

PAULINE CONCEPT OF *EGEIRO*, *ANASTASIS* AND *SOMA PNEUMATIKON* IN AN URHOB0 CHURCH COMMUNITY OF DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Paul's use of *egeiro*, *anastasis* and *soma pneumatikon* in 1 Corinthians 15 relates to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and that of Christians on the Last Day. While *egeiro* and *anastasis* are analyzed to mean resurrection, the term *soma pneumatikon* means glorified body. Using the comparative and evaluative models which fall within the inculturation model as a methodology, this work is aimed at the exposition of Pauline understanding of resurrection as against that of Urhobo traditional understanding of the subject matter. It also seeks to encourage the church in Urhoboland to remain steadfast in the teaching of Paul in the New Testament, particularly in 1 Corinthians 15 on the subject of resurrection, being that the Pauline concept of *egeiro* and *anastasis* are similar to the Urhobo concepts of *erhovwo*, *evrhen* and *ekparho*. For this reason, the understanding of Pauline *didache* on resurrection can be easily understood by the Urhobo Christians. Although, Jesus' resurrection was not directly seen to have been predicted in the Old Testament and in the Intertestamental Literature as a background to the New Testament understanding of resurrection, it was seen that the idea of resurrection was not alien to the Hebrews or Judaizers. Since the teaching of resurrection is an important doctrine in Christian faith, Paul made it clear that the eschatological *egeirein* and the *anistanai* of Christians is sure and as such, Christians should be hopeful of this without any prejudice to some kinds of philosophy that exist within some people around who do not believe.

Introduction

The terms *egeiro*, *anastasis* and *soma pneumatikon* in Pauline writing in the New Testament, particularly in 1 Corinthians 15, are Greek words that relate to the *didache* (teaching) on Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Paul describes Jesus' resurrection in this passage as the act of God in which the dead in Christ shall rise on the last day, just as Christ has risen.

Paul further described Jesus' resurrection as the first fruit of resurrection for Christians. The propelling factor behind this study is the mix-up of the terms of resurrection as taught in the New Testament by Paul as against the African-Urhobo traditional understanding of the afterlife.

Besides the fact that the theme of resurrection is more understood in the New Testament by Christians, the Old Testament and the Intertestamental literatures also gave some clues to the concept of resurrection. The aim of this study therefore, is to exegetically examine the Greek terms *egeiro*, *anastasis* and *soma pneumatikon* in the context of Pauline concept of resurrection and do an ecclesiological theology for a better understanding of the church, especially as it relates to Christians in Urhoboland of Nigeria. This study will also help the church to distinguish between resuscitation and resurrection; between necromancy and resurrection; the living dead and resurrected body; and between spiritism and resurrection. In a nut shell, the study argues that Jesus' resurrection is not a fictitious story but an undeniable concrete occurrence in Christian history within the space of time and as such, it cannot be equated with the Urhobo concept of the living dead, ancestorship, spiritism, spirit existence myth, and the likes.

The methodology that is explored here includes the comparative and evaluative paradigms (models). According to Ukpong, while, the Comparative model is interested in comparing the Bible and African life and culture,¹ the evaluative model seeks to understand the biblical message against the background of African life, thought and practice.² Both methodologies fall within the inculturation paradigm of African biblical interpretation. This methodology shall help in the exposition of Pauline understanding of resurrection as against that of Urhobo traditional understanding of the subject matter and encourage the church in Urhoboland to remain steadfast in the teaching of the Bible.

Definition of Some Operational Terms

The Urhobo:

The Urhobo according to Ottuh quoting Otite, form an ethnic group who speak Urhobo language in Delta State, one of the 36 states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.³ Ottuh, also quoting Henigie says that the Urhobo are a major ethnic group in Delta State and are located in over eighty villages and towns including a few cities like Warri, Effurun, Sapele, Ughelli,⁴ etc. The Urhobo nation is made up of different sub-

groups such as Ughelli, Isoko, Agbon, Uvwie, Okpe, Abraka, Udu, Idjere, Oghara, Orogun, Agbasa to mention but a few. Their major occupation includes farming and fishing. The land is blessed with mineral resources like crude oil. They are found in the Niger Delta Area. The Urhobo are people of southern Nigeria, near the northwestern Niger River delta. Apart from Urhobo language, the Urhobo people communicate in Pidgin English. The Isoko and Urhobo are related in language and culture.⁵ The Urhobo now live in a territory bounded by latitudes 6° and 5°, 15° North and Longitudes 5°, 40° and 6°, 25° East in the former Bendel State of Nigeria. Their neighbours are the Isoko to the South East, the Itsekiri to the West, the Bini to the North, Ijaw to the South and Ukwani (kwale-Aboh) to the North East.⁶ The territory is covered by a network of streams whose volumes of water and flow are directly concerned with the climatic season; wet season (April–October) and dry season (November–March).

