

## **Curbing Cultism in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria: The Need for Moral Education**

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### ***Abstract***

*The menace of cultism is one whose roots and dimensions are much deeper than the observed external occurrences such as initiation ceremonies and clashes. The root may be traceable to values, attitudes, habits and practices emanating from the hangover of discontentment with colonial aberration in pre-independent Nigeria and the precipitated riots and murders occasioned by the Nigerian civil war. Today, it dangles like the Sword of Damocles over our tertiary institutions and by extension the education sphere. Some members of these groups who are said to have been involved on account of peer group influence and social, psychological and other reasons possibly began from primary and secondary schools, that by the time they get to the tertiary institutions, jungle don mature, as is popularly said in the Nigerian parlance. Consequent upon this, Nigeria appears to be at the cross roads of socio-economic development and moral flux. It is worthy to note that succeeding governments, groups and individuals have expressed and demonstrated concern towards eradicating this ugly incidence. This is the issue which this paper addresses, covering its origin, typology and terminology, causes and effects, etc. It is contented that moral education is a veritable tool and occupies a pre-eminent position in curbing cultism in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, nothing that its ultimate aim is the bringing forth of a morally sound and mature person and personality cum society.*

## **Introduction**

This issue of having a Nigerian society with the right calibre of persons and values has been on the front burner of recent, especially in the current civilian dispensation, following the potpourri of values inflicted on her by many years of exposure to western induced and western influenced value system, military rule and the hi-tech connections. The fact however remains that this concern predated the present era. It was this that led to the National Conference on Moral Education, held in Port Harcourt, from 1<sup>st</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> February, 1982. According to the organizers, the impetus for the conference was both remote and intellectual, and immediate and practical. The dual objectives of the Conference were:

- i. To generate and sustain informed dialogue among the various classes and groups of Nigerians with the intent of identifying and restating the viable norms, especially the moral values and attitudes, which it is hoped would be capable to sustain a modern and plural society in addition to enhancing individual and social development;
- ii. To make concrete proposals as to how the norms, values and attitudes so identified in respect to the above, might best be disseminated and inculcated among specifically the nation's youth and in the society at large (Nduka and Iheoma, 1983).

Of a related interest is that the 1969 curriculum conference among others, recommended the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and of society. This was incorporated into the National Policy on Education (1977) and carried on to other revised editions.

The foregoing indicates that well meaning Nigerians in academics and outside had identified and recognized the existence of a lacuna in attitudinal behaviour in private and public lives and hence the need to bridge it, using the instrumentality of moral

education. That our society is inundated with vices is not therefore in doubt. It is this realization that led to the inclusion of subjects like Christian Religious Studies, Social studies, Civic education and Security education under religion and national values, in the curriculum of primary education (National Policy on Education, 2013). This, it is hoped, would assist in realizing the overall aim of the philosophy of the nation, the philosophy of education and goals of national education, which is the ability or the concern to map out a relevant, meaningful and right strategy of inculcating the right types of values and attitudes in her citizenry. This was borne out of the observed yawning gap in the existing curriculum. Regrettably, this failure has dragged the nation into a deep moral crisis engulfing the various fabric of her life, manifesting in indiscipline at all levels. These include recklessness on the road by motorists and pedestrians, indiscriminate waste disposal, the scramble, hijack and depletion of national wealth and resources, armed robbery, examination misconduct, sexual impropriety, certificate forgery, manipulation of the electoral process, kidnapping, terrorism of all shades and the hydra headed incidence of cultism in tertiary institutions. This state of affairs may adequately be described as a steady, gradual but firm drift to moral bankruptcy, a paradigm shift of our national values into a state of delinquency.

That tertiary institutions occupy a central role in the overall development of the nation cannot be over stressed. Among its goals are the contribution through high level manpower training, forging and cementing national unity and the promotion of national and international understanding and interaction (NPE 2013). It follows then that the incursion of cultism into tertiary institutions today is a misnomer and an aberration, running contrary to its

philosophy. How moral education can help to curb cultism in tertiary institutions in Nigeria is then the focus of this paper.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

It would be squarely fair to begin this expose by examining some of the concepts that would be used in this paper: moral (morality), education moral Education, cultism and tertiary institutions. The topic becomes germane because consequent upon the seeming societal indifference, lackadaisical and sit don look syndrome that appears prevalent, our society has kept degenerating into systemic malfunctioning, half education, mental failure, value distortion and disorientation, complacency and spiritual darkness.

The word moral derives from the Latin *mores* which corresponds to the Greek *ethos*. It refers to percept or law or that which is acceptable by members of a particular community or society or simply society. According to Okere (1983), the adjective morality has come to mean either the theory of what is right or wrong in human conduct or objectively, the body or system of what is regarded right or wrong in human action, and especially of what is wrong. Moral thus has to do with the rightness or wrongness of an action or actions in relation to conduct in society and interpersonal relations. The aggregate of this moral value serves as test that directs human conduct in a variety of ways. It is in line with this that Nduka (1983) quoted Jeffrey's as defining morality as behaviour in accordance with certain standards of what is good and what is evil-striving for the good and rejecting the evil. As both guide and code of conduct itself, it is advantageous to the individual and society. This implies that when an action is considered moral, it means that there are elements of voluntariness and motivation, pursuant to producing a decorous society and a purposeful knowledgeable, willed and informed individual.

