

## ASSESSMENT OF CULTISM IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS: THE NEED FOR COUNSELLING

By

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### Abstract

*Secret cult is a practice, belief system or an idea whose essence is known only to the inner members and excessively admired and defended even to the point laying down one's life. In Nigeria, secret cult have always existed in every parts of the country and membership of these societies provides sense of belonging, sources of status, economic, social and political security to their adherents. In most of our institutions of learning today, cultism is the order of the day. Students are attracted to it for various reasons such as the desire to fight perceived injustice, desire for power and respect among others. Cultists have done much harm than good such as loss of lives, properties and constant interruption of the school academic programmes. The paper therefore assessed cultism in Nigerian schools, examining the incidences, causes and its effect, while recognizing the need for counseling as an antidote.*

**Keywords:** Assessment, Incidences, Causes and Effects of Cultism, Nigerian Schools, Counselling

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### Introduction

In recent times, Nigeria society and indeed other African countries have witnessed an increasing trend in the scope and sophistication of youth immorality and violent antisocial acts. The situation appears worrisome as it escalates by the day. Ordinary, this state of affairs should be seen as indicators of the socio-economic and political state of affairs of most developing African states in the past two decades or so, but what we have found more disturbing is its permeation into the structure of our educational institutions including the primary and secondary schools (Arijesuyo & Oyewole 2011). This paper attempts to explain the need for counselling in stemming a child of cultism in school. It is imperative to note that cultism is a behavioural problem that would require counselling and behavior modification strategies in stemming a child of cultism in school. All over the world, from the universities to the polytechnics, college of education and other tertiary institutions and some secondary schools, come stories of violence, tortures and unwanted intimidation executed by members of secret cults. Common observation reveals that many Nigeria newspaper and magazines have become bulletin boards for exploit of members of secret cults. Unfortunately, despite all efforts to tackle the problems, secret cult activities in the institution have defiled all solutions.

In defining cultism, Azelama, Alude and Imhonda (2000) noted that "cult is an assemblage of people united by certain ideals, or symbols and whose rites and ceremonies of veneration are unique and shrouded in mysteries with a secrecy that cannot be broken." Maxey (2004) traces the meaning of cult from the Latin word 'cultus' which means 'to worship or give reverence to a deity.' Thus, in its original usage, it was simply applied to a religious worshipful group of people regardless of the object or person they venerated. Rotimi (2005) cites the anthropological definition of 'cult' by Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology (1996) as 'a set of practices and beliefs of a group in relation to a local god.' The same dictionary gives a sociological definition of a cult as 'a small group of religious activists whose beliefs are typically secret, esoteric and individualistic. From these accounts, it can be deduced that cults and cultism have certain elements in common. They are esoteric, shrouded in secrecy, usually made up of a small group of people with a

charismatic leader, and may or may not be religious in nature. The activities of secret cults have extended to primary and secondary schools in Nigeria where the child is found. What then led to the change in status and functions of these societies? This is because the change in status and function in the seventies from being in the vanguard of the fight against oppression to oppressing others, bloodletting and executing activities that were and are inimical to the lives and properties on campus where they exist today is a matter of concern to every well-intentioned person. The value of the parent body has changed to clandestine activities, such as rape, murder, robbery, assault, drug abuse, terrorism, examination malpractice etc.

The nomenclature thus changed from a club to “secret cult” whose activities are known to members only (Bolakale & Kolo, 2002). This change came with the formation of the Buccaneers Confraternity in the 70's by the malcontents, expelled members and rejects from the Pyrates Confraternity. This formation led to the struggle supremacy among the various secret cult groups which often result to violent clashes with the attendant losses of lives and properties. The redefinition of the agenda of the cult groups led to the growth of these nocturnal organizations, and today, the list is inexhaustible. Some of these cult groups are: Buccaneer Confraternity, Eye Confraternity, Black Axe (New Black Movement), Black Cat, Naphtes, Vikings, Mgba Mgba Brother, Eagle Club, Fraternity of Friends, Mafia, Trojan Horse, Rainbow, Brother Cobra, Ku Klux Klan (KKK), Musketeers, Dragons, Walrus, Trojan House Fraternity. Among ladies, there are cult groups like: Royal Queen, Amazons, Pink Ladies, Daughters of Jezebel, White Angels and Mermaid. (Owoeye, 1997).

