

# **Kirimomo: A Hermeneutical Approach in Gospel Proclamation among the Urhobo of the Niger Delta**

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## **Introduction**

The research on the history of gospel music in Urhoboland is broadly divided into two parts. These parts cover the era of Adam Igbudu and the post-Adamic period. The development of Urhobo gospel music can be traced to the Protestant Churches especially the Anglican Church. The origin of gospel music in Urhoboland is not specifically known. Scholars of Urhobo studies are not certain as to how and when it began. Urhobo gospel music began in a combination of many factors. It was unconsciously fabricated with some elements of cultural influences and divine inspiration.

It is therefore the purpose of this study to establish the historical origin of Urhobo gospel music and the way it is used to spread the gospel. The study is also intended to show how the gospel music was influenced by local factors. Two basic methods are used in this study. These are the historical approach and the interview methods. The interviews were carried out randomly in several Urhobo towns: Abraka, Eku, Kokori, Ughelli, Egborode, Ewureni and Sapele. Forty persons were interviewed<sup>1</sup>. This implies that about seven persons were interviewed in each town. The people interviewed were mostly elders of Churches and some pastors. The interview

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<sup>1</sup> Some people did not respond to the interview invitations. I did not meet five persons at home when I visited them for a second time. Six persons refused to be interviewed in spite of my request because they were afraid of state security agents.

is significant because those from whom information was solicited were either contemporaries of the early Urhobo gospel music activist or pioneers of the gospel music who are still living.

### **The Coming of the Missionaries**

The coming of the missionaries is a prelude to the development of indigenous music in Urhoboland. The first attempt to Christianise the Urhobo took place in 1470 by Portuguese missionaries. This effort failed because of inadequate finance, manpower and the unfavourable climate. Towards the middle of the 19th century, Christianity came to Urhoboland from three fronts: Sapele, Urhuovie and Warri. The Church Missionary Society first appeared in Urhoboland in 1854 at Okwagbe, 1864 in Warri and 1892 in Sapele and Urhuovie (Ajayi 1981; Erivwo 1973:34).

These missionary attempts derive from the efforts of Samuel Ajayi Crowther and some ex-slaves in Sapele. The church spread and established stations in the Urhobo hinterland. It came to be known as the Niger Delta Pastorate under Bishop James Johnson (Ayandele 1970:88; Ryder 1960:1). It has become the Anglican Dioceses of Warri, Ughelli and Oleh. The fourth diocese, Sapele diocese comes from the old Warri diocese. The Urhobo tribe is a tribe among four other tribes in the three dioceses. These dioceses came into existence by due process and by the effort of a hard working Bishop, Rt. Rev. Eneku.

The Roman Catholic Mission later came to Urhobo-land. Coming in a big way with both human and material resources, parishes were established in Warri in 1919 by Rev. Fr. Cavegenaire and Fr. Olier, Aragba in Orogun clan in 1920 by Rev. Fr. George and Eku in 1921 by Rev. Fr. Kelly. By 1924, the church has come to Ovu, Okurekpo, Okpara, Kokori, Ughelli, Ovwo, Ekuigbo, Ewvreni, Olomu and Arhavwarien<sup>2</sup>.

The Baptist Mission came to Urhobo-land in 1920. The charismatic activities of A. Omotosola in 1921 and Jove Aganbi in 1926 contributed to the spread of the Baptist Church in Sapele and Eku. From these two places, the mission came to Abraka, Okpe, Idjerhe, Agbon, Ughelli and Orogun.

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<sup>2</sup> An interview with Rev. Fr. A. Ozele, Aragba, Age 42 years, Aragba Parish Priest, 2/4/2000. Cf. Ryder (1992:2).

Makpa Mojami brought the Baptist Church to Oginibo near Ughelli in 1922. Oginibo became an important centre of the Baptist Church among the riverine Urhobo (Atanda 1988: 246).

This in brief is the spread of Christianity in Urhoboland. Within three decades (1901-1930), Christianity of various brands had entered Urhobo hinterland through Urhuovie, Sapele, Warri, Eku and Ughelli. By 1935, the entire land was dotted with mission houses, schools and hospitals. The Bible was their major material. The Niger Delta Pastorate suffered much schism and intrigues from rival denominations. This led to some mutual hostility and suspicion. The Mother Church in England also alienated them. Thus, they remained in isolation without any assistance from the Church Missionary Society in England for over five decades. Though the Baptist Mission has made some in-road in this locality, the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Missions have won more converts. The evangelical pressure and rivalry of the indigenous Pentecostal Churches currently confront these Colonial Churches. This has forced the three orthodox Churches to critical self-examination. They had to either swallow their pride which is embedded in a European 'slow motion liturgy' or face extinction.

