

The Urhobo Traditional Theologumenon on Afterlife and Christian Theology of Eschatology: A Comparative Study

by

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Abstract

Using the comparative analysis model, this paper examines the Urhobo traditional world view about God and the afterlife, and compared it with the Christian theology of eschatology. The study shows that there was similarity and dissimilarity between the Urhobo cultural concept of afterlife, and the Christian theology of eschatology. The similarity portrayed that the concept of immortality is similar in both Urhobo concept of afterlife and in Christian eschatology. The dissimilarity is that while there is the concept of resurrection in Christian eschatology, Urhobo does not have such a concept. It also showed that the Urhobo cosmology reflects the afterlife and believe in ancestral spirit and other many gods with the understanding that *Oghene* the Supreme Being created other gods to represent Him in carrying out order and justice among humans. The work concluded on the presupposition that the consciousness of the afterlife in Urhoboland engenders quality ethical discipline so as to seek a good name, avert dying as bad person, and a quest to attain the status of an ancestor in the afterlife.

Key Words: Urhobo, Theologumenon, afterlife, Christian theology, eschatology.

Introduction

There are practices that mark the identity of a people. One of such things is the culture and cosmology of such people. This culture and cosmology are in relation to religion. The Urhobo people in Delta State, Nigeria are not exceptional. They have their culture and worldview. All of these are weaved up in their traditional religion called African Traditional Religion (ATR). Within this religion, the Urhobo understanding of the Supreme Being called *Oghene* (God) is given an important place.

However, their understanding are similar and dissimilar to that of the Christian in one way or the other. For example it is similar in the believe that God is the creator of all things but dissimilar in the believe that other gods where created by God Almighty to help rule the affairs of humans. The Urhobo belief about God and afterlife will be the focus in this paper.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the Urhobo traditional world view about God and the afterlife and compare it with the Christian Theology of Eschatology. In this study, the comparative model shall be explored as a methodology. The comparative model according to Ukpong (2006) seeks to establish similarities and dissimilarities between African and biblical life and thought, and correlate one with the other. In this case, the similarities and dissimilarities between Urhobo traditional *theologumenon* on the afterlife and the Christian concept of eschatology will be considered.

Conceptual Clarification

The term *theologumenon* is from the Greek, neuter *theologoumenos*. It is a present passive participle of *theologeîn*, meaning to discourse on the gods, talk about God, from *theologos theologue*. It also means a theological statement or concept in the area of individual opinion rather than of authoritative doctrine (Merriam-Webster Dictionaries, 2015). Such theological concept or idea could be informed by either theological doctrine or cultural tradition. It also refers to traditional-cultural theology. In the same line of thought, the Collins English Dictionary (2014) also refers to *theologumenon* as a theological assertion or statement not derived from divine revelation. Here in this work, *theologumenon* refers to the Urhobo traditional world view about God (Urhobo traditional theology) in the light of the afterlife and Christian theology of eschatology.

The Urhobo: Occupation and Cultural Heritage

Ekeh (2008) did a research work on “clans and kingdoms in Urhobo history and culture and described a basic unit of Urhobo culture which he termed clan. The word “clan” according to him came into existence at the onset of British colonial rule in Urhoboland in the beginning decades of the 20th century and that from prehistoric times, and even during that era of colonial rule, the Urhobo people employed their own native expressions, including *ekpotò* (that is, *ekpo r’ otò* in full phrasing), to describe these units of Urhobo culture. Other words that were so used to describe Urhobo’s cultural units were *ekuoò* and *ubrotò*. However, that colonial term of “clans” dominated Urhobo studies and everyday analysis of Urhobo ways of life until its authority was undermined in the late 1990s. Ekeh also made reference to Otite (1973) in which the term “kingdom” was first applied to the special case of Okpe.

