

CULTISM IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS, THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND RELIGIOUS IMPACTS

Dr. Ayinla Saadu Alanamu¹, Dr. G. T. Olanrewaju² and Dr. A. Y. Muhammed³

¹Lecturer, Department of Islamic Studies, School of Arts/Social Sciences, Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin

²Department of Behavioural Sciences, Faculty of Clinical Sciences, College of Health Sciences, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.

³Department of Sociology, University of Ilorin, Ilorin

ABSTRACT: *The menace of cultism in Nigerian schools has certainly emerged as one of the main social problems in contemporary Nigeria, with obvious psychological consequences. This paper therefore examines the impact of religion in combating the demented acts of cultism in Nigerian schools, using Islam and Christianity as the basis. Religion dictates to its followers basic values intended to guide people towards living an ideal life-style. In Nigeria, there are two dominant religions: Islam and Christianity. To these writers' minds the two religions do not condone cultism. The core values of these religions are purity, chastity, honesty, integrity, quality of moderation and humility. After the analysis of the causes and psychological impact of cultism, it then concludes with the submission that the menace of cultism in Nigerian schools can be drastically reduced or eliminated through the internalization and inculcation of the fear of God in the minds of students.*

KEYWORDS: Christianity, Cultism, Islam, Religion and School.

INTRODUCTION

Cultism has become a major social problem in the Nigerian schools with obvious psychological effects (Adewale, 2005). The emergency of secret cultism has been characterized by some bizarre and violent activities which include, physical torture as a means of initiating new members, maiming and killing of rival cult members and elimination of real and perceived enemies. Eneji, (1996) observed that, almost every passing day, there are new stories of devilish acts perpetrated by secret cults in schools especially on campuses.

A very important element in the mode of operation of secret cults is recruitment. Like any other social organization, recruitment must occur so that membership which might be lost through graduation, rustication, or even death, be replenished. Recruitment exercise is closely tied to the willingness of students to become members of secret cults. Apart from some physical and emotional attributes which have been referred to earlier, prospective cult members must demonstrate the ability to use weapons, while ability to consume alcohol and use drugs are added advantages. New recruits must also demonstrate some stoic abilities, especially, ability to bear pain. For the prospective female cultists, wearing of provocative dresses that accentuate natural curves and contours is almost a must (Brown, 1999). On the initiation day, the new entrants are made to drink some concoctions mixed with blood (Thomas, 2002).

It is almost impossible to accurately and empirically document the amount of crime resulting from secret cult activities. In Nigeria, the police remains the major source of crime data. Unfortunately, the police records do not indicate which crimes specifically result from secret

cult activities. Consequently, possible crimes resulting from secret cult activities are diffused among such crimes as rape, manslaughter, arson and others. In recent times the activities of secret cult members in Nigerian schools, especially tertiary institutions have assumed a very dangerous dimension that the society at large is no more comfortable when the word “cult” is heard or mentioned. The prevalence of cult activities in the higher institution campuses has taken a fresh dimension, outright brutality, killings, slaughtering or butchering etc.

In the effort to curtail the demented acts of cultism in Nigerian schools, several measures have been adopted including intelligence, legislation and law enforcement. It is within this context that this paper sets out to examine the psychological impact of cultism and establish the impact of religion against this social problem. To accomplish this objective, the paper covers the following issues: concept of cultism, historical background of cultism, theoretical framework, causes of cultism in Nigerian schools, the psychological and religious impacts as well as conclusion.

Concept of Cultism

The term “cult” is capable of various interpretations depending on the person defining it. The word cult is derived from Latin word cultus, which means both cultivation and worship. The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2000) defined “cult” as the group of people believing in a particular system of religious worship with the special customs and ceremonies, worship of or loyalty to a person, principle or idea.

