

**SIR IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE (KCW)**  
**THE LIFE, TIMES AND MUSIC OF THE MASTER**



**Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte (KCW)**

**("Mystic Musician" --- Dr. Thomas Frank Davey)**

**(1905-1977; MON, KCW posthumously)**

**Composer of Sacred Music and Lyric Poet Par Excellence, Choral  
Director and Conductor, Teacher, Singer, Prophetic Intercessor,  
Philosopher, Theologian and "Preacher" of the Word of God  
through his Music.**

**BY**

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## **DEDICATION**

This humble effort at writing this book about the late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte is warmly and thankfully dedicated

To

God Almighty, the Giver of all Wisdom and Knowledge;

the enduring, loving and sweet memories of the late Rev. Dr. Thomas Frank & Mrs. Katheline (Kay) Davey, for much of the information in this book;

Ms Mary Sheila O'Friel,  
my beneficent LINK to SHF;

Dr. Johei Sasakawa and his Health Foundation (SHF), Tokyo, Japan, in particular to Ms Aya Tobiki, Chief Programme Officer, for bringing out God's endowment in me through their facilitative grant and thereby empowering me to make this contribution in loving Evocation of my Mentor;

Prof. Joseph A. Ajienka,  
for his humanity and continuing encouragement and assistance;

the Chief Consultant Surgeon, Alex Ekwueme Federal Teaching Hospital, Abakaliki, Dr. Emmanuel Uche and his Dear and Amiable Wife, Mrs. Nkechinyere Oyidie Eni, for all the reasons they know so very well; all servants in the Lord's vineyard, dead and alive, who dedicated and still dedicate their lives and service to the eradication of leprosy from our world.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- i. Dedication
  - ii. Foreword 1      The late Rev. Canon Dr. Clement C. Ezegbe  
    Foreword 2      Dr. Joseph N. Chukwu
  - iii. Preface
  - iv. Acknowledgement
- 
- Chapter One      -      Abonnema ---- Birth, Parentage and Early Childhood Years
  - Chapter Two      -      A Dark Spot ---- Leprosy Diagnosed
  - Chapter Three    -      Journey In Search Of A Cure
  - Chapter Four     -      Sojourn At Oguta And Return To Port Harcourt
  - Chapter Five     -      Final Departure From Port Harcourt To Uzuakoli
  - Chapter Six      -      Uzuakoli --- His Foster Home and Foster Home Of His Art
  - Chapter Seven    -      Harcourt Whyte, The Daveys and Ms Grainger
  - Chapter Eight    -      A Bright Spot: Discharge Service ---- His Discharge And After
  - Chapter Nine     -      Harcourt's Compositional Abilities And Techniques
  - Chapter Ten      -      Harcourt Whyte's Commissioned Works
  - Chapter Eleven   -      The War Period
  - Chapter Twelve -      A Study Scholarship Rejected

<b>Chapter Thirteen-</b>	<b>His Last Ten Years From Nothing to Something, From Nobody to Somebody; His Journey to Celebrityhood</b>
<b>Chapter Fourteen</b>	<b>The NUNC DIMITIS</b>
<b>Chapter Fifteen</b>	<b>Perceptions Of Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte And/or His Music By His Family, Practitioners And Consumers Of His Art</b>
<b>Chapter Sixteen</b>	<b>Theology and Spirituality In Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's Songs.</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The Rev. Prof. Sir A. Kanu Achinivu</li> <li>b. The Very Rev. Nnamdi N. Nsude</li> <li>c. The Rev. John Uga</li> <li>d. Elder Okoroji onoh</li> </ul>
<b>Appendix 1</b>	<b>- Bibliography/References</b>
<b>Appendix 2</b>	<b>- Sample Brochures of Performances of Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's Works</b>
<b>Appendix 3</b>	<b>- Ikoli Harcourt Whyte Photographs</b>
<b>Appendix 4</b>	<b>- Accessible Musical Scores Mentioned or Discussed in this Book</b>
<b>Appendix 5</b>	<b>- Certificate of Recognition From GLRA</b>
<b>Index</b>	

## FOREWORD 1

Several articles and books, perhaps even many of these written by indigenous and foreign scholars alike, on Nigerian Art music and musicians, abound in various specialized journals and scholarly magazines. Most of these, however, qualify as not more than mere anecdotes picked from enthusiasts and scantily verified reports. This new book, **IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE ("MYSTIC" MUSICIAN)** is, therefore, a most welcome arrival in the music scene of Nigerian Art music and musicians authored by an insider, an altruistic researcher and, perhaps, the closest music scholar to the composer and founder – icon of Nigerian indigenous church music, the Rev. Prof. Dr. Sir A. Kanu Achinivu, the work captures the most exquisite details of the life and times of Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, the man who blazed the trail in the style of composition of indigenous church music tradition in Nigeria, that his language was not Igbo, notwithstanding.

The work is by no means one of those compilations on a legendary musician; it is rather an in-depth resource material for any scholar, music teacher, student and/or music enthusiast who is interested in knowing the real stuff of which Ikoli Harcourt Whyte was made. Of equal importance is some understanding of the theology, spirituality and aesthetics of his music. Perhaps the realization of the dreams of this book may cause many more music scholars to venture into similar in-depth and exclusive studies on other doyens of present-day Nigerian folk, sacred, popular and art music traditions. This unique act of patriotism is, perhaps, the only solution to the fast-disappearing knowledge and detailed information on Nigeria's musical giants which are facing imminent extinction.

The Rev. Prof. Dr. Achinivu Kanu Achinivu's book points the way to collecting, collating and documenting data on other dead and living legends of Nigerian musical genres for use by posterity at all levels of our educational system. The book is easily readable, it is instructive of life, it is informative, it is educative. It is a work which every musician, nay, even non-musician, will read with pleasure about the man and his music. It is hereby strongly recommended to Nigerians and foreigners alike.

**Rev. Canon Dr. Clement C. Ezegbe**

**M. Mus., Ed. D.**

**Department of Educational Foundation**

**Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka,**

**Anambra State of Nigeria.**

## PREFACE

The book in your hands now has taken me some twenty-one years (2003-2024) to write!

### Two Songs

Two (2) songs composed by the late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, namely, **OGE DI N'IRU** (The Time Is Coming --- MESSAGES..... Vol. 1, No. 42), the last line of whose chorus/refrain says: **IHE NKE NA-ADI GHI TAA NWER'IK'IDI ECHI** (What is not there/available today may be there/available tomorrow) and **CHERE OGE YA** (Wait For His Time --- MESSAGES.... Vol. 2, No. 16) have, since the year 2003, influenced and affected my attitude to life in general and my approach to people, things and situations.

What is significant in my life about the year 2003? It was in the year 2003 that Harcourt appeared to me in a dream and said:

**My son, Achinivu, I made some requests of you concerning my works before I left the world (died). What have you done about any of those requests to tell the world about me and my music? You are the one whom God has chosen to do them. Therefore, He will make ways for you to accomplish them.**

**DO NOT GIVE UP!**

I don't usually dream; I am not a dreamer. When, however, I dream, I often forget the dream and, therefore, have no reason to search for the meaning or interpretation of the dream. But with this particular dream, I knew that



the Almighty God Himself was preparing to empower me for that service which, according to Harcourt in that dream, He had appointed me to accomplish for Him. I had had no hope of fulfilling Harcourt's requests of me. The dream perplexed me and Harcourt's statement perplexed me, too, but after praying and recovering my composure, I began to think seriously about the dream and his requests.

What are the requests Harcourt placed before me before he died? To have

- i. the lyrics of all his compositions that are almost exclusively in the Igbo Language translated into English Language in the first instance, and into some major Nigerian Languages, including his native Kalabari Language;
- ii. his music, written exclusively in tonic-solfa notation, transcribed into staff notation;
- iii. all his works published in song-book series and sheet music and
- iv. all his works recorded in some permanent retrievable forms, then as L-Ps (long-playing records, today as CDs (compact discs).

Before I could get up from my sleep to give him a reply, he had vanished from my sight. I woke up, completely disconcerted. I began to ruminate over the dream, his statement therein and his requests before his death in 1977. These are requests the implementations of which, as I said in my Prefaces to MESSAGES.... Vols. 1 and 2, would require huge sums of funding/money to realize. I had no connections with any grant-awarding organizations and knew next to nothing about grants. So, I decided that since I had or knew no wealthy individuals or friends to support me in the implementation of the requests, I could start by sitting in my study and

writing a small book that interestingly tells his story and talks about his works. This would require nobody's support, I thought and assured myself.

The writing of the book now in your hands was conceived and started in 2003 after that dream, but writing it proved to be such an uphill and a herculean task that at some point in 2003 I dropped the idea. I then began to write and send proposals to multinational companies and wealthy individual-philanthropists in this country requesting for funding for me to attempt the fulfilment of Harcourt's heart's desires. I received no reply, this way or that, from any of the many companies and individuals except negative ones from Chevron and the German Leprosy and TB Relieve Association (GLRA), Enugu. I had thought, no, believed, that getting support from GLRA, Enugu, was, for two reasons, just for the asking. First, it is an organization concerned with leprosy, leprosy-affected people and those serving in leprosy establishments or institutions like the Leprosy Centre at Uzuakoli, Abia State of Nigeria. The second reason was that I had obtained my two higher degrees/qualifications in musical studies ---- the M.A and the Ph.D. ---- from the two (2) universities in Berlin, Germany: respectively, the Technische Universitaet Berlin (TUB) and the Freie Universitaet Berlin (FUB), Germany, Unfortunately, that thinking was through and through mere wishful thinking. Consequently, I was shocked by GLRA's response, namely, that "**...giving grants was not part of her mandate...**" It was then that I thought that all hope was lost and that I had reached a dead end. I became slowly but surely despondent. But, as Harcourt encouraged and/advised me in that dream, I did not give up. I turned again to writing a book and by the special grace of God, under the title: **IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE ("MYSTIC" MUSICIAN ---- DR. THOMAS FRANK DAVEY)**. I was able to produce a 62-page booklet after some time to which the late Rev. Canon Dr. Clement C. Ezegbe, my

former student and friend, was glad to write a foreword (Foreword 1. I reproduce this Foreword in the final book in remembrance of the late Rev. Canon). Then another problem set in. Sourcing the money for publishing the book was impossible, that I made much effort to find a sponsor, notwithstanding. I found none. Meanwhile, the messages enshrined in the two Harcourt's songs.... **Chere Oge Ya** and **Oge Dị N'iru (Ihe Nke Na-adighị Taa Nwer'lk'ldị Echi)**, kept speaking to me, sustaining me and buoying me up. For a whooping seventeen long years' period! I kept updating my proposal and sending it around the country and internationally, until the year 2020 when, alas, it seemed to me, that God's time for something positive with respect to getting/receiving funding had arrived ---- the time when the thing that was not available in 2003 through 2019 became, by His grace, available.

An Irish-born American lady, Ms Mary Shella O'Friel; visited Nigeria in 2020, and called at the offices of the GLRA in Enugu. There, shev either stumbled upon the proposal I had sent to the GLRA some years before or had her attention drawn to it by Dr. Joseph N. Chukwu. She read it and thought, according to Dr. Joseph Chukwu, Medical Coordinator at GLRA, that it was "a powerful proposal". She returned to the United States with a copy of it. Without any hesitation or delay, Mary sent me the LINK that led me to the Sasakawa Health Foundation (SHF), a grant-awarding body concerned with leprosy and people affected by leprosy. On behalf of my organization, I at once applied to SHF for a grant because my Mentor was a noteworthy example of those affected by leprosy. My application, in two stages, was adjudged worthy and declared successful. The Achinivu-Harcourt Whyte Choral Association (The Chorale), Arochukwu Incorporated was thus awarded a two-year SHF grant to (i) translate the lyrics of one hundred (100) songs (50 per year) from Igbo Language into

English, (ii) transcribe the music of the selfsame 100 songs from the tonic-solfa notation into staff notation and (iii) have the 100 songs published in two song-books of 50 songs each ---- some of Harcourt's request of me!! The project outcome of the second year is to be accompanied by a book on **Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte** ---- the book now in your hands. The Grantor, the SHF, went the proverbial "extra mile" by approving an **End-of-Project Live Choral Music Concert "...In honour and loving evocation of the late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte..."** at which a small selection Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's works would be featured/presented. The period of seventeen (17) years was the period for "waiting for God's time" and "making available that which was not available" in 2003 through 2019. God had sent the right person, Ms Mary S. O'Friel, at his own right time, 2020! Is our Bible not altogether right? It is abundantly so. That's it, that's how it all happened and, I believe, is going to continue to happen to grant all the Master's wishes.

The book in your hands is an expansion of the abandoned and unpublished 62-page book of 2003. The expansion consists in the change of title from **IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE ---- "MYSTIC" MUSICIAN** to **SIR IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE (KCW): THE LIFE, TIMES AND MUSIC OF THE MASTER.**

It appeared to me and so it proved to be that the 62-page book of 2003 was merely the story of his sufferings; it did not show that there was a splendorous period of his life and career, even if after his death. This vacuum in the story is what the expansion of the 62-page book attempts to fill. It does so in the main by the inclusion of a Chapter on Perceptions of him and his music by his family and others and another Chapter on

Theology and Spirituality in his music. There are other small accounts injected into the expanded book.

It tells as briefly and simply as possible the long and fascinating story of the life of the late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, who, for very many years, suffered from the most debilitating disease, leprosy, but who, nevertheless; became, a great and fearless leader, a teacher, a philosopher, a great choral director and conductor, an insightful lyric poet par excellence, an accomplished pace-setter composer of African church music with a unique personal style ----- a celebrity.

I have, hopefully, tried in these pages to tell his story simply and pointedly. I have also given some of the statements of hope and encouragement which the Master himself made to me in the course of my many years' interactions with him. The aim, of course, is to make it possible for even the uninitiated into music to learn the lessons of life and living which his rather simple and moving life-style teaches us, as the late playwright's and dramatist's Ola Rotimi's quite powerful and beautiful piece of drama: **"Hopes of the Living Dead,"** used aspects of the life of Ikoli Harcourt Whyte as plots to teach Nigerians a number of life's truths. These truths are even more important for the youth of our society, so that, apart from the book being of interest to the general reader, it can also be read at the Senior Secondary School level and used as a text at the early-levels of musical studies, where it can fill the gap in the biographical section of African Musicology of a university curriculum and in theological institutions.

It is my hope and expectation that those who read this book will learn God's providence and love, they will learn that God can and does change man's fortunes, status, condition and all, and that they will come to

appreciate with what little means Harcourt Whyte gave so much good to culture and to the worship life of the Church of God everywhere.

This Preface may fittingly end with the late Rev. Dr. Musician Thomas Frank Davey's statement with which he closed his foreword to **ABỤ EKELE NA OTUTO (Songs of Thanksgiving and Praise)** Vols 1 and 2. In his words, which I adapt as follows:

**"MESSAGES FOR LIFE AND LIVING.....** and this book are offered in the hope that those who sing and those who listen (and those who read this book) will enjoy them not only for their musical charm, but also for the messages and lessons enshrined in them, I offer this humble book to you.

**A. Kanu Achinivu,  
Arochukwu,  
March, 2024.**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I cannot but express my sincere gratitude and appreciation for the assistance I received from many minds in the two (2) stages of the preparation of this book on the late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte (1905-1977; MON, KCW posthumously).

First, I thank God Almighty for His great providence, inestimable love and provisions for me which kept me so much alive, active and well as to be able to finally produce this work. I am thankful to an inordinate degree to the "Mystic" Musician himself (now of blessed memory) who, throughout my personal interactions with him during his lifetime, revealed himself and his ideas about life to me. I thank his now also late biological son, my 'elder brother', Sir Godwin Dagogo Harcourt Whyte (he was the biological son, I the musical son of the Master!), for his enduring love, understanding and appreciation of the little or much I have tried to do about the Master and his works and for his unalloyed cooperation arising from this understanding. I am grateful to Ms Rosalind Colwill (Nkechinyere) for the copies of **SHARE** and other publications from which I obtained much information about the Daveys in particular and other servants in our Lord's vineyard. I am awfully and inordinately indebted to my friends at the GLRA Enugu, who ably led by Dr. Joseph N. Chukwu, man of the moment and problem solver, guided, directed and assisted me in many ways and saw that the book is written and published. I am most grateful to you all.

I am in love with and deeply thankful to the three (3) friends of mine and three (3) men of God: the Rev. John Uga, Overseer, Jesus The Way Ministries, Enugu, Enugu State; the Very Rev. Nnamdi N. Nsude, Presbyter and Administrative Secretary, Diocese of Umuahia West of Methodist Church Nigeria (MCN) and Elder Okoroji Okwara Onoh, a

Ruling Elder of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (PCN) Festac Parish, Lagos, who at very short notice responded positively and promptly to my request of them to contribute papers on **Theology and Spirituality in Harcourt's works**. No less deeply indebted am I to the avalanche of friends, former choristers of mine at UNN, well-known choirmasters, all of whom may be described as "Ambassadors of Harcourt Whyte's music" and who, each in a jiffy, turned in papers at my request on their "perceptions" of Harcourt Whyte and/or his music. Lack of space forbids me to include the names of who all submitted papers to me. Those included here are merely a small selection from the avalanche. They are, by name, Elder Chief Isaac Okwara Onoh, Ezeogo XIII Agbagwu, Arochukwu Kingdom; Eugene Ernest Abosi; Elder Chief Ndubueze Obioma; Pa Enyinnaya Akwara (of blessed memory); Dr. Somiari Harcourt Whyte; Mr. Tamunoremi Harcourt Whyte; Sir Ikechi U. Anozie; Sir Chris A. Igwe; Rev. William Christian Unchenna; Rev. Onyekaozuru P. Marcus; Teacher Kalu Uka; Sir Friday Nkemka Ehilegbu; Mr. Stanley Maduagwu; Prof. 'Ranti Adeogun and Mrs. Onyinyechi Okoye. I thank all of them for their interest and positive response to my request. I thank Mr. Micah Agbara who, although he never met or knew me from Adam, responded positively and promptly when asked with some account of Discharge Services at The Colony during his service years there as staff. My indefatigable, meticulous and prompt-at-delivering assignments Personal Secretary and Administrative Assistant, Mr. Ikechukwu Victor Basse, deserves much commendation. Without him typesetting all the stuff, some several times over, the book would never have seen the light of day. I thank you very much, IK. Finally, but by no means the least contributor, I salute Oyidie AK, my beloved wife, who, always believing that I have something in my discipline to leave for posterity, constantly urged me on and encouraged me, often with biting words, to settle down



to writing the book. I thank her for her for enduring love, patience and understanding of me. How sad, she is no longer alive to see the book she so much encouraged me to write. Our God knows best. Lack of space limits me to list these persons by name. I am thankful to several other people who contributed little or much to the making of this book. God bless all of you. To God be all the glory for what He used the Teacher, Philosopher, Leader, Choir Director and Conductor, Composer and Preacher, Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte and his compositions to teach us about God, life and living.

**A. Kanu Achinivu**

**Arochukwu, March, 2024.**

## CHAPTER ONE

### ABONNEMA --- BIRTH, PARENTAGE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD YEARS

The late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, more simply and better known as Harcourt Whyte, was born in some unidentified and, therefore, unknown day and month in the year of our Lord 1905 to Abonnema, Rivers State of Nigeria middle-class parents: Slick Munabo Boy Whyte and his wife, Dibo (possibly the short form of Odibo) Kelly Jack. Harcourt's mother Dibo Whyte, was reportedly and reputedly a very beautiful woman. As a result, she could not escape being desired by the roving eyes of the then King of Abonnema, Chief Briggs.

Attracted so much by her beauty, Chief Briggs craved to marry her, that she was already married to Slick Munabo Boy Whyte, notwithstanding. Slick Munabo Boy Whyte, was quick to notice the advances that Chief Briggs was unashamedly making to his wife and he vehemently opposed, rejected and resisted the King's move to take his wife away from him. In an obvious display of the wrong use of power and of man's inhumanity to man, he, Chief Briggs, autocratically directed that Munabo and his wife, Dibo, who was then heavy with child, be thrown into a Degema Prison. It was while they were languishing in the Degema Prison that Harcourt, was born and they gave him the name **"Ikoli"**, meaning **"Prison"** ---- in remembrance of the circumstances of his birth.

As a boy, Harcourt, had an enquiring mind and was fond of asking his parents many questions about his surroundings and nature. One day, he asked his mother, to whom he was rather close, to tell him when he was born. His mother, recalling a great event that took place in about 1905, at

the time Harcourt was born, namely, the death of the great and famous Chief of Abonnema, Chief Briggs, fixed his birthday at about one month after the death in 1905 of Chief Briggs.

As was common in those days, Harcourt's paternal and maternal grandparents had many children but, unfortunately, Harcourt's parents were their only surviving children, the others having died of unknown or mysterious causes. So, when Harcourt's parents were born, they were given, interestingly enough, the same name by their respective parents. In the names Munabo and Dibo is embodied the entreaty to the gods to let their children go wherever they would and return home safely in the end. That M.S.B., Whyte and D.K. Jack were the lone survivors of their parents would seem to confirm the traditional belief in the role the gods could play in the lives of traditional people.

The Kalabari of Harcourt's youth were predominantly traders and fishermen by occupation, and his parents achieved much economic success and fame as traders. As was the custom with the women of the time Harcourt's mother engaged in retail trade in many different articles of food such as smoked and fresh fish, yam and other kinds of foodstuffs. Occasionally, she went with other women to palm beaches where they sold palm kernels to European firms. His father, on the other hand, was one of the few successful wholesale traders in Abonnema. He made bulk purchases of various goods and his wealth made him achieve a high social status in the communities. That Harcourt described his father as "**...rich in boys...**", who provided the much-needed labour and bore the brunt of his business for him, would point to the fact that he, or at least his ancestors, might have engaged in some form of the slave trade – as

supplier(s) of slaves or simply as middlemen. Describing the state of affluence of his parents, Harcourt declared:

**..although my parents were not very rich people, they,  
nevertheless, led the middle-class life of their time ---  
(Achinivu, 1979 P. 57)**

At any rate, his father was sufficiently rich to keep a large barn of yams and plenty of bags of rice for his **"boys"** to eat and be happy to work hard for him.

Anxious that their son should also be successful in life, Harcourt's parents bought him a case of laundry bar soap, gave him some capital and thus initiated him at the early age of eight (8) into the techniques of trade by barter. Harcourt, therefore, began life as a trader. He cut his bars of soap into very small tablets and exchanged them for palm kernels, which his mother then used in obtaining other goods and money from European firms. He made rapid progress but before long, the first stark reality of life disrupted his trade in soap. It was in 1914. The First World War had broken out and with it came the exodus of the British traders out of the country. Following the exit of the Europeans, his capital gradually fizzled out, his already flourishing trade stagnated and, eventually, collapsed completely.

His description of his parents' affluence is convincing, for in 1915, at a time that going to school was a luxury and/or a matter for only those boys whose parents could afford to send their sons to learn how to read and write, Harcourt began schooling at the prestigious Bishop Crowther Memorial School, (B.C.M.S.), Abonnema, at the age of 10. His parents,

who were Christians and attended Sunday services regularly; always took young Harcourt with them to church and sent him to the Sunday School. It was not long before he began to show that the things he heard and learnt at the Sunday School classes were already impressing his young absorbent mind. He had already been credited at the age of nine with expressing the desire to become a preacher, a Revered Minister, but although he never became an ordained Minister of the Word and Sacrament, there was, nevertheless, a greater preacher than he through the medium of the words he wrote and set to music.

His first direct contact with foreign, i.e. European music coincided with the beginning of his schooling in 1915. As a young boy, Harcourt was very fond of singing and dancing --- talents/attributes he had inherited from his parents whom he described as:

**.....not only good singers and dancers, but are (sic)  
distinguished for that and are (sic) popularly known ---  
-- (Achinivu, 1979, P. 59)**

Before he went to school in 1915, he had formed the habit of following the B.C.M.S. band behind and marching round with them on every occasion they played in the town. When, therefore, he became a pupil of the school, the opportunity of meeting face to face with the band presented itself and it was there that the first musical seed was sown. He had looked forward very much to becoming the school band's flutist or side drummer; however, between the later part of 1915 and early 1916, a tremendous religious revolution, that had very far-reaching consequences for him, took place in his home town, Abonnema.

The British people, who were in Nigeria in colonial times, were not just traders and colonial administrators; there were also missionaries and medical men among them. In fact, trade and missionary work were at that time two inseparable things; the one was a means of achieving the other. Trade and missionary work were as the Igbo would say: "**Ahughi mmiri na emeghi akwu**" (in the absence of water there can be no palm fruit processing). You could not engage in the one without also engaging in the other.

The European colonialist had observed that Africans are deeply religious people and so they turned their Christian religion into an instrument for politicizing and winning the people for trade with them. Following strong and consistent missionary activities which accompanied the trades in the Delta region, the people of Abonnema rose up in 1915/1916 against their traditional gods and idols, destroyed them as heathenish and unworthy objects, and turned Christians, swelling thereby, in a singularly dramatic way, the membership of the then Niger Pastorate Church (NPC), Abonnema. But within a few months of their accepting Christianity, some misunderstanding arose among them. During one Sunday morning service, the misunderstanding precipitated a split in the church, whereupon the majority of the worshippers left the church and continued their worship in the open. From that group of people, a new church called the **Christ Army Church (CAC)**, Nyemoni, was born. Young Harcourt found himself in the new church by following his parents. Not unexpected in such a situation, a new school also sprang up as a result. Harcourt thus became a pupil of the new Abonnema school. With the loss of his membership of the Bishop Crowther Memorial School, his hopes of becoming a flutist or side drummer seemed to have been dashed on the hard wall of dissension. That made him extremely sad and gloomy for

quite some time. At about the same period early in 1916, the next real crisis of his life occurred, his mother suddenly died. He was thus compelled to temporarily stop schooling. Meanwhile, he was showing remarkable interest in Sunday School work. Every Sunday in the new Christ Army Church, Harcourt gathered the children and taught them, among other things, stories about great man and women in the Bible, the Apostles Creed, the Ten Commandments and hymns he had learnt by rote by his parents. Late in 1916, he returned to school and went on until 1918.

At school, Harcourt proved to be very brilliant and intelligent. Unfortunately, none of his teachers are known as he himself seemed to have known or remembered anything about them. All along at school, the thought of a school band plagued his mind. One day, Harcourt confronted one of the school's authorities with the matter. His answer, that the Abonnema school authorities were not silent over the issue, delighted his heart very much. Their intention was, in fact, to make their new school an enviable one, a second-to-none, and even superior to the mother schools. They knew that music would do it and that the presence of a band would raise the tone of their school. A complete band set had been ordered from Europe and early in 1917 the set arrived. The services of an Indian bandmaster were engaged, and young Harcourt experienced the earliest, deepest and greatest pleasure of his life when he discovered that his name was the **"Abou Ben Adem"**, that is, top on the list of the first band boys of the Nyemoni school. He was assigned to play the side drum, which he learned to play with dexterity in a matter of a few months --- a sign of his musicality, giftedness (talent) and quickness at learning. Besides the instrument assigned to him officially, he taught himself to play the flute as well.

In December 1918, the Abonnema school band undertook a tour of Bonny, one of the most important ports on the eastern tributary of the Niger and the centre of the trade in slaves and palm oil between Europeans and the natives. As the band's side-drummer, Harcourt was to go on the tour with the team but his father and other relatives, afraid of his undertaking such a risky journey on high seas at his tender age (he was then about 13 years old), refused to let him go.

Harcourt, quite respectfully, pleaded with his father and relatives to let him go on the tour. Eventually, he was successful in persuading them to let him go. As a result, he undertook the journey to Bonny with the band. His display in Bonny earned him a great deal of admiration from the people of Bonny, and he became the talk of the town. During that tour, it became increasingly evident that Harcourt was extremely musically talented and that music was becoming his preoccupation and a consuming pastime. He told me the story of how, one day during that tour, the team was dissatisfied with the food given to them and rejected it. As an alternative, the bandmaster gave each player the sum of two shillings, then a lot of money, to buy himself something else to eat. While others spent their money on food items and chewables, Harcourt bought himself a mouth organ and played it throughout their stay there to the pleasure and enjoyment of all. The 1918 influenza, which took many lives, was very much around during that Bonny tour. On their way back to Abonnema, Harcourt caught the influenza which nearly took his life. The team managed to get him home where he was given the treatment that made him survive the attack.



Harcourt seemed to go from one misfortune to another, for not long after he had survived the influenza epidemic attack, he became an orphan following the death of his father early in 1919. The death of his father was soon followed by the real and greatest crisis of his life, the discovery that he was suffering from the most dreaded disease of all time --- leprosy.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A DARK SPOT --- LEPROSY DIAGNOSED

Although the crisis of Harcourt's life-history were many and intensely moving, none was so depressing as the revelation that he had contracted leprosy, for very closely linked with his awareness of that fact was also the fact that he would leave home, relatives and friends. **Considering the very strong African family experience.** It was in 1919 that fate struck him hard, in a way that drastically and completely changed his life. He was about fourteen years old, a young man teeming with life and full of musical and religious hopes, son of middle-class parents and very promising at school, having been doubly promoted because he was studious. Harcourt had "**Ọrĩa ocha**" (literally, the white disease, descriptive of the changing and debilitating effects of the disease on the skin and body).

Following an apparently trivial misunderstanding between him and another village boy, the boy, oblivious and quite innocent of the implications of the imprecatory remarks he poured on Harcourt as a result of their quarrel, called him a **leper** referring, as he cursed him, to the unusual colour of his skin. That was the revelation and, with it, the promising future as flutist and side-drummer and the school years ahead immediately terminated. Completely overcome by the incident, Harcourt returned home to tell his relatives the story of what had transpired.

During the years between the early 1920s and 1930s, the then Eastern Nigeria was witnessing an epidemic of leprosy because the conditions for the spread of the unusual phenomenon, the disease, were ripe. Before that time, Nigerians as a whole, at any rate the people of Eastern Nigeria,

never travelled very far from their homes because the world was very unsafe for distant travels as a result of the prevailing trade in slaves. People remained more at home. However, the Aro, the fame of whose oracle, "**Ibiniukpabi**" or the "**Long Juju**", and whose highly strong and secret intelligence network had given out as a sinister people were the only people who dared and ventured to travel wherever they wanted. The only other people who travelled far were those men and women who, by virtue of their positions as allies or middlemen, had some connections with the Aro and were permitted by them to travel. It was said that the mere mention of the word "**Aro**" in the face of danger during a dangerous journey was like a magic wand that averted the danger. Besides the fact that most of the people did not travel much, the strong democratic nature of the Igbo, the people who formed the larger part of the population of the then Eastern Nigeria, helped to promote the conditions for the spread of leprosy epidemic. Unlike the Yoruba who were so very much afraid of leprosy that they committed all sorts of atrocities against leprosy sufferers, including killing them off as soon as any sufferers were discovered and for whom, consequently, leprosy was never a serious problem, the Igbo never killed any leper just because the Yoruba did so; they did not follow others slavishly to eradicate lepers from their midst.

