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M. O. A. Abdul, *The Religion of Islam*, (Lagos, Islamic Publications Bureau, 1980), p. 40.

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EVIL: MAN'S APPREHENSION OF CONTRARY SITUATION

BY

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Introduction:

Evil is a force that every man whether small or big, young or old, poor or rich struggles with. Unfortunately, the solution to the problem is not always in sight, at least, from the human perspective. Man, down through the ages, has suffered different types of evil either inflicted by God to punish him for his sin or inflicted on him by Satan and his demons to test his faith. Evil is a times self-inflicted as a result of man's greediness and evil desires. Interestingly, the presence of evil in the world is confirmed in the Lord's Prayer where Jesus taught his disciples to pray "...and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil," (Mat. 6:13). In other words, if evil did not exist, Jesus would not have mentioned it in the prayer.

The focus of this paper is to examine evil as the apprehension of man's contrary situation through a historical – empirical approach. Specifically, the paper examines the general and biblical concept of evil; types of evil; causes of evil; and some biblical examples of those who experienced evil. The paper is corroborated with empirical research on the presence, recognition and causes of evil in the world.

General and Biblical concepts of Evil:

Evil has various definitions, one of which is a "powerful force that makes people behave in a cruel way, or wicked behaviour in general"[1]. It is that which is morally wrong and it hinders the realisation of good. It is something that is injurious to moral or physical happiness or welfare of an individual or community. It is a distressful situation in the life of an individual, family, community, state or nation. It is a

bad or an unpleasant situation, which in effect gives pain, unhappiness, misery, sorrow, etc.

Biblically, there are two terms commonly used in the Old Testament to express evil. The first word is **רָעָה**, which is a feminine noun, and it means evil, distress, and injury. The word is used about 310 times in the Old Testament. The word has both religious and moral connotations of evil.[2]The second word is also a feminine noun **צָרָה** which means strait or distress.[3] The word is used to express the distress of the brothers of Joseph when they met him in Egypt (Gen. 42: 21). It is also used to express the hardship and tribulation, which David experienced with Saul (1 Sam. 26:24). Furthermore, the word is used by the Psalmist to indicate troubles in his heart (Psalm 25: 17).[4]

There are three terms commonly used in the New Testament to express evil. The first word is **Κακos** which means "bad, worthless, inferior."[5] The word is used generally in the moral sense of a person (Mat. 24:28). The word is also used of the characteristics, actions, emotions and plans of men. It is the word used in Matthew 7:21 where Jesus regards the heart of man as the seat of evil.

The second word **πονηρος** is an adjective which means evil.[6] In the physical sense, it shows the poor condition of the health of an individual (Mat. 6: 23; Lk. 11: 34). In the moral sense, it shows the wickedness, worthlessness and viciousness of an individual (Mat. 12: 35; Lk. 6:45). Generally **πονηρος** emphasises evil in the sense of dangerous, perilous and harmful situation. It is the word used in Matthew 5: 44-45 where Jesus recognised the presence of enemies and evil in the world.

The third word is **θλίωίς** which means pressing, pressure, sense of oppression, affliction, tribulation".[7] The word- **θλίωίς** is used of the distress that is brought about by outward circumstances (cf. Acts 11: 19; Rom 5:3; 12:12; 2 Cor. 1:8, etc). The word is also used figuratively to indicate the mental and spiritual states of mind (2 Cor. 2:4). Generally, the New Testament evil manifests itself in disease (Rev. 16:2), the non use of the talents (Mat. 25:26), lack of mercy (Mat. 18:32), misfortune (Mat.6: 34; Lk. 18:25; Acts 28:5), and the activities of the present age (Gal. 1:4; Eph. 5:16; 6: 13).[8]

Types of Evil:

There are at least three different types of evil, namely, natural, moral and religious evils.

a. **Natural Evil**: This does not involve human will and act. It is an aspect of nature that works against the welfare of men. Examples of natural evil include: hurricanes, earthquakes, flood, storms, pestilence, volcanic eruption, etc, each of which produces large losses of lives and properties. A recent example of natural evil is the Tsunami disaster of the year, where over 120,000 were confirmed dead in the Asian and East African countries on the coast of Indian Ocean.[9]

b. **Moral Evil:** This evil has its root in lust, greed, hatred, etc. in men. Moral evil involves the will, choice and action of men, the free moral agents. Examples of moral evil are: war, crime, cruelty, class struggles, discrimination, slavery and various forms of injustice. Two recent cases of moral evil include "a 18 year old, Tina Linus, who was bathed with acid by one Godwin Ojim for refusing his love advances"[10] and a "renowned preacher, Rev. P.F. Owa, who was shot by robbers."[11]

