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A Yorùbá reflection on the theodicy embedded in Prince's "Sign O' The Times": Implications for scholarship on African Theology

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Given the array of tracks inspired by various realities during Prince Roger Nelson's (popularly known as Prince) career, this study engages the philosophical problem of evil as well as the implied justification that Africans had no idea of the divine as embedded in his "Sign O' the Times." In this track, Prince reflects over some of the horrendous evils in the world. However, his evangelizing of The Cross as a possible panacea resurrects the philosophical problem of evil (theodicy), which was a primary source of concern for prominent Western minds like David Hume, Gottfried Spinoza, St. Augustine and even Epicurus. "Sign O' the Times", since it appeals mostly to Afro-American listeners, seems to justify the earlier Eurocentric and ethnographic warrant that their progenitors had no idea of the divine but need the foreign Abrahamic God for salvation. In this guise, this study aims to analyze "Sign O' the Time" as to extrapolate the misleading 'theology' which estranges Afro-Americans further away from their rich religious root. It is on this showing that it seems "Sign O' the Times" does more harm to the religious life of Afro-Americans since it makes them lose contact with their rich religious and moral heritage. In order to put matters in the proper perspective, this work forays into the Yorùbá thought system (an instance of traditional African theology), whose metaphysics and outlook on evil absolves *Olódùmarè*, the Higher God, without being steeped in theological exaggerations inherent in the theological system that inspired Prince. In the final analysis, the Yorùbá submits, contra Prince that the evils we experience in the world are not the Sign O' the Times; that the world is not getting better or worse, but going round as usual.

Key words: Prince, Yorùbá, "Sign O' the Times", theodicy, ethno-philosophy.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, a look at the religio-metaphysical underpinning of Prince's "Sign O' the Times" will be attempted in the light of traditional Yorùbá theology. On the one hand, there are: the Mainstream and dominant

Western religio-metaphysical orientation, dating back to Aristotle and the traditional Yorùbá thought system. Each has its distinctive reflection on the philosophical problem of evil. This is the religio-metaphysical aspect. There is

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the music of the transitioned icon, Prince Rogers Nelson, popularly known as Prince, throughout his music career. This is the aesthetic arm of this inquiry. Hence, our aim is to inquire into the coherence of the religio-metaphysical groundwork of the system in which Prince is steeped to correct the implied but wrong perception he could have passed to his dear Afro-American listeners that their African progenitors have no idea of God and salvation. It is this religio-metaphysical framework that implicitly and perhaps unintentionally impacts Prince's aesthetic attitude as executed in "Sign O' the Times." Whereas the tendency is rife to pass on the spate of horrendous evil in the world to Satan/Devil, Prince in "Sign O' the Times" looks up at the Cross for salvation and redemption from tumultuous times. The Cross, no doubt signifies the Judeo-Christian twin of the Abrahamic monotheisms, the other being Islam.

Through the method of critical analysis and hermeneutical interpretation, this essay seeks to achieve three aims. Firstly, it seeks to disclose the understanding of evil in the religious orientation (Judeo-Christianity) that undergirds Prince's "Sign O' the Times" as inadequate even when influential. Secondly, this work purports to show that evil has not received a satisfactory explanation in that religious tradition, yet this tradition wields influence in many parts of the world and even over the minds of contemporary Africans and Afro-Americans who are further misled by Prince, away from their rich African religious cultures. Finally, in a bid to present an African culture that has a better alternative over the religious culture that inspired Prince's "Sign O' the Times," this essay offers traditional *Yorùbá* understanding of God and the presence of perceive evil in the actual world. This is where the goal of self-retrieval from the initial warrants that primitive Africans had neither history nor an idea of the divine is further mitigated and treated as fallacious.

