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RELEVANCE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN CURBING CULTISM IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This study examined the relevance of religious education in curbing cultism among secondary school students in Nigeria. In doing so, the researchers relied on the data gathered via electronic, print and secondary sources. Concepts of religion, religious studies and cultism were enumerated. It was found that prevalence of cultism is no longer restricted to Nigerian higher institution of learning but rather, it has spread to the secondary schools in Nigeria. The findings of this study also revealed that religious education has the potentials of curbing the bane of cultism menacing citadels of learning in Nigeria. In line with the findings of the study, it was recommended that the governments at all levels are charged to be firm in fighting secret cultism with justice and Equity. Religious education should be made compulsory for all secondary school students.

Introduction

The standard of education and its quality continue to fall in Nigerian despite the efforts by government to improve its quality. Among the factors that have been reported to be responsible for the falling standard of education is persistence of cultism in the Nigerian schools. This problem posts threats to safety and security in schools. It also has negative effects on the development of the nation as a result of unskilled and moral decadent workforce. For a nation to grow and develop there is a strong need for highly skilled and morally upright workforce (Mujahid and Lawal 87-98). Francis asserted that recently, one disturbing trend that is fast becoming a source of concern to many Nigerians in the country is the incidence of secret cult or secret societies across almost all geo-political zones in the country. Various reports of kidnapping and ritual killings are daily reported in our news media. Killings of the innocent victims are widely seen and witnessed frequently in some part of the country where human lives are constantly wasted in the quest for monetary gains and other vanities.

Ismail noted that the nation has recently witnessed the proliferation of secret cults in the tertiary institutions. The menace of cultism is glaring not only in Nigerian universities, but even in some secondary schools. Cultism is perhaps one of the great problems confronting our institutions today in Nigeria. In recent years, this plague has assumed a frightening and deadly dimension. Its spread to secondary schools in the country is enough to give every caring parent a cause to lose sleep. In fact, a cult is a group of people which places a secondary need in the position of a primary need. In other words, any group of people that place emphasis on secret initiation or rituals for the purpose of group-help, group protection but whose activities are clandestine in nature is a cult.

For instance, Okeke and Ukemena reported that in February 2014, 26 students of Baptist High School, Gbodofon in Osogbo, Osun State were suspended indefinitely for their alleged involvement in cultism and disruption of academic programmes in the school. Also, some teenagers from two secondary schools were arrested by officers of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) in 2013 in Ogun State for cult-related activities. In addition, Akinlami when writing on cultism corroborated his point with reports from Nigerian newspaper like Vanguard and Leadership. There it was affirmed there were reports of prevalence of cultism among secondary school students Cross River state, Akwa Ibom State and Ekiti state. These points are however point to the fact that cultism is no longer restricted to higher institution of learning in Nigeria, but rather it has spread to the secondary schools. The situation was tagged by Akinlami as 'the rot at the secondary school level'.

Religion has been described as the only agent that can correct the wrong of all other agents. This is because socialization at this level of agent is based on metaphysical knowledge (knowledge beyond human understanding). So, it's believed that this agent works on the Holy Scriptures (Quran and Bible). Ajidagba asserted that the rationale for the inclusion of religious subject in the curriculum can be best appreciated within the general policy statement on the Nigerian educational system and the virtue it seeks to inculcate in the learners. One of the six values which the 9-3-4 system of education was planned to inculcate in a child, is moral and spiritual value in the personal and human relations. Ajidagba offered that morality is so inter connected to religion such that it is difficult to separate them. That is to say, morality cannot be easily inculcated in students without teaching religion (1-16).

Concept of Cultism

According to Amaele the term Cult is a Latin word which refers to worship; religion and faith. According to the *Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary*, cults is referred to as a small group of people who have extreme religious believe and practices. A cult is a group of people who are adherents of a certain type of worship (32-41). According to Langone, cult is a group or movement exhibiting a great or excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea, or thing, and employing unethically manipulative techniques of persuasion and control designed to advance the goals of the group's leaders, to the actual or possible detriment of members, their families, or the community. Unethically manipulative techniques of persuasion and control include but are not limited to: isolation from former friends and family, use of special methods to heighten suggestibility and subservience, powerful group pressures, information management, suspension of individuality or critical judgment, promotion of total dependency on the group and fear of leaving it.

