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EDITORIAL COMMENT

Since its formation, Nigerian Association of Educationists for National Development (NAEND) has consistently engaged in down-to-earth deliberations on, and concise analysis of the Nigerian educational system, and proffered solutions. These have been done in conferences, workshops and seminars at national and zonal levels.

The theme of our third annual conference, "contemporary issues in Nigerian Education", was founded on our naked appreciation of the multifarious debilitating factors in Nigerian Education. The problems are many. We are however equally conscious that problems, no matter how serious, are meant to be solved and can be solved.

Participants at the conference were opportuned to pick on problem areas of interest in Nigerian Education system and offer appropriate solutions to them. The current issue of the Journal of Educational Development (JONED) is reflective of our deliberations at the conference.

We re-emphasize our absolute resolve to be continually relevant in national and international educational and socio-economic developmental efforts. In this direction, we very much appreciate the formidable support accorded us by Governments, Institutions, organisations and individuals. Since our focus is to nurture an Association of active minds to build a virile education system towards socio-economic relevance, we call on individuals and organisations that have stake in Nigerian and global educational development to team up with us. We shall not fail.

Oyetunde Awoyele, Ph. D.
Editor-in-chief.

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SOLVING THE PROBLEMS OF CULTISM THROUGH CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

By

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Abstract

This paper highlights the problems of cultism in educational institutions in Nigeria. It discusses the place of religious and moral education in a nation's quest for development, and how to curb moral decadence, especially cultism, among our youths through religion.

Introduction

The menace of secret cults in educational institutions has assumed an alarming rate in Nigeria. Cultism in Nigeria appears to be second to drug trafficking (Onugha 1999:35). Federal and State Governments, parents, school authorities, religious leaders, student bodies, mass media as well as well-meaning members of the public, are greatly concerned about the menace of secret cults and are interested in finding means of curbing their activities in our institutions of learning.

Educational Institutions are regarded as citadels of learning, but unfortunately they have been turned to citadels of violence. The reason for this is that academic programmes become shattered and battered, examinations are disrupted and postponed due to the activities of cultists, since the lives of people in the academic community are not safe. Akesode (1999) exclaimed that "the activities of these clandestine fraternities in our various institutions has become a cankerworm, and it is eating the fabrics of our academic culture at an alarming rate. It is a problem to the family, problem to the society." Similarly, Raufu (1997:1) reported that the problem of secret cultism with the associated problems like killing, extortion, rape, maiming, stealing and other social vices in the country's institutions, has permanently imprinted the issue in the mind of the average Nigerian. However, it is disheartening that the supposed leaders of tomorrow behave as Sergeant Rogers who confessed to killing for rituals (TELL, October 25, 1999).

Definition of Secret Cults

The concepts "Secret Cults" and "Secret Societies" are used interchangeably. Encyclopaedia Britannica (1973 - 1974) and the Encyclopaedia Americana (1979) defines Secret Societies as groups or organizations characterized by the use of secret initiations or other rituals, oaths, grips (or handclaps) or signs of recognition between members (Onugha 1999:36). In the same vein, the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria cited by Onugha (1999) defines Secret Societies as any Association, Group or Body or Persons (whether registered or not) that uses secret signs, oaths, rites or symbols and which is formed to promote a course, the purpose or part of the purpose of which is to foster the interest of its members and to aid one another under circumstances without due regard to merit, fair play or justice to the detriment of the legitimate interest of those who are members (Section 329(1)).

Also, Ogundimu, Opegun and Odeje (1999:13) see secret cult as an exclusive social group consisting of individuals with a common attitude to life. In other words, it is a group of

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people with shared experience, accepted beliefs and group objectives.

However, Oguntase (1997) defines secret cults as a group of people engaged on a form of ritual under oath that binds them in a common destiny. A secret cult therefore is a group of people engaged in a particular set of worship that involves rituals and an oath that binds them together as one entity.

The Birth of Secret Cults in Nigerian Educational Institutions

Researchers revealed that secret societies came into Nigerian institutions of learning through Western civilization. They came as a result of the influence of the social fraternities and sonorities which flourished in American and European Universities and Colleges in the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century (Onugha 1998:38). Interestingly, the aims and objectives of the fraternities then were noble and idealistic. Baird (1968) identifies six purposes of the fraternities:

1. Recognition and respect for God
2. Encouragement of moral living
3. Discouragement of gambling and the use of liquor
4. Making much of friendship
5. Emphasis on honesty and integrity and
6. Promotion of charity

From the above, any organization with such purposes will be kind and benevolent and likely to be encouraged by the authority of any Tertiary Institution as well as the larger society. In the same manner, Herbert (1998:75) explained that in the United States there is the Ku Klux Klan which is a secret organization of white protestant Americans. The Japanese and South Koreans emphasise harmony referred to as "Wa" in Japan and "In Whdahgyul" in Korea. The purpose of all these groups is to express and emphasise harmony in the society.

