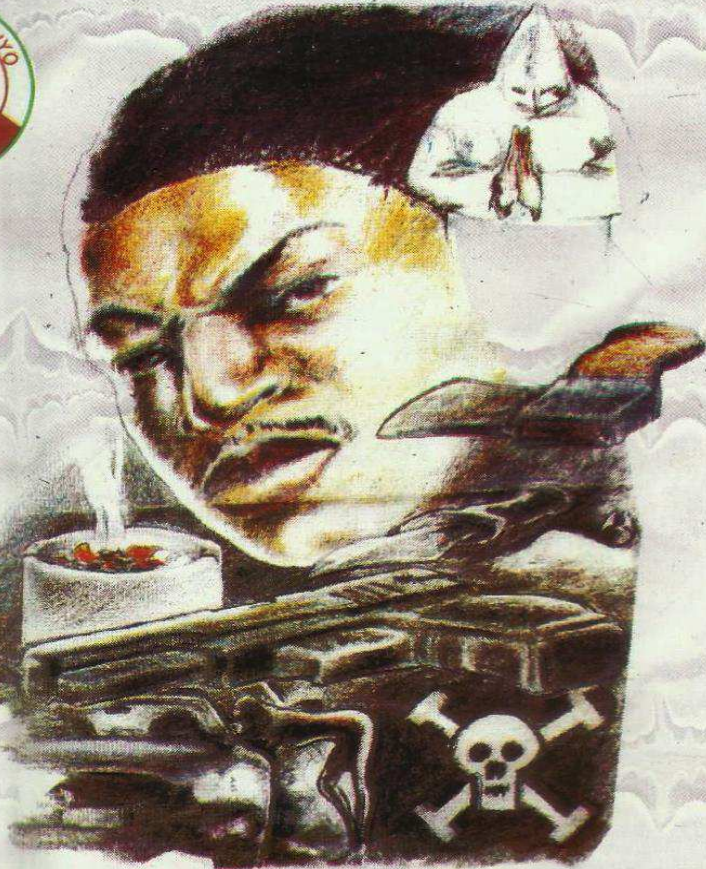


# CULTISM: EVIL UNLIMITED





## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **CULTISM IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS**

#### **Introduction**

Cultism is a many-sided problem which has overtaken our campuses in the past twenty years. It is a dangerous practice which has contributed to making our campuses unstable. It is said to have started in the 1950s at the University of Ibadan but this form of cultism was of the non-violent type.

Yet today many do not regard the National Association of Seadogs (NAS) or Pyrates Confraternity as a cult since it is registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission and its members are widely known. But it is widely believed that they laid the foundation for the emergence of most of the cults on our campuses since some of them were splinter groups which broke away from the Pyrates Confraternity.

#### **What Is A Cult?**

Most of the groups in tertiary institutions do not even meet the minimum characteristics of cults as defined by most experts. Cultism refers to 'a system of religious worship, especially with reference to its rites and ceremonies'. However, when the term is used in Nigeria, it is extended to include groups whose activities may or may not involve rites and ceremonies of worship but whose very trade marks are violent clandestine activities.

In addition, cultism also refers to the activities of those who adhere to a common ideology, doctrine or leader especially when such adherence or devotion is based on fanatical beliefs or dogma. It is sometimes applied in a light-hearted manner to groups whose

activities are characterised by some kind of faddish devotion to a person or practice. For example, young executives' intense passion for flashy cars may be labelled the yuppie cult or widespread interest in physical exercise (jogging), the physical fitness cult. In spite of its many meanings, it would be important to note that in Nigeria today, because of the frightening campaigns of physical violence unleashed on members of cults during internal self-cleansing and rivalry wars, or during inter-cult wars which sometimes threaten the peaceful lives of others, most people identify cults as secret societies or organisations which engage in violent activities which lead to murder, maiming, rape, extortion, robbery and other criminal activities. Since they are secret societies, non-members hardly know what goes on during their meetings.

Membership is said to involve oath-taking, spilling of blood and the drinking of certain 'poisonous' concoctions as part of their initiation rites. Members take oaths not to reveal the identity of their members to outsiders. The general information available to outsiders is often obtained during confessions made by former members. Unfortunately, these groups terrorise peace-loving members of the University and other communities. Certainly, these are not the kinds of groups any decent human being or student would wish to belong.

#### **Manifestations Of Cultism**

As a freshman (new student) you have to be wary of the company you keep. Many students are lured into cultism through invitations by their former college friends to night parties! You soon discover on arrival that what you were invited to was no party but an initiation ceremony. You get trapped.

Sometimes you are intimidated or bullied by those older students who believe that you may have enough resources to fund their activities. Some of the cultists are outwardly some of the



most gentle - looking persons in the day time. At night, they are as deadly as pythons.