For the attainment of the foregoing aims, this study focuses on the following crucial posers: Who is Prince Roger Nelson and what are the religious and metaphysical implications undergirding his "Sign O' the Times"? How adequate is the religious tradition embedded in Prince's "Sign O' the Times" in explaining the reality of evil in the actual world? Which alternative explanation from the traditional *Yorùbá* makes the idea of evil easily reconcilable with *Olódùmarè*, the Higher God? Can traditional *Yorùbá* discourse on *Olódùmarè* and evil in the world correct the misleading impression as evinced in "Sign O' the Times" that traditional African theology is vitiated in the presence of Judeo-Christian theology? These are the main questions that this study concerns with in the pages that follow. Subsequently, a very brief biography of Prince will be undertaken. Afterward, the research contends with the problem of philosophical evil in Prince's "Sign O' the Times" as well as how philosophers in the mainstream and dominant Western philosophic tradition have contended with the problem. Owing to the lack of consensus about the reality of God

and evil in a culture that have inspired, misled Prince and his Afro-American fans and claimed to have a better understanding of the world and God over Africans, this study divulges the traditional *Yorùbá* approach to evil. It shows how the people have not adduced evil as suggestive of *Olódùmarè*'s incompetence but as a necessary fragment of the world. The last section concludes the entire drudgery.

Biography of Prince Roger Nelson

Prince Rogers Nelson, popularly known as Prince to the music world, was born on June 7, 1958. He was a singer, guitarist, song writer, producer, and dancer. Taking an early interest in music, Prince began playing the piano at age seven and had mastered the guitar and drums by the time he joined his first band at age fourteen. With very few African-American residents, his hometown, Minneapolis, Minnesota, was an unlikely site for the development of a major black star, but Prince even managed to lead other local musicians, most notably Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis, to major success (Walser, 2016). However, Prince attained fame even when he worked on the same genre of music as Michael Jackson. It is also pertinent to disclose that with his rare talent as a musician, Prince acquired stardom and won several Grammy Awards and Nominations. He was so inventive that he had to give some of his completed but unreleased tracks to budding and established artistes, sometimes in anonymity. And, yet, with all that he had to give and all that he accomplished, not even was Prince able to escape trails of human existence. A life so full of energy and creativity was cut short too soon. According to Robert Walser, "Prince was found dead at his Paisley Park estate on April 21, 2016. An autopsy later revealed that he had died from an accidental overdose of fentanyl, a powerful opioid" (Walser, 2016: 4). The circumstances make one wonder why such a talent would die from "accidental overdose". Upon critical reflection, it underscores the inevitable reality of evil in the actual world.

Ironically, it is the case that even Prince must have been concerned about these questions as expressed in many of his songs, such as "Let's Go Crazy," when he says: "Pills and thrills and daffodils will kill/ hang tough children/ He's coming." The exhorting of his listeners to "hang tough" because his God is "coming" signals Prince's belief in the Judeo-Christian notion that at some point the evil present will completely destroy the world, which can only be saved by God. Throughout his entire career, Prince was seemingly well aware of the hardships of life and the fact that many turned to drugs as a way to cope with their pain. Yet, Prince attempted to offer hope by offering the gift of salvation from destruction through Jesus, as is seen in "The Cross" from *Sign 'O' the Times*. However, seemingly on the other end of that Judeo-

Christian spectrum is “Sign ‘O’ the Times,” which while offering faint hope with “Some say a man ain’t happy/ unless a man truly dies,” focuses mostly on the chaos and destruction that signify the end of times according to Judeo-Christian prophecy, to which Prince is sympathetic. The rest of this section and a bulk of the remainder of this essay purport to disinter the religio-metaphysical reflections of Prince within the purview of Western and African thought systems. This task is pertinent as we find it necessary to debunk the implied notion expressed by Prince that “only the Cross can save” - the Western tendency and justification to situate their religious beliefs on Africans even when it does not offer better explanations regarding the origin of evil that the Africans believe. But before this task, it is pertinent to exhume the theodicy latent in Prince’s “Sign O’ the Times.”

