

**PHILOSOPHY: PROPOSING A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE ON GOD****Barnabas Obiora Idoko, Ph.D**

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**Abstract**

Wars have been fought and millions have died in the name of religion. In fact, religious beliefs and practices have a lot of consequences for the society. This is one of the reasons philosophy of religion is very important because philosophy as a critique of all beliefs including religious creeds, tries to demystify and demythologize religious beliefs of dangerous primordial sentiments. Some of such sentiments currently debated by philosophers of religion bother on the meaning of religious language and incommensurability of religious languages or lack communication between members of different religions. The two problems are connected because the first leads to the second, however, the second is of particular interest because it has been the source of religious misunderstandings and conflicts around the world. Using conceptual analysis and the historical method, this paper first discovered that the debate on the meaning of religious language is trivial because it was premised on the wrong assumption that religious language was a representation or reflection of reality. Arguing rather that religious language is socially constructed, the study maintained that once this was realized the problem would disappear. Secondly, while conceding the incommensurability of religious languages, the paper recommended a universal religious language based on the commonality of human need as a way of reducing religious tension, encouraging interreligious dialogue and peace among people of different religions.

Keywords: Universal Language, religion, problem, incommensurability, ultra-realism, linguistic relativism

**Introduction**

The most important subject of debate in philosophy of religion during the medieval and modern periods was on the existence of God. Philosophers devoted lots of energies on this theme and many theories and proofs were formulated on the existence of God. In contemporary discussions however, it is no longer the question of God's existence that generates the problem of religious language. If God does not exist, any attempt to describe him will be an inaccurate description of reality. As such, in the contemporary period,

discussions about religious language attempt to articulate how one could speak of God if, in fact, God exists. Specifically, when philosophers debate the problem of religious language, they more or less have two things in mind: the inadequacy of human language in articulating the reality of God and the inability of the major religions and cultures of the world to talk about God in universal terms.

The first problem relates to the nature of God. Almost all religions of the world, especially the Abrahamic religions, conceptualize God in superlative terms such that God is said to be infinite, omnipotent, omniscience, Omnibenevolence, etc.If God is infinite, then words used to describe finite creatures might not adequately describe him. For example, is God good in the same sense that Peter Obi, the presidential candidate of the Labour Party of Nigeria is good? This difficulty challenges philosophers to articulate the degree that attributes used for finite beings can be used for God and what these attributes mean when they describe God. The ambiguity in meaning with respect to the terms predicated of God is the “problem of religious language” or the “problem of naming God.” These predications could include divine attributes, properties, or actions.

Now if God is absolute in all senses as almost always presented by the Abrahamic religion and the only language available to humans is the language used in naming and describing finite beings, it means that human language is deficient and will never be adequate in talking about God. This inadequacy has its root in human knowledge. Human language is the means used in describing and discussing what is known to man and the God of the major religions is presented as beyond human comprehension, ipso facto, human language cannot describe what man cannot comprehend and God is therefore beyond and above the ability of human language to describe.

The second problem is the problem of commensurability. Almost all religions and cultures understand and express the idea of God differently, most times in very contradicting and conflicting manners. For instance, one of the hallmarks of the Islamic Religion is that God is not human and therefore doesn't and cannot have a son. Contrarily, Christianity is established on the foundation that God has a son who is also God. These differences in the understanding and representation of God by the different cultures and religions of the world have been the harbinger of religious conflicts for centuries. It is still the ember that stokes religious conflicts even in our own time and especially in our country Nigeria. The young Christian, Deborah Yakubu who was murdered in Sokoto state last year (2022) was killed because her fellow

students accused her of blasphemy against the Holy Prophet Mohammed, a concept and practice completely unknown at least to modern Christianity.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to clarify and address these two problems. Using the method of concept analysis, the study will argue that the first problem is not a real problem because it arises by the lack of clarifications on the statues, meaning and applications of religious language. The study will show that once these conceptual clarifications are made the problem of religious language will be resolved. Concerning the second problem, the study will propose a universal language derived from the universal need of man to develop a language on God that will be meaningful to all religions and cultures.

### **Epistemological Foundation of the Problem of Religious Language**

Man is a symbolic being. As such beyond the mechanical instruments he creates to dominate the environment, he also creates symbolic instruments to communicate with his fellow human beings. According to Batista Mondin, of these symbolic instruments, the most important is language, which is the totality of written or vocal signs with which man puts himself in communication with his own peers (Mondin, 2011, 129). Consequently, the purpose of human language is to describe what is known by man. Any reality that falls outside of human knowledge is a reality outside the power of his language. In Kantian dictum, whenever man tries to describe such realities, he runs into contradictions or antimonies which are difficult if not impossible to resolve.