### **Causes of Cultism in Nigeria Institution of Learning**

Cultism is an anti-social behaviour which is a deviant act. It is at variance with the established norms of behaviour. It is a non-conforming behaviour which usually contravenes the social rules of an institution in particular and the society in general. In spite of the negative consequences of cultism, it still thrives. Some factors responsible for these are:

- ❖ **Parental and home background:** Students participation in cult activities may be influenced by parent's involvement in similar activities. Parents who are members of secret cults will not see anything wrong in their children's involvement in cultism. Parents may encourage their children to join cults so that they may maintain the traditional titles that have been given to them (that is parents). A home that is characterized by child abuse, intolerance, violence, insecurity and hostility may be a breeding ground for prospective cult members.
- ❖ **The society:** The Nigerian adult society is materialistic. There is the mad ambition for wealth and power. Some powerful members of the society sometimes unleash terror on the other members of the society. Some of them recruit young adults to perpetrate heinous crimes in the society and can erase the long arms of the law. They are the fraudsters, kidnappers, ritual murderers, etc. children who grow up in this kind of environment may see nothing wrong in cult activities that involve maiming and killing of innocent people. “Godfather” who are ready to protect cultists from prosecution sponsor cult activities.
- ❖ **Emotional Sickness:** children who have emotional sickness tend to be frustrated and fed up with life. In an attempt to express their anger against neglect, they may join cults to unleash terror on the society that has caused emotional distress. Some children are possessed by the demon. Those children can grow up to become criminals because of the evil spirit in them.
- ❖ **Peer Group Influence:** Motivation for joining cults may come from peer group's influence. Some members of the peer group influence one another with the experience they have had in their various families and environments.
- ❖ **Support Given by Staff of Educational Institution:** in some institutions, certain administrator and lecturers are members of secret cults. The students' cultists are used against other members of the community to promote selfish interest. There are allegations that some Vice Chancellors were sponsoring cult activities in their universities to silence the voice of dissent.

- ❖ **Government's Lukewarm Attitude:** cultist in our educational institutions watch how government officials break law of the land with impunity because they are members of secret cults. Government also fails to apply sanctions against cultists who contravene the laws of the land because of the pretention offered by those who are close to the corridor of power. Cultists are therefore given the impression that they can go away with any acts of lawlessness.
- ❖ **Un-conductive Learning Environment:** Learning facilities provided in educational institutions are grossly inadequate to the extent that some students cannot cope academically. Because of the craze for certificates, such intellectually weak students join cults to harass lecturers and administrators so that they can be given underserved marks.
- ❖ **Inadequate Religion and Moral Instructions/Education:** Some parents have abandoned their responsibilities in the area of moral upbringing of their children because of the craze for material wealth. They hardly show interest in the progress of their children at school. Such parents rarely attend parents' forum meetings. Educational institutions teach Islam and Christian Religious students for students to pass examination without emphasizing the moral lessons that can be learnt from such topics. The heart of the young ones therefore left for the devil to manipulate. Some religious leaders are not showing good examples to the younger generation.
- ❖ **Administrative Style of Institutional Administrators:** A number of institutional Administrators are autocratic and maintain hostile relationship with staffs and students. They hardly involve the members of the community in decision-making thereby promoting rumors mongering. They ban students unionism at will. This atmosphere promotes violence and cult activities because peaceful resolution of conflict has been made absolutely impossible. Some institutions maintain boarding facilities but administrators rarely find time to know what is going on in this hostels. They do not monitor students and staff activities.
- ❖ **Mass Media:** The mass media also expose our young ones to all kinds of negative behaviours. There is importation of magical films, occultism literature and obscene behavior. Advertisements are made on the media on how youth and adults how youth can join occultism organization both locally and abroad.
- ❖ **Inadequate Welfare Programmes for Students:** Our educational institutions lack adequate basic amenities like accommodation, transportation, recreational facilities, to mention a few. Students are therefore encouraged to join violent groups like secret cults that wreak havoc in these institutions because of the insecurity of the government and institutional administrators to their (students) plight. The factors discussed above are not exhaustive (Bolakale & Kolo, 2002)