Church Community:

The word church in the New Testament usage is *ekklesia* and it means the assembly of people summoned by a herald (Acts 19:32,39,40). Moreover, it means the congregation which the living God assembles about His Messiah Jesus.⁷ Thus, the church is the spiritual family of God, the Christian fellowship created by the Holy Spirit through the testimony of the mighty acts of God in Christ Jesus. It is the sphere of the action of the risen and ascended Lord.⁸ The term church community as it is used in this work, refers to the body of baptized believers in Christ who profess their faith in Jesus Christ as one who died for their sins and was buried and resurrected on the third day. Also, an Urhobo church community means Christian church or those who profess their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and saviour in Urhoboland.

Concept:

The Encarta Dictionary gives several meanings of the word ‘concept.’⁹ First, it means something that somebody has thought of, or that somebody might be able to imagine; second, a broad abstract idea or a guiding general principle; third, basic understanding of something; and fourth, a way or methods of doing things. West and Endicott also defined concept as a conceived idea.¹⁰ A concept can also mean a world-view of a people or person about something or an issue. As it is used here, concept means an understanding of something as it relates to Paul’s understanding of resurrection in the New Testament.

Concept of Resurrection in the Old Testament: A Historical Background to the Concept of Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15

Although, the theme of resurrection is more relevant to Christians as it relates to the New Testament, the idea of resurrection is presented in the understanding of the Hebrews. One of the basic references to the concept of what happens to the dead in the Old Testament is *sheol*, and it is rendered as the abode of “the *shades*,” that is, of those who died. Here, the dead are depicted as having a diminutive type of existence and they are not even able to sing praises to God (Ps.115:17). The idea of full human survival after death developed gradually, and the concept of resurrection became clearly articulated and widespread only later in Judaism.¹¹ The development of this concept could be traced in the Old Testament by first considering those texts that deal with the theme of resurrection indirectly and then those that have direct reference to it. In this way, we shall be able to note the gradual development of the theme in Judaism. Ukpong¹² traced the concept of resurrection as follows:

- i. In I Corinthians 15:3-4, the resurrection of Jesus is said to be “according to the scriptures,” that is, according to the Old Testament, yet, no specific Old Testament text was cited to substantiate the claim. However, an echo of it could be found in Hosea 13:14 and 15:55 as they relate to I Corinthians 15:4 and reference to Genesis 2:7 in I Corinthians 15:45. But these are not direct citations in support of resurrection. Another reference to the scriptures is found in Luke 24:25-27. Again, there is no specific text of the Old Testament cited. The sense of these formulae therefore is that the resurrection of Jesus is in accordance with the will of God. It is not an attempt to prove the resurrection of Jesus from Old Testament predictions.
- ii. In Acts 2 and 13, respectively, appeal is made to Psalm 16:10 in support of the resurrection of Jesus: “for you will not abandon me to *Hades* or allow your holy one to see corruption.” While this psalm becomes clear as a reference to resurrection in itself, it is rather vague and gives no substantial idea on which to build the theme of resurrection. In Acts 2:32, Psalm 110:1 is also cited; “The Lord declared to my Lord, take your seat on my right hand till I have made your enemies your footstool.” This is clearly a psalm of exaltation and promise of divine protection to the king. In the light of the resurrection, it is seen in the New Testament as a reference to the exaltation of Jesus.

- iii. In Acts 13:33, Psalm 2:7 it is interpreted in the light of the resurrection and applied to Jesus: “You are my son: today I have begotten you”, originally, it referred to the King. Another Old Testament text interpreted it in the light of the resurrection in Exodus 3:6, “I am the God of your ancestors and the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob” (Cf. Matt. 22:32). The argument is that if the living God still has relationship with these people, then they must still be living even though dead and out of this world. These texts, as we have said, are texts that can be interpreted in the light of the resurrection experience as implying the idea of resurrection. They do not of themselves provide the basis for Old Testament theology of resurrection.
- iv. Ambiguously, in Daniel 12:2, Daniel saw a vision of the end time when the dead will wake up, some to eternal life and others to eternal disgrace. In Isaiah 26:19, the prophet tells of the day when the dead will come back to life and corpses will rise again. It is however disputed whether there is reference to the resurrection here.¹³
- v. Also, Ezekiel’s vision of dry bones coming to life (Ezekiel 37:1-11) though referring to the house of Israel alone contains the theme of resurrection. What these texts point to, is that though the idea of resurrection is neither widespread nor developed in the Old Testament, it is not altogether lacking. Especially, they embody the idea of a general resurrection of the dead at the end time. To that extent, they contain a starting point for understanding the theme of resurrection that we find well developed in the New Testament.