Ogunbameru (1997) defined a secret cult as an organization whose activities are kept away from the knowledge of others. These activities are essentially covert, disguised and are usually carried out behind closed doors (Aguda 1997). The word cultism may be referred to as the formation of a group of initiates or adherent round the figure of a god, a saint or even a living being. It may involve the practice of a particular doctrine within the body of religious belief (Pemedede and Viavonu, 2010). Ogunbameru and Daodu (2003) defined Secret Cult to be any form of organization whose activities are not only exclusively kept away from the knowledge of others but such activities are carried out at odd hours of the day and they often clash with accepted norms and values of everyday life.

From the above different definitions, cultism can be seen as a group or association in the schools whose membership, admission policy and initiation formalities as well as its mode of operation are done in secret and kept secret. This does not mean that every group in our schools whose business is conducted in at most secrecy is campus cult. Campus cults are usually nocturnal in their operations. Members are under spell and bound never to reveal the indents or business of the group and carry out any duty that might be assigned to them by the group. Above all, campus cult otherwise, called secret cult. A secret society is an illegal and illegitimate association.

Historical Background of Cultism

Cultism is not a new phenomenon on our campuses but the way it is being practised today is new. The relationship between a violent philosophies and modern technology has helped in the creation of the current crises of cultism in Nigerian schools. Nigerian schools are now becoming battle fields and terrorist training ground with captain and all manner of cult violence. The origin of the secret cults in the Nigerian tertiary institutions, especially universities can be traced back to the Pyrates Confraternity, also known as National Association of Sea Dogs, that was founded at the University College, Ibadan (now called the

University of Ibadan), in 1953 when the institution was still a satellite campus of the University of London. It has the skull and crossbones as its logo. The Seadog Confraternity was similar to the numerous fraternities and sororities, which are so ubiquitous in many American universities and colleges both in membership requirements and activities. In the United States, the fraternities and sororities are sometimes called Greek Clubs because of their Greek names and symbols. These Greek clubs promote, among other things, moral uprightness, patriotism, community service and high academic and intellectual standards.

The Pyrates Confraternity at the University College, Ibadan, was formed by the first African Nobel Laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka and a few others popularly known as G7. The original aims of the association were very lofty and noble. They aimed at producing future Nigerian leaders who would be very proud of their African heritage. (Thomas 2002). It also wanted to revive the age of chivalry. As Thomas further asserts, the Confraternity boasted of the cleanest, the brightest and the most politically conscious among the students.

The main objectives of the seadogs have been summarized by Orintusin (1990). They are as follows; (i) to fight non-violently but intellectually and effectively, against the imposition of foreign conventions, (ii) to find a lasting solution to the problems of tribalism and elitism. Professor Wole Soyinka was the first democratically elected “captain” of the society with the name, Captain blood (Orintusin 1990). Professor Muyiwa Awe was Long John Silver. Many prominent Nigerians who were founding fathers of the Confraternity include Pius Oleghe, Ralph Opara Aig I’Moukhuede and others. The outfit of the seadogs resembled those of the pirates of the old. Everything done was healthy, fun and harmless (Orintusin 1990). Soyinka (2002) comments that the pirates wanted to be different from the “stodgy establishment and its pretentious products in a new educational institution different from a culture of hypocritical and affluent middleclass, different from alienated colonial aristocrats”. Professor Soyinka also explained that confraternities are not cults (Dixon, 1994). According to him, Confraternity was part of the social life of the university, which existed then, and as Adebayo (2001) has pointed out some evil minds have twisted the original aims of this noble tradition that was simply one of campus life.

Confraternity did not swear any oath of secrecy, no binding of blood and the identities of members were known to both students and staff (Adiamoh, 2003). Long after the founding fathers had left the University of Ibadan, the Confraternity (seadogs) continued to thrive. Unfortunately towards the end of the 1960’s, the social, political and educational changes which were occurring in Nigeria began to affect the operations of the Confraternities. According to Adelola (1997), the first notable departure came in 1968 with the formation of the Eiye Confraternity at the University of Ibadan. According to Owioye (1997) the Eiye Confraternity had sprung from the “Bucaneers” which also had sprung up from the sea dogs. The major force that led to the formation of new splinter groups from the sea dogs was basically doctrinal (Thomas 2002). For example, members of the new groups were not able to meet the high academic standard originally set by the sea dogs Confraternity.