The birth of secret societies came up in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions; first and foremost in the University College Ibadan (now University of Ibadan) in 1950s. Onugha (1998:39) explains that the aims and objectives of pyrates confraternity of the then University College Ibadan were similar to those of the early College Fraternities of Western Europe and America mentioned above. Awe (1999:176) asserts that seven students of the University College Ibadan, who were idealistic and young started the pyrates' confraternity. He identifies some of the aims and objectives as:

- a. to abolish convention
- b. to revive the age of chivalry and
- c. to end tribalism and elitism

Awe (1999:176) explains that many people in all walks of life regarded the Pyrates Confraternity as the fountain of campus cults. Ogundimu, et al (1999:16) stress that the intent of Pyrates Confraternity is to fight the social injustice usually meted out to students and to put to an end all forms of colonial mentality of the expatriate lecturers and the authorities of the then University College, Ibadan.

A consideration of the emergence of social fraternities in Europe and America between the 19th and early 20th century and its emergence in Nigeria in the 1950s is generally idealistic and benevolent to the society. The aims and objectives of the confraternities were noble, genuine, sincere, wholesome and satisfactory to mankind.

Types of Secret Cult in Nigeria

Ogundimu et al (1999:14) highlight major types of secret cults in Nigeria. They are the traditional and institutional cults.

i. The Traditional Cults

The traditional cults include the 'Ogboni', 'Egbe Awo', 'Egbe Imule' in Yoruba land, 'Ekpe' in Efik, 'Ekine' in Delta area and 'Owegbe' in Edo. The traditional cults were predominant in Nigeria during the pre-colonial era. Moreso, one positive thing common to traditional cults is that they do not harm people unless they are provoked. They serve as a mechanism for cleansing the society of any cultural debris and become dominant in the midst of social order. Furthermore, some serve as socialization groups that initiate young people into adulthood as in 'Poro' and 'Mende' societies of Sierra Leone (Akani 1999:61). The traditional cults in the pre-colonial era manifested from clan to clan, or kingdom to kingdom. They were purposeful in the art of good governance, and usually enforced discipline in the society.

ii. Institutional Cults

The institutional cults emerged only about a decade before independence in Nigeria. The institutional cults (especially the splinter groups from the pyrates) include the Black Axe, Vikings, Pyrates, Trojan Horse, Eiye, Mafia, Red Devil, Black Cat, the Eagles, Scorpion, Mgbamba Brothers, Temple of Eden, Royal Queen, Executioners, etc (Waheed 1998: 5). One thing that is common with institutional cults is that they are known to perform various ungodly activities such as looting, abduction, maiming, kidnapping, extortion, forging, raping, murder, etc. (Dare 1999).

Factors Promoting Cultism

The prolonged reign of military regime in Nigeria was a period of catastrophe, atrocities, assassination, frustration, oppression, kidnapping, etc. Nigerians should not forget that many military men (popularly known as Khaki boys) are under the influence of drugs. That is, they cannot do without drugs. Furthermore, they are noted to be callous and inhuman.

An examination of military regimes since 1966, up till now, shows their footprint in Nigeria society and there is hardly any difference between the attitude of the military men and cultists. The cultists in the campuses are noted for ritual killings, maiming, raping, and many others. As the military believes fervently in guns, so also the cultists cannot operate without guns. It is therefore clear that the prolonged reign of the military in Nigeria largely promoted cultism in our various Educational Institutions.

There are many other reasons why students join secret cults in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions. Scholars have shown reasons why students join campus cults in the Tertiary Institutions. One of such reasons is quest for protection (Raufu 1997:6). Girls in general, and weak male students run into cults to ensure protection from attack by strong and powerful individuals or rival cults on campus. Some join cults in order to secure undue promotion by lecturer cult members, some do so to boost their personal egos, or to bring about retribution for past ill treatment by co-students or lecturers. Students from poor home may also join with the hope of gaining quick employment after the National Youth Service. This is based on the belief that cultists are largely children of people in exalted positions both in private and public sectors, and that such highly placed parents in executive positions can give them (children from poor homes) the employments they much desire (Dare, 1999).

The Effects of Cultism

Cultism in Nigerian Educational Institutions today has a very negative effect in the society. If quick steps are not taken the institutions will breed criminals rather than intellectuals, and this will affect the development of Nigeria in all ramifications.

Also armed robbers and hired assassins in the society often graduate from cultism. It is worthy of note that some students in secondary schools are already cultists. When they gain admission into Universities they continue with their cult activities. Cultists are a threat to lecturers' lives and properly, school authority, students (non-cult members and rival cult members alike) as well as non-academic staff in the campuses.