Thus, Christianity came into Urhobo land swathed in Western garments. They came through the agencies of the missionaries, traders and British government. They came with the Bible, hymn and liturgical books of different types. For the first decade of Christianity in Urhoboland, Western hymns set in the metric system were used: *Ancient and Modern* for Protestants, and the Westminster hymns for Catholics. These hymns remained in vogue from 1920 to 1930. They remained till such a time when some Urhobo Christians felt bored and unimpressed<sup>3</sup>. They wanted to sing and dance in their native language for the gospel to be effectively spread among the people.

## Basic Terms

Among Urhobo Christians, the word for gospel music is '*Iyere Esiri*'. It means songs of good-news. It is popularly called *kirimomo*. But *kirimomo*

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Mr. Lawrence Oniovosa, Ughelli, Age 37 years, 13/2/2000. Cf. Onosemuode (1991: 92).

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has over-shadowed the original name 'Iyere Esiri'. This term has no definite meaning. Urhobo choirmasters mostly use it. Isoko people also employ this word in their songs. It is designated *kirimomo* because Christ is asked to come nearer. For this reason, the word has become increasingly associated with Urhobo gospel music. Urhobo gospel music may be defined as the songs of praise, which Urhobo Christians coined from the Bible into their own language. They draw the songs from both Testaments and are not restricted to the Gospels alone as the title implies.

*Kirimomo* is a compound word of *kiri* and *momo*. *Kiri* is 'near' and *momo* is 'come'. Thus it can be translated as draw near, or come very close. Hence, Henry Ovie said 'It is to draw nearer'<sup>4</sup>. The term, *kirimomo* performs certain functions in the music. It is used in Gospel songs to control the rhythms and to boost the melody. It indicates as well the moment of real dancing when the choristers stop verbal action for body-demonstration. According to Matthew Idjighere 'the word precedes 'abor', clapping of hands, by the choir'<sup>5</sup>. In an actual choral situation, it is used three times by the leader of the choir as follows:

*Kirimomo kiri*  
*Kirimomo kiri*  
*Kirimomo kiri*

Draw near nearer  
Draw near nearer  
Draw near nearer

## **The Origin of Urhobo Gospel Music**

### **Early Urhobo Gospel Music: 1900-1926**

Urhobo Gospel music started from revival groups in the Anglican and Baptist churches. The missionaries came into Urhoboland and made efficient use of local resources and able Church members. A process of adaptation and indigenisation of personnel, church music and structure was put in use soon after Christianity was founded. Bishop James Johnson of the Niger Delta Pastorate appointed some local converts as agents. This action was in

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Rev. Matthew Idjighere, Abraka, Age 40 years, 17/4/2000, founder of Christ Saviours' Chapel.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Mr. Odieta Erhapowhenri, Okpara, Age 38 years, 16/6/2000, a catechist.

compliance with the policy of Henry Venn which required that a native Church must have a native pastorate in a self-sustaining system (Okologbo 1984: 19).

Notable agents between 1902 and 1917 were Omofoye Emuakpo who controlled Effurun, Oguname and Mogba areas. Efanodo took charge of Eku, Ovu and Abraka. Evwaire was the agent of Johnson in Ughelli from 1910 to 1920. He also spread the faith to a part of Isoko: Iyede, Erhwen, Ernevor, Owhe and Ozoro clans (Erivwo 1973: 37). Others include Oluku, Adjarho in Ekiugbo, Mukoro Kaghogho in Eruemukohwarien and Oghenebrume in Ukwokori assisted by Jacob Oluwole.

Masima Ebossa and Ejovi Aganbi were prominent agents. They were both active Christian leaders in Eruemukohwoarien and Eku respectively between 1918 to 1926. The first revival movement in Urhoboland was formed and led by M. Ebossa. Isikpe stood firmly for the Church in Ewreni (Earawore 1984: 2f). These agents became the main bearers of the Anglican faith in the Urhobo sub-region. They had a great deal of zeal and enthusiasm to spread the gospel and convert souls to Christ. They acted as Church teachers and leaders in their own locality.

