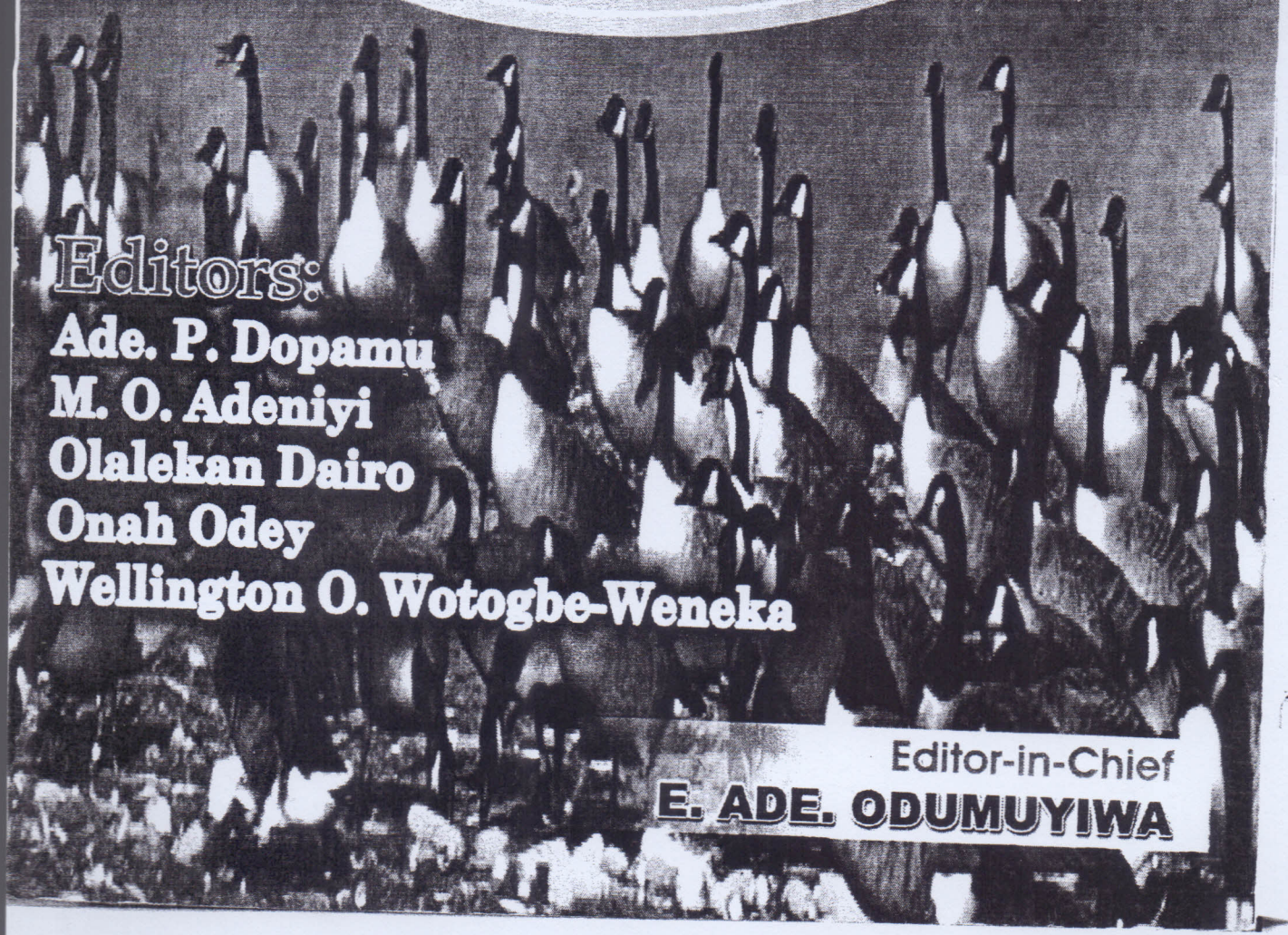
# GOD:

# The CONTEMPORARY DISCUSSION

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Editor-in-Chief
E. ADE. ODUMUYIWA