Intimidation and assassination become the order of the day and University campuses become abattoirs. In fact, Delta State University (DELSU) is an example of institutions where assassination has taken place. A short while ago, a principal Assistant Registrar was allegedly assassinated in the University (DELSU) by cultists.

Curbing Cultism Among the Youths through Religion

i. Parental Role:

Parents are the first socializing agent. Haralambos (1980:4) describes the family as the primary agent of socialization. Broom and Selznick (1969:84) explain that individual participates in new social forms, learns new disciplines and develops new values. On the other hand, it implies that parents need to re-socialize their children, inculcate moral values, religious education and other things that the society considers as important in them. Parents should see themselves as Chief agents socializing their children. By so doing, they will be helping to see to the growth and development of the society (Broom and Selznick 1969:84). Badmos (1997:37) expresses that the moral strength of a society essentially depends on the state of its families. In the same vein, Messer (1965) argued that the decay of family life is the deepest cancer of the decline of a nation.

Furthermore, the Bible enjoins the parents to teach the child in the ways of God so that when he/she grows up he/she will not depart from it (Proverbs Chapter 22 verse 6). Parents are like the entrance through which children comes into the world. Parents therefore are expected to lay more emphasis on religious education in the various homes in order to inculcate good habit and behaviour into their children. Proverbs Chapter 7 verse 1 says: "My son keep my words, and lay up my commandment with thee".

Also, proverbs chapter 13 verse 1 says "A wise son heareth his father's instruction but a scorner heareth not rebuke".

From the biblical quotations above, the family (parents) has a great task ahead using religious education to inculcate moral values to new generations in the society. Significantly, from early age, children should be taught obedience, truthfulness, love, hard work and respect for elders as well as love for the nation. Similarly, parents should serve as role models for their children.

ii. Religious Education as a core subject in schools

Section 1 (3) of National Policy on Education (1981) postulates the inculcation of the following values at all levels of our educational system:

1. Respect for the worth and dignity of the individuals;
2. Faith in man's ability to make rational decisions;
3. Moral and spiritual values in inter-personal and human relations;
4. Shared responsibility for the common good of society

5. Respect for the dignity of labour
6. Promotion of the emotional, physical and psychological health of all children (p. 7)

The above values enumerated would be achieved in a society where there is the fear of God. The Bible says "the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom". The expected future leaders (students) no longer fear God. The reason for this is that religious education is hardly taught in schools, especially at primary and post primary school levels. It is an elective course in senior secondary schools (SS 1 - 3). It is clear that to achieve those six values enumerated in the National Policy on Education, religious education must be compulsory from primary to post primary education like English and Mathematics. Also, all undergraduates, irrespective of the choice of career should offer religious studies as a compulsory course. Moreover, all religious institutions should confront cultism by organising seminars and crusades so as to eradicate it in educational institutions.

iii. The Curriculum

The Nigerian educational institutions have a great job at hand for the nation. Their curriculum must be reviewed or revamped. Courses in the area of sociology of education and guidance and counseling must be offered by students, irrespective of their choice of career. Also, religious and moral education should be made compulsory for all students in the tertiary institutions.

The curriculum needs to be revamped so as to reflect belief systems, norms and values in the society. The students or learners being referred to as future leaders need to learn and share the culture of the society. Linton and Kluckhohn as reported in Haralambos (1980:3) explain that culture must be learnt and shared, and failure in this, society would be unable to communicate and cooperate, and confusion and disorder would result. This shows that the curriculum needs to be heavily loaded with African culture and less emphasis on western culture. However, the moral and religious education should be part and parcel of the curriculum from primarily, post primary and post secondary level.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, one can conclude that cultism is a disease, a leprosy that can jeopardize the overall development of the Nigerian society. Henceforth, there should be crusade against secret societies in primary schools through to post secondary schools - since the youths of today are the leaders of tomorrow. It therefore connotes that if all hands are not on deck to wage war against cultism, this great nation (Nigeria) will consistently breed and nurture criminals and brigands.

Recommendations

From the foregoing, to promote peace in the educational institutions in the new millennium;

- (a) The curriculum must be reviewed, and greater emphasis should be laid on courses like Sociology of Education, Guidance and Counselling, as well as Philosophy of Education because these disciplines touch and discuss human behaviour in the society.
- (b) In the Tertiary Institutions, irrespective of the choice of career, students must be required to pass at least 12 units in the department of religious studies
- (c) There should be regular parents meeting with school authorities so as to know the problems that are confronting the schools.
- (d) Parents should endeavour to pay impromptu visits to their children
- (e) The Student Union of each University should assist their school authority and protect students

- from the hands of the criminals called cultists. Moreso, any member of students' union executives who join secret societies should be exposed, and expelled.
- (f) Religious leaders should organize seminars as well as crusades in order to eradicate cultism in our educational institutions.
- Finally, secret cult members should be recognized as a danger to the society, and should be treated as armed robbers when caught.

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