paris to a self-taught theologian (Edwards 1997, 310). He was a learned man and, after joining the Reformation, desired to continue a life of study. Yet he was also a deeply pious man and viewed it as God's will that he should be a pastor. So, from 1541 Calvin remained in Geneva becoming the city's "leading pastor and theological authority" (Hiestand and Wilson 2015, 40).

As a theologian Calvin's academic output was immense. His most renowned work, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, presented Calvin's understanding of how the church originally was and should be, while distortions were brought on during the Middle Ages (McGrath 1990, 136–38). While an academic work, the *Institutes'* main guide was scripture and its main principle was clarity in presentation (cf. McGrath 1990, 148–49). It was written for anyone interested, not only academics. Calvin's other academic activities can be seen in his biblical commentaries (Hiestand and Wilson 2015, 40) and teaching in Geneva (see Cottret 2000, 288–89; Parker 1975, 152–53) and continually correlated with his pastoral duty. Calvin was deeply committed to church ministry. He preached multiple times per week and by the end of his life had given sermons on nearly every book of the Bible (see Parker 1992, 61–64). Beyond this he had a pastoral concern for his congregation, viewing the church as a family dependant on each other (Milner 1970, 186). Within this concern, he kept an eye on each believer's walk of faith and developed a disciplinary/counselling service to guide and support believers (see Kingdom 1992, 96; Olson 1991, 8). Calvin's life and works, as such, can be seen to be deeply involved in both academic theology and the local church, fashioning "a self-consciously theological pastorate in Geneva" (Strachan 2015, 78). Always, what the church did was guided by a rationalised and sustained reflection on scripture (aka academic theology).

Up until this point it has been illustrated how the correlation between academic theology and the local church has been beneficial for both institutions. This is a correlation which should be appreciated and brought to the attention of the current debate around theological education. However, as the following section shows, this historical correlation has fallen away, being replaced with a disconnect between academic theology and the local church.

21 Buchheim's translation has been used here (Luther and Halsall 1998).

22 In the introduction to his commentary on the Psalms, Calvin provides a small biography in which he describes his conversion as a sudden experience in which God brought his mind into a teachable frame and stirred him to study theology (see Calvin 1999, 1: 23).

The Decline in Correlation

The demise of the traditional correlation is a complicated mix of multiple factors that occurred over a few centuries. Through the seventeenth and eighteenth century a shift in the intellectual climate occurred. This shift was brought on by several factors and came to have significant effects on the correlation between church and academy. After the Reformation, theological reflection started to stagnate. Instead of expounding on new developments and looking at their ecclesial application, Reformed denominations argued with each other and with the Roman Church over points of doctrine. Consequently, the Protestant Church entered a time of “scholasticism” trying to define every detail of doctrine (Gonzales 1996, 80). Often this doctrinal “nit-picking” resulted in conflict and even war. One of the most severe and bloody of these was the 30 Years’ War (see Gonzales 1996, 76–79). In short, there were two main outcomes of this bloody and scholastic approach to theology. The first, within ecclesial circles, was the move towards piety and religious experience being of utmost importance. The second was the rise in rationalism and developments which started to question the methodology of academic study.

The clearest example of the move towards experience-based faith comes from pietism. Pietism was born out of dissatisfaction with academic discussions. Not rejecting doctrine, it saw personal religious experience as much more important (Gonzales 1975, 276). The believer’s experience of the divine was valued above the specifics of doctrine. However, in itself, this did not spell the end for a correlation between local church and theology. In fact, the Pietist movement founded the University of Halle which was “a centre for training of missionaries” as well as academic theology (Gonzales 1975, 277). Focus on experience did not mean separation from the academy, although it would come to have a large effect on later development.

The second movement, the turn towards rationalism, eventually developed into the Enlightenment era. While the Enlightenment age was negative towards religion, those that laid the foundations of rationalism in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century were often deeply committed Christians. René Descartes’s famous maxim, “I think, therefore I am,” shows the start of the shift towards cognitive function being the chief criterion over revelation. Reason and logic (thinking) was all that could be taken for granted, everything else must, and could, be proven through this (see Gonzales 1975, 294–95). Yet Descartes did not see his work to be in opposition to the Christian faith and, according to Gonzales (1975, 273), was “dismayed” at the negative reaction it received from believers.²³ While some rationalist movements were not so positive towards the Christian faith, such as the Deists,²⁴ by and large no contention was seen between the rational methodology and Orthodox faith.

23 Isaac Newton is another example of a rationalist who saw no contention between his work and the Christian faith. In fact, Newton, whose works debunked the Aristotelian worldview, was a deeply committed Christian (Williams 1988b, 224)

24 Deist came to use reason as a support for natural religion. This branch of philosophy developed the idea of universal religion which could be rationally supported, opposed to the “subjective” Christian faith which was established on revelation (see Gonzales 1975, 306–7; Williams 1988a, 190).

