

Secret Cults Pandemonium in Nigeria: An Ethical Reflection

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Abstract

Almost no day passes without the news of secrets cult killings, maiming or disturbances in one quarter of the country or the other. Secret cult's activities have arguably become the number one rocker of terror in Nigerians. Members of these cults no longer cut across students of higher institutions; students of secondary and primary school now have huge membership and most unfortunately, even non-students are now members of one cult or the other. What exactly is the cause of this proliferation of cult groups and the multiplications of cult members in Nigeria? What is to be done to ensure that cultism is wiped off or greatly minimized in Nigeria? This paper grapples with answers to these questions. It concludes that Nigeria can only be free from the menace of cultism if her government truly becomes people-oriented rather than individual-oriented.

Introduction

The greatest instinct of human beings is the instinct of self-preservation. Every human being wants to preserve his/her existence for as long as possible and is prepared to go extreme if need be. This instinct of self-preservation is the root reason, why humans live in clusters. Humans are well aware that the best way to preserve the self in existence is not to be alone but to live with others, hence the existence of villages, communities and states. However, membership of a society in some cases, fail to guarantee the preservation of the self as envisaged by individuals, leading to a desire for a society that could perform this role. This desire for a better society is the root reason for the formation of secret societies. It is the charm behind the mass trooping of people into secret societies.

The Nigerian state has actually failed many, making them to seek a better meaning to life in these cultic groups. Though, it is not clear to me, whether or not these cults actually satisfy the yearnings of members for a better life, what is clear to me is that, these cults have become a menace to the public. It has made fear to become the constant companion of most Nigerians. It has made life to become meaningless for many and has driven peace far away from many hearts. It is by virtue of its threat to security and peace, that I feel, it should be eradicated. It is possibly able to satisfy the inward yearnings and emptiness of its members but since its activities cause havoc in the society, it needs disbandment.

To disband cultism, is simply to do what these secret societies do for its members. For the government to end cultism, it needs to do for the citizens, what cultism promises. If government is effective, the charm of cultism will be reduced. The war against cultism is therefore, not won by weapons or words, it is in making frantic and sincere efforts to better the life of the people.

Origin of Secret Cults in Nigeria

Secret cults in Nigeria started in higher institutions and are traceable to Wole Soyinka, who founded the pyrate confraternity (Seadogs) in 1952 alongside six friends at the university

college of Ibadan. The initial aim of this cult was to fight for the welfare of the poorer students. The magnificent seven as the new cultists were called, felt that the poorer students were marginalized, making them to strive in manners and dressing in order to be accepted by the richer class, who tailored their lives after the colonial powers. Soyinka would later note that the Pyrates wanted to differentiate themselves from "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" (Rotimi, 81).

The cult was mainly intended as a revolt against this elitist tendency and generally against the ill-treatment of members. Membership to the cult was restricted to promising male students and all members were bound to obey strict rules. Signs of hard work as manifested in high grades was one of the criteria for membership and many intended members were denied membership..

Over time, those who failed to be admitted as members and those expelled for flouting the rules started forming other cult groups. Carew found the Buccaneers Confraternity (also known as the National Associations of Sea Lords) in Ibadan. Other groups came forth: the Supreme Eiye Confraternity (also known as the National Association of Air Lords) founded in the University of Ibadan, the Neo-Black Movement of Africa (also called Black Axe) founded in the University of Benin, the Eternal Fraternal Order of the Legion Consortium (the Klan Konfraternity) founded in University of Calabar, the Supreme Vikings Confraternity (the Adventurers or, alternately, the De Norsemen Club of Nigeria) founded in University of Calabar (Wellington 2007). Other cult groups include: Second Son of Satan (SSS), Night Cadet, Sonmen, Mgba Mgba Brothers, Temple of Eden, Trojan Horse, Jurists, White Bishops, Gentlemen Clubs, Fame, Executioners, Dreaded Friend of Friends, Eagle Club, Black Scorpion, Red Sea Horse and Fraternity of Friends (Wellington 2007). -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. As new groups emerged, inter-group tensions led to fighting, especially for supremacy, though these were initially limited to fistfights. These fist fighting later graduated to fights with deadly weapons.

Gradually, cult activities ceased being a campus thing and extended to off-campus. Due to the condemnation of cultism and general renunciation of it during the democratic regime of the fourth republic, most cultists publicly denounced cultism and accepted the offer of amnesty. However, due to inability of the government to protect repentant cultists, those still in schools and those out of schools, most of them went back to their cults to gain protection from rival cult groups who see them as easy targets. This marked the beginning of cultism outside the campus. Today, even those who have never entered the university are members of cult groups.

