

## ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN CURBING CULTISM AMONG NIGERIAN YOUTHS

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### **Abstract**

The Nigerian society has accepted norms, customs and way of life. To guarantee safety of lives and property, laws are made to govern and ensure right conduct among the citizenry. Cult and cultism as it is known refers to a group whose beliefs or practices could be considered strange or sinister. The action of members are contrary to accepted practices thereby causing social disorder, injury, loss of lives and properties. This work therefore, is designed to examine the evolutionary trend of this menace in Nigeria, its modus operandi, consequences/effects as well evolving ways/strategies on how to curb this ugly monster by the church.

Generally cult and cultism has become an everyday vocabulary amongst literate Nigerians, the concept of cultism remains an enigma. Much noise about cult and cultism are heard almost every other day over the mass media (both prints and electronics), street and campus corners. Generally what people talked about are simply the names of these cults and the danger/treat they represent to the immediate and larger society. Sea pyrates/pirates (Sea dog) black cat, buccaneers are just but few popular names that strike fears in the mind of campus students and their parents when ever they are mentioned. One thing that is clear however is that even though the true nature of these notorious and nocturnal groups are not clearly known to outsiders (Non members), their activities are generally regarded as counter productive to societal values. Hence they are not desirable. It is therefore, no wonder, that progressive minds

seek ways of eradicating these barbaric mundane practices from not only our, university campuses but also from the larger society.

But how can one think of eradicating or evicting an enemy without first knowing how the enemy is? His strength and antics need to be understood. Even the good book: - The Holy Bible itself declares that except the strong man is first of all bind, damage cannot be done into his house.

### **Evolutional History of Cultism in Nigeria**

Cultism to Nigeria started as a confraternity rather than as a cult. The major difference between a confraternity and a cult is that while a confraternity is ideologically based, a cult has well defined religious rules.

In Nigeria a confraternity is a group that is normally university based' on initiated. However these groupings eventually spread to street and creeks in the 1990's. The first confraternity known in Nigeria was the 'Pirates confraternity. It was formed by the noble prize winning author Wole Soyinka in 1952, at the University College, Ibadan with six others. According to the Pirates the magnificent seven as they called themselves, "the confraternity was formed to speak for the poor". It was essentially elitist confraternity. Membership was open to any promising well student regardless of tribe or area but selection was stringent and most applicants were denied. For almost twenty years (1952 - 1972) the Pirates were the only confraternity on Nigeria Campuses (Wikipedia, 2009).

In the late 1960's campuses were

largely affected by the Nigeria Civil war which wracked the country till 1970. However, in 1972, sources including Wellington (2007) claimed that a former member of the Pyrate Dr. Bolaji Carew and some others were expelled from the Pyrates confraternity. This development and some other led to the withdrawal of the Pyrate from the campuses and formally registered as a social organization with the name "Nigeria Association of Sea dogs (NAS)" while the expelled members formed a parallel confraternity by the name 'National "Association of Sea Lords". These new fraternity was and still is called "The Buccaneers". The Buccaneers expectedly modeled after its parent grouping, largely copying the sea dog structure, symbols and ceremonies. The major difference between the sea dog and Sea Lord Fraternity was mainly in approach to issues. Where as the sea dog use the elitists approach - dialogue, the sea lords were more confrontational.

In the 1980's (Wikipedia, 2009), opined that confraternities spread through the area of three hundred institutions of higher learning in the country. The Neo-Black Movement for Africa also called the Black Axe emerged from University of Benin while the supreme Eiyé confraternity also known as the National Association of Air Lords broke off from Black Axe in 1983. University of Calabar then founded the Eternal fraternity order of the legion consortium (the Klansmen Confraternity In 1984). A former member of the buccaneer formed the supreme Vikings confraternity (the adventures or alternately Denorsemen club of Nigeria). Interestingly by this period, the then military government under General Babangida rather than see the evil of cultism instead saw these confraternities (cults) as a weapon to checkmate the academia's who were the only

organized groups that can challenge the military junta at that time. The confraternities were- thus provided with weapons, cash remuneration and protection to oppose and quell possible dissenting voices from the campuses. The same author went into quote Emeka Akudi (a sociologist) as saying that some Vice Chancellors protected confraternities which were known to be violent and use then to attack students adjudged to be troublesome. The Obafemi Awolowo University crisis 1991 corroborated this view when the student union leader had to call on the federal government to hold the Vice Chancellor responsible for the mahem in the campus as a result of his failure to rusticate an earlier identified eight cultists in the campus. The Vice Chancellor Professor Owolabi was later dismissed by the FGN.

Three major reasons have clearly been identified as being responsible for confraternities emerging into cults in Nigeria universities. These were properly summarized by Lewa, in Naira land forum (2006) as:-

- i. The proscribing of campus cults (confraternities) by the Buhari/Idiagbon Junta in 1985.
- ii. The decay in educational institutions in Nigeria and
- iii. The militarization of universities by successive dictatorship government.