These agents had a great deal in common particularly in the method of evangelism. They preached the gospel through singing and dancing. They organised fellowships where this could happen. They prayed, fasted and preached the Bible. The missionaries had taught the agents simple English and fundamental Christian doctrines. They were used alongside the ex-slaves in Sapele and Urhuovie as interpreters, crusaders, revivalists and catechists. Onakome Edevwie in Urhuovie, an ex-slave, composed the first Urhobo revival song in 1910. The song reads:

*O re! O re! Urhobo O re!*

*Otu re g' ame g' irhe O re!*

*Ore ru wa kp' Ishoshi Ijesu ta re ni O re!*<sup>6</sup>

It is finished (twice)

Urhobo it is finished.

Worshippers of water and wood

Go to the church because Jesus  
said it is finished.

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Mr. James Edevwie, Urhovie, Age 65 years, 22/5/2000. He is the son of Onakome. Edevwie, an ex-slave in Urhuovie, composed this song.

Mr. D. Esiovo related one early Urhobo gospel song:

*Edjo Sheri – O*

*O! She*

*O! Sheri – O*

*O She*

*Edjo Sheri – Oh! Sheri*

*O! Sheri – O (thrice)*

*O! She<sup>7</sup>*

Evil Spirits have fallen

Oh! Have fallen

Oh! Have fallen

Oh! Have fallen

Oh! Evil Spirits have fallen,  
have fallen

Oh! Have fallen (thrice)

Oh! Have fallen.

These songs were some efforts of early Urhobo to use music to preach and teach the gospel. They were the prevailing songs from about 1906 to 1920. These songs were very effective for conversion. Many Urhobo turned out in great numbers to embrace Christianity in defiance of the traditional religious beliefs<sup>8</sup>. The songs reflect the Christology of early Urhobo Christians. It was a power Christology. This far-reaching conclusion is deduced from two concepts among Urhobo Christians: '*Orugbawa*' and '*Operu Ugbenu*'<sup>9</sup>.

*Orugbawa* means defier of evil spirits and taboos. It implies that Jesus is the destroyer of evil spirits, witches and wizards. According to S.U. Erivwo, the traditionalists designated Christianity as *Orugbawa* because members defied all taboos, totems, clan gods and ancestors with impunity. Consequently thousands who desired to be liberated from the tyranny of evil spirits, witches and wizards accepted the Christian faith. *Operu Ugbenu*, which literally means breaker of mountains, is one of the early Christian songs in Urhoboland. Ugbenu is the metaphor for obstacles and problems in life. The song means that God is the destroyer of obstacles and problems in people's lives.

By 1918, the hymn book, *Ancient and Modern* has been translated

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Mr. D. Esiovwa, Agbaro, Age 48 years, 3/12/1999.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Dr. Jude Ukaga, Benin, Age 42 years, 17/12/99. He is a lecturer at the University of Benin, Benin City.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Mr. J. Adaga, Abraka, 19/4/2000. He is the Chairman of Emmanuel Urhobo Joint Choir in Abraka Zone.

into the Urhobo language. Mr. Emedo of Orogun in 1920 published a Urhobo prayer and song book<sup>10</sup>. This prompted other pioneer Urhobo Christians to compose and arrange original biblical songs in the local language. The nature of the missions in Urhoboland led to the use of agents because missionaries were confronted with language barriers. The Urhobo and the missionaries could not communicate effectively because they did not understand one another's language sufficiently. The missionaries were also faced with the problem of inadequate manpower and finances.

Here it is worthwhile to note that Urhobo gospel music was influenced by Urhobo traditional music. Traces of the two models of dances in Urhoboland, '*Udje*' and '*Opiri*', can be found in Urhobo gospel music in words, tones, rhythm and instruments. *Udje* is a group dance. *Opiri* is Urhobo traditional highlife music<sup>11</sup>. The traditional music is rigorous because it is danced with much strength and physical exertion. Before the advent of Christianity, the Urhobo had many family and community social activities such as wrestling, festivals of clan gods, marriage, initiations and burial ceremonies. These ceremonies were accompanied with songs, drumming and dancing. The songs are composed either to praise or humiliate an individual, family or communities.