Otite's use of the term "kingdom" was specialized and was largely circumscribed by the unique events of Okpe history. Ekeh also pointed out that the publication of Otite's book in the early 1970s did not diminish the use of the term "clans" for describing Urhobo's subcultures nor did it lead to any upswing in the use of "kingdoms" in Urhobo studies and everyday life. To Ekeh, the various units of Urhobo is called clan even when kingdom is used by other scholars. Using the term kingdom to describe the various units of the Urhobo people could be controversial in the sense that some units which do not have a king cannot be called a kingdom. However, it is equally correct to the units as kingdom especially when traditional monarchs are ruling such units or entities. In Ekeh's view, these basic subunits of Urhobo culture were prehistoric. That is, their existence predated modern historiography that assigns dates and ascertainable time periods to historical events and that today, Urhobo scholars and culture artists have arrived at a sum total of twenty-two of these units of Urhobo culture. By saying that they are prehistoric, we mean to say that all of them—*Agbarha-Ame, Agbarha Otor, Agbarho, Agbon, Arhavwarien, Avwraka, Ephron, Eywreni, Eghwu, Idjerhe, Oghara, Ogor, Okere, Okparebe, Okpe, Olomu, Orogun, Udu, Ughelli, Ughievwen, Uvwie, and Uwherun* were well settled before the rise of significant historical epochs that defined the boundaries of medieval and modern Urhobo history. Thus, it is presumed that all these twenty-two subunits of Urhobo culture were in existence before the rise of Benin Empire in the 1440s and before the arrival of the Portuguese in the Western Niger Delta in the 1480s.

The Urhobo people are spread over nine local government areas of Delta State such as: Ethiope East, Ethiope West, Okpe, Ughelli South, Ughelli North, Sapele, Udu, Uvwie and part of Warri South. In both their homeland and in diaspora in 2002, their population is estimated to be over 2 million (Akpomovie, 2009 citing Otite, 2003 and Eriwwo, 2003). In this same vein, Aweto and Igben (2003) say that the Urhobo are united not only by ties of ethnicity and culture but also by the salient geographical features of the territory they occupy as their homeland. Moreover, they held that the Urhoboland is a deltaic plain, generally under 30 metres above mean sea level, without prominent hills rising above the general land surface. The climate is also uniform, being humid sub-equatorial rainforest climate with a fairly marked seasonality in rainfall distribution.

The main traditional occupation of the Urhobo people is agriculture. The type of agriculture that was practiced was the subsistence method of which farm lands were cultivated and fishes caught from the river for family consumption or social exchange. Lumbering was also an occupation among the Urhobo. Okpokunu (2001) did a research work on a development ethnography of Urhobo agriculture from an ecological perspective and presented an ethnographic analysis of the patterns of agricultural development within the ecosystem of the Urhobo (in the Niger Delta hinterland, Nigeria) over several centuries and shows how a complex interaction between ecological and socioeconomic factors gave rise to its degeneration in recent times.

Based on data from previous studies carried out in 1987-1988 and 1990, the Okpokunu presents information on physical characteristics of the Urhobo environment, including ecological variations, types of farm land, space for land and farming, soil types and ecological prospects and concluded that earlier generations could sustain agricultural development in the Urhobo ecosystem because their mode of adaptation throughout was oriented towards environmental conservation in which the purpose of agriculture was to provide food and possibilities for social exchange. Furthermore, Okpokunu asserts that Agricultural development in Urhoboland consisted of the gradual acquisition of new crops, the evolution of viable farming systems, and appropriate technology and that when this mode of adaptation began to get disrupted, especially some 40 years ago, Urhobo agriculture came into its present crisis because land has become smaller and poorer and human ambition increased, new economic alternatives emerged with which agriculture cannot compete in the context of a monetized economy. By implication, the Urhobo practiced subsistent farming with crude agricultural implements like hoe, knife, locally made spade, etc. The present day emphasis on commercial agriculture has eroded this type of traditional practice.

Literary Heritage

The Urhobo is rich in literary expression. Their literary expertise is demonstrated through oratory and philosophical speeches. They speak in parables and idioms. The elderly ones teach the younger ones. They also demonstrate their literary proficiency in their folklores which is similar to that of other Niger Delta counterparts like the Ijaw, Ibibio, Anang, Edo, Efik, etc. This similarity is what Oduaran (2013) called common ground of interaction. This folklores and parables are used to form traditional legacies for the future generation.

Tradition of the Urhobo Origin

Otite (2003:23) asserts that the Urhobo are surrounded by other neighbours such as the Isoko to the South-East, the Itsekiri to the West, the Bini to the North, the Ijaw to the South and the Ndokwa to the North-East and that the geographical characteristics and natural resources played an important role in the migration history of the Urhobo. He further explained that the name Urhobo is a name or word which etymology has both a linguistic and socio-cultural grouping and it is not yet known. How did the Urhobo originate? The history of the Urhobo is mostly based on oral tradition which has not been fully substantiated. In the work of Otite (2003: 25-29) on the Urhobo history, he pointed out four main traditions of the origin of the Urhobo. These traditions collected at different times in different places and by different researchers are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The four main traditions of the Urhobo people according to Otite are as follows:

1. *Autochthony*: This tradition states that the Urhobo were the original dwellers and owners of their territory or where they dwell today. They were the aborigines coming from nowhere but living in their territories from time immemorial. This tradition is without documentation or archaeological evidence, yet it recurs among Urhobo respondents and it may not be brushed aside. According to Bradbury, the distinctive characteristics of the various Urhobo and Isoko tribes could probably have resulted from the super-imposition of Ijaw, Ibo and later Edo immigrants who were already speaking Edo-type dialects (Bradbury, 1957:129 cited by Otite, 2003).
2. *Emigration from an original Edo Territory*: This tradition of origin holds that the Urhobo originated from the Benin kingdom (Egharevba, 1960:14 cited by Otite). This tradition is the one found in recorded works which may have also come from oral sources. To Otite and some other scholars, the Urhobo were associated with the Bini through biological affiliation of birth or intermarriages not necessarily that Urhobo originated from the Bini.
3. *Origin from Ife*: This tradition says that the Urhobo migrated from Ile-Ife. This does not have any written record, and as such remains oral tradition.
4. *Origin from the Sudan and Egypt*: This tradition says that the Urhobo migrated from Egypt, left some of their people on the shore of Lake Chad, halted for a time at Ile-Ife, had a permanent abode at Benin and finally were driven to swamp of the Niger Delta (Otite citing Arawore and K. B. Forge's Reports). Though this tradition seems at face value a mere fiction, however it is an important indication of societal links existing between the Edo and the Yoruba speaking people.

Location, Population and Settlement

The Urhobo people live in the Mid-west region of Nigeria (Acquaye, 1974:525). They are found mainly in the Delta State of Nigeria where they constitute the largest ethnic group (Aweto and Igben, 2003:11). They are spread over nine Local Government Areas in Delta State of Nigeria. These Include: Ethipe West, Ethipe East, Ugheli South, Ugheli North, Okpe, Sapele, Udu, Uvwie and part of Warri South (*ibid*). These Local Government Areas are part of the twenty five Local Government Areas which make up Delta State as will be shown in the appendix to this work.

The Urhobo occupy a contiguous territory bounded by "latitudes 5°15' and 6° North and longitude 5°40' and 6°25' East" (*ibid*). Urhoboland is a deltaic plain, generally under 30 meters above main sea level, without prominent hills rising above the general land surface. The climate of Urhoboland is humid with subequatorial rainforest.

As regards population, there are no current accurate statistics of the Urhobo people. This situation seems to be compounded by the migratory propensity of the people (Aweto and Igben, 15). At present a large number of Urhobo people are either settling permanently or semi-permanently outside their homeland. In 1963, the Urhobo people constituted one of the ten largest ethnic groups in Nigeria (Otite citing Awolowo, 1968:141-142). The 1991 census revealed the population of the Urhobo to be over 1.1million. By 2002 the population was estimated to be over two million people including Urhobo in diasporas (Aweto and Igben, 15).

The Urhobo live mainly in nucleated settlements. Some of these are large urban centres like Warri, Effurun, Sapele and Ugheli which are of considerable commercial, industrial, educational and administrative importance (Otite, 2003:23). There are also a number of medium-sized industrial towns such as Jesse, Oghara, Okpara, Eku, Avwraka (Abraka) among others. The latter at Delta State University is rapidly growing. Some of these settlements are situated in towns and villages along the main motor roads.

Urhobo Traditional Religious Theologumenon

In the Urhobo existence, they have developed some thoughts, beliefs, religions, concepts, rich folklores, and work culture in their attempt to explain their environment and survive in it. The Urhobo believe in the supreme Being called Oghene (God). The Urhobo believe that Oghene created humans and everything we see in the world. The throne of creation is called *Urhoro* and it also connotes the abode of babies not yet born (Ottuh, 2012 citing Onobrakpeya, 2003: 379). According to the Urhobo belief, after one's image is molded out of clay by Oghene, one must kneel down before this throne to say with his mouth what one wishes in life. Once this wish was made, it was blessed and could not be revoked (Onobrakpeya, 2003). The life of the person right from birth thereafter becomes strictly governed by the wish. They also believe that every man has a destiny (*Urhievwe*) from Oghene. The Urhobo believe that every creature of God such as moon (*Emeravwe*), the sun (*Uvo*), water (*ame*), etc, have their functions in cosmic activities. The Urhobo believe that Oghene is transcendent and as such he created other gods and other spirits to act on his behalf in the affairs of humans. Also these gods are believed to have been empowered by the spirit of the ancestors and other spirits to act in the affairs of Humans. Some of the gods include, *edjokpa* (god of palm tree), *emedjo* (dancing masquerades), *okunovu* (water related deity), *Erivwi* (spirit of the ancestors) who helps to fetch out and punish culprits who violate the norms and values of the land (Eriwo,1991:66).