Before the Europeans came, therefore, the situation was that leprosy patients were so badly treated in some areas that the disease was naturally removed from among them, while in other areas they were more kindly, even if indifferently treated, with the result that leprosy stayed there. When the British opened up the country through the construction of better roads and railway lines, increased mobility was the result. People, including leprosy sufferers, began to travel out of their homes. In this way,

leprosy spread very rapidly throughout the country, moving upwards into the North, where it could be said to be now very strongly endemic.

Now "**Ọrịa ocha**" was an anathema. It was a spiritual disease exceptionally feared by all and believed by Africans, certainly by the Igbo of Nigeria [like the Jews in the Bible], to be the direct visitation of the gods, the befitting reward for one's equally grievous moral failures. Leprosy was, and still is regarded as quite a different disease from all other diseases, for whereas the blind, the lame, even the epileptic and the tuberculosis (until the time of hospital isolation) were allowed to live with their people while receiving the recognized native cure for their respective diseases, the leprosy patient was at once rejected by his people and ostracized from the society. He had done something extraordinarily terrible for which he must suffer. This fear of leprosy was not unknown even within the circles of medical men themselves, because at that time no definite cure for the disease had been found. Consequently, very few doctors were prepared to do leprosy work while those who agreed to serve in leprosy establishments did so with fear near contempt. Harcourt told of how he brought a letter from Dr. Savage of the Port Harcourt hospital introducing him to the first doctor of the then newly-opened Leprosy Hospital at Uzuakoli, Dr. J.A.K. Brown, who told him to open the letter and when he did so, "**....he (Dr. Brown) read it from my hands...**"

## CHAPTER THREE

### JOURNEY IN SEARCH OF A CURE

That Dr. Brown was successful in securing a piece of land for the new settlement must be regarded as one of those acts of God in support of a good cause. No one would touch any who is experiencing or has experienced leprosy or anything he touched for fear of becoming infected. The sufferer himself knew what his fate was in society and so took the appropriate steps on his own. Those who were not prepared to live the life of the rejected, the outcast, the unwanted, the beggar on the streets, often committed suicide as soon as it was known that they had leprosy. Davey recorded several cases in Uzuakoli of people who, after being identified as leprosy patients and told to report to the hospital for treatment, simply went away and threw themselves into on-coming trains or hanged themselves. The state of the leprosy patient and the Igbo man's attitude to him can be summarised in Dr. J.A.K. Brown's statement:

***He (the leprosy sufferer) had been shut out by the world, and he was now for his own peace shutting the world out of his life. This was the disease of which the Igbo said rather cryptically.***

***"Ọnwụ bụ ogwu ya"***

***(Death is its cure) Death was indeed the cure, and the kindest thing to do for a man so cursed by the spirits in his life was to speed up his return to the next world so that he might be born again into the earthly tribe. So these people gradually died to***

***sound and sense whilst their bodies through disease and ill-treatment, rotted to an early and miserable death....(Brown in Achinivu, 1979, P. 66)***

"Death cures it", the Igbo say, and so was it until medical science found an answer of the greatest "Dibia" (native Doctor) confirmed the gravity of the sufferer's offence. Finally, at death, the natural cure of the disease, he was given the worst of a pauper's burial; he was never buried but was simply brushed or swept into the village's "**Ohia Ojoo**" (literally, bad bush --- a piece of land regarded as worthless and therefore condemned to such purposes, a piece of land set aside for such purposes). When Davey began out-station work for the many un-hospitalized patients and needed a helping hand from the natives, the very first helper, a leprosy inspector, had to be an ex-patient. But the fear of leprosy was not destined to live on, for soon a devoted young man, who had never had leprosy, joined the team of out-station workers.

Furthermore, as the hospital began to discharge patients, the discharged people always asked for certificates of good health from Dr. Davey and other after him which, they believed, would convince their relatives that they were healthy again and admissible into the community. Before long, people free from leprosy were attending the discharge and other services held at the Leprosy Hospital, Uzuakoli, as definite proof that the people believed the evidence of their eyes and that the fear of leprosy was rapidly going away from their minds. In some villages, those certificates were so amazingly believed and well trusted by the people that their Chiefs enacted laws prohibiting people from referring to ex-patients' pasts and thus made it easier for them to reintegrate themselves into their communities. Although all these happened in various places, it must be

borne in mind that one does not change the hearts and minds of men simply by enacting laws; leprosy was and still is regarded in many quarters as the most terrible disease one could suffer from.

To return to the composer, such was the situation at the time it was known that Harcourt had leprosy. Davey thought that Harcourt must have contacted the disease by 1918, the most likely factors in the disease developing and appearing noticeably on his body being the journey he made to Bonny in 1918. The change of environment involved in the trip, the accompanying deprivations and the Influenza attack at the sensitive period of a young man's life, the age of puberty ---- all these helped to make him contract the disease. Harcourt was only fourteen at the time; in any case, the evidence of leprosy was there and these very few options were open to him: he either went a-begging or sought anonymity and cure in flight from home to a place he was not known, or he took his life. For Harcourt, however, the last-mentioned alternative was simply out of the question, it was not an option for him, for he believed, even at that age, that God had a reason, a purpose, for bringing him into the world. He chose to leave home in search of a cure, but, ironically, not anonymity. One of his cousins, on hearing of his decision, tried to dissuade him from leaving home, declaring that the changed colour of his skin was rather inconsequential and attributing it to the normal change which his body was undergoing because "he was becoming a man," meaning the changes familiar at puberty age. Harcourt listened quite attentively and intently to him, but was constantly irritated at the painful observation that he made that everybody he wanted to talk to avoided and shunned him.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **SOJOURN AT OGUTA AND RETURN TO PORT HARCOURT**

Late in 1920, Harcourt decided and left home for Oguta where, he was told, there was a very powerful "**Dibia**" (native doctor) who could cure every known disease. There, Harcourt was made to drink all sorts of concoctions prepared from herbs and roots in all sorts of ways and mixed with "**elu aki**" (palm kernel oil), reputed and remarkable for its medicinal powers, as the basic and integral component of native doctors' concoctions. For approximately two years, he took those drugs while witnessing a gradual and continuing disintegration of his body. Meanwhile, another cousin of his who, following the death of his father in 1919, had assumed responsibility over him as guardian, took seriously ill in 1923 and was admitted into the General Hospital, Port Harcourt, for treatment. While he was there, he heard that a leprosy ward had been opened in the hospital. After his discharge, he returned home and visited Harcourt at Oguta. Terribly shocked at the condition in which he found Harcourt, he took him home and sent him to the General Hospital, Port Harcourt. But Harcourt, thinking that his cousin was merely finding a way to get rid of him, refused to avail himself of the singular opportunity. For several months, his cousin pleaded with him in vain until in 1924 when, tired of pleading with him, he threatened to disclaim Harcourt and withdraw every form of maintenance and assistance to him. Harcourt insisted on remaining in Oguta. In the end, Harcourt yielded to his pressures and the stage was thus set for Harcourt finally leaving Abonnema, and the beginning of a scientific cure of the most debilitating disease that ravaged his body.

With a letter of introduction from his cousin who had won the friendship of the superintendent doctor of the General Hospital during his hospitalization there a short while before, Harcourt took a bed in the



leprosy ward of the hospital in 1924. The doctor was a Scotsman, called Dr. Ferguson. Soon, Harcourt found out that he was not the only one in that condition and that he had not been sent there by his cousin as a way of dispensing with him. Dr. Ferguson had become so overwhelmed and incensed by the lot of leprosy patients and by the high incidence of the disease in Port Harcourt and the environs that he created a ward for patients in the Government General Hospital of which he was in charge. He got together some of the very bad cases and began to research for a possible cure for the disease.

The following four to five years in the hospital were a period of increasingly turbulent revolts and uproars by the patients against a concerted action by the "healthy" to have them, the patients, thrown out of the hospital and, it would follow, out of Port Harcourt. As was and still is usual in Government service, civil servants often go on leave or transfer. So it was that Dr. Ferguson went on leave and was replaced by a "Pharaoh who did not know Joseph". His successor did not at all like the presence of the patients in the hospital, let alone those in the streets of Port Harcourt. The task he set himself to accomplish, therefore, was to rid the hospital of any presence or sign of a leper and in that plan, he was one with a large part of the population. In his first attempt, he arranged for a number of government lorries to go to the hospital and collect the patients and discharge them at such points outside Port Harcourt that they could never return to it again. He offered the patients no alternatives and what happened to them did not matter to him. Meanwhile, Harcourt brooded over the matter, for he was plagued by the thought that he would never have a home again as long as he was a leper. What was worst of all was that a cure was by no means in sight and nothing was practically being done for them. He would neither pack nor quit; he decided, with three other

patients, to resist the authorities. But he also realized that alone they would achieve very little or nothing at all. Harcourt thought that the only kind of people who would show interest in and understanding for their cause and circumstances were Christian people such as missionaries. At the suggestion of John Nweke, they went to consult the Head of the Methodist Church in Port Harcourt, the Rev. F.W. Dodds, whom Nweke had known at Ihube-Okigwe, on the matter. Rev. Dodds, knew and spoke Igbo quite fluently so that communication between them was no problem. Nweke and Harcourt narrated their sad and bitter experiences to him. Terribly shaken by the unbelievable story, Rev. Dodds promised them that he would discuss the matter with the hospital authorities on the following day. Early the next day, he went as he assured them and as a result of his deliberations with the authorities, the patients were allowed to stay in the hospital. That was a beautiful development which made an indelible impression on their minds.

For a while, it appeared that peace had returned to the hospital but soon afterwards, the Government took a course of action they hoped would deal with the matter once and for all. It was in 1929. The patients were moved to a space formerly used as an infectious disease hostel but which had gone into disuse because of its location behind the Port Harcourt cemetery. Patients who were isolated there because of some infectious disease they suffered from often refused to go because they believed that ghosts were there and often haunted and disturbed them at night and even at day time. Out of fear, therefore, they refused and repelled isolation. It was to that dreaded location that the patients were moved but, to the great surprise of the authorities, they all went without raising an eyebrow. They had no choice, what mattered to them was a shelter, not where it was located.

Meanwhile, Dr. Savage had joined the services of the Port Harcourt Hospital and was interested in leprosy and its sufferers. He joined in the research and arranged for a small group of patients to come to him in the hospital at agreed times. Being of Yoruba and white parents, he had no command of any of the locally spoken languages, Kalabari and Igbo, and he required the services of an interpreter. Harcourt offered his services and distinguished himself as a capable interpreter. This won him the doctor's friendship ---- a friendship that followed him to Uzuakoli.

During Dr. Ferguson's leave, one of the staff attached to the leprosy camp died. His death thus created a vacancy that was to be filled urgently. For reasons that have been mentioned more than once, it was not easy to get a replacement from among people who did not suffer from leprosy. When Dr. Ferguson returned from his leave, Dr. Savage recommended Harcourt for the post. Harcourt underwent an interview and was appointed a staff nurse in the Ministry of Health, Port Harcourt. Thus, Harcourt went from the post of ward servant to patient staff nurse --- an exceedingly rare position for a leprosy patient to occupy. Soon, his appointment was confirmed by Lagos and he began to receive a salary. His enhanced position in the hospital soon engendered a great deal of hatred with whom, as it were, Harcourt had been identified, and his fellow patients above whom he had risen.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FINAL DEPARTURE FROM PORT HARCOURT TO UZUAKOLI

Following the increasing influx of leprosy patients into Port Harcourt, the need for more and longer space to house them soon arose. Consequently, a camp of out-patients suddenly sprang up on a vast piece of bush land opposite the General Hospital. The presence of that unauthorized camp underscored the people's insistence on getting rid of the patients from Port Harcourt. Trouble was once again brewing, so that at a meeting of all the patients was called to prepare themselves for any eventualities. At that General Meeting, Harcourt was chosen to be their spokesman. In that capacity, Harcourt began to write a number of petitions to all known important white and black Port Harcourt-based personalities, but he achieved no success thereby. Soon and without doubt, the growing modernity of Port Harcourt was seen to be no longer compatible with the presence of leprosy patients in that city. As a result the Garden City population laboured more and more for the riddance of the city of the patients.

The culmination of the events that led to the patients finally leaving Port Harcourt began early one morning in 1931. A man came into the leprosy camp and asked to see Harcourt. When Harcourt was called, he informed him that the magistrate would like to see and speak with him the following morning in his, the magistrate's office. The next day, Harcourt, accompanied by four (4) other patients chosen by their colleagues, arrived to see the magistrate. There, an interesting confrontational dialogue will have taken place during which the magistrate angrily ordered Harcourt, spokesman of the patients, to return to his comrades, ask them to pack

their luggage and quit Port Harcourt or else have their huts burnt down. Unintimidated by the magistrate's threats, Harcourt calmly and composedly replied that as deprived and depraved citizens of the country, they deserved and expected some responsible treatment and care from Government. Consequently, he went on and told the magistrate that, if they received no alternative place where they would at least lay their heads at night and sleep and continue to receive the free medical care given to them by the European missionaries, they would rather elect to die than leave Port Harcourt. With that reply, Harcourt set the scene for and unleashed the series of events that culminated in the founding of the now would-renowned Leprosy Hospital at Uzuakoli of which Harcourt himself was a founding patient. Having given the magistrate a piece of the patients' mind, Harcourt left the magistrate's office immediately, thus giving him no opportunity to comment on his answer.

Harcourt and his colleagues returned to Rev. Dodds as they were wont to do and told him of the latest development in the plan to eject them from Port Harcourt. Rev. Dodds gave them the hint that their plight had been registered in England and that something was being done about it by the Methodist Church. He, therefore, advised them to exercise some patience, restraint and equanimity of mind. During those years of confrontations between the government authorities and the patients, Rev. Dodds' Christian attitude and approaches to them, the patients, and situations as the only link between the "clean" and the "unclean", made a lasting impression on Harcourt's mind. Now, following Harcourt's answer to the magistrate, the government authorities began to apply a series of increasingly hard and stringent measures that told the patients that their resistance to authority would not last much longer. They withdrew one facility after another from the hospital. They began with the withdrawal of

the greatest human need ---- food ---- and thus compelled the patients to have to fend for themselves. Then the four staff nurses, of whom Harcourt was one, were served with Government papers asking them to report to the Senior Medical Officer for re-posting. The posting paper served on Harcourt proved to be one of the greatest temptations in his life. It was clear to him that if he took the paper to the Senior Medical Officer of Health, he would either be transferred to the Leprosy Hospital, Itu, which had been founded in 1927, or he would be taken to some unknown or obscure place in Port Harcourt and dumped there to slowly die. The great temptation lay in the fact that, as he rightly responded, his acceptance of a re-posting to Itu would assure him of continued medical attention and payment of a salary, ---- all at the expense of his fellow leprosy sufferers. Concerned about the fate of his comrades, who had placed much and implicit confidence in him as their spokesman and leader, Harcourt decided to withhold his re-posting letter and continue the fight for the cause they believed was just with his comrades.

The stage was set in 1931. One evening, a number of police vehicles, carrying armed policemen, drove into the leprosy camp. As the patients rushed out to find out what was happening, a uniformed man came out of one of the vehicles and, with stentorian voice, addressed the patients in a most threatening manner. He warned them of the terrible and unpleasant consequences of their continued resistance and disobedience to constituted authority, that would follow if they continued in their obstinacy, and ordered them to pack their property and enter their respective vehicles that had been appropriately marked with the names of the respective Divisions. Before he ended with his threats, Harcourt stepped out and told him in reply that they were not leaving Port Harcourt until they had been offered an alternative for what they were giving up and, turning

to his comrades, he asked them whether he was speaking their mind and properly representing their views on the matter. They all, without exception, shouted in affirmation. The policemen tried to apply some brute force but the patients would not budge an inch; some of them lay down on the ground and asked the policemen to pick them up and put into the vehicles. Of course, they knew they would not want to touch them, for lepers were very much feared at that time. When they saw that their measures were futile, they returned to their barracks to plan a change of tactics. In the meantime, word had been sent to the then Chief Inspector of Police, Osuji Njemanze, to the effect that that day's strategy had failed. It was during those troubles in Port Harcourt that Harcourt Whyte contracted his first marriage with Hannah, also a patient in the camp. Although the patients had apparently won in their struggle, they became very much more frightened by the incident and wondered what other steps and measures Government would apply on them.

With the series of incidents that began in 1929 and culminated in those of 1931, Rev. Dodds had started negotiations with the Resident of Port Harcourt in connection with finding a suitable place for the patients. The Resident was opened and assured Rev. Dodds that if the Church was prepared to help in founding a hospital for the patients, Government would also be willing and ready to help in the project. Rev. Dodds wrote home to the Methodist Missionary Society (MMS) in England in order to enquire whether the Church would support the project. Their reply was positive and so began the negotiations that led to the founding of the hospital at Uzuakoli.

Following the failure of the armed policemen to force the patients into the lorries arranged by Government to transport them to their respective

Divisions, Inspector Osuji Njemanze came himself the following day and addressed the patients in a very friendly and understanding manner. He broke to them the piece of good news that Government had acquired a piece of land at Uzuakoli where a special hospital for them was already under construction.

He appealed to them to return to their various Divisional Officers who had been instructed by Government to receive, take care of them and move them to Uzuakoli when all was ready for them. Although that was what the patients had been asking for all along, the good news was, nevertheless, still like a fairy-tale to them. Their faces beamed with varying shades of smiles as they listened to the good news of a special hospital being built for them at Uzuakoli. But they wanted to be sure that they were not being tricked into leaving Port Harcourt. The arrangement to carry them home had been overtaken by the events of that day and had to be postponed to a later date. The patients used the opportunity to crosscheck the information given to them.

They met, contributed money and sent two indigenes of Uzuakoli among them to secretly travel to Uzuakoli and find out whether what they had been told was true. They did as they were told to do and returned to confirm that work was indeed going on at Uzuakoli. Within a few days of the announcement, the patients were removed from Port Harcourt and taken to their home Divisions. Only a few patients, including Harcourt Whyte, remaining in the camp in Port Harcourt.

In February 1932 and later, on August 02 of the same year, Harcourt travelled to Umuahia, in order to find out from his friend, Dr. Savage, who had since been transferred to the Government College there, when the



hospital would be opened. During that visit, Dr. Savage told him that the hospital would be officially opened on the 10th or 12<sup>th</sup> of August, 1932. With a letter of introduction from Dr. Savage for the doctor in charge of the new hospital, Harcourt returned to Port Harcourt, overflowing with gratitude to God that he had not resisted and fought the authorities in vain. There was now some hope of some regular and proper medical attention, perhaps even of a cure! Leaving his wife, Hannah, who was then heavy with child, and taking his friend, John Nweke, with him, he travelled to Uzuakoli to check things out for himself. There he met Dr. J. A. Kinear Brown, the first doctor of the hospital, and gave him the letter he had brought from Dr. Savage. Harcourt and John Nweke went round the hospital grounds. Although there were as yet no houses for the patients, the reality of it all pleased them tremendously. Harcourt returned to Port Harcourt the next day and took his wife along to Uzuakoli and settled down for medical care.

## CHAPTER SIX

### UZUAKOLI ---- HIS FOSTER HOME AND FOSTER HOME OF HIS ART

***---- In that valley, the silence was eloquent. It is difficult to forget or even to get away from the peace and serenity of those evenings as the smoke rose from the fires within the houses to merge overhead into a purple haze while the band gently played for evening prayers. The scene was an evening vesper, and the tune, "Abide with me", (six) chosen by the patients themselves and played by the band, could not have a setting more perfect in the most dignified cathedral ---"***  
***(Achinivu, 1979, P. 80)***

With the Methodist Missionary Society (MMS) in England expressing their willingness to share in the proposed project with the then Government of Eastern Nigeria, the principle for the building of a hospital, where leprosy patients would be given not only a suitable and comfortable home but also scientific medical treatment, was established. Discussions to establish a hospital had in fact begun as far back as 1929, the first peak of the unrest in the Port Harcourt leprosy camp, with the MMS sending Dr. J.A. Kinnear Browne to Nigeria to see the site chosen for the hospital and start the project. When it became clear that the Church was going to cooperate in the project, the governments at Owerri, Okigwe, Ahoada and Bende Divisions met and decided on a site for the hospital. Because leprosy was a much dreaded disease, and a settlement of patients in any area spelt danger for the community concerned, the difficulties encountered by the four Divisional Officers in making a choice of a site are anybody's guess.

However, the fact that leprosy was already a threat to the society and that its stringent control was also urgent and of great importance were also perfectly clear to all of them, a place had to be found by all means. The place they chose was a piece of land between Okigwe and Afikpo Railway junction. It was a desolate, deserted and barren piece of land from which the natives had been digging out clay for brick-making, far away from anywhere else --- a kind of "no-man's land", completely lacking in the necessities of life and existence. It had to be such a place because of the nature of leprosy and the great fear people had for it.

When Dr. Brown arrived in 1929 and was shown the site, he rejected it outright as his description of the site would confirm:

***----the site suggested was disused brickwork, 3 miles from the road, and not easily accessible. The land was suitable for making bricks, but not for growing food: there was no sand, stone or timber for buildings; no firewood; and the water was pumped 3 miles in a pipe alongside the railway line and exposed to the sun; the water was muddy in the rains. There were three important juju groves on the margin of the site, the Ishiagu people were notoriously unfriendly; and there were no fruit trees, palm trees or markets --- (Fox, 1958).***

The search for another site, following Browne's rejection of the one identified and suggested by government, was not an easy one. Browne went from one Division to another, always being rebuffed by the people with the plausible reason that "---there was more land there" (meaning in

some other Division), while in fact it was for the true reason that he wanted land "----for an unpopular cause." At last, the Chiefs of Lodu, Nkpa and Lohum were persuaded to see good in the project and give something of their lands. The land they gave was their communally owned land known as "Ọhĩa Ọjọọ" (bad bush literally --- rejected, abandoned and useless land). Each of them, however, gave something extra of his own-good land. Dr. Browne was glad to accept the disused piece of land and with it, the physical aspect of the work began.

When Harcourt and his colleagues before him arrived at the hospital still under construction, there were no houses for the patients. Each patient had to fend for himself and his family until houses were built for them. In December 1931, Browne and his family returned to England. In July of the following year, 1932, he returned to Uzuakoli, this time without his family, but with the most essential medical instruments and items of equipment he required for starting work in the hospital. By that time, too, the doctor's house, three staff houses and two patients' hospital blocks were ready.

In pursuit of the arrangements made in Port Harcourt for conveying the patients to Uzuakoli when all was ready for them, the various Divisional Officers had transported the patients in their areas to Uzuakoli in lorry-loads. Their first assignment was to provide themselves with shelter as work on the site was still in its embryonic stage. Following the pattern of living in villages already worked out by Browne --- men's and women's villages ---- and in each of these, sections for the weak and poorest patients/members, Harcourt joined them and made a hut for himself and his wife, Hannah.

On the 12th of August, 1932, the Leprosy Hospital Uzuakoli officially opened its doors to patients from wherever. For the opening ceremony,

Browne had arranged for a brass band, raised from the new Uzuakoli patients, to play on that day. Bassey Udoh, the Director of the Itu Leprosy Hospital brass band, was invited to coach the Uzuakoli band and to conduct it at the opening ceremony of the Uzuakoli Hospital. The first tune they played was the Welsh traditional tune, "Ar hyd y nos", sung to the words: "Through the Love of God, Our Saviour. All will be well (M.H.B. 525, R.C.H. 702).

The mellow and noble brass timbre of that tune, recalled to Harcourt's mind his earlier acquaintance with band music while he was in his village school in Abonnema. He wished he was one of the bandsmen but the debilitating effect of the disease was already so strongly perceptible on his fingers that his ever playing any instrument was completely out of the question. It was by no means a pleasant recollection; nevertheless, he remarked as follows about the tune:

***...I was highly impressed by the tune --- After the performance of that day, I decided to do everything I can to read and teach music --- (Achinivu, 1979 P. 78).***

It must have been one of the hymns he later studied very closely in the course of his development as a composer. Clearly, his desire, his goal, was now pointedly stated. ".... to read and write music....", and before very long he was very much into doing so. There is also no doubt at all that Bassey Udoh, the band's Director and Conductor, made an indelible impression on his mind, for only he who could ".....read and teach music..." could conduct a band the way Bassey Udoh did. It was, reportedly, in the ceremonial atmosphere of that day that Harcourt's wife, Hannah, was delivered of a baby boy --- an event which he looked upon as God-sent,

as God's victory for Himself and His reward to him for his steadfastness, doggedness and genuineness of purpose in the pursuit of the cause which he very strongly believed to be right. He named his son Godwin.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### HARCOURT WHYTE, THE DAVEYS AND MS GRAINGER

By June 1936, Dr. Browne had returned to England for good. The hospital came under the personal superintendence of the Rev. Dr. Thomas Frank Davey. With Dr. Davey's take-over began a new phase of development both for the hospital and for Harcourt. It is convenient at this juncture to make some necessary digression, an excursion, in order to examine more closely one of the several influences that were exerted on Harcourt. The Rev. Dr. Thomas Frank Davey was by profession a medical doctor --- specifically, a leprologist. His avocation was music and as a secondary vocation, or perhaps as an adjunct to medicine and music, religion. He came from a musical family. His father had conducted a church choir; his mother was a singer and his brother a church organist. He began to study piano-playing at 8 and at 12, he took on the organ as well, later playing in a small city church as organist. Davey was, therefore, more of a practical than a theoretical musician, having learnt not so much of the theory of music, but of its practice. Like his parents, he was interested in service overseas.

In the course of his science studies at the University of London, his minister had discovered his interest in overseas service and told him that if he really wanted to do a successful work abroad, it was not sufficient to be just a scientist or a doctor; he needed the ministry as well. He took his minister's advice. After his studies in London, he candidated for the Tent-making Ministry of the Methodist Church. He was in his first year of religious studies at the Hartley Victoria College in Manchester when Dr. Browne went to Nigeria in 1929 to found the hospital, one of whose

earliest pioneers he came to be. After his course at Hartley College, the MMS, which had in part sponsored his medical and religious studies, asked him to go to Nigeria and relieve Dr. Browne. It was in this triple capacity as Doctor ---- Leprologist, Rev. Minister and Musician, that he exerted the enormous and profound influences on Harcourt ----- influences which became very evident later in Harcourt's life and works.

***....In fact, it will be no overstatement to say that Harcourt's life at the Colony and outside it was a projection, a reflection, of Dr. Davey's many-sided influences on him: the medical, the spiritual and the musical --- (Achinivu, 1979, P. 83)***

His medical and religious influences on Harcourt were perhaps much more easily perceptible and obvious: Harcourt was cured of his leprosy and the lyrics of his music, and especially that he wrote mainly sacred choral music, are evidences of these influences. What the Davey's musical influences on him were, are, perhaps, not as easily perceptible as the medical and religious.

Mrs. Kathleen Davey was one of the influential forces on the musical career of Harcourt Whyte. As an educationist, she took over the educational life of the hospital, controlling both the children's and adults' schools which Harcourt had started and run entirely in his own way. Through her efforts and hard work, the children's school came to be recognized by government and later on grew to writing the West African School Certificate Examinations. Harcourt was very thirsty for knowledge. Working very closely with Mrs. Davey, he learnt a great variety of valuable methods, which he applied later on in teaching his and other choirs.



Mrs. Kay Davey, Mr. Alfred Hasted, the hospital's Welfare Officer, and Browne before them, regularly organized social events, usually on competitive basis. At the end of such events, the winners were awarded various prizes. Harcourt took part in many such competitions, especially in the recitation of Bible passages and in singing, and won several prizes. However, while other winners were given other things, Harcourt was always given religious books as his prizes and that enabled him to read wide and increase his knowledge of the Bible and of christian life and living.

***---Leprosy, he declared, isolated me into a place where I could see no other books to read than the Bible and religious books. I read and read and read, and they transformed me. At this time, I had read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation four times as literature. So, instead of seeing God as cruel to me, I see (sic) him as a loving Father and Friend. Instead of feeling bitter that all was lost, I discovered that "all things work together for good to them that love (and trust) God" (Rom. Viii, 28). (Achinivu, 1979, P. 84)***

Not long after he had assumed the superintendence of the hospital, in 1938 to be precise, Dr. Davey and his staff began out-station services in Eastern Nigeria. During their surveys of the villages and schools, they found many people with Leprosy, a number of whom were teachers and children. Davey selected from them those he thought had the greatest need of being hospitalized. These were first and foremost the teachers among them who suffered terribly at home because they had leprosy. His foresight and prudence had dual advantages. In the first place, they

helped to provide more qualified teachers for the Harcourt Whyte School and thereby furthered education in the right direction. Secondly, and this is the more significant point, as more and more educated people, above all more qualified teachers than Harcourt, joined the hospital, Harcourt was soon relegated to the background in educational matters. The direct consequences of this was that he had a lot more time, helped by Davey, to concentrate his energies on music and purely musical matters.

With time, therefore, Harcourt, who had begun with teaching all subjects in the curricular throughout the week, was by 1937/38, able to do less and less of ordinary education and more and more of composing music. At that point, the Daveys began to direct his mind away from the European style of musical composition (as found in the hymns he imitated) and the rudiments of European music which they had taught him since discovering his great musical gifts. They redirected his attention towards an African style of musical composition as found in traditional songs, which he also copied and blended with the European style to establish a personal style of composition recognizable as such. One of the names that should be mentioned in connection with Harcourt's musical career and in connection with healing at Uzuakoli is Mrs. L. Grainger. She did a lot of women's work in the hospital. During social occasions, she invited Harcourt to help her with the preparation of the Women's Fellowship's musical activities. Giving Harcourt the hymns and songs she wanted to use for any particular occasion, usually in staff notation, she taught him how to transcribe the music from staff into tonic-solfa notation, the notation in use at the time and still being used today in most West African countries. In that way, Harcourt gained a deep insight into the problems of notation, particularly tonic-solfa notation, transcription from staff into tonic solfa notation, harmony and of music-reading in general. During Davey's village surveys,

he heard and collected much good traditional music which he very much wanted to hear in the church because he was convinced that music with such driving rhythms and beautiful melodies would enhance the religious life and worship in the hospital. He saw in Harcourt the man who was to bring the beautiful melodies and exciting rhythms of the village music into the church. Harcourt was glad to receive the traditional songs and instrumental dance music recorded by Dr. Davey. He listened to them intently and religiously absorbed in particular the beautiful and titillating melodies and rhythms and style.