When Urhobo gospel music started, it took the form of *Opiri* and *Udje* traditional music. Their modes of drumming, clapping of hands and rigorous dancing found the expressions in the gospel music. Traces of these could still be found in some Churches today. Nevertheless, some minute differences exist in both. The pattern of dancing by twisting the whole body in *Opiri* changed into a gentle shaking of the body in Urhobo gospel music. While *Opiri* employs the whistle, Urhobo gospel music uses the clapping of hands to tell their members to mellow down their hands and voices in order to dance silently. Urhobo gospel songs are composed either to praise God or to humiliate Satan and its agents. By 1925 gospel music in Urhoboland was widespread. At the close of this decade the interest, nevertheless, began to wane.

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with P. Emedo, Orogun, Age 62 years, 25/5/2000. He is the son of Emedo who translated *Ancient and Modern* into Urhobo language in 1920.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Mr. Samuel Okotie, Abraka, Age 50 years, 13/6/2000.

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## **The Era of Adam: 1926-1982**

By 1930, Christian activities began to dwindle in Urhoboland. The Church experienced a declining membership. This low interest was caused by the fact that missionaries trained Church workers who took over the control from the agents. For example Agori Iwe returned from catechist training in Oyo in 1928 and was posted to Ughelli. The problem rose from the manner in which Church services were conducted. When the missionaries and their trained native workers took over the conduct of Church services they introduced a liturgy which was quite alien in character. Worship became characterised by rigidity, orderliness and dullness that were quite foreign<sup>12</sup> to the Urhobo Christian. The Bible was read, the preacher talked and everybody remained still. The services were stereotyped and there was no free-flow of worship. It does not touch the inner-mind because the native-trained workers strictly followed the European pattern of worship.

European liturgy does not use a strong beat. European churches also prefer soft music that appeals to the senses. People were dissatisfied and there was a decline in Church attendance because services became dreary and unimpressive.

Many people dosed away, infants fall into naps when scripture passages were being read or sermons were being delivered because they were not actively involved in worship. Motivation and enthusiasm died (Nabofa 1992: 17).

Urhobo people are not accustomed to gentle music. They are used to exciting and soul moving rhythms, 'music of heavy rhythm produced by drums, clapping of hands' (Nabofa 1992: 18), songs and dancing are characteristics of African worship. The Urhobo man is used to the *Udje* and *Opiri* dance. He wants to shake his body, he wants to sing and dance in appreciation for what God has done for him. He learns faster through songs. He would, therefore, like to transfer and exhibit these traits in his new-found faith.

To attest decline in the membership of the Church, the leaders reversed back to the methods applied by the agents of Bishop Johnson. They constituted prayer bands that were led by some active lay Christians. The

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Chief E. Ogaga, Aladja, Age 84 years, 18/8/2000.



intention was to revive the early mode of using the Bible in worship in native language, the spirit with which the early church in Urhoboland was established. This demand was the prevailing situation in most parts of Nigeria.

Hence, Rev. Ola Olude championed a revolutionary idea in Church music in Lagos. He employed the melodies of Egungun songs for gospel music in 1930s. Ikoli Harcourt Whyte of Uzuakoli leper settlement composed Christian songs in the Ibo language. The Isoko and Urhobo also had this experience (Nabofa 1992: 28f), which brought about revival movements and the rise of the gospel music of Cornelius Adam Igbudu of Araya in Isoko.

Before the advent of Adam Igbudu when the early church was plagued with dissatisfaction, Oluku Adjarho in Ekiugbo and Mukoro Kaghogho in Eruemukohwarien were looked upon for moral, spiritual and social reforms in the Church by Urhobo Christians between 1925 and 1930. The two men initiated new revival movements in Urhoboland. They preached the Bible from place to place to convert people. New converts brought out their ritual emblems for burning. Two of Adjarho's major revival songs which he composed are as follows<sup>13</sup>:

*Chi we chi we (twice)*  
*Emo ri Jesu chi edjo hweree*  
to  
*O! chi wee*

Crush to death (twice)  
The children of Jesus have crushed the devil  
death  
O! crush to death

He also composed:

*Aya rhe ra go ghene orere*  
*Aya rhe ra gi Ibaba oreree*  
*Ab' otu rega ame g' Irhe*  
and trees

Come and let us worship God, oh city  
Come and let us worship our Father, oh city.  
Including those who worship water

*Oreree, A yarhe ra g' Oghene* Oh city, come to worship God.

