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Curbing Cultism among Nigerian Youths: The Role of Christian Religion

By

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Introduction

Cultism among the youths has become a popular discussion in the contemporary Nigerian society. It is one of the most important social problems experienced in Nigerian educational set up from the primary level up to the tertiary institutions. Youths have always been in the core of it. This is incredible.

Various organs of the nation like the religious bodies, government, the Parents Teachers Association and other philanthropist groups have offered suggestions and possible solutions to the vice but the problem seems to be escalating on a daily basis. The formation of the seadogs (i.e. the pirates) in 1952, at the then, University College Ibadan, marked the history of cultism among youths in Nigerian tertiary institutions. During this early inception, they (the Devotees) had very good ideas and objectives, which according to Umeh include the following: "Bringing to focus societal ills (injustice, anti people government Politics, mal-administration, doing humanitarian duties, such as donating blood to hospitals, and materials to the needy and establishing relationships with their members for future benefit."¹

Then, only academically sound students could be recruited. But unfortunately and to the contrary, things went sour with the group as disagreement, unhealthy rivalry and personality clash crept in, thus leading to the formation of more cults like the, Buccaneers, Black Arrow, Black Axe, Black Beret, Black Cats, Black Cobra, Eye, Pirate Confraternity (Sea Dogs) and Vikings.² The female equivalents are, Daughters of Jezebel, the Bad Girls, the Amazon

among others.³ This paper therefore represents an analysis of what cultism is, the possible causes and effect on youths and the nation. The roles religious leaders could play are highlighted and conclusion drawn as to the possible solutions to this menace.

Today, they have forgotten their noble ideals and objectives, which had now been replaced with intimidation, maiming of people and wanting destruction of lives and properties. Today, they have been automatically reduced to dreadful instrument for striking terror in the society.

What is Cultism?

There is no universally agreed upon definition of what cultism is, there are only some generally recognizable traits. But Aje asserts: "Cultism refers to the formation of a group of initiates or adherents round the figure of a god, a saint or even a living thing."⁴ He goes further to say that: "Cultism may involve the practice of a particular doctrine within the body of religious belief."⁵

On the other hand, cultism by Umeh is the act of belonging to a secret cult, and carrying out secret cult activities.⁶ According to the Communicative Grammar of the English Dictionary, "a cult is any association that believes in a particular system of religious worship with its special customs and ceremonies." Besides, the Oxford Learners English Dictionary, defines 'secret cult' as the practice that is kept away from the knowledge or view of others.⁷

In his own case, Akinbobola sees cult as organization whose objectives are not made public and whose members are under oath or are bound by obligations or threats with the aim of promoting illegitimate and self interest.⁸ Ipaye also confirmed this view when he says, cults are associations that are kept absolutely hidden from general public, and members who violate their tenets are bound to face a severe consequence.⁹

From the above views, it could be acknowledged that, cultism especially among the youths is a particular system of religious worship kept away from others, and it conjures fear and terror, trouble, insecurity, gang, warfare, armed, attack, destruction and death in

people's minds. Though cult members are usually attached to certain oath, which must be strictly adhered to, so as to assist co-members at all costs, but violators of such oath are severely punished or dealt with. Their leaders may be charismatic in ideas and actions and are highly respected.

With the above description of what cultism is, it could be said that, it is a secret society, as it agrees with section 35(4) of the 1979 Constitution, which states that a secret society is a society or association not being solely cultural or religious body that uses secret signs, oaths, rite or symbols.¹⁰ It goes further to say that:

- a) Its meetings or other activities are held in secret and
- b) Its members are under oath, obligation or other threat to promote the interest of its members or to aid one another under all circumstances without due regard to merit, fair play or justice to the detriment of the legitimate expectation of those who are not members.¹¹

However, cultism among our youths today seems to be thriving because the enforcement of law and order appeared to have broken down. The nation is experiencing a chain of serious competing social problems of which cultism is one. The educational system in the country is fatally threatened by cult activities.

The Impact of Cultism on Youths in Nigeria

The effect of cultism on youths in this country cannot be over emphasized. It is indeed a very serious problem. Youths who are deeply involved employed it as a weapon against any form of oppression at work, in institutions of learning or in the community. Its menace is also felt among secondary school students, as they are actively involved in the evil act. The daily Times of 11th October, 1999, reported that some SS3 students confessed that they were members of secret cult, after having brutally killed a fellow student.¹²

With the above view, cultism has a very serious effect on the youths and the nation politically, socially and economically. They are known to unleashing terror in the campus community, thereby causing instability in the school calendar system, disruption of normal academic activities and even regular closure of the affected schools.

