

Theological Study of Religion in Nigeria as a Corrective to Misguided Religious Practice¹

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Idahosa Amadasu
Associate Professor of Theology,
Seminary of All Saints,
Uhiele, Ekpoma.
idahosaamadasu37@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper argues that the lack of theological studies of religion in Nigeria has fostered a culture of an enthusiastic practice of religion without reason, ethics or love. Through historical, descriptive, critical and analytical methods, it invites the Nigerian culture and educational system to take a cue from Christianity's pristine identity from its Greco-Roman heritage as a veritable synthesis of faith, reason and charity. A theological study of religion studies religion beyond comparative and phenomenological levels to take seriously the faith tradition of each religion and promote a more rational and critical engagement of religious practice in a way that makes it responsible for its theological identity.

Keywords: Theology, Religion, Reason, Faith, Love, Nigeria

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1. Introduction

A culture of abuse and misuse of religion plagues the current Nigerian religious landscape. Characterised by double allegiance to two or more religious beliefs systems, religious practices are increasingly marked by syncretism, superstition, violence, commercialisation and the disconnect between faith and life. Recently, a former Nigerian president said that even though he is a Christian, he still gives deference to the native Yoruba god, 'Ifa' for divination.² This kind of double allegiance has fuelled religious syncretistic behaviours, where inharmonious aspects of religions are mixed.³ Since Nigeria gained her independence, she has been afflicted by various religious wars, disputes and by violence arising from fundamentalist and fanatical beliefs.⁴ So many lives have been lost due to religious violence, and the peace and harmony in society are constantly disturbed. The abuse of religion to promote violence is one of the pathologies of religious practice in Nigeria.

The average Nigerian is deeply religious.⁵ His religious inclination comes into play in all he does. However, religion has been used to

² James Ogunnaike, "I'm a Christian, but hold respect for Ifa, African heritage – Obasanjo," *Vanguard*, January 26, 2025, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2025/01/im-a-christian-but-hold-respect-for-ifa-african-heritage-obasanjo>

³ For example, fortune telling, which is common with African traditional religion and is distinctively opposed to the Christian faith, has assumed a Christian veneer and is promoted by many Christian religious sects. Cf. Idahosa Amadasu, "*Africae munus* and Syncretistic Movements in Africa: A Challenge for Inculturation," *The Oracle*, 3, no. 5 (2017): 1-25.

⁴ See S.M. Nwaomah, "Religious Crises in Nigeria: Manifestation, Effect and the Way Forward," *Journal of Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology in Practice* (2011): <https://ir.unilag.edu.ng/handle/123456789/9104> and F. O Falako, "Religion and Violence: Historical Appraisal of the Activities of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria, 2009–2012," *Nigerian Journal of Sociology of Education* 7, no. 2 (2013): <https://ir.unilag.edu.ng/handle/123456789/9104>

⁵ For scholarly articles on Nigeria's religiosity see Andre McKinnon, "Christians, Muslims and Traditional Worshippers in Nigeria: Estimating the Relative Proportions from Eleven Nationally Representative Social

foster and justify immoral practices. It is common to find politicians who rig elections and go to Church to offer thanksgiving to God for their victory.⁶ This attribution of an immoral action to God, which should ordinarily be ranked as blasphemy,⁷ is commonplace in the way many Nigerians understand and practice religion. There is increased recourse to fetish religious practices among many young people today who participate in cybercrimes, popularly called “Yahoo Boys” or Yahoo Plus.”⁸ Even young people who were initially brought up as Christians or Muslims have found an easy recourse to these practices that are not in tandem with the core tenets of their beliefs.⁹ When there is a culture of religious abuse, anything can be acceptable under the guise of spiritual practice as long as it serves utilitarian ends.