### **Incidences of cultism**

The nefarious and nocturnal activities of secret cults have also led to the untimely death of cultists and innocent students and staff/lecturers of our institutions of higher learning. Cult groups have gradually turned the campuses of Nigerian institutions of learning into killing fields- theatres of war. Here are some sample of both students and lecturers that have been killed as a result of cultism:

- i. July 10, 1999, five students of Obafemi Awolowo University were killed.
- ii. October 2003, three students- Kehinde Dosumu, Omotayo Suraju and Olalekan Ajao of Kwara State Polytechnic were killed.
- iii. November 12, 2003, Tony Ilegbuna, acting Head of Geology at the Enugu State University of Science and Technology was murdered.
- iv. February 2004, Yomi Edeki of University of Benin, was killed.
- v. On Tuesday, March 2004, Vincent Uloho of University of Benin, Benin was killed in cold blood.
- vi. July, 2004 Wale Adeyori and Banji of the Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro, were killed.
- vii. March 2005, Ashifat Olatunji Saheed, a student of Ibadan polytechnic, Ibadan was murdered.
- viii. June, 2005 Gbenga Joseph, a policeman and leader of Anti-cult squad of Kwara State Police Command was killed by suspected cultists from Federal Polytechnic, Offa.
- ix. September, 2005, Bolaji Tomiwa, a student of the Lagos State University was killed

x. June 6, 2006, Alhaja Fatimo - 400 level Economic student was killed in University of Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria.

Again, some members of cult groups caused bodily harm that may result to physical injuries and or death especially during initiation ceremonies. Closely related to this, is the fact that some of them risk health problems because of harmful drugs they take. Moreover, some cultists have their educational career terminated abruptly (expulsion or rustication) or they may spend more than the required number of years for graduation. For example, on March 27, 2005, a 32-year-old Ikechukwu Okomah Anthony was arrested. He had spent over ten years pursuing Higher National Diploma in the Department of Estate Management, Ibadan Polytechnic. More importantly, cult's activities may disrupt the academic calendar of the nations' institution of learning. The Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, generally regarded as the hot-bed of cultism, was closed for 10 months by the Lucky Igbinedion in the year 2000 for the purpose of sanitizing the University. Before and during examinations, students are always organizing night vigil and prayers for a successful end of examinations and or semester. They always sleep with one eye closed. Cult activities are no longer secret or done in the dark. They now operate in the public-under the full glare of the public.

### **Effects of Cultism on Students**

There is no doubt that cultism in institutions of higher learning has dire consequences for students, staff, parents and guardians and the society in general. In institutions where cultism exists, many students live in overwhelming fear. This is because occasionally there are mysterious illness, accidents, disputes, threats and even deaths. Serious academic work can hardly ever take place in a climate of fright and insecurity. Moreover, many students become suspicious of one another. Thus, young innocent students may acquire negative attitude which may manifest all their lives. This is a threat to quality education indeed. According to Okujagu (2003), cultism in any form infers social stigma.

Besides, institutions noted for serious cultism, lecturers charged with discipline come under frequent threat. Sadly, enough, some threatened lecturers react by joining other cult groups only to avoid the shame of being intimidated. In such circumstances opposing and contending cultists take over the institution. This may lead to decline in the tone and general academic performance. Additionally, the homes of cultist come under varied attacks. There was a story of an eleven-year-old member who confessed to have killed her mother and four other members of her family. In such a home, any sibling or a parent who insists on correcting the erring cultists may be her next victim. Indeed, bloodletting and blood sucking by cultists have become the order of the day. Recent killings as a result of cultic activities abound in our institutions. It was reported that blood-sucking children in Taraba State confessed to killing parents and teachers through cultism. Thus, there is room for curiosity and temptation to do evil. The credibility of the degrees and certificates being issued by tertiary institutions which should train graduates in character and learning have been sacrificed on the altar of incessant closure of schools as a result of fraudulent, violent and cultic activities. Hence, secret cults on campuses have led to the breeding of new generation of decadent and degenerated Nigerians.