God according to Kant belongs to such realities that cannot be rationally discussed with human language. Kant gives two reasons for this. The first reason is that God is neither a part of the realities of human experience nor part of the categories in the human mind. As such, man cannot discuss God significantly and meaningful. The second reason is the religious concepts of God. God is conceived by different religions as infinite and since the human mind does not have the ability to understand the infinite, it is impossible for human language to discuss the infinite in a meaningful way.

This particular problem has led different philosophers of religion to propose a number of statues to religious propositions. For the logical positivists, especially members of the Vienna Circle statements about God are meaningless. A. J. Ayer in this regards claimed that:

But the notion of a person whose essential attributes are non-empirical is not an intelligible notion at all. We may have a word which is used as if it names this 'person,' (God) but, unless the sentences in which it occurs express propositions which are empirically verifiable, it cannot be said to symbolize anything (Ayer 1946, 144).

By this Ayer and majority of the logical positivists believe that at least one solution to the problem of religious language is to claim that statements about God are unintelligible.

There are at least three solutions to the problem of religious language other than the view that statements about God are meaningless. The first solution argues that when terms are used to describe God and his attributes, those terms are equivocal with respect to what they mean in reference to God and what they mean in reference to creatures. Consequently, this solution would argue that God is not good in the same sense in which Peter Obi is good; God's goodness is entirely different from the goodness of a creature. Despite this tremendous difference in kind, God can be spoken of by human beings through negations. Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides) is one of the most famous proponents of this doctrine. He argued for this position in his *Guide for the Perplexed*. His view has been defended in the twentieth century by, among others, Harry Austryn Wolfson (1887-1974) and Kenneth Seeskin (1947-).

The second solution argues that when terms are used to describe God and his attributes, those terms are univocal with respect to what they mean in reference to God and what they mean in reference to creatures. This approach would argue that God is good in the same sense in which Peter Obi is good. In the contemporary literature William Alston argues that there are some concepts that can be applied univocally to God and to human beings, but he rejects a completely univocal solution.

The third solution argues that when terms are used to describe God and his attributes, those terms are used analogously. This solution argues that God is good in an analogous sense to Peter Obi's goodness. "Good" applied to both God and to Obi would signify the same thing, but in different modes. That is, when "good" is applied to Obi it picks out a property of Obi, but when "good" is applied to God, it refers to the unity that is God's essence and not to an individual property. This approach provides a middle position between an equivocal solution

and a univocal solution, since terms used analogously aren't entirely equivocal nor are they entirely univocal; terms used analogously signify the same thing but in different modes. This is the approach of St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). He defends this position in his *Summa theologiae* as well as his *Summa contra Gentiles*. The analogical approach has also been defended in the contemporary literature by a number of philosophers, including Ralph McInerny (1929-).

The outcome of these theories and positions in Kantian term is that due to the limitations of human knowledge and by extension human language, we can never know God as he really is. Recall that Kant in reference to human knowledge, distinguished between the phenomenon and the noumenon. The phenomenon or what Kant called thing-as-it appears is in the circumference of human knowledge and is therefore within the range of what human language can appropriately describe. The noumenon as opposed to the phenomenon is the thing-in-itself is outside the range of the observer and therefore the power of his language. This sphere of reality according to Kant is unknowable which in essence means that human knowledge and the language used in expressing it is limited and will be limited forever.

### **The Status of Religious Language**

At the root of the debate on religious language is the question of the ontological status of religious language. Specifically, the question centers on whether religious language represents reality or is a conventional construct that reflects human conceptualization, experiences and interpretations of the world. Another way of putting the question is this: do people, by using certain words and terms, denote the being of God, or are they just conventional names? Answering this question is, without a doubt, controversial and daring. In the history of Christianity we can see that many of the doctrinal conflicts, if not most of them, were in fact the aftermath of problems with language, translations, and usage of specific words.

This question was raised quite early in theological debates in early stages of Christianity, and answers were given by such prominent Church Fathers as Gregory of Nyssa and Basil the Great. The problem resurfaced millennium later, when Western missionaries encountered nations and people whose religious and philosophical concepts were far different from their own. Should they accommodate local terms to fit the Christian concept of God, or should they introduce Western terminology? This translational and linguistic problem leads to the question: are there universal concepts which (despite of cultural affiliation, based on the

common human experience) could communicate the Christian idea of God? This last question goes beyond the reach of mere secular linguistics, and enters the domain of theology. For it is theological claim that in our human nature we are capable of addressing God. Starting with and from the time of the fathers of the church, scholars have advanced two different approaches or solutions in addressing this question: ultra-realism and Linguistic Relativism.