c. **Religious Evil:** Religious evil is closely connected with the moral evil. Religiously, evil is an activity that is contrary to the will of God (Job 8:20; Isa. 31:2; Zeph. 1:12). Evil designates experiences which entails physical pain (Num.16:15; 1 Chro.16:22; Psa. 105:15), emotional pain (Gen. 43:6; Num. 11: 10-11) or loss of family member (Ruth1:21). Generally, evil is the opposite of good (Gen. 2: 9; 3:5; Prov. 11:21; Mic. 3:2 etc).

Causes of Evil:

The fact that evil has its ultimate origin in God is established in the Bible. Amos 3:6[b] says:

"Does evil befall a city, unless the LORD has done it?"

Also, Isaiah 45:7 says:

I form the light and create darkness;

I make weal and create woe.
I am the LORD, who do all these things.

Furthermore, Jeremiah 25: 29 says:

For behold, I begin to work evil at the city which is called by my name, and shall you go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished, for I am summoning a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth, says the LORD of hosts.

Therefore, it is implied from the above quoted verses that evil exists in the universe with the permission of God.[12]

Man may not comprehend fully reasons for the existence of evil yet, it is not beyond the control of the Almighty God, the creator of heaven and earth. It should be noted that evil is not listed among the things created at the time of creation but it is older than man as can be inferred in Gen. 2:9 where God planted the tree of life and also the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Secondly, apart from God who has allowed evil in the world, man also has inflicted evil upon himself as a result of sin, wickedness and disobedience. Some Biblical examples include: Adam and Eve who brought evil upon themselves as a result of disobedience to God's command (Gen. 3). Cain who brought evil upon himself with the killing of Abel (Gen. 4), etc. Indeed, man has brought evil upon himself in several ways which include: rejection of God (Isa. 1:4; 9:17; Jer. 7:26) especially in the practice of idolatry (1 Kings 14:9; 16:25; II Kgs. 21:11; Jer. 25:6); abuse of people and exploitation of their property which include causing physical pain (Num. 16:15; Psa. 22:16) harsh slavery in Egypt (Exod. 5: 22-23; Num. 20:15; Deut. 26:6); dishonesty (Gen. 31:7; 44:5; Deut 15:9); demand for immoral relations (Gen. 19:7; Judges 19: 23); verbal abuse (Psa. 27:2); and efforts to kill (I Sam. 25: 34; 26:21; Jer. 38:9).[13]

Finally, Satan is equally identified in the Bible to inflict evil upon people. This, he does directly or through his agents as recorded in 1 Chronicles 21:1 where it was stated that:

"Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel."

A similar story is recorded in Zechariah 3:1-3

> .Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The LORD said to Satan, The LORD rebuke you, Satan.! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire? Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as we stood before the angel.

Biblical Examples:

There are at least two examples of men in the Bible who experienced evil as an apprehension of contrary situation. The first man to consider is Job whom the Bible described as "a blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil" (Job 1:8). The author of Job shows that the source of evil in the world is Satan, the afflicter and accuser of man, who is behind every form of evil in the lives of men. The content of the book of Job shows that he was afraid of evil and he tried his best to prevent it from happening to him and his children. Job also demonstrated his uprightness by sanctifying each of his children and offering sacrifice to God on their behalf with the aim of cleansing them from evil (Job 1:5). But unfortunately, God allowed evil to come upon him. He experienced evil in all aspects of his life (Job 1: 13-21). Roy B. Zuck notes that "in a matter of minutes, Job, a prominently wealthy and godly man, lost all his material possessions, all his children, and his health."[14] His wife and friends did not help him, rather, they added to his problems (Job 2: 9-13). Furthermore, God seemed to be ignoring Job, refusing for a long time to answer him and rise to his cause.[15] But then, one is impressed with the patience of Job as the Bible says in Job 1:22 that :In all this, Job did not sin or charge God with wrong" cf . Job 2:10.

The reaction of Job in chapter 3 of the book to the anticipated evil is exactly opposite of what was said about him in Job 1-2. He bemoaned that he had ever been born and expressed his longing to die.[16] He concluded the chapter by saying:

> For the thing I fear comes upon me,

And what I dread befalls me.
I am not at ease, nor am I quiet;
I have no rest; but trouble comes (Job 3: 25-26).
He also said in Job 30:26 that
But when I looked for good, evil came;
and when I waited for light, darkness came.