Surveys,” *Review of Religious Research* 63, (2021): 303–315. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-021-00450-5>; Michael Owojuyigbe and Dauda Aderemi Busari, “Religion and Social control in Nigeria: The Rise and Rise of Secularization and Fanaticism,” *LASU Journal of Social Sciences*, 10 no. 2 (2014): 45–57, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318834932>; Johnson Olusegun Ajayi and Bodunde David Oluwafemi, “Religious Practices and National Development. *Social Sciences*,” 3 no. 4 (2014): 105–111. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ss.20140304.11>

⁶ See Ignatius Chukwu, “Has thanksgiving become a political tool in Rivers?” *BusinessDay NG*, May 5, 2024, https://businessday.ng/politics/article/has-thanksgiving-service-become-a-political-tool-in-rivers/?utm_source=chatgpt.com; Kayode Oyeró, “It’s Abomination for Politicians Who Rigged Elections To Expect God’s Help – Ex-AGF,” *Channels Television*, September 16, 2024, https://www.channelstv.com/2024/09/16/its-abomination-for-politicians-who-rigged-elections-to-expect-gods-help-ex-agf/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

⁷ The Catechism describes blasphemy as “directly opposed to the second commandment. It consists in uttering against God - inwardly or outwardly - words of hatred, reproach, or defiance; in speaking ill of God; in failing in respect toward him in one’s speech; in misusing God’s name.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 2148, accessed April 04, 2025, <http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/INDEX.HTM> (hereafter cited as CCC).

⁸ Cf. Idahosa Amadasu, “Cybercrime among Nigerian Youths: The Need for a New Evangelisation of Yahoo Boys,” *Ekpoma Review*, 10 (2024): 22–44.

This paper wishes to show that a lack of theological study or appreciation of religion is at the root cause of the distorted understanding and the consequent unreflective practice of religion in Nigeria. In the Catholic tradition, theology advocates an intelligent practice of religion through the harmony of faith and reason, which helps direct human behaviour toward love. No thanks to the lack of theological study of religion in many Nigerian universities, which ought to be the think tanks of society, the practice of religion is degenerating into a means for unjust material advantage, a justification for violence and a dehumanization arising from an ethic devoid of love.

The first part of this study exposes the inadequacy of a theological study of and engagement with religion, which has led to the abuse and misuse of religion in Nigeria today. Thereafter, we shall retrieve the original Christian synthesis of faith, reason and love to argue that when Nigerians approach religion theologically, their practice of religion will be more reflective and form the basis for the direction of their lives and society according to love.

2. Need for a Theological Study of Religion in Nigeria

Anthony Akinwale has shown that religion can be studied through phenomenological, comparative and theological approaches. The phenomenological approach studies religion as a phenomenon through “the lenses of a philosopher, anthropologist, historian, psychologist, sociologist or of any other member of the academia.”¹⁰ The comparative approach studies religion as a phenomenon alongside other religions as phenomena. It wishes to inquire into

⁹ Cf. Emmanuel C. Anizoba and S.I. Aande, “A Critical Evaluation of Religious Syncretism among the Igbo Christians of Nigeria,” *Acta Theologica* 41, no. 2 (2021): 10-22.

¹⁰ Anthony Akinwale, “The Place of Theology in the University Curriculum,” in *The Idea of an African University: The Nigerian Experience*, ed. Joseph Kenny (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2007), 141-160.

their similarities and differences. The theological approach, as understood from the Catholic perspective, goes beyond studying religion as a phenomenon. Its starting point is faith. It is the *crede ut intelligas*, of St Augustine, or, as St. Anselm expressed, *credo ut intellegam*, and ‘*fides quarens intellectum*,’ faith seeking understanding.¹¹

Akinwale notes that whereas many Nigerian universities combine phenomenological and comparative approaches in their study of religion, they do not do so through the theological approach. In fact, hardly any Nigerian university hosts a theology department except for some recent private universities.¹² He sees the non-inclusion of theology in the curriculum of Nigerian universities as a testament to the British heritage of the history and philosophy of university education in Nigeria. This empiricist philosophy does not grant scientific status to the supernatural foundation of theology: “While an empiricist philosophy of education may accord scientific status to the phenomenological and or comparative study of religion,