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Mr. John Esioghene, Agbarha, Age 65 years, 19/12/1999.

Another device by the missionaries to revamp the declining population of the Church besides using revival movements, was to organise singing competitions among the churches. They also introduced combined services in 1929. The combined services were held on a rotational basis on every first Sunday of the month (Nabofa 1992:21). The gospel music of Adam emerged out of this gloomy situation. The charismatic activities of Adam brought gospel music in Urhobo and Isokoland to the foreground. His career cut across tribes as well as denominations.

Adam, through his gospel songs, made Isoko and the Urhobo hinterland a strong Anglican base. In fact 'what St. Patrick is to Ireland is what Adam is in Isoko and Urhoboland'. His influence could be compared to the influence which Babalola exercised in the Christ Apostolic Church in Yorubaland. This made E. Onosemuode refer to him as a great musical reformer among Isoko and Urhobo Christians (Onosemuode 1991). Cornelius Adam Igbudu hailed from Araya in Isoko. He was born into a family that believed in traditional religion. The date of his birth is still controversial. Some scholars think he was born in 1886, others believe that he was born in 1918. Many people prefer the date, 1914 given by Adam's contemporary, Chief Igrude the Chancellor of Warri Diocese (Nabofa 1992: 34).

In 1925, Adam became a member and a vocalist of Isoko folk music of Usini. According to M.Y. Nabofa, Usini was a dancing club in Uzere. It was known for its classical traditional Isoko music. Adam became a member because he loved music and dancing (Nabofa 1992: 37). He was converted into the Christianity of the Anglican communion in 1927 by Mr. Michael Adarugo Akara. He withdrew from Usini club after his conversion in order to use his musical talent for Christ. At the age of twenty he was fully involved in Church activities. He had no formal education, but he learnt reading and writing in Isoko language from Mr. Michael Adarugo Akara and catechist John Mark Israel Eloho (Nabofa 1992: 45).

Adam diligently learnt these lessons in Sunday schools and privately at the convenience of catechist John Mark Israel Eloho. He used the Obe-une Isoko (Book of Isoko language) and Mark's Gospel in the Isoko language which was translated by Israel Eloho. Adam's high spiritual developments were enhanced by his ability to read the Bible because he drew his inspiration from the holy writings. He committed many biblical passages,

prayer and hymns into his memory. These efforts assisted him in his preaching, composition of songs, spiritual and evangelistic activities (Nabofa 1992: 46).

In 1938, Adam formed a prayer and musical group of five persons in Araya. It was called Ole-Orufuo, or Ukoko Orufu (Nabofa 1992: 46) which could be translated as 'Society of Holiness'. It implies physical and spiritual purity, cleanliness, and righteousness. By 1942 the choir of Adam had increased in number and had branches in other Anglican churches in Isoko. He moved around to teach the new branches his current songs. Adam took cognisance of the spiritual slump in the Isoko and Urhobo churches caused by the belaboured liturgy. He knew that preaching by singing and dancing could touch the inner mind of the individual.

Among the Isoko and Urhobo, kings and government officials are welcomed and entertained with music and dancing. For Adam, therefore, it was not out of place to worship and praise God who is the Supreme King with drums, songs, bells, rattles, flutes and dance (Nabofa 1992: 50). Adam knew that if the gospel was to be meaningful for the people, it had to be converted into songs in traditional melodies. M.Y. Nabofa discussing V. Massasi noted:

The same duty lies on us with regard to music. If Christianity is to become evident as belonging equally to the Africans with all other races, at the first possible moment the melodies of the land should begin to be collected and Christian words composed in the same metre and form as the secular words. The songs can then be used in Church to supplement if not, to supplant the translated hymns from home (Nabofa 1992: 52).

Adam's gospel hymns and chants followed the Usini rhythm. They were formed to suit the local milieu. In 1940, he translated 'Venite' and 'Te Deum'. Some gospel songs which he composed himself include *Jesu jo Akaba ra* (Jesus is my stronghold), *Didi Osivwi no owhu kome na* (The Saviour who died for me), *Olori tua iruo ra* (Lord begin your work), *Abe sua ile oro* (We are singing the song of praise), and *A ko mo ogaga kpobi no* (I have been given all power, Matt 28:18) (Onosemuode 1991: 93).