Exploration of the theodicy embedded in Prince’s “Sign O’ the Times”

“Sign O’ the Times” is the ninth studio album of Prince with “Sign ‘O’ the Times” being the first track on that album. The album was released on March 30, 1987. Commenting on the concert film of the same name that closely follows the same tone and theme of the album Nathan Rabin avers:

Sign O’ the Times begins with a bluesy dirge of weary social protest, but closes with a hypnotically intimate appeal to accept Jesus as your lord and savior before the ultimate spiritual reckoning of death. In between, its one hell of a party, albeit one that finds one of the greatest hit makers of the 1980s perversely choosing not to play his most popular songs in favor of letting some deep album cuts really breathe. Among the films many strange qualities is one of patience; Prince takes his time with these songs, confident in his ability to control his audience even with lesser-known material (Rabin, 2016: 3).

It must be stated that Nathan Rabin’s assertion in the foregoing is based on the audio and visual of the concert film for Sign O’ the Times. Yet, since the same narrative and emotive tone and structure is true of the album, the single, “Sign ‘O’ the Times” shows that Prince wonders about the existence of evil in the world. Singing shortly after the discovery of HIV/AIDS, Prince opens the song with “a skinny man” who “died of a big disease with a little name” – AIDS. Worse still, the girlfriend may have also contacted the disease from the needle - an accidental contraction of HIV. Does this not forecast how Prince himself would pass on? The attention given to HIV/AIDS by Prince makes him a sort of prophet because his concern over the epidemic was actually accurate.

According to the data released by UNAIDS (2000: 6),

from the beginning of the epidemic to December 1999, 34.3 million people live with HIV when the virus had claimed another 18.8 million lives by the end of 1999. Similarly, the publication by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, chronicle that 72, 000 drug overdose deaths occurred in the United States. Of this figure, nearly 30, 000 were related to fentanyl and fentanyl analogs. Paradoxically, this is the figure in the year that follows the year of Prince’s death. This is precisely where the concern and prophecy of doom by Prince receives fulfillment.

Furthermore, Prince seems to be concerned about the spate of youths forming gangs, using narcotics and other illegal substances as “their idea of fun”, and then killing one another or even innocents. It would be recalled that the former President Barrack Obama was for some time during his tenure concerned about the spate of guns passed around in the United States. According to the BBC (2016), “US President Barrack Obama is to widen background checks on buyers of firearms, in a series of measures to address gun violence.” Now, one would be fallacious to offer that Prince was singing in vacuum.

Prince wonders in “Sign O’ the Times” why a hurricane would implode the ceiling of a church, killing everyone. Are these souls not worshipping God? Why would God allow such a horrendous death befall his? A similar occurrence in Kaduna, Nigeria, was on December 12, 2012 when a bomb exploded in a Christian gathering. Is it the case that God allowed evil willfully but impotent to halt it? The 2015 Charleston massacre in South Carolina comes to mind when Dylann Roof murdered nine African-Americans during a prayer service at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church (Horowitz et al., 2015). Where is the God they were praying to in these circumstances? We come to the crux of Prince’s rhetorical lyrics. The television is now globalized. There are sufferings everywhere as the news of someone killing or dying are now commonplace. Situation of things in the world since the release of “Sign O’ the Times” in 1987 have not improved. This is despite the spate of converts and eruption of religious institutions in every nook and cranny. People are suffering while a part of the world live in waste and affluence. This is one of the motivations for Peter Singer’s (1972, 2010) proposal of a moral norm to care for the world’s worse-offs.

Prince makes what can be considered an existential statement when he avers that “some say a man ain’t happy, truly until a man truly dies.” On the one hand, while Prince’s Judeo-Christian construct asserts that death is humanity’s escape from the hell of the realm of tangible existence, it can also on the other hand, be perceived as a statement about the meaninglessness of life. In this vein, he comes close to the German sage and existentialist scholar Martin Heidegger who penned: “As soon as man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die” (Heidegger, 1962: 289). Yet, the irony of this notion is made more intelligible via Soren Kierkegaard’s