Many of them use drugs and engage in excessive consumption of alcohol. Some other factors may lead you into joining such deadly groups and subsequently signing your death warrant. One of such conditions is loneliness. The others may include the following problems as highlighted by Professor J.U. Okorie (1997), Wilson (1999) and others.

- Academic
- Financial difficulties
- Health and Drug
- Sexual Relationship
- Family/Home
- Religious/Spiritual
- Peer group pressure
- Lack of counselling
- Lack of accommodation
- Marriage (lack of fulfilment)
- Wrong choice of programmes
- Social Maladjustment/Culture Shock
- Admission of academically weak candidates
- Cultism in homes
- Lack of effective and prompt disciplinary mechanism in schools
- Legal constraints and community interference
- Examinations malpractice
- Inadequate recreational facilities
- Overcrowded hostels and classrooms
- Military interference in University governance
- Politicians' recruitment of idle students as

thugs

- Internal maladministration in universities
- The ban of students unionism in 1978.
- Lack of interest by parents/guardians in the private activities of their wards.
- Incessant industrial actions by University - based unions.
- Godfatherism among others

### Penalties for cultism in tertiary institutions

Hitherto it was difficult to arrest and punish appropriately all those engaged in cultism on our campus. The Universities now have the right to expel any cultist.

Through an informant system and a network of internal and external security operatives it would now be easier to identify culprits. The law of 1989 as reaffirmed by the Minister of Justice in 1999 authorises the Governing Council or any authority or person in charge of or in control to conduct investigations in respect to any cult and proscribe any such society or group. But goes further to state that:

“The minister may, as from the commencement of this Act, whenever he is of the opinion that public interest or public safety so demands, suspend for any specific period of time, remove, withdraw or expel any student (whether undergraduate, postgraduate or otherwise) from any University, institution of higher learning or similar institution.”

The ministerial power can also be exercised by any person he authorises including the Governing Council and the Vice Chancellor. Once the student takes the matriculation oath he or she is bound by the new regulation. Therefore, it is dangerous to be recruited into these dangerous groups or gangs. If you cannot be



openly identified by the company you keep, then there is no need to be part of that company. You can spend your time more usefully in decent clubs, associations or unions registered with the Student Affairs Division. Any group that is not registered and is operating in any form is illegal and is most likely to be a cult.

If anyone invites you to join a club, check in the Student Affairs Division whether it is registered. This is necessary because you should have no cause to claim that you did not know you were joining a cult.

Remember too that no decent human being will ever come forward to defend you when you are caught. Equally the University will not listen to anyone who may dare to come and make a plea on your behalf. If anyone pesters you to join a cult, just report him to the Dean, Student Affairs because it is an offence to attempt to recruit people into a criminal group. You are therefore protected by the law. You will be free from cultism if you join the Peace on Campus Initiative Campaign.

### **Ending The Cult Scourge**

It is the responsibility of every student to end the menace of cults on our campuses. You can do a number of things to prevent this scourge.

First, you have to decide at this very moment that since your studentship is geared towards preparing yourself for the future, you will not engage in anything that threatens that future. There are many positive clubs/associations or unions that you can join. Remember that before you join any club, you must confirm from the Student Affairs Division whether that group is registered. There are reports circulating that some of the cults have changed their names and hope now to present themselves as respectable clubs while they carry out their usual negative activities. They will always be found out and you are advised not to have anything to do

with them. They will come forward and entice you with gifts and money and if you are broke you may be tempted to join them. But you should remember that if you take their money, you have signed a pact with the devil and you may only be able to pay back with your life.

Second, when they (the cultists) come for you, inform your trusted friend and seek the support of your priest or pastor. Be careful with some lecturers who may entice you with a seeming goodness or award of undeserved marks. Report all those who threaten you to the Student Affairs Division and your parents and guardians. Do not fail to do this because this may be the only way of saving your life in the hands of hoodlums.

Third, be watchful and report all suspicious activities to the authorities. For the sake of your security you may report such cases truthfully without identifying yourself. But ensure that the information provided is as detailed as possible. You should always forward all such sealed reports directly to the Dean, Student Affairs or in his personal name.

Fourth, do not go about at night alone. Always ensure that you go in groups of three or four. Raise an alarm immediately you suspect a threat. You can carry a whistle along with you and blow it immediately you are threatened. The security arm of the Peace on Campus Initiative will always be around to respond to your distress call.

Fifth, when you are invited to a party, try and find out others who are attending it. If the venue is not quite a decent place decline the invitation politely. Under no circumstance must you attend a party in the bush or in the ravine. If it is held in a hotel, the moment you begin to notice a change in the general atmosphere of the party, quietly sneak out and head for home. That change may mark the beginning of initiation rites and you may be forced into something you never bargained for.

All in all, whether cultism is eradicated or not will depend on you. If you decide that you will have nothing to do with it



because your studentship responsibilities are too grave to add the burden of cultism which will remain a grave distraction that will lead you to hell.

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