Urhobo value and wisdom are reflected in the names of people and things, proverbs, songs, prayers and incantations. They are the results of careful observations of nature and the understanding of both the physical and spiritual aspects of humans. These became codes or canons, which guide behaviour and reasoning and are profusely, quoted during speeches. The Urhobo welcome their visitors with kolanuts, drinks and money.

An acceptance speech is always concluded with a prayer expressing five points life expectations: *Emamoremo* (good children), *Ufuoma* (peace), *Omakpokpo* (good health), *Idolo* (wealth) and *Otovwe* (long life). The Urhobo also believe in reincarnation. People who had lived and died do return to the world again through rebirth to have another life which may be different from the previous life they lived. Almost every clan in Urhoboland has her own myth of creation and names of their gods and beliefs but the ones above are some of the major Urhobo world-view (Ottuh, 2008, 2012).

Afterlife in the Urhobo Cultural Milieu and the Christian Theology of Eschatology: A Comparative Analysis

The Afterlife Concept in Urhobo Cosmology

There are three stages of man in Urhobo cultural understanding: birth, marriage and death. It is believed that when a child is born, the child came with *urhievwe* (destiny) from Oghene (the Supreme Being) and as such, the person lives on earth according to his or her *urhievwe*. Both birth and marriage are stages of celebration in the life of a person and death is believed to be the end of human's journey here on earth. The Urhobo describes the activities of humans with the analogy of *eki* (market transactions) depicting that those who go to the *eki*, go there to trade after which they return home. This implies that humans are like marketers who go to market to trade and return home. Returning home means death, meaning there is life after death. The afterlife concept in Urhobo cosmology lies within the understanding that after the death of a person, there is another type of life lived in *erhivwi* (the spirit world). The Urhobo believe that good people in the society who died metamorphose spiritually to the abode meant for such people to continue a better life called *urhorho*. It is also believed that evil people who died go to the abode of suffering called *egbevwerhe*. Death is also categorized in Urhobo culture and it is called *ughwu*. There is *ughwu rhi ikprhegede* (sudden death, that is one dyeing abruptly without any sign or traced causes), *ughwu ri idadiri* (any how death, either through accident or sickness) and *emamoru ughwu* (good death). While the formers are referred to as bad death, the latter is referred to good death. It is being referred to as good death because this type come at a very old age when a person is fulfilled. It is believed that those who died before their time do not go to any abode, rather their spirits hover around and even go elsewhere to fulfill their destinies before finally exiting the world.

There are equally two aspects of the human being in Urhobo cosmology. In line with the above understanding, Nabofa (2005) asserts that in the Urhobo concept of human existence:

every human being is composed of two principal entities which are referred to as *Erhi* and *Ugboma*, which could be roughly translated as Soul/Spirit and body. In referring to these two halves of man at the same time, the people first mention *Erhi* before *Ugboma* (soul and body) because it is the former that gives meaning and expression or reality to the latter. In the people's cosmology, these two entities were supposed to have lived forever, but something happened whereby man has been cursed to die. God's primeval plan was that when human beings grew really old they would regenerate by sloughing off their skins like snakes, including the renewal of their physical nature and vigour. They were to become fresh and young human beings. This process was to be repeated, so man was to live forever...but they lost this mythical eternity. They explain the loss with a myth which states that a misunderstanding arose among human beings and animals at the cradle of their lives over the fate and duration of all creatures' stay on earth. In order to resolve this issue they sent the dog and the toad to God for final determination. Each of these emissaries was given a different message to deliver to God as the choice of his creatures. It was agreed that whichever message out of the two got to God first He would ratify as a choice they made out of their free will. The dog was asked to tell God that all creatures have chosen to live forever, in accordance with the primordial plan; while the toad bore the message which states that they were not to live forever; but to return to God, that is, die after a while. At the start of the race to God, the dog outran his rival but its attention was diverted to human faeces and its other favourite foods that lay along the path on which they were running. It stopped and started to eat; it over-helped itself and fell asleep. The toad caught up with the dog, passed it where it was snoring in a deep slumber and got to God first with its message just before the dog sped to the finishing point. God ratified the toad's message and death came to be among all creatures. They all came to accept it as God's decree resulting from their decision which cannot be altered.