pondering about one's individual responsibility to understand and seek purpose through one's Christian ideals. As such, Kierkegaard often highlighted the great amount of anxiety that sprang from this desire to know and execute one's purpose. Therefore the awareness and acceptance of death is a requirement for authentic existence, since death is the state that gives finality to life. And, as early as "Ronnie Talk to Russia" from *Controversy* (1981), Prince has shown concern about bombs, given that some countries now possess nuclear bombs and armories capable of blowing the universe to pieces several times over. Of course, if a bomb explodes at night, who will see the dawn of a new day? But Prince unable to be completely fatalistic, clings to his faith in Jesus in the last verse as he epitomizes how in the face of difficulty, people still want to have fun, procreate, hoping the next generation would be better. "Sign 'O' the Times", mess with you mind/ Hurry before it's too late/ Let's fall in love/ get married, have a baby/ We'll call him Nate...if it's a boy." And while Prince is attempting to be positive, attempting to provide hope to his listeners, his notion of looming doom of a world that can only be saved by a God sets in direct contrast to African (*Yorùbá*) traditional theology. From the traditional *Yorùbá* parlance, it is the case that the world does not seem to be getting better or worse, for us. The world seems to be turning as usual. But Prince seems to think otherwise. Prince's sort of thinking is detrimental to society as it does not take cognizance of the obvious - life is nothing but birth, old age and death. The tendency to operate on a wishful plane that life could have been better or was better as implied in Prince's tracks is a revelation of his poor understanding of history.

In the face of the horrendous evil and suffering in the world, Prince is fairly convinced in the Cross to improve life as expressed in the song, "The Cross" thus: "We all have our problems/ Some big, some are small/ Soon all of our problems/ Will be taken by the cross." If this is the case, a post humus riposte for Prince could be: With the upsurge in the record of those who call on the name of the Abrahamic God, how come evil in the world occurs as though no person's prayer has filtered into the ears of the deity? Why would a supposed Creator, Hume would produce a rejoinder to Prince, permit so much evil in the world and simultaneously promise eternal life and eternal damnation? Perhaps, Hume's reflection would be beneficial. For Hume:

By what rule are punishments and rewards distributed? What is the divine standard of merit and demerit? Shall we suppose, that human sentiments have place in the deity? However bold that hypothesis we have no conception of any other sentiments. According to human sentiments, sense, courage, good manners, industry, prudence, genius are essential parts of personal merit. Shall we therefore erect an Elysium for poets and heroes, like that of the ancient mythology? Why confine all

rewards to one species of virtue? Punishment, without any proper end or purpose, is inconsistent with our ideas of goodness and justice, and no end can be served by it after the whole scene is closed (Hume, 2007: 148).

It has been amplified that in the foregoing, "Hume is obviously reacting to the notion of immortality in the monotheistic parlance. He questions the logic in the Deity's meting out punishment eternal and infinite reward or damnation for atrocities committed in finite time" (Ofuasia, 2016: 192). Hume maintains: "Punishment, according to *our* conceptions, should bear some proportion to the offence. Why then eternal punishment for the temporary offences of so frail a creature as man?" (Hume, 2007: 149). Since the Deity rewards or punishes on the presumption that humans are rational creatures capable of keeping to precepts and dogmas, what is the place of those who cannot exercise their rational capacities or those born and living in vegetative states? What is the position of the innocent two-week old baby blown apart in the deadly Kaduna Church blast? David Hume expatiates further in this connection:

Nature has rendered human infancy peculiarly frail and mortal; as it were on purpose to refute the notion of a probationary state. The half of mankind dye before they are rational creatures (Hume, 2007: 149).

Now, with the critical and philosophical position of Hume placed against the admonition for the Cross, for Christianity and God by Prince in "Sign O' the Times", listeners can deduce that for Prince:

- (1) There is evil in the world;
- (2) This evil is a fulfillment of prophecy; and
- (3) Hence, they are the "Sign O' the Times."