### **Ultra-realism and Linguistic Relativism**

Christian debates on language can be traced to the first centuries. One of the first serious debates involved the Cappadocian Fathers and Eunomians. Eunomius adopted the rule of strict correspondence between the structure of being and structure of language or what is been called ultra-realism here. Basil the Great (1995, p. 4) in *Tractatus De Spiritu Sancto* wrote about their theory:

They have an old sophism, invented by Aetius, the champion of this heresy, in one of whose Letters there is a passage to the effect that things naturally unlike are expressed in unlike terms, and, conversely, that things expressed in unlike terms are naturally unlike.

Also, debating with Eunomians, who could be called the “linguistic universalists” of the IV century, Gregory of Nyssa (1995, p. 329) in his Letter to Eustathius draws attention to the insufficiency of names when naming reality, and especially God. He notes that the Eunomians bring the appellation of Godhead to be an indication of nature:

But the Divine nature itself, as it is, remains unexpressed by all the names that are conceived for it, as our doctrine declares.

He shows that it is impossible for the names to indicate a different nature accordingly. It would mean that to each of God’s attributes: beneficent, judge, good, just, there would be different definition which would mean each distinct nature. Gregory (Ibid.) states that:

Indeed the substance is one thing which no definition has been found to express, and the significance of the names employed concerning it varies, as the names are given from some operation or accident.

According to Gregory, the Godhead is a name “derived from operation,” but the appellation of Godhead is not necessarily indications of nature. He uses scriptural argument by referring to Exodus 7:1 when it says that Moses is “as a god to Pharaoh.” If we had to use Eunomian logic, which would mean that the Moses’s very nature is divine. This is why the Godhead should be derived from action. Godhead is undefinable in its nature. In his letter to Ablabius he gives etymology of the name God – θεός, being the name of three divine Hypostasis.

Accordingly the name God derives from “one of these that operation of surveying and inspection, or, as one might call it, beholding, whereby He surveys all things and overlooks them all, discerning our thoughts, and even entering by His power of contemplation into those things which are not visible (Ibid. p. 333)

Godhead, or θεότης, therefore “is so called from θέα, or beholding, and that He who is our θεατής or beholder” (Ibid.)

Tomasz Grodecki (2004, p. 20), notes that “the term God is a purely human creation and has a basis in God only as long as He gives us the knowledge of his actions.” The names are purely conventional, and are not indicative of the true nature of things they are referring to. Those names sometimes can be abstract and made up – it is a matter of convention. This is the essence of Gregory’s “philosophy of language.” The names do not imply the ontological status of beings. Grodecki, writes that:

Man having the power (dynamis) of the reason, which he can use according to his will (exousia) performs the activity (energeia) of naming things. All the names are therefore conventional terms, words describing some particular subject. Their origin is, however, purely human, they are constructs of human reason and of human cognition of things, and express the essence of certain things, as long, as man can know it. They are, therefore, not their specific names, but names given to them by people. Moreover, they do not necessarily have anything to do with the nature of things. Words signify things not so much defining them, but rather being their symbols, signs directing the thought of man towards them (pp. 20-21).

It does not mean, that this kind of linguistic relativism was and is widely accepted in the Church. From *Contra Celsum* we know, that Celsus was himself radical advocate of linguistic relativism. In book I, Origen cites Celsus (1995, p. 406):

It makes no difference whether the God who is over all things be called by the name of Zeus, which is current among the Greeks, or by that, e.g., which is in use among the Indians or Egyptians.

Origen argues against Celsus, stating that the names, depending in which language they are pronounced, correspond to a certain reality – it is due to magical practices, rituals and liturgy. Names, according to him, “possess the great power”: “He, therefore, who has a nobler idea, however small, of these matters, will be careful not to apply differing names to different things.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, although Gregory stated that language is conventional and that terms do not indicate the nature of named things, sometimes the Church maintained more universalistic view on language. Especially when some terms from the theological vocabulary became solidified, becoming much more difficult to change and translate.