# God:
# The Contemporary Discussion

TO: Dr Adegoke K
18-09-20

**Editor in Chief**
E. Ade Odumuyiwa

**Editors**

Ade P. Dopamu . M.O. Adeniyi . Olalekan Dairo . Onah Odey . Wellington O. Wotogbe-Weneka

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# DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Ven. Professor J. Omosade Awolalu, who retired as a Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Ibadan. He founded The Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions (NASR), in 1975, and was the foundation President from 1975-1979. He was an official member of the Executive of the International Association of the History of Religions (IAHR), the parent body of NASR, and he is still an honorary member of the Executive of IAHR. He is celebrating his 80th birthday on October 30, 2005. We wish him Happy Birthday, Long Life of Peace, Happiness, Good Health and Prosperity

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# FOREWORD

Religions cannot but discuss God. Many years ago man had been talking about God, and in the contemporary time, discussions continue about God. *God: The Contemporary Discussion*, is a very suitable title for this book, which contains philosophical, religious, social, theoretical, moral and ethical discussions about God in the twenty first century.

This book contributes a lot to the on-going modern debate about God. The intrinsic nature of God, together with the metaphysical concept that people have about God calls for discussion about Him. The attributes of God within the limitations in human language vis-à-vis the problem of evil in our society, prompt philosophers, scientists, theologians, humanists and sociologists to contribute to the on-going debate about God.

More light has been shed on how best God could be discussed and understood in the twenty first century as presented by contributors to this book. The book is published by the Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions (NASR) to promote better understanding of the discussions of God among scholars. It is a book that enhances the knowledge of students, researchers and teachers of religions concerning God. Since discussion about God is ad-infinitum, this book forms the basic foundation for further research to enable humanity to understand God the more. This is very necessary today in view of scientific discoveries that are challenging religious views and beliefs.

However, it is not for academics alone. The book will also water the appetite of people that have anything to do with God. It is, therefore, specially recommended for reading by the public, particularly the priests, adherents of the three major religions practised in Nigeria and scholars in other disciplines. No doubt, the book will enrich their understanding of God.

It is clear that human beings cannot fully comprehend and apprehend God. We will continue to learn and know Him as He reveals Himself to us from time to time. Future researchers are,

therefore, challenged by the contents of this book to carry out more researches about God who is the anchor of all theistic religions. When this is done, more revelations about God would be explored. This will, indeed, help us to meet the challenge of atheism, agnosticism, scientific discoveries and dwindling interests in religion.

**Professor E. Ade Odumuyiwa**
***Editor-in-Chief***

# PROBLEM OF EVIL AND HEADSHIP OF GOD IN YORUBA, CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAMIC BELIEFS

*Adegoke Kazeem Adekunle*

**Introduction**

The concept of evil and headship of God is one of the seriously debated issues in the ancient as well as contemporary period among religious scholars and philosophers. The problems of evil become more serious among religionists and philosophers who uphold that both evil and God exist, even though they argue it from different perspectives. The religionists argue the existence of evil and God with the method of dialectical argument while the philosophers argue it with philosophical speculative reasoning. The notable point in their argument on the existence of evil and God appears as if the confirmation of one is the denial of the other. This is where the problem arises in the concept of evil and theistic headship of God. This problem rests on the contention of the following theistic claims which go thus:

- (a) God exists and is essentially Omni-potent, Omniscient and perfectly good.
- Evil really exists
- (c) A perfectly good being would always eliminate evil so far as it could
- (d) An Omniscient being would know all above evils

(e) There is no limit to what an Omnipotent being can do.

It should be noted that the conjunction of any four of the above propositions entails the denial of the fifth proposition. For instance, the conjunction of proposition C and E with either proposition A or B would suggest that the others are false. It as a result of this development that some atheistic philosophers atheologically advanced an argument against the existence of God.