The solution provided by Prince to the foregoing summary of the idea listeners have been able to extrapolate is to trace humanity's steps to the Cross, to God, causing the real philosophical problem to unfurl: Why could God permit (1) above? If He is so powerful and as loving as He has been portrayed why would He make a prophecy, allow His creatures to wither away to raise them again to be judged in an unfair world? This is the problem with (2). There seems to be an asymmetry between someone who has foreknowledge and who also permits evil to occur. God, in this sense, is like a physician who knows well enough that withdrawing medical care from a patient who is in agony of excruciating pains would lead to death but does nothing is guilty of passive euthanasia. Perhaps a brief foray into the meaning of passive euthanasia would furnish the knowledge that the Christian God is on a full scale passive euthanasia. Passive euthanasia is usually defined "as withdrawing medical treatment with the deliberate intention of causing the patient's death" (Foot,

1977: 86). Put in another way, passive euthanasia prevails when we know that someone who is very ill and living on an oxygen mask is disconnected from the source. It is the case that the person will surely die. Active euthanasia, on the other hand, “involves taking specific steps to cause the patient’s death” (Foot, 1977: 87). Given this description, one could query Prince’s “Sign O’ the Times”: Is the foreknowledge, through prophecy not sufficient to hold God responsible for the evils in the world? Would this not be a form of passive euthanasia? At this juncture, a critic could offer the Judeo-Christian notion that humans are responsible for failing to make the right and proper choices of harmonious living with self and nature. A critical look especially from the traditional Yorùbá theology reveals that the observation is valid. However, traditional Yorùbá theology does not parade a God that has knowledge of all things regarding the distant past and remote future. The undue emphasis on the extreme attributes ascribed to the Judeo-Christian Deity invites such circumspection. Hence it does not need much elaboration that in the Judeo-Christian tradition, “...the deeper idolatry, of the fashioning of God in the image of the Egyptian, Persian and Roman imperial rulers, was retained. The Church gave unto God, the attributes which belonged exclusively to Caesar” (Whitehead, 1978: 343).

But Prince is not to blame for this religio-metaphysical gulf that we have cited in his inspiration. The whole problem derives from the mainstream and dominant way of thinking about the relation between God in the universe that Prince finds himself. It has been taken that God is all powerful; all knowing; and all loving. Let us scan the theoretical background of this outlook closely. The problem of evil also dubbed theodicy was first poked by Epicurus. Epicurus holds that the supposed attributes of God do not reconcile with the existence of evil. In his argument quoted by David Hume in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, we read that:

Epicurus old questions are yet unanswered. Is he willing to prevent evil but not able? Then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil? [Hume, 1947 (1779)].

In recent times however, the philosophical discourse(s) about the problem of evil has branched into the logical and evidential problems of evil, with scholars working within each and/or both orientations. The logical problem of evil’s early shape for contemporary analytic philosophy of religion was provided by Mackie (1955). Some prominent scholars who have contributed to the debate from this perspective are: Pike (1963); Plantinga (1967, 1974); Plantinga and Inwagen 2004); van Inwagen (2008); Phillips (2004) and Schellenberg (2006). The logical problem of evil (also called a priori problem and deductive problem) “challenged theists to clarify key

terms and formulate effective strategies to reconcile the propositions in question” (Peterson, 2010: 491). The propositions concern the reconciliation between a good, all powerful and knowing God on the one hand and the reality of evil and suffering in the world on the other hand. Have they been able to achieve this feat? We think not. The evidential problem of evil, on the other hand, queries the affinity between horrendous sufferings in the universe and the supposed attributes of God. According to Graham Oppy:

... in light of the horrendous suffering that is to be found in our universe – e.g., the rape, torture, and murder of babies and young children, the excruciating suffering and deaths of animals in bushfires and other natural disasters, and so forth – many atheists suppose that there is very good reason to judge that, if there is a being that has sovereignty over our universe, then that being is either unable to prevent horrendous suffering (and hence certainly not omnipotent), or uninformed about the horrendous suffering that there is in our world (and hence certainly not omniscient), or falls far short of moral perfection... (Oppy, 2010: 500).