The concept of education and hence its definition is multifaceted. To large extent, it could be described as analogous since no single, particular and precise meaning has so far been attached to it. Etymologically, it derives from two Latin words *educere* and *educare* (Nsirim 2006). The former means to lead or draw out, to bring up, which is taking a person from one stage to another, usually to a better and advantaged one. The latter refers to bring up, to rear, form or train. Education then serves to better the disposition of man who is its recipient. It is in line with this idea that Socrates described education as midwifery; helping the student to bring forth what he is pregnant with already. Man from cradle is said to be full of possibilities and potentialities. It is these that education seeks to explore for maximum use. Education therefore is not the mere transmission of knowledge from one person to another but the raising (energizing) of one's composition (personality) to bringing about the application of wisdom, skill and other virtues necessary for his well being and that of others. McGill is quoted by Obilo (1995) as having stated that education is the effort of the society to help the individual achieve certain of his developmental tasks. Education is thus a tool for growth and development. For John Dewey (1858-1952), an American philosopher and educator, education has two sides: the psychological and the societal, either of which must be subordinated to the other or neglected outright. Because man from inception has always desired, sought for and purposed to survive through engagement in certain activities, knowledge or skills within society, Farrant (1975) sees education as the process of learning to live as a useful and acceptable member of the community. The implication of this is that because they occur concurrently, there exists only a thin line between life itself and society. The understanding of what education is may then depend

on one's level of literacy, personal values, generational emphasis and perception of its functions. Viewed as a process, discipline and product (Ukeje, 1979), its benefits to the individual and larger society are numerous.

From the foregoing, moral education than may mean the preparation, leading out, bringing out, exploiting, exhibiting or displaying the moral qualities or context in man for the purposes of survival. It exposes man to the rejection, suppression and and ultimately deciding to do away with the animal instinct in him. Having been exposed to a number of actions, man takes a decision on clinging to that which would ensure his perpetuity, continuity and stability in society not for his own personal interests alone but in the wider and overall interest of society without which he becomes an isolate. The ultimate aim of moral education is the turning or bringing about a morally sound, mature person and personality, which ensures that he lives and coexists peaceably and progressively in society. Nduka (1983) corroborates the foregoing assertion when he stated that moral education involves not only the teaching, learning and other processes whereby values, rules, principles, ideals, habits and attitudes are inculcated but also the taking of adequate educational steps supplemented with appropriate institutional arrangements to promote moral growth along the developmental continuum.

For Nsirim (2006), moral education is the process whereby man is being helped to form good habits, develop character, imbibe useful experiences and pursue skills and capabilities that enable him to lead functional and harmonious moral life as a member of a social group or society. Furthermore, Aminigo (1999) sees moral education as all the educational and institutional arrangements made by a society to enhance the autonomous moral development of the child.

It should be noted here that moral education is not limited to the formal instructions that are given in the classroom; it includes those given by parents, elders and society in general, in a non-formal setting like the family, clubs or age groups. In this wise, we see it as the aggregate experience that one is given or has acquired having been exposed to the norms of a people or society in formal or informal, setting, with the aim of producing or causing the recipient to acquire principles or behaviors that are in consonance with group or societal expectations. In short, moral education desires to create a harmonious and peaceful coexistence among people in society.

Finally, we wish to point out that moral education aims at the preparation, or leading out of individuals whose personal interests of others for the purposes of creating a decorous and harmonious society, placed against the rightness or wrongness of an action.

### **Meaning of Cult**

Cult or secret cult is a term that is not strange to modern lexicon. Many Nigerian newspapers and magazines are awash every now and then, with what it means and its activities are of common knowledge. The word is of Latin origin which implies worship, religions and faith (Anele 2013). The oxford concise dictionary of sociology (1996) views cult as a small group or religious activists whose beliefs are typically secret, esoteric and individualistic. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) in section 318 subsection) (1 iii a and c) defines secret society to include any society, association group or body of persons (whether required or not) that uses secret signs, oaths, rites or symbols or which is formed to promote a cause, the purpose or part of the purpose of which is to foster the interest of its numbers and to aid one another

under any circumstances without due regard to merit, fair play or justice, to the detriment of the legitimate interest of those who are not members. The activities of which are not known to the public at large, the names of whose members are kept secret and whose meetings and other activities are held in secret. It follows that cult or secret society is a group of people whose identify and activities, that is, the modus operandi is known only to initiates.

### **Cut Metamorphosis and Perpetuation in Nigerian tertiary institutions**

Secret cult activities are traceable to the university college Ibadan (now university of Ibadan), when it was a satellite campus of the university of London. Formed by the popular G7 in 1953, it was known as the pirates (Pyrates) confraternity, also called National Association of Sea Dogs, with the skull and cross as its logo. Most popular among the founding fathers is the first African Nobel Laureate, Prof. Wole Soyinka. It must be given that their originals aim noble and lofty: the producing of future Nigeria leaders, who would be proud of their African heritage, and comprised of the best and brightest most politically conscious students (Osakinle Falana, 2011).