Thus, Harcourt moved away from reproducing, imitating or even copying the hymn style of harmonization in the way many song-books at his disposal to becoming a composer with his own recognizable and distinguished style. In the meantime, yet another crisis occurred in his life. After twelve years of apparently happy married life that was blessed with two children, providence smiled, as it were, on Hannah, his wife. In 1943, Hannah was discharged from the hospital, symptom-free of leprosy. Here was a situation involving the now "clean" and the "still unclean" living together and, as if to say that they were no longer compatible with each other, Hannah left Harcourt and their two children; Godwin and Beatrice. It was indeed a further reminder of the Port Harcourt situation and of his continuing fate as a leprosy patient. However, he was already so mature and so overflowing with christian experiences, attitudes and approaches to life situations and events that he outlived with relative ease the shock and depression the separation caused him. Six long years were to pass after Hannah had left him, before he was declared "clean". In April 1945, the Hospital was nationalized under the special arrangements that government took over the medical work in all its aspects, while the social welfare and religious aspects fell to the church, the MMS.



## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **A BRIGHT SPOT: DISCHARGE SERVICES ---- HIS DISCHARGE AND AFTER**

The great landmark in the war against leprosy was made in about 1948/49 when, under Dr. Lowe and Davey, Dapsone, the modern treatment for leprosy, was researched at Uzuakoli. Harcourt went through all the experiments that led to this achievement in medical research, and in 1949, exactly thirty-five years after he had contracted the disease, he was pronounced "clean", symptom-free of leprosy, and was discharged from the hospital. With his discharge, the next important phase of his life, namely, that of getting reintegrated into society, began.

Before him, so many patients had been discharged. The practice developed with those discharged earlier whereby a special discharge service was held for the discharged patients. At the end of such a discharge service, the out-going patients were usually given discharge certificates which they took home to present to their circuit ministers, village chiefs and relatives. At first, nobody came from outside the hospital to attend a discharge service; all that happened much later, in about the early fifties, when the general public began to lose their fear of leprosy. Then, people, especially relatives and friends of patients being discharged, but also other people, began to attend discharge services as they attended any major christian occasion such as Christmas or Easter Service. That this was now the case and that discharged patients proudly went back to their homes were a great landmark in the social attitude of the people both towards leprosy and those who had suffered from it.

***When I came to the Colony, described Harcourt, "people stand (sic) yards away from a patient to speak to them (sic), when I left, people speak (sic) with the patients side by side. When I came into the Colony, a discharged patient sneaks (sic) away unnoticed, but when I left the Colony, families and friends of patients came to escort away their people at their discharge.***

***(Achinivu, 1979, P. 8)***

In December 1949, Harcourt experienced, as he described it, the greatest joy of his turbulent life when he found his name on the list of the fortunate. But this had taken so long in coming that his discharge became at the same time one of the greatest dilemmas of his later life. At first, he received the news with mixed feelings, but his misgivings soon gave way to pleasant thoughts about his leaving the hospital. Of that day, he recalled:

***....My impressions of that day was (sic) confused. I did not know whether it was real or fallacy (sic). Having lived in the settlement for seventeen years, how easy would it be to break the age-long acquaintanceships. Having left my native home when I was 14, in 1919, and roaming (sic) all nooks and crannies (sic) to regain my health for thirty years, what sort of welcome awaits me at home? But the joy of being once more a clean man overshadowed everything and I went out singing. Abonnema, shall I live again in you?***

The foregoing quotation adequately reflects the state of his mind. He never, in fact, lived in his beloved native Abonnema again; he did return there for a brief moment after his discharge only to come back again to Uzuakoli. As a composer, he had made such enormous contributions to the day-to-day christian life of the community that when he was discharged, he left a vacuum that was extremely hard to fill. He was the live-wire of the spiritual and musical life of the hospital not only through the service of his choir to the community at church services but also through his services as Music and Religious Knowledge teacher in the normal and adult schools. Consequently, in 1950, soon following his discharge and five years after government had taken over the hospital, the hospital management recalled him and made him a permanent welfare staff, a teacher. The appointment should also be seen as a deserved reward for a "patient" leader who led the way in the search for relief from the pangs of leprosy.

His new status in the hospital was a great psychological relief to him. For the first time in the early fifties, he began to go beyond the boundaries of the hospital to teach his compositions to choirs in Uzuakoli, the environs and beyond. Choirmasters living in distant places to which he could not conveniently travel came to the hospital and participated in his choir rehearsals. In this way, his music spread to the remotest parts of the country wherever there was an Igbo who could interpret his works. At first, Harcourt was satisfied with people hearing and learning his music.

One could say, in fact, that he derived psychological satisfaction from the fact that people so quickly and without any reservations accepted him and his music. Consequently, he gave out his music and taught people free of charge. But soon, he discovered that choirmasters and choirs to whom he

went or who came to him were becoming careless and untrustworthy. He was thus compelled to introduce a registration fee for every choir or choirmaster who underwent his tutelage. He also began to demand, albeit, a paltry monthly contribution from every choir. Not that Harcourt wanted to make some money from his music, he believed that the axiom, that people do not value anything they get free of charge, is true, that is, the costlier a thing is, the more valuable it is to its owner. And he proved himself right; he made great strides with the choirs and, at the same time, began to receive some extra, even if paltry income from his music. This was also the period of a great deal of commissioned works for which he was paid some money.



## CHAPTER NINE

### HARCOURT'S COMPOSITIONAL ABILITIES AND TECHNIQUES

A story was very popular in Uzuakoli, the environs in particular, and in many parts of Nigeria in general that whenever Harcourt was ready to go to bed he always kept several blackboards, sticks of chalk and duster at the head end of his bed, and an exercise book, a pen or pencil under his pillow. During his sleep, someone --- a spirit, the angel of the Lord Himself, the story said ---- came to him and sang one, sometimes several melodies to him which he thoroughly learnt also in his sleep. He then rose up and wrote them down in the exercise book under his pillow or on one of the black-boards at the head end of his bed. After writing the melodies down and returning to sleep, the angel came again, usually in the same night, sometimes also some days afterwards, and taught him how the melodies would be harmonized. This fascinating story ---- as fantastic and perhaps superstitious as it may sound --- draws attention to certain interesting points, above all to the inspirational aspects of his composing career. First is the point that his melodies and harmonies were inspired by an unknown force which he acknowledged to be God.

Secondly, it draws attention to the point that the harmonization of a melody in four parts by an African was, at the time he began, a new and unusual thing ---- a new way of singing by Africans. True, the singing in four independent parts was, through Christian hymns, already familiar to the people but that a person like Harcourt could also compose such works in four parts was regarded as an inspired phenomenon. It was an art that could not just be acquired or learned, and this might have contributed to the fact that in spite of the hundreds of choristers and choirmasters who

passed through him during the many years he worked as a composer and conductor, very few understood him since his music was inspired by God.

The story emanated, in fact, from Okoko Item, a village not very far away from Uzuakoli. Harcourt had just been discharged and was recuperating in his home town, Abonnema, when he received an invitation from the Methodist Church in Okoko Item. It was a request to come to Okoko and prepare their choir for the year's Thanksgiving Service, which the people wanted to remember as one with a difference. For Harcourt, it was a great honour and a pleasant thing to be invited in that way and that soon after his discharge. It was a sign of his belonging again to the community of the "clean" and of the people's acceptance of his status as Composer and Choir Director. He accepted the invitation with pleasure and, taking with him a number of compositions he had written earlier, left his home for Okoko Item. For the people of Okoko, it was also a great honour that he accepted their invitation to come to them and so they prepared themselves to receive him well and make him feel at home.

The Okoko people, like other Igbo groups, are fond of pageantry in such public matters; they prided themselves in the singular good, the unheard-of, and the first-of-its-kind. When Harcourt arrived, he was made comfortable and given all he wanted. And then came the assignment for which he was invited to Okoko, not simply to compose an anthem and send it to them. Expressing their readiness to pay him correspondingly well for his services, they told Harcourt, as if they knew that he brought some of his old compositions with him, to put away any old compositions he had and prepare their choir with an anthem specifically composed for them, an anthem that had never been sung before by any choir, not even by his own choir! Assured that he was coming, the people of Okoko invited

many churches and their choirs from far and near and advertised that the Okoko Item Methodist Church Choir was going to be conducted by the famous composer and conductor, Harcourt Whyte. That was sufficient to attract hundreds of people to their church for the Thanksgiving occasion. For many, it was an opportunity to see Harcourt in person for the first time. The people, however, never imagined for a moment that they had set Harcourt a task that normally required some time. For them, it was his profession; he was, as it were, a "musical mint" who could produce music just for the asking. They merely wanted to boost their prestige as the first church to have Harcourt write a special anthem for their choir and conduct it. Harcourt accepted the challenge and met it squarely. He asked that three (3) blackboards, some sticks of chalk and a duster be brought into his room. This they did and in the night, when all nature was asleep, Harcourt rose to write. The following day, the choristers, overflowing with anxiety, came to see what he had done in the night. They were astonished to see that the black-boards were covered with notes in tonic-solfa notation, in a way comprehensible only to the composer. That was the story; there it originated and, like his music, it spread quickly like wild fire all over the country.

An interesting story, it does show that Harcourt Whyte was, in fact, a composer. Thus, through commissions such as this and by charging inexorbitant fees, he began to make paltry sums of money from his works.

## CHAPTER TEN

### HARCOURT WHYTE'S COMMISSIONED WORKS

In 1954, seven years after Hannah had left him, he remarried. His second wife was Roseline Echeziaku, a young industrious woman from Amoji Lodu, a small village about four miles away from Uzuakoli. It was a happy marriage that was survived by three children at his death in 1977. During the years following his discharge, Harcourt was over-run with commissions; churches, school and other choral organizations requested special compositions of him. Easter, Christmas, Harvests, Festivals, Discharge Services, etc. were occasions that called for special compositions from him. In 1956, for instance, the now late Queen of England, Queen Elizabeth II, visited Nigeria and for her reception, the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) commissioned Harcourt to write two suitable anthems. In 1959, the Shell B. P. Company of Nigeria asked him in a letter to compose two (2) Christmas carols for a recording. Because there were no specific terms of reference as in the Okoko Item commission, Harcourt gave himself free rein and did what he wanted. Here may be noted one of his practices, especially when he had more contracts for writing entirely new compositions than he could fulfil in terms of time. Sometimes, he took an old composition, wrote new text for it, in English or Igbo, depending on the occasion for which it was required, and then reworked it as far as possible by altering notes here and there. If the new text is in Igbo, he would, for example, consider the tonal inflexions of the new lyrics whereupon the melody would change dramatically from its original version. Sometimes, too, he simply wrote some other appropriate lyrics for a composition and left it at that. On the whole, very few people knew what he did in such circumstances and this was the case with the

Shell B.P. commissioned works. The two Christmas carols that resulted were called "Peace To Men Of Goodwill" and "From Heaven He Came" (O Si N'igwe Bia). But in fact these were two quite old compositions which he had originally titled "Dere Jii" (Be Still) and "O Si N'igwe Bia" (From Heaven He Came) which he reworked and re-dressed in new and English texts. In such cases as "From Heaven He Came", it was often evident that, for poetic reasons, his Igbo versions came through better than the English as a comparison of the two versions of this anthem will show. Certainly, Harcourt was more poetic and expressive when he wrote in Igbo than when he wrote in English. In 1952, he wrote a composition he called "Gozie Nzuko Gi" (Bless Your Church/Congregation), apparently for some Christian dedicational ceremony. In 1960, following the death, the year before, of Kanu Achinivu, the Principal of the Elementary Training Centre (E.T.C.) and the first Indigenous African Senior Principal of the entire educational complex known as Methodist College, Uzuakoli, the Methodist Mission built a house on the Elementary Training Centre premises in remembrance of him. For the occasion in which that house was dedicated to the glory of God, Harcourt, who was himself a great friend of Kanu Achinivu, was commissioned to compose an anthem. He called the resultant anthem for the occasion "Gozie Ulo Nke a" (Bless This House). It was in fact, his "Gozie Nzuko Gi", written eight years before, that he reworked, bringing in the name of the deceased after whom the house was named, and revising notes here and there to reflect the need to make patterns resulting from the new texts. That occasioned a reworking of his melody and harmony as well. To many who heard it, it was a brand new composition, written specifically for the occasion. However, that it was a reworked composition did not detract from its effectiveness on that occasion. Notwithstanding this practice, Harcourt wrote a very large number of new compositions and there is no doubt that

such demands on his abilities made him write rather prolifically, many of them at short intervals of time. Besides these demands from outside bodies, Harcourt was, so to say, mandatorily compelled as J.S. Bach of the European Baroque period was, to provide appropriate music for each Sunday service, discharge service and other special occasions --- occasions at which he sounded new each time.

Harcourt's close association with the hospital school from its inception gave him the opportunity to write what might be termed "School anthems and musical dramas" because of their specific school backgrounds and pedagogical purposes. He had discovered that music was a surer and quicker means of impressing a Shakespearean verse or an Igbo proverb on the minds of his pupils. This made him write relatively simple, shorter anthems and secular compositions in which the substance of a Bible story or the oral lesson of a proverb is brought home to children. He had also made the observation during his early teaching career that school children learned and quoted Shakespeare much more readily and easily than simple Igbo proverbs. Consequently, he began to collect some Igbo proverbs, which he intended to disseminate under the title "Igbo proverbs in Songs". A good idea; however, he did not seem to have gone far with his original intention. Rather, here and there, Igbo proverbs and idioms are scattered in some of his compositions. Because of the wide variety of choirs which he taught his music, he wrote music of correspondingly different lengths and difficulties. His compositions for schools, for instance, have narrower, smaller melodic ranges than those he wrote for his and certain other advanced choirs. In his musical dramas, he often chose dramatic episodes in a Bible story and set them to music as commentary on the plots. In that way, he helped in impressing the plots on the minds of his school children and of the audience. His "Samson and Delilah" and

"Moses and the Deliverance from Egypt" are typical examples. Unfortunately, the scores of these works are no longer complete or even available; they certainly were not accessible to me for this study, but I know about them.

With the passage of time, Harcourt received invitations to give talks on music and to participate in musical colloquiums. In 1953, he gave a talk on "The Development of Music in Nigeria" under the auspices of the British Council in Enugu. In 1957, he was invited by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) to participate in an essay competition on African Music which it was sponsoring. Harcourt took part in that competition and emerged as runner-up. The late fifties and early sixties saw in Eastern Nigeria a great awakening of interest in music and the other arts. The upsurge of interest in the arts gave birth to the establishment of the then Eastern Nigeria Festival of the Arts. The Festival drew so many individual and group artistes from the provinces to the regional level of competition in all branches of music. Harcourt featured prominently in that festival, sometimes as a participant with his choir and at other times as sole or co-adjudicator of musical events. At about the same period in Uzuakoli, the late Rev. Robinson Kalu Mba had introduced choir competition for the Methodist Churches in the Circuit, a practice that later spread to other Circuits. Harcourt was always there to adjudicate. Even the Anglican Churches held their Diocesan Choir competitions and invited him as the only judge or the Chief of several judges of the events. This shows that his acceptance as composer and choral master went beyond denominational boundaries. At those competitions, his judgements were, without exception, accepted as equitable. The pronouncement of his judgement was always preceded by comments on such performance matters as tone-production, balance of voices, choir demeanour and

response, conducting and the like, so that in that way too he disseminated his ideas and profound experience in choir work.

With the acquisition of Independence in October, 1960, Nigeria required her own National Anthem. In a competition for choosing one, Harcourt made an entry, possibly with either his "Ah Nigeria Attends (sic) Her Independence" or "Lift High The Banner Of Nigeria", two of the very few works he wrote in the English language. Although he did not win in the competition, he lost quite honourably as he clearly acknowledged his many limitations and the disadvantages he had vis-a-vis his musically trained opponents.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### THE WAR PERIOD

The last major crisis that shook Harcourt's musical precocity in a remarkable way before his death in 1977 was the Nigerian civil war. It was as late as March 1969, when the Federal Government troops advanced into Uzuakoli, that the people of Uzuakoli began to feel the fierceness and intensity of the war that had begun some two years before. Harcourt and his family, like many others in the area, were forced to flee Uzuakoli and seek refuge elsewhere. Their first port of call was his parents-in-laws' home in Amoji Lodu, a village situated away from the route taken by the Federal troops emerging at Uzuakoli. Within a few weeks of the troops' entry into Uzuakoli, life in Amoji Lodu and other surrounding villages became unsafe as mortars, shells and bullets fell there like hailstone. This compelled them to move further inland to Amaohoro Nkpa and, in a few other weeks, to Amaegbuato Nkpa as the Federal troops spread their wings over and beyond Uzuakoli. It was there in Amaegbuato Nkpa that Harcourt, his family and his parents-in-law took refuge until September 1969. Meanwhile, what remained of the hospital at Uzuakoli had evacuated to Ibere under the then Area Superintendent, Dr. Marcus Kanno of blessed memory. Dr. Kanno was very much concerned about Harcourt's safety, as he was not among those evacuated to Ibere. When Dr. Kanno heard from those who had seen Harcourt at Nkpa that he was at Amaegbuato Nkpa, he arranged with the World Council of Churches (WCC) to bring Harcourt over to Ibere, his family joining him there later on.

They were at Ibere until January 1970 when it was announced that hostilities had ceased and the war was over. When he left Uzuakoli for

Nkpa, he had thought that it was going to be for a few days and he would be back to his home in Uzuakoli. Consequently, he took very little with him of his property and music. During the restless wanderings from village to village in search of shelter, Harcourt's productivity was at the lowest ebb. He wrote only about two compositions in support of the Biafran cause and a few other secular anthems in his usual vein. Life was so rough for him that he had thought he would pass away with the civil war, but although he, like many other people, suffered considerable hardships, God always provided appropriate people to help him, so that things were not particularly too bad for him. During the war, the Biafran fighting forces as well as the civilian population, fundamentally Christian people, found in Harcourt's music a source of hope, succour, and encouragement. It gave them the conviction that whatever the result of the war, it was surely God's ruling for the nation. The radio stations and various choral groups used his music as morale-booster for the fighting forces and the population.

With the capitulation of Biafra in January 1970, the patients at the Ibere Camp, Harcourt, and his family were moved to the Government College, Umudike, Umuahia. Now, what next? "Where do I go from here?" The International Red Cross Society came to Umuahia to take patients and staff of the hospital back to Uzuakoli or to their states of origin. Once again, Harcourt was faced with taking a major decision, namely, the decision to be carried back to Abonnema in Rivers State or to Uzuakoli in the then East Central State, long since his second but now permanent home. Considering the difficult adjustments that were going to be made following the devastations of the war and other private or personal matters, Harcourt chose to be carried back to Uzuakoli. Asked whether his people in Rivers State would not misconstrue his decision for a changed attitude

towards his home town and people, as it were, for a denial of his home of origin, he aptly replied:

***... The creation of States is not meant to make us strangers to each other but to make administration more smooth running. I have been in the East Central State for more than half of my life. I am, therefore, not prepared to leave it unless the ECS (East Central State) Government asks me to leave. As a pioneer Nigerian musician and composer, I have been serving the whole country from Uzuakoli in Bende Division of the East Central State for many years and I see no reason why I cannot continue to serve it from there after the creation of states. (Achinivu, 1979, P. 101)***

Besides his artistic contributions to the cultural aspects of Nigerian life, economic as well as socio-psychological considerations might well have been at the back of his mind when he took that decision. And so Harcourt was brought back to Uzuakoli as one of the first to see the ruins of the war there. For him, it meant beginning anew; his house was ransacked and burnt in part. Nothing remained for him, not even a score of his music. It was clearly one of the greatest losses Nigeria suffered culturally as a result of that war. Within a few weeks of his return to Uzuakoli with Dr. Marcus Kanno, the Area Superintendent, Harcourt, saw to it that the hospital school was revived along with other schools in the State; that he was not the headmaster of the school notwithstanding; after all, the school was his brainchild. Through his efforts, helped by Sunday Aniche, the school was revived and the teachers who were working there before without salaries were promised or assured that their salaries would be

paid. There was so much poverty and suffering among the defeated 'Biafran' population at the end of the war. Consequently, the first salary was anticipated with much anxiety. When the first pay-day arrived, Harcourt experienced another suffering from the machinations of a jealous and unscrupulous colleague. For a pay packet, Harcourt was served a retirement letter! It is easy to imagine the state of his mind when he read the letter in the face of much want. An announcement had been made that all headmasters should submit lists of teachers who had attained the retirement age of 65. There is nothing so finely perceived as injustice. Harcourt had discovered that although he was not the only one who had attained that age of 65, his name was the only one submitted by his headmaster. Naturally, it pained him very much, for he saw at once that the existence of his entire family was at stake. He recalled that at 57 he had been appointed a permanent music teacher and here was he now being retired without any previous notice and without any alternative source of livelihood in view. Even the deprivations caused by the war were not considered. It is indeed true that when Governments change, new laws, regulations, ways of doing things are the result and that was the case with Harcourt. He was reminded of his Port Harcourt days, of the scholarship award which he had rejected several years before and so he began to petition every known current Government official in protest against his sudden and inhumane retirement. Dr. Kanno made strong representations on his behalf at various levels of Government but it was not until after one year of undue pain, suffering and hardship that the various efforts directed towards his reinstatement yielded the expected results. In February 1971, Harcourt was recalled. Having achieved that, he took up the matter of his one year's salary arrears which, badly enough, he did not receive by his death.

With the recovery of his position and the steady, but meager income accruing therefrom, Harcourt settled down once again to composing music and rather prolifically too. In 1973, the Writers' Workshop of the East Central State Ministry of Information, Youth and Culture was launched and Harcourt's Choir at the Uzuakoli Hospital was chosen as the Workshop's Choir while he became the Choral Director and Musical Adviser to the Workshop --- a position he held until the end of the Asika Regime in January/February, 1976. His connection with the Workshop through its Director, Obi Egbuna, helped in no small measure in improving Harcourt's social and economic conditions for his advisory position brought him some additional allowance, some other, lesser honours, but not much financial benefit. As a teacher with no recognized certificate, he received very paltry salary that he handled a specialized subject like music, notwithstanding.

***... It is clear to all who know me, like you (Achinivu), he said, that I am both physically and economically handicapped and yet in spite of all the praises showered on me by the radios at public occasions and in churches for my works, no organization or individual, not even any arm of the Government has put these much-praised, much talked-about-works into print (apart from the Methodist Missionary Society (MMS) which, however, is no Nigerian organization). The result is that about one third of my works are missing today. The originals were either eaten up by white ants or lost during the war.... (these) points make me ask myself whether it is not all flattery, and think that our Government and people merely make me believe they are interested in my works and me and thereby give***

***me a feeling of consolation for a life of sufferings and disappointments. Anyway, from my Christian experience, I am confident that my life is neither a failure nor a disappointment, but a well planned and purposeful life under God's providence... (Achinivu, 1979, P. 103-104).***

This was the lot of one of Africa's particularly Nigerian's greatest and most modern artists and musical giants. And so Harcourt lived, worked, made enormous contributions to the development of African Church Music and died a poor man. It seems to be the lot of a good number of musicians. Was Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart not buried in a pauper's grave?

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### A STUDY SCHOLARSHIP REJECTED

So far, Harcourt's vocation as a teacher in the hospital school had been within the framework of the hospital administration, he being responsible to the latter rather than the Ministry of Education of the Government of the then Eastern Nigeria. Mr. Alfred Hasted, the Missionary Welfare Officer to the hospital, later realizing the implication of this situation for Harcourt, undertook to bring about the necessary conversion. He made representations to the Government on behalf of Harcourt through such personalities as the late Dr. Sir Francis Ibiam (Dr. Akanu Ibiam) and Dr. Michael I. Okpara, the then Premier of Eastern Nigeria, and asked that Harcourt be made a Government teacher like all the others. In 1962, at the age of 57, the Ministry of Education approved his appointment as a permanent music teacher in the hospital school. It will be seen later that although his age was discountenanced at the time of this appointment, it became a source of insecurity for him after the Nigeria civil war. In that same year, 1962, the scholarship division of the Ministry of Education awarded Harcourt a scholarship to study music at any local or foreign university or music academy he wanted to, specialize, attend and in any aspect of musical study of his choice. It may be supposed, however, that the scholarship donors expected that he would jump at the offer and would naturally opt for the study of composition, the area in which he had so ably demonstrated his ability. Although that offer was an express recognition of his musical ability and competence, in particular in composition, Harcourt eventually rejected the offer because he thought that accepting to undertake a musical study was most inconsistent with the facts of his life at the time --- he had no fingers, he was already old (57), and had a

family to care for. Above all, he thought that accepting the offer was certainly going to deny some younger perhaps even more gifted person than he the opportunity to improve himself. For this and several other genuine reasons, Harcourt rejected the scholarship outright. Asked much later in his life-time what he would have studied if he took the opportunity, Harcourt replied:

***---The folksongs of my country – In them we express our feelings, our sense of values, what we honour and what we dishonour, what we esteem and what we despise. Our folksongs are the musicians of our past and our history. Indeed, if I had the opportunity of studying music directly from a tutor, I would have devoted a considerable part of my time to (our) folksongs --- (Achinivu, 1979, P. 96).***

Understandably quite so. In retrospect, he had been amazed that despite the ups and downs of his life he could attain the beautiful age of 57. He was, therefore, not optimistic over benefiting much from such a study, at home or abroad. Already, long before his discharge, the disfigurement and loss of some of his fingers were proving to be a major retarding factor in his compositional process.

Harcourt was never a musically ambitious man; he never aspired to become a composer of world repute. He merely wanted to serve his God and man with the musical talent with which the Very God blessed him. Consequently, he did not think that he would become any happier if he took a University degree or any other professional qualification in music at his age. That ...."a style of composition of traditional and modern



cultural music has been established by me..." gave him a great deal more pleasure and satisfaction instead. But he did not want that singular opportunity to slip him entirely. In the letter with which he turned down the scholarship award, addressed to the Permanent Secretary to the Scholarship Division of the Ministry of Education, Harcourt requested that the scholarship be transferred to his son, Godwin, who, besides being much younger and in a much better physical condition than he, Harcourt, was, would have benefited more from it, anyway. Unfortunately, perhaps also surprisingly, his request was also turned down by the scholarship officers with the justification that the scholarship was not transferable. In 1970, Harcourt had cause to regret his rejection of the scholarship eight years before when, after the Nigerian civil war, his reinstatement as a teacher was so difficult that his very existence was threatened. What the study of music at home or abroad could have done for him can only be a matter of conjecture. However, he now thought that such a study might probably have influenced his rate of working at a composition. Also, thinking now in purely economic terms of the circumstances resulting from the civil war, it might also have provided him much more readily and adequately the much-needed means for educating his children well. His regret at the loss of the scholarship opportunity also stemmed from his awareness of the typical African and particularly Nigerian mentality towards education and academic qualifications, for he thought too that,

***...It (the academic study of and qualification in music)  
would have enabled me to earn the appreciation of those  
who feel that a person is nothing unless he has a  
university degree --- (Achinivu, 1979, P. 98).***

Harcourt was, in fact, already so deeply sunk and soaked in his self-taught and self-developed style that an academic pursuit in music at his age then, with its many prohibitive rules --- the "don'ts" of European harmony, for instance ----- might have bridled the spontaneity of his musical expression and perhaps constrained him to view his works as "not so good", "not good enough" or "below, standard", because European music was looked upon as the standard. However, the opportunities and possibilities of such training cannot be denied. Had Harcourt undertaken a study of music, he might have experimented with such things as chromaticism, for example. It is just hard to say, so that he had to be judged entirely by what he produced and within the circumstances he was compelled to work. Very true is it to say, however, that his evident lack of European musical education and of scholarship in his musical creation is both his strength and his weakness. Music flowed easily and readily from his pen, as evidenced by the quantity and depth of emotional theology in his works. However, when one examines his compositions in great detail in the light of the norms of the style to which he certainly would have been exposed had he undertaken an academic study of music, one cannot help agreeing that his style is in many respects at variance with the European style which he obviously emulated. In other words, one will see that some other compositional principles than those found in European hymnody have helped to form his early style. In the limited world of the hospital, Harcourt had contact with no other kind of music than the hymn and gospel songs. Davey surely had some records and scores of orchestral, piano and organ music, but Davey never exposed Harcourt to any such music. Perhaps if he had his fingers complete and could play the harmonium at least, he might have met Bach and such other European Church music composers. No, he did not know any of them. So, Harcourt was on the whole an autodidactic --- a self-taught person; the influences that helped to form his

style were principally indirect, he having received rather meagre and infrequent music theory lessons from Davey. All these considerations point to the fact that Harcourt was indeed a great man; his was a very rare native talent that was let loose by the circumstances of his life. All these explain, too, why he never wrote anything else than vocal choral music and mainly sacred music at that ---- that man may praise God with his voice. For the same reasons, instrumental music was for him entirely out of the question.

In 1964, Harcourt's name appeared on the honours' list of Nigerians and Europeans whose distinguished services to the nation, in Harcourt's case, in the field of culture, were recognized by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Under the sponsorship of J. A. Enyeazu and Miss M. I. Ededem, Harcourt Whyte was honoured with the insignia of Member of the Order on the Niger (MON) --- perhaps the only honour or recognition which Harcourt received from any Nigerian Government.

## **CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

### **HIS LAST TEN YEARS**

#### **FROM NOTHING TO SOMETHING, FROM NOBODY TO SOMEBODY; HIS JOURNEY TO CEREBRITYHOOD.**

The joint efforts of the then Eastern Nigeria Government and the Methodist Missionary Society (MMS) in England had led to the founding in August, 1932 of a proper specialist hospital at Uzuakoli, Abia State of Nigeria, where people experiencing leprosy/people affected by leprosy (PEL/PABL) would not only live permanently but also receive proper treatment for leprosy. Consequently, the need arose that all such people who had been at the General Hospital, Port Harcourt, be transferred to the newly established Leprosy Hospital at Uzuakoli. Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte who, at that point in time, was a young adult of twenty-seven (27) years of age, saw his name top on the list of the transferees as the "Abou Ben Adem".

While at the General Hospital, Port Harcourt, Harcourt had cultivated Dr. Ferguson's interest in him, love for him and such friendship with him that when he was leaving Port Harcourt for Uzuakoli, he could request him, Dr. Ferguson, for and receive a letter of commendation from his friend, Dr. Ferguson, to the then new and yet unknown Dr. J.A. Kinnear Browne. On arrival at Uzuakoli and settling down in his new environment, Harcourt went to present the letter to Dr. Browne. Harcourt vividly remembered the episode that followed, namely, that when he showed the letter to Dr.