The above background of the concept of resurrection as traced by Ukpong is predicated on indirect and direct idea in the Old Testament. It may not have clearly referred to Jesus’ idea of resurrection as explained by Paul with the concepts of *egeiro*, *anastasis* and *soma pneumatikon* but at least, the idea of resurrection is not strange to the Hebrew people or Judaizers.

Concept of Resurrection in the Inter-testament Literature

In contrast to the Old Testament, we find in the inter-testament literature as an intelligible and widespread perception of the resurrection. These books which are apocalyptic in nature contained a ferment of thought and speculation and are not what could be called normative Judaism. Indeed, according to Pfeifer, one could hardly talk of normative Judaism at this period, for Judaism was “so alive, so progressive, so

agitated by controversies, that under its spacious roof the most contesting views were held until a greater uniformity was reached after AD 2000.”¹⁴ This was a period when Judaism fell under the heavy influence of Hellenism and Persian religious thoughts.

These writings were very diverse in character, context and status. In terms of date, they cover a period stretching from the time of the book of Daniel (c.166 BC), the latest book in the Old Testament, to the end of the first century AD. This was a period of acute crisis in Israel. First was crisis of conscience occasioned by hellenization and then were the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes, the Maccabeans war, then subjugation to foreign power, the revolt and eventual extermination of Israel as a nation. Judaism had become more conscious of itself than before and so began to be opposed to foreign powers though opening up to their cultural influence. It was during this period that belief in *Sheol* gradually got replaced by belief in resurrection.¹⁵

Ukpong¹⁶ categorizes the idea of resurrection in the intertestamental era into three main currents of thoughts. The first current addresses the resurrection of martyrs to eternal life and judgment of the community. The earliest form of belief in the resurrection in this period can be seen in *2 Maccabees*. The book arose out of a situation of conflict and is a reflection on that conflict. We see in it belief in resurrection emerging from a situation of martyrdom. Israel had always regarded any oppression it suffered from foreign powers as a chastisement from God for its sins. But in the context of martyrdom, a new perception emerged whereby the martyrs were seen as expiating the sins of their brethren and thereby meriting resurrection to eternal life. Surely, God would not allow such people who fearlessly offered their lives for God’s law to perish. Eternal life was interpreted as reunion with their brethren in order to participate in God’s kingdom on earth. Hence, resurrection in this conception meant restoration of the actual tormented body to life (cf. *2 Macc* 7:14-38; 14:46). Another early form of belief in resurrection is to be found in Daniel 12:2 also written within the same background as *2 Maccabees*.¹⁷ Here, it is only those Jews who had performed well in resisting Gentile tyranny that would rise to eternal life. Those who apostalized from Judaism would resurrect to “abhorrence.” In this earliest form, the conception of resurrection is rather limited in context and scope. It is seen only within the context of martyrdom and means restoration of the same body that died.

The second current understood resurrection as a prelude to final assertion of God's righteousness over all. This second current of thought about resurrection is more metaphysical. It is found in 2 Baruch, Psalm of Solomon, 1 Enoch, 2 Esdras, etc. It starts with the concept of God's righteousness and judgment as we find in the Old Testament prophets. This is now seen in cosmic and dualistic terms. The primary concern is not with resurrection but with God's universal judgment whereby God will bring to an end the present age and assert his righteousness over all. Resurrection is part of a scheme. It is a necessary prelude to assembling all people before God for judgment. This implies restoration of the body since in ancient Jewish thought a person would not be fully himself or herself and capable of being judged unless such person existed in the body.¹⁸ Thus in 2 Baruch 50-51 the resurrection body is not a body of glory but the previous body restored from the earth for purposes of identification. It is only after judgment that the body is transformed into a body of glory for eternal life. This appears in various and even contradictory forms: (a) the resurrection of the righteous Israelites only (Psalms of Solomon. 1 Enoch 83-90); (b) the resurrection of the righteous and the unrighteous in Israel for judgment (Dan. 12:2; 1 Enoch 6-36; 2 Baruch); and (c) the resurrection of all for judgment (2 Esdras: Testament of 12 Patriarchs). Although, having a strong ethical content and connected with universal moral judgment, this understanding of resurrection lacked a strong spirituality and theological perception as Charles¹⁹ refers to it as a "Mechanical conception" of resurrection.