Characteristics of Cultism

Langone asserted that cults tend to share the following characteristics. Members are excessively Zealous and unquestioning in their commitment to identify with leadership of the group. Members replace their beliefs and values with those of the cult group. Members are manipulated and exploited and may give up their educational careers and families to work excessively for cult group assigned tasks such as recruiting new members, fund raising and so on. Miller opines that members arrogate authority and power to themselves which have no basis in commonly understood reality. Persistent systematic anger, the cultic personality cannot tolerate anything he cannot control; his inner frustration comes out as anger. Cultists isolate their devotees, so that their sources of information are confined to the cultist. Some other characteristics of the present day cults are as submitted by Jekayinfa include:

- a) Illegal possession of firearms;
- b) Drug abuse;
- c) Violent crimes like armed robbery;
- d) Illicit sexual escapades;
- e) Killing of innocent students, academic and non-academic staff;
- f) Arson, rape, extortion, threats, physical attacks, blackmail and other inhuman practices.
- (g) Inter-cult clashes involving the Black Axe, Vikings and Buccaneers, the Pirate Confraternity (PC) and the Mafia and so on with their disastrous consequences.

Reasons for Students' Involvement in Secret Cult

Various reasons have been identified as prompting students in cultism among which are the followings:

Influence of peer group: there is no doubt that peer group influence is a potent factor that compels young under graduates to join secret cults. The period of adolescence is marked by intense social relationship in any environment he/she finds himself. At adolescent, there is a shift of emphasis on social relationship from the parents to the peer group. As adolescence breaks the total reliance and contact with his/her parents, he/she shift same to the newly acquired group which in most case is any group on campus he/she embraces (Ajayi, Ekundayo and Osalusi 155-60)

Parental background and Negative parental influence: Some young students in cults have experienced very unstable or non-existent family relationship, but they do not constitute the norm. Many students have experienced varying degrees of communication problems with their parents. While a number of students have known the pains and deprivation of a single-parent home and perhaps for this reason, some have strongly identified with older students who provide a parental image (Jekayinfa 3).

Social status: student join campus secret cult with the aim of requiring power. They also see it as a means of influencing the decision makers on the various campuses and as well an avenue for financial assistance (Ajayi, Ekundayo and Osalusi 155-60)

Political influence: 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 (Oludele 218-21).

Poor Attitude/Attention to Religious Education: Ismail noted that government attaches much importance to science, commercial and other Subjects at the expense of religious studies.

Therefore, consideration for religious studies is mostly relegated to the background when formulating policies on education.

Inadequate Religious and Moral Education: Some parents have abandoned their responsibility 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 Islamic and Christian Religious studies for students to pass examination without emphasizing the moral lessons that can be learnt from such topics. Some religious leaders are not showing good examples to the younger generation (Osakinle and Falana 45-51).

The Roles of Religious Education in Curbing Cultism

Religion is a term that has been given different meaning and subjected to divergent interpretations by the religionists, religious scholars, exegetes and commentators. Interestingly, despite the seeming endless difference in the meaning and divergence in the interpretations, opinion converge on the centrality of beliefs as the foci as the religions. On the other hand, the central theme of all beliefs is the existence of a higher being whose activities are beyond ordinary comprehension. In Christianity, religion is a guided belief in the heritage of Jesus Christ and his acceptance as the savior as illustrated in the Bible. In Islam, religion is all man's activities carried out to please his Creator and his fellow human being, taught by the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Religion has always been seen as a veritable tool for the teaching and inculcation of moral values. As a matter of established facts, moral values can be accomplished only with the teaching of religions, either formally, informally or non-formally. This accounts for why religious education is part and parcel of all religious practices. Scholars agreed that both morals and religion are inseparable twins (Ajidagba)

Islam sees cultism as evil and condemns the activities of the cultists. The Qur'an categorically prohibits collaboration and association on the basis of enmity and wrong doing. It encourages collaboration on the basis of benevolence and piety. "You help one another in righteousness and piety, but do not help one another in sin and rancour: fear Allah : for Allah is strict in punishment" (Quran 5:2) Allah says: "The way (of blame) is only against those who oppress men and rebel in the earth without justification; for such there will be a painful torment" (Qur'an 42:42). These verses show that all forms of aggression and intimidation which is the core of cultism in Nigerian is prohibited.

Cultism is association with aggression; the prophet (S.A.W) condemned aggression and oppression in his sayings. He says: "indeed Allah has revealed to me that you should be humble that no one should oppress others, and so one should be dissolute to others". In another, He says "There is no sin that worthy that Allah hastens its punishment for the offender in this world in addition to the punishment that will be reserved for him in the hereafter, as (the case of) oppression and sovereign the bond of kinship. Sayyid Qutb counts the activities of the cultists as Hirabah (banditry piracy, etc) the Quran describes such people as those who wage war against Allah and his Apostle and prescribe the worst punishment for them. The Quran put it as follows: "The punishment of those who wage war against Allah and its messenger, and strict with might and main for mischief through the land is: execution, crucifixion, or the cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides, or exile from the land. That is their disgrace in this world and a heavy punishment is theirs in the hereafter" (Q5:33).