The toad in Urhobo symbolizes something meaningful hence its usage in this cosmological folklore in the narrative of the cause of death. The Urhobo name for toad is *Owhokpo* which etymologically and literally means, "the one who dies should go home." This name arose out of the myth which states that it was the one whose message brought death to mankind (Nabofa, 1983:297). This no doubt must have also influenced the thinking about the frailty of human beings and at the same time the afterlife concept because as time went on, human beings started to reflect on the nature and purpose of human life and they came to develop the hope that death does not write *finis* to human life (Nabofa, 2005; Schopenhauer, 1974, 276).

In an earlier study carried by Nabofa (1978: 72-78) he identified five entities which the Urhobo consider to make up a human being and these are: (a) *Erhi* - the Human Double or the Soul; (b) *Ugboma* - the physical body; (c) *Enhwen* - the breathe of life; (d) *Udu* - the essence of the human heart; and (e) *Uhobo* – ethereal body. Among all these *Erhi* and *Ugboma* are considered to be more vital. Dopamu (2006) agreeing with Field (1980:17) called this human identity ‘dogma of human personality. Human personality concerns the physical and psychical constitution of human beings, or the visible and the invisible aspects of human beings. The dogma of human personality, therefore, is a sort of dualism in the nature of human beings, delineating matter and spirit.

According to Nabofa (1983: 296), it is believed in Urhobo cultural understanding that the soul of the departed is said to stand near the body or hover around the premises where the corpse lies, watching over all the burial and funeral performances on its physical part. It remains there for about ninety days before it finally expires into the land of the dead to be fully incorporated into the happy folds of the ancestors, if he is considered worthy to be among them, otherwise, he will be driven out to lament his fate. This is one of the main reasons why full burial rites among the Urhobo are spread over such a period. Nabofa explained further that:

the descendants of the deceased, especially those who are supposed to take over his erstwhile responsibilities, both in the home and in the community are required to remain in his home, where, in most cases, he is buried, for at least three months. They are required to remain there so that the soul of the newly departed may not feel lonely while still hovering around; rather it is believed to make the living-dead feel happy in the midst of his descendants. Such practice is said to give the departed an assurance that though he is dead his place in the society has not become empty. This is an aspect of immortality that every Urhobo craves for and those who have no offspring from their own loins are said to lament their fate in their death-bed and while on their journey to the land of the dead. There is an aspect of every Urhobo funeral rites which eloquently reveals the idea of the present of the deceased's soul where such rituals may be taking place. The first few drops from each bottle of drink opened for the rites are poured out. They are for the departed and his invisible spiritual companions who have come to rejoice his home-coming with him and receive him into their fold. Not to pour out such libations is believed to result in the breaking of drinking glasses and bottles, and fights among the celebrants. It is as a result of the above belief and practices that the deceased are said not to be really in the grave that the Urhobo have no doctrine of the resurrection of the body, that is, to use Idowu's words, "not in the dramatic eschatological sense of the grave giving up their dead at the consummation of all thing (Idowu, 1970:196).

To them, what takes place happens immediately after death. The dead pass through the gates to the spiritual realm when all the necessary rituals have been performed. As the departed are never regarded as being really dead in the grave, their offspring and other relations still refer to them as their fathers, mothers, brothers or sisters which they were before their transition. They are believed to be still capable of exercising their parental roles or so, though now in a more powerful and unrestricted way, over their survivors.

One of the concepts of the afterlife in Urhobo cultural understanding is the concept of the living dead. It is believed that a person who died lives on in the spirit realm as an ancestor if such person is qualified. The person guides and protects the family. So in trouble situation, the ancestors are consulted for direction and solution. Those who commit taboos in the family are arrested by *erivwi*, otherwise called the spirit of the ancestor.