Lewa (2006) further explained that these actions, drove most of the groups underground and gave way to excesses. Wellington (2007) added that by this time the splintered cult groups introduced a new dimension into confraternities' tradition: Before carrying out any activities, they would practice voo doo rituals.

#### **Cult Activities Outside the Campus**

According to Wikipedia (2009), in

the early 1990s as the end of the second republic drew near, confraternity activities engaged in a bloody struggle for supremacy. The family confraternity (the campus Mafia or the Mafia), which modeled itself after the Italian Mafia emerged. Shortly after the arrival, several students were expelled from Abia State University for cheating “cultism” a reference to the voodoo - practicing confraternities, which marked the beginning of a shift of confraternity activities from the university to off campus. However the consolidation of confraternity activities outside Nigeria University campuses was boosted by the renouncement of cultism by the university students and the break down of traditional campus cults all over the country as a result of amnesty granted to all renounced cultist from the campuses to residential neighbourhoods and streets as campuses where no more safe haven for them. Incompetence of government officials and inadequate facilities to police campuses by Universities Authorities led to the resurgence of cultism of campuses as renounced cultists who could not be protected by the law, went back to their cult groups to seek protection from rival groups who have unraveled their identity as a result of the renouncement ceremony. This resulted in' a situation where cult groups were now well established in and outside the campuses.

The Brotherhood of the Blood (also known as Two-Two) (Black Beret), another notorious confraternity, was founded at Enugu State University of Science and Technology. Another cult, the Victor Charlie Boys, was established by Augustine Ahiazu when he was Vice Chancellor of the Rivers State University of Science and Technology. The cults established in the early 1990s are legion; they include: Second Son of Satan

(SS5), Night Cadet, Sonmen Mgba Mgba Brothers, Temple of Eden, Trojan Horse, Jurists, White Bishops, Gentlemen Clubs, Fame, Executioner, Dreaded of Friends, Eagle Club, Black Scorpion, Red Sea Horse, Fraternity of Friends.

The Klansmen Confraternity expanded their influence by creating a “street and creek” wing, Deebam, to fight for and control territory outside of the universities through violence and crime. In response, the Supreme Vikings Confraternity (SVC) established their own street and creek group, Deewell. When Deewell was unable to match Deebam, the SVC created a second confraternity wing, the Icelanders (German), which would eventually be led by militia leader Ateke Tom. The Outlaws, another well-known street and creek confraternity, began as a splinter group of the Icelanders (German).

In the late 1990s, all female confraternities began to be formed. These include the Black Brazier (Bra Bra), the Viqueens, Daughters of Jezebel, and the Damsel. Female confraternities have supplied spies for allied male confraternities as well as prostitution syndicates.

### **Campus Cult in Nigeria and their Activities**

Ogharaerumi (2006) in her paper presented at a seminar organized by the Delta State Post Primary Education Board (PPEB) for principals of secondary schools identified the activities of youth cult and their names as follows:

#### **Male Cults are:**

- Buccaneers
- Black Axe
- Red Skins
- Pirates (also called National

- Association of Sea Dogs).
- Eiyas
- Mafia Beta Sigma;
- Dragons, Vikings and
- Black Beret etc.

**Female Cults are:**

- Temple of Eden
- Frigates, uptown girls
- Barracudas
- Black Brazier
- White Angels
- White Horse
- Daughters of Jezebel
- White Bra etc

Going further Wikipedia (2009) enumerates some more bizarre forms to operations of campus cults. According to him, during the first week of the school year, confraternity alumni and members swarm campuses recruiting new members. Initiations ceremonies normally involve severe beatings, in order to test their endurance, as well as injections of a liquid mixed with blood. Male initiates may some times be required to pass an additional hurdle before becoming full members, including raping a popular female student or a female member of the University Staff. Among the all female Jezebels or Amazons, prospective members may be required to undergo six rounds of rough sexual intercourse or fight with/against a group of women or against a much stronger man. Cults also charge annual membership fees of between 10,000.00 (US\$80) and 30,000 naira.

**Consequences/Effects of Cultism on the Society**

Although the history of cultism on the university campuses in Nigeria dates back to some fifty years, its involvement in violence

became manifest only some two decades ago. Akinbami (1991) has observed, for example, that the Pan African Black Axe confraternity normally commemorated the murder of anti-apartheid students who were murdered in Sharpeville, South Africa.

Unfortunately, however, from the beginning of the 1980's, the activities of Confraternities became violent and secrecy became their ways of life. Their activities included "dealing" with any non-members who snatched a member's girl friend or "sugar daddy" (in case of female cultists). Their activities also included "setting" lecturers in cash or kind (Okwe 2002). Female cultists began to operate prostitution rings and having their photographs displayed in popular hotels. From this period on, secret cults sprang up in the country like mushrooms with their activities assuming more devastating and dangerous proportions. They became nightmares to the general student communities, parents and successive military and civilian.

Consequently data on secret cult activities in Nigeria must be teased out of newspaper reports, magazines and occasionally from anonymous persons. An examination of some random reports which throw some light on the extent of violent activities of secret cults in the Nigerian universities is now presented.