The new groups which were formed from the sea dogs regarded the pirates as rather elitist whose campaigns had outlived their usefulness (Owioye 1997). The protestant groups which sprang up from the Pyrates Confraternity included Black eye, Vikings, Bucaneers, Mafia, dragons, Black Beret and others.

Theoretical Framework

Structural functionalism theory will be used to explain the upsurge in cultism in Nigerian schools. Structural functionalism is a sociological paradigm which addresses what social functions various elements of the social system perform in regard to the entire system. Social structures are stressed and placed at the center of analysis, and social functions are deduced from these structures. It was further developed in the United States by sociologist Talcott Parsons (Holmwood, 2005).

Structural functionalism is built upon twin emphases: application of the scientific method to the objective social world and use of an analogy between the individual organism and society. The emphasis on scientific method leads to the assertion that one can study the social world in the same ways as one studies the physical world. Thus, Functionalists see the social world as "objectively real," as observable with such techniques as social surveys and interviews. They believe that rules and regulations help organize relationships between members of society. Values provide general guidelines for behavior in terms of roles and norms. These institutions of society such as the family, religion, the economy, the educational and political systems, are major aspects of the social structure. Institutions are made up of interconnected roles or inter-related norms. For example, inter-connected roles in the institution of the family are of wife, mother, husband, father, son, brother, sister and daughter.

The theory is based around a number of key concepts. First, society is viewed as a system – a collection of interdependent parts, with a tendency toward equilibrium. Second, there are functional requirements that must be met in a society for its survival (such as reproduction of the population). Third, phenomena are seen to exist because they serve a function (Holmwood, 2005). Functionalists believe that one can compare society to a living organism, in that both a society and an organism are made up of interdependent working parts (organs) and systems that must function together in order for the greater body to function.

From this theory, it can be seen that the collapse of basic social institutions especially family and religion is responsible for the upsurge in cultism in Nigerian schools. Therefore, the role of social institutions especially family and religion is essential in tackling the problem of cultism in Nigerian schools.

The Failure of Proper Socialization as Root Causes of Cultism in Nigerian Schools

Students are attracted to cultist groups for a variety of reasons. One of the causes and reasons for the existence of the secret cults in our educational institutions could be associated with economic situations of students. It is important to add that, in modern Nigeria, the influence of the family has greatly receded. Increasingly and as a result, the average family fails in its function to provide a solid moral foundation for children. Children are thus weakly prepared to resist negative peer group influences which they encounter on a daily basis. Commenting on the activities of "area" boys and girls - a sub-cultural deviant group of young boys and girls in urban centres in Nigeria (Epkenyong, 2010). Rafiu (1993) highlights the inability of the modern family to equip children with effective socialization needed to conform to acceptable cultural norms. He further indicts mothers for the children's loss of touch with nature: "no time to run after lizard, no time to swim to their hearts content, no time to play hide and seek game with their dogs in the nearby bush - indeed, there is no bush, there is no river.

There are no plants to provide habitation for lizards”. The focus is solely on school and special coaching and lessons to prepare children to face the powerful JAMB (Joint Admissions Matriculation Board) examinations for universities. Rafiu (1993) concludes that, with the lack of contact with nature in a jungle of concrete, that is proof of affluence in our society, children become soulless. They lack moral instruction both at school and at home. Because they are soulless, they become vulnerable to all types of groups memissing to alleviate their problem. Owoeye (1997) has established strong links between a weak and defective family background/influence and tendencies for students to join secret cults. In such cases, parents themselves may be members of secret cults and/or they may be the perpetrators of child abuse and neglect. Likewise, Rotimi (2005) argued that children from broken or single parent homes often miss the much needed socialization process and as such fail to absorb the real social values of society, making them anti-social and aggressive.