¹¹ See St. Augustine, “Tractates on the Gospel of John,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First series, Vol. 7, Philip Schaff, ed., John Gibb, trans. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888), Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1701029.htm>, 29.6; St. Anselm, *Prosologium, Monologium*, Sidney Norton Deane, trans. (USA: The Catholic Primer, 2005), Preface & Chapter 1. <https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/anselmproslogion.html>. For more explanation on the relationship between faith and reason, see Lawrence Feingold, *Faith Comes From What is Heard: An Introduction to Fundamental Theology* (Steubenville, Ohio: Emmaus Academic, 2016), 93-111.

¹² Akinwale, “The Place of Theology,” 142. According to the unpublished National Universities Commission (NUC) database, only about seven universities have a department of theology out of the approximately 300 universities in the country. They are the National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja, the only government-owned university that does so. The other six are private universities: Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Bingham University, New Karu, Veritas University, Abuja and Wesley University, Ondo.

it will not recognise theology as having such status since the latter lays claim to a supernaturally revealed starting point which is beyond the scope of empirical verification.”¹³

Theology is a speech about God, as supernaturally revealed to man. The supernatural revelation is foundational because reason alone is insufficient, even though God can be known by human reason. St. Thomas Aquinas lists three consequences of knowing God through reason alone: only a few persons will be able to know God, this knowledge will be after a long period, and the knowledge will be mixed with error. Divine aid is, therefore, necessary to know God fully for our salvation.¹⁴ Theology speaks about the God who has been revealed with the help of reason. It is faith-seeking understanding. It invites the adherents of a particular faith or religion to be attached to their religion intelligently.

The theological habit promotes a disciplined exploration of the content of Revelation.¹⁵ This disciplined exploration requires the ability to make an argument, have a retentive memory and imaginative flair.¹⁶ An intelligent attachment to revelation demands one to “give an account of what we believe” (Cf. 1 Pet. 3:15). Since what we believe has been received through time and ages, it is not just the product of our thinking or imagination. If the intelligent engagement with revelation is to reflect the pristine and dynamic

¹³ Akinwale, “The Place of Theology,” 142.

¹⁴ “Even as regards those truths about God which human reason could have discovered, it was necessary that man should be taught by a divine revelation; because the truth about God such as reason could discover, would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors. Whereas man’s whole salvation, which is in God, depends upon the knowledge of this truth. Therefore, in order that the salvation of men might be brought about more fitly and more surely, it was necessary that they should be taught divine truths by divine revelation.” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Iq. 1a, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/>.

¹⁵ Aidan Nichols, *The Shape of Catholic Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991, 1995), 32.

¹⁶ See Nichols, *The Shape of Catholic Theology*, 14-15.

identity of what we believe, then the theologian should remember important facts about the contents, dates, events and important personalities that have played a role in the transmission of the faith. Because this intelligent attachment to the faith is not simply an exercise in sophistry, nor is it exhausted in the ability to recall past events, the theologian should be creative in exploring how the revelation that came “for us men and our salvation”¹⁷ speaks to the people of today and in a way that it can also speak to the future.

As informative and resourceful as the phenomenological and comparative approaches to studying religion might be, they do not require an attachment to any religious tradition. They do not take up the task of requiring intelligent engagement with a given tradition to demand consistency between practice and belief. Hence, while one can study a given religion at the phenomenological and comparative approaches without being an adherent of that religion, the same cannot be properly said of a theological approach to the study of religion because “Theology is the approach of a scholar whose starting point is adherence to the doctrines and beliefs of the religion, and whose intent is to demonstrate the beliefs. It requires taking seriously a supernatural source of revealed truths.”¹⁸

The Christian faith’s intrinsically rational nature is rooted in her Old Testament Judeo-Greek heritage. It is a heritage that demands an intelligent practice of the faith. God’s self revelation in the burning bush as “I am who I am” (Exod 3:14) attests to the choice of Israel’s faith in expressing her God in rational and philosophical terms against those of ancient mystical religions.¹⁹

¹⁷ See Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in Heinrich Joseph Denzinger, Peter Hünermann, Helmut Hoping, Robert L. Fastiggi, Anne Englund Nash, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals* (43rd ed.; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), no. 150 (hereafter cited as DS).