## Definition of Terms

The term "Problem" could be rightly described as a difficult idea suggestion, hypothesis put forward for reasoning, solution or decision. Hornby defines Problem as "a question to be solved or decided, especially something difficult." West and Endicott regard "evil" as "bad, harmful and misfortune."[1] Thus, evil is universally seen as something likely to bring misfortune or trouble to a person. The term "God" is defined as a most Supreme Being believed to be the Creator and Ruler of the Universe.[2]

## Origin of Evil

Origin of evil in African Religion, Christianity and Islam is attributed to two theories of evil which are as follows:

## Dualistic Theory

Dualistic theory of evil asserts that there are two forces or powers which are controlling the affairs of universe. They are forces or power of good and evil. This theory stress that force or power of good is controlled and masterminded by God while the force or power of evil is controlled and master-minded by the Devil, (Esu, Satan or Shaytan) who is always at war with anything good. The Dualistic theory of evil is upheld by African Religion, Christian sect of Manichaesim and Muslim sects of Mu'tazilah and Qadariyyah.[3]

## Monistic Theory

Monistic Theory of evil believes that God is the Ultimate behind everything existing in the universe. Thus, evil is a mere illusion and non-entity as the concept of evil is relative to the choice and need of man. Therefore, what is evil to someone may not be evil to others who would benefit from it. Evil is seen as a lower good to man according to man's need at a particular time. The monistic theory is upheld by a Christian Saint named Saint Augustine, and majority of Muslim sects such as Ash'ariyyah, Shi'ah, and Ahlu's Sunnah.[4]

**Kinds of Evil**

There are three kinds of evil in the Universe namely metaphysical evil, moral evil and physical evil.

**Metaphysical Evil**

Metaphysical Evil is a kind of evil based on abstract reasoning of man on the nature of existence, truth and acknowledgement of particular phenomena in the Universe. This kind of evil consists of man's limitation and imperfection within the created order in the universe. In fact, it is the extent to which man falls short of the ultimate reality of a particular phenomenon in his environment. Thus, every finite human mind is infinitely evil to him because his acknowledgement about the nature of evil is highly limited especially when the discovery and invention on the nature of such an evil could not be further extended.[5]

**Moral Evil**

Moral evil generates a lot of controversy among the people from various walks of life because of its relativity and subjectivity to time and place. What constitute morality in a place and at a time may be considered to be an immorality in another place and at another time. Moral evil is regarded as a human product. This is the reason why the philosophers give three interpretations of the nature and feature of moral evil. For instance. Socrates holds that moral evil is a complete deviation from goodness, Stoic-Spinozists sees it as a mere illusion which does really exist while Leibniz sees it as a contrast necessary for the existence of goodness and a necessity for perfect world order.[6]

**Physical Evil**

Physical Evil is a kind of evil for which man's freedom is not directly responsible for its occurrence. This evil is built in the world order of the universe by God Himself in order to maintain peaceful order of the universe. It is a product of non-human agency, though, it serves as a human's experience, calamity and fate in the universe. Some

examples of this evil are death, sickness, disaster, misfortune, penury, and other various forms of agony.[7]

## Concept of God in Yoruba, Christianity and Islamic Beliefs

The concept of God is widely and generally accepted in almost all the religions that exist in the universe. The headship of God is the center of attraction of the creed and ideology of every religion irrespective of the place and mode of worship. This is the reason why the definition of any form of religion is debatable if it could not offer a relationship between man (worshipper) and God (object of worship).[8]

In the belief of Yoruba Religion, God, popularly known as "*Olodumare*", is recognized as the Creator of the Universe and its contents (*Eledaa*). He has varied two hundred names and one thousand and two hundred cognomen (*Oriki*), on the basis of His benevolent attitude to his entire creatures.[9] Some of His names are *Olorun* (Owner of heaven), *Eledaa* (creator), *Alaanu* (Merciful God), *Alewilese* (Acclaimed Doer), *Eletigbaroye* (Hearer), *Arinurode* (All Awared God), etc.[10] It is believed in Yoruba Religion that God sent various prophets (*Orisa*) and deities (*Irunmole*) to facilitate the way of rendering service and worship to Him. Thus, these Prophets and deities are regarded as agents of intermediary between man and God through which their requests are presented to God.[11]

God in Christianity is also regarded as sole Creator of the universe and its content.[12] He is one with the three headship of God namely God of the father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Doctrine of Trinity). God is taken as the father of man and He is so Merciful that He sent His only begotten son (Jesus Christ) to the universe as a sacrificial lamb for the salvation of mankind.[13] In Christianity, God cannot be directly approached by man except through His son (Jesus Christ) who can guide him to the way of salvation. God is believed to have had various names such as Eli, Jehovah, Jah, Father, Love, etc. Thus, God is personal, peaceful and loving towards man.[14]