It is obvious that Job was disturbed throughout the book especially with the comments of his so-called friends. He needed a mediator, someone who would plead his cause with God (Job 19:25). It should be mentioned that the main problem is not really the existence of evil in the world but the way one responds to it when it comes. And for Job, it is most instructive that the climax of the book is reached when the man had a positive attitude and response to God who allowed the evil to come upon him. After God raised several questions to which Job had no answer, he simply submitted himself to God in repentance (Job 42:1-36). This positive response forms the beginning of better thing for Job.

Another man who experienced evil as an apprehension of contrary situation is prophet Jonah. The main theme of the book of Jonah is the problem of evil.[17] The word evil occurs ten times in the book and it is used in two senses: One, it refers to the wickedness of the people, the Ninevites (1:2; 3:8, 10; 4: 6). Two, it refers to the judgement which is (is not) visited upon human sinfulness by God (4:2), on Jonah and sailors (1:7,8) and on Nineveh (3:10).[18] Evil, in the book of Jonah, has been defined as "a continuum whereby human wickedness sets into motion a chain reaction that leads inevitably to the judgement unless God intervenes."[19]

Jonah, who had the knowledge of the Assyrians and the evil they had done to the Israelites and their neighbours considered preaching to the Ninevites as evil. He was apprehensive that preaching to the Ninevites might lead to their repentance and that God's judgement would no longer come upon them. Therefore, he decided to flee to Tarshish, a different direction, but God overruled. As the people had problem in the ship in which Jonah was, they cast lots so as to know the cause of the evil (Jonah 1:7). The lot fell on Jonah and eventually he was thrown into the sea. However, God

saved Jonah through a fish which He had appointed. The fish vomited Jonah upon the dry land. Thereafter, the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time and he obeyed. Jonah preached to the Ninevites and everyone in the city repented of his evil (Jonah 3:8). Just as Jonah had anticipated, God repented of the evil which He had intended for the Ninevites (Jonah 3:10). God's action did not go down well with Jonah as he regarded God's mercy on the Ninevites as evil (Jonah 4:2). He even prayed that God should take his life as he said, "it is better for me to die than to live." (Jonah 4:3). Summarily, it was the evil in Nineveh and Jonah that prompted much of God's activity in the book of Jonah as rightly noted by Fretheim:

> In the case of Jonah, his disobedience led to the evil of the storm, which God stopped before it achieved its destructive ends. In the case of the Ninevites, their wickedness led to the announcement of judgement, which God stopped because of their repentance.[20]

The Nigerian Situation:

The fact that evil is real in the Nigerian society is noted in an empirical research on the use of imprecatory Psalms.[21] Two of the questions asked in the questionnaire that was widely administered in several denominations in Nigeria, especially the Anglican Communion (Ang), United Missionary Church of Africa (UMCA), Christ Apostolic Church(CAC) , Church of the Lord (Aladura) (CL), Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) are:

1. Do you recognise the presence of evil in the world?
2. Who is the major cause of evil in the world?

The two tables below show the response of the total 494 respondents that responded to the questionnaire.

1. Distribution of respondents by their denominations as to recognition of presence of evil in the world.

DENOM	No	Yes	Total
A. Ang	4	67	71
	5.6%	94.4%	14.4%
	30.8%	13.9%	
B. UMCA	1	84	85
	1.2%	98.8%	17.2%
	7.7%	17.5%	
C. CAC	0	75	75
	0.0%	100.0%	15.2%
	0.0%	15.6%	
D. CL	0	51	51
	0.0%	100.0%	10.3%
	0.0%	10.6%	
E. CCC	6	68	74
	8.1%	91.9%	15.0%
	46.2%	14.1%	
F. Others	2	136	138
	1.4%	98.6%	27.9%
	15.4%	28.3%	
Total	13	481	494
		2.6%	97.4%

There is a significant difference between those who recognise the presence of evil in the world (97.4%) and those who do not (2.6%). This view cuts across the denominations. Therefore, almost every Christian recognises the presence of evil in the world.