Browne, he, Browne, asked him to open the envelope, bring out the letter and hold it up before him and Harcourt, signing, added

**...he read it from my hands...**

Harcourt had yet another experience similar to the one he had from Dr. Browne. At his first visit to the hospital to see the doctor for treatment, Dr. Browne prescribed some drugs for him and directed him to the hospital's dispensary. There, too, he was shocked to the marrow when the dispenser asked him to hold his prescription up before his face and, again,

**...he read it from my hands...**

So it was then, that no "clean" person touched anything that the "unclean", one experiencing leprosy, had touched nor sat where one affected by leprosy had sat because the disease is contagious.

Naturally, Harcourt had asked himself for how long such experiences would be. He recalled the options open to him when it was made known to him that he had contracted leprosy, one of which was committing suicide. But being a man of faith, his faith in God had surged in him and he, reassuring himself that his was a life well-ordered by God Himself and that God had brought him to the right place ----- the place where he would be treated for leprosy ---- had regarded such experiences as he had from Dr. Browne and the dispenser as temporary, for a while and abandoned the idea of a suicide. His composition "Nwa Oge Nta" (For a short while) (May, 1941) was very probably inspired and born of the thought of those experiences.

So it was that there at Uzuakoli his journey to celebrityhood, with its ups and downs and highs and lows, began.

The following chronicle of splendourous events, occasions, recognitions, awards, activities shows how he slowly but surely became a celebrity in the selfsame society in which he started as a "nothing", a "nobody", a "reject", an "outcast" and eventually became a "something", a "somebody" integrated, celebrated and a Celebrity.

### **HARCOURT WHYTE'S RECOGNITIONS, COMISSIONS, POSITIONS, ACHIEVEMENTS, HONOURS, AWARDS, ETC. 1950-1977 AND AFTER**

**1950-1977:** The year 1949 was a most-significant landmark in the life of Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte. It was the year in which Providence smiled on him, when the Settlement authorities pronounced him symptom-free of leprosy and discharged him from the hospital. He was free to go home and reunite with his family and friends if he wished. The tightly-bolted doors to becoming anything were now open to him so he could become anything, and he did become somebody.

His discharge from hospital precipitated a dilemma for him --- to, go back to Abonnema and reunite with his family and friends or live the rest of his life at Uzuakoli where he already had a position in the hospital as a Teacher in the school he had established, where his art was born and being well nurtured and where he had made a name for himself and become well known and famous. Being not a sentimental person, he decided for the latter option and lived the rest of his life at Uzuakoli. He was now busy composing music --- at least one new anthem every Sunday for the Colony Church, directing and conducting his choir and

other choirs, adjudicating over choir festivals/competitions and, above all, evangelizing the people by “preaching the Word of God” through the medium of his many soul-moving songs that address all known recesses of the human heart/mind.

Accolades were now being poured on him, recognition and honours and awards began to follow him. Although Harcourt had become quite famous towards the end of his life, his worth was, nevertheless, not really much known or acknowledged as the following list of quite few honours, awards and positions would seem to underscore:

### **1953**

In **1953**, the British Council in Nigeria sponsored Sir Harcourt Whyte in a public lecture titled “The Development of Music in Nigeria.” Unfortunately, I am yet to come across the paper he presented at the occasion.

### **1956**

In **1956**, the Queen of England, Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II of England, visited Nigeria. Harcourt was commissioned by the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) to compose two (2) anthems for the welcome and reception of the Queen. That was an honour and an acknowledgement of his status as a composer. Harcourt also had the honour of being introduced in person to the Queen and shaking hands with her. At that occasion, Harcourt was reportedly awarded Member of the Order of the British Empire (O.B.E) by the Queen. This latter honour has, however, neither not been established nor confirmed.

### **1957**

In **1957**, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) sponsored an African Music Essay Competition. Harcourt participated in that essay contest and was declared the Runner-up Winner. That was an index of the academic in him. Efforts are being made to source his entry from the BBC.

### **1958**

In **1958**, the Methodist Missionary Society in London published, through the instrumentality of the Rev. Dr. Thomas Frank Davey, fifty-seven (57) of Harcourt's songs under the title **ABU EKELE NA OTUTO** (Songs of Thanksgiving and Praise). That was a major step in the dissemination of his works among church choirs and his many enthusiasts over his music in the country.

### **1959**

In **1959**, the Shell Petroleum Company of Nigeria Limited (Shell B.P.) commissioned him to compose two Christmas Carols for some Christmas event.

### **1963/1964**

In **1963/64**, the now late Mr. Alfred Hasted, one-time Welfare Officer at the Uzuakoli Settlement, made a series of recordings of Harcourt's songs for the Methodist Missionary Society's pageant of that year in England.

### **1964**



In **1964**, the Federal Government of Nigeria honoured Harcourt with the insignia **Member of the Order on the Niger (MON)** for his **contributions to the cultural life of the nation.**

### **1973**

In **1973**, the then East Central State Government's Ministry of Information under the Directorship of Obi Egbuna, launched her **Writers' Workshop** and appointed Harcourt the **First Music Director**. Harcourt occupied that position until his death in 1977.

### **HIS LAST TEN (10) YEARS (1967-1977) AND AFTER**

Sir Harcourt Whyte's precocity in composing music was halted only by the civil war in Nigeria (1967-1970). The war caused him to evacuate his family to some three other villages. In the course of moving from one village to the other, he lost so many of the manuscripts of his compositions. At his mature age as a composer, when he was poised to give of his best as composer, the war came and terribly badly affected him physically, mentally, materially and emotionally. However, at the time of his untimely and unfortunate death on Ascension Day, Thursday, May 19, 1977 from the injuries he sustained in a ghastly motor-car accident, Harcourt had bequeathed to us some three hundred (300) odd of those songs which the Cambridge University Anthropologist and Researcher, Dr. John Manton, aptly described as "**Songs of Worship and Wonder**". These "songs of worship and wonder" are a great heritage of the Church of God, of Abia State, of Rivers State, of Nigeria, of Christendom and of the world at large.

### **SINCE HIS DEATH IN 1977**

Since his death in 1977, Harcourt has received an avalanche of accolades, honours, awards and recognitions in various forms throughout the country.

### **1977**

When Sir Ikoli Harcourt died on Thursday, May 19, 1977, the then Imo State Government honoured the late Harcourt Whyte in a most unusual way, in a way that was never done for any calibre of person in the State. Government had organized in his honour a wake of singing and dancing that witnessed an unprecedented crowd of attendees at the wake. Harcourt was thereby well honoured and celebrated by the State Government.

### **1978**

In **1978**, I wrote and had published my ground-breaking Ph.D. dissertation on him and his works titled: **IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE: THE MAN AND HIS MUSIC, A CASE OF MUSICAL ACCULTURATION IN NIGERIA** (in 2 volumes; Vol. 1 --- the text, Vol. 2 --- a collection of 50 select songs of Harcourt in staff notation and hand in my autograph) submitted to the Freien Universitaet Berlin (FUB), Germany. This work will be important and useful in later years, as will become evident.

### **1980**

In **1980**, the Ikoli Harcourt Whyte Choir at the Settlement, now called General Hospital, Uzuakoli, recorded and released a memorial her L.P. album of some Harcourt's songs.

### **1981 (a)**

In **1981**, Thomas Nelson (Nigeria) Limited published another, a second volume of his **ABU EKELE NA OTUTO** that contains sixty-five (65) of his songs.

### **1981(b)**

In the same year, **1981**, the renowned Nigerian Playwright and Dramatist, Professor Ola Rotimi, was commissioned by the Federal Department of Culture in Lagos, headed by Dr. Ashiwaju, to write a suitable play for the celebration of Nigeria's 21st Independence Anniversary that year. It is interesting and instructive that Prof. Rotimi thought that Harcourt Whyte's life and career were an ideal theme or plot for his projected play that would tell the story of Nigeria at 21 to Nigerians and the world at large. He came to me at my University of Nigeria, Nsukka residence, borrowed my said Ph.D. dissertation on Harcourt and his works and drew his inspiration for the play from it. The resultant play, titled **HOPES OF THE LIVING DEAD** was, most unfortunately, rejected at the last minute by the Ashiwaju administration for the very trivial and flimsy reason, namely: that "...we cannot be showing the world lepers on stage on our 21st Independence Anniversary --- our Coming of Age! It was, to put it mildly, simply heart-breaking to Rotimi and all of us who were contracted into the project. It is, however, heart-warming, that Harcourt has gone on stage as a dramatic work, and is available for production to Departments of the Theatre Arts in our institutions.

### **1981(c)**

In the selfsame year, **1981**, and as a fall-out from 1981(b) above --- Ola Rotimi had made me the Music Director in his play. That led me to founding a group to sing appropriate Harcourt Whyte's songs in the play at the 21st Independence Anniversary of Nigeria. Since the Rotimi play

had been rejected, the then nameless choral team that I had put together to sing the Harcourt's songs in Rotimi's play, ... sang those songs in the show that was now titled: **"The Nigerian Epic"** with Ms Edith Enem in charge and I composed the theme song I titled: **"Nigeria, Our Fatherland"**. The team came back to Nsukka and unanimously agreed to remain as a choral group and be called the Achinivu-Harcourt Whyte Chorale (A-HWC) UNN --- a symbolic representation of the musical son-father relationship between me and the late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, my first music teacher and mentor. That Chorale was functional at UNN until I retired and relocated home to Arochukwu in 2008.

### **1983**

In **May, 1983**, my Beloved Christ Church Chapel Choir (C<sup>4</sup>), UNN, under my direction, released an L.P. album of twelve (12) Harcourt's songs under the title: **THROUGH THE YEAR WITH IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE**. The launching of the album took place at Umuahia. Our late eminent politician, Dr. Michael I. Okpara, was Chairman of the event. In his opening address, he made the following important and instructive remarks among several others:

**...It is quite amazing that so many of our people (Ndi Igbo) have gathered here today at the invitation of Dr. Achinivu to listen to him, Achinivu (Musician) nor me, Dr. Okpara (Politician). Our people will normally assemble like this when they hear that M. I. or some other big Politician is coming to address them. It is really amazing to me because, let's face it, our people (Africans) do not "listen to music" as the Europeans or Americans do. We sing, clap our hands and dance to music, not "listen" to it. And so it**

**is really amazing that all of you here today have come to "listen" to Achinivu speak to you through good music composed by our veteran composer, Harcourt Whyte, not listen to Okpara talk politics. This is a great and laudable development in our cultural life. We are moving forward.**

That L.P. album and, with another album titled: **Hymns, Psalms and Anthems That Warm The Heart** were fully sponsored by my now late bosom friend and contemporary at UNN, the late Mr. Albert Ebiye Koripamo and his wife, Peggy Koripamo.

### **1987**

In **1987**, the Achinivu-Harcourt Whyte Chorale (A-HWC), UNN, released a CD of twelve (12) Harcourt Whyte's best songs under the title: **ANYỊ BU IHE**. The recording was magnanimously fully sponsored by Chief Dr. Sir Onyema Ugochukwu (KJW).

### **1992**

In **1992**, Methodist Church Nigeria (MCN) honoured Harcourt Whyte, albeit posthumously, with her highest award --- **the Knighthood of Charles Wesley (KCW)** for his **contributions to Church Music**.

### **2009**

In November, **2009**, I founded the Achinivu-Harcourt Whyte Choral Association (The Chorale), Arochukwu Incorporated, on retiring from active service to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and relocating home to Arochukwu. The Association was incorporated in 2013. It is the artistic extension of its UNN forerunner.

### **2011**

In 2011, the Department of Music of the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State of Nigeria with Prof Onyee N. Nwankpa as Head of Department, organized a 3-day Choral Music Festival/Competition tagged: **The Garden City Choral Music Festival 2011: The Odyssey of Ikoli Harcourt Whyte**. Harcourt and his music were at the centre of it all.

Nwankpa had, asked me to write a Citation for Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte and read it at the Grand Finale of the event. Some sixteen (16) excellent choirs from around the country competed at the Festival in which Harcourt Whyte's "**A Tula Egwu**, arranged by Onyee N. Nwankpa, was the set piece. It was a great musical jamboree, it was a period of a great heart-throbbing exuberant entertainment in which Harcourt was not only recognized and well remembered but also much celebrated by the unprecedented crowd of students, teachers, other staff and friends of the University. The outcome of my said Citation is the 22-page pamphlet I titled: **IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE: THE ABRAHAM OF OUR TIME**. The Achinivu-Harcourt Whyte Choral Association (The Chorale), Arochukwu Incorporated and the Harcourt Whyte Choir of the Uzuakoli Leprosy Settlement, directed by Sir Onyekachi P. Alighili (KCW), were invited to that event as Guest Choirs.

It would seem to me that V.C. Ajenka was so pleased with the Citation that he asked me for a copy of it. This I did in February, 2012.

## **2012**

### **IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE CHAIR IN CHORLA MUSIC, UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT.**

In April, 2012, I received a telephone call from Prog. Onyee Nwankpa that told me that his Vice Chancellor, Prof. Joseph A. Ajenka, was standing by him to speak to me. Said Prof. Ajenka's then quite unfamiliar voice to me:

After reading through your quite interesting, instructive and informative Citation for Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, my University has endowed a Chair in the name of Harcourt Whyte to be called: **IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE CHAIR IN CHORAL MUSIC** and you appointed its first Occupant.

"Wao!" I shouted. "A Chair in the name of my first music teacher and Mentor, a one-time boy affected by leprosy". I was and am still amazed at Prof. Ajenka's humanity shown in his endowment of a Chair in the name of a one-time "**Nobody**", Harcourt. Not only that, an **IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE MUSEUM** was opened almost simultaneously and is today domiciled in the Department of Music of the University. Such recognitions of a one-time boy who experienced leprosy tremendously can, only lead him to cerebrihood!

## **2013**

### **HARCOURT WHYTE FOUNDATION**

On June 07, 2013, Maazi Ugochukwu Okoroafor, a great enthusiast over Harcourt Whyte's music from his school days at the Methodist College, Uzuakoli, single-handedly launched his brain-child ---- **THE HARCOURT WHYTE FOUNDATION**. A Foundation in the name and honour of a one-time diagnosee of leprosy! Maazi Okoroafor had invited five (5) choirs to Abuja to launch the Foundation. The young, newly established Achinivu-Harcourt Whyte Choral Association (The Chorale), Arochukwu Incorporated was so privileged to be one of the choirs. The ceremony was

held at the Ladi Kwali Hall of the Sheraton Hotel, Abuja. It attracted an unprecedented crowd of people from all walks of life among whom were the Hon. Justice Oputa's family --- his son, Charlie-Boy, and his wife, Charlie Boy's mother. It was another musical jamboree of Harcourt's songs by the five (5) different choirs --- all in recognition and celebration of my mentor. Harcourt Whyte. His "**A Tụla Egwu**", conducted by me, was taken as the last item of the evening's programme and as an audience-participation song because, like a theme song, it is so very well known and popular with the populace. The singing of A Tụla Egwu was simply electrifying --- all that to honour and immortalize the name and works of a one-time "nobody" and thereby make him "a somebody".

**2014**

**THE GERMAN LEPROSY AND TB RELIEF ASSOCIATION'S (GLRA'S)  
GOLDEN JUBILEE CEREMONY**

On July 07, 2014, the German Leprosy and TB Relief Association (GLRA), Enugu, Enugu State of Nigeria celebrated the 50th Anniversary (Golden Jubilee) of her presence and service in Nigeria. It was a rather great occasion that attracted men and women from all walks of life including many Germans in Nigeria and those Germans from home (Germany). At that ceremony, to which the Achinivu-Harcourt Whyte Choral Association (The Chorale), Arochukwu Incorporated was very kindly invited by GLRA, to sing, I also read a paper on Harcourt Whyte titled: **From Nothing To Something, From Nobody To Somebody --- A Celebrity**, that has found expression in this book. GLRA did not forget Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte. He, Harcourt, was adorned by the GLRA with the posthumous award of



**a Certificate of Recognition to Harcourt Whyte for  
Exemplary Leadership, Profound Achievements in Choral  
Music and Restoration of Dignity to many people affected  
by Leprosy Despite all Odds. (See Appendix 5)**

**2015**

From **March 13-15, 2015**, Dr. John Manton, a Cambridge University Anthropologist and Research and Scholar, visited me in my Arochukwu residence to enquire after Harcourt Whyte's life and music from me, in my capacity, according to him, as **The Global Authority on Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte and his music** ---- a name that sent a thrill of joy through my heart! Working on the project: **Social and Cultural Life of Scientific Sites in Africa**, Dr. Manton had Uzuakoli and Harcourt Whyte favourably mentioned in the publication that resulted therefrom --- "... a way of increasing the profile of Uzuakoli and Harcourt Whyte ...", he said in his letter to me thereafter.

**2016**

On **October 14, 2016**, the Students' Christian Movement (SCM) of Nigeria, in their 2nd Award/ Gala Night, celebrated their seventy-five (75) years of service in Nigeria and presented to Harcourt Whyte (posthumously!) **the Legacy Service Award --- A plaque, for A Renowned Christian Music Artiste.**

**2017 (a)**

In January, 2017, the German Leprosy and Tuberculosis Relief Association (GLRA) in Nigeria launched their 2017 momentous Calendar dedicated to the late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte.

### **2017 (b)**

In November, 2017, the Diocese of Uzuakoli, Methodist Church Nigeria, celebrated the 40th Anniversary of Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's death in 1977, in an also momentous Award ceremony captioned: **AMBASSADOR OF IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE'S MUSIC AWARD**. At that ceremony, some nineteen (19) Practitioners, Executors or Performers of Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's music from all over the Diocese, including me, were honoured with the Diocese's Ambassador of Ikoli Harcourt Whyte Music Award.

### **2017 (c)**

In 2017, Ms Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, interviewed me in Abuja on various aspects of Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's life and careers as a composer. Thereafter, she wrote a paper with the information she obtained from the interview which she titled: **The Nigerian Who Composed Hymns From A Leprosy Colony**. The paper was read by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in one of their series of **Letters from African** sent in by journalist, novelist and writer Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani.

### **2020-2023 --- Two (2) Volumes of Messages... And A Live Music Concert**

In 2020, the Sasakawa Health Foundation (SHF), Tokyo, Japan, through her 2-year research grant, facilitated my fulfilment of some of Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's heart's desires which he placed before me before his death. The outcome of the grant is the publication of two (2) songbooks of fifty (50) Harcourt's songs in each volume under the title: **MESSAGES FOR LIFE AND LIVING IN 50 SELECT SONGS BY SIR IKOLI HARCOURT "Mystic" Musician --- Thomas Frank Davey (In Dual Notation --- Tonic solfa and Staff) volumes 1 and 2**.

SHF went the proverbial "extra mile" by approving an **End-of-Project Concert** for my organization. The Concert, styled: **LIVE MUSIC CONCERT IN HONOUR AND LOVING EVOCATION OF THE LATE SIR IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE**, was held on Sunday, November 26, 2023 at the Anyim Pius Anyim Auditorium (APAA) of the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike (MOUUAU), Umuahia. It witnessed the attendance of the Vice Chancellor, MOUUAU, Prof. Maduebibisi O. Iwe, who was Chairman of the occasion, the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Administration), MOUUAU, Prof. Mrs. Franka Elechi Asawalam, the Vice Chancellor, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, vicariously represented by the University's Orator and one of my academic sons, Dr. Emmanuel Ikenna Onwuebuna, my Methodist Bishop of the Diocese of Umuahia East, the Rt. Rev. Ikechukwu Nkulo, and his wife, Dame Uzoma Nkulo, Sir Surv. Okoronkwo Kanu and Lady Ejigfhato Achinivu, Prof. And Mrs. Solomon Umuham, Princess Nnennaya Okwara Onoh, Eziukwu Amannagwu contingent (my Kindred) and many other dignitaries too many to mention by name. The First Lady of Abia State, Her Excellency, Lady Priscilla Chioma Otti, Special Guest of Honour at the occasion, was unavoidably absent. At that well-attended Live Music Concert given by the Achinivu-Harcourt Whyte Choral Association (The Chorale), Arochukwu Incorporated, the two volumes of MESSAGES.... were launched. The Concert was live-streamed on YouTube by @Aromouthpiecetv/live. The Concert was reportedly successful and entertaining. The third outcome of the SHF grant to my organization is the book: **SIR IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE --- HIS LIFE, TIMES AND MUSIC**, now in your hands. The Concert was also recorded on CD and a Photo album of various scenes in the concert is available.

## **2024**

With Maazi Ugochukwu Okoroafor as a member of the Dr. Alex Chioma Otti's formidable government team and, therefore, his relocation nearer home to Umuahia, the Harcourt Foundation Chorus was launched in February 2024. The

Chorus rehearses and sings in the main Harcourt Whyte's works. An Easter Concert of Harcourt Whyte's Easter works has been projected by the Harcourt Whyte Foundation (HWF).

In closing, let me prophesy that many many more honours, recognitions, awards, etc are yet to come.

**An Artist, especially if he is a great one, never dies. He lives on  
because his works live on and on.**

Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte died some forty-seven (47) years ago, but he is still alive today for courtesy of **SASAKAWA HEALTH FOUNDATION (SHF)** through whose empowerment/enablement, Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's are already being preserved, thus fulfilling my late mentor's heart's desires expressed to me many years ago.

## A WORD TO METHODIST CHURCH NIGERIA (MCN) CONCERNING SIR IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE

As a result of his adversity, misfortune, in becoming a diagnosee of leprosy, Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, as a young adult of twenty-seven (27) years of age, found himself in a Methodist establishment ----- the Uzuakoli Leper Settlement (The Leper Colony). A handsome, simple, easy-going, kind, happy, unassuming and amiable young man of stature, he began to imbibe and absorb Methodist tenets and practices thereby growing in Methodism and eventually becoming a Methodist through and through, to the core, until his death.

His now also late son, Sir Godwin Dagodo Harcourt (KCW) was also, with his entire family, also a Methodist to the core. His grandson, Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon, Dr. Somiari Lucky Harcourt, and his nuclear family are also Methodists through and through. So were most of those experiencing leprosy at the time and the "clean" staff of the Hospital Methodists, it was by and large a "Methodist Hospital". So, when Harcourt began to compose music, he composed first for the Methodist congregation worshipping at the Colony Chapel who were the first and earliest consumers of his songs. It was from the Colony congregation that Harcourt's songs began to spread to other Methodist and non-Methodist congregations. That Colony congregation were always the first to hear every new song Harcourt wrote throughout his lifetime at Uzuakoli except, perhaps, the Okoko Item's --- commissioned composition.

So, Harcourt's compositions may be said to be, with justification, a heritage, a legacy, first of Methodist Church Nigeria before it became that of Christendom, the Church of God and the world of music at large.

Therefore, Methodist Church Nigeria should be the one Church, the first Church, to seek, to aspire, in fact to rush or hurry to recognize and immortalize Harcourt Whyte and the musical legacy, the musical heritage, he bequeathed to her.

It is truly heart-warming and a profound cause of praise and thanksgiving to God Almighty that from obscurity as one who was seriously affected by leprosy, Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte surged to prominence as a great composer and music consultant; that the one-time leprous boy, Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, then a "nothing", a "nobody", a "reject" and an "outcast" in society many years ago made, in his short span of life, such far-reaching and profound achievements and contributions to world culture and Christendom that he is today being remembered, honoured, appreciated and celebrated by all and sundry as a "somebody", a great and notable composer of sacred choral music and lyric poet par excellence, a great "preacher" of the Word of God through his deeply personal and intensely absorbing lyrics which have changed lives and won more souls for Christ than the naked words of any sermon of any great preacher, as a Celebrity.

**But where and how, I humbly and pathetically ask,  
has my great Church, Harcourt Whyte's great  
Church, Methodist Church Nigeria (MCN), through  
the instrumentality of her individual member-  
philanthropists, organizations or Arms of the  
Church or as a great Church, featured or fared in  
the foregoing chronicle of recognitions, awards,  
positions, etc of this her member-genius?**

Very badly, in my view or opinion!

If, by the way, there be any other Methodist(s) from wherever else in the Conference Area who did as well or better in music or other field(s) of

endeavour than Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, he/they, too, eminently deserve(s) to be properly recognized and immortalized by our great Church.

It is not enough to award the Knighthood of Charles Wesley (KCW) to every local Church choirmaster. The Ibadan Chapter of the National Council of Methodist Knights of John and Charles Wesley, reacting to my paper to Council on the urgent and great need of Council to allow the Knights of Charles Wesley (KCWs) of our National Council to hold their **separate council meetings** at which they would fully focus on and discuss the goings-on and the decadent state of music in our great Church that was originally, but not any longer "**born in song**", said this of our Methodist Church organists (where any may be found!) and KCWs:

*... Many an organist of these days have not had the necessary Methodist touch in their training, in fact a good number of them can hardly read music ... (emphasis is mine) and ... there are also some (many) KCWs who can hardly sing, talk less (sic) of teach and correct hymn – singing (or read music in staff or tonic solfa notation...) (interpolations are mine).*

The point being made here is that although Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte was honoured with the Church's highest award: the insignia of the Knighthood of Charles Wesley (KCW), and that posthumously and only as recently as 1992! something more striking, more memorable, more momentous, more reflective of his stature, status and achievements not only to Nigerian Methodists, but also to the Methodist world and world culture at large,

should be undertaken **first by Methodist Church Nigeria** towards immortalizing this member-genius of Methodist Church Nigeria.

How may MCN attempt to immortalize Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte and the musical heritage or legacy he bequeathed to her? It is first and simply by accepting that this genius, this member of hers achieved so much for her as a Church and, therefore, deserves immortalization by her in some concrete and tangible way(s). Then MCN should declare herself willing and able to undertake the immortalization process in some concrete ways such as committing funds to the preservation of his works "...for the use of all the faithful...". The one small but sure way of starting the immortalization process of this our member-genius seems to me to be that **Methodist Church Nigeria should demonstrate in word and action this willingness and ability to sponsor the transcription into staff notation, translation of the exclusive Igbo lyrics into English in the first instance and a properly planned recording of his songs in some contemporary retrievable systems (CDs, for example).** In this way, MCN would acknowledge Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's gift to her and immortalize his name and works. The MCN Leadership Hierarchy may wish to seriously consider this suggestion that had been made one thousand and one (1001) times before now by several other people (including a functional current Archbishop!!) than Achinivu, and take some concrete actions to implement it.

Most remarkable, memorable and momentous way of immortalizing this great "Preacher" of ours, Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, and the musical heritage he left behind for his great Church would be that which the then Bishop of Uzuakoli Diocese, now the Archbishop of Enugu Archdiocese, the Most Rev. Barr. Christopher Nweke Ede, to me an action Bishop, who



leaves a mark(s), footprints, wherever he superintends, tried to do many years ago. His Grace Ede, then Bishop of Uzuakoli Diocese, took the bull by the horns ---- a step in the right direction towards recognizing and immortalizing Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte and his works in a most unmistakable way. He conceived and actually vigorously pursued the establishment in Uzuakoli Leprosy Centre grounds of a School that was to have been called **Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte School/College of Music.** Left alone, Archbishop Ede would have achieved his goal but, alas, like many Methodist Church Nigeria good ideas and excellent projects, that excellent move was, somewhere along the line, even before it had quite gathered momentum to take off, halted by, alas, some member of the then Church's Leadership Hierarchy.

For whatever strange, peculiar or even personal reason(s), that great and progressive idea that would have generated a fantastic project, that would have been economically, educationally, morally, spiritually, physically, etc a big PLUS for MCN, was killed; it just died. Ede had made contacts here and there. One such contact, Methodist Church Overseas, was poised to support the project but since we did not want it, it failed, it died, it just died!

Methodist Church Nigeria should buckle up to be the first Church to start a School of Music in Nigeria before some sister church ---- Anglican, Presbyterian, even Roman Catholic, etc, outsmarts her and takes the honour from her. Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, has, through his achievements, given MCN the ticket to do this.

It behoves MCN to do it. With a new and committed Leadership today, they should very seriously think about this idea and inwardly digest it for urgent and full implementation.

One needs to also draw the attention of the Diocesan Bishop of Uzuakoli and the Archbishop of Umuahia Archdiocese of MCN to the decadent state of Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's tomb, unmarked tombstone and the entire graveyard beside the swiftly dilapidating "**Chapel of Hope**" (or is it "**Hopeless**" Chapel?) at the Leprosy Centre, Uzuakoli. There, three (3) objects --- tomb, tombstone (gravestone) and graveyard --- are abandoned, which constitute a yawning and disgraceful eyesore first to the Diocese and Archdiocese and then to the many who crave to visit the Leprosy Hospital where miracles have been and are still being performed against leprosy.

Harcourt's graveyard, tombstone and tomb eminently qualify for and deserve the active attention of some great artist and sculptor who would give them such serious artistic finish that would speak eloquently and befit the stature and status of the man lying there. The Diocesan Bishop of Uzuakoli and the Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Umuahia, MCN, may wish to seriously think about this aspect of immortalizing Harcourt Whyte and leave their own personal footprints and impacts thereon.

In closing, may I adapt for our purpose the words of the Congregational Scholar, Bernard L. Manning, who, finding genuine cause to address English Methodists on the need to preserve Charles Wesley's hymns, said to them (and I say the same thing to Nigerian Methodists, Christendom and the world of music at large to see the urgent **need to preserve the corpus of three hundred (300) odd songs composed by the late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte** ---- our own Charles Wesley):

(Our) greatest ---- incomparably (our) greatest ----  
contribution to the common heritage of Christendom is

in Charles Wesley hymns (for our purpose, **in Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's songs**). All the other things which (we) do, others have done and can do as well, better, or less well. But in Charles Wesley's hymns (for our purpose, **in Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's**) songs) we have something unique no one else could have done (or did) it, and unless we preserve them for the use of all the faithful, till that day when we are all one, we shall lose some of the best gifts of God ---- (Davies, R. E., Methodism, P. 104). ((and our own (Nigeria's) special and unique gift to Christendom and the world of music at large)).

Harcourt Whyte, through his life and music, gave much hope to people affected by leprosy the world over. He demonstrated to them that all is not lost when one is afflicted by some terrible misfortune. He also instilled it in them that faith in God, who is able to do all things ---- kill and make alive ---- surmounts all odds. **The Legacy Service Award**, given to him by the Students' Christian Movement (SCM) of Nigeria, is an eloquent testimony to this fact.

