

## **The Efficacy of Moral/Religious Counseling in Checking Cultism in Nigerian Institutions of Higher Learning**

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### **Abstract**

*Cultism has become a disturbing phenomenon in Nigerian society especially in institutions of higher learning. Thus, the issue of secret cults has been of great concern to many meaning Nigerians in all facets of life, as a serious cankerworm that has eaten deeply and fabrickly into the Nigerian content. It is therefore a dreaded phenomenon that destroys the lives of youths, their present and the future. A lot of promising young men and women have lost their lives through the devastating attack of cults and members. This paper examines the meaning, causes, and effects of cultism, the place of moral/religious counseling, moral/religious strategies for curbing cultism, conclusion and recommendations. The import of this writing, therefore, is self-discipline. Self-discipline will improve the quality of the home. A disciplined home would produce a disciplined environment, thus creating a better society in which man will be responsible, responsive and accountable for his actions.*

### **Introduction**

According to the New Webster's Dictionary (1995), a cult is a system of religious worship, a creed or sect involving a faddish behaviour. For Ikudayisi (2005), cultism is a cancer and a kind of "dark signal" with criminal activities among some notorious, arrogant and influential students in tertiary institutions. It is a strong indication to show the level of moral and societal decadence that the society had degenerated into the recent times. Cultism is a strong agent that breeds violence, which could be in from of gang, interpersonal and domestic. A standard dictionary gives one of the marriage of cult as extravagant devotion to a person, cause, thing; also the object of such devotion. Cults are often associated with secrecy but not all cults are secret organizations.

The word cult is often associated with religion though a cult does not need to be religious in outlook. In the case of the religious cult, another dictionary defines cult as a system of religious devotion directed towards a particular figure or object. That is, a relatively small religious group regarded by others as a strange or as improving excessive control over members. A religious cult can also be described as any religious group which differs significantly in some one or more respects as to established expression of that religion. Religious and social cults are overtly or covertly practiced in Nigerian institutions of higher learning. My religious focus in this paper is Christianity and Islam. Thus, it can be inferred then that a cult is a group of people gathered about a specific person's misinterpretation of the Holy Bible or Holy Quran. Usually, they reject faith in Jesus Christ as God's only way to salvation and in Mohammed the messenger of Allah.

The word cultism originated from the Latin word "cultus" with the verb "colare" meaning to cultivate, to worship. Ogbonna (2005) viewing the word cult in the context of worship, defines it as a reverential honor or religious devotion given to one. Still in the context of worship, Ogbonna again defines cult as a system of outward form and ceremonies used in worship, religious rites and formalities.

### **Causes of Cultism**

The most nauseating trend in Nigeria campus in recent times is the alarming rate at which students particularly newly admitted students are being initiated into cultism. More worrisome is the involvement of members of staff in tertiary institutions in luring these innocent students joins cult's in spite of its glaring and negative consequences.

The following causes have been identified:

Some students join cult as 'ego' boosting and to obtain power to oppress their fellow students and indeed members of the campus community. These people cannot survive competition and they do not want a situation of equal opportunities.

Besides, student from separated parents can cause or influence one to join cult. The antecedent of some students coming from broken homes is also responsible for their joining this group. Thus, they lack home training require from good parents.

Moreover, some also indulge in cultism to ascend political prominence in the campus. Some indulge in campus political wrangling, and they join cults to retaliate on their opponents. They believe that their membership of cult group would enable them to be dreaded by political opponents which make them to subdue the opponents. It is a common occurrence to see that two cult groups do claim superiority over each other. When fracas ensues, it could lead to terrorism among the groups where lives can be lost.

Other reasons why students join cults includes acquisition of social, economic and psychological powers. However, girls join to liberate themselves from the chivalry of cultism or from the tormenting lecturers. It is also considered opinion of these cultists that cult offer them protection against perceived enemies.

### ***Effects of Cultism***

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, in 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.

In addition, 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 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 (2003), 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.

### ***Morals/Religious Counselling***

According to Immanuel Kant (1959), he sees moral as pre-eminent goal and morality as that action that is rational, universally valid as it embodies a law, capable of being applied as a standard to govern the action of all rational beings. According to Odudele (2006), in his popular book titles: "Religion and Moral Instructions in Schools", he describes morality as a set of beliefs current in a society about character and conduct, about what should try to be and do.

To him, it has to do with set of ideas and rules regarding the conduct and behavior of the people living in a society. It is the assessment of human conduct as to what constitute what is right or wrong in relation to how man action affect other. The Collins English Learner's Dictionary defined moral as being "connected with the choice between right and wrong", something that is good pure and not evil.

On the other hand, Matthew Arnold cited in Odudele (2006), observes that religion is nothing but morality touched with emotion. Here, the entire conducts of the individual surrounds his moral life style. Since religion aids morality in the society, the normally good life is worthy of emulation, while the morally bad life is highly discouraged or condemned. According to Melford E. Spiro cited in Lawal (2003), he asserts that religion is a cultural institution which consists of postulated supernatural beings and the patterned interaction. For him, religion is an instrument for the satisfaction of human needs. Emile Durkheim cited in Dzurgha (2002) defined religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices which are related to separate things which are things that are set apart and forbidden. These beliefs and practices are unified into one single moral community such as church. He maintains that religion contributes to the establishment and maintenance of order in the society by creating condition for social wellbeing, self-discipline, social solidarity, social cohesion and continuity of culture and knowledge.

Thus, a cursory examination of the two concepts 'moral' and 'religion' reveals clearly and expressly that the two are related. Religion is seen from functional point of view that directly and indirectly aids moral living and morality. Both of them talks of righteousness and wrongness of an action and total rejection of evil.

Therefore, moral values refer to those things in human character, conduct and social relations which are judged as good or bad, right or wrong, progressive and unprogressive, noble and ignoble e.t.c (Nwala, 1980). Moral values are associated with values and development. You will agree with me that as societal values change with development, there is always a corresponding change in the moral values of the citizens. Thus, the only thing that is permanent in nature is change. Today, Nigeria as a country has witnessed a deteriorated of its moral, social and educational values. The deterioration is reflected in the behavior of her citizens, both adults and children. Cultism in Nigerian institutions of higher learning 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 counseling. According to Nwamuo (1999), moral 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. So, Adamu and Mambula (1999) confirmed that moral/religious counseling programme are necessary to help individuals recognize moral and religious point of view 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 they accept as critically justifying their own moral 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 counselors as all laboring to find permanent solution to the problem. It is therefore of paramount importance to examine the efficacy of moral/religious counseling in checking the menace of cultism among students in Nigerian institutions of higher learning.

### ***Moral/Religious Strategies for curbing Cultism***

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, moulded 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 gives 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 problem 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 not to promote 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 in all school and in all places 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.

### ***Conclusion and Recommendation***

The problems posed to the society by the issue of cultism discussed in this paper is not as insurmountable as we deem it to be. It only requires the federal and state governments to call a spade a spade. When in 1980's the issue of examination malpractice became serious, government enacted a decree which stipulated a twenty-one year jail term for anyone found guilty of examination malpractice, yet the decree did not stem the increasing wave of examination malpractice. Cultism in tertiary institutions in Nigeria shows the degree of moral decadence to which the society has degenerated. Some strong environmental influences that motivate students to belong to secret cults on the campuses are therefore preventable. All hands must be on deck to free our campuses from the nefarious activities of secret cults. Nevertheless, they should increase their vigilance as well as cooperate with the authorities of the institutions and security agents in making our campuses cult-free.

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