Adam's use of the Bible is significant. He knew the relationship between preaching, singing and dancing. Adam preached his sermons when a sufficient number of people has gathered as an audience. He used songs to relate biblical themes in his sermons because they appealed more to the people and attracted men and women in Isoko and Urhoboland. His gospel hymns are capable of striking the mental faculty of his audience and they consciously join the evangelical choir in dancing and singing. His music revived many weak Christians and won many converts. For his performances, he was often invited to conduct revival and harvest thanksgiving services in different parts of Isoko and Urhoboland. 'He preached, he sang and exhorted the people' with the Bible (Nabofa 1992: 54).

In 1946, Ole-Orufuo was changed to Ukoko Adamu (society of Adam) and two years later it became Usiwoma. This word literally means body healing. By 1950, branches of Usiwoma had been opened in the Anglican Churches in Urhobo and Isoko villages and towns. His activities in early 1960 caught the attention of Paul Umale in Benin and S.A. Asaboro in Ughelli. Both men had evangelical choirs in their respective places like Adam. They held revivals, sang, danced, preached and prayed. In 1967 the three Anglican evangelical bands in Urhoboland and Isoko merged together<sup>14</sup>. The name was changed from Usiwoma to the Anglican Adam Preaching Society. The melody and the tunes of his music were lively and understood by the people. He died in March 1982. The impact of Adam's evangelical choir is felt so much among Urhobo Christians that the history of Christianity in Urhoboland will not be complete without his name. He was an itinerant Isoko missionary in Urhoboland.

### **Post-Adam Gospel Music: 1982-1992**

After the death of Adam in 1982, the Anglican Adam Preaching Society faced internal squabbles and a leadership tussle ensued (Enuwosa 1997: 279). Musical groups on gospel songs merged in large number. Some individuals and groups began to compose hymns in the Urhobo language.

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Mr. Augustine Rukevwe, Ughelli, Age 59 years, 26/8/2000. (Nabofa 1992: 56).

Out of this disorder, from 1982 to 1990, four choir groups emerged as the strongest evangelical bands. The Anglican Adam Preaching Society is one of them. Others are Gods Grace Ministry led by D.D. Mimeyeraye and the Anglican Ukoko Rorufuo (Anglican Holiness Society) pioneered by Evangelist S.U. Ayanyen. Both bands started under the canopy of one umbrella organisation, the Anglican Mimeyeraye Praying and Fasting Society. The society was formally launched on 13th July 1984 in St. Andrew's Anglican Church in Warri<sup>15</sup>.

In 1993, Evangelist Mimeyeraye moved his musical troupes out of the Society and the Anglican Church. In the same year, he constituted the group into a Church, which he called God's Grace Mission. Under Mimeyeraye, the mission has composed new Urhobo gospel songs. Between 1993 and 1997, Mimeyeraye has developed more than ten gospel songs in the Urhobo language. Prominent among them are *Erhari rho Oghene turaye-o* (The fire of God burn them, every evil spirit that is attacking God's children), *Emo Israeli Chiyi wanvhre Urhie obara* (Children of Israel marched through the Red Sea)<sup>16</sup>.

The Anglican Ukoko Rorufuo society is spearheading the gospel music in the Anglican Church in Urhoboland. It was not disturbed by the schism caused by the exit of Mimeyeraye. The evangelical choir quickly changed its name to the Anglican Ukoko Rorufuo in 1993. This is to reduce the side-effects which the separation with Mimeyeraye might have had on it and the floor crossing of its members to the rival group. In 1995, they composed some melodious songs. One is as follows:

*Esu jeba rhe-o Ogidio* Devil has run to its end with great trouble  
*Kasa kasa wo je rha erharhi-o*<sup>17</sup>. Anywhere you run to is fire.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Mr. Matthew Okomeh, Warri, Age 47 years, 26/12/1999. He is the secretary to the society.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Bishop D.D. Mimeycraye, Warri, Age 48 years, 27/12/2000. He is the founder of God's Grace Mission in Warri.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Evangelist S. Anyayen, Warri, Age 46 years, 27/8/2000. While Anyayen is the evangelist of Anglican Ukoko Borufuo, Dr. Ighedo is the President of the society.