Consequently, students slated for four year programme, end up spending five or six years. This could in turn affect the quality of graduates produced from our higher institutions of learning. Cultism among our youths has also led to wanton destruction of lives and properties. The impact of it on our institutions is enormous. Many lecturers and innocent students have lost their lives during such ugly scenes, a lot of them incarcerated, rusticated or expelled from their institutions of learning. The *Daily Times* of June 7, and 11, 1999, reported on the evil perpetrated by cult members in Enugu State University of Technology (ESUT), and Delta State University (DELSU), where one Mr. Stanley Ukeje, the Head of Department of Business Administration and Mr. Peter Oyolo, and his wife, respectively were brutally murdered.¹³

Also on record was the killing of a lecturer, Dr. Ignatius Agewime, of the Ahmadu Bello University. Other tertiary institutions in the nation have also recorded more brutal and gruesome act of killings of innocent souls who are potential great assets to the country. More disgusting is the fact that replacing all properties damaged during cults' evil activities is telling negatively on the already lean account of the affected institutions.¹⁴

Additionally, cultists usually perpetrate examination malpractices, sexual harassment, drug abuse, theft and maiming. Again, the numbers of intakes of some higher institutions noted for cult activities have greatly reduced, as many parents now feel reluctant to send their children to such schools. As a result of this, many institutions devoid of cultism have great increase in the population of intakes, and these institutions are highly commercialized, which makes the opportunity to education open only to the children of the affluent in the society.

Moreover, social activities on our campuses have almost become a forgotten issue as students now feel reluctant to move out at nights to attend social gatherings. Similarly the moral standard of our youths have been negatively affected as they are found to always indulge in all forms of immoral acts. The use of dangerous weapons like guns, knives, swords, axes and cutlasses during clashes are very common among them.

Expected Roles of Christian Religion and Religious Leaders in Eradicating Cultism among Youths

The principal religions recognized in Nigeria are: Christianity, Islam and African Religion. Each of these has deep rooted roles to play in eradicating cultism among Nigerian Youths. First, these religions must see to the building of moral character. In the view of Falaye, he opined that religion is the passport to eternal life; hence man must endeavour to live a worthy life, doing good to God and fellow man, and at the end be justified to render good account of his stewardship.¹⁵

In addition to the above, Religious Education should be taught as a core subject at all levels of our educational system. This view is clearly stated in section (3) of the National Policy on Education that:

- i. Respect for the worth and dignity of individuals
- ii. Faith in man's ability to make rational decisions;
- iii. Moral and spiritual values in inter-personal and human relations.
- iv. Shared responsibility for the common good of society
- v. Respect for the dignity of labour
- vi. Promotion and psychological health of all children.¹⁶

All these virtues can only be achieved with the fear of God which the Bible says is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 1:7), thus religion as a subject should be made compulsory for students at all levels of our educational system right from the primary up to the post secondary level. But today it is an elective subject at the secondary schools neither is it made compulsory even for undergraduates taken courses other than Religious Studies. This ideal should be corrected as students in all institutions of learning irrespective of the level and choice of career should be guided to take few courses in Religious Department, as electives. Religious bodies too should endeavour to organize seminars, workshop and crusades on monthly basis in our campuses so as to totally wipe out cultism from our institutions.

Religious leader should as a matter of fact, instil courage into cult members to denounce their membership. The fear of being assassinated or tortured by other cultists should not bar them from taking such courageous stand. Those affected could be encouraged

spiritually from what the Holy Bible and the Holy Quran say. For example, the Bible says in II Timothy 1; 7 that, "God has not given us, the spirit of fear, but boldness and sound mind."

Thus, whoever breaks away or disassociate from cultism must be adequately strengthened spiritually. National prayer programmes like Nigeria Prays organized by the then head of state, General Yakubu Gowon, should hold at least once in a semester to rebuke cultism and other vices on the campuses.

Also, the religious roles of the parents in curbing cultism among the youths need to be emphasized. Parents are the first teachers from whose feet children learn. As Denga puts it that the family is the primary agent of socialization.¹⁷ Parents therefore have a great responsibility to inculcate moral values, and religious education into their children. Badmus also opines that the moral strength of a society essentially depends on the state of its family. The decay of a family life is the deepest cancer of the decline of a nation.¹⁸

Moreover, Proverb 22:6 equally admonishes parents to teach their children the ways of God, so that when they grow they will not depart from it. All these views point to the fact that parents have great responsibility ahead of them in ensuring that, they inculcate into their children right from early stage of life good habits such as obedience, truthfulness, love, hardworking and respect for elders and any constituted authority. When these are achieved, then they would have contributed a great deal to the growth and development of the society as further opined by Aje that: "Religions should be exploited as opium to restore calm to the people's trouble nerves! Everything that emphasizes decency should be emphasized in the crusade cults and secret societies."¹⁹

The Bible also states in Philippians 4:8 that: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, what is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praise worthy, think of such things."²⁰

However, after adequately taken care of the aforementioned, and cultist are again discovered or caught, then such should be dismissed instantly and also be made to face the music by allowing the law to take its full cause. The punishment should be instant as pointed out in

Ecclesiastes 8:11 that: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is become fully set in them to do evil." This step probably could serve as a deterrent to other cultists.

Conclusion

From the aforementioned, one can say that cultism is a problem and a deadly disease that can destroy every segment of our development, if not properly and timely checked. Thus, students, teachers, schools administrators, parents and government functionaries, must ensure that all hands are on deck to curb and eradicate cultism in our society. There are many ways all the stake holders could employ to curb the ugly trend of cultism, which among others as explained by Anyam include; the provision of socio-economic facilities, improvement in parental care, improvement in security, formation of Anti-Cult organisations, provision of adequate infrastructural facilities and inter-institutional information exchange.²¹ Religious leaders too could organise seminars from time to time. If all these are adequately catered for, cultism is most likely going to be a forgotten issue in the society, and especially our institutions of learning.

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