However, as shown in the subheading where Kant was discussed above, language doesn't reflect reality. Rather language reflects human interpretation of the world, how they see the world, not reality itself. This position is theologically defensible because it is in accord with predominant orthodox Christian view on the nature of language. Eunomian ultra-realism, stating that language reflects reality, indicating the substance of things, was found to be heretical. Also, evidence of nominalism as opposed to ultra-realism is present in the tradition of the church even before the fathers. For instance, In his speech on the Areopagus, the Apostle Paul said to the crowd, that he sees that they are religious people, and that they have even erected pedestal dedicated to “Unknown God” (*agnostotheo*). He continued to say: “To Whom then, you are ignorantly devout, This One am I announcing to you” (Acts 17:23). We can say, therefore, that Paul was not attached strictly to the terminology of naming God, when he was spreading the teaching of Jesus Christ. The pagan devotees may be potentially, unknowingly, giving honour to the one and real God. Charles M. Stang considers that Paul may be anticipating Dionysian notion “that the unknown and unknowable God can only be properly known through unknowing.”

In the Apostle's statement we can find the dominant Christian idea that language, words, do not precisely correspond with metaphysical reality. They are, to some degree, relative. However, we are not by this saying that concept of God is not fundamental in understanding

God. The concept of God is fundamental for explaining the Christian or any other religious doctrine. Without it, it is obviously impossible to explain fundamentals of Christianity: the Trinity, Christ, Revelation, protology, eschatology etc. If there is no basic understanding of the concept of God everything falls apart. The predominant opinion pursued here is that in every culture there is some rudimentary even primitive concept of God, which can serve as *preparation evangelica*. We shall return to this shortly, for the mean time let's consider the implication of what we have discussed so far to the first question raised at the introduction of this work, namely, the question of whether the finite human language can be used effectively to discuss an infinite being like God.

### **Human Language and Discussion of God**

As already hinted at the introduction, the question on the adequacy of human language in discussing God arises because some philosophers erroneously assumed that language represents reality such that for human language to discuss God appropriately it is expected to represent the true nature of God. However, since God is infinite and logically cannot be represented by finite human language and also because language is indispensable in talking about God, the question arises on whether human language can truly represent the reality of God. It is important to underline the tension here: Religion must talk about God because the existence and believability of religion depends on its ability to communicate God in understandable terms. However, religion cannot talk about God comprehensively because God is infinite why human understanding and language are finite. However, as is shown above this problem is superficial because it assigns to human language and religious language in particular the function it is not created for: representation of reality. Religious language doesn't represent reality. It only expresses the emotional and the lived experience of the adherents of given religions. Once this clarification is made, the question on the meaning of religious language disappears because such language rather than expresses reality represents the religious feelings, believes and experiences of believers.

The point being outlined here was particularly demonstrated in the theoretical turn around that occurred in the scholarship of the Austrian British Philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein. In the early part of his professional life Wittgenstein developed the 'picture theory' of language. According to him, reality ('the world') is a vast collection of facts that we can picture in language, assuming that our language has an adequate logical form. "The world is the totality of facts, not of things", Wittgenstein claimed, and these facts are structured in a logical way.

The goal of philosophy, for early Wittgenstein, was to pare language back to its logical form to picture the logical form of the world. He believed that there were “atomic propositions” in language which mirrored the structure of reality. Wittgenstein believed, however, that only ‘fact stating’ language could be said to be meaningful. He argued that all philosophical problems (and many personal ones) arose because people used language in circumstances when it had no meaning. He was advocating a highly technical and restrictive use of language to avoid error and this is why he says, “Of that which we cannot speak, thereof we must be silent” (Wittgenstein, 1961, p. 13).

This particular position was defended by Wittgenstein in the first of his two famous books: the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) and the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). He wrote the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* while in the trenches on the Eastern Front in the First World War (Monk, 1990). With typical Wittgensteinian humility he believed he had solved the problems of philosophy with this work. This early work inspired a generation of logical positivists – critical analytic thinkers who set out to debunk unverifiable ‘pseudo-statements’ in an effort to define the limits of meaningful language. Logical positivism was a powerful movement that defined the shape of analytic philosophy well into the 1960s. However, it was undercut by the work of the same man who was its founder.