It is truly heart-warming and a source of profound joy, praise and thanksgiving to Almighty God that the one-time boy seriously affected by leprosy at fourteen (14), then a "nothing" and a "nobody" in society, a "reject", and an "outcast" many years ago, made such far-reaching and profound contributions to and achievements in world culture and Christendom that he is today, and will always be, remembered, appreciated, honoured and celebrated as a "somebody", a Celebrity by all and sundry. The songs he left behind have won more souls for Christ than the naked words of the sermon of any great preacher.

Harcourt was buried beside the **Chapel of Hope** in the Methodist premises of the Uzuakoli Leprosy Hospital, where his choir had performed all his works. The decrepitude/cobwebbiness and nonchalant attitude and lack of care of the grave in which he lies and of his unmarked tombstone and graveyard is yawning for a philanthropist and artist's attention, for it is unbelievable that such a "somebody" as Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's stature, lies there. May it please the Leadership of our Great Church to look there and take some concrete, memorable and laudable action.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### THE NUNC DIMITIS

Throughout his life-time, Harcourt Whyte remained a movingly simple, extraordinary modest and a deeply religious man. Davey called him, with justification, a "mystic". A man with an amazingly deep spiritual intuition, Harcourt lived very close to God in whom he believed and with who firmly many people do not have, is most evident in his life and will remain the most precious truth about him. He dedicated his entire life to God and His service, and believed that:

***....man is too precious to God to be forgotten or forsaken  
by Him. Therefore, there is nothing a man can do for him  
than to praise and serve Him in word and deed.  
(Achinivu, 1979, P. 105).***

In the course of his much-troubled life, Harcourt gave the musical and Christian worlds hundreds of anthems and other kinds of music, only about 300 of which have survived several destructive forces. Following a car accident from which he sustained fatal injuries, Harcourt took ill in his home and was taken to the Ramat Memorial Specialist Hospital (formerly Queen Elizabeth Hospital and now Federal Medical Centre), Umuahia, for treatment and care. Five days after his admission, on Ascension Day, Thursday, the 19th of May, 1977, to be precise, God, his creator and the force behind all his life, took the baton from his hand. At the time that Harcourt Whyte was poised to give to the world and to God that which He, God, had given him abundantly --- tune and theology, with no more worries of war and disease, of desertion, of anxieties over his livelihood -

--- his heart beat its last stroke --- naturally at the time of his creator God. He was survived by his wife, Roseline, two daughters, three sons, three grandsons and two grand-daughters. The news of his death was broadcast by the Imo State Broadcasting Service, and many Nigerian newspapers, among them the "Daily Star", told the people of the death of their pioneer musician and composer. Harcourt Whyte could not have been laid to rest elsewhere than in his "home" --- in the church-yard of the Leprosy Hospital, Uzuakoli, where he lived, worked and served almost all his life. There, beside the chapel, he was buried after a funeral service at which thousands of people from all walks of life and all over the country were present. Messages of condolence poured in from abroad, in particular the MMS in England and state officials in Nigeria, who could not be present at his funeral service.

Harcourt's life overflowed with variedly pathetic crises: the stagnation of his trade following the outbreak of World War I; the death of his mother shortly afterwards, and of his father; his awareness, at the tender age of 14, that he had leprosy and concomitant with it, the fact of his leaving home and relations in a hopeless search for a cure; the constant, painful experience of rejection by his people and the consequent sojourn in Port Harcourt; his transfer to and life in his new home, Uzuakoli, cut off from the rest of the world and still without any hope of a cure; his continuous witnessing of his gradual but sure incapacitation through the loss of his fingers and toes; the departure of his wife, Hannah, from him following her discharge from the settlement before him; the civil war in Nigeria and its many anxieties; his sudden retirement from service after the civil war without any hope of another source of livelihood.

These were the various phases of his life, punctuated, here and there, by occasional rays of hope and sunshine, the occasional climaxes of which his discharge in 1949 and his subsequent artistic success represent. These circumstances brought him into contact with godly men and women who influenced his life in a tremendous way. His artistic precocity, notwithstanding, the nature of the disease from which he suffered tended, initially, to alienate him from the very people --- the aristocracy and the common people alike to whom he spoke in songs. However, he came closest to the greatest aristocrat the world has ever known and will ever know --- God Himself, through his Son, Jesus Christ --- who makes no distinction between the "clean" and the "unclean".

His long and terrible sufferings at the hands of both a serious disease and his fellow human beings, notwithstanding, Harcourt remained a typical example of a self-made man, guided, of course, by providence. He will be remembered for his music, and his life will be a shining example for the many within and without Leprosy Hospital the world over who may have thought that their lives were no longer worth living.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### PERCEPTIONS OF THE LATE SIR IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE AND/OR HIS MUSIC BY HIS FAMILY, PRACTITIONERS AND CONSUMERS OF HIS ART

Early one morning in the recent past, I bumped into a post as I scrolled up and down the newly created WhatsApp platform of my great Alma Mater, the Methodist College, Uzuakoli called Uzuakoli Methodist College Old Boys' Association's (UMCOBA's) centenary celebrations events. The post was placed by a very young "Old Boy" of the 1981 set, Mr. Ernest Eugene Abosi, presumably an indigene of Uzuakoli. Said he, Mr. Abosi, in his post (I quote him in part):

There was this Very Popular Musician, Harcourt  
White (sic) who had two sons in Uzumeco....

The post immediately caught my attention and interest, and I read through it. That Abosi remembered Harcourt Whyte and his opinion, his perception of him was not that of the man who, for many years, was badly affected by the most feared and debilitating of all diseases of all time ---- leprosy - --- but by his art ---- music: "this very popular musician" ----- gave me much delight and a tremendous thrill of joy. It was that post that at once inspired and struck the chord in me that elicited this chapter of the book in your hands ----- **Perceptions...**

"This very popular musician," Harcourt Whyte, was not popular in the sense that he composed, played or performed the genre of music described as "POP" (popular music) but rather in the sense that he was



very well known in Uzuakoli, in Igboland, in Nigeria, in the US, in the UK (especially in Methodist circles), today, in Japan and all over the world – thanks a million to the Sasakawa Health Foundation (SHF), Tokyo, Japan, the project outcomes of whose two-year grant to me, namely, **(i) MESSAGES FOR LIFE AND LIVING IN 50 SELECT SONGS BY SIR IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE, (Vols 1 and 2), (ii) a Live Musical Concert in loving evocation of Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte and (iii) the book now in your hands are.**

Abosi further said that "this very popular musician", Harcourt White (sic), had two sons at Uzumeco, whose names he did not mention. However, another, also young but older Old Boy than Abosi, gave their names in a subsequent post as Tamuno Krumah (sic) Harcourt (SP = Senior Prefect) and Tamuno Eni (sic) Harcourt ((DSP (sic) Deputy Senior Prefect, 1977)). The first-named above, Tamunokuroma, Harcourt's first son from his second marriage with Roseline Echezieaku, came to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 1979 and took a Bachelor's degree in Sociology and Anthropology (1983) but he died a short while after ---- in December, 1989. Of the second-named above, Tamunoemi, see later under Category A.

As I said immediately above, Abosi's post precipitated this chapter of the book by making me undertake extensive enquiries after individuals' and groups' opinions and perceptions of Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte and his music. What follows is a select few of the avalanche of responses I received in return from men and women of all works of life, especially of practitioners (choirmasters and choristers) and people of different callings who are consumers of his music.

The Responses are in three (3) categories. Responses in Category A are those of select family members. Those in Category B are of the older generation of our people who knew Harcourt and possibly interacted with him somewhat or intimately, taught, sang, enjoyed and still sing and enjoy his works. Responses in Category C are of the younger generation of our population who never met or knew Harcourt at all, but probably heard or read about him and today, sing and enjoy his works.

### **CATEGORY A: Perceptions of Family**

1. **Tamunoemi Harcourt Whyte** --- He is the second son of Harcourt Whyte by his second wife, Roseline Echezieaku. He, like his late elder brother, Tamunokuroma, attended the Methodist College, Uzuakoli, and was a school official --- General School Monitor (GSM). After writing and passing the West African Examinations Council's (WAEC's) examinations, he took to self-employment as a professional water bore-hole driller. After a while on this profession, he left it and joined the Worldwide Evangelistic Gospel Outreach (WEGO) where he is today a Senior Pastor. His perceptions of his late father, Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, follow.

#### **Tamunoemi writes**

My father, the late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, was very committed to God. As we were growing up, we came to know that God was at the center of everything about us.

I want to write about my late father's spiritual gifts which were very manifest in his words of knowledge. This I will do through three (3) testimonies.

**This first testimony is this:**

When the Nigerian soldiers entered Uzuakoli during the war, we left Uzuakoli, when the war was declared over, we returned to Uzuakoli and resettled down. One day, early in the morning, when everyone had left home for the day's work and I was left alone at home with him, we saw a Peugeot 404 station-wagon full of people drive past our house. "These people are looking for me," he said to me. In response, I asked him: "if they are looking for you, why did they drive past and not stop in front of our house? He replied: "They don't know where our house is. They are going to the welfare office where they will meet Mr. Nkolor." After some thirty (30) minutes had elapsed, I asked him about the people he had said were looking for him. He replied that when the people got to the office they saw only Mr. Nkolor who waited for another staff to arrive to stay in the office for him, Mr. Nkolor, to bring them to the house. Asked by me how he knew what he was saying, he replied: "I just know."

After a short while the vehicle pulled up in front of our house. Guess what! They had come all the way from Lagos to find out if he had survived the war. How thoughtful, how loving, how kind of them.

**The second one is this:**

After the war, a woman called Tetee came to our house on a Monday and told my father that because her son, who served in the Biafran Army, did not return from the war, she was leaving for her home-town and would not return to continue her work as matron of the Motherless Babies' Home. My father paused for a few minutes and then told her to wait until the next Thursday afternoon and travel on Friday morning. Tetee returned to her house and waited. On Thursday afternoon, Tetee came back to our house

to tell my father that she would travel on Friday morning and to say goodbye to our family. She bade us farewell and left for her house.

At about 4:00 am on the Friday morning that she was to set out for her home-town, she heard a lucid knock on her door. When she sought to know who was knocking on her door that early, behold, it was the voice of her son that she heard; he, too, had survived the war.

**The third testimony is this:**

The family had no money at home and very badly needed some money to do certain important things the next day. So, at the family's prayer session that morning, we prayed God to send us some money to do the important things. When my father was leaving the house for work that morning, he told us to be watchful as someone would bring an envelope containing the money we needed.

We waited till 7:30pm but nobody came, let alone bring an envelope containing any money. When he came back in the evening, we jokingly asked him where the money was. He said it was yet to come. At the family's evening prayer session, my father profusely thanked God for sending him the money he so badly needed. We were all so amazed that after the prayers, we asked him when, from whom and how the money was brought. He told us that Mr. Okeafor, a very regular visitor to our home, brought the envelope to him when he visited that day at about 8:30pm. We never suspected that he was the instrument God would use to solve the family's problem.

These three testimonies and many more convinced me and other members of our family that my father was very devoted to God. Oftentimes

we thought, even believed, that he was not an ordinary man. Most of his songs were composed in the middle of the night when he got his inspiration from above.

I really thank God Almighty for the life he lived and for his songs which have blessed many lives.

**Mr. Tamunoremi Harcourt Whyte, Pastor,  
Worldwide Evangelistic Gospel Outreach.**

- Dr. Somiari Lucky Godwin Dagogo Harcourt** – He is the first grand-child and grandson of the late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte. He is a young and successful Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon at the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital (UPTH), Port Harcourt, Rivers State. I am glad to record here that it was he, with a colleague of his, who performed the partial hip replacement surgery on me when, in 2014, I had the fall that broke my hip. He remains, like his late parents and late grandfather, a staunch Methodist in the faith. His Perceptions of his grandfather, Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, follow.

**My Few Years' Memories Of My Grandfather, Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte.**

I lived with my grandfather, the late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, from 1975 until he passed into glory in 1977. He lived a very active life even at old age. He continued to ride his bicycle to work and back daily until he fell ill shortly before his demise. It always gave me much joy to collect the bicycle from him and "park" it in its place when he came home. His was a

modest home, and he was very content with his lot. He seldom raised his voice, but was very firm in matters of discipline.

I remember how, from time to time, a luxury bus came and collected him and his entire choir to go on "tour" and brought them back several days after. What those "tours" were remained a mystery to me until much later when I understood that he went with the choir to give musical concerts. I remember very vividly how his choir sang endlessly and so emotionally the night before his burial (at the wake) after his passing that I wondered whether it was an earthly or a heavenly choir that sang. I was so moved that I really felt that he was a great and godly man.

As I became older and read and listened to the words of his songs, I realized how personally close he was to God and how truly inspiring and sobering his songs are.

**Dr. Harcourt Somiari**  
**Orthopaedic Surgeon**  
**(1st Grandson and Child)**

**CATEGORY B: Perceptions of the Older Generation of people who met, knew and possibly interacted somewhat or intimately with Sir Harcourt Whyte**

1. **Elder Chief Isaac Okwara Onoh**, Ezeogo XIII Agbagwu Village, Arochukwu Kingdom. Elder Chief Onoh had a first-hand knowledge of Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, having served at the Leprosy Hospital for many years and retired from there (1945-1985). He is a Ruling Elder of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria

and was last November 16, 2023 ninety-seven (97) years of age. His Perceptions of Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte follow.

### **THE MAN, MR. IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE, AS I KNEW HIM**

Mr. Ikoli Harcourt Whyte was one of the people affected by Leprosy who were transferred from Gborokiri, Port Harcourt, to Uzuakoli Leprosy Settlement on 5th August, 1932, to permanently live there for possible cure in the future, to avoid their mixing up with the "clean" society, or return to their different villages in the then Owerri Province for their relations to isolate them by housing them in 'BAD BUSHES', where they might die unsung or get killed.

The Primitive Methodist Church, copying the example of the Church of Scotland Mission (today's Presbyterian Church of Nigeria), which founded a "leper colony" at Itu, Cross River State, in 1928, agreed, with the then British Government in Nigeria to open Uzuakoli for those in the Owerri Province. The Government used her provincial engineer, Engr. Taylor Woodrow, to build the houses at Uzoakoli, while the Primitive Methodist Church brought Dr. J.A.K. Browne to manage the place. When he arrived Nigeria, Dr. Browne went to Itu for a familiarization tour from which he came back to Uzuakoli with 2 clean staff. Itu gave him Mr. Eze Agha and Mr. Ebeke Inyang – natives of Unwana near Afikpo. With other clean staff from the Methodist College, Uzuakoli, Mr. H.L.O. William, Principal, supplied Maazi Mezieobi from Nekede Owerri.

Mr. Taylor Woodrow dropped as a technical officer, as work began. The leprosy-affected people were quickly organized to get settled, appointing

their chiefs (men and women) and children assigned to foster “parents” among the adult leprosy-affected people.

Methodist churches within Umuahia, Ozuitem, Bende, Ovim, Item, Alayi, Ihube and Isuochi in Okigwe area as well as the District officers of Bende, Okigwe, Ahoada, Port Harcourt, Orlu, Owerri and Degama were duly informed of the establishment of the new institution and urged them to spread the news.

Dr. J.A.K. Browne left in 1936 when the Primitive Methodist Church sent Dr. Thomas Frank Davey, to take over from him. While he, Dr. Davey, was still there in London, the Methodist Church ordained him a Rev. Minister too. A well-known Pianist, Dr. Davey took great interest in learning the Igbo language to the extent that the Methodist Church assigned him to write “Ekpere na Abụ Ndị Methodist” in the Igbo language. He worked so hard that the Settlement was a huge success as he initiated outside clinics in all suitable towns of the Owerri Province e.g. Abua, Ahoada, Omoku, Alayi, Asa, Igbere, Ovim, Bende, Umuimenyi – the host community ---- Ibeku, Uturu, Ohafia, Aba and other places.

As expected, too, he opened a primary school for children suffering from leprosy and, fortunately, Mr. I. H. Whyte was one of the key teachers. Some of the expatriate staff had their wives teaching too. Following her resignation as Principal, Methodist Girls' School Ovim (founded in 1930 after their wedding) Mrs. Davey became the manager of the school and moved to join her husband, Dr. Davey, at the Leprosy Settlement, Uzuakoli.



It was in this Leprosy Primary School, Uzuakoli Settlement, that Mr. Ikoli Harcourt Whyte started to write songs, providing music to the lyrics he wrote. The pupils and the interested teachers became his choristers as the choir grew.

Mrs. Davey and Dr. Davey, himself a musician, took great interest in what Harcourt was doing and joined to encourage Mr. Whyte. Thus, the staff became increasingly proud of the choir as they sang every Sunday in the chapel, during ceremonial occasions at the Settlement and the usual visits of many dignitaries and groups, who came to see all the miracles being manifested on all sides of the Leprosy Settlement. With the enhanced performance of the Settlement, three (3) other young men and I were engaged/employed on 1st May, 1945 as "clean" staff of the Settlement.

Furthermore, Dr. Davey took Harcourt's songs to England after editing their notation in tonic-solfa and produced three (3) volumes of the songs. The Government became interested as the Broadcasting Service of Eastern Nigeria, Enugu, sent their staff such as Mr. Ubaka Nnamdi Olebara and others to record the music, which they beamed in their stations. When Television stations were introduced in Western Nigeria in 1959 by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, as shown in 1960 in Lagos when Nigeria became independent. The stations never failed to mention Mr. I.H. Whyte. I do remember that as a delegate to the Methodist Synod Annual Conference at the Methodist College, Uzuakoli, in 1959, I joined other delegates in raising a standing ovation when the Uzuakoli Leprosy Settlement Report that gave praise to and emphasized the performance of Mr. Whyte in music was read. At the Leprosy Settlement itself, the information reaching the community made them rejoice.

Uzuakoli Leprosy Settlement at that time had more than ten (10) expatriate staff and their wives plus the others at the Methodist College, Uzuakoli. These formed the team of determined, dedicated and intelligent people determined to help even the "clean" Nigerian staff and patients to enjoy the culture of the English people. On the other hand the Nigerian staff worked towards making the expatriates enjoy what there are to enjoy in this country. These things were done in order to hold social evenings once a month in the Staff Club House. Often, Mr. I. Harcourt Whyte and his choir were our guests.

In 1949, Mr. I. H. Whyte became one of those to be discharged as cured and symptom-free of Leprosy. The discharge ceremony for leprosy patients then used to be celebrated in the church and certificates given to the large number of ex-patients involved. Later, however, was of the Settlement discharge services which took place in the open in order to accommodate the large mammoth crowd of relation present to witness the occasion. The crowd that gathered in 1949 was really great unprecedented as Mr. Whyte's admirers formed the greater majority present. He rejoiced home to a clean quarter in the Settlement to further confirm that he was no longer a "HANSEN'S DISEASE" patient. The crowd that represented Mr. Whyte's admirers were mostly his in-laws and lovers of his songs who came mainly to hear his choir. I came to the ceremony from Aba. I did not see much of the Abonnema people. The people of Umuimenyi, from where his second wife, Roseline, came, were there.

Although the Rev. Dr. T.F. Davey and his wife left in 1959 on retirement to work for the Methodist Church in London, other Europeans like Mr. Alfred Hasted, made sure that Mr. Whyte did not lose his popularity. Mr.

A. Hasted was the Settlement's Welfare Officer, while Mr. F. Hathaway was Works Manager and an organist there were always ready to help Harcourt. Dr. T. F. Davey, too, used his position in London to assist the group. In fact, as the European left Uzuakoli by order of the Nigerian Government at the onset of the civil war (1967-70) they took home some of the copies of Mr. Whyte's songs. When Mr. A. Hasted died in England some of Harcourt's songs that he had recorded and taken home, were, at his and his family's requested that they be used during his funeral. It is unfortunate I cannot remember any of the popular songs his choir rendered during his discharge ceremony. The crowd was so enormous that a particular interest in watching the ceremony was not possible. I remember he wrote one to celebrate the Nigerian independence in 1960.

My family's friendship with that of Mr. Whyte was very noticeable the way we used to plan his programmes. Most of the time hosted many of his guests. When Godwin, the son, wedded, I went with my wife from Ikot Ekpene to Uzuakoli to witness the ceremony.

Mr. Whyte moved to live in his home in Uzuakali Town and many of his clients – choirmasters, choirs of surrounding churches ----- Ahaba, Item, Umuahia and many others, including Government and overseas guests - ---- visited him. I was in Abakaliki when, in 1975, the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria held its annual synod meeting at Afikpo. I was there and to my surprise, the Synod invited him and his choir to perform as guests of the Synod. Thus, we met for the last time there, for he died in 1977 and was buried in the premises of the Methodist Church, Leprosy Settlement and Research Centre, Uzuakoli nearest to the Church building, where his choir used to start processing into the church or recessing after the service. Although I was not there owing to circumstances beyond my control, I was

sent to Uzuakoli on transfer (1982-1985) and I saw the grave and those present at his funeral confirmed that it was well done. I learnt that the family left Uzuakoli to Port Harcourt in the Rivers State nearer their home ABONNEMA.

Many persons and organizations have continued to use Mr. Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's songs and his popularity remains high as through the research efforts of the Rev. Prof. Sir Achinivu Kanu Achinivu, retired music lecturer of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, is at present spreading what benefits those songs could bring to humanity. At the University of Port Harcourt, there is now a "Chair" in the name Harcourt Whyte. There is also the group at Arochukwu which Prof. A.K. Achinivu established in Harcourt's name which sings Harcourt's songs. In addition, a Japanese Foundation is supporting Achinivu's works on Harcourt's works. These blessings are worthy of praise to our Almighty Father. May the light he has lit never quench.

**Elder Isaac Okwara Onoh**

**Ezeogo XIII, Agbagwu, Arochukwu.**

- 2. Sir Friday N. Ehilegbu** ---- Sir Friday Nkemka EHILEGBU is an Old Boy of the Methodist College, Uzuakoli. During his school days he was, with the Rev. Prof. Sir A. Kanu Achinivu, a great enthusiast over Harcourt's music. He is a notable native of Okweukwu in Ikwuano LGA of Abia State, and a very popular choirmaster of many years' standing and much experience. As Choirmaster of his local church choir in Okweukwu Oboro section of the Diocese of Ngoro Methodist Church Nigeria (MCN), he has led the choir to competitions at which they won laurels/awards.

Because of his musical prowess as Choirmaster he was made a Knight of Charles Wesley in 2011. He is a **Banker** by training. His perceptions of late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte and his works follow.

**My Perceptions About Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte**  
**(1905-1977; Mon, KCW posthumously)**

The late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte came to Uzuakoli Leper Colony when he was a very young adult of about twenty-seven (27) years of age. By that time, he was strong and agile despite the fact that he had come with that deadly disease of leprosy which, by then in 1932, had taken much root in his body from 1919-1932. I watched a film-show at the Methodist College, Uzuakoli in 1959 in which Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte was helping other patients to fetch water and get their food.

He became popular among his fellow patients and the workers at The Colony as a result of his kindness and humility. The late Sir Goodwin Harcourt Whyte was the first child and son of the Late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte. His mother Hannah was from Umugbalu Oboro in the present Ikwano Local Government Area of Abia State. Hannah later died and Sir Ikoli Harcourt, Whyte as I heard officially, got married to another woman from Amoji Lodu called Echezieaku Rosaline Harcourt. I visited the Harcourt family quite often but the only experience was that neither his wife nor any of his children came out to greet or welcome me. I decided not to ask of them.

Sir Harcourt Whyte suffered from the worst species of leprosy. It cut off all his toes and fingers on his left hand. On his right hand were only two left, the thumb and the index finger. He used those two fingers to write

everything he wrote, his songs and letters, but rather very slowly. Of particular interest, he preferred to write in capital letters because it was easier for him to do so with the two fingers which he also used to hold the tuning fork to give his choir the keys of the songs they sang. He often said that God knew he had to write and so he preserved the two fingers for him. Lack of toes made Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte walk without strong balance because he fell with little cause.

He therefore tried as much as possible to avoid a situation that would subject him to miss his step or have a little push. At a good time in his life, Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte developed a deep interest in choral music. He started writing some songs in the Igbo language. He told me that any time he went back to sing the songs he had written without writing them down in tonic solfa notation, he would forget the melody to which he had set the words of the songs. This worried him so much until the Rev. Dr. T. Frank Davey came into his life. Rev. Dr. Davey was a leprologist of great fame. He was sent to Uzuakoli by the Methodist Missionary Society and was also trained as a musician.

He taught Sir Harcourt Whyte how to notate music in tonic solfa and helped him to learn about the time duration of sounds. Neither Rev Dr. Davey nor Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte knew that the Igbo language is a Tone language, the meanings of which words in the Igbo language depend on their tonal inflections, Eg Ike, (strength, power) and Ike (bottom, buttocks). This is why in Sir Harcourt Whyte's early compositions, one hears words like isi (d':d') (head) sounding like isi (d:d) (blindness) or isi (f:d) (smell) and afo (f:d)-year) sounding like afo (f:f) stomach or belly) or afo (d:d)- (a market day). We can clearly see this in one of Sir Harcourt Whyte's

composition titled: **UNU NIILE NDI IKE GWURU** (all of you who are weary/tired) Ike (power) sounds like Ike (bottom).

When Sir Harcourt Whyte became aware of this peculiarity of the Igbo language, he began to apply it in the compositions he wrote later. This may be seen in the composition

1. **I BU NNA;**
2. **O BU N'UWA KA O SORO;**
3. **DERE JII** and
4. **ANYA CHINEKE.**

The sounds of these words are as spoken; that is, they sound the way we pronounce them in speech. Sir Harcourt Whyte told me that if it was possible for him to go back and rewrite his old compositions, the Igbo-speaking world would have understood him better.

In 1959, I went to Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte every student-outing day to learn his songs. I travelled the distance of about three (3) miles from the location of my secondary school, the Methodist College, Uzuakoli, to The Colony. I quickly understood what he taught me because I had already learned some of the things he taught me. In the course of his teaching, he stopped and I waited for him to smoke a stick of cigarette, rinse his mouth with some liquid I did not know what it was and cleaned his body that had been drenched with sweat. He always kept a big towel beside him because he sweated profusely at any little work he did, including writing and singing his songs.

After all these, both of us would sing his new songs. He became so happy with me that he allowed me to make copies of his new songs for myself. I always returned late to school and missed my lunch as a result. I did not mind that. The regularity of my going to Sir Harcourt Whyte decreased when the Rev. Prof. Sir Achinivu Kanu Achinivu came to the Methodist College, Uzuakoli, in 1960 to pursue the Higher School Certificate course. He knew much more about music than I did. So, I changed to undergo his tutelage. Nevertheless, I continued to receive Sir Harcourt Whyte's new songs from his choirmaster who was writing down his new songs for him.

When the Nigeria-Biafra civil war became tough, Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte and his family were moved to Ahiaorie Ibere by the late Dr. Marcus Kanno. Ahiaorie Ibere is a village on the outskirts of the present Ikwuano Local Government Area of today's Abia State. The people produced a lot of food. Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte remained comfortable there until the end of the war when he and his family were moved back to Uzuakoli. When he died in 1977, I was working at Nkalagu where one of the branches of the African Continental Bank was located. His burial date coincided with the date when the bank's Inspectors from Lagos came to inspect our branch. Every staff member of the bank was expected to be at work with them. He was so good to me that I am still in pain for missing his burial. He was such a good spirit-filled man.

May his soul rest in peace. Amen

**SIR FRIDAY NKEMKA EHILEGBU (KCW)**



3. **Elder Chief Ndubueze Obioma** --- Elder Chief Obioma was a chorister of Harcourt' and a choirmaster in his home, Lohum. He is a Methodist to the core. He was Secretary of Harcourt's choir for many years and, with the late Eliezar Obiakor and Paa Elder Enyinnaya O. Akwara, a strong pillar of the choir. His perceptions of late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte and his works follow.

**MY PERCEPTIONS OF**  
**SIR IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE**  
**(1905-1977; MON, KCW (POSTHUMOUSLY))**  
**COMPOSER OF SACRED MUSIC, POET, TEACHER AND**  
**CONDUCTOR, AND HIS MUSIC**

The bad childhood experiences and all the traumatic stresses from which the late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte suffered during his early life on this planet are, as contained in this write-up, narrated to me by himself. I, as Secretary of his choir, note that he made members of his choir know that he was born in 1905 in Abonnema, Rivers State of Nigeria and attended the prestigious Bishop Crowther Memorial School, Abonnema. After passing the Standard Six Certificate examination at the age of fourteen (14) years, it was discovered that he had contracted the very dreaded disease ---- leprosy. On realizing the fact that he had truly become affected by leprosy, he thought of committing suicide as the last option open for him for escaping the segregation, stigmatization and rejection that were the lot of people known to be leprous.

At that young age of 14, he was avoided, feared and treated as an outcast. Young Harcourt, whom leprosy had made a "reject" in his community, believed strongly that He who created him had not rejected him but had a

purpose for creating him, called off the idea of a suicide. His uncle took him to the General Hospital, Port Harcourt where other people experiencing leprosy were already receiving treatment. After a little time in the General Hospital, the Magistrate ordered patients to vacate the Hospital and leave Port Harcourt. Boldly and with strong faith in God, Harcourt Whyte gathered all other patients and staged a strong protest against the Magistrate's order. They demanded that because they were among the population of Port Harcourt and citizens of the country as well, government should provide them an alternative residential area where they would live and continue to be treated. It was that bold step taken by Harcourt that led to the founding in 1932 of the Leprosy Hospital, The Colony, at Uzuakoli by the then government of Eastern Nigeria and the Methodist Missionary Society (MMS) in England. Harcourt Whyte and other patients were then transferred to the Colony at Uzuakoli for further treatment.

Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte stated that he noticed a great difference between the General Hospital in Port Harcourt and the by-government-and-MMS founded hospital, The Colony, at Uzuakoli. His actual healing was at Uzuakoli Leprosy Centre, more popularly known as The Colony. The joy that flowed in him when he noticed that the treatment at The Centre was very effective, made him organize some fellow patients and taught them his songs of praise and worship of God in the evenings. The medical officer in charge of the hospital, Dr. K. Browne, noticed Harcourt Whyte's talent in music, especially in the praises and worship of God, and advised and encouraged Harcourt to establish a choir and thus THE HARCOURT WHYTE CHOIR was born. The choir practised every evening and sang every Sunday in the church and the songs they sang on Sundays were so impactful on the patients that some were reportedly miraculously healed

and discharged from the hospital; symptom-free of leprosy. On such discharge Sunday services, many government officials, Reverend Ministers and relations of discharged patients gathered mainly to listen and tape-record the songs that Harcourt and his choir sang. Many more patients would expectedly be cured and discharged. Harcourt himself was discharged in 1949. Later, after his discharge, Harcourt was made the Headmaster of the Leprosy Centre's Children's School. The Rev. Dr. Thomas Frank Davey had taken over the management of the Leprosy Centre and Hospital at that time. The choristers then consisted mainly of patients and a few discharged people who were teaching at the primary school.