Christian Theology of Eschatology

Christian eschatology is the branch of theological study relating to last things, such as concerning death, the end of the world, the judgment of humanity, and the ultimate destiny of humanity (Erickson, 1998:1156). Eschatological passages are found in many places in the Christian Bible, with many being found in the Old Testament prophets, especially in Isaiah and Daniel. Many are also found in the New Testament books, such as Matthew 24, Matthew 25, the General epistles, the Pauline epistles, and the Book of Revelation. It is also being seen as the branch of Christian theology that deals with the biblical study of end times prophecies and the events of the last days. Some of these events include the Rapture, the Second Coming of Christ, the Tribulation, the Millennial Kingdom and the Future Judgments. The primary books of the Bible pertaining to end times prophecy are the book of Daniel, the book of Ezekiel and the book of Revelation (<http://christianity.about.com/od/faqhelpdesk/a/eschatology.htm>).

Anyanwu (2012:28-29) postulates that the concept of metaphysical life gives two constant ideologies, that is, the concepts of resurrection and immortality which co-relate with life after death culminating the rising of the dead or flesh/body at the resurrection of the dead. The resurrection of the dead or of the flesh, in some cases is linked up with the question of the immortality of the soul (van Unnik, 1964). Anyanwu explains further that both resurrection and immortality are related though; there are inner differences which could be misconstrued. The two concepts describe life after death. In its strictest definition, life-after-death is a conscious existence after resurrection. For the Christian, it is the fullness of life in God. Paul attested to this concept in 1 Corinthians 15 that there will be resurrection of the dead on the last day. Paul taught that the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is a prototype for Christian resurrection on the Last Day.

Paul used the Greek words *egeiro* and *anastasis* to mean resurrection, the term *soma pneumatikon* to mean glorified body. Ottuh (2013) using the inculturation model pointed out that 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 who do not believe. Anyanwu (2012:28-29) added that:

Christians (catholic) believe life in God begins here in the present physical world especially through the sacraments. It begins with the sacrament of baptism. By baptism, the Christian is buried with Christ and share his death. Thus, Paul writes; "by our baptism, then, we were buried with him and shared his death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from death by the glorious power of the Father, so also we might live a new life. For since we have become one with him in dying as he did, in the same way we shall be one with him by being raised to life as he was" (Rom 6:4-5). It is the objective of Christian baptism and initiation, to transform the Christian from mortality to immortality. By initiating him in the death of Christ to gain the immortal life of he who has conquered death. The death of Christ is only salvific, it does not destroy or obliterate our own individual physical death. However, through the help of God who resurrected Jesus, death becomes a means of life for many through baptism. Death of course does not destroy life in the baptized of Christ. The death of a Christian therefore becomes only but a reiteration of a systematic change; from one stage to another, one life to the next, in this way life does not end. It does not enter into oblivion neither is it a cessation of existence. Thus, the terms resurrection and immortality brought to light by the Gospel means that man rediscovers in God his whole history. In this mode, resurrection is not a question of empty faith or a simple belief on a survival theory. It is not just a mere doctrine of hope, which we must believe in order to escape the worries of the present situation. It is not a theory we must believe just because we wish to survive and experience a better life beyond the grave. It is an inevitable moment in human existence when death seen as an enemy will turn to be a great crusader of life. It is a moment when death will be a gateway to the immortal life of the transformed.

The above quotation depicts the fact that the Christian believe that the beginning of real life starts from death. By implication, it is understood that a Christian transits from this world and sleeps in the Lord. Christians believe that resurrection has two dimensions. First, the resurrection of the righteous. Paul taught that the resurrection of the righteous will take place first and then they go with Jesus to Heaven and this shall be followed by those who are alive at the time of the rapture (I Thess. 4:16-17). Second, the resurrection of sinners (those who refused to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour). This type of people shall resurrect from the dead to face judgment so as to be remanded in hell for everlasting suffering. Phan (1997:16) says that eschatology in Christian understanding is regarded:

as a rule, religions claim to offer answers to questions regarding the beyond and to help their followers attain ultimate happiness variously referred to as heaven, paradise, eternal life, or nirvana. Christianity is no exception. One of the central tenets of its creeds proclaims that its founder, Jesus Christ, who died and was raised to life will come again to judge the living and the dead and that there will be the resurrection of the dead and life everlasting.

Phan's understanding showed that Christianity is centered around the afterlife which is termed eschatology. Despite the fact that Christianity is regarded as eschatological in essence, a religion of hope, based on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it would seem that with the likely exception of Lent, Easter and funerary liturgical services, eschatological talk rarely features in Christian preaching and discourse in contemporary times.