The third current delved into the concept of resurrection as arising from Greek idea of immortality and Jewish belief in God as master of life. This third current of thought is concerned more directly with the problems of death and immortality. It is to be found in the book of Wisdom, the book of Jubilees, 1 Enoch, 4 Maccabees etc. What could be found in these writings is not a consistent philosophical conception of immortality of the soul, but a conjunction of Hebrew conception of God as giver of life and as actively intervening in human affairs. Thus, in the book of Wisdom, we read that man is created for immortality; his pre-existent soul enters corruptible body. The righteous only seem to die but that they are kept in immortality by incorruptible wisdom. The wicked however continues in spiritual death. This is the reward for ungodliness. In 1 Enoch, the belief is expressed that the righteous who died, pass in their spirits from *sheol* to eternal life while the wicked are left behind in *Gehena*. The same belief is also to be found in 4 Maccabees. In 2 Maccabees too, it was found that

the belief in the immortality of spirits of both the righteous and the unrighteous is present. According to Josephus, the Pharisees believe that every soul was imperishable, and that the souls of the good passed into other bodies while those of the wicked suffered eternal punishment.²⁰

The Sadducees did not accept belief in the resurrection. Rabbinic writings of early Second century AD also contain speculations about resurrection and immortality of the soul. The soul was seen as a spiritual and God-given element, and pre-existent. This current of thought does not however seem to have had much influence on the New Testament.²¹ It is a matter of debate what influences were behind the above ideas concerning life after death in Judaism. One influence often pointed to is Zoroastrianism,²² a Persian religion. But while such foreign influence might be the reason for a proliferation of ideas and conceptions which are often contrasting, cognizance has also to be taken of the fact that the idea of foreign religious thought and the special circumstances of persecution and martyrdom would then create a favourable environment for the incipient concept to develop and be understood in various ways.²³

What the above considerations make clear is that the concept of resurrection appears rather late in the Old Testament and does not have strong roots there. In the Intertestamental literature however, the concept is well established but has a variety of meanings. In 1 Corinthians 15, the Greek ideal of the immortality and transmigration of the soul was expressed by those who argued with Paul as regards the resurrection of the dead in Christ. Paul used the Greek word *soma pneumatikon* to describe the resurrected body as against the Greek philosophical understanding.

Pauline Concept of *Egeiro, Anastasis* and *Soma Pneumatikon* in the New Testament: An Exegetical Study

The vocabulary of resurrection found in the New Testament appears both in the Old Testament and in the Intertestamental Literature. The main words involved are the verbs *egeirin* and *anistanai*. These verbs were used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. The verb *egeiro* appeared in 1 Corinthians 15: 4,12,15,16,17,20,32,35,43,44, and 52. Also, the verb *anastasis* showed in 1 Corinthians 15:12,21, and 42. *Egeiro* as it is used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 is the present active indicative first person singular: I raise up.²⁴ Paul by this understanding makes the believer to understand that the act of believing in the *didache* (doctrine) of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not what should wait for the future but something that must start in the present to the future. Therefore, if one

must be saved to experience the resurrection such person must put his faith in Jesus Christ now. It is the faith of one that can earn such person resurrection to a *soma pneumatikon* (glorified body). *Egeiro* or *egeirein* ordinarily means “to awake” from sleep (transitive); “to wake up” (intransitive, passive). It also means “to arouse”, “to stir up,” (transitive); “to erect”, “to set up,” “to raise up” (transitive); “to raise oneself,” “to rise up” (transitive). The fourth meaning is “to awaken the dead” (transitive); “to rise from the dead” (intransitive).²⁵ Using *egeiro* from the view point of waking from death, it is found in the Old Testament in Dan. 12:2; 2 Kings 4:31; Ecclus 48:5. In intertestamental literature, it is found in I Enoch 22:13. The noun *egersis* (rising, resurrection) from the verb is found in classical and Hellenistic Greek with the meaning of “raising of a dead man” (transitive) and “rising from death” (intransitive).²⁶

Another Greek verb that was used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 *anastasis* or *anistanai*. It is used in the New Testament to express the concept of resurrection. Ordinarily it means “to raise up,” “to awaken” from sleep (transitive); “to rise up”, “to awaken” from death. The term is common in classical and Hellenistic Greek in connection with death and life after death. The compound *anabioskesthai* was used to express the Greek idea of transmigration of the soul. The idea of a general resurrection is alien to Greek understanding.²⁷