God in Islam is one and has no associate or equal among His creatures (Mukhalafah lil-Hawadith) as He is the sole creator of everything (Khaliq). He is everlasting (Al-Qadim), all-Powerful (Al-Qadir), all-Knowing (Al-Alim) and all-Hearing (As-Sami'). He loves

justice, truthfulness, kindness, peace and noble deeds. He hates injustice, tyranny, falsehood, arrogance, cruelty and wickedness. Any of His creatures should not be worshipped at His expense. He is popularly known as Allah with different ninety-nine names and several attributes. In order to facilitate His message to mankind, He sent several prophets and apostles (Nabiyy and Rasul) with divine scripture (Kutubu's-Samawiyyat) for man's guidance.[15]

**Problems of Evil and Headship of God in Religious Theodicies**

Problem of evil and headship of God in the contemporary theodicies of Yoruba Religion, Christianity and Islam is a highly sensitive issue that should not be taken with a pinch of salt. This problem has generated a lot of controversy and engaging debate from these three religions from time immemorial up to the present day. Without mincing words, the problem has succeeded in bringing up the proliferation of religious denomination in both Christianity and Islam. The problems arisen from the concept of evil and headship of God can be summarized into the following hypothesis.

Does evil exist? Is it God or other being? Why does He want to punish the evildoer? If God does not like evil, why does He not eradicate it once and for all since He is all Powerful? If evil is created by other being different from God, does that not mean that such a being created what God Himself could not create? Then if God is all-powerful, why does He allow such a being to create what He could not create or to create what He dislikes?

The problem of evil and headship of God attracts less debate and controversy in the creed of Yoruba Religion than exists in both Christianity and Islam. In Yoruba Religion, problem of evil is attributed to the two concepts namely: the concept of *Ori* (Head) and the concept of *Akunleyan* (fate).[16] It is upheld in Yoruba belief that before man is born, he kneel before *Olodumare* (God) requesting for his fate (*Akunleyan*) during which he asks for his needs and wants for his existence during the period of his sojourning on earth. Whatever he asks for on that occasion becomes his lot on earth.[17] This is the reason for the Yoruba wise saying that goes:

*Akunleyan ni adayeba, a de ile aye tan, oju nkan gbogbo wa*

Meaning:

> It is our destined fate that we pass through on earth. Despite this, we do not want to accept the fate when we got to the earth.

After choosing one's fate (Akunleyan), man goes to *Obatala*, the god of creation, to choose *Ori* (head) according to his desire. By this, whatever occurs to him on earth whether evil or good, depends on his choice of *Ori* (head) when he was choosing his *Akunleyan* (Fate).[18] Yoruba also uphold that there are cultic-practising people who could bring evil to man by changing his *Ori* and *Akunleyan* from good to bad fate out of their envious attitude of such a man or through the misbehaviour of such a man to them. These cultic people are known as *Aje* (witch) and *Oso* (wizard). They are ever ready to deal with anybody stepping on their toes by casting spell on him during the night when they use to assembly for their cultic meeting. It is in this meeting that the fate of their offender would be decided and dealt with accordingly. In short, Yoruba Traditional belief completely alienates God (*Olodumare*) from the blame of evil and misfortune befalling a man. The evil is not naturally caused but through the man himself or from his fellow man in the society.[19]

In Christianity, the problem of evil and headship of God is place on metaphysical assumption of evil which is passed from the Socratic Greek thought to Christian theology through the works of Saint Augustine of Hippo and Saint Aquinas. The Socratic Greek thought emanated from Socrates who opines that evil is not carried out intentionally and knowingly but due to man's ignorance, mistake, accident, coercion and incapacity from eternal force. Christianity attributes only goodness to God and attributes evil to devil (Satan) who is ever ready to destroy good work of God. It goes on to explain that the prevalence of evil on earth is due to inherited original sin from Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when they ate the forbidden fruit in defiance of the order of God. Thus, it is the curse of this original sin that leads man to prefer doing evil to goodness and thereby weakly putting himself against God's limit.[20] The above reflection tends to suggest that

the existence of evil in the universe is a reality but nevertheless it contends that evil is subjected to God's power and control.