2. Distribution of respondents by their denominations as to who is the major cause of evil in world.

DENOM	God	Government	Others	Satan	Self	Total
A. Ang	3	2	3	56	7	71
	4.2%	2.8%	4.2%	78.9%	9.9%	14.4%
	30.0%	33.3%	37.5%	13.4%	13.5%	
B. UMCA	1	2	1	77	4	85
	1.2%	2.4%	1.2%	16.4%	4.7%	17.2%
	10.0%	33.3%	12.5%	18.4%	7.7%	
C. CAC	4	0	0	56	15	75
	5.3%	0.0%	0.0%	74.4%	20.0%	15.2%
	40.0%	0.0%	0.0%	13.4%	28.8%	
D. CL	0	0	0	49		51
	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	96.1%	3.9%	10.3%
	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	11.7%	3.8%	
E. CCC	2	0	3	59	10	74
	2.7%	0.0%	4.1%	79.7%	13.5%	15.0%
	20.0%	0.0%	37.5%	14.1%	19.2%	
F. Others	0	2	1	121	14	138
	0.0%	1.4%	0.7%	87.7%	10.1%	27.9%
	0.0%	33.3%	12..5%	28.9%	26.9%	
Total	10	6	8	418	52	494
	2.0%	1.2%	1.6%	84.6%	10.5%	

A very high percentage of the respondents, 84%, in all the denominations believe Satan is the major cause of evil in the world.

Concluding Remarks:

It has been demonstrated in this paper that:

1. Evil is a force that every man struggles with and it the apprehension of man's contrary situation illustrated in the lives of Job and Jonah. Evil is present in every society. The empirical research shows that 97.4 of the respondents recognised the presence of evil in the world.
2. Evil can be God inflicted or Satan inflicted or even it can be self-inflicted. The empirical research shows that 84.6% of the respondents believe that Satan is the major cause of evil while 10.5% believe that man is the cause of his own evil. Only a small percentage of 2% believe that God caused evil in the world.
3. Even though God is aware of the presence of evil in the world, yet He is not the author of evil in individual's life (James 1:13).

Notes and References:

1. Randolph Quirk, *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*. Third Edition with New words supplement (Edinburgh, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2003), p. 470.
2. F. Brown; S.R. Driver; & G.A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon with An Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrikson Publisher, 1979), p. 949. .
3. Ibid. p. 865.
4. Ibid.
5. W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-Lexicon of the New testament and other Early Christian Literature*

Second Edition, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 397-8.

6. Ibid., pp. 690-1.

7. Ibid., p. 362.

8. Duane F. Watson, "Evil" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Edited by David Noel Freedman et al (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:678.

9. For detailed, see Theophilus Abbah, "Tsunami of the Year" *Sunday Punch* January 2, 2005, pp. 5, 8-10. Also the recent air mishap which claimed the lives of the 117 passengers in the Bellview Airlines in Lisa Igbore village in Ifo Local Government area of Ogun State can be regarded as a natural evil. See *The Punch* Monday October 24, 2005.

10. For detailed, see *Sunday Tribune* December 2004 and "What should be done to me who deface women with acid?" *Sunday Tribune* January 30, 2005, pp. 20-21

11. For detailed, see Niyi Adebimpe "Renowned Preacher, Rev. P.F. Owa, Shot by Robbers" *Sunday Tribune* January 9, 2005, p. 6.

12. Even though, evil has its ultimate origin in God but it should be noted that God is not the author of evil in individual's life (James 1:13 cf. 1 John 1: 5; Hab. 1:13). God has given every man freedom to choose between good and evil. God does not do evil (Job 34:10; Psalm 5:4). He hates evil (Psalm 5:4-6; 45:7) and He judges evil without any respect for the people involved (Rom 3:10-23).

13. G. Herbert Livingston, ר ע ע in *Theological Wordbook o the Old Testament.* Edited by Laird Harris et.al 2 volume (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:854-6.

14. Roy B. Zuck in "Job" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty: Old Testament* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Book, 1985), p. 715.

15. Ibid.

16. Compare the reaction of Job in 3: 1-26 with that of Jeremiah in 20: 14-18. It should be noted that Job, in his sad soliloquy of a death wish, he did not curse God, as Satan had predicted (1:11; 2:5), nor did he contemplate suicide. He regretted his birth (3:11-19), and longed to die (3:20-26) cf. Ibid. p. 722.

17. This view is the opposite of what several contemporary pastors have of Jonah. They see Jonah as only a run away prophet.

18. cf. Terence E. Fretheim, *The Message of Jonah: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1977), p. 45.

19. Ibid.; p. 45.

20. Ibid. p. 45.

21. For detailed, see C.O. Ogunkunle "Imprecatory Psalms: Their Forms and uses in Ancient Israel and Some Selected Churches in Nigeria" A thesis in the Department of Religious Studies submitted to the Faculty of Arts in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria (November 2000), pp. 245-290.