¹⁸ Akinwale, “The Place of Theology,” 142.

¹⁹ “I am who I am” which expresses God’s self-subsistence as a Being itself (‘ipsum esse subsistens’) and not simply a being among others connects to the Greek philosophical idea of being. In this way, it shows how biblical revelation fulfills what philosophy is seeking. See Joseph Ratzinger,

The prophetic critic of those who serve gods who have ears but cannot hear, eyes that cannot see, and noses that cannot smell (Cf. Ps.115:5-8) was an invitation to an intelligent attachment to the faith.²⁰ At the same time, the prophetic critic demanded the integrity of faith and life, where worship without conversion was abhorrent, and the true sacrifice demanded was a humble and contrite heart (Cf. Ps. 51:17). In this heritage, Christianity found its basis in synthesising faith, reason, and love, and this accounted for its missionary appeal.²¹

Introduction to Christianity, trans. J.R. Foster, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 1969; reprint, 2000), 116-126.

²⁰ This intelligent attachment to the faith that flows from the prophetic critique points to the rationality of the Christian God, rooted in the faith of Israel. It is precisely this rational character that accounts for the universality of the Christian faith as Joseph Ratzinger aptly expresses: “If the prophets ridicule man-made idols with mordant acerbity and set the only real God in contrast to them, in the wisdom books the same spiritual movement is at work as among the pre-Socratics at the time of the early Greek enlightenment. To the extent that the prophets see in the God of Israel the primordial creative ground of all reality, it is quite clear that what is taking place is a religious critique for the sake of a correct understanding of this reality itself. Here the faith of Israel unquestionably steps beyond the limits of a single people’s peculiar worship: it puts forth a universal claim, whose universality has to do with its being rational.” Joseph Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Approaches to Understanding its Role in the light of Present Controversy*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius 1995), 24.

²¹ In showing how this universality of the Christian faith is the basis for its missionary appeal, Ratzinger continues that “Faith has the right to be missionary only if it truly transcends all traditions and constitutes an appeal to reason and an orientation toward the truth itself. However, if man is made to know reality and has to conduct his life, not merely as tradition dictates, but in conformity to the truth, faith also has the positive duty to be missionary.” He, thereafter, shows how there is a coherence between truth and love: “Love is the desire for intimate knowledge, so that the quest for intelligence can even be an inner requirement of love. Put another way, there is a coherence of love and truth which has important consequences for theology and philosophy. Christian faith can say of itself,

A theological approach to religion is an invitation to a rational expression of the faith and to a way of life that is an expression of love. Without this approach, faith suffers from a lack of intelligent expression and is unable to direct human behaviour to love. We can think here of the example of seed sowing, an important tenet in commercialized religion. Whereas the biblical meaning of seed sowing advocates self-offering through self-denial, the commercialised version of seed sowing effectively, turns Christian offering into a trade by barter—the one who has made such an offering does so in the expectation that God will repay the offering usually with some greater material reward or the granting of some cherished desire.²² Even though the prophets have long warned that God does not delight in our sacrifices of bulls and goats but in a contrite heart (see Ps 51:16-17, Is. 1:11), the one who sows the commercialised seed and offers God some material offerings, rather than a humble and contrite heart that should accompany an offering, develops an entitlement mentality, believing he or she earns the right to have God repay the offering abundantly. The core value of Christian prayer as submission and doing God's will is substituted with seeking to do one's will. This is why the average Nigerian Christian can find it compatible to pray and thank God for stolen

I have found love. Yet love for Christ and of one's neighbor for Christ's sake can enjoy stability and consistency only if its deepest motivation is love for the truth. This adds a new aspect to the missionary element: real love of neighbor also desires to give him the deepest thing man needs, namely, knowledge and truth." Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 26-27.