Effects of secret Cults activities to the society

The agenda of secret societies in themselves may not be wrong. The law after all, allows freedom of association. However, the activities of secret cults which usually threaten public peace, betrays whatever good agenda they may have. So many people have lost their lives due to cult activities. Many more have been maimed and still more have been rendered useless to self, because many cultists live in perpetual fear of the unknown. Cultism therefore is destructive to self, as it inhibits freedom. By inhibiting freedom, which is the essence of human beings, it dehumanizes. It makes members less human and therefore less functional to self and society.

Most of the lost lives, due to cult activities are those of prominent lecturers and promising students, on whose shoulders the hope of the nation lies. No nation fares well, if it continually

losses its most essential factors of production. Since cult activities had centered more in the academic circle, it means the most promising lives in the nation are daily lost. Those alive are rendered less productive because of constant fear of being attacked by rival cultists. Since the nation depends on its best resources for growth; by continually losing lecturers and students due to cult activities, the Nigerian state is unable to function optimally and actualize its potentiality. Cultism therefore, affects negatively the growth of the nation.

Most cultists get a half-baked education, due to lack of appropriate disposition to academic activities. This means that cultism also contributes to the lamentable state of the Nigerian educational system, whereby she mills out millions of educated unemployable graduates. The Nigerian educational system is one where in most cases unmerited grades are given to students. Most of these unmerited grades are given under duress from secret cultists. Secret cultism puts a knife to standards in education. It destroys meritocracy and enthrones malpractices of all sorts.

Secret cult members are expected to pay dues regularly. This makes most of them to go into arm robbery, kidnapping and other criminal activities in order to meet up with their dues. Most of the arm-robberies and kidnapping in Nigeria is therefore, by secret cultists. Secret cultism contributes much to insecurity in the country and by extension the poverty of the country. A state of insecurity drives away investors and stifles business activities. Many foreign investors who otherwise would want to invest in Nigeria fail to do so, because of the high level of insecurity. Even indigenous investors prefer to invest outside Nigeria for the same reason. The result has been low economic development, unemployment and mass poverty.

Secret cultism therefore, is not merely detrimental to members; it also negatively affects nonmembers and the society at large. It is on this ground that I feel, much needs to be done to efface it.

Eradicating Cultism: Way Forward

I acknowledge the fact that there have been several attempts to eradicate cultism. There have been several propaganda, several talks against cultism, several revolts and protests. However, the amnesty programme to all cultists at the outset of the democratic regime in 1999, is one of the most commendable attempt to end cultism in schools. Today, cultism has reduced in schools but unfortunately has become stronger outside campuses. Cultic activities is no longer linked to school campuses, the centre has shifted to the open society. This makes it more dangerous, for it is easier to convince an educated with words, but an illiterate is a hard nut to crack. Weapons in the hands of an enlightened person is far better than weapons in the hands of stark illiterates. Unfortunately, for Nigeria, this is the situation she finds herself today. Cultism has spread like wildfires even into our villages. In my village, Boki of Cross River State, cultic fighting and killings are almost becoming a common spectacle. What then should be done about this?

Obviously, the amnesty programme will not fare well as it did not fare well in 1999 due to poor implementation. The poor implementation of the amnesty programme and the failure to grant security to ex-cultists, made cultism to escalate to off campus. For me any attempt at a solution to a problem, must begin from the source of the problem. It is useless to preach against cultism; it is useless to arrest and prosecute them; it is equally useless to grant them amnesty, when the reason why people seek refuge in secret cults have not been addressed. There are reasons why secret cults entice and attract members. One of such reasons is the promise of

security. Another is the promise of a better material life. Also there is the promise of love, care, brotherliness, fellow feeling and mutual help.

Every human needs the above to certain degrees. That is essentially why human beings congregate into societies. Unfortunately, Nigerian societies have failed to provide these to its citizens, leaving them with no option than to join artificial societies (secret cults) which promise to supply these needs in abundance. Commenting on this Bewaji writes that the present society, is one “in which competition for the scarce resources of the environment takes place. But it is not only the resources of the environment that are scarce. The human resources of love, patronage, recognition, compassion, companionship, etc. are also scarce, and require deliberate efforts in both their generation and equitable distribution” (2004). Generally the Nigerian society, is that where insecurity of lives and properties reign supreme. It is where poverty, corruption, unemployment is common place. It is a place where favoritism, nepotism, godfatherism, tribalism and ethnocentrism reign supreme. It is not merit that counts in Nigeria, it is who you have. The secret cults, boast of members in all works of life, thus it is easier to convince people to join them in order to get connected to the powerful in the society, for the sake of help. In the face of insecurity in the country, it is easier to convince one to join cults, in order to get secured. And in the face of the lack of love and fellow feeling that rocks Nigeria now, it is easier to convince people to belong to where they can have a feeling of belongingness, care and love.