The Greek noun most commonly used to express the idea of resurrection is *anastasis*, derived from the verb *anistemi*. The verb *egeiro* is used with equal frequency in the New Testament to convey the idea of rising from the dead. It is difficult to detect any specific difference in the connotations of these two words in the minds of the New Testament writers. In the Gospel records, both are used in parallel accounts as could be seen in Matthew 16:21 and in its parallel Luke 9:22 it reads *egeiro*, but in Matthew 8:31, it is *anistemi*; in Matthew 17:23, it is *egeiro*, but in the parallel in Mark 9:31, it is *anistemi*; in the account of the raising of Lazarus, *anistemi* (John 11) is used exclusively. Even in such a definite concept as God raising Christ from the dead, both words are used. For instance, *anistemi* was used in Acts 2:24 and 3:26 and *egeiro* was used in Acts 3:15; 4:10; 5:30, etc.²⁸ Although some scholars argue that there is nuance between *egeiro* and *anastasis*, Kreitzer dismisses the argument by postulating that the duo mean the same thing when it relates to Paul’s teaching on resurrection.²⁹

Another theme under discuss here is that of *soma pneumatikos*. This means ‘glorified body.’ This concept was prompted by the

background of Greek philosophy which believes in the transmigration of the soul of man and the decay of the material body. Those who still held to this philosophy reject the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, hence Paul's emphasis that Jesus is the first fruit of resurrection. It raises the question of whether the body Paul was talking about in 1 Corinthians is referring to physical or a spiritual resurrection? Being that that Greek scepticism of physical resurrection was at the heart of the problem, it becomes clearer to note that Paul was trying to address another question raised by those who reject his doctrine of the resurrection: what kind of body would a "resurrected body" be? The question is not about life after death (easily accepted by Greeks as a "spiritual resurrection"), but the idea of a physical resurrection itself was absurd to the questioner. Again, the fact that Paul is having to argue what kind of "soma" was raised strongly suggests that he has previously taught and he is repeating what he taught them earlier that it includes a physical³⁰ resurrection but *soma* (the body) at this point in time will be totally transformed to become a glorified body. Paul's usage of *soma pneumatikos* here describe the type of body that will be resurrected and it also meant that the physical, establishes Paul's belief in the physical resurrection of Jesus and of Christians.³¹

Another question which the idea of physical resurrection raises is: why then does Paul say; 'flesh and blood cannot inherit God's kingdom'? The second half of verse 50 already explains, in Hebraic parallelism with the first half, more or less what he means, as Paul's regular use of 'flesh' would indicate that 'flesh and blood' is a way of referring to ordinary, corruptible, decaying human existence. It does not simply mean, as it has so often been taken to mean, 'physical humanity' in the normal modern sense, but 'the present physical humanity (as opposed to the future), which is subject to decay and death.' The reference of the phrase is not the presently dead but the presently living, who need not to be raised but to be changed; and this brings us back to the dual focus of verses 53 and 54. Both categories of humans need to acquire the new and transformed type of body.³²

Paul's concept of *soma pneumatikon* in respect of resurrection marks the transition from the state of humiliation to that of exaltation. For him, this was a real space-time event in which the one who had been crucified, was dead, buried and was raised to newness of life, through the glory of the Father (cf. Rom 6:4).³³ This involves not just a restoration to life but to a new life, that is; a better kind of life that is imperishable, powerful and glorious, no longer subject to weakness (sickness, aging or death), and a

new creation-life over which no power in the universe or cosmic had any influence (cf.1 Cor.15:20-23).³⁴

The Urhobo Church Community and Pauline Concept of Resurrection: A Comparative Analysis

The Urhobo traditional religion is mainly expressed through the worship of deities called *Edjo* who they believe to be representing Oghene (the Almighty God) the Supreme Being. Some of these deities include *Olokun*, *Okunovun*, *Onerun*, etc. There is also veneration of ancestors (*erhivwi*) who the Urhobo believe to be the spirit of the living dead who watches over the affairs of the living. The Urhobo also worship these traditional divinities with substances like chicken (*okho*), goat (*evwe*), dock (*ikpukpuyeke*), cow (*irue*), plantain (*odhe* or *orhe*), yam (*onne*), Orhen (white chalk), etc through the means of sacrifice. Urhobo divinities can be classified into four main categories, which probably coincide with the historical development of the people. These are guardian divinities, war divinities, prosperity divinities and fertility and ethical divinities.³⁵

The Urhobo traditional religious adherents have a concept of resurrection which is different from that of the Christian. It is believed that when a person, especially prominent fathers and good people who have fulfilled their destinies (*urhievwe*) die, they attain the status of an ancestor and the living dead. This belief makes the traditional Urhobo man to pray calling the name of the dead person during marriage ceremonies (with libation through liquor gin) and purification rituals in the family. The spirit of the ancestor is believed to be spiritually alive in such a way that he can arrest all those who commit taboos (*egha*) in the family. One who is oppressed or being lied upon can prove his innocence by swearing with the ancestors.