²² For some researches on the abuses of the biblical concept of seed sowing, see Gladys Akabike, Peace Ngwoke, and Onyekachi Chukwuma, "A Critical Analysis of Tithe and Seed Sowing on Contemporary Christianity in Nigeria," *HTS Theological Studies*, 77, no. 1 (2021): 8; Emmanuel Adedayo and Daniel C. Onyejiuwa, "Seed Sowing and Its Socio-Economic Impact in Nigeria," *GVU Journal of Research and Development*, 1, no. 2 (2024): 64–75; Rimamsikwe Kitage and Hillary Achunike, "A Historical Discourse on Tithing and Seed Sowing in Some Nigerian Pentecostal Churches," *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 18, no. 3 (2013): 7–19.

goods and corrupt material enrichments or ask God to punish their enemies against the clear gospel precept of love for enemies. The opposite will be true for those with a theological habit characterised by an intelligent attachment to the faith and its core principle of love.

3. Christian Synthesis of Faith, Reason and Love

One of the charges against the early Christians by the Roman state was that they were atheists. This charge arose because they refused to worship the gods of roman pantheon but rather aligned themselves with the “irreligious” God of philosophy, as the Romans understood it.²³ In his *City of God*, Augustine’s dialogue with the philosophy of religion of the Roman polymath and prolific author, Marcus Terentius Varro (116-27 B.C), brings this encounter to light. In his concern with the relationship between religion and truth, Varro distinguished three kinds of theology: mystical, civil and natural theology.²⁴ Varro, who describes theology as an understanding and explanation of the divine (*ratio quae de diis explicatur*), noted that the theologians of the mythical religions are the poets who composed songs about the gods with their poetic visions and images. They functioned in the theatre, which was cultic and religious in character. The theologians of the civil theology are court theologians who served the state and were responsible for cult worship. The natural theologians are the learned men who went beyond the mundane to inquire into the truth about reality. They are those found in the academies and were essentially concerned about the subject and nature of the gods.²⁵

The implication of Varro’s classification is that natural theology has to do with the nature of gods that do not exist, while the mythical

²³ See Joseph Ratzinger, *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1954; reprint, 1992), 7; Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 142.

²⁴ Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: The Modern Library, 1993), 6:5-12.

²⁵ See Augustine, *The City of God*, 6:10.

and civil theologies concern the divine institutions of humankind. This means that natural theology has a god that is not religious. This is because its god cannot be addressed in religious terms, but in the postulations of ancient philosophy that see the primary stuff of reality as number (Pythagoras), fire (Heraclitus) or atoms (Epicurus). In this classification, 'religion', which essentially means cultic official worship and 'reality,' which is the rational perception of what is real, exist in two separate spheres. In this case, religion does not derive reality from the divine but from its political function. It was seen as an institution that was essential for the continuous existence of the state.²⁶

Augustine saw Varro's combination of a non-religious God to natural theology as an attempt at demythologisation. This is because it applied natural science to promote a form of enlightenment, which was critical of the mythical forms of ancient times. In recognising the form of enlightenment that Varro was promoting, Augustine thought that the ancient scholar failed to bring the implications of this enlightenment to a conclusion because he wanted to give deference to mythical and civil theologies. This was a counterpart to the contradicting classification of the non-religious God of natural theology that lacked a relationship with human beings.²⁷

The Bishop of Hippo identified Christianity with natural theology but corrected the inadequacies in Varro's conception. He thought the latter considered all reality physical and failed to distinguish between physics and metaphysics. In his *De civitas Dei*, he writes: "For although He who is true God is God, not by opinion, but by nature, nevertheless all nature is not God; for there is certainly a nature of man, of a beast, of a tree, of a stone – none of which is God."²⁸ After making this distinction, Augustine then links natural

²⁶ See Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius 2004), 168.

²⁷ Augustine, *The City of God*, 6:10.