Manicheans Christians opines however that there are two kingdoms, namely: "light" kingdom which is governed by God and "Dark" kingdom which is governed by Satan (devil). Thus, God created man with pure element but he was made a prisoner by Satan who planted in him the seed of darkness. Since that time, man has become a subject of struggle between God and Satan (devil).[21] The stand upheld by Manicheans is dualistic theory of evil which was opposed by the orthodox Christian in the council of Toledo in 589 C.E. This council accepted the fact that evil really exists but not on the basis of dualism. As a result of this, they trapped themselves in a contradiction, as their stand has robbed God of His omnipotence.[22] In order to exonerate God from this mess, Saint Augustine of Hippo opines that God is an ultimate good and reality. By this, evil is a mere defect in human being and cannot exist independent of good things. He borrowed from the view of Plotinus that what appears to be evil when seen in isolation or in a limited context may be wholly good when viewed in totality. This view as upheld by Saint Augustine and Plotinus tends towards monistic theory of evil.[23]

The problem of evil is also a critical and controversial issue in Islam to the extent that two schools of thought emerged on the basis of this problem. These schools of thought are Mu'tazilah founded by Wasil Ibn At,a' (d. 748) in the eighth century of Christian era, and Ash'ariyyah founded by Abu al-Hasan Ali Ibn Ismail al-Ash'ari (d.945) in tenth century of Christian era. Both schools of thought uphold the view that evil and God (Allah) really exist. The bone of contention between them is the authorship of evil and identification of evil in the society. On the issue of authorship of evil, the Mu'tazilah maintains dualistic theory of evil by arguing that God is not the author of evil and can never be the author of evil. They opine that man, himself is the author of evil carried out by him and this is the main reason why he is to be held responsible for it. They believe that any action (good or evil), which proceeds from man, takes place by his power, freewill and the choice endowed on him by God. Therefore, he is not forced (Ghayr Majbur) to act as he does, because he can act and he can refrain from acting if he wishes.

If man were not held responsible for his action, then his *taklif* (responsibility) would be impossible and questionable. By this, he would neither be regarded as an obedient nor disobedient fellow and therefore would not be due for reward or punishment for his action. Should God decide to punish or reward him for evil or goodness he is not responsible for, that would be injustice and God is far exalted above such attribute.[24] The problem arisen from this Mu'tazilah view is that the theory has partially robbed God of the power of creation and has extolled the concept of dualism in the creation, both of which run contrary to the oneness and uniqueness of God in everything and concept of Islamic monotheism (Tawhid).[25]

On the issue of identification of evil, Mu'tazilah upholds the view that evil is not evil because God declares it to be so, but because such a thing is evil in itself and this could be easily identified the man's reasoning faculty. By this, nothing is known to be good or evil until reason has enlightened man on its nature. God, Himself makes the distinction between good and evil on account of their being good and evil as the goodness or evilness of a thing is innate in the essence of such a thing in itself.[26]

Ash'ariyyah holds that God is the doer of everything as He is the Willer of all contingent existence, be it good or evil, virtue or vice, faith or unbelief. The authorship of any action should not be attributed to any creature rather than God who is the sole Creator of everything. Man can neither create anything even if he wills to do so nor does man's power produce any effect on his actions at all. God only creates in him power (*qudrah*) and choice (*ikhtiyar*) by enabling man to carry out actions corresponding to the power and the choice thus created in him. By this, God creates the action of creature whether in its initiative and production, which is finally acquired (*iktasaba*) by the creature.

The concept of acquisition of action (*kasb*) as it is upheld by Ash'ariyyah points out that man's action is made to correspond to God's power and the choice previously created in him, without him having had the slightest notion of the action, while God is the creator and the actor behind the scene. It is the man's acquisition of the action that will make him responsible for the action.[27] At this juncture, it could be rightly said that the authorship of evil as enunciated by Ash'ariyyah is not free from logical and ethical difficulties. These difficulties lie in

their inability to reconcile the absolute determination of all actions by God with the man's accountability and responsibility for his deeds.