This song was followed by other songs titled *Jesu mija ga* (I will serve Jesus), *Oto gboro ojo rhesu shei-o* (The ground should open for Satan to fall in) and *Evhi osivhina* (The Saviour is born)<sup>18</sup>. The Anglican Ukoko Rorufuo are today found in all parishes of the Anglican Church. The head of each group is called an *Osu* (leader or shepherd). He leads the evangelical band of his parish. They sing, preach and pray.

The Anglican Adam Preaching Society is an associate of the Anglican Ukoko Rorufuo because both bodies are societies in the Anglican Church. In addition, some people are members of the two evangelical choirs. The Society continues to exist. It did not die with its founder, but survived the subversive activities imposed on her by some selfish and greedy individuals. Its branches all over Urhoboland are still intact and are growing stronger. They continue with the spirit with which Adam established the evangelical band.

They conduct a service called *Iyere esiri* (service of good news) once a month. This *Iyere esiri* is a praise and worship service. The praise and worship are used to achieve two things according to elder Simon Enaowho. By them, God is praised and man is called to repentance and conversion<sup>19</sup>. In terms of the Urhobo Christian music, the Anglican Adam Preaching Society is the leading factor. Their success is based on the fact that they have been together and performed together for a longer period of time than the other groups. This is evident from the choral night held in Agbarho in December 1996. They won the overall trophy. The audience was thrilled in Agbarho with the song:

*Peter* (twice)

*Peter vwbi Jesu, yan rhenu rhami-o*

*Peter duvwe yarhe rheo-o Jesu*  
*kparovhe vrhe* (Mt. 14: 25-30).

*Peter* (twice)

Peter and Jesus were walking on the river

Peter was drowning, He called on Jesus to lift him up.

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Evangelist S. Anyayen, Warri, Age 46 years, 27/8/2000. While Anyayen is the evangelist of Anglican Ukoko Borufuo, Dr. Ighedo is the President of the society.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Mr. Simon Enaowho, Sapele, Age 57 years, 23/8/2000.

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Though independent Pentecostal groups exist in Urhoboland, they are still very young. They do not possess a strong choir as to compose songs. In most cases they use Urhobo gospel songs released in the orthodox charismatic groups<sup>20</sup>. Their situation is made complex by constant threats of schism. Members who are musically talented often prefer to establish their own Churches, thereby deviating from their original groups. For this reason many however lack talented choir leaders to brace the trail.

In his evangelical choir, Adam used the instruments of the Usini folk music. These instruments consist of cymbals, gongs, bells and the clapping of hands. M.Y. Nabofa noted that Adam adopted the simultaneous rhythmic clapping of hands in the 1960s (Nabofa 1992: 35). Adam Igbudu added a drum called *Alaja* to his instruments which he personally constructed. *Alaja*, according to Emanurhe Obukowo is an Isoko word for Elijah (Nabofa 1992: 35). His praying band also employed *Isorogun* or *agidigbo* (the thumb piano). In modern times, guitars and trumpets have almost replaced the *agidigbo*. This loss is detrimental to Urhobo music because the guitar and trumpets do not convey the sonorous melody of the *Isorogun* in the same way as it was done by traditional instruments.

## Conclusion

The study reveals that Urhobo gospel music is a product of certain social factors. Beside the difficulty of singing in foreign languages, which were not understood by the people, there was the genuine desire to compose gospel songs in their mother tongue that would be suitable to the environment. The gospel music was also developed as a result of the influence of Urhobo traditional music on the Christians. The music was patterned along the lines of traditional music, the *udje* and *opiri* music. A typical Urhobo person is addicted to traditional music. They sing and dance while they work in their farms, processing palm oil in their local factory, in initiation rites, marriage, wrestling, and at their birth and burial ceremonies. Traditional music, therefore, was the framework on which Urhobo gospel music was built. Christianity came into Urhobo and, some missionaries like Massasi taught that God is better praised and worshipped in one's own language (Nabofa 1992: 35).

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Mr. Simon Enaowho, Sapele, Age 57 years, 23/8/2000.

It was, then, that J. Oboh in 1937 translated the Bible into Urhobo language and he used the Urhobo language to preach and sing<sup>21</sup>. With this translation Urhobo converts began to read the Bible in their native language. This enhanced their knowledge of the attributes of God on which they drew to compose the Urhobo songs of praise. One such song is 'God breaks the mountain' (*Oghene operu ugbenu*). This song is used to express the power of God.