One of the earliest reported secret cult violence occurred at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1985 when a non-cult student incurred the wrath of another student, who was a cult leader, for "snatching" the latter's girlfriend (Akor 1994). It was also reported by Eneji (1996) that sometimes in 1991 a student at the University of Port Harcourt was beheaded

during a feud between cult members. In 1993, fifteen students of the University of Port Harcourt were jailed for terms varying from five to thirty years for belonging to secret cults. They were jailed by the miscellaneous offences tribunal which sat at Enugu, Anambra State in Eastern Nigeria (**Daily Times**, 23rd Jan, 1993, p. 7).

Furthermore, at Delta State University in Abraka, the activities of secret cult groups resulted in the death of a Principal Assistant Registrar and his wife. Two secret cult groups- the Black Axe and the Buccaneers were engaged in what appeared like an all-out war.

On 10th July, 1999, armed cultists stormed a male hostel at Obafemi Awolowo University brutally murdering five students. Many pages of the **Nigerian Tribune** of 24th July, 1999 were devoted to the extensive reporting of the event.

Olubusuyi (2002), reported that the students of Delta State University in Abraka, carried out a massive destruction of some parts of the campus on 7th September, 2002. The Vice Chancellor's lodge was burnt in the process, also was the department of linguistic building. On 5th August, 2002 a 300 level economics student was shot and slaughtered at the Dalimore area of Ado-Ekiti, the Capital City of Ekiti State. Koleoso (2002) traced the source of the crime to cultists. Incidentally the slain student was the only child of his parents.

At the University of Jos in Plateau State, Shobayo (2002) reported that two undergraduates were callously shot dead while they were deeply asleep. This happened when some cultist groups were engaged in a battle of supremacy during the Miss "Unijos" competition.

In Edo State, Ayodele (2003) reported that some criminals suspected to be cultists set a house ablaze at 32 Omokaro Street, Benin City when the cultists, after ransacking the house could not find the people they were looking for. Thus, the consequences of cultism among Nigerian youths are grievous.

### **The Role of the Church in Curbing Cultism among Nigerian Youths**

From the foregoing, it is evident that cult being an extreme religious group is not part of any religion (Longman Group (1995), has well defined doctrines that are counter to the Christian Faith. Obadare (2009), pointed out some of them as follows:

- ❖ New truth
- ❖ Non biblical source of authority.
- ❖ Another Jesus
- ❖ Rejecting of Orthodox Christianity
- ❖ Contradictions
- ❖ Non biblical teachings on the nature of God
- ❖ Changing theology
- ❖ Strong Leadership
- ❖ Salvation by works and
- ❖ False prophecy

Going further, Obadare (2009), identified some fundamental truth: about what attracted youths to cultism as follows:

1. Search for identity and purpose.
2. Search for answers for the unknown.
3. Unmet basic needs and
4. Empowerment

These identified attractions to cultism by people generally and youth especially, can be so strong a force to blind people from godly doctrines. Hence, the Bible counseled in Prov. 6.22 to train a child (right from infancy) in the way (biblical doctrines) he/she should go so that when they are growing up, they

will not depart from it. If children are not yet given sound biblical orientation, from their respective Christian homes, the tendency is that they may not even have the basis for true comparism.

Christians are also enjoined in Thes. 5: 17 to pray without ceasing. Also 1:Tim. 2:1-4, the Bible admonished Christians who desire peaceful life to pray always for leaders (Government). No wonder therefore that Ogharaerumi (2006), in proffering strategies through students and staff religious (Christian) groups. Above all the activities of cultism in the campus today and their attendant effects on the overall society is a challenge to the gospel of Christianity which preaches love, mercy, and forgiveness as opposed to hatred, violence and revenge which is the philosophy of these odd groupings.

#### **Conclusion**

Christian religion is obviously opposed to cultism (occult) practices worldwide. However, no sane personality attempts to solve a problem without knowing what the problem is. If the Christian religious bodies must impact the society positively, they cannot afford to pretend that cultism can demonically affect even their own children. They must gather all information they can get about this occult groupings, know their attendant ripple effect and antics. Then and only then can they attempt to eradicate cultism from our campuses.

Cultism is evil, all hands must therefore be on deck to salvage not only our campuses but the entire Nigeria society. The Holy Bible enjoined Christians in Amos 6:1 that “woe unto him that is at ease in Zion....”

#### **Recommendations**

Christians as a body must rise to these challenges by:

- i. Being more society sensitive in their preaching
- ii. Organize indoor seminars to educate their members on proper concepts of socialization: - Proper mode of dressing, partying and even cash education.
- iii. They should speak against evil policies of government without bias
- iv. They should take active part in politicking. However, the clergies should distant themselves from partisan politics.
- v. Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) should carefully examine the policies of government especially as it concerns education with the hope of having their input.
- vi. A drama piece mimicking the evil of cultism can also be staged by Christian group to discourage attraction to it.

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***Role of the Church in Curbing Cultism Among Nigerian Youths***

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