²⁸ Augustine, *The City of God*, 6.8; See Ratzinger, *Volk und Haus*, 272-273. Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 172.

theology to religion; in this way, he shows how the metaphysical contained in natural religion can be connected to salvation history.

Retrieving this dialogue between Augustine and Varro in his doctoral dissertation, Joseph Ratzinger further exposed how Augustine engaged the religious civil theology of Varro, which has the state as its source in contradistinction to the Church, which has its source in God, to explain the link between metaphysics and salvation history. In the state of ancient Rome, the constitution of the people as a community was understood to be based on a common object of love. The gods are created from love. This implies that the state precedes religion, just as love comes before belief or faith. This means the state is the original divinity or the god-mother that encompasses the unity of the people. As Ratzinger explains, Augustine responds to this in his *De civitate Dei* by saying that the Church is established in reverse order to the structure of the Roman people and their religions. God comes before the community, who have faith in him just as Christ comes before the Church and the Church is born from Christ.

It is not because she was that the Church raised her founder Christ to God, but because Christ is God, she was born. It is not because the Church loved Christ, that she finally believed His divinity, but because through faith she rests on the foundation of His divinity, she loves Him. Here God is first, and thereafter the community of people who have their unity Him.²⁹

When Varro postulated that religion depended on the state, he abolished the link between God and religion. This implies that God has nothing to do with human beings and has consequently not entered human history. In this regard, religion does not move towards God but remains within the physical. It does not go beyond the physical; it is 'un-metaphysical.' Augustine's counter-response is that based on the facts of Revelation and salvation history, God entered the world, and religion finds its link to God on this ground.³⁰

²⁹ Ratzinger, *Volk und Haus*, 274.

³⁰ Ratzinger, *Volk und Haus*, 275.

Ratzinger maintains that Augustine's identification of Christianity with natural theology and its philosophical enlightenment is in tandem with the New Testament and early Christian apologists and theologians of the second century. When St. Paul says in his Letter to the Romans that human beings can perceive God rationally, he spoke from an Old Testament heritage of the wisdom theology, which upheld human rationality by mocking the gods, as we see in the Psalms. This attests to the fact that the Jewish heritage of Christianity identified with philosophical enlightenment and not with ancient religions. On this basis, Augustine held that Christianity is not based on vague notions and mythical images that only find justification in their political usefulness. Instead, it is rooted in a divine presence which can be perceived from a rational analysis of reality. This enables the Bishop of Hippo to identify biblical monotheism with philosophical perceptions that concern the foundation of the world, as perceived in different forms in ancient philosophy. In his speech at the Areopagus, St. Paul characterised this biblical monotheism, which is religious, unlike the religious divinities of ancient philosophies, as *religio vera*, true religion (cf. Acts 17:16-34).³¹

Christianity's identification with reason/philosophical enlightenment was reinforced by her identification with the philosophical morality of the ancient Stoics. Just as the Christian faith transformed the notional image of the philosophical God to be religious it also fleshed out the moral practice by basing all morality on the two-fold commandments of love of God and love of neighbour. Hence, "Christianity was convincing because of the connection of faith and reason and by directing behaviour by *caritas*, by loving care for the suffering, the poor, and the weak, across any boundaries of class or status."³² He continues that the force of Christianity that made it a world religion "consisted in its synthesis of reason, faith, and life; and it is precisely this synthesis that is summed up and expressed in the term *religio vera*."³³

³¹ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 169-170.

³² Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 175.

³³ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 175.