Cultism in Schools, the Psychological and Religious Impacts

The psychological impact of cultism is enormous. Cultism had made parents lose some of their dearly beloved children when they struggled to get to institutions of higher learning, upon when they have put hope for their tomorrow. Some students have been killed, some maimed and disfigured. Others were brutalized, some had to abandon their studies in order to have respite from their predators, while many students live in fear and perpetually in nightmare conditions because of cult activities of co-students in institutions of higher learning. As a result of cult-related violence, many lecturers and students now live in fear and have emotional problems, which prevent them from serious academics exercises.

Religion has played tremendous impact on cultism in Nigerian schools. Religion dictates to its followers basic values intended to guide people towards living an ideal life-style and has been a good weapon to fight cultism if its values are appropriately applied (Adeniyi, 2001). In Nigeria, there are two dominant religions: Islam and Christianity. To these writers’ minds, the two religions do not condone cultism. Christian ethical values are dictated in the New Testament. This compels Christians to do, perform act, in accordance with the dictates of scripture and in conformity with societal values. For example, the Bible dictates to Christians to be holy (Lev. 11:45), to be just, to be loving, to be truthful etc. They are drawn from the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament, the ethical teachings of Jesus Christ and those of early disciples. The Bible advises all Christians to be of exemplary character on earth and serve as models in all societies or communities, they are expected to be of good conduct and endeavour to be honest (Mtt. 5:13-16).

Like in Christianity, Islam is built on ethical values, which guide or direct Muslims in their behaviours towards their fellow human-beings and the societies in general. According to Abe (1993), Islam is a practical religion whose tenets are based on the provisions of the Qur’an. Qur’an is therefore the fundamental source of Islamic values and guidance. It also derives some basic principles or standards of ethics from Hadith. Qur’an and hadith serve as the prime source of Islamic faith and practice. Qur’an seriously warns the people against all sort of greed, especially the greed of wealth and property (Abe, 1993).

It is clear from the above, that Christianity and Islam bequeath principles or standards to their adherents on good behaviour, especially as it relates to discipline, love and quality of moderation. The inculcation of these values by Christians and Muslims can therefore serve as springboards to achieving correct behaviour in the Nigerian schools. As a matter of fact, the

effective application of all these values in the lives of Nigerian students will go a long way in eliminating cultism.

As a corollary of the above, the religious leaders and their followers must be proactive in preaching and campaigning against cultism in Nigeria since the two dominant religions are against this social vice. At another level, religious followers in Nigeria must continue to teach and preach against greed so as to eradicate all menace of violence in Nigerian schools. Besides, religious leaders and their followers must not relent in their efforts in preaching and inculcating the fear of God in the minds of Nigerian students.

In using religion to combat cultism in Nigerian schools, Johnson-Bashua (2006) noted that the religious organizations in the country have the responsibility to reawake the moral consciousness of students on cultism. By so doing, the menace can be eliminated from the schools. The role religious bodies in the establishment of private schools, especially universities have been acknowledged as an effort to reduce or eliminate cultism in Nigerian schools. Christian and Muslim missionaries, such as Redeemed Church of God, Catholic Church, Winners' Church, Islamic Movement for Africa (IMA) etc have established universities for moral and intellectual development of Nigerian students. According to Simpson (2006), the steady influx of religious universities into the realm of educational system in Nigeria is widely linked to a response to the disappointments of people in the secular universities in the country. Such disappointments, according to him, find relevance in Weeks's (1980) emphasis on the interrelatedness between education, morality and religion as well as intellectual development. Apart from establishing schools, religious bodies have established organizations that campaign against cultism in the society. All these steps by religious institutions have positively impacted on reduction of cultism in the society.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the cultism in Nigerian schools and its psychological impact. Without doubt, the menace of cultism is one of the social vices affecting educational development in Nigeria. Thus, towards combating this problem, this study posits that the fear of God should be inculcated in the minds of students, the majority of whom are Muslims and Christians. Towards this end, Nigerian Christians and Muslims must not relent in their efforts in supporting anti-cultism crusade. They must continue in their preaching and admonition against the violent acts of cultism. The students should be given responsibilities, which would positively occupy their time. The private sector, for example, can help the situation by funding intra- and inter-University academic and sports competitions. Parents and Guardians should inculcate greater interest in the academic and moral progress of their wards through regular monitoring and relevant follow-up sessions.

