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Course Code: GST122

Matric No.: 19/MHS01/433

**CULTISM AND ITS EFFECTS ON INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETY.**

A cult, according to the English Dictionary, refers to a group or sect of people with a deviant religious, philosophical or cultural identity, often existing on the margins of society or exploitative towards its members. Cultism on the other hand, can be defined as a ritual practice by a group of people whose membership, admission, policy and initiation formalities as well as their modes of operation are done in secret and kept secret, thus, mostly referred to as “Secret Cults”.

Cultism in Nigeria started as far back as the 1950s Nationalism was intensified in Nigeria with the aim of fighting colonialism and gaining independence for Nigeria. Therefore, in 1952, the first secret cult, The Sea Dogs Confraternity (a.k.a. Pirates) was formed at the University of Ibadan. At the time, the formation of this secret cult was in good faith and with good intentions. As time went on, amid the 70s and 80s, trouble broke out in the cult as a result of unresolved leadership problems. This led to the formation of other cults.

By the early 1990s, there was a cult explosion, mostly the formation of female confraternities which acted as spies for the male confraternities and operated as prostitution syndicates. This explosion in confraternity activities led to the extreme hooliganism, violence and bloody struggle for supremacy among rival confraternities. These cult groups began unleashing terror in the Nigerian universities because each group wanted to assert supremacy on campus.

Some reasons have been given for the establishment of cult groups. These include:

1. Fight against colonialism.
2. The desire for brotherhood.
3. Fight against injustice.
4. Preservation of culture etc.

However, we must not forget the major reasons why people join cult, mostly those in universities. These reasons include:

1. Good performance in education.
2. Assertion of supremacy.
3. Protection.
4. Search for security.
5. Search for social identity.

Others may join cults as a result of the following:

1. Peer group influence.
2. Poor family background or poor home training.
3. Negative influence of Social media, Electronic Media.
4. Poverty etc.

The effects of cultism on individuals and the society as a whole cannot be over emphasized. Some of the consequences of cultism on individuals are outlined below:

1. Cultism leads to the untimely death of youths. This often happens during initiation or rival cult clashes.
2. Many cultists risk health problems because of the harmful drugs and dangerous concoctions they take.
3. Most cultists do not graduate as they are either expelled or rusticated from the university.
4. Cultists cause their parents a lot of pain and embarrassment.
5. Cultists have a record of poor academic performance.

The effects of cultism on the society include:

1. Breakdown of law and order.
2. Violence and social instability.
3. Disruption of academic activities.
4. Disorientation of societal values.

As normal as the above listed effects may sound, this poses as a big threat to the country. Therefore, all hands must be on deck to prevent this monster from destroying our youