

ordering of chaos into a fixed order or universe. Creation out of nothing did not appear in the Bible until the Greek period when philosophical notion were current. See (2Mc. 7:28); J.L. McKenzie "Aspects of Old Testament Thought", *Op. cit.* p. 744.

20. See Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* trans. by R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p.190.

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POSITIVIST PRINCIPLES AND THE PROBLEM OF RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

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In the early part of this century, it was very common to hear some scholars affirm confidently: "All utterances about the nature of God are nonsensical". Such scholars belong to the group of those who believe that a statement has meaning, if and only if, it is analytic or verifiable. In the thinking of this group, since metaphysical, theological and ethical statements are neither analytic nor, strictly speaking, verifiable, they are meaningless. They provide no knowledge. Neither can they be empirically tested. There are no public and visible evidences to point to in order to establish or refute the claims of such utterances.

In this essay, I will try to re-examine the traditional problem of religious language in the light of the challenge of logical positivism.¹ While it is true that logical positivism is no longer a popular position to maintain², some of its ideas are still to be found, albeit in considerably modified form, in our present day. It is with this in mind that I will address some of the principles and procedures of logical positivism which I believe do contain some fundamental flaws. These flaws weaken considerably the challenge that it poses to the meaningfulness of religious language.

I will try to show, therefore, that contrary to the usual unbridled confidence in scientific language, that the positivist takes to be the norm of language generally, the criteria that govern the use of that language (i.e. the scientific) cannot be justifiably extended to all other forms of language. This is because each language reflects not only the "form of life"³ in which it is in use but also human purpose. Each employs the approach and the logic that is suitable for the purpose which it serves. No language can, in all seriousness, pontificate on the other. The fact is that religious language has significance and meaning in the context in which it is in use, otherwise people would not continue to use it.

Religious Language

Religious language is a form of language that claims to speak about supernatural realities in a manner whose sense or meaning is different from that of ordinary language used in day-to-day human life. In our present, largely secularized, world this form of language has become not

only strange but also problematic. A contemporary thinker⁴ describes the problem in this way:

The empiricist in us finds the heart of the difficulty not in what is said about God, but in the very talking about God at all. We do not know 'what' God is and we cannot understand how the word 'God' is being used.

The problem of religious language would appear, therefore, to center on the logic of apparently meaningless language.

Background

The earliest form of religious language was largely *mythological and anthropomorphic*.⁵ The reality of supernatural beings or religious objects were usually expressed in terms that were derived directly from human experience. Thus, for example, the reality of God was usually expressed in the concrete, especially in nature, where there were events believed to be unusual manifestations of God. He was often seen as a person — a very powerful person who rules over the world. He sometimes intervened in the natural order even though His abode is in heaven. While He is believed to be apprehensible empirically to be the inhabitants of heaven, he can only be apprehended by those on earth through divine providence in dreams, visions etc. Gradually however, mythological ideas were left behind. God was no longer to be found in the sky, heavens or in the mountains. Neither could He be seen nor perceived by the ordinary human senses.

Alongside this naive supernaturalism there was another way in which religious ideas were expressed. It was what served as the root of *traditional theism*. A classical example of it can be seen in John 1: 18 (God no man hath seen at any time). As man's knowledge of natural processes increased, the religious man began to see the presence of God and His power as being of "another kind" rather than physical presence and natural power. Theologians and philosophers began to build up metaphysical systems about God and the supernatural order. On the other hand, however, there grew gradually the conviction especially among religious people that metaphysical language was not really biblical language.⁶

It was actually from another direction that religious language became acutely problematic. With the development of modern science and tech-

nology it became possible for man to account for most things in terms of other things in the world. Previously, usual explanations for both common and uncommon things were often essentially religious or spiritualistic. Religious assertions then presented no great problem. With the growth in human knowledge especially noticeable in modern science and technology the "strange" assertions of the religious man has become very problematic. For the terms used in expressing religious ideas have become highly ambiguous.

It must be noted that the awareness of the ambiguity, obscurity or obliqueness inherent in religious language had always been there ever since religious man began to reflect on some of his religious beliefs. This was sometimes brought about as a result of the scathing criticisms that his archaic and naive ways of talking about the supernatural faced. New ways of talking had to be evolved. For talking about the supernatural order in words normally designed to cater for human characteristics and activities would not do.

Partly as a result of this, there grew the notion of the inexpressibility of what is most important in religious experience. If, however, religious experience was to be absolutely inexpressible, it would logically follow that the attempt to express the content of religious beliefs in words would be impossible. Silence would be the only resort, for, in the famous words of Wittgenstein,

What one cannot speak about

One must pass over in silence.⁷

Adherents of religious faiths are, however, almost notorious for their habit of expressing their beliefs in speech and writing. Despite any shortcomings inherent in his utterances, the religious man had to look for a way of expressing his ideas and beliefs.

While he was acutely aware of the fact that his religious statements may not possess the clarity of normal mundane or secular assertions, he nonetheless, presumed the factual or cognitive character of his statements. He believed that if one could get an idea of what was being talked about then it could surely be taken to be legitimate. Moreover, having a unique subject matter the religious statement should not be taken in exactly the same sense as any other form of statement. He believed that religious statements constitute a special use of language. In this way the

religious man believed that he had found some form of justification for his religious assertions. He soon discovered, however, that this reprieve was a transient, if not a totally false, one. For the temporary relief in no way lessens the nature of the problem of religious language. It has to be shown in what sense the terms used are to be taken and what kind of functions the language performs.

According to Professor John Hick⁸ the discussion of these issues generally centres around one of two main problems. The first concerns the special sense that descriptive terms bear when they are applied to supernatural subject matter while the second is concerned with the basic functions of religious language. It is often asked if human language can validly talk about the supernatural, a finite tool for an infinite referent. This is because to talk about the supernatural in words that are normally designed to cater for human characteristics and activities can only reduce it to anthropomorphic terms. There is no running away from the fact that every human word uttered has a referent that is solidly embedded in a human context. To insist, therefore, that statements about supernatural realities have a meaning that if indefinable in human terms is surely a denial of knowledge of the real meaning of the words used about them.

Logical Positivism and Religion

Such problematic issues that had, for long bedeviled religious language have been given close attention and brought into sharp focus by contemporary work in the philosophy of religion. This attention was initially kindled by the desire to respond to the empiricist critique⁹ of metaphysics and religious beliefs, most especially the language involved.

It must be remarked that linguistic problems have always been endemic especially in western philosophical thought. The fact is that philosophers had always been interested in language and linguistic analysis even if some of them were not fully aware of this fact.¹⁰ Today the most important criticism of religious language comes from what Weelfel calls "a revitalized logical positivism aided by analytic methods".¹¹ It is a phenomenon that represents a revival of extreme empiricism (knowledge comes from experience or through the senses as opposed to rationalism) combined with formal logic.

The positivism had developed a criterion they believed would enable one to distinguish between factual and nonfactual statements. In the process a challenge was directed against the meaningfulness of many metaphysical and religious statements especially that of belief in God.

The logical properties of scientific statements, the same should hold for the logic of religious language if it is to be taken as meaningful. They concluded that this was not the case. Most religious statements, they say, are examples of uses of language that are devoid of any meaning. They claim that for example, such a proposition like "God exists" is cognitively meaningless as it lacks any clear sense. In their view, it is not that we lack evidence that "God exists" alone but that we do not even know what it means to make the assertion that He exists.

Generally, it was held that language had at least three important functions: statement of facts, expression of feeling and calculations both in logic and mathematics. This is to say that for the positivists these were three kinds of statements: the empirically verifiable, the emotive and the analytic. The immediate problem for religious language was where it rightly belonged among the three. Failing to qualify as empirical or analytic, metaphysical as well as religious statements were taken to be purely emotive. They "are like laughing, lyrics and music expressive."¹²

The change that religious statements are cognitively "meaningless" was first made by the Viennese Philosophical Movement, the brainchild of the "Vienna Circle."¹³ The Movement has been variously called logical empiricism, "scientific empiricism", "logical positivism" etc. The works of the scholars were based largely on the recent logical and scientific concepts of the time. The Circle was deeply influenced by the doctrine espoused by Ludwig Wittgenstein.¹⁴ He had presented his ideas almost in the form of revelation in his famous book, *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* where he made such assertions as:

Language disguises thought

*Most of the propositions and questions to be found in philosophical works are not false but nonsensical. Most of the propositions and questions of Philosophers arise from failure to understand the logic of our language.*¹⁵

Moreover, he insisted that all philosophy does is in the nature of providing a "critique of language."¹⁶ According to him the primary task of philosophy.

*Consists essentially of elucidation. Philosophy does not result in 'philosophical propositions', but rather in the clarification of propositions.*¹⁷

The Vienna logical positivists built on ideas such as these. They believed that language was one thing that was common to all sciences because all of them use it as a means of expression and communication. They, therefore, sought for a system that would include the sciences. They studied the language of some particular science as well as the analysis of language generally in order to be able to find a universal language of science. They came to the conclusion that scientific statements were to be taken as the norm for all language. They were considered to be empirically viable and objective as well as satisfying other necessary criteria.

Verificational Analysis

The heart of logical positivism and the basis of its attack on the meaningfulness of religious statements was the verifiability theory of meaning. Verificational analysis, a basic tool of the movement had two forms. One takes distinctive positions on the nature and purpose of religion especially on the question of meaning. The other focuses on the proper methods of philosophical analysis.

Verificational analysis insists that language should communicate facts or at least establish verbal conventions. If language is to be meaningful, its terms or signs must at least bear some relationship, that should be definite and dependable to one another. Frequently compared to a game,¹⁶ if the rules governing language were permitted to shift and vary indiscriminately, the point of language, which is to communicate, would be lost.

According to verifiability theory of meaning there are two types of meaningful statements — the analytic and the synthetic. Analytic statements are those statements which are true

*"by virtue of meanings and independently of fact"*¹⁶

The positivists included among such statements, definitions and the truth of mathematics and logic. Synthetic statement, on the other hand, are statements whose truth-value is determined by experience. What then, is the essential meaning that synthetic statements convey? Verificational analysis claims that the meaning of a sentence is the method of its verification. On this point, the meaning of a sentence, for the philosopher, is not to be equated with mental facts about the speaker. A genuinely meaningful statement should provide a number of possible

sense — experience that would be relevant to its verification.

A variation of the verification principle is that of falsifiability. In this principle, the emphasis is shifted from the search for possible experiences as the criterion for verification to those that would falsify an assertion. Accordingly, for an assertion to be meaningful what would count against its truth must be known. With typical religious assertions like "God exists", "God is great", "God is merciful", etc. the possibility of their not being true would not readily be admitted by a true believer. These kinds of expressions are, therefore, shown to be meaningless on purely logical grounds. J. Macquarrie²⁰ puts the situation thus:

A man is crossing the street and gets narrowly missed by a bus. He says, 'God loves me,' for the bus did not hit me'. On another occasion he is struck by a bus and injured. This time he says, 'God loves me, for the bus did not kill me'. Finally he is actually killed by the bus. But now his friends say, 'God loves him, for he has called him out of this unhappy and sinful world.' The ground of verification shifts each time, and it seems that nothing that might happen would be taken as falsifying the religious belief.

The most notable proponent of this view has been Professor Antony Flew.²¹ He claims that nothing would really make the sophisticated religious people admit that their so-called meaningful assertions are in fact vacuous. No circumstances, real or imagined, would be readily accepted by them as falsifying them. Thus such assertions must be rejected on purely logical grounds.

Overall verificational analysis is harshly critical of religious and metaphysical statements. Religious language claims to make assertions about the supernatural but verificational analysis contends that it fails to refer beyond natural phenomenon. As to the claim that religious language states necessary truth, it is asserted that inasmuch as it is involved in logical contradictions it necessarily falls into falsehood. Instead of possessing deep significance, religious language can only provide incomprehensibility coloured with emotion. The abandonment of religious language is clearly indicated.

It must be noted, however, that to abandon the right of using religious language implies abandoning many important aspects of religion. In the first place, without language, there would not be any medium of communicating the cognitive claims of religion. Secondly, public liturgical

worship would be impossible. It would also be impossible for religious people to achieve their most cherished past time, to share and acknowledge common experiences and beliefs. Thirdly, the loss of language would mean the end of organised religion. Without the vehicle of its formulation no belief can be known and acknowledged. Even private religion made wordless would definitely become vague and degenerate into amorphous feeling-states. The importance of language for higher thought, disciplines and abstract thought can hardly be overstated. To abandon religious language would definitely mean dismissing religion as an important human activity.

Appraisal

On the face of it the arguments of the logical positivists against religious language are quite strong indeed. A close look, however, reveals some flaws in the positivists position and consequently the status of the verificational analysis as a definitive arbiter on the issue of language.