Yet tension was emerging. Seen in Descartes was the church's negative reaction to the rationalist paradigm. As Kung (1995, 669) highlights, the church in general, and especially the Roman Church, tended to have a negative reaction to scientific developments. This served to isolate the church from rationalism. When movements in Europe, and particularly France,²⁵ started to become hostile towards the church, the stage was set for the nineteenth century and the further detrition of the correlation.

The nineteenth century “was a time when political, economic, and cultural circumstances seemed to spell doom for the Christian faith—at least in its traditional form ... and yet, the nineteenth century was also a period of great religious awakening within the Protestant churches” (Gonzales 1975, 319). The two key stems of experience and rationalism highlighted above came to function and flourish independently of each other in the nineteenth century. In general, the church followed the line of experience, while academic theology followed that of rationalism.

Within the church paradigm, experience and piety came to be the chief criteria and as time progressed, an anti-theological attitude started to emerge. In reaction to biblical criticism, some churches came to have an uncritical reading of scripture, developing a “strident supernaturalism” towards its defence (Webster 2003, 20). In these circles, it was one's charisma, not their theology, which was of utmost importance. Enthusiasm and accessibility prevailed over correctness (see Strachan 2015, 86–88). Ministry became about practical skills, losing focus of theological development. Intellectually theology was even seen as a negative. Strachan (2015, 90) quotes Billy Sunday as stating that “he knew as much about theology as a jackrabbit knows about Ping-Pong.” Yet this move away from academic theology did not only stem from a negative reaction to rationalism, but also due to development in academic theology.

Academic theology was not opposed to the critical principles of the Enlightenment. Rather it was the sufficiency, how far the rationale could go, not its efficiency that was questioned (Farley 1983, 7). In order to survive, academic theology embraced the changing intellectual culture. With the change in paradigm, theology found itself on the edge of the intellectual world, forming just another discipline.²⁶ In these challenging circumstances theology was forced to function purely through reason away from revelation (cf. Strachan 2015, 88–89), changing from knowledge of God for the edification of faith, to knowledge being a scientific category with certain methods pertaining to each category (Farley 1983, 56). One clear example of this was the rise of biblical criticism. The Bible was no longer regarded as the source of divine revelation and its merit for study now came through its cultural relevance (Hiestand and Wilson 2015, 45). This approach led to the rise of specialist knowledge in the

25 The *Encyclopédie*, edited by M. Diderot and M. d'Alembert (1751–1780) sought to be a presentation of all human learning up until the eighteenth century and intentionally left out any entry for *Jesus Christ* (Hiestand and Wilson 2015, 43).

26 Within the modern paradigm the rise of plurality became a strong force. In short, plurality emphasised that one religious belief could not be given preferential treatment over another. This phenomenon has greatly affected the ability of academic theology to speak “prophetically” in its current situation (Hiestand 2008, 364).

academy, widening the gap between the understanding of scripture within church and academy (Gonzales 1996, 85). The theology that was now coming from the academy was clearly incompatible with the church's needs (Hiestand and Wilson 2015, 45). The discipline had changed from a study of scripture designed to guide and edify the local church, to a conglomerate of specialist disciplines. Theology was no longer primarily concerned with the development of faith but with the development of knowledge. The university remained the appropriate environment for the intellectual study of theology.²⁷ Yet it had moved away from a study focused on the needs of the church, to a study focusing on its own justification and criteria (Farley 1983, 39–40). Thus, while the church moved away from the study of doctrine, the academy moved away from the needs of the church. Both these effects have been equally important in creating the divorce between academic theology and the local church.

Conclusion

In summary, it can be said that up until the Reformation, the intellectual activities of the theologian were strongly correlated with the local church. Both church leaders and theologians viewed academic learning (theology), and the local church, as vital to their work. Theology was shown to be highly relevant to congregational life; and the church highly valued within academic theology. This correlation was seen to be beneficial to both institutions. However, post-Reformation the correlation started to demise. The rise of the rationalist paradigm saw the rise of reason. Purely rational endeavour in academic reflections developed with a disregard for revelation. At the same time the church, in response to doctrinarism and rationalism, came to focus on experience as the main source of belief. Subjective personal experience was not refutable by purely scientific exploration and so was safeguarded from Enlightenment developments. In general terms, the church started to lose focus on congregational learning and focused more on the worship experience; while theology became the sight of rational engagement with doctrine, with little focus on personal experience. Although not complete, a divide emerged which led to the modern view that science and religion (experience of God) were not compatible. The break in correlation has become deeply ingrained in the social fabric of church and academy and, as such, still presents a huge challenge today. Within the South African context, discussions on theological education need to become aware of the once long-standing tradition. This awareness, along with understanding of its demise, is a vital way in which theological education can overcome its commercial, irrelevant and colonial nature.

²⁷ Hiestand remarks how today the academy is almost completely seen as the correct location for the study of theology and as such the “pastor-scholars” of old have been replaced with the “professor-scholar” (Hiestand 2008, 360). This is important to note as “Each social location of theology imposes its own set of questions ... its own special emphasis. Theology in the academic context naturally tends to be apologetically oriented: theology in the church is interested primarily in the clarification and interpretation of the church’s message” (Migliore 1991, 14).

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