Before the start of the Nigerian civil war in 1967, Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte had already composed over a hundred (100) songs for church choirs. The first edition of fifty-seven (57) of those songs collected by Methodist Church of Eastern Nigeria in 1958 were published and copies of the publication were circulating widely in many churches and schools throughout Eastern Nigeria in particular.

Harcourt, who, by the special grace of God survived the Nigeria Civil War had no choristers to start off his choir. During the war, Harcourt composed several songs. Such songs include:

- (i) Chineke, Nụrụ Olu M, O Nweghị Mgbapụ Nke Dịrị M (Hear me, O God, For I don't have Any Escape)
- (ii) Bịa Ndụ Na Mmeri (Come/Let Life And Victory Be)
- (iii) Ndị Ọgụ Nke Jizọs (Soldiers of Christ), etc, etc.

Many of the patients in the Settlement whose conditions were very bad and could not run away when the Nigerian soldiers entered Uzuakoli were

killed by the soldiers. Many others died inside nearby bushes while those who survived did not want or could not come back to the Settlement after the war. This was despite the fact that, according to Sir Harcourt Whyte, “Leprosy” had been declared ‘NON CONTAGIOUS’ by one Dr. Sydney, a medical expert on leprosy. Dr. Sydney had carried out several laboratory researches in India and other Asian/African countries on the spread and cure of leprosy. Dr. Sydney instructed that leprosy patients could attend the hospitals and receive their treatments like any other out-patients. People affected by Leprosy would no longer return to Uzuakoli Settlement to spend some time for treatment. They resorted to coming from their homes for treatment.

With the end of the war and its myriad concomitant problems, Sir Harcourt Whyte lost virtually all his choristers. Based on this premise, he in order, not to lose all his music and the Gospel message that the music bore, decided to move to nearby primary, secondary and commercial schools and churches and appeal to the teachers, students and church members join his choir while also searching for new choristers. Teachers, students, church members and even people in private practices, who loved music and singing, responded positively. The result of that step he took gave birth to the new, vibrant and famous **Harcourt Whyte Choir** of the Uzuakoli Settlement.

I personally joined the choir from the Methodist Teachers' College, Uzuakoli and was made Secretary of the Choir. It was then that I became closer to Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte and the family. Harcourt Whyte's son, Mr. Godwin Harcourt, was my teacher at the Methodist Central (Primary) School, Lohum. I was also his chorister, for he also taught his father's songs at the Methodist Church, Lohum.

The Harcourt Whyte Choir became so very famous that members of other denominations ----- Anglican, Presbyterian, Assemblies of God and even the Roman Catholic Church ---- also joined the choir. The Choir received invitations to perform at church and civic ceremonies held at Owerri, Onitsha, Enugu, Port Harcourt and in and around Uzuakoli and all Abia State. For example, the Choir performed during the coronation of His Royal Majesty, Eze Isaac Ikonne, the longest-serving Monarch in Igboland. The Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Enugu, invited the Choir several times every year for performance and recording. To ensure the continued existence and appearance of the Choir, the NTA Enugu employed Harcourt's son, Mr. Godwin Harcourt, and gave him the task of producing a special programme of his father's songs every week with the aim of showcasing Harcourt's songs in the entire country.

It was this projection of his songs, that inspired the young Yoruba businessman, Dr. Bayomi, in Lagos, to invite the Choir to Lagos for the recording of some Harcourt's songs in his **Ark Studios**. For two consecutive times, the Choir travelled to Lagos and recorded some 50 songs on CDs. Many companies, churches, schools, business centres and even homes played the recorded songs in the markets, business centres and indeed in individual homes, schools and ceremonies. Because of how fast the records were sold, Bayomi engaged the Choir a third time at which more than twenty other songs were recorded.

Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte composed more new songs. The Imo State Commissioner for Youths and Culture, Chief Dr. Anoka, (Abia State had not been created from Imo by then) commissioned Harcourt for a few songs. The Government of Imo State directed that the name Harcourt

Whyte Choir be changed to **"Imo State Government Choir."** Following that change of name, the Imo State Government provided the Choir with a set of robes. On this new premise, Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte renamed Harcourt Whyte Choir, "The Association of Singers, Choirs, Choirmasters and Actors/Voice and Action Stars" (ASCCA/VAS). Drums, gongs, wooden and metal instruments were provided for practices and performances by the State Government. The instruments blended well with the new songs and produced excellent harmonies that thrilled the hearts of the audience. Choirmasters of various Christian persuasions travelled from Umuahia, Okigwe, Owerri, Onitsha, etc to Uzuakoli to learn new songs from Harcourt, and returned to their different churches and organizations to teach them. The Choir became very famous and incomparable to any other choir around. The number of singers/choristers swelled and the Choir became proud of the talented choristers she had won, who could thrill any audience excellently. Some Igbo people in Ghana, enamored of Harcourt's songs and the waves they were making, muted the idea of inviting the Choir to perform in Ghana. While the Choir was preparing to travel outside the country, the disconcerting news of the death of Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte following a motor-car accident in which he fell out of a moving vehicle, reached the people! Harcourt died after a few days at the Federal Medical Centre (FMC), the former Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Umuahia.

It is true that Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte is dead, but it is also true of the belief of all who knew him and us, his choristers, that our Master, Composer of so many sacred songs, a Poet, Philosopher, Teacher and Minister of the word of God, is one of the Angels, who constitute **"The Heavenly Choir"** and who endlessly sing to the praise and glory of our Almighty God. He

will receive the crown of glory and salvation about which he wrote in his new songs yet unsung by choirs.

### **Elder Chief Ndubueze Obioma**

4. **Sir Onyekachi P. Alighili (KCW)** ----- Sir Onyekachi P. ALIGHILI is an **Economist**. Throughout his graduate and post-graduate careers at UNN, he sang in Christ Church Chapel Choir (C<sup>4</sup>), UNN, under the direction of the Rev. Prof. Sir Achinivu Kanu Achinivu. He directs and conducts the Grace Methodist Church Choir at the Federal Low-cost Housing Estate, Umuahia, Bethel Circuit Diocese of Umuahia and his village/home Church Choir at Umulenso, St. Charles Methodist Church Ohuhu Circuit, Diocese of Umuahia East. He also works with Dodd's Cathedral Choir, Uzuakoli. These various church choir activities earned him the Church's highest award ---- the Knighthood of Charles Wesley (KCW) in 2017, he received the Bishop O. C. Chiemeka's Harcourt Whyte's Music Ambassador (HWMA) award for his musical contributions to the church. His perceptions of late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte and his works follow.

### **MY PERCEPTIONS OF THE LATE SIR IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE, THE MUSIC LEGEND, AND HIS MUSIC**

I thank God for the opportunity of writing about the great music marker, the late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte. My first contact with him was in the early 70s. As a chorister, I trekked from my home at Umulenso in Ohuhu to Uzuakoli to learn his songs taught by him. The choir then was made up of choristers from different denominations who came from far and near. His

songs like “**KPEE EKPERE, CHEBE M O NNA, ANYỊ BỤ IHE, GEE NTỊ, UNU GEE NTỊ, E BURU IWE N’OBI,** etc.” speak of the wisdom of this great man.

Ikoli Harcourt Whyte was the chief judge of one of the choir competitions we held in 1974 at the Practising School, Uzuakoli, under the then Uzuakoli Circuit.

I joined the Christ Church Chapel Choir (C<sup>4</sup>) University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 1982 as an undergraduate student. The choir then was led by a distinguished music master, Dr. A. K. Achinivu. Although the choir was made up of undergraduates students of different disciplines, levels of study and especially tribes of different languages – Yoruba, Hausa, Efik, Ibibio, Igbo, Edo, etc. Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's songs were sung during church services, musical concerts and special occasions to the glory of God and the pleasure of the listeners.

His songs are ageless – composed in the 40s, 50s, 60s and early 70s, they are still very relevant today. He was a philosopher and a preacher.

In 2011, I took a nondenominational choir of fifty eight (58) choristers from Uzuakoli to Port Harcourt at the invitation of the Department of Music of the University of Port Harcourt. The Department was celebrating Harcourt Whyte's 106th birthday anniversary under the rubric: Garden City Chorale Music Festival and the theme: **Restoring Hope through Choral Music: The Odyssey of Ikoli Harcourt Whyte.** Mine was one of the guest choirs invited to sing Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's songs at the grand finale of the event. We rendered four (4) of his songs:



1. Bìanụ Ndi Enyi M Niile
2. Rue Ole Mgbe, Obi M?
3. Kpee Ekpere
4. Tụlee N'obi Gị,

with Sir Emma Onyeabor, a Director in the Broadcasting Corporation of Abia State (BCA), running commentaries on each song before it was rendered. One of the highlights of the occasion came when the moderator of the programme wished to know how many members of the choir from Uzuakoli, my choir had sung with Harcourt Whyte at some time in his lifetime, and thirty-eight (38) out of the fifty-eight (58) choristers raised up their hands. That attracted much ovation.

The impact of Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's songs around Igboland and beyond cannot be over-estimated. Some of his songs, such as "**Gee Nti, Unu Gee Nti**" and "**E gburu Nwa Chukwu**", are about the birth, ministry and death of Jesus Christ. Some other songs of his like "**Igwe Bụ Ulo M**", "**Oge Nke Ndụ**", etc, help us to understand properly that we are not of this world.

His other songs talk of our faith in the existence and power of God – "**Chukwu Nọ N'ezì**", "**Oburụ Na Chineke Nonyere Anyị**", "**Teta, Teta**", while others like "**Ekele, Eze**" and "**Nye Ekele Dị Mma**" show gratitude to God.

Going through the more than 300 songs written by Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, one will discover that he was a special gift to humanity. You cannot talk of works of this philosopher, great composer, preacher and music maker without mentioning the name of Rev. Professor Sir Achinivu Kanu

Achinivu. He wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on Harcourt Whyte and his songs. He teaches his songs at different fora, organizes seminars and workshops for choirmasters and choristers and uses Harcourt's songs in them to elucidate ideas about Harcourt's songs and to ensure that the songs are properly taught.

As Choirmaster of C<sup>4</sup>, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, he had, since the 1980s, taught more than 70% of Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's songs. Prior to competitions in which Harcourt Whyte's songs were set pieces, he'd prepared participating choirs and choral groups at different times for the competitions. Meanwhile, his commitment to projecting Harcourt and his songs has attracted, is still attracting God's reward to him in his work through the sponsorship of a foreign foundation ---- the SHF of Japan. His works help to make the songs stand the test of time.

We are inordinately thankful first to Harcourt, who, well-endowed by God, wrote the songs, second to Achinivu, the man of the moment, who has done and is still prepared to do great works to project Harcourt and his songs; and third to SHF, who has allowed herself to be used by God to finance Achinivu's works. May God continue to endow and bless SHF so that her sponsorship of Achinivu's works continue. May God bless the dead and the living among them. Amen.

**Sir Onyekachi P. Alighili,**  
**B.Sc, M.Ed, BOD, KCW,**  
**Ambassador of Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's Music**

5. **Sir Ikechi Ubani Anozie (KCW)** ----- Sir Ikechi Ubani ANOZIE is a **Physicist** by training but he is so highly musically gifted that he

practises music as Director and Conductor of the Umuihenyi Circuit Choir. By reason of his musical contributions in choir work, he was given the Church's highest award --- the Knighthood of Charles Wesley (KCW). By the same token, he was also a recipient of Bishop O. C. Chiemeka's Harcourt Whyte Music Ambassador (HWMA) award. He sang in Christ Church Chapel Choir (C<sup>4</sup>), UNN, throughout his study sojourn at UNN under the direction of Rev. Prof. Sir Achinivu Kanu Achinivu. His perceptions of late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte and his works follow.

### **MY PERCEPTIONS OF THE LATE SIR IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE AND HIS MUSIC**

There are two (2) statements that have made and still make great impacts on me. They are:

1. There is ability in disability.
2. Somebody can be in distress or in what is considered a bad condition, yet he will be a friend of God and can make heaven. That was, perhaps, why St. Paul said in Romans 8:38-39, "For I am persuaded that...(nothing) shall be able to separate us from the love of God (which is) in Christ Jesus, our Lord."

To my mind, Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte is more well-known for his music; than his family history and other circumstances of life. The number of people who had direct contact with him is by far less than the number of those who heard and read stories about him and appreciated his songs. His music is in many respects like rhythm, melody and harmony, quite unique and in its own class.

The question people often ask because of his compositional prowess and output is: "where did he study music?" This question is very instructive because many consider the academic study of music as a criterion for being called or considered as a composer. In his book: Ikoli Harcourt Whyte: The Man and His Music, with the sub title: Case of Musical Acculturation in Nigeria, Achinivu abundantly showed that, Harcourt Whyte was a great composer, that he was not academically trained in composition, notwithstanding, the quality and style of his songs stood him out. More astonishing is the fact that his educational background was minimal and more or less informal. Yet such great works in music were accomplished by him. Can one say, he attended the School of Destiny?

In 1973, he visited the University of Nigeria Nsukka, at the invitation of the Students' Union of that time, and one of the many questions put to him by the students who were obviously delighted at meeting him was:

**"Sir, is it true that you are taught music in the dream when you are asleep?"**

**His answer to this intriguing question was: "No, I usually base my songs on the words of the Bible and the experiences I draw from the happenings around."**

He wrote hundreds of songs, his physical disability and limitations, notwithstanding. How many able, healthy, and well educated persons have produced as many musical compositions as Harcourt Whyte did? Really, there is ability in disability.

The other area of interest is his medium of communication. He came from Rivers State of Nigeria. One would expect his music to be written in his

mother-tongue, ---- the Kalabari language ---- since he was not so well-educated as to have a good command of the English language to compose his lyrics in it. He acquired the Igbo language from the natives of Uzuakoli where he lived. Most of his compositions that I have come across are written in Igbo language. Judging from the volume of his works, how many people who are speakers and "masters" of the Igbo language can beat Harcourt's feat in this regard? He certainly possessed an unusual endowment by God which enabled him to acquire such depth of knowledge and usage of the Igbo language.

People must have aided him in some ways to solve some of his unforeseen difficulties in the course of writing his songs. By this we are saying that such assistance apparently did not overshadow his initiative or originality. Harcourt Whyte wrote simple, direct music in Igbo language. This is evident in the first volume of his songs. Harcourt Whyte was a man of peace. A story told by an insider highlights this fact.

A certain woman quarrelled with Harcourt Whyte's wife. In the course of the quarrel, the women used many abusive, incisive and derogatory words against each other and their families. Harcourt Whyte's wife's opponent had the upper hand in the fight with words by raining provocative remarks concerning the physical disfigurements of limbs and body which she observed in Harcourt Whyte's wife's family. Consequently, Harcourt's wife began to shed painful tears; she could not bear the full weight of the insults and of the imprecations her opponent poured on her. Rather than Harcourt joining in the war of words against his wife's detractor, he, with some other men, including his wife's detractor husband, waded into the case and amicably resolved their differences. It is reportedly true that his song: **"Ọ Bụ N'ụwa Ka Ọ Sọrọ"** was born out of that experience.

I am one of the lucky few who met Harcourt Whyte and interacted with him personally. I am also one of the many fans of the man and his music. He was a very simple, straightforward and peaceful man. He wrote many soul-touching, spirit filled songs for worship in spite of the many visible signs of disability. Life and its meaning, faith and its substance; heaven and its reality were clearly expressed in his life and music to the extent that one can confidently assert that nothing could separate him from the love of God who profusely endowed him musically.

I am persuaded to believe that Harcourt Whyte left the world with the satisfaction and joy that he did his best in spite of the many worldly limitations placed on him by a debilitating disease he suffered.

**Sir Ikechi U. Anozie, KCW,  
Ambassador of Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's Music.**

6. **Sir Christopher A. Igwe (KCW)** ----- Sir Christopher A. IGWE's academic discipline is **Environmental Protection**. He is a very highly gifted musician. Notwithstanding that he, like Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, has no musical training background, he has written over 500 songs awaiting publication. One of his compositions; "**O Kwesiri Nwaturu Ahu**" was a first-prize winner at some recent Methodist Church Nigeria conference competition. He directs and conducts his private choir called **Free Gospel Singers** and his compositions are branded **Free Gospel Songs**. He was a recipient of the Bishop O. C. Chiemaka's Harcourt Whyte Music Ambassador (HWMA) award of 2017. He sings and teaches

his choir Harcourt's songs and acknowledges Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte compositional prowess, that he writes his own songs notwithstanding all his deprivations and handicaps. He is a Knight of Charles Wesley (KCW) of Methodist Church Nigeria (MCN). His perceptions of late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte and his works follow.

### **DIVINE ANOINTING:**

#### **FROM PRISON CONFINEMENT TO ISOLATION IN A LEPROSY CENTRE:**

#### **IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE – THE MUSIC LEGEND**

Unto the church, a child was born and unto it a son was given in a prison confinement in a Decema prison in 1905, without the choice of material heritage obligation and liberty as the outcome of an inescapable encounter of a pregnant woman and spouse resisting the advances of an amorous king.

That was the experience of Ikoli Harcourt Whyte who derived his name from the term “Prison” (“Ikoli” in Igbo Language). Unfortunately, however, young Ikoli Harcourt was afflicted by leprosy, a supposedly contagious, and incurable disease. Consequently, he was banished and quarantined at a Leprosy Centre at Uzuakoli, Abia State of Nigeria.

That, of course, was all in a state of desperation of melancholic separation and depression which God eventually turned into a divine anointing of gift of song-writing for praise, worship, and evangelism. At his most degraded human condition, Ikoli Harcourt composed songs that lifted the name of God above all other names as the Giver of Life and Great Provider in times of need. Harcourt eventually became a foremost songwriter of an extra-

ordinary endowment and potential, touching the lives of all and sundry, the clergy and the laity alike, with his songs.

Coming from a Kalabari ethnic and language parentage, Harcourt wrote his songs in Igbo Language and assuaged not only the sufferings of his fellow inmates in isolation in the leprosy centre, but enhanced the spiritual life of Christians and non Christians, thus, with almost all fingers and toes lost to the debilitating disease of leprosy, Harcourt Whyte wrote numerous songs, as well as organized and conducted the famous Harcourt Whyte Choir at the Leprosy Centre Uzuakoli. Representatives of many church choirs also converged regularly at the centre and were trained in Christian choral singing and music appreciation.

Until his death in 1977, Ikoli Harcourt Whyte influenced choral evangelism across churches not only in the former Eastern Region of Nigeria, but beyond and across denominations. His songs addressed many situations, ranging from spiritual, social, economic to political lives. The songs touched all who listened to them, built up their faith and trust in God over their circumstances.

Ikoli Harcourt Whyte was a prolific songwriter who demonstrated an unappeasable desire to praise and give thanks to god in all situations and conditions for “His mercies and faithful love enduring forever” (Psalm 136). One of the songs which continue to strengthen faith and trust in God is his composition titled “**Ọ Bụ Na Mgbe Obim N’ada Mba**” with the following words in the chorus:

***Ọ bụ na mgbe obim n’ada mba,  
Ọ bụ na mgb’Ekwensụ n’agbụ’uja,***



***Mgb'ụkọn'akọ, ya na mgbe'okwu kwen'agbaze,  
A ga gh'ewezugam n'onsum no ...***

***(Even when depressed in spirit; even when Satan is unrelenting in attack; in time of absolute lack and poverty and hopelessness, I will still hold my faith in God).***

One unfortunate lacuna in the life and times and achievements of Ikoli Harcourt Whyte is that neither the Church, especially the Methodist Church, nor any individual or organization has raised any appreciable memoriam on this music legend who has touched so many lives through his music, and enhanced the worship content of churches, especially in the Igbo speaking area of Eastern Nigeria. This calls for a rethinking. There should be foundations and monumental memorials established in the name of a man whom God turned his circumstances of obscurity to prominence in saving souls and touching lives through his songs.

**Sir Christopher A. Igwe (KCW, tFG, fcaI,)**

**Ikoli Harcourt Whyte Music Ambassador**

**Oka-Abu**

**(Composer and Founder/Leader Free Gospel Songs of Praise)**

**7. Paa Elder Enyinnaya Onyecheri Akwara**

**PAA ENYINNAYA OHAECHESI AKWARA**

## (1929 – 2002)

Born on September 22, 1929 to the family of the late Maazi Akwara Idegbu and his wife the late Madam Nganyadim Akwara both of Ndagbo Eluoma, Ozuakoli (today's Uzuakoli), Bende LGA of Abia State, the late Enyinnaya Akwara grew up and developed into one of the foremost enthusiasts over Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's music. He started his formal education at the Methodist Practising School, Uzuakoli. Later, he attended the Teachers' Training College, Uzuakoli. Thereafter, he joined the teaching profession and taught for a short while at the Methodist Practising School there. Enamoured with and lured by the music of Harcourt Whyte, he sought for a position at the Leprosy Hospital, Uzuakoli, and got it. There, he became so very intimately connected with Harcourt Whyte and his songs that he began to perceive Harcourt as a godsend in his life and carrier, for which reason he endlessly gave praise and thanks to God. Harcourt and his songs very quickly brought Enyinnaya to limelight as **Leader** of a group of young men who could be described as members of **Harcourt Whyte's "School of Composers and Choirmasters"** in Uzuakoli, its environs and beyond.

Paa Elder Akwara was a great interpreter of Harcourt's music. His perceptions of Harcourt and his songs were those ascribable to a "mystic"; no wonder Dr. Thomas Frank Davey had described him as "mystic musician". Paa Elder Akwara perceived Harcourt's songs as songs of inspiration and hope to the hopeless and downtrodden in society. In short, Harcourt's songs were to him a Gospel of life-giving, life-changing and life-saving messages to the world at large.

My older colleague in the admiration and love of Harcourt and his music, Paa Elder Akwara had once said to me:

**Ọ dighị abụ dị ka abụ Harcourt.**

**Abụ ya niile m bụrụla, m nūrụla na ndị m zirila dị ezigbo uto na ntị kara abụ bekee anyị na-abụ. Abụ ya jupụtara n'akpala okwu anyị, ihe ozizi na ihe mmụta dị iche iche dị kwa omimi e ji adị ndụ. O kwesiri ka a na-ezi abụ Harcourt n'ulo akwụkwọ ma na chọchi anyị dị iche iche n'ala anyị.**

**(There is no song like a Harcourt's song. All his songs that I have sung, heard and those that I have personally taught are much more pleasing to the ear than most of the English songs we sing. His songs are replete with the proverbs and idioms of our language, teachings and lessons of very deep meanings for life and living. It will be good to have Harcourt's songs taught in the different schools and churches in our land).**

Paa Elder Akwara died in his country home in 2002. He composed many songs in strictly Harcourt Whyte's style..., among which his **"Mu na Ya so mgbe dum"** (I walk with Him always), **"Until I reach my home I will never stop my journey"** and **"He holds the key to my life"** may be cited.

**CATEGORY C: The younger generation of our population who never met or knew Harcourt at all, but probably heard or read about him and today, sing and enjoy his works.**

1. **Christ Church Chapel Choir (C<sup>4</sup>), UNN** --- C<sup>4</sup>, UNN, is as old as the University itself. She is here represented by Prof. 'Ranti Adeogun, Choirmaster, and Mrs. Onyinyechi Okoye, Secretary. Notwithstanding that he "Uncle Ade" (as he is very fondly and popularly called) is of Yoruba extraction, he is a great lover of Sir Harcourt's songs. He is, according to himself, learning much of Igbo language from them. He is a professional academic Music Educator. He is an Anglican.

Mrs. Onyinyechi is the current Secretary of C<sup>4</sup>, UNN. An Adult Educator by training, she has sung in C<sup>4</sup> for altogether twenty (20) years. She had inherited her love of Harcourt's songs from her late father who had sung them as chorister in his local church at Umulenso, Ohuhu Circuit of the Diocese of Umuahia East Methodist Church Nigerian (MCN). Although she was a staunch Methodist by birth, she is now Anglican by marriage. C<sup>4</sup> perceptions of Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte follow.

### **C<sup>4</sup> PERCEPTION ON SIR IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE**

Ikoli Harcourt Whyte songs is a song that affects everybody any time because it addresses every aspect of the human consciences. Do you know why, check the words in any of his composition line by line. His songs became a source of consolation, encouragement to all lovers of good music. His music affected so many persons even Christ Church Chapel Choir singers. Somebody like Uchenna a.k.a Pa Willy, will always admonish us joking through this song "Ihe Ndia Ndị Njo" whenever he wants you to desist from evil and "Gị Onye Uche Gbago r'agbago". Somebody like Onyinye (Ogoo m Nwanyị) joined C<sup>4</sup> the day she heard

Christ Church Chapel Choir sang “Jihovah Bụ Eze” and it happened to be her late father’s best song. According to her, she felled in love with Ikoli Harcourt Whyte songs from her father (of blessed memory), who had a copy of compiled music of Ikoli Harcourt Whyte though incomplete. Unfortunately, she lost Ikoli Whyte music book in 2019. I get inspired and encouraged whenever I am downcast in live struggles through this particular song of Ikoli Harcourt Whyte “Obuna Mgbe Obi m N’ada Mba, Dere Jii, Chukwu Dị, and Atul’Egwu.

Chukwu Dị will always remind us then that with this particular song of Harcourt Whyte “Chukwu Dị” for us to be careful in everything we do in life. So Ikoli Harcourt Whyte music is philosophical, theological and captivates the mind/soul of lovers of music.

Members of Christ Church Chapel Choir (C4) cannot forget even in a hurry this particular song “Chebe M’ O. It has really inspired us that throughout the period of COVID 19, we always encourage ourselves that God will protect us with or without the vaccination.

In fact, Ikoli Harcourt Whyte songs are biblical, prophetic and ecumenical in the sense that it carries a lot of messages from the bible which is not faked for selfish aggrandizement.

We, the entire C4 appreciates our Daddy, Prof. A. K Achinivu for bringing Ikoli songs down to Nsukka. Daddy really revived Ikoli Whyte here in Nsukka and it will never die in our own time. In a nutshell, Ikoli Harcourt Whyte has made most of C<sup>4</sup> members tick even in our performances. Let us sing “Kelenu Jehovah” because of evidences we see till today as his handiwork. We salute Sir, Daddy A.K. Achinivu for your hard work in

raising C<sup>4</sup> so high that even the sky has become our starting point in this ministry of singing. To God be the glory.

**Prof. A. O. Adeogun**  
**Choirmaster, C<sup>4</sup>**

**Mrs Onyinyechi Okoye**  
**Secretary, C<sup>4</sup>**

**2. Achinivu-Harcourt Whyte Choral Association (The Chorale),  
Arochukwu Incorporated. ----- Represented by Mr. Stanley  
Maduagwu, the Deputy Director and Conductor**

The names ----- ACHINIVU and HARCOURT WHYTE ----- in the Choral Association's full name ----- are symbolic of the musical son-father relationship between the first-named, Achinivu, and the second-named, Harcourt Whyte. It is also symbolic of the pupil-teacher relationship between the twain, for Harcourt Whyte was my first music teacher who, using his own compositions as examples, taught me how to read and write music in tonic-solfa notation. These two symbolisms ----- the "parental" and the "tutorial" ----- explain the total commitment of my life and career to promoting, projecting and propagating everything about Harcourt Whyte and his music in Nigeria and abroad.

A career crisis was raging in my family over my choice of a future career. My family, in particular my mother, wanted me to study Medicine, but I wanted nothing of medicine but everything about Music. That was as a result of the strong influence which Harcourt Whyte's music had had on my young absorbent mind. It was through Harcourt Whyte's prophetic intervention in my family that the tightly closed doors to the pursuit of music as an academic career became widely opened to me to undertake the academic study of music. It is in appreciation of that positive

intervention that I have committed my life and career to doing everything within my power to project, propagate, promote and immortalize the late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte and his music. Is it then any wonder why the subject of my Ph.D. dissertation, submitted in 1978 to the Freie Universität Berlin (Free University of Berlin) in the then West Berlin, West Germany, had to be **IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE: THE MAN AND HIS MUSIC** with the subtitle: **The Story of Musical Acculturation in Nigeria** (in two volumes)? It is that selfsame genuine desire to immortalize the late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte and his music that informed my founding, on my return from my study sojourn in Germany, of the entertainment outfit: **Achinivu-Harcourt Whyte Chorale, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN)** in 1979.

#### **ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHORALE, AROCHUKWU INC.**

With my retirement in 2005 from active service to the Department of Music of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), and my final relocation in July, 2008, to my hometown, Arochukwu, the motive force that led me to establish The Chorale, UNN, namely, to let people hear and sing the music of Harcourt Whyte, also led me to establish The Chorale Arochukwu, in November, 2009.

The Achinivu-Harcourt Whyte Choral Association (The Chorale), Arochukwu (A-HWCA, A) is today a 40-man strong group of men and women from all walks of life who love choral music and singing, and who are being musically and professionally well-trained to sing and perform well on stage.

**PERCEPTIONS OF SIR IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE'S MUSIC BY THE**  
**ACHINIVU-HARCOURT WHYTE CHORAL ASSOCIATION (THE**  
**CHORALE), AROCHUKWU INCORPORATED.**

**Maduagwu, Stanley**

The earliest encounter of choral music among the natives of Africa came as a result of the activities of the European Christian missionaries including their Western education. As time passed, the interest and consciousness of choral music arose, especially as musical knowledge grew among the few educated folks.

Most of the members of this Achinivu-Harcourt Whyte Choral Association Arochukwu were not born when Ikoli Harcourt Whyte composed his version and replica of mostly the Whiteman's strophic style of music; but his was a concept, a paradigm shift from purely European fashion to the local content of the people's linguistic and cultural ingredients. It was extremely necessary at that time of a nascent black society that the natives enjoyed 'home-made' choral music to boost their interest and help allay most of the phobia and suspicion nurtured against the 'new religion' - --- Christianity.

Some members of the chorale had their initial contacts with choral music experiences through the songs written by Ikoli Harcourt Whyte as rendered by the church choirs made up of mostly armature choristers. Back then, churches under the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S) - Anglican, Methodist, and Presbyterian - made good use of his songs as special choir renditions while the hymns, as translated into vernacular, served congregational purposes especially in the regular and routine



services. Before the 1980s, it was common for a church choir to render any Harcourt Whyte's song as special anthem without laying hand on the sol-fa score or knowing who actually composed it. Such was the case of St. Michael's Anglican Church Alulu in Imo state, a place of my up-bringing.