According to Ayodele (2005), cultism in the Nigerian higher institution today is a reaction to the societal and institutional pressure. It is a manifestation of conflict between the youths and adults over withdrawal of privileges and rights. The first secret cult in Nigerian higher institution was founded in 1952, the premier university now University of Ibadan by Professor Wole Soyinka who was the head of the maiden group referred to as original seven. It was called "pyrate's confraternity". The intentions of the founding fathers were good as the objectives of the organization were meant to correct some ills in the society then.

### **Counseling Implications in Resolving Cult Activities**

The deterioration is reflected in the behavior of her citizens, both adults and children. Cultism in Nigerian institutions of higher learning and basic education is one of the deteriorations and the effect is almost causing the destruction of an educational system the nation had spent years to build. Hence, the solution to this problem may therefore lie with changing the moral values of students who engage in cultism through moral counselling. According to Nwamuo (1999), counselling is a reorientation of the public and society for proper

daily living. It is a re-education of the people from monetary wealth to moral wealth. In view of the above, Adamu and Mambula (1999) confirmed that counselling programmes are necessary to help individuals recognize moral etiquette, make good career choices and to critically establish reasons for taking definite lines of action, objectively evaluate others' point of view and be capable and willing to act according to reasons acceptable as critically justifying their values. Cultism has become a cankerworm and a major problem undermining our educational development in this country. It has become an issue of serious concern to educators, religious leaders, researchers, parents and counsellors as all are laboring to find permanent solutions to the problem. It is therefore of paramount importance to examine the efficacy of moral/religious counselling in checking the menace of cultism among students in Nigerian institutions of higher learning.

Strategies are the methods, techniques or ways of reducing or eradicating cultism in schools. Such strategies include:

**Solid Parental Care:** Charity they say begins at home. Children are best nurtured, molded and tutored by both parents to enhance good upbringing at home. Parents should instill the fear of God and respect for fellow human beings in mind of their children at home. We should as a matter of urgency give our youths the desired moral education so that, when they get out of their homes, they will not be influenced by bad company.

**Good Counselling:** Guidance counsellors should extend their work to include child study, the detection of origins of problems noted in the lives of students, academic counselling in addition to maintaining regular contact with parent/guardians of problem students in institutions, particularly in the secondary schools. Besides, a viable guidance and counselling centre should exist in every institution. The centre should be well financed to perform its role like release of bills, inviting students for chat and mounting counselling programme regularly. Since broken home is one of the causes of cultism, efforts should be made by our counselors to counsel the family unit to avoid broken homes at all cost.

**Discipline:** One of the major religious and moral values of the society is discipline. Maintenance of discipline at home, in the school and the society at large by the parents, teachers and top government functionaries on the younger ones is very essential. This will help to build up an integrated total individual that promotes personal development and social adjustment. Parents, lecturers and the constituted authorities in tertiary institutions should find ways of helping students develop worthwhile interest, values and life goals so that they would be able to resist the appeal of secret cults. Of prominent importance in developing such attitudes is the very example set by adults as models.

**Encouragement of religious Activities:** The administration should encourage the students to participate actively in religious activities. The religious leaders should be encouraged to preach strongly against the existence of secret cults in Churches, Mosques and Schools. Our religious leaders should make it a point of duty to always go to our higher institutions to pray and preach to our youths. They should also emphasize the evil effects of cultism now and in the future on their lives.

**Government Policy on cultism:** The government should out-law registered secret cultism and embark on a vigorous campaign against cultism at all levels of the educational system. Government should also make efforts to ensure the application of all relevant laws that have been enacted against the scourge of secret cultism. The security forces should be ready to pursue to conclusion the investigation and prosecution of students suspected to be cultists. They should also curb the movement of illegal arms.

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