After life in Urhobo Cosmology and Eschatology in Christian Theology: Similarity and Dissimilarity

There are similarity and dissimilarity in Urhobo afterlife concept and that of Christian doctrine of eschatology. The similarity is the concept of immortality. Both the Urhobo traditional understanding of the afterlife and Christian understanding of eschatology agree that the afterlife is a life in the spirit realm. While the concept of rest and immortality palliate that of Urhobo concept, eschatology in Christian doctrine equally have the concept of rest and bliss which will take place in Heaven. The idea of immortal ancestors dominates African thought about death and the afterlife. Although the mode is different, the idea of immortality is present in both concepts. While that of Christian take place after the resurrection, that of Urhobo traditional believe is within the grave.

The dissimilarity is resurrection of the dead and heaven. The Urhobo traditional understanding does not believe in resurrection neither do they know anywhere called heaven. They only believe in reincarnation. They also believe in ancestral spirit not resurrection. The Christian on the other hand believe in resurrection and heaven. Resurrection means the rising of the dead to possess a new body called *soma pneumatikon* and when this happens, the person goes to heaven to live with God forever. On the contrary, the Urhobo believe that when a person dies, such person translate into the realm of the ancestor if he deserves the status. Another is the concept of the soul. Wiredu (1987) says that in the Western tradition one can trace the notion of the soul as an astral body to Tertullian, the idiosyncratic early church father (160-220 A.D.). He argued that the conclusion that the soul is corporeal (though ethereal) can be inferred from the Christian doctrine of purgatory. What contemporary spiritualism adds to Tertullian's conception is the social dimension. This social dimension is, however, unsystematic and desultory in comparison with that of the African idea of ancestors. The African ancestors rule their kin from the grave, so to speak; the same cannot be said of their astral counterparts. Because of their minimal social interactions with the living, the cultural significance of the latter (even among the persuaded) is not as great as that of the former (Wiredu).

Conclusion

The concept of afterlife in Urhobo cultural milieu and that of the Christian concept of eschatology show the reality that human beings must be born and they must also die. The only thing human beings pray for is long life. This work has shown that there is similarity and dissimilarity between the Urhobo cultural concept of afterlife and the Christian understanding of eschatology. While that of Urhobo portray immortality, Christian eschatology also portrays immortality after resurrection. While there is the concept of resurrection in Christian eschatology, that of Urhobo does not have such concept.

The work has also shown that the Urhobo are found in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria (South of Nigeria) and their cosmology reflect the afterlife and believe in ancestral spirit. The Urhobo believe in Oghene as the Supreme Being calls for respect and awe before the Supreme Being in all that one does within the context of polytheism because they believe that other gods are representing the Supreme Being in carrying out order and justice among humans. The consciousness of the afterlife in Urhoboland challenges the Urhobo people to seek good name and good behaviour within societal ethics and material contributions.

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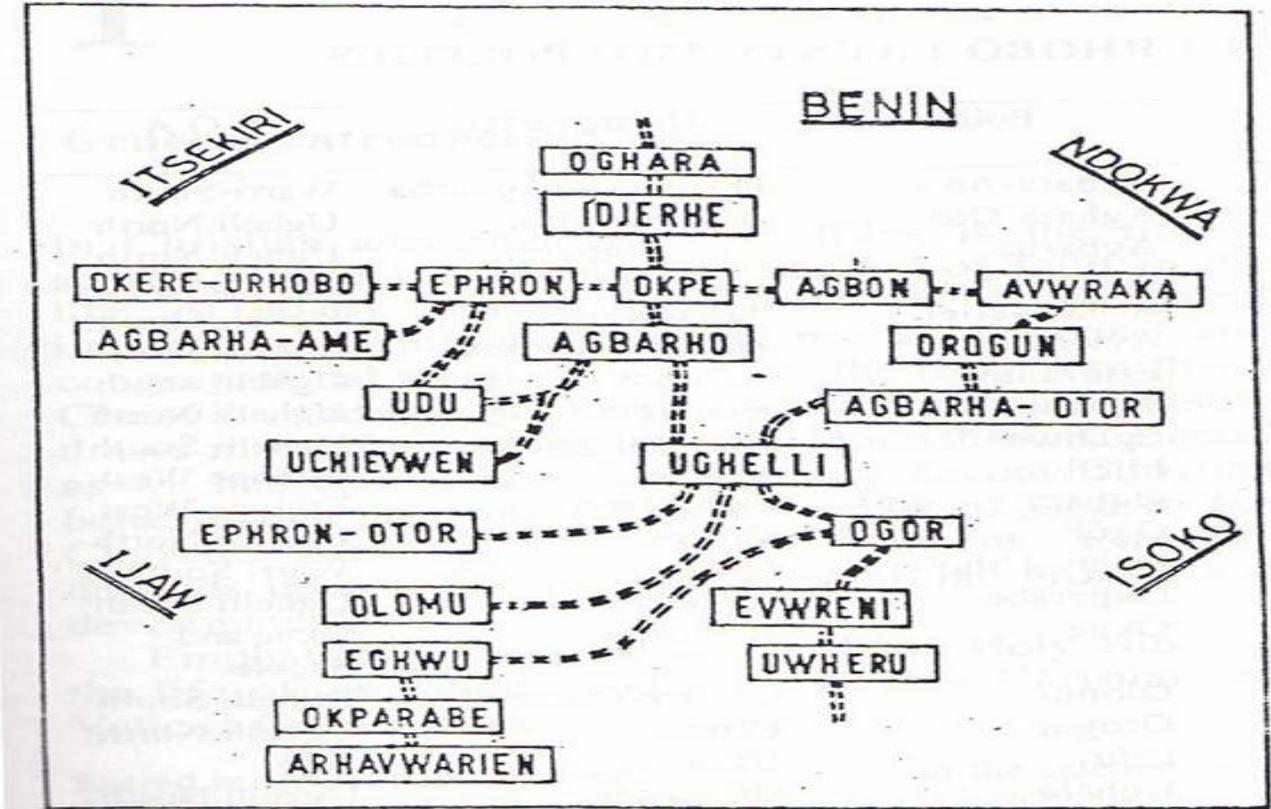
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Appendix