Prominent scholars whose ideas informed debates on the evidential problem of evil are: Rowe (1979); Draper (1989); Schellenberg (2006); Drange (1998); Howard-Snyder (1996); Bergmann (2001) and Wykstra (1984).

This study finds that both the logical and evidential problems of evil derive from similar assumptions. This may be expanded to mean that scholars researching in each orientation have taken as canon some claims which are not true. These assumptions are entrenched in the attributes of God. In the words of Murray and Rea (2008:7), one might first take note of the fact that theistic traditions almost all agree on the following basic claims about God:

- (1) Nothing made God, and God is the source or ground of everything other than God;
- (2) God rules all that is not God; and
- (3) God is the most perfect being.

These three points of agreement correspond to three distinct starting points for developing a richer, more detailed concept of divinity. We can label these three points: creation theology, providential theology, and perfect-being theology. The above clearly implies the traditional triad of accidents (Omniscience, Omni-benevolence and Omnipotence) ascribed to the Western God. How real and adequate do these attributes capture the essence(s) of God? How do these accidents play out in the interaction between God and the universe? It is the case that a rational mind faces the dilemma: Either God has the attributes of Omni-benevolence, Omnipotence, and Omniscience ascribed to him or horrendous evil and

suffering in the world are illusory or human-caused. All of these are assumed in the “Sign O’ the Times” as rendered by Prince. What are the problems presented in this way of perceiving the divine and the world?

There is no doubt that it was accepted uncritically, the notion that whatever is static and motionless is perfect. Various accidents are then employed to garnish the perfect substance, God in Western metaphysico-religious tradition. This is one of the outcomes of the fusion of Aristotelianism and Church doctrines (Ofuasia, 2017: 149-53). One of the consequences of this uncritical garnishing is the problem of evil. From whence are the attributes adorned the Western God? Alfred North Whitehead hints that “...the deeper idolatry, of the fashioning of God in the image of the Egyptian, Persian and Roman imperial rulers, was retained. The Church gave unto God the attributes which belonged exclusively to Caesar” (Whitehead, 1978: 343). A perusal *Ifá*, the repository of traditional *Yorùbá* thought system discloses *Olódùmarè*, the Higher God in *Yorùbá* world-view as lacking in the attributes of Omnipotence, Omnibenevolence and Omniscience. This does not however diminish his place as the God. For instance in one of the chapters of *Ifá* corpus, *Odù Òyèkú Méjì*, it is clearly stated:

*It was Olódùmarè’s forgetfulness
That accounts for the non-separation of the duck’s feet.*

Evil, according to the traditional *Yorùbá* folklore, is a necessary feature of the world owing to the influence of malevolent forces. In another chapter of the *Ifá* corpus, *Odù Òtúúrúpòn*, something akin to the Biblical story of the Fall of Man is replete. In the English rendition of the chapter, we have:

*...Divination was held for eniyán (malevolent forces)
Same for èniyàn (humans)
As both descended from heaven to earth
Both of them were asked to offer sacrifice
Eniyán (malevolent forces) swore that on reaching the earth,
He would be destroying the lots of èniyàn (humans),
Èniyàn (Humans), too, vowed that, on reaching the earth,
She will do as she pleases
Both refused to offer sacrifice.
The two reached the earth and,
Whenever èniyàn (humans) gave birth to a child,
Eniyán (malevolent forces) would kill it
All the things that èniyàn (humans) laboured for
Were all destroyed by the eniyán (malevolent forces)...*

There is no better *odù* in the entire body of the *Ifá* corpus that discusses the origin of evil and its persistence than *Òtúúrúpòn*. The foregoing is even strengthened by the *Yorùbá* maxim: “the world emanates from the admixture of good and evil.” All of these clearly reveal how the

Yorùbá does not grapple with the problem of evil. Hence, some of the themes that concerned Prince in his “Sign O’ the Times” and the possible end of the world with salvation only from the Cross would not bother the *Yorùbá*. To strengthen this case, let us explore closely the place of *Olódùmarè* in *Yorùbá* thought system.