To destroy that allure to cultism, an alternative must be provided. It is not enough to drag people out of cults, when nothing is put in place to quench their inmost tastes for a better life. When they come out and find out that what they expect is not found out here, they will simply go back. That is what happened to repentant cultists of 1999. It is also what happened to the repentant militants, that were granted amnesty by president Yar’adua. They simply went back to their normal lives, since the alternative offered them was not good enough.

An effective fight against cultism, is not one with weapons but one shown in commitment to the improvement of the lots of the people. The yearnings of the people may not be attainable in a day. I believe no sincere human being expect this. However, what counts most, is that sincere commitment to alleviating the plight of the people. Even the secret cults do not at all times, supply the expectations of the people, but people still adhere to them and many more still join them because of the perceived commitment and interest on their affairs. If this commitment to bettering the lives of citizens is shown by the government, then secret cultism will begin to lose its grips and allure. The following steps could be taken to overthrow cultism:

1. Improve security. The security situation in Nigeria is pathetic. Lives and properties are not safe in Nigeria. Many people run to cultism for safety reasons. If Nigeria can provide security, most people will not see the need to join cult. One way to beef up security is to strengthen the police force. More police personnel should be recruited, trained and equipped. Policemen attached to individuals and organizations should be withdrawn and sent to the streets. “Apart from the president and the governors, I see no reason why policemen should accompany individuals around. The security should be for everybody and not for some individuals. I believe if the police effectively do their jobs, these individuals will not even need special protection, since there will be enough security to cover everybody” (Essien & Bisong 2015). Each streets should have policemen patrolling it. In Nigeria, it is common to see, policemen guarding single individuals and organizations when a whole street will not have even one policeman guarding it. This convince most citizens that the government do not care about them, making cultism more attractive. Everybody wants to have that feeling of sincere care; this could be achieved if

the government makes it visible to the people that their lives are important to her. Everybody should be secured and not merely some important individuals.

2. Enthroned meritocracy. Presently, almost nothing is achieved or gotten by merit in Nigeria. According to Bisong and Egbai, “the means to attaining the ideal (money), which are: open and free competition, merit, recognition of hard work and talents are not known in Nigeria. On the contrary these are replaced by the Nigerian means which are: favouritism, nepotism, godfatherism, ethnocentrism, tribalism and other preferential means of selection” (2014: 838). This means that in Nigeria, one must have one big person somewhere, before he/she is employed, admitted into a desired course, given a deserved contract, awarded or favoured by the government. This understanding of the Nigerian system makes people join cult, because it is believed that membership of a cult, will give one the connection he/she desires. If meritocracy rather than favoritism could be made the norm in Nigeria, membership in cults will wane, since this will not be needed to get connected to jobs and contracts. The moment jobs and other booties become open for fair competition that is the moment hard work will become the norm in Nigeria, as it will become known that hard work pays better than having people in positions of power. To be dissuaded from joining cults, for the sake of getting connected, favoritism, nepotism, tribalism and other forms of defective selection processes need to give way for merit to rule.
3. Create employment opportunities. Most people join cult even when they know how risky it is, because they believe death and life is the same. A frustrated person fears death less. A frustrated and a defeated life is not too different from death. To such people, the risk involved in cultism is not more than the risk of not being a member. There is a risk of dying of starvation if he/she is not a member and there is a risk of dying from fights, if he/she belongs to a cult. The risk in cult to such people is lesser than the risk outside, for in cult one could possibly escaped death, but outside cults death by starvation is sure. In such circumstances, the motivation to leave cultism is weak and the motivation to join cultism is strong. This is so, especially now that politicians use cultists for many nefarious assignments. Cultism has become a sort of job for the jobless. This could be stemmed if jobs could be provided by the government for the masses. A relatively comfortable man will fear death more than an uncomfortable man. A well employed man therefore will most likely take less risks than an unemployed. This means that an employed man will less likely be charmed into joining cultism.

Conclusion

When these three basic recommendations are taken seriously, we will not need to fight cultism, it will fizzle out on its own. If a man is sure of his security and is sure that if he works hard, his hard work will be rewarded, irrespective of whether or not he belongs to one group or knows one powerful person or not, he will most assuredly not seek to join cultism.

To end cultism is to make it less attractive. To end cultism is simply to make non membership more attractive than membership. When this is achieved, no reasonable man or woman would seek to join cultism. Since cultism thrives when there are members, this will be the beginning of the end of cultism in the country, as new members will not join and some old members will renounce it willingly.

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