Thus, after the war, Wittgenstein became a primary school teacher in rural Austria. When he returned to philosophy in Cambridge in 1929 his thinking was dramatically different. By the 1930s, he had decided that the picture theory language was quite wrong. He devoted the rest of his life to explaining why. This turn around in Wittgenstein’s scholarship was articulated in the *Philosophical Investigations*. This shift in thinking, between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*, maps the general shift in 20th century philosophy from logical positivism to [behaviourism](#) and [pragmatism](#). It is a shift from seeing language as a fixed structure imposed upon the world to seeing it as a fluid structure that is intimately bound up with our everyday practices and forms of life. For later Wittgenstein, creating meaningful statements is not a matter of mapping the logical form of the world. It is a matter of using conventionally-defined terms within ‘language games’ that we play out in the course of everyday life. Wittgenstein claimed, in perhaps the most famous passage in the *Investigations*:

In most cases, the meaning of a word is its use. It ain’t what you say, it’s the way that you say it, and the context in which you say it. Words are how you use them (1968, p. 178).

Communication, on this model, involves using conventional terms in a way that is recognized by a linguistic community. It involves playing a conventionally accepted language game. “If a lion could talk, we should not be able to understand him”, Wittgenstein argued, because the language games of lions are too different from our own to permit understanding.

Consequently, in the *Investigation*, we are a long way from the formalistic view of language described in the *Tractatus*. We have left the Platonic realm of pure logic and rediscovered the world. Wittgenstein had come to believe that language did not represent a reality ‘out there’ but was an instrument or tool woven into human practice. In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* he believed that the meaning of language came from its logical form. His later belief was that language is an elastic, social, and sometimes ambiguous structure that necessarily defies simplistic definition because of its scope and complexity. Language’s meaning, he believed, is defined by how it is used in daily life rather than by any logical structure that underlies it. It is meaningless to look at language divorced from the society within which it takes place. Wittgenstein had shifted from believing that language reflected reality, to seeing language as a metaphor for reality. It is in its very messiness and adaptability that Wittgenstein believed the essence and power of language lies.

Wittgenstein’s view of language as social practice is important not only for addressing the particular problems we are dealing with here but for most problems of language in the philosophy of religion. Take the word ‘God’, for example. The contemporary debate between atheists and believers is premised on the idea that the word ‘God’ either represents something in the real world, or it does not. Believers argue that it does (and tie themselves in knots trying to verify this claim), while atheists argue that it doesn’t. However, both parties to this debate unwittingly rely on a picture theory of language. On this theory, language represents facts about the world. What it says is either true or false. Never the twain shall meet. A Wittgensteinian approach to the debate begins by pointing out ‘God’ is a word that has different meanings in the context of different communities. In the context of different linguistic communities, people use ‘God’ in different ways to articulate different facets of experience (consider ‘It’s in God’s hands now’ or ‘When the sun rose, I felt the presence of God’). Another way of thinking about the meaning of ‘God’, therefore, is to see peoples’ use of this term as a move in a social language game – a move that ideally has specific connotations for members of a community. Perhaps the term expresses fidelity to a way of life, as [Karen Armstrong](#) argues. Perhaps it expresses wonder in the face of existence. The bottom line is that using a term does not necessarily imply a belief in an entity that

corresponds to this term. The meaning of a word hinges on its usefulness in context, not its ideal referent outside of all possible contexts.

Wittgenstein's teaching has practical value. Why waste time arguing over issues that will never be resolved when the whole thing could be deflated with a simple question: 'Are we even talking about the same thing?' If you struggle to overcome the urge to define things too carefully, or find yourself becoming obsessed about the meaning of words and their 'true' definition, or if you are convinced, like many philosophers, that the existence of a word logically implies some metaphysical essence, or Platonic form, that corresponds to this word, remember that what gives a word meaning is the conventional social discourse within which it is employed. By attending to the ordinary language contexts that give words their meaning, we can avoid misusing them and trying to make them mean things that they aren't made to mean. The more that we return words to their home, seeing them in terms of the ordinary language contexts that they work within, the easier it becomes to untie the knots in language and understand what is really being said.

### **A Universal Language on God**

The second question this study proposes to address is the problem of the commensurability of religious language between different religions. As underscored earlier, this has been the area of tension and the source of numerous religious conflicts around the word. The problem is that different religions have what they believe and ways of expressing these beliefs which in many cases are contradictory and in some cases direct attacks on the beliefs of other religions. If we agree that language is conventional construct and it reflects "human conceptualization, human interpretation of the world" we must further ask, after Blumczyński (2013, p. 236), "Does conceptualization vary from one speaker to another, from one human conceptualizer to another?" The answer is obviously – yes. Every speaker, even of the same language, using the same word may be referring to a different concept. This is why context of the spoken language is crucial. This is no more a matter of text but also of lived situations. Defining complex concepts through dictionary terminology is not sufficient. Christianity, as it was stated before, is not based on text, it is not "religion of the Book," rather a religion of the Living Word – a God-man Jesus called Christ. It is religion of personal relationship with this Person together with His Father through the Holy Spirit. This is why a simple translation of the fundamental Christian concepts will be in vain, if they will not be experienced in the community of Church. Some ideas, e.g. as the one of the God – the one creator can

be difficult to grasp even if explained precisely. What enables someone to share the same view of the world, of understanding these concepts is not mere being part of community speaking one language, but a way of living.