***Olódùmarè* and *Yorùbá* thought system: A riposte to Prince’s “Sign O’ the Times”**

At this juncture the function and role of *Olódùmarè* as the Higher God among the traditional *Yorùbá* is the subject of analysis. A critic could query why the term Higher God is employed to depict *Olódùmarè*. The usage is important to stress that besides *Olódùmarè*, there are other Gods or Divinities such as *Òbátálá*, *Òrúnmilá*, *Esu*, to name a few. They were created by *Olódùmarè* for the primary purpose of assisting Him in the management of the planetary system” (Akintola, 1999: 52). In the words of Olarenwaju Shitta-Bey what this is suggestive of ‘...is that the divinities were created by *Olodumare* to assist...That they are to assist suggests that they are deputising for *Olodumare*, which make them all the deputies of *Olodumare*’ (Shitta-Bey, 2013: 79). Worship is channeled to the Higher God through these divinities since no one worships *Olódùmarè* directly.

With the foregoing preliminary statements, the prime concern in this section is to give a very concise note on the role of *Olódùmarè* in the world as the *Yorùbá* conceive the Higher God. Thus, it would be unearthed why the traditional *Yorùbá* would not think of the end of times as Prince and the religio-metaphysical framework he is steeped in does. All the occurrences that Prince hinted at in his “Sign O’ the Times” are normal things that happen to individuals in the course of existence irrespective of whether or not they are good or bad persons. But before we disinter the ways the *Yorùbá* think of horrendous evil in the world and the place of the Higher God, it would be better to commence with the position of *Olódùmarè* in the order of schemes.

Olódùmarè is the term that depicts God in *Yorùbá* classical thought system. However, *Olódùmarè* differs from the concept of God that is ascribed to the mainstream Western equivalent of the term. Due to space-time limitation, we shall concern with the features of *Olódùmarè* that puts this Supreme Deity far from the pedestrian attributes usually given to God in the Abrahamic monotheistic sense. We commence with the idea that *Olódùmarè* is the Creator, Cause and Origin of all things. In the words of Bewaji: “the evidence that *Olódùmarè* is the creator of everything is displayed in virtually all accounts of the relationship between *Olódùmarè* and the Universe. Where He did not directly cause or create, He instructed the divinities to create and He supervised. So, He both created the good and the bad, well-informed and the deformed, the rainy season

and the drought..." (Bewaji, 1998: 8). There are at least two facts that must not be wished away at this juncture. Firstly, no one directly witnessed the whole creation process. Secondly, what is to be gleaned is that *Olódùmarè* had never been alone. The Higher God has always been with the primordial divinities, who have duties and responsibilities affixed to them. These facts attest to the cardinal truth in Process-relational philosophy which is: "God is not before all creation, but with all creation" (Whitehead, 1978: 521). This underscores a necessary relation between the world and God, without which nothing can be.

Furthermore, Bolaji Idowu informs that *Olódùmarè* "...is known as *Eleda* – "the Creator", "the Maker"" (Idowu, 1962: 39). He is the Origin and Giver of Life, and in that capacity He is called *Elemi* – "the Owner of Spirit", or "Owner of Life" (Idowu, 1962: 39). A similar stance is taken by John Mbiti (1969: 47). It is pertinent to note that all these scholars are more concerned with responding to the charge of Eurocentrism and the consequence of which Africans lack an idea of the divine. The primary output of the foregoing is that the main framework employed by the dominant philosophic tradition in the West which led inevitably to the problem of the evil has been accepted uncritically. This has not done much improvement but merely accentuate "the widespread, but mistaken belief that Africans are religious in all things" (Mbiti, 1969: 2; Oladipo, 1988: 16).