Another early song of this type is '*Me urhupe rhapsa, Orho nenuvwe chasa yan ebri rhe*' (I am the light of the world he who follows me shall never walk in darkness). In the attempt of early Urhobo Christians to win more converts from traditional religion, they changed most songs used in the veneration of divinities, work and initiation rites to songs of praises to God and Christ. They substituted biblical words, phrases and stories for the content of the original songs. The Igbe song, *Ejiyo kporo, Ejo erhieda* (match it to scatter, the spirit of witches) was transformed into *Jesu jiyo kporo*. Songs used in Urhobo folk tales were also converted into gospel music.

As early Urhobo Christians used music of traditional religion and folk tales to sing and dance, many non-Urhobo Christians were attracted to them. Some joined the new faith because they could no longer distinguish the songs of traditional religions from Christian songs since the Christians were using their local songs for worship. They came to believe that they are after all the same since they share the same band beat (*kon gi, kon gi, kon gi*) and idea. However, Urhobo Christians used these songs as a bait to win converts. As they became full members, they were taught the message of the good news of Christ. This enabled them to know the difference between their traditional religion and Christianity.

Hence, the future uses of Urhobo gospel music strictly lies in its unique characteristics. The gospel music will, therefore, persist because of its evangelical nature and the melody of the songs that are firmly established in Urhobo musical culture. It will also continue to survive by the fact that many Urhobo are converted through this process.

Thus, Urhobo Gospel music began among revival groups in the Anglican Church in Isoko and Urhoboland. The formation was spontaneous and intuitive. Initially they translated English hymns into the Urhobo

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Mr. Gabriel Ogba, Orerokpe, Age 72, 24/12/1999.



language. As they became more conversant with the Bible, they began to extract and compose songs from biblical passages. They were formed into short moving choruses. The songs in this way are biblical and Pentecostal in nature using native rhythms and tones. Soon they introduced into it native musical instruments such as the *agidigbo* and drums. They discarded the *adjudju* (a leather hand fan used in dancing in Urhobo traditional religion). The clapping of hands was substituted for *adjudju* though both perform the same function.

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## Interviews

Interview with Mr. J. Adaga, Abraka, 19/4/2000. He is the Chairman of Emmanuel Urhobo Joint Choir in Abraka Zone.

Interview with Evangelist S. Anyayen, Warri, Age 46 years, 27/8/2000. While Anyayen is the evangelist of Anglican Ukoko Borufuo, Dr. Ighedo is the President of the society.

Interview with Mr. James Edevwie, Urhovie, Age 65 years, 22/5/2000. He is the son of Onakome. Edevwie, an ex-slave in Urhuovie, composed this song.

Interview with P. Emedo, Orogun, Age 62 years, 25/5/2000. He is the son of Emedo who translated *Ancient and Modern* into Urhobo language, in 1920.

Interview with Mr. Simon Enaowho, Sapele, Age 57 years, 23/8/2000.

Interview with Mr. Odiete Erhapowhenri, Okpara, Age 38 years, 16/6/2000, a catechist.

Interview with Mr. John Esioghene, Agbarha, Age 65 years, 19/12/1999.

Interview with Mr. D. Esiovwa, Agbaro, Age 48 years, 3/12/1999.

Interview with Rev. Matthew Idjighere, Abraka, Age 40 years, 17/4/2000, founder of Christ Saviours' Chapel.

Interview with Bishop D.D. Mimeyeraye, Warri, Age 48 years, 27/12/2000. He is the founder of God's Grace Mission in Warri.

Interview with Chief E. Ogaga, Aladja, Age 84 years, 18/8/2000.

Interview with Mr. Gabriel Ogba, Orerokpe, Age 72, 24/12/1999.

Interview with Mr. Matthew Okomeh, Warri, Age 47 years, 26/12/1999. He is the secretary to the society.

Interview with Mr. Samuel Okotie, Abraka, Age 50 years, 13/6/2000.

Interview with Mr. Lawrence Oniovosa, Ughelli, Age 37 years, 13/2/2000.

Interview with Rev. Fr. A. Ozele, Aragba, Age 42 years, Aragba Parish Priest, 2/4/2000.

Interview with Mr. Augustine Rukevwe, Ughelli, Age 59 years, 26/8/2000.

Interview with Dr. Jude Ukaga, Benin, Age 42 years, 17/12/99. He is a lecturer at the University of Benin, Benin City.