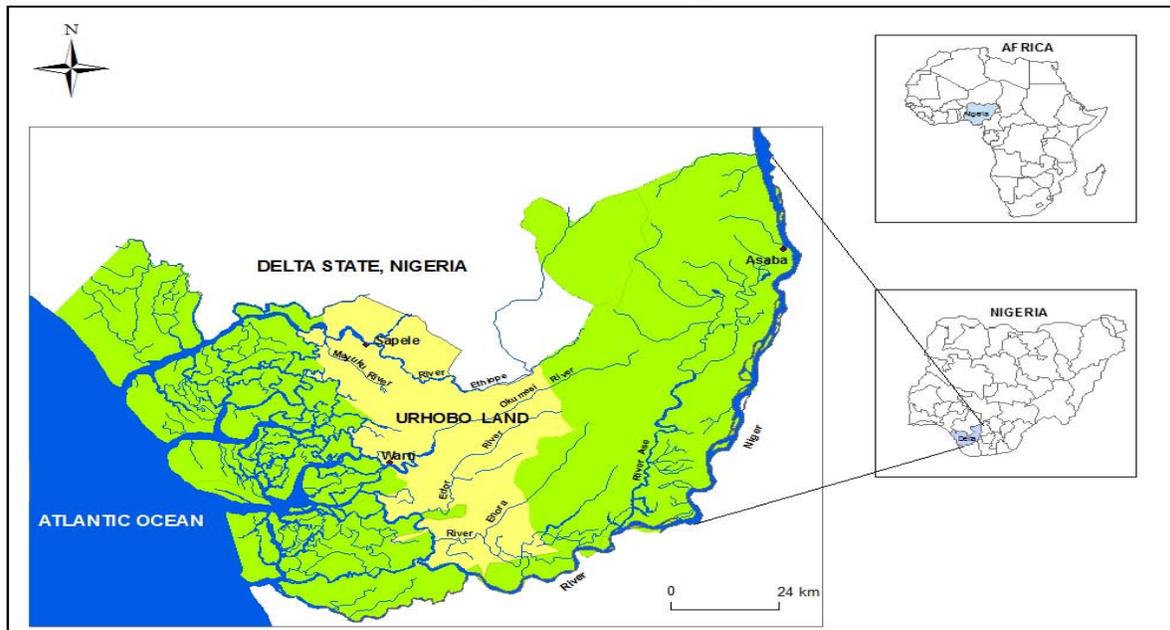
Figure 1: Geographical Display of Urhobo's Cultural Units



Source: Ekeh citing Michael Nabofa's Geographical Display of Urhobo's Cultural Units

Figure 2:

A Map of Delta State, Nigeria, Showing Urhoboland and Major Rivers of Western Niger Delta



Map drawn by Professor Francis Odemerho, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, USA

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