The Urhobo believe in the duality of man as a personality of that consists of two beings: the physical body called *ugboma* and the spiritual body called *erhi*. It is the *Erhi* (spirit man) that declares man's destiny and controls the self realization of man's destiny before he incarnate into this world. *Erhi* also controls the total well being (*ufuoma*) of the man. *Oghene* (God) is like a constitutional Monarch who set his seal on the path of destiny set by a man's spirit (*Erhi*).³⁶ In the spirit world, (*Erivwin*) man's destiny is ratified and sealed. In the final journey of the spirit man (*Erhi*) after transition, the Urhobo believe the physical body (*ugboma*) decays while the spirit man (*Erhi*) is indestructible and goes back to join the ancestors in the spirit realm. The elaborate and symbolic burial rites are

meant to prepare the departed *Erhi* for happy re-union with the ancestors in the spirit world.

Another similar Urhobo concept of resurrection is the belief that when a person dies in a particular place, especially those who did not fulfil their destinies (*urhievwe*), such dead person or persons continue to exist in another place of the world. This belief is informed by some stories of some people who claimed to have seen their dead ones elsewhere after death. It is also believed that when such dead person is seen, the living should quickly stone the living-dead person with an egg laid by a native chicken and dead person will remain alive. Also, there exists another understanding of resurrection in Urhobo traditional understanding that, when a person dies unfulfilled, such person reincarnates several times.

There is also, the concept of resuscitation in Urhobo traditional belief and experience. This is similar to that of Lazarus in John 11. This understanding is predicated on some experiences of some people who died but came back to life after some time. Such people lived in the community before they eventually died later.

There are several nuances of the Urhobo grammar for resurrection. First, *erhovwo* (to wake up from sleep). When the verb *erhovwo* is specified with a subject it gives the intended meaning of the user. For example, *erhovwo no vwerhe* (to wake up from sleep), *erhovwo nu uwhu* (to wake up from death) and *erhovwo nu utchi* (wake up from the grave). *Erhovwo* can also mean the acceptance of presentation of items during a welcome entertainment in Urhoboland but the intended meaning of the user depends on the subject it is attached as explained by the above instances. Second, *evrhen* (to rise up) and it could mean either rising up from fallen or rising up to one's responsibility. Just like *erhovwon*, *evwrhen* gives its intended meaning a clearer understanding when used in attachment with a subject, for example, *evwrhen nu utchi* (to rise up from death), *evwrhene no ovwerhe* (to rise up from sleep or slumber), etc. Third, *ekparho* (to raise) and it means to raise up something with the aid of someone or something. To get the meaning in the context of usage, it has to also be attached with a subject, for example, *ekparo re edhe* (the postponement of date), *ekparho kpenu* (to raise or lift up with an aid), etc. When all of these grammars are related to the theme of resurrection in comparison with the Pauline usage of *egeirin* and *anistanai*, the Urhobo grammars *erhovwo*, *evrhen* and *ekparho* give the understanding of resuscitation, not resurrection but when *erhovwo nu utchi* (wake up from the grave), *erhovwo nu uwhu* (to wake up from death) and *erhovwo nu*

utchi (wake up from the grave) are used in relation to the resurrection of Jesus Christ in an Urhobo church community, it refers to the translation of Jesus' resurrection from the dead as aided by the power of *Oghene* (the Almighty God). While the Greek word used by Paul for resurrection are *egeirin* and *anistanai*, that of the Urhobo are *erhovwo*, *evrhen* and *ekparho*.

In a nutshell, what could be referred to here as the Urhobo understanding of resurrection is the concept of the living dead who is believed to have spiritually transformed into an ancestor after death. In some sense, the Urhobo concept of resurrection seems to give the understanding of immortality of the spirit of man which can be equated with the understanding of Paul's usage of *soma pneumatikon*. It is on this basis that Paul's teaching on resurrection is at variance with the various Urhobo concept of resurrection. However, the influence of Christianity is fast becoming an acceptable religion in most Urhobo communities of which many of them belong to Baptist church, Roman Catholic Church and new evangelical and Pentecostal denominations.

Theological Implications of Pauline Concept of *Egeiro* and *Soma Pneumatikon* for the Urhobo Christians

Pauline concept of *egeiro* and *soma pneumatikon* gave some theological dimensions of understanding.