May I recall with fondness one of my childhood experiences in the mid 70s. Every Sunday the children's service was to last between 7:30am until about 9:00am; and then the adult service commenced at about 9:15am, while the children went back to their various homes. My maternal grandmother had a step daughter who was living with her and attending the church choir. She returned from one rehearsal evening and was singing a Harcourt Whyte's number they were practicing against the coming Sunday. It was **"Amara Nke Gi Nna"** and it was so good for my listening pleasure.

On that very coming Sunday I had to stay back after the children's service in order to Join the adult service so I could hear the choir sing the **"Amara Nke Gi Nna"**. Their flowing White Choir robes were an interesting sight to behold but it was shorter than the one won by the 'Agent' (that was the title of the vernacular pastor in charge) For he was not yet an ordained reverend). The choir rendered the song well, by my infantile assessment. And back then the only special anthem always sung by the choir was Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's compositions. Some of the Harcourt Whyte's numbers that graced my childhood were: **"Owuwe Ihe Ubi"**, **"Nwa Aturū Chukwu"**, **"Onyinye Chukwu"**, **"A Tula Egwu"**, etc. At rehearsals the Agent, who himself tripled as pastor, choirmaster and school teacher would proudly say a few things he knew about the composer while he struggled to teach the choir. Most often only the lyric was written on the blackboard for choir members to copy.

In the house, my father Sir F.O. Maduagwu also said something about the Leper Colony and his leprous old friend, Maazi Orji Nweke Kanu, had told him. The following day my father took me on a visit to him. The old friend told a story about the Uzuakoli Leper settlement and Harcourt Whyte's musical activities. Observing our curiosity and excitement, he entered his bedroom and came out with a song script written in tonic solfa. He sang some Harcourt Whyte's songs as they learnt them at the colony. Most of his fingers and toes were out; and he said with amusement that their identity was the lack of toes and fingers. However, he skilfully applied his frail hands towards conducting the songs he sang. It was then we knew that the Leper settlement run by the Methodist church offered them some reasonable level of quality western education; and he had said that late Harcourt Whyte was both his choirmaster and school teacher. My father took some scripts from him that day including Negro spirituals.

Many years later I began to appreciate both spirituals, and hymns my father introduced to the school and choir. We began to hear various kind of choral songs from the radio. Then at certain occasions the Presenter would play Harcourt Whyte's recorded songs and the voice of Nnamdi Olebara rent the air with his Igbo sacred poems alongside.

At the end of the era of vernacular priests, fully ordained priests, and secular school teachers who had little or no interest in quality choral music took over the local churches. The progress of choral music now depended on volunteer choirmasters whose dedications were affected by the interest of resident priests. Harcourt Whyte's songs became a treasure to be searched for. Local choirmasters always relished the moments they lay their hands on Harcourt Whyte's Music. Of course, every church choir in the old Eastern region needed them to perform. Harcourt Whyte's music

had become a concept in choral music. Coming in contact with a sizeable number of Harcourt Whyte's compositions was the dream of too many Igbo-speaking choirmasters.

Mysteries shrouded the news of who had or knew much about Harcourt Whyte's printed songs. Music scholars were often consulted from departments of music and famous choirs. There in Port Harcourt, Lady Monica Okeke of Department of music, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, had said so much about then Dr A.K. Achinivu that both staff and students wanted to behold him and know about him and Harcourt Whyte's music. I hoped also that one day I'll come in contact with him and some other notable music scholars and composers including Sam Ojukwu, O. Ndubuisi and Laz Ekwueme. Upon retirement from the department of Music, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Prof. A. K. Achinivu, returned to his Arochukwu home and established the Achinivu- Harcourt Whyte's Choral Association Arochukwu to replicate the one at Nsukka after successfully opening the Department of Music through the then Provost of Abia State College of Education (Tech) Arochukwu, Dr. Ernest Nkemakolam.

Down to the late year 2000 in Arochukwu, most of the chorale members had at some point enjoyed Harcourt Whyte's music either as chorister or part of the audience.

The chorale in Arochukwu had performed quite a good number of Harcourt Whyte's music. Each number is unique in rhythm, melody, harmony and message. Moreover, the local contents, tonal ingredients and harmonic texture make them identifiable as 'igbo music' according to Harcourt Whyte. Members of the chorale usually take the performance of his music as opportunity to showcase some 'birthright'. Seeing the

sizeable repertoire of Harcourt Whyte's music at our disposal, courtesy of Rev. Prof. Achinivu, the Arochukwu audience and those of neighbouring communities often referred to the group as '**Harcourt Whyte's choir**'.

3. **Rev. William Christian Uchenna** ----- Rev. William Christian UCHENNA, best known and fondly called "**Pa Willie**" by all members of Christ Church Chapel Choir (C<sup>4</sup>), UNN, of his time. "**Pa Willie**", is an Anglican Priest and an **Educationist** by training. The beautiful rendition of Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's "**Jihova Bụ Eze**" by Christ Church Chapel Choir (C<sup>4</sup>), UNN, in the third week of his studies lured him into the C<sup>4</sup>. He is consequently a great lover of Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's songs. Exuberant and overflowing in humour, there was never a dull or sad moment during C<sup>4</sup>'s rehearsal at which Pa Willie was present. His perceptions of Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte follow.

### **MY PERCEPTION OF THE LATE SIR IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE AND HIS SONGS**

Looking unto Jesus the Author and finisher of our faith" (Heb; 12:2) the great hymn-writer and hymn-complier, Ira D. Sankey has always reminded us in his famous hymn turn **ONLY REMEMBERED**, that we are remembered "only by what we have done" (SS&S 798).

As a child growing up in my village, I heard and sang his songs in my local church. His song were described as or referred to as "**native airs**". I enjoyed them very much. They did not make much or even any meaning to me or any impact on me then. The only thing I knew of him was that he was badly infected by leprosy and that he wrote the songs we sang, by

himself, even believed, that his was one of those names in the Bible ages. I also thought, even believed, that for him to have written such beautiful songs that were sung in our local churches, he must have been a musician, a song-writer and of the 19<sup>th</sup> century!

In the late 90's in 1999 to be precise I was an undergraduate student of the University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) Enugu State of Nigeria. On the first Sunday I attended the Church Service at fateful Protestant Christ Church Chapel UNN: I heard a loud voice from the Choir gallery that said: The Choir will sing the anthem titled: Jihova Bu Eze (Jehovah is king) "composed by the late sir **Ikoli Harcourt Whyte**." That voice was the voice of the then choirmaster **Maazi Rev. Prof. Sir Achinivu Kanu Achinivu (Ph.D., JP., KCW)** an ordained minister and a knight of Charles Wesley (KCW) of Methodist Church Nigeria (MCN). Completely overwhelmed by the beauty of the staging and impacted by the lyrics so beautifully rendered in lovely melody and harmony, I being an old chorister in my local church decided to join the Christ Church Chapel Choir (C4) under Prof. Achinivu's direction.

Inspired by the songs he taught at C4 I also joined his personal choir the **Achinivu-Harcourt Whyte Chorale** (UNN), which he had established to promote Harcourt Whyte's songs in particular. In that chorale as well as C4 we learnt the following Harcourt's songs among many others:

1. Nye Ekele Dị Nma
2. Anyị Bụ Ihe
3. Bjanụ Ndị Enyi m Niile
4. Dere jii
5. Jihova bụ Eze

6. Bata N'obi Anyị, Bata
7. Onye Uche Gbagoro Agbagoro. etc.

The two choirs, C4, UNN and the chorale UNN respectively made recordings of twelve (12) Harcourt Whyte's song , each titled, through the years with **Ikoli Harcourt Whyte** songs I realize that;

Harcourt Whyte's songs are ageless, timeless and seasonless.

Harcourt was a prophet, preacher, teacher and an influence of those who follow him, his disciples.

Because Harcourt did not allow his disability and incapability to hinder him from carrying out the responsibility which God gave to him, God richly endowed him with the gift/talent of composing music that affected the lives of people. The fact notwithstanding that leprosy affected him, he won souls for Christ with his songs.

Luckily, Harcourt was educated to such a level that he could write and teach his songs. The inspiration and talent God gave him enabled him to write his music in Tonic-Solfa notation for others to sing from and enjoy his songs till today. I know his songs and music have gone to places and are yielding positively and converting souls to God's Kingdom.

Sir Harcourt Whyte was evidently the messenger of God after Jesus Christ our Saviour. He came, saw and conquered.

Finally, the "students of fact" declare that "**God also has His Gospel preached through the medium of music**" (Martin Luther 1483-1546)

**and that he who sings prays twice”** (Attributed to St. Augustine) are fact and truth most evident in Harcourt Whyte’s songs. The title **MESSAGES IN 50 SELECT SONGS BY SIR IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE** is a most fitting title for the Rev. Prof. Achinivu’s publications. May these “messages” get around the Whole World.

**Rev. William Christian Uchenna**

**Ozuoba, Portharcourt**

**Rivers State.**

4. **Rev. Onyekaozuru Patricia Marcus** ----- Rev. Onyekaozuru Patricia MARCUS is a Methodist Minister. She is so much in love with Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's songs that she perceives every one of Harcourt's songs as a potent sermon. She sings soprano in Achinivu-Harcourt Whyte Choral Association (The Chorale) Arochukwu Incorporated, and watches over the spiritual life of the Association's membership. She is the Principal Executive Officer at Abia State College of Education Technical Arochukwu (ASCETA). Her perceptions of Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte follow.

### **MY PERCEPTION OF SIR IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE'S MUSIC**

Any man born of a woman has one or more God-given gifts or talents for which purpose God had created him or her. Great men and women are those who tried to make use of their God-given talents to affect the lives of people.

Harcourt Whyte, a man with deformity, was a great achiever, a hero, a genius in the 70s who, even in his lowly state, affected lives with his songs. He did not allow his condition to prevent him from accomplishing his God-given assignment. Harcourt Whyte's songs have affected many lives of which mine is an example or typical.

The songs of this great man touched lives across the globe. His songs are full of wisdom and inspiration. They are full of messages from the Bible, the word of God. They are also melodious.

These songs were composed in Igbo language, so that any Igbo indigene will understand their meanings and become greatly impacted by them. The melody of Harcourt Whyte's songs wakes one up from sleep. It inspires one's spirit, quickens and comforts the sorrowful heart.

Harcourt Whyte's songs revives weary souls and, thereby, brings back hope to the hopeless. An example is one of his songs that brings hope to the heart is **"A TỤLA EGWU" (Do Not Be Afraid)**. This song reminds me of what we were told by our elders, that Angels taught him songs in his dreams. No wonder his songs are gospel songs. Harcourt Whyte's songs have taken me to several places in the country and beyond, under the tutelage of the Rev. Prof. Sir A. Kanu Achinivu. Many young adults and I have been exposed to the public through the performance of his songs.

Another one of his songs that gives me joy and hope is titled: **"BỊA, NDU NA MMERI" (Come, Life And Victory)**. I am excited that Harcourt Whyte handed over the mantle to the Rev. Prof. Sir A. Kanu Achinivu, who is creating much awareness of Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's songs. A man who



was deformed in the early phase of his life, a man who despite all odds departed this world as a hero, a Faithful of God.

I still have hope that the songs of this great man will take us to overseas if life continues. Through the Rev. Prof. Sir A. Kanu Achinivu, the songs of this hero have attracted overseas sponsorship, The Sasakawa Health Foundation, Tokyo, Japan. Almost all the churches in Nigeria are in search of Harcourt Whyte's songs because they are teachable, inspiring and uplift the spirit and gladden the heart of those that listen to it.

I call on Ministers of the gospel to introduce the songs of Harcourt Whyte to their congregations.

**The Rev. Marcus, Onyekaozuru Patricia.**

5. **Teacher Kalu Uka** ----- Teacher Kalu UKA is a staunch member of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (PCN). He is an Accountant by training and so strongly has attained the highest musical position in PCN ----- the Chairman of the PCN's Music Desk. A lover of Harcourt's songs, he teaches his local church choir Harcourt Whyte's songs. His perceptions of Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte follow.

**MY PERCEPTIONS OF THE LATE SIR IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE**  
**(MON, KCW, Posthumously 1905 – 1977)**

Silently came the angel, white-robed angel, fair and carried away our darling friend, father, grandfather, brother, Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, our handsome dynamic 'Vade Mecum'. The angels carried him home to the

song land to dwell in its blissful bowers, and play with the cherubs, who gather its fadeless flowers.

Silently came the angel, and whispered in accents clear...you spent 17 years as a leper, discharged in 1949. You left behind about 300 songs which speak on your behalf daily. I bring you a balm of comfort singer, your sorrowing heart to cheer; God spares your loved ones in answer to earnest prayers, but has taken you to where they may follow their dearly beloved quintessential councillor, cherished mentor, singer plenipotentiary... Ikoli Harcourt Whyte.

We know not the unseen future, 'Tis wisely from us concealed, we know not the way before us. But this has our Lord revealed: Through clouds that may seem the darkest there shines a radiance bright, that makes each tear a jewel to sparkle in God's own light.

Oh, let not our hearts be troubled, but trust our redeemer's love, who kindly now is preparing a mansion for us above; here is not our home but yonder, here is not our rest, but there, where Jesus Christ, our Lord, has beckoned our quintessential, Abonnema – born musician to daily one-on-one rendering of your songs: ! Bụ Nna, Igwe Bụ Ụlọ M, Ndụ Dịrị Ndị Kwere Na Jizọs, Nwatụrụ Chukwu, Bianụ Ndị Enyi M Niile...The church will miss his enduring contributions and his meticulous pyrrhic victory.

Oh, think of blessed reunion, no parting nor pain is there. In 1961, he made a prophetic pronouncement about my ebullient music encyclopaedia, Maazi Rev. Prof. Sir Achinivu Kanu Achinivu... in the words of Ikoli Harcourt,

***“Please, allow my son (Achinivu) to study the music he wants to study. Leave him alone, do not stop him, for who knows, the world may, through him, come to know about me and my music”!***

Today it has come to pass. On Thursday, May 19, 1977, he died (72 years) at FMC, Umuahia. But safe in the arms of Jesus Christ is now where our beloved hero, icon, music leaders of repute rests.

Goodnight.

**TEACHER KALU AWA UKA  
MUSIC DIRECTOR... THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NIGERIA.**

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

**THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY IN IKOLI**  
**HARCOURT WHYTE SONGS**

**THEOLOGY IN SIR IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE'S WORKS:  
HIS "CHUKWU DI" AS A CASE STUDY.**

**BY**

**THE REV. PROF. SIR A. KANU ACHINIVU**

Dr. Ben Johnson, Director of Music of the Southeastern Baptist Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina, begins his article titled: **THEOLOGY IN THE HYMNALS** with this statement:

**The only text-book of theology which the average  
Christian sees is the hymnal.**

How true! Too true! Thanks, again and again to the Sasakawa Health Foundation (SHF), Tokyo, Japan, that one hundred (100) of the late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's sacred choral works have been successfully compiled into two (2) volumes of fifty (50) songs in each volume titled:

**MESSAGES FOR LIFE AND LIVING IN 50 SELECT  
SONGS BY SIR IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE  
(1905-1977; MON, KCW posthumously)**

While the two volumes may not be seen and regarded as "hymnals" in the sense we understand hymnals to mean ----- a book of hymns, a hymn-book used principally by worshipping congregations all over the world such as the Methodist Hymn Book (MHB), the Revised Church Hymnary (RCH), Hymns Ancient and Modern (A&M), the Baptist Hymnal/Hymn Book (BH/BHB). etc, etc, ---- Harcourt Whyte's songs were not really conceived for congregational use, being longer or shorter than the regular hymns, more difficult to execute in terms of their complex and driving rhythms in particular and being altogether more differently conceived than the regular, familiar or popular hymns.

The Rev. Dr. Thomas Frank Davey in his Foreword to the first edition of Sir Harcourt Whyte's **ABỤ EKELE NA OTUTO (Songs of Thanksgiving and Praise)**, clearly states as follows:

**Mr. Harcourt Whyte is well-known in Eastern  
Nigeria as a Composer of music for Church choirs**

The title page of the first edition is **ABỤ EKELE NA OTUTO NKE NDI CHOIR IJI IFE CHINEKE** (Songs of Thanksgiving and Praise for Choirs in the Worship of God). This book title makes it even more specific or definite that the songs in the volume are meant for the use of choirs in worship, for although choirs rehearse or practise the songs they perform in worship, congregations hardly rehearse even the hymns for worship or they do so not in the sense that choirs seriously and regularly do.

It is not accidental that the two volumes of one hundred of Harcourt's 300-odd songs are called **MESSAGES.....**, for Harcourt believed very strongly that he had "messages" in his songs for the world to imbibe. Is it any

wonder that he objected furiously to the use of any form of accompaniment, including the well-known familiar traditional African hand-clapping, in the rendition or performance of his songs? No wonder, too, that he frowned on Nnamdi Olebara's recitation of his poems over his songs when he heard Nnamdi Olebara's poem **MGBE M GA-ALỌ ỤWA ỌZỌ M GA-ABỤ UDELE**, Harcourt was reportedly very furious at the idea of reincarnation (Ịlọ ụwa), in which he overtly did not believe, let alone reincarnating as a vulture!. For him, any form of accompaniment in the performance of his songs was a great distraction from listening to and imbibing his "messages." Who knows how he would have reacted today to the various forms of accompaniment to his songs were he still alive. So while there is theology in the old familiar hymns or hymnals, so is there theology in Harcourt Whyte's songs and **MESSAGES...**, as will hopefully, be shown shortly in his **CHUKWU DỊ** (There Is God). Every keen singer or listener to any Harcourt Whyte's song ---- long or short, difficult or easy, will perceive some powerful or spiritual statement(s) in it.

The all too familiar attributes of God ---- His omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience ---- find copious expressions in **CHUKWU DỊ**.

### **BACKGROUND OF THE SONG:**

**CHUKWU DỊ** may be neatly classified as a war song, one function of which, among several others, is to boost the morale of fighting forces. Composed shortly after the onset of the civil war in Nigeria in June, 1967, when Nigeria declared war against Biafra. General Odumegwu Ojukwu, the then Biafran Head of State, Leader and Commander-in-Chief of the People's Army (Biafran Army) had made a pronouncement to the world after assessing the strength and power of his Biafran, the People's Army, that

**NO POWER IN BLACK**  
**AFRICA CAN SUBDUE BIAFRA**

(not quoted verbatim or in full).

Shortly after that pronouncement, **CHUKWU DỊ**, apparently inspired by General Ojukwu's famous declaration, appeared on the scene and began to circulate all over Biafra. It expressed, without any inhibitions, the omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience of God in its four (4) verses and refrain (see score overleaf). All through his lifetime, Harcourt was never equivocal about the existence of God, His omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience. Thus, the title is unequivocal about the existence of God: There is God. He is not in any doubt about this for he begins the first line of each of the four (4) verses with the affirmation statement: **CHUKWU DỊ** (There Is God), and followed by a comma before the next statement of assurance of God's power, presence and His all-knowing nature follows.

**Verse 1**

Chu-kwu dị, ọ dị-gh'i-he,  
Ọ dị-gh'i-he pụ-rụ ì-nọ-chi'a-nyị'ụ-zọ (ma ọ-lì) (God's power),  
Ga-wa, Ọ n'a-nyị'n-so n'e-zi, (God's presence)  
Ọ dị-gh'i-ke n'ụ-wa g'e-me-ri'a-nyị n'e-zi, n'e-zi (ma ọ-lì)

Because there is God and God is these, He is with us, He is near us (His existence and omnipotence) march on, for nothing in this world is capable of barricading or blockading our movement.

**Verse 2**

Chu-kwu dị, ọ dị-gh'i-he,

Ọ dị-gh'i-he g'a-hịa n-kwa Ya n'u-wa (ma ọ-li)

Ma-ta na'n-kwa Ya bụ n'e-zi,

Ọ dị-gh'i-ke n'ụ-wa g'e-me-hịa ya

N'e-zi, n'e-zi (ma ọ-li).

Because there is God and God is there, there is no power in the world that is capable of causing His promises which are true and perfect, to fail.

In verses 1 and 2, Harcourt refers to things as incapable of barricading our way or causing God's true promises to fail.

### **Verse 3**

In verse 3, he turns to man as agents while in verse 4, he makes reference to thing or material human agents.

Chu-kwu dị, ọ dị-gh'o-nye,

Ọ dị-gh'o-nye n'a-ma'm-gb'Ọ n'a-lụ'ọ-lụ Ya (ma ọ-li)

'Gbe Chu-kwu n'e-bu-t'ụ-zọ

**Ọ dị-gh'o-nye n'ụ-wa g'e-me-s'i-ke n'e-zi, n'e-zi (ma ọ-li)**

There is God and because He is, there is nobody who determines when He performs His miracles. And when He leads the way nobody in the world can confront His people.

### **Verse 4**

Chu-kwu dị, a-tụ-l'e-gwu,

Ọ dị-gh'o-nye pụ-rụ i-gbo-chi'm-ma Ya (ma ọ-li)

Gu-zo, Ọ nọ kwa'n-so n'e-zi,

**Ọ dị-gh'i-ke n'ụ-wa g'e-me-ri'a-nyị n'e-zi, n'e-zi (ma ọ-li)**

This final verse of the song expresses God's omnipotence and omnipresence. Nobody is capable of stopping His sword and because He



is near, and with us, we must stand firm and be strong as no power on earth is capable of subduing our people.

While General Ojukwu boasted of the power of his army on earth, in Africa, Harcourt's boast is of Almighty God's power in heaven and on earth.

In the Refrain, Harcourt poses two (2) questions in the two upper voices (Soprano and Alto) and answers them almost immediately in the two (2) lower, male voices (Tenor and Bass)

### **The first question**

**Ọ d'i-ke dị n'ụ-wa (m'ọ-bụ n'i-gwe)**

**'Ke g'e-me ka u-che'n-ke Chi-ne-ke'N-na bụ-rụ i-h'e-fu?**

**(Is there any power on earth (or in heaven) that is capable of foiling the plans or will of God?)**

### **The Second question**

**Ma-ta kwa m'ọ-d'i-ke dị n'ụ-wa (m'ọ-bụ n'i-gwe) 'Ke g'e-me ka**

**Ọ-nụ'n-ke Chi-ne-ke nye-re ghọ-gha-rị'kw'a-kwa (ma ọ-lị)?**

**(Find out/ascertain whether there is any power on earth (or in heaven) that is capable of turning able to change the joy God has given His children into weeping?)**

**The answer to both questions, delivered immediately by Tenor and Bass, is:**

**Ik'a-dị-ghi n'ụ-wa ma n'i-gwe**

**(There is no such power on earth and in heaven).**

This is to say that God's power is supreme. Harcourt emphasizes this omnipotence of God in the second half of the Refrain:

**Chu-kwu dī, ọ dī-gh'i-he,**

**Ọ dī-gh'i-he pụ-rụ ị-ka-gb'u-che Chu-kwu (ma ọ-li)**

**Kwe-re kwa n'ọ dī-gh'o-nye,**

**Ọ dī-gh'o-nye n'ụ-wa g'e-me-gbu'a-nyị n'e-zi, n'e-zi (ma ọ-li)**

(There is God, there is nothing, there is nothing at all that can foil the will of God. And believe it that there is nobody indeed/in truth who will be able to oppress us.

In Chukwu Dī, Harcourt reminds and enjoins us to accept that there is God because He is omnipotent, omnipresence and omniscient and, in the words of the Prophet Isaiah, in Isaiah 40:31, that

**They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary and they shall walk and not faint.**

**A. Kanu Achinivu,**

**Ambassador of Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's music.**

**THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY IN IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE  
SONGS BY THE VERY REV. NNAMDI N. NSUDE**

## Introduction

Ikoli Harcourt Whyte was well-known in Eastern Nigeria as a composer of music for church choirs. This understanding placed him in line with other free-lance composers in various Churches but Harcourt Whyte is different from the others, in the sense that his songs always came out of his experiences which were based on his personal spiritual discoveries of God. Those discoveries are themselves based on his relationship with God, his maker, His Son Jesus Christ who died on the cross and his walking and living experience through the Holy Spirit. Harcourt Whyte had a deep faith in God as a result of some life threatening challenges he had.

A. Kanu Achinivu agreed that through lots of various experiences of life, Harcourt demonstrated ability in disability in the face of the loss of his parents at an early age, and his contraction of the deadly and dreadful disease of leprosy at the age of fourteen (years), one can only agree that it was only his ardent faith in the living God that helped him to do all that he did. Harcourt fervently believed that God endowed and called him to musically serve him. Achinivu in his brief biography of Ikoli Harcourt Whyte stated that as a result of his search for a cure for leprosy at the leprosy Hospital Uzuakoli, "Harcourt met God and God met him face to face. From there his prolificacy in composing music burst, blossomed and spread like wild fire throughout Nigeria and beyond". It is a fact that an encounter with God changes one's pattern of thinking and subsequently changes his behaviour and attitude.

John Wesley, the Father of Methodism, had his "heart strangely warmed" on May 24<sup>th</sup> 1738 as he was listening to a reading of Martin Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans at Alders Gate Street. His thought of

God, his understanding and purpose of life changed. It was so with Ikoli Harcourt Whyte when “He met God and God met him”. His understanding of God and his relationship with Him improved and he had a better relationship with people as a result of his faith in God. His purpose of life also changed.

### **The Importance of Music in Worship**

God created man in His own image and likeness (Gen. 1:26). The essence of the creation of man is that man will have dominion over all that God created on earth. Man then is to have fellowship with God. This fellowship with God will involve man worshipping and giving honour and glory to God. The worship of God is very paramount in Man-God relationship. Worship implies giving God the reverence and recognition He deserves because He created all things.

Man is to worship God both in public and in private. Public worship is that which is done together with other like-minds in open places of worship appointed by people. Public worship is also said to be the visible aspect of Christianity, while private worship may mean a personal act done in private, individually at, place of work or other places one may find oneself.

Worship could be performed with the offering of gifts and observance of certain ceremonies which the people have agreed to perform as God approved. Music is a very important part of a worship act. Music is usually used to glorify or praise God and is commonly done using singing of hymns and gospel songs. Roberta M. Chambey observed that “a hymn is an expression of praise, adoration, and thanksgiving to God. Hymns are centered on God and should be addressed to Him or sung about Him with a sense of dignity and reverence”.

Hymns and songs in worship are very important. They are designed to draw people close to God. Some of the writers of hymns and songs such as, Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, wrote their songs and hymns to express appreciation and thanks to God for what He did or is doing in their lives.

### **The Concept of Spirituality and Theology**

In considering the concepts of spirituality and theology, one's personal relationship with God is very important and necessary in whatever one does. The spirit of God usually manifests and controls one's thought and understanding of life issues.

Ugwa J. A. noted "that true Christian spirituality is based upon the extent to which a born again believer allows the Holy Spirit to lead and control his or her life". Furthermore, Ugwa J. A. is of the view "that Christian spirituality involves a choice we make to know and grow in our daily relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ by submitting to the mind of the Holy Spirit in our lives".

One who lives out his belief in God and allows his thought to be controlled by his personal belief is said to have true spirituality. One of the major failures of Christians today is that some believers of the Christian faith do not show their beliefs in their ways of life, consequently their spirituality is so much in doubt and so they have no influence in the lives of others.

Ugwa J. A, defines Christian theology as "the study of Christian beliefs and practices. Such study concentrates primarily upon the texts of the Old Testament and the New Testament as well as on Christian tradition". Theology is believed to be the study of God which depends on what God has revealed to the people through scripture, tradition and studies. It

should be noted that a good understanding of God which depends on deep study of the scriptures and good participation in various Christian activities in the Church usually assist one in developing good theology and spirituality.

At the age of fourteen (14) young Harcourt was found to have contracted the most dreaded disease, leprosy. Harcourt went to Uzuakoli where the Methodist Missionary Society with the Government of then Eastern Nigeria had established the Leprosy Hospital in 1932. There Harcourt was healed both physically and spiritually. He established a personal relationship with God his Creator and Maker. He then had a deeper knowledge and understanding of God and allowed the Holy Spirit of God to inspire and use him in composing spiritual songs and hymns which he taught to nearby churches and widows.

Harcourt understood that he received freely from God and so he did not use the gifts and talents which God gave him to make money. According to Achinivu, Harcourt was well-known, especially in the Igbo area of Nigeria, in Methodist Church circles throughout the world, and in England as a composer of excellent and spirit-filled Church music, conductor and choir trainer. This is only what one can do only when one has fully and wildly yielded to God and allowed the Holy Spirit to live and work in and through him.

### **Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's Songs**

One cannot know the number of songs Harcourt wrote. However, he himself estimates the number to be about 300. Of these, The Nigeria Civil war took a toll on them. Harcourt wrote songs covering various aspects of human life and experience. The sufferings that he went through also

influenced him in the writing of these songs. Being a spirit-filled child of God he was able to write songs that encourage, uplift people and then draw them closer to God. Going through some of the songs written by Harcourt, one will observe that he could be described as a theologian who was at peace with God and who had allowed God to touch him in all that he did.

It will interest one to understand that Harcourt's songs were primarily for thanksgiving and praise of God. In thanking God, he expressed appreciation for sending His Son Jesus Christ to die for the sins of mankind and thus redeeming mankind and establishing relationship and fellowship with them. This we can see in Harcourt's song; **OGUM! ODI EGWU** (*Messages... Vol.2 song no 44*). A very deep study of this song shows that the writer understands God as a caring Father who redeemed man from the slavery of Satan through His loving kindness and grace. In this song, Harcourt truly taught about the benefits of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and His second coming. Some of the songs of Harcourt will teach one the rudiments and tenets of the Christian faith.

Harcourt believed in the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit. One cannot live and achieve success in life without the leading and direction of the Holy Spirit. The song **BIA MUỌ NKE SI N'EL'IGWE** (*Messages ... Vol. 2, Song No 48*) is another master piece by Harcourt concerning the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit which God poured on His people on the day of Pentecost. Man's heart is full of darkness and can only be illuminated by the Holy Spirit. Fears and death can only be overcome by one who has allowed the Spirit of God to enter and dwell in him. As one sings and listens to Harcourt's songs, one appreciates that the Christian life can only be lived victorious through the help and leading of the Holy Spirit.

Another issue that is so prominent in this Harcourt's song **BIA MUỌ NKE SI N'EL'IGWE** (*Messages ... Vol. 2, Song No 48*) is the belief in the Holy Trinity. In this song Harcourt calls on the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit to come and visit His people and pour His power into the hearts of His children.