Islam condemns secrecy on evil motives because it implies deeds of darkness, something which men have to hide. Usually, secrecy are for evil ends or from questionable motives or

because the person seeking secrecy is ashamed of himself. Islam therefore, disapproves of secrecy, loves and enjoins openness in all consultations and doings. To this end Allah says "secret counsels are only (inspired) by satan, in order that he may cause grief to the believers, but he cannot harm them in the least, except as Allah permits; and on Allah let the Believers put their trust" (Quran 58:10).

Similarly, Christianity frowns at cultism and prohibits any form of bloodshed. While reiterating the Christian's injunction on cultism, Ogunade made reference to the following biblical excerpts:

God created man and gave him intellect. He made him superior to all other creatures. Of all that man has dominion over, his intelligence is yet to fathom how blood can be created. He lacks the mechanism of blood creation. He can only supply diet for multiplication of blood. He cannot make blood originally. Since this aspect of the human life transcends the capabilities of man, it behoves us naturally that man must not spill blood unlawfully. Drawing an innocent blood means taking the life of a man" (Gen.9:4).

In addition, Gen.9:5-6 reads thus: "Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man". Ephesians 5: 11-12 also states that "take no part in and have no fellowship with the fruitless deeds and enterprises of darkness but instead (let your lives be so in contrast as to) expose and reprove and convict them, for it is a shame even to speak of or mention the things that (such people) practice in secret".

Religious Education develops pupils' capacity to make responsible personal judgment or evaluation on the many matters with which those religions are concerned. The teaching of religion provides youths with adequate answers that legitimate the institution of society as well as human existence. In addition, religious education enables the youths to imbibe quite early, the legitimate influence of religion for social norms (Abdur-Rafiu). Religious education has the potentials to reduce or curb cultism, examination malpractices, murder, stealing and fraud, gambling, alcoholism /drug abuse, sexual immorality, riot, bribery and corruption, intolerance, tribalism, theft, homicide/suicide if properly internalized. On the other hand, religious education has the potentials to inculcate in the learners the spirit of honesty, patience, love, faith, tolerance/forgiveness, righteousness, contentment, simplicity, justice, respect/humility, kindness, cooperation, dignity of labour, modesty in dress etc if well implemented (Bibire).

Abdur-Rafiu stressed that religious and moral education when properly employed for truth and reconciliation would be a tremendous instrument for peace building in schools and the society at large. While Oludele was of the view that Today, Nigeria as a country has witnessed a deterioration 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. However, religious studies should be exposed to youths in order to prepare them for a way of living harmoniously together without fomenting trouble or seek unnecessary preference over others. 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 (220).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The menace of cultism is glaring not only in Nigeria higher institutions, but even in some secondary schools. Research findings have shown that cultists are reported to have attacked, molested, beaten, maimed, brutalized, raped and even killed some innocent students. While this menace is on the increase, it is in conflict with the core purpose of education. The activities of secret cults are however among the factors that pose threats to safety and security in the schools. A prominent factor that prompts students to join cultism is poor attitude/attention to religious studies education. Since findings of this study have revealed the importance of religious education in schools, it cannot be overemphasized that the subjects should be given recognition and special incentives like other fields because of the direct moral and high expectation in them. The following recommendations are suggested:

1. The religious teachers and other teachers are challenged to live beyond precepts and live by example and preach against cultism and other vices by:
 - (a) Offering religious counseling to their students and members on the ill of secret cultism.
 - (b) Organizing regular religious campaigns targeted towards cultists.
 - (c) Organizing orientation programme for fresh students on the dangers of cultism.
2. The curriculum developers are also challenged that:
 - (a) The entire contents of religious education call for urgent review to meet the yearnings of the nation.
 - (b) Emphasis should be placed on moral development of the Youth.
 - (3) The governments at all levels are charged to be firm in fighting secret cultism with justice and equity by:
 - (a) Government should organize seminar for the religious teachers on how to inculcate moral and religious education that will make the students shun the habits that can jeopardize their future ambition most especially cultism.
 - (b) Religious education should be made compulsory for all secondary school students.
 - (c) Make the holy books, the Bible and Quran available in quantity for the students at subsidized rates and for the poor masses to reflect the nation's religious insight that breeds peace and harmony as spelt out in the National Anthem and Pledge.
 - (d) They should intensify efforts to employ qualified religious teachers at various level of education.
 - (e) Invoking the full wrath of law on cultists, their sponsors and those that seek their services whenever they are apprehended without discrimination or prejudice.
 - (f) Founding counter cultism programmes in schools conflicts with the core purpose of education religious education plays crucial roles in the society.

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