On the identification of evil, the Ash'ariyyah maintains different opinion from the Mu'tazilah's on the question of whether the evil could be identified by man's reasoning faculty or by textual revelation (Qur'an). Despite the fact that both Ash'ariyyah and Mu'tazilah admit the necessity of reason for the rational understanding of the Islamic faith, they differ with regard to the question of whether the reason or revelation is to get preference. Ash'ariyyah maintains that only textual revelation is the ultimate truth for the identification of evil because the human reasoning merely confirms what is accepted by textual revelation and if there be a conflict between the two, textual revelation is to be preferred and the human reasoning must be in line and conformity with the textual revelation (Qur'an).[28]

**Possible Solution and Recommendations to the Problems of Evil**

Both monistic and dualistic theory should be reconciled together to bring out possible solution to the problems of evil. It is undisputable fact that God is the ultimate Being behind everything that occurs in the world, as nothing can take place without His knowledge. Despite this, God does not command nor wish human being to cause evil to himself, talk-less of causing evil to his fellow beings. Both goodness and evil are created by God; He does not condone evil.

God, the Omniscient and Knower of secret and manifested things is fully aware of any action taking place in the world on every dire minute. Whatever action that affects man is for the man's benefit, though he may not be aware of this due to his short-sightedness and his inability to know what is hidden from him. What man regards as an evil may be a form of goodness to him at the long run.

The people in the society should uphold relativity of concept of evil. The reading an action to be evil could be subjected to two things namely the personality of the person concerned and nature of the action. What is regarded as evil to one man may not be regarded as evil to another man. For instance, it is evil to lose one's money but it is goodness for someone who finds it. It is evil for the loosing team but a form of goodness for the winning team in a football match. Similarly,

the nature of evil also determines its goodness and evilness. For instance, sickness and illness are regarded as evil for man, but they are not evil for the medical practitioners who would get his income from such fate. Crime is regarded as societal evil, but is it evil for the law enforcement agents and legal experts? Even, what is regarded as evil when seen in isolation or in a limited context may not be evil at all when viewed in totality. As a result of the relativity concept of evil, some philosophers such as Plotinus and religionists such as Saint Augustine take evil as a mere illusion in the mind of man and which is relative to the choice and need of such a man.

Man should also uphold the concept of destiny. This concept of destiny is known as Qadar in Islam and as *Ayanmo* in the Yoruba belief. This concept of destiny asserts that whatever happens to man, irrespective of the goodness and evilness of the action to him, has been predetermined for him by God before he ever comes to the earth. God is in the best position to decide the affair of man whom he created. And as God creature, man should accept whatever befalls him with patience and good faith. Thus, whatever is predetermined by God for man shall come to pass no matter how perfect such a person is.

Evil should be seen as a necessity in the peaceful organization of human society in order to keep society going on smoothly. Evil must exist in order to maintain social order in the community. If there is no evil, how could man know and appreciate goodness. If there is no casualty, how would medical practitioner survive. If no one dies, how would coffin maker and undertaker survive? By this, what is evil to you as single soul in a society may be a form of goodness to several souls in the same society.

The last but not the least is the belief in the uniqueness of the actions of God, which sharply differ from that of man. Thus, the conception of God's action, whether good or evil should be understood in a unique sense and never taken with limited human understanding. God's conception is conception of goodness and evil is a pole apart from that of man's conception. What man sees as a form of goodness or evil may be a trial from God in order to confirm the faith and steadfastness of such a man in God's omnipotence. Apart from this, goodness and evil can only be known through the textual revelation from God, whereas man's knowledge of goodness and evil is attributed

to his societal nature and experience which are thickly coated with his self-centred attitude.

## Conclusion

This study has discussed "Problem of Evil and Headship of God in Yoruba, Christianity and Islamic Beliefs". It was revealed that both *God and Evil* exist and that one cannot serve as a negation of the other. There is a strong link between the concept of evil and religious theodicies in the creed of Yoruba, Christianity and Islam. However, the concept of evil and headship of God constantly reminds man, not only to shun evil and do goodness only but also to refresh their memory of the day of judgement when everyone would be made to give the full account of his deed. It is hoped that this study would motivate further researches into the problems created by the concept of evil to the theism or theistic belief in religions from time immemorial till the present, in order to arrive at a more accommodating solution to it.