- i. ***Eschatological dimension:*** This gives the understanding that there shall be an *egeirin* of those who died in Christ at the consummation of time as God has set it in physical and spiritual spheres of existence. Here in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Paul makes all Christians including those in Urhoboland to understand that Jesus' *egeiro* was the prototype of the eschatological experience of those who died in Christ. Paul also made his audience to understand that the *egeiro* of Jesus Christ was done by the aid of the power of God, and that the believer who died in Christ will also be raised up by God just the way He raised Christ from the dead. The Sadducees and Samaritans are known to have rejected this while the Pharisees accepted it.³⁷
- ii. ***Faith dimension:*** Pauline usage of *egeiro* as it relates to the Gospel story and the hope for the future of the Christian experience as promised in the scripture, 1 Corinthians 15 is a *didache* (doctrine) that was handed down to him and the Church probably by the apostles and as such it must not be seen as myth but must be accepted by faith. The apostolic creed according to Smith³⁸ carries within it the idea of faith

when it reads: “I believe in Jesus Christ... who...the third day rose from the dead, and I believe in...the resurrection of the body.” Faith in the Christian understanding is the ability to believe even when one cannot see what one hopes for.³⁹ Jesus even made it clear to Thomas that Christianity is about believing in Him without physically seeing what one believes with the physical eyes.⁴⁰ Faith in this dimension shows the Christian’s confession of an absolute trust in the uniqueness and supernaturalness of the person of Jesus Christ, and the particular hope which he has brought to men especially that of future faith of man after death. According to St. Paul, without the resurrection, the Christian message is meaningless and the faith of the Christian futile (I Cor. 15:14, 17). Belief in the resurrection of Jesus was what distinguished Christianity from other religions in the New Testament times.⁴¹ This belief permeates the entire New Testament⁴² and forms the point of departure for its message. Paul explains that without the resurrection, the New Testament loses its focus and the Christian faith its meaning. Apostolic Christianity was a Christianity of the resurrection, and its basic message was the proclamation that Jesus had risen from death. The early Fathers of the Church also affirmed the centrality of the resurrection to Christianity. According to Tertullian (c. 160 – c. 225) in his *De Resurrectione Carnis* (On the Resurrection of the Flesh), “The resurrection of the dead constitutes the confidence of Christians. By believing it we are what we claim to be.”⁴³

- iii. ***Dimension of immortality:*** Harris⁴⁴ postulated that several factors may account for the heat so often generated by the discussion of the issue of immortality as used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. First, serious misunderstanding not infrequently arises from the ambiguity of the terms ‘immortality’ and ‘resurrection’. What a student of Greek philosophy means by ‘immortality’ is certainly not what the term signifies to a New Testament exegete. What a physicist understands by the phrase ‘resurrection of the flesh’ differs markedly from the meaning attached to that phrase by a systematic theologian.

Secondly, the two terms are often (erroneously) thought to symbolize the difference between Greek philosophy and biblical revelation: Plato argued for immortality, Paul preached resurrection, it is said; the word ‘immortality’ has no proper claim to a place in the vocabulary of Christian theology. Some imagine that to defend the doctrine of ‘the resurrection of the dead’ against any notion of

'immortality' is to contend for the faith against the encroachment of philosophical paganism.

Thirdly, many who are convinced by arguments for the immortality of the soul find themselves repelled by the view (mistakenly taken to be Christian) that resurrection simply amounts to reanimation: decomposed corpses are to be revived or scattered fragments are to be reassembled, the resurrection body having the same atomic structure as the body that was laid in the grave or was cremated. The Christian view of immortality as portrayed by Paul here is not based on mere philosophical arguments but based on the belief on the omnipotence of God to do so. How God will put together the decomposed and scattered bodies of the dead on the last day is immaterial, but the faith that God can and will do it is what matters to Christian faith. Paul affirmed this line of thought in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 when he admonished the Christians in Thessalonica to live holy lives in anticipation of the *parousia* of the risen Christ. Moreover, Pauline usage of the word *soma pneumatikon* in 1 Corinthians 15:44ff indicates immortality after attaining the status of resurrection.⁴⁵ This affirms the nucleus of the Bible message of *zoe aionios* (everlasting life) which could only be attained through faith in Jesus Christ.⁴⁶

Paul makes it clear that the body of man will experience decay after physical death but shall rise on the day of resurrection to wear a glorified body (spiritual body) which cannot experience mortality. This status of immortality after resurrection according to Paul is made possible by the mighty power of God through Jesus Christ. This is the hope of all Christians including those in Urhoboland.

Another corresponding term used by Paul to describe the immortal nature of the resurrected and glorified body is the Greek words *aphtharsia* (1 Cor.15:42) and *athanasia* (1 Cor.15:53). While *Aphtharsis* means incorruption, *athanasia* means immortality. Both Greek words in this context referred to the immortality of the glorified body that will be given to the resurrected body by God to Christians at the consummation of time.

iv. **The Dimension of God's Power:** The resurrection and the transformation of the believer on the last day can only be done by the mighty power of God. To Paul, the act of the resurrection of believers on the last day is not a natural phenomenon in the material sense but a supernatural act of God in which His omnipotence and omniscient shall be displayed over nature and decay (death). Whether resurrection

is seen from the point of view of the terms *egeiro* or *anastasis* and *soma pneumatikos*, it will all be done by the infinite power of God (1 Cor.15:43).