According to its proponents, the main aim of verificational analysis is to analyse and clarify the language of common sense and that of science. In the process, meaningless metaphysical and religious talks of realities that transcend sense-experience are supposed to be eliminated. There are at least two immediate difficulties in this aspect of the positivists approach. On the one hand, there is the identification of meaning with verification. This had meant a reduction of the meaning of a statement to the method of its verification. If verification is no more than a direct empirical observation, however, statements about the past and the future would be eliminated. Moreover, there are many meanings that are difficult if not impossible to express satisfactorily. It is commonplace to hear people, especially poets and authors, struggle to express their feelings in words. It is conceded nonetheless, that we do not classify what cannot be expressed as nothing. As John Wisdom²² has pointed out, unsayable experiences must not be measured by mainly linguistic criteria. In fact the philosopher must strive to enunciate properly what is proving difficult to express.

On the other hand, such general propositions as those of the natural sciences would as well be eliminated if conclusive and complete verification were to be demanded. The fact, however, is that many of the entities that are assumed without proof to be true or real by the natural sciences are not directly observable by sense-experience. Thus there are limited empirical propositions that can really survive severe verification. A.J.

Ayer concedes that other general propositions are no more than mere "hypotheses which are continually subject to the fact of further experience."²³

Overall, two closely related sets of questions are opposite in this discussion. Firstly, on purely logical grounds have the positivists been successful in showing that metaphysical or religious statements are meaningless? How successful are they in discussing language in total separation from the question of how language is related to fact or reality? Secondly, how consistent have they been in their claim to have substituted logic for metaphysics or religion? It must be remembered that they limit their consideration to the language of common sense and that of science as well as limit their philosophical statements to those that are analytic with respect to these languages.

As E. Cell²⁴ has pointed out in this connection the Positivists are not consistent for two obvious reasons. On the one hand, the restriction of philosophical statements to those that are purely analytic alone means that the purpose of clarification of language cannot really be achieved. Actually, on the positivists' own account no real information is conveyed. Thus, one wonders how such a proposition of statement can be known to be true. On the other hand, if all philosophical statements are analytic, a philosophic statement can surely not eliminate any sort of language as meaningless. It must be borne in mind that analytic statements simply illustrate part of the logic of one sort of language. Thus to draw attention to one type of meaning is to indicate that it is not another type.

Proposed as such, an analytic statements is intended to be a clarification of the logic of the language of science and common-sense. To say that it defines literal or indicative meaning is to attempt to employ those terms to refer to the logic of these languages alone. This would of course, be a radical departure from ordinary common-sense usage. In ordinary language, for example, it would be unusual to refer to value-statements as nonsense or meaningless. On a strict analytic basis, therefore, the verificational principle fails to eliminate not only metaphysics but also any other language. Rather, it appears to point to the fact that metaphysical or religious statements are not to be verified in the same manner as that of scientific statements. By taking analytic and synthetic statements as a norm or measuring rod for all language, the logical positivists disregard too much of the rest of language.

In the final analysis, there are at least three basic criticisms that appear to eliminate the possibility of the logical positivists' approach as a real

threat to religious language. In the first place the status of the basic tool of logical positivism, the verification principle, itself, is questionable. As a principle it is not self-sufficient. It relies heavily on extra-linguistic data to carry out its function. Moreover, the principle is not verifiable by sense-data. It employs persuasive definition in making distinctions between empirical and non-empirical concepts and statements. Secondly, the positivists' reliance on sense-data has serious implications because theories and concepts especially as are obtainable in the sciences have to be ruled out. Empiricism however, relies often on theories and concepts. Thus the positivists' position is seriously undermined. Thirdly, despite its rejection of metaphysics, logical positivism has an implied metaphysics of its own. In fact while purporting to be dealing with problems of language, it makes covert and uncritical ontological assumptions.

In conclusion, one can justifiably say with J. Urmson, "every type of language has its own logic."²⁵ Each language reflects different interests. It may be scientific, artistic, moral, religious etc. Each area normally employs the approach and logic appropriate for its own purpose. There is no foolproof evidence to show that the empirical is the only acceptable type of language. Since they use different parameters and different approaches, serve different purposes and functions, none can really pontificate on the other.

Notes and References

1. Logical positivism holds that only empirically verifiable or analytic propositions are meaningful.
2. Kai Nielsen, for example, states categorically that logical positivism is "stone dead." Many of those scholars who originally identified actively with the position have since revised their views considerably. *Contemporary Critiques of Religion*, (London and BasinStoke: Macmillan, 1971), p. 31.
3. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans., G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell & New York: Mott, 1958) p. 47.
4. Paul Van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel*, (London), Macmillan co., 1963. p. 84
5. This view and the succeeding one, traditional theism, are largely derived from J. Wm. McClendon's article "Can there be talk about God-and-the-world", *HARVARD THEOLOGICAL REVIEW*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (Jan. 1969,) pp. 39-14.
6. cf. Blaise Pascal's distinction between the God of the philosopher and "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" — *Pensees*, trans., W.F.