However, the proliferation of many more tertiary institutions equally led to an increase of secret cults, with different aims, most often misplaced. While some emerged as protestant groups, from other original cult group, there were further split into many more groups, struggling for space, authority and recognition, with the attendant adverse consequence of conflicts, leading to arson, brutality, violence and death. These include Black Eye, Vikings, and Buccaneers, Mafia, Dragons, Black Beret and others. There are equally purely female groups such as temple of Eden,



Frigates, Barracudas, Black Brassier, Queen of the coast, daughters of Jezebel among others.

Reasons for students being attracted to cult groups include the search for responsibility, satisfaction of one's aspirations and needs, security, social identity, respect and recognition. Others join in order to express their frustration arising from the family, school and society. While there are those who do so for financial assistance, others join on account of inferiority complex (socially or academically induced). Finally, while others are forced (coerced) to join others join voluntarily perhaps due to peer influence or attraction by the objectives of such groups (Osakinle and Falana, 2011).

Specifically, granted that cultism as it exists today is anti-social and a display of deviant behaviour, yet there are certain causative factors for its proliferation. Some of these include parental and home background and the materialistic nature of the Nigeria society. Our contention here is that the underlying factor is inadequate or lack of religious and moral education (instruction). As indicated above, the effects of the nefarious activities of these cultists are enormous on the individual at educational and societal levels.

### **Tertiary Institutions**

These are post secondary institutions of higher learning or educational institutions which offer post basic education. These include universities, inter-university centres, and colleges of education, polytechnics, mono-technics and other specialized institutions such as colleges of Agriculture, schools of health and technology and the National Teachers Institute (NTI).

**Their goals include**

- a. Contribution to national development through high level manpower training
- b. Provision of accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interests of all Nigerians
- c. Provision of high quality career counseling and lifelong learning programs that prepare students with the knowledge and skills for self reliance and the world of work
- d. Forgoing and cementing of national unity
- e. Promotion of national and international understanding and interaction (NPE 2013).

These goals shall be pursued through quality student in take, quality teaching and learning, research and development, an all inclusive credible admission policy for national unity and dedicated services to the community through extra-moral and extension services.

**The Place of Moral Education**

1. To promote the knowledge and understanding of moral values geared towards fostering good moral conduct in human society.
2. The promotion of an attitude of mutual concern for one in order to build a society in which the most possible god exists
3. The promotion of harmony and a sense of fair play in human relations
4. The strengthening of the basis and motivation for good behavior as an essential foundation for social order.

These are in agreement with the values outlined in the NPE (FRN 2013):

- i. Respect for eh worth and dignity of the individual;

- ii. Faith in man's ability to make rational decisions;
- iii. Moral and spiritual principle in inter-personal and human relations;
- iv. Shared responsibility for the common good of society;
- v. Promotion of the physical, emotional and psychological development of all children; and
- vi. Acquisition of competencies necessary for self-reliance.

The imperative for moral education in curbing cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions is predicated on the following facts:

1. Some parents have abandoned their responsibility in the area of moral upbringing of their children because of the pursuit of wealth. They hardly show interest in the progress of their children.
2. Education institutions teach Islam and Christian religions for students to pass exams without adequate emphasis on the moral lessons that can be learnt from such topics.
3. Due to peer influence and the paucity of parental influence, the hearts of the young ones are left at the mercy of the society or devil to manipulate.
4. Some religious leaders are not showing good example to the younger generations. They preach do as I say instead of do as I do.

### **Recommendations**

1. There should be a de-emphasis of material tendencies
2. Awakening and inculcating of values (values orientation)-moral, cultural and spiritual) in our society
3. There should be emphasis on discipline beginning from the home. Parents should lead the way.
4. Close monitoring by parents and teachers on the types of friends their children have and activities they engage in

5. Religious groups should spearhead moral revolution through emphasis on love and service to humanity and fear of God.
6. Organizations and associations such as Girls Guide, Boys Brigade, and Red Cross society should be reorganized to teach moral principles and discipline.

### **Conclusion**

The consequence of cultism, either in the larger society or at the educational level is alarming. Tertiary institutions are reputed to be the seat of knowledge and academic prowess. The invasion of this seat of wisdom by cultism is a rape of the human intellect; hence the socio-political and economic development of the nation becomes dwarfish. It is therefore imperative that parents, governments and the various institutions join hands to eliminate this unfortunate experience from our tertiary institutions, through the instrumentality of a sound and effective moral education, whose ultimate objective is the bringing forth of a morally sound and mature person and personality cum society. It is our contention that an effective moral education which takes cognizance of the various intervening factors that range from sociological, anthropological, psychological to religious, can make a strong statement on the raising of the moral tone of this nation especially on the subject under discussion. This is a battle that must be fought and won if our tertiary institutions are to occupy a place as global citadels of learning.

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