Conclusion

Pauline usage of *egeiro*, *anastasis* and *soma pneumatikon* is predicated on the Christian belief that Christians who have died before the *parousia* are destined to be raised up by the power of God on the last day and the body that shall be raised up shall gain an immunity to that principle of decay and deterioration which characterizes humanity in Adam, through sharing the endless life of God through Christ Jesus. In distinctive usage of the term *egeiro* or *anastasis* by Paul in New Testament, particularly in 1 Corinthians 15, resurrection signifies not the reanimation of corpses but the transformation of the whole person into the image of Christ by the power of the indwelling Spirit, in spite of the intervention of death. The majority of pagan Greeks of the first century AD among whom Paul also addressed in 1 Corinthians 15 would probably have understood the New Testament phrase *hē anastasis tōn nekrōn* (the resurrection of the dead) to mean nothing more than ‘the standing up of corpses’ (cf. Acts 17:32a). Since, for the Greeks, resurrection was either impossible or at most an isolated miracle,⁴⁷ it is little wonder that some Athenians understood Paul’s reference to Jesus (*Iēsous*) and the resurrection (*anastasis*) as an allusion to two new deities, the ‘Healer’ (*Iēsō*) and his consort Restoration (*Anastasis*-cf. Acts 17:18).⁴⁸ Perhaps, some Christians in the Corinthian Church may have understood resurrection in crassly materialistic terms as simply the revival of dead persons, the restoration of decomposed bodies to their original atomic structure. But others would have inherited from Judaism the more developed view that resurrection involved the receipt of a new body (*soma pneumatikon*) as the permanent home of the soul that had been preserved intact in heavenly treasures since the time of death.⁴⁹ It was shown here that *egeiro* and *anastasis* mean resurrection or the raising up the dead on the last day.

Although, the Christian concept of resurrection was more clearer in Pauline *didache* (teaching) in 1 Corinthians 15, the general ideal of resurrection was also directly and indirectly present in the Old Testament and Intertestamental Literatures as a background to Paul’s concept on the subject matter. Theologically, Pauline concept of *egeiro* and *soma pneumatikon* could be seen from eschatological, faith, immortality and

God's power dimensions. Comparatively, the Urhobo words *erhovwo*, *evrhen* and *ekparho* give the understanding of resuscitation as against the Greek word *egeiro* or *anastasis* (resurrection) but when *erhovwo nu utchi* (wake up from the grave), *erhovwo nu uwhu* (to wake up from death) and *erhovwo nu utchi* (wake up from the grave) are used in relation to *egeiro* or *anastasis* (the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the dead in Christ), it means the same thing. In other words, while the Greek word used by Paul for resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 is *egeiro* or *anastasis*, that of the Urhobo are *erhovwo*, *evrhen* or *ekparho*. Paul's teaching on resurrection in 1 Corinthians should be taken as a masterpiece among the Urhobo Christians and live holy lives in anticipation of the *parousia* of Jesus Christ and for those who have and who will die as Christians before the second coming of Jesus Christ, there is hope of resurrection at consummation of time.

Notes and References

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30. 1 Cor. 15:39-49 All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and

another of fish. There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So also it is written, "The first man Adam, became a living soul." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

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39. See Hebrew 11:1.
40. Cf. John 20:29.
41. Justin S. Ukpong, "Background of the New Testament Concept and Language of Resurrection," in J. S. Ukpong, ed., *New Testament Essays* (Lagos: Campbell Publishers), pp.93-100.
42. Reference to the resurrection is found in every New Testament book except in 2 Thess. Titus, Philemon, 3 John, 2 Peter, Jude and James but there is no doubt that the entire New Testament ethics is that of the resurrection.
43. Tertullian, *De Resurrectione Carnis*, 1. See also T. D. Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: OUP, 1971), pp.44-48. Cited by J. S. Ukpong in page 93 of Background of the New Testament Concept and Language of Resurrection in *New Testament Essays*.
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45. 1 Corinthians 15:44-57. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man *was* of the earth, *made* of dust; the second Man *is* the Lord from heaven. As *was* the *man* of dust, so also *are* those *who are made* of dust; and as *is* the heavenly *Man*, so also *are* those *who are* heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the *man* of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly *Man*. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed-in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O Death, where *is* your sting? O Hades, where *is* your

victory?" The sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law. But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

46. See John 3:16.
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