What this means is that religious language is incommensurable. However, what this work intend to address in this section is, since the incommensurability of religious language is one of the greatest sources of conflict for believers around the world, is it possible to develop a universal language that will enable people of different religions to communicate, understand each other, make peace and have a more harmonious and peaceful coexistence? The answer is yes! However, it has to be clarified that the universal language proposed here is not the kind being proposed by a number of scholars who believe that globalization has made the world a global village and therefore that there is a need for a universal language for all the people of the world. Some of these advocates for world language have gone as far as either to develop or to propose existing languages such as English, Chinese, etc for universal adoption.

While not against the project creating a universal language for man if it is possible, the proposal being made in this study is for a way of talking about God but all religion that is grounded not on the creeds of particular religions but on the universal need of mankind. Admissibly, human beings are very different both in their perceptions and communications, however there are also communalities in the needs of mankind that exist in spite of these differences. A number of scholars, especially psychologists have theorized on these common needs. For instance, Abraham Maslow defines these communalities in his theory on the hierarchy of needs. Karl Yung also made reference on this in his theory of archetypes. There is also the belief that religion arises in man as a result of these needs. Since, these needs are common in humanity they can be used to develop a universal language based on the common need of mankind for talking about God.

More specifically, human beings in every culture are limited, weak and vulnerable are therefore have the need for protection, for support to overcome his shortcomings and actualize his potentials, for food, for shelter, for love and companionship, for justice and most importantly for meaning, especially for the meaning of life in the face of death. These needs are common to mankind and words used in expressing them exist in every culture. Since these needs are at the foundation of every religion and man's need for religion they can be used to develop universal language not only for discourse on God but very importantly, for measuring the "TRUTHFULNESS" of every religion such that those religions that promote these values

are adjudged better than others; better not in the sense of truthfulness but in the sense of serving mankind's better interests.

The proposal here is very important and flows from the answer proffered to the first question, namely that religious language is not a representation of reality but a reflection of the beliefs and experiences of the faith community. In other words, it is a reality created by a social group. What this implies is that the current hostile relationship that exists between people of different religions doesn't in any way reflect an ontological reality either about the nature of God or man but the creation of the adherents of these faiths. As such, it is as well in the hand of the adherents of this faith to create a new mode of relationship that makes for love, brotherhood and mutual coexistence. For instance, Christians and Moslems in Nigeria can decide to create new beliefs and language of communication that abolishes things like blasphemies and promotes love and peaceful coexistence. This is also possible on a global scale so that instead of spending so much energy to debate whether God has a son or not – a doctrine which means different things in Christianity and Islam – Christians and Moslems can use their time more productively to discuss the common fatherhood of God and how such doctrine can be used to solve real problems that humans face in society.

## **Conclusion**

The two most important problems debated by contemporary philosophers of religion are the problem of the meaning of religious language and the problem of the commensurability of religious languages. In this study these two questions were tackled. The study was divided into five sections. The first section, the introduction, laid out the problems and outlines how their resolutions were to be pursued. In the second section, the epistemological background of the problems was exposed. In section three, the status of religious language was explored. In this section, ultra-realism and linguistic relativism, the two dominant theories in the field were interrogated and the verdict was that religious language instead of referring to reality out there in the real world represented the general beliefs, feeling, etc., of adherents of these faiths.

The outcome of this section was used in addressing the two questions posed in the study in sections four and five. In section four, the study argued that if religious language was socially created as found out in section three, then asking whether religious language was meaningful or not became unnecessary and trivial because what would determine that would be the social context under which such languages were created. Section five while accepting the

incommensurability of religious languages, proposed the development of a universal religious language that will be based not on the creed of any religion but on the common need and humanity of mankind. To conclude therefore, this study will recommend spirited efforts on the part of philosophers, linguistics and adherents of major global religions to work in concert to develop the universal language recommended in this work as it would help to mitigate religious and cultural tensions that have become the order of the day in our time. Such universal language will also encourage intercultural and religious dialogues that are of grave need in a time like this.

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