General education of the citizens on the corrosive effects of secret cult violence must occur. Consequently, churches, mosques, school administrators and the society at large must fuse efforts to combat cultism. Finally, churches and other religious groups can campaign against cultism in the society. All these steps by the government and public establishments will help create an enabling environment where education will thrive.

REFERENCES

- Abe, G. O. (1993) "Ethics and African Societies: The Perspectives of African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam" *African Journal of Biblical Studies (AJBS)* Vol. VIII No. I.
- Adebayo, W. (2001) VCs Use Secret Cults to Settle Scores. *Sunday Punch*, 8th Jul, pp. 1, 2.
- Adelola, L.O.A. (1997) Secret Cults in Nigerian Institutions of Learning: A Periscopal Appraisal. In: *Readings on Campus Secret Cults*, O.A. Ogunbameru (ed.). Ile-Ife: Kuntel Publishing House.
- Adeniyi, N. O. (2001) "War against Corruption in Nigeria: The Need for Islamic Approach" *Journal of Arts and Social Sciences (JASSSO)* Vol. 2 No. 1.
- Adiamoh, G. (2003) Our Citadel of Knowledge, Our Dens of Cults. *Sunday Tribune*, 12th January, p. 32.
- Aguda, A.S. (1997) The Environment of Secret Cults. In: *Reading on Campus Secret Cults*, O.A. Ogunbameru (ed.). Ile-Ife: Kuntel Publishing House.
- Brown, A. (1999) Shocker, Female Cultists on Rampage. *Weekend Sketch*, 2nd January, pp. 4, 31.
- Dixon, S. (1994) Soyinka Differentiates Cults from Contraternities. *The Guardian*, 27th April, p. 40.
- Eneji, T. (1996) Death on the Loose as Secret Cults Take Over Campuses. *Sunday Tribune*, 25th Feb, p. 19.
- Epkenyong, S. N. (2010) "Secret Cults at Niger Delta University" *International Journal of Scientific Research in Education*, October, Vol. 3(2), 121-131.
- Holmwood, J., (2005) "Functionalism and its Critics" in Harrington, A., (ed) *Modern Social Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 87-109
- Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2000) New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ogunbameru, O.A. (1997) *Readings in Campus Secret Cult*. Ile-Ife: Kuntel Publishing House.
- Orintusin, J. (1990) The Making of Sea Dogs, the Oldest Cult. *National Concord*, 27th Jul, p. 5.
- Owoeye, I. (1997) Campus Cults: A study in urban violence. In *Readings on Campus Secret Cults*, O.A. Ogunhameru (ed) Ile-Ife: Kuntel Publishing House.
- Pemedede, O. and Viavonu, B. (2010) "Cultism or Gangsterism and Its Effect on Moral Development of Learners in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions" *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies (JETERAPS)* 1 (2): 61-64.
- Rafiu, A. (1993) Area Boys, Area Girls. *The Guardian*, 8th April, p. 15.
- Simpson, A. (2006) "Christian Universities and the Regeneration of Traditional Values in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects". in Oyekanmi, A. D and Nwabueze, N. (eds.) *Education and Regeneration of Traditional Values in Nigeria*. Lagos: Department of Sociology, University of Lagos.
- Soyinka, W. (2002) Cults Counterculture and Perils of Ignorance. *Nigerian Tribune*, 19th December, p. 9.
- Thomas, D. (2002) F9-Cultists. *The Week*, 14th February, 15(18): 12-14.
- Weeks, A. (1980) *GCE Model Answers: Sociology*. The Sussex: The Artemis Press.