7. L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico — philosophicus*, trans., D.F. Pears & B.F. McGuiness. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; New York The Humanities Press, 1968) p. 74 (7).
8. J. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 76
9. Empiricists take personal sense-experience as the sole valid criterion of knowledge. As a result they reject *a priori* first principles, metaphysical and religious assertions especially about supernatural realities.
10. CF. Frederick Ferre, *Language, Logic and God* (New York Harper and Row, 1961) p. 6
11. James W. Worlfel, "Non-metaphysical' Christian Philosophy and Linguistic Philosophy," *NEW THEOLOGY*, No. 2, edited by M.E. Marty & D.G. Pearman, (New York: Macmillan, 1965), P. 50
12. R. Carnap, *Philosophy and Logical Syntax*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1935), p. 12.
13. This was a group of positivist scholars who were mostly scientists, mathematicians or men who were actively interested in symbolic logic and scientific methodology. The group was headed by Ernest Mach and Moritz Schlick, who succeeded him in 1922. The influence of the movement was eventually felt in the whole of the Western world. The English-speaking world became vividly aware of the impact of the challenge posed by logical positivism through the work of A.J. Ayer. His *Language, Truth and Logic* was first published in London in 1936 by Victor Gollanz Press. The second edition of the book came out in 1946 with substantial modifications. *Language, Truth and Logic* spelt out the main tenets of logical positivism in a popular and percussive form.
14. Other sources of influence included the lead provided in the novel ideas in logic indicated in the works of such scholars as Bertrand Russell and A.N. Whitehead.
15. L. Wittgenstein, Op. Cit, p. 19 (4.002 - 4.004)
16. Idem (4.003)
17. Ibid p. 25 (4.112)
18. Cf. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, especially sections 23, 290 & 184.
19. W.V.O. Quine, "The Two Dogmas of Empiricism" In H.D. Lewis (ed.) *Clarity is not enough*, (London: Allen & Unwin,) P. 111
20. J. Macquarrie *God-Talk, An Examination of the Language and Logic*

21. of *Theology*, (London: SCM, 1967) pp. 108 - 109.
22. A. Flew "Theology and Falsification", *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London: SCM, 1955), pp. 96ff. Also R.W. Hepburn, *Christianity and Paradox: critical studies in Twentieth Century Theology*, (London: Watts, 1958), pp. 9 - 22.
23. J. Wisdom *Philosophy and Psycho-Analysis* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), p. 50.
24. A. Ayer *Language, Truth and Logic*, p. 9
25. E. Cell *Language, Existence and God*, (New York: Abingdon, 1971). p. 94.
26. Philosophical Analysis, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957), p. 179.

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THE CHURCH AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE THOUGHTS OF OBAFEMI AWOLOWO⁽¹⁾

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Introduction

The issue of human development is a perennial one and can never be over-discussed. In this critical and transitional period of the history of our nation, when we hope to bid good-bye to military rule permanently, and hope, also, to return to a democratic civilian rule with a renewed spirit, it is only right to examine the writings of Obafemi Awolowo (1909 - 1987), one of Nigeria's nationalists, and a foremost sage, to see what values and lessons we may learn from him. This is even imperative if we bear in mind that the development of man in the state was the primary concern of his thoughts, writings and career as a christian, journalist, business-man, economist, lawyer and politician.

This paper adopts the expository method, therefore, it examines Awolowo's concept of development, in its relation with its subject matter, man. Finally, and more importantly, it considers the role the Church can and should play in his development and that of the society. It ends with an evaluation.

The Nature of Development

Which ever way one looks at it, there is something complex about the nature of development. This explains perhaps why views, theories and perspectives are many and diverse. Generally, however, one can identify the humanist view-point as well as those of the naturalists. For the humanist, development is meaningful if it projects and uplifts the person and dignity of man as a unique being in the cosmos. On the other hand, the naturalists talk of realization and actualization of the material or physical energy and power that is inherent in the universe in a more or less generic sense. The distinction is necessary especially for the group among the humanists that lays emphasis on the spiritual dimension within an integrative development of man.

Awolowo, like Teilhard de Chardin, belongs to this spiritual segment of the humanist group. For him, development is not a state that is already attained, but a goal and ideal to be achieved. The present state of man is