One song that shows the true spirituality of Ikoli Harcourt Whyte is **NDỤ DỊRỊ NDỊ NIILE KWERE NA JISỌS** (*Messages....Vol. 1 Song No. 31*). Here, Harcourt shows that life can only be gotten through faith in Jesus. Here, he shows that man's own righteousness, knowledge, wisdom and all the struggles of mankind are nothing but vanity. Notwithstanding, man's achievements in life one can only find true happiness in life through absolute faith and confidence in God and the finished work of Christ on Calvary. Because he had "met God and God met him", he developed a deep relationship and fellowship with God. He was also a man of prayer as one may observe in many of his songs. Prayer is one of the major ways of deepening one's relationship with God. Through prayer, man can move closer to God and then cause God to effect changes in the life of men here on earth.

One outstanding song in prayer is called **KPEE EKPERE** (*Messages ... Vol. 1 Song No 1*). In this song, Harcourt encouraged everyone to pray at all times. One of the reasons people should pray is that prayer is both staff and messenger. Through prayer we can overcome the enemy, fight and defeat Satan. Prayer also gives courage and consolation and one who prays is filled with comfort. Harcourt believed that one should always pray in the midst of problems, troubles, crisis and confusion. One should make prayer his companion. One other important thing we will find in this song



is that prayer is always powerful and can do everything. Therefore, we need to request God to teach us how to pray. This will make this world be like heaven and with its power we will fight and defeat Satan.

Another major discovery one can make in the songs of Harcourt is the comforting words of God to every one of his children passing through difficult situations. Harcourt sees God in every situation of life especially during the most difficult times. The song **DERE JII** (*Messages Vol. 1 Song No 6 Be still*), will always bring comfort and consolation to one who finds himself in difficult situations. The song will always speak to one whose heart is in great trouble and one whose heart is unspeakably burdened. Even when one thinks there is no escape from his rough situations and troubles then that one hears God and directing him to be still. Complete trust and confidence in God is what the writer of this song in wants all God's children to have. He believes that even when death seems to be the issue and when one has already fallen it is then that God is around be around to say rise my son. Harcourt calls on all to walk with God and remember that God is with one.

### **Conclusion**

While Ikoli Harcourt Whyte was in Uzuakoli receiving treatment for the disease that attacked him, he had some spiritual encounters with God which led him to an inward discovery of himself. He understood that God had called him to serve Him. This discovery of himself made him place God above everything else. Materialism and wealth acquisition were never seen in the life of Harcourt. Achinivu wrote that "he died, like the Austrian Mozart, a pauper and was buried beside the chapel of Hope at the Leprosy Settlement. But the many beautiful, soul-inspiring and

titillating compositions he left behind are Nigeria's great and eloquent gift to the world of music, Christendom and the global community at large". One would tend to believe and accept that Harcourt died an extremely wealthy composer. Through his many rich spiritual songs many people have come to find God, have their souls revived and have their lives transformed and changed for good.

Ikoli Harcourt Whyte understood the spiritual saying in Matthew 10:8-9 ..... "Freely you have received, freely give". He really lived the life of Christ which is one of sacrifice. Christ laid down His life for the people He loved. Jesus in Matthew 16:24, Said "if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me". During the time that Jesus lived, carrying the cross meant dying by crucifixion. It meant a call to self-denial and self-sacrifice. It also meant willingness to die in order to follow Jesus. It is absolute surrender to God. Harcourt surrendered his life to God during his sojourn on earth. He believed that his reward was eternal life. Nothing in this world can be compared to the reward of eternal life.

The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:9 states "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him (KJV), the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him, are the motive, power that moved Harcourt not only to compose these songs but also to travel from place to place to teaching them to various choirs and Choirmasters until his death in 1977. He believed that God will reward him and give him the crown of righteousness which he has prepared for those who love him. (2 Timothy 4:8). One can only make great impacts on others if one has had life-transforming encounter with God, through the finished work of Christ on

the cross. So, Ikoli Harcourt Whyte was marvelously rich in Christ and did not die a pauper.

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## **THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY IN SIR IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE’S SONGS**

**BY THE REV. JOHN UGA**

The word “Theology” is the study of God which emanates from the concept of God of a people. This concept covers His personality, character and attributes. It also can go beyond these to the study of His operations in relation to His creation and creatures.

Simply put, it is the world view of a person or group about God. God, who is infinite, is set in the eyes of a group as finite or infinite. In some religions He is pictured as:

- a. Angry with the sinner.
- b. Revengeful of any act of sin, sin in itself being what the “theologizer” pictures in his mind and in his act.
- c. Rewarding of any act of good done by the individual, good being what the “theologizer” pictures as acceptable to both the theologizer’s religion and by God.

In the Christian concept of God, God must be seen as depicted by the Bible in the Old Testament and New Testaments.

The Christian concept of God, therefore, should see God as He is in both Testaments. The theology of Christianity should not see God simply as the Old Testament God who is still performing acts as seen in the Old Testament. For example: Accepting physical or literal sacrifices of animals, physical purifications of individuals, etc but rather as God of the New Testament who is defined in the light of the New Testament which now reveals what was in the mind of the God of the Old Testament. We can now say that God is the God of the Old Testament revealed in the New Testament, whereas He is the God of the New Testament concealed in the Old Testament. The Christian Theology of God in the New Testament covers a variety of the characters and attributes of God like:

1. God is Love,
2. God is Just,
3. God is Patient,
4. God is Gracious,
5. God is Longsuffering,

6. God is Pure,
7. God is Righteous,
8. God is Honest,
9. God is True,
10. God is All-Powerful (Omnipotent),
11. God is All-Knowing (Omniscient),
12. God is Everywhere (Omnipresent),
13. God is Healer

In the New Testament, the cardinal word is GRACE while in the Old Testament the cardinal word is LAW. Since if you offend in one law you are guilty of all, no one in the Old Testament would have been accepted by God if not for His Grace given out in a measure. The Law was a schoolmaster and could not relieve the conscience of sin.

GRACE, in the New Testament, emphasizes salvation, justification and a clear conscience. Grace, which is an unmerited favour, goes to work to save and uphold the recipient, Ephesians 2:8-9 says: "By Grace are ye saved, that not of yourselves, not of works lest any man should boast of his ability". The concept of religion in the New Testament is founded on this one Truth, hence John 3: 16 says: "For God so loved the world that He GAVE His only begotten Son that whosoever BELIEVETH in Him should not perish but have everlasting life". The emphases here are GAVE and BELIEVETH. No works, no struggle. However, verse 10 of Ephesians Chapter 2 tells us of works which we are to work in because we are God's workmanship. We, therefore, work not to be saved but because we have been saved.

The one who rejects salvation by GRACE is doomed to death, hence the act of God triggered by Grace connotes Longsuffering of God, waiting for the sinner to RECEIVE His free gift.

## **SPIRITUALITY**

Spirituality is the ambient feeling that surrounds a thing or a person. It is, therefore, a spiritual atmosphere that can be felt but is not tangible. This Spirituality, though intangible, is still noticeable, felt and is not ephemeral. It is elevating to the soul of the one who is immersed in it. It exerts a sweet, satisfactory and responsible feeling of wellbeing in spite of all odds. The soul is thereby adjured to this atmosphere with which it is in consonance.

Having tried to define Theology and Spirituality, we now go further to dissect the Theology and Spirituality in Harcourt Whyte's songs against these backgrounds. The Songs of Harcourt, when sung and listened to attentively, evoke all that is described in Theology and Spirituality. When sung as written in four-part harmony, the songs elevate the soul and inspire action.

The world view (Theology) of Harcourt's songs brings home to the individual listener a healthy relationship between a Father and a son and cherishes those undying principles which make the soul revel in God's grace.

A famous musician had said that a people are like the songs they listen to. That's why Harcourt Whyte's songs foster spirituality with its timelessness.

**“Amara Gi Zuru Oke”** (“Your Grace is Sufficient”) (yet unpublished in **MESSAGES....**) is a Harcourt's song which captures the effect of Grace in both one's life and in the world. The worship of God, which emanates from this Grace, increases Peace in Heaven and Earth and the inhabitants of the Earth will, with reverence, fall before His Holy presence.

Another Harcourt's song that brings the believer close to God who answers prayers is **“Onye Na-arioni Na-ariota”** (ABU EKELE NA OTUTO Vol. 1 No. 45) (not yet published in **MESSAGES...**) (“He Who Asks Receives”). Harcourt Whyte starts this 6-verse song with the call to seek, ask and knock and the door will open. The chorus highlights that he who seeks, asks, knocks will receive a positive response. In the verses that follow, he enumerates the various fields of endeavour in which we must cause God to bear upon our success while in the last two verses we are reminded that it is the promise of our Lord Jesus that he who asks receives and with an emphasis that seems to ignore the mood, he then enforces his plea to ask either in laughter or weeping, making no excuses for either of the moods and urging the “prayer” to show forth faith by believing that he would get what he asks for. With those two verses the song brings the “asker” to a crescendo that is as irresistible as the Giver is credible.

**“Ọlọ Nzọpụta Nke Si N'Obe”** (not yet published in **MESSAGES....**) is a song that captures the beauty and very essence of the Faith which is the foundation of Harcourt Whyte, and to which his compositions are espoused. The song starts with a plea for God to hear his voice and cry, stating that he has no place where his soul could rest if not in Him. The chorus emphasizes that he has no excuse or saving verdict if not in the work of salvation from the CROSS.

From the foregoing, it is important to note that the poem or prose – from an individual in the 1970s Writers’ Workshop, Enugu – with which some of Harcourt Whyte’s songs were interlaced ----- could not be wholesome.

**“Mgbe M Ga-abija Ozo M Ga-abu Udele”** smacks of reincarnation which is a far cry from the theology of Harcourt Whyte. It’s important we emphasize this here. I personally asked the late Sir Godwin Harcourt, first son of the also late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, about this and he said that his father, Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, did not welcome it, in fact he said that he, Harcourt, frowned at it.

I think that perhaps because of the labour put into it, and the cost of production then, the sleeping dog was allowed to lie. I believe that the album was not further reproduced.

These songs of Harcourt have gained wide audiences as they are sung across the board of religious denominations, languages and tribes and even among the Roman Catholics. This goes a long way to show how effective and universal the truth contained in these songs is. May they be sung regularly in our churches and other gatherings as they hold an enormous amount of revitalizing virtue and inspiration to the singer, as well as the listener.

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**THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY IN SIR IKOLI**  
**HARCOURT WHYTE’S SONGS:**  
**THE CASE OF “OKWUKWE GA EMERI” AND “OGE NKE NDU”**  
**BY**  
**ELDER OKOROJI OKWARA ONOH**

**BACKGROUND**

To understand art, in this case a piece of music, it is important to appreciate the person or brain behind it or the composer of the music. A study of Ikoli Harcourt Whyte’s spiritual odyssey will be helpful in understanding his music. Late Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte (1905-1977), popularly known as Harcourt Whyte, was a Nigerian music composer of repute best remembered for his classic hymn “**Atula Egwu**”. He was born at Abonnema, Rivers State, Nigeria in 1905 from the Kalabari kingdom whose main occupation was fishing and trading. He was diagnosed with leprosy in 1919 (at fourteen years of age) after the symptoms were noticed about a year earlier. Naturally, he was sent to General Hospital, Port Harcourt for treatment in 1920. While there, he honed his talent in music and deepened his vocals as he formed a vocalist band with forty other lepers. Twelve years later, precisely in 1932, Harcourt Whyte was transferred to Leprosy hospital (popularly called leper colony), Uzuakoli, Abia State, where he met Rev. Dr. Thomas Frank Davey, also a musician. With like attracting like, Dr. Davey greatly encouraged Harcourt Whyte to develop his musical talents. By God’s special grace and mercy with the help of modern orthodox medicine, Harcourt Whyte was cured of leprosy and declared ‘clean’ by Rev. Dr. Thomas Frank Davey and his medical team by 1949. This was a whopping 30 years of ill health which in real

terms spanned most of his youthful life. The treatment of lepers as social outcasts must have had its toll on the young mind of Harcourt Whyte, but he stayed the course buoyed by his faith in God. Harcourt Whyte's zeal for the Lord did not wane with his cure as he continued his sacred music compositions and Wesleyan doctrinal philosophy. He was said to have composed more than six hundred (600) hymns in Igbo language. Harcourt Whyte died in 1977 by car accident.

## **DEFINITIONS**

We shall attempt the definition of some key words involved in this topic.

**THEOLOGY:** is ordinarily defined as the study of God; that is the Greek word "theos" (God) and "logia" (study). The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (online) defines theology as the study of religious faith, practice, and experience, especially the study of God and of God's relation to the world. Theology can also be described as thinking about God.

**SPIRITUALITY:** Dr. Maya Spencer (2012) of the royal college of psychiatrists generally defines spirituality as involving the recognition of a feeling or sense or belief that there is something greater than myself, something more to being human than sensory experience, and that the greater whole of which we are part is cosmic or divine in nature. Oxford Learners Dictionary defines spirituality as the quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things.

While these two definitions give us some clues to the meaning of spirituality as a phenomenon of something beyond human comprehension, I submit that biblical spirituality best describes the right context of our discussion on the works of Harcourt Whyte. Andrews University, a

Seventh Day Adventist Theological Seminary, issued a statement on Biblical Spirituality where it is defined as

**“The process of the divine restoration and healing of the broken relation between the Triune God and humanity. As such, biblical spirituality is the response of a repentant heart and mind to the loving heart and mind of God (1 Cor. 2:12-13; Rom. 8:14). Initiated by God, biblical spirituality is a conscious walk with God in which we enjoy His presence and live in dependence upon Him” (pg.1-2).**

This is a profound definition of biblical spirituality which should help the Christian to avoid the dangerous current definition of spirituality in today’s culture being seen as a generic, all-inclusive word for sensory, emotional, physical, intellectual, or relational experiences intended to build a positive relationship with a nebulous “higher power” either inside or outside of the self.

Therefore, in this study, we shall attempt to review and understand the theology and spirituality of Harcourt Whyte’s songs through the lyrics of his many Igbo composition of hymns and songs. Generally, the lyrics of songs are essentially poems written by composers to document happenings in society, explain relationships between individuals or groups, remember significant events, correct societal ills, praise singing of individuals for significant accomplishments, to teach morals and worship God with praise for his goodness. The songs of Harcourt Whyte are not any different as there are primarily focused on God’s word and his personal revelation of his dealings with God.

**GENERIC REVIEW OF ‘A TULA EGWU’ – HARCOURT WHYTE’S  
SIGNATURE SONG**

Starting with his signature song “**A Tula Egwu**”, which, interpreted in English, means “Fear not or Do not Fear”, the phrase ‘do not fear’ or its equivalent, according to some Bible scholars, appears about 365 times in the Bible making it a reassuring word to believers who are afraid of so many things in their lives. It is like taking a single dose of a drug daily. The subject of fear is very critical in life, it can either affect somebody positively or negatively. There is a healthy fear that deals with reverence for God and natural respect for men, especially those who are elderly. From the scriptures, we read about God urging Joshua not to fear as he prepared him for the several battles, he was to fight in leading the children of Israel to the promised land. See Joshua 1:6-9. The Lord twice instructed Joshua to “be strong and of a good courage” and “be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest”. The scriptures in 2 Tim. 1:7 reminds believers that “...God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind”. Hence, Harcourt Whyte in ‘**A Tula Egwu**’ lyrics reminds men not to be afraid in whatever circumstances they find themselves. Fear is a spirit that the believer must replace with the spirit of boldness and a sound mind. Fear cripples the mind, but faith brings hope.

**THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY IN “OKWUKWE GA EMERI”  
(FAITH SHALL OVERCOME)**

This song exposes the deep spiritual insight of scriptures by Harcourt Whyte. This composer must have immersed himself into the reading, studying and meditation on the word of God. Given the devastating nature of leprosy that Harcourt Whyte and others suffered, it is not surprising that he would also seek to encourage himself and his hearers with words of faith through the heroic and miraculous accomplishments of Abraham, Elijah and three Hebrew boys in Babylon.

Drawing inspiration from these three Bible characters, Harcourt Whyte confidently states that faith shall overcome in truth and indeed. In the three-stanza song, **“Okwukwe G’emeri N’ezi, Okwukwe G’emeri”** (Faith shall overcome; indeed, faith shall overcome) appears in the first two lines and another two lines within each stanza which demonstrates the dominant theme of overcoming faith in the composer. This is in line with 1 John 5:4, “for whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith”. Faith is very crucial in man’s relationship with God for “...without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). Our God is a God of faith as he exemplified it in the creation story (Genesis 1) where He spoke into being his creation in a world that was “...without form and void”. Our father, Abraham, followed in the same faith trajectory as he believed God, against all odds, that the promise of Isaac’s birth will be fulfilled which was counted unto him for righteousness (Rom. 4:4,22). Abraham, against hope believed in hope that he might become the father of many nations (Rom. 4:18). Abraham was not weak in faith, did not stagger at the promise of God through unbelief but was fully persuaded that God will keep to his promise (Rom. 4:19-22). In agreeing to offer Isaac,

his only son, as a burnt offering, Abraham significantly displayed his unflinching faith in God (Gen. 22:1-19).

Harcourt Whyte, the composer, thus invites his listener to acquire this faith of God by all means (wer'ike n'obi nat'okwukwe Chineke). No man dealing with God can succeed without faith because that is the lingua franca of heaven. Whether it is for salvation, healings, miracles, preaching and survival, faith is vital and inevitable. Little wonder that Harcourt Whyte in the music refrain (chorus) of '**Okwukwe Ga Emeri**', encourages us to exercise faith when things are well with us or when they are bad with us: "**Ọ dịrị gi nma mata n'okwukwe g'emerị; Ọ dịrị gi njo kwere n'okwukwe g'emerị**". These lyrics are also uplifting to a weary soul suffering untold hardship and deprivation in even in Nigeria of today. Thankfully, the Bible has prescribed for us how to acquire this God-kind of faith. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17). Therefore, to have faith, increase in faith and sustain our faith, it can only be by hearing (reading, studying, meditating, and applying) the word of God. If anyone lacks faith, the reason may not be far-fetched for it can only be located in our lack of understanding the word of God.

In stanza #3, Harcourt Whyte takes us through the heroics of the three exiled Hebrew children-Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego-who defied the order of King Nebuchadnezzar to bow to his man-made image against the laws of the living God (Dan. 3:1-29):" N'okwukwe ka Abednego, Shadrak, Meshak, meriri ok'okui nu?". They were thrown into a furnace of fire but were not consumed because of the presence of the fourth man. This was divine intervention at its best. I observe a strong nexus between the faith of Harcourt Whyte and his healing of leprosy- an unenviable badge he carried for more than thirty youthful years of his life. With the

three illustrations of faith actions shown in this music piece, the writer/composer proved indeed that faith shall overcome even today. Harcourt Whyte overcame by faith, and you too can overcome. Let us all be encouraged in our struggle through life that with faith we shall surmount every obstacle no matter how long it lasts.

### THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY IN “OGE NKE NDU” (PERIOD OF A LIFE)

This piece of music “**Oge nke Ndu**” sounds like a funeral dirge (a lament for the dead; a mournful song) and is captured under Harcourt Whyte’s group of songs meant for funerals/burials (olili ozu). “*Life is a mystery that’s only known to God; Known to Jesus the only son of God; Life is filled with wonders that no one can explain; Life is a mystery to me*”, so goes the lyrics of a popular Nigerian gospel musician, Ody Elosiebo in the 70’s. It is a song that captures life as a mystery, a phenomenon too great for man’s comprehensive understanding. The philosophy behind the lyrics of Harcourt Whyte’s “**Oge nke Ndu**”, which obviously predated Ody’s gospel lyrics, is mirrored in the latter’s song. I believe that many people share in the same sentiment about death as expressed in these two songs. The Bible says that life is a vapour, a mist that vanishes away (James 4:13-17). Job’s wife, observing the terrible suffering the husband was going through, advised him to curse God and die (Job 2:9). The transient nature of life also caught the attention of William Shakespeare in his epic tragedy book, Macbeth. When lady Macbeth killed herself, the husband, Macbeth lamented, “***life is but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing.***” (Act 5 Scene 5 Lines 16-27). Macbeth held a pessimistic view of life

following the tragic death of his wife, Lady Macbeth, and the impending march of his enemies against him. He saw no purpose or meaning in life in his reference to life as a walking shadow. But we are no different as some of us would normally curse the day we were born at the slightest experience of inconvenience in life.

In Harcourt Whyte's "**Oge Nke Ndụ**", he repeatedly reiterates that the period of our life on earth is painful compared to the fullness of joy experienced in heaven. This conviction he constantly shared in specific lines within each of the four stanzas thus: "**Oge Nke Ndụ Nk'ụwa N'afufu N'ezie, M'oge Nke Ndụ Nk'igwe Bụ Ọnụ**". Harcourt Whyte goes further in stanza #1 to stress the fact that money, wealth, and beautiful clothes do not remove the pains of life on earth and cannot be compared with the joys of heaven: "ego na uru di ya, ya na uw'oyiyi mma".

In stanza #2, Harcourt Whyte reminds his listeners that the joys of earthly life are fleeting and despite the existence of laughter and dancing, compared to the permanence of the heavenly joy: "**Ọnụ n'ile nk'ụwa n'agafe n'ezie; M'ọnụ nke ndụ nk'igwe n'adi adi; Ịchi ọchi nk'ụwa n'adi ya na ụzụ nk'itegwu.**"

In stanza #3, we are told that the struggles of this life are increasing but that the peace of heaven is complete even in the face of the oppression of men by their rulers: "**Mgba n'ogụ nk'ụwa nka n'abuba n'ezie; M'udo nke di n'igwe zur'oke**", an experience we have in Nigeria today.

In stanza #4, the composer posits that it is, therefore, futile to put one's trust in earthly things which are temporary and fleeting: "**Gị-tụ kwa-sị obi**



**n'ihe nk'uwa obu nzuzu"**. Harcourt Whyte rather enjoins us to invest in heavenly things as they are eternal in nature.

The theology of life and death is brought to full glare in this beautiful dirge of a song. Life is sweet but only if lived in Christ Jesus because of the hope of heaven and eternal life. If everything we have acquired will pass away one day on earth, why place any premium on it? Does not placing premium then mean that we should be pessimistic about life and do nothing because earthly things will perish with the using? No, rather we should enjoy the good things God has given to us but in such a way that enables us not to lose focus on eternity with Christ. In Ephesians 5:15-17, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise but understanding what the will of the Lord is". While man is alive, he has opportunity to take stock of his life and make amends where necessary. When songs like this are sung in funerals, it carries a heavy message of relevance to the living who are witnessing the burial that life is painful, and they should make peace with God. The Bible says in Deut. 8:18, "...it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth...". Hence, being rich on earth is not a sin (although it comes with diverse temptations) as long as it is genuine and used to serve God and humanity with eternity and God being the real focus. 1 Timothy 6:10 warns, "For the love of money is the root of all of evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows". We must avoid loving wealth and money so much that we displease God.

The real beauty that God desires is that of the inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit which is of great worth in God's sight (1 Peter 3:3-5). We are created in God's image and should look good

outwardly but our inner beauty from the heart is what matters most to God. In John 14:6, Jesus declared that he is the way, the truth and life, and no man comes to the father except through him. Therefore, true life can only be found in Jesus who lived, suffered, and died that we might have everlasting life. Since this is the case, we should “seek those things which are above where Christ is at the right hand of God, set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:1-2). So, while we live here on earth, in the flesh with all its imperfections, we are enjoined to be heavenly minded but never earthly useless. Some believers live in the world today without the consciousness of heaven and the second coming of Christ behaving like the Epicureans – people devoted to sensual enjoyment. See Acts 17:18. Master music pieces like this funeral dirge would serve as a wake-up call to retrace their steps and focus on Jesus who is the author and finisher of their faith. To live a life that is pleasing to God while here on earth requires us to mortify (deaden or kill) our worldly or fleshly inclinations. We are in the world but not of the world. Jesus has given us the courage to know that he has overcome the world (John 16:33) therefore, no matter the temptation, we too are overcomers. Christians must be careful not to become so disillusioned as to slip into depression.

The theology of death is humbling because it is a leveler. It does not know the young, old, poor, rich, handsome, beautiful, gender and so on. When death comes it wreaks havoc speaking in human sense but for the believer it simply opens the chapter into another life with God. All men will go the way of death one day, but the only difference is the lack of precise knowledge of when and how it will happen. The Preacher in Eccl. 3:1-2 says, “there is a season for everything under the sun; a time to be born and a time to die. Hebrews 9:27 cautions, “and it is appointed unto men

once to die, but after this the judgement". We must note that physical death is not where it ends or even spiritual death. There is a second death which is an unending separation from God (Rev. 20:2,11,14). True believers will not be part of this second death.

## **CONCLUSION**

As I conclude this treatise on theology and spirituality of some songs of Harcourt Whyte, it bears re-emphasizing that the composer's spiritual depth, closeness to God and understanding of God's word are showcased in his songs. Let those of us reading and listening to his works, learn from his commitment, devotion, and consecration to God. Like Moses challenged the Israelites, "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore, choose life, that both you and your seed may live" (Deut. 30:19), I urge you this day to choose life. Again, like Joshua, "...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). Is that your resolution as you get inspired by Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's songs?

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## APPENDIX 1

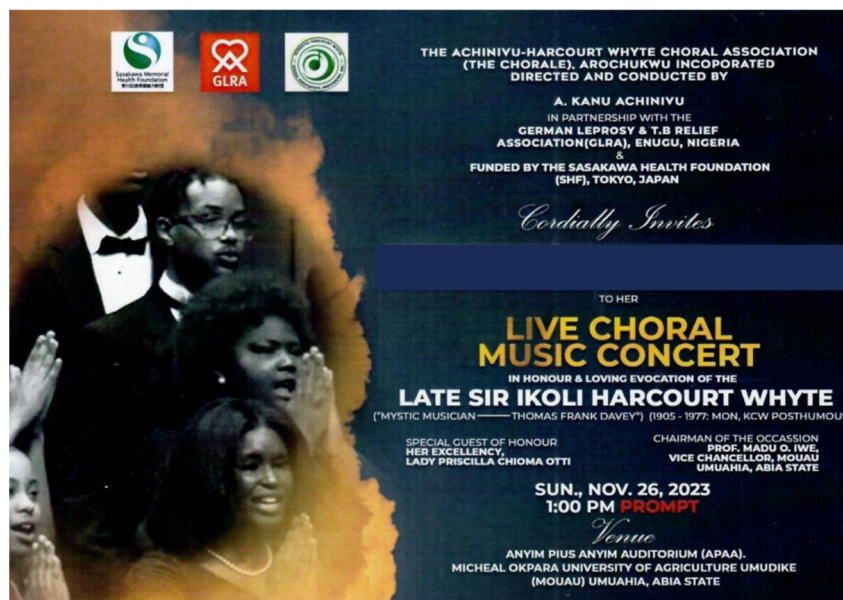
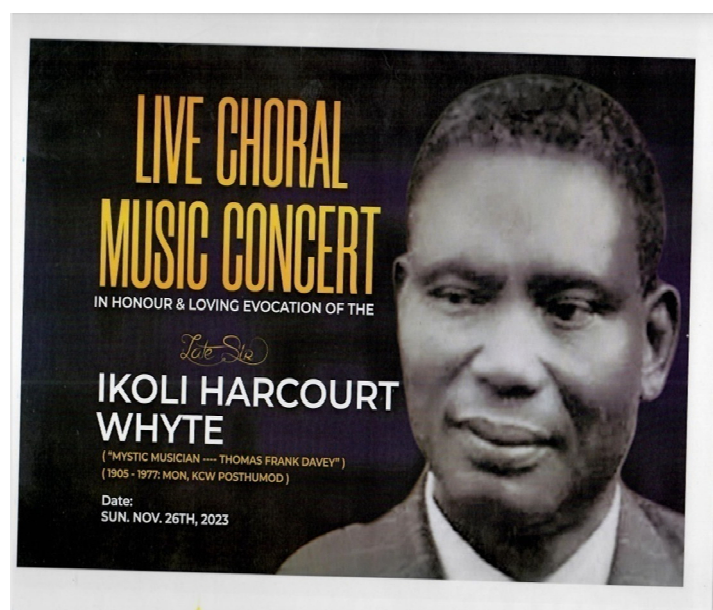
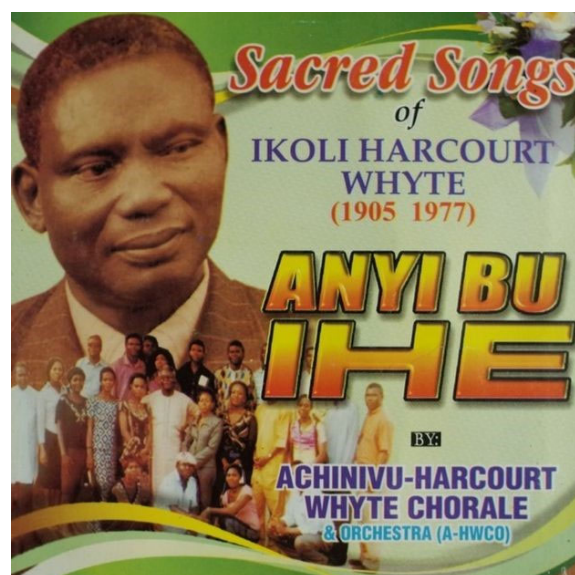
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## APPENDIX 2

### Sample Brochures of Performances of Sir Ikoli Harcourt Whyte's Works



## APPENDIX 3

### IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE'S PHOTOGRAPHS





**IKOLI HARCOURT WHYTE'S PHOTOGRAPHS**



## APPENDIX 4

### List of Accessible Songs Mentioned or Discussed in this Book.

1. Oge Dị N'iru ---- Messages Vol. 1 No. K. 42
2. Kpee Ekpere --- Messages... Vol. 1 No. A. 1
3. Dere Jii ---- Messages...Vol. 1 No. C. 6
4. Oge Nke Ndụ ---- Messages Vol. 1 No. H. 23
5. Okwukwe Ga-emeri - Messages... Vol. 1. No. K. 43
6. Chere Oge Ya --- Messages... Vol. 2. No. B. 16
7. A Tụla Egwu --- Messages... Vol. 2. No. D. 22
8. Chukwu Dị --- Messages... Vol. 2. No. D. 24
9. Ogu M O! Ọ Dị Egwu --- Messages... Vol. 2. No. J. 44
10. Bịa Mmụọ Nsọ Nke Si N'elu Igwe --- Messages...Vol. 2. No. L.48
11. Ndụ Dịrị Ndị Kwere Na Jizọs ---- Messages...Vol. 1. No. I. 31

**APPENDIX 5**  
**Certificate of Recognition From GLRA**