At this juncture, it is imperative to aver that some aspects of Supreme Being as conceived in *Yorùbá* system are divergent to the idea of God among the Abrahamic monotheisms whose essential elements had been summarily stated hitherto. This does not rule out similarities. However, the divergences between the Christian notion and this African conception of the Supreme Being are too obvious to require any elaboration. One of the areas of divergence can be found in the creative works attributed to these Supreme Beings (Oladipo, 2004). God in Christian thought is believed to have "brought all things out of nothing." However, in the *Yorùbá* conception of the Supreme Being the idea of *creatio ex nihilo* is absent. Indeed, the *Yorùbás* believe that our earth was made out of what "was once a watery, marshy waste" (Idowu, 1962: 40).

Unlike the West, the *Yorùbás* do not ascribe their God as possessing transcendence and immanence. He is neither "wholly other", nor is it a purely spiritual being. "The *Yorùbá* God does not possess any gender as does the Western's masculine God" (Oladipo, 2004: 260). At this juncture, it is necessary to get more critical and demand why the *Yorùbá* according to Oladipo (2004) so conceive *Olódùmarè*? Throughout his treatise, Oladipo provides no explanatory justification for this. He seems more concerned about drawing the places of divergence and convergence between the Western and *Yorùbá* notions of the divine.

When one tinkers on the notion of Satan, the situation

does not improve. 'Esu' is usually misconstrued for Satan. Meanwhile, *Esu* is not necessarily opposed to *Olódùmarè*, God in the *Yorùbá* perspective. In fact *Esu* is one of the primordial deities, amongst many others who must be appeased during rituals or supplications meant for *Olódùmarè*. It is in this connection that Wiredu (1995) calls for conceptual decolonization in African philosophy and religions. It is very obvious that the ideas of God vary radically in different cultures. Whitehead informs that:

What further can be known about God must be sought in the region of particular experiences, and therefore rests on an empirical basis. In respect to the interpretation of these experiences, mankind has differed profoundly. He has been named respectively, Jehovah, Allah, Brahma, Father in Heaven, Order of Heaven, First Cause, Supreme Being and Chance. Each name corresponds to a system of thought derived from the experiences of those who have used it (Whitehead, 1948: 170). Whereas there is the temptation to interpret *Olódùmarè* as a *Yorùbá* equivalent of Jehovah or Yahweh, Oladipo (2004:360) perceives this as a form of "conceptual superimposition, which has for long prevented a proper appreciation of the nature of indigenous African religions". This study concurs and also adulates his move in this mould.

In a nutshell, torrents of research have successfully shown that *Olódùmarè* are radically different from the Western notion of God which has been used as the standard of what a Supreme Being should exhibit. Whereas *Olódùmarè* is everywhere, this does not rule out the fact that people get to worship this Deity through an array of either or both primordial or deified divinities. Whereas *Olódùmarè* is the most powerful, the Deity is not Omni-potent (if this means All Powerful) as God of the Abrahamic monotheisms. While it is the fact that *Olódùmarè* is the most knowledgeable, s/he still relies on the knowledge of some of its creatures. It is therefore safe to say that the question of evil as posed by Epicurus does not concern the *Yorùbá*. It is from this angle that it becomes obvious how the *Yorùbá* will not be bothered by the emphasis on evil and The Cross in Prince's "Sign O' the Times." The theological undergirding of Prince's track is different from the traditional *Yorùbá* perspective, as the essay has argued.

CONCLUSION

It is a case of flogging a dead horse were one to assume that Prince is not a multi-talented entity in the realm of music and entertainment. It is also true that the society he finds himself in is one that boasts of the Judeo-Christian faith. This is a consequence of the notion that "the child grows in a community with its own distinct ideology. The environment shapes the way the child would think. At this point, it really matters where the child is raised" (Ofuasia, 2016: 197). The ideology of the

Abrahamic monotheisms therefore is one that informed the theme of Prince's "Sign O' the Times." This essay attempts to show from an ethno-philosophical perspective that the *Yorùbá* way of conceiving the Higher God and its relation with the world is one that does not take the problem of evil as it is the case for Prince. It is therefore not only pertinent to discard all literatures that have hitherto enjoined that the man of colour has no history or ability to construe the celestial, but to restate that for the traditional Yoruba, the world is not improving or deteriorating. It is just turning as usual.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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