4. Concluding Reflections

Varro's description of theology as understanding and explanation of the divine (*ratio quae de diis explicatur*) does not fully capture the Christian understanding of theology as a disciplined exploration of divine revelation. The divinity Varro refers to is not one known through divine revelation. It is more properly a divinity in the sense of the prime stuff of matter present in ancient philosophical conception, which made the ancients characterise some objects in the universe, such as fire, water, number, etc, as divine. Hence, he did not attribute religion to the study of this divinity. The mythical and civil theologies that he classified as religious are not responsive to the demands of reason but serve only political and social functions. One can say that the study of religion at merely phenomenological and comparative levels shares some similarities with the conception of religions at mystical and civil theologies because religion is only studied to inquire into its social, cultural and political relevance. The gods of these religions are the creation of the state. Only what is empirical can be assessed in these religions. When many Nigerians and African Christians have recourse to African Traditional religions, as well as the Christian religion, without the lens of the intrinsic rationality of our Christian beliefs, they reduce religion to a tool for social and political functions. Scripture is replete with the incompatibility of fortune telling with the first commandment.³⁴ Those who still have recourse to the gods

³⁴ See Lev. 19, 2 Kings 21:6, Is. 8:19 Lev. 20: 6 & 27, Deut. 18:9-14, Ex. 22:18, Mic. 5:12, 2 Chron. 33:6, Rev. 21:8 & 22:15, 1 Sam. 15:23, Acts 8: 9-13 & 16:16. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "All forms of divination are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to "unveil" the future.⁴⁸ Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums all conceal a desire for power over time, history, and, in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers. They contradict the honor, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone." (§2116).

for divination, fortune-telling cave into a non-rational pre-Christian heritage. This syncretistic practice further detaches Christian practice from an intelligent adherence to one's tradition.

A theology that seeks to foster a synthesis between faith, reason and love must also be responsive to the pastoral needs of the people. While the Nigerian Church continued to be influenced by the European cultural medium of the faith that was brought to them, a theology that seeks to be rationally rooted in Christian tradition must strive to realise the full possibilities of that tradition by exploring the resources of the past and seek how the encounter with the rich past of Christian tradition and the cultural values of Africans can become an instance for promoting and inculturated faith and a tradition that can be passed on.³⁵

A profound pastoral reason that often fuels recourse to inharmonious aspects of African Traditional Religion by many Africans is their peculiar spiritual experiences of the demonic world and activities. Many Africans do not find help when they relate these experiences. They are either dismissed or manipulated to foster superstitious beliefs. Whereas the Church and Christian tradition has a rich heritage of the practice of exorcism and how to deal with the demonic world, the lack of official attention given to these makes many have recourse to self-proclaimed exorcists, who are often untrained and use their ministries to promote more confusion. It should be surprising that in a culture where many lay claim to demonic experiences, there is hardly any Catholic diocese that has an official exorcist.³⁶ When people's real or imagined pastoral

³⁵ Cf. Idahosa Amadasu, "Conditions for a Plausible African Theology: A Dual Retrieval of Traditions," *Enwisdomization Journal*, 8, no. 1 (2020): 96-106.

³⁶ According to Catechism of the Catholic Church §1673, "When the Church asks publicly and authoritatively in the name of Jesus Christ that a person or object be protected against the power of the Evil One and withdrawn from his dominion, it is called exorcism. Jesus performed exorcisms and from him the Church has received the power and office of exorcizing." According to the Code of Canon Law: "No one can perform exorcisms legitimately upon the possessed unless he has obtained special and express

problems make them have recourse to other religions to find a solution, they often end up in syncretistic practices that corrupt the rational identity of the Christian faith and incapacitate an integral practice of the faith. Here, Africans have their fair share of what the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council described as the gravest errors of our time: “split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives.”³⁷

When our religious practice is rooted in a theological understanding of Christianity as a synthesis of faith, reason, and love, we will have a more responsible practice of the Christian faith that can also challenge other religions to an intelligent attachment to their religious practices and traditions.

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permission from the local ordinary. §2. The local ordinary is to give this permission only to a presbyter who has piety, knowledge, prudence, and integrity of life” (n. 1172). The Code of Canon Law accessed April 4, 2025, [Vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va), 1172. 1 §2. For a compilation of the traditional and revised rites of Exorcism, see Chris Burton, ed., *Traditional & Revised Catholic Rites of Exorcism*, 1& 2 (Self-published, CreateSpace, 2017).

³⁷ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* [Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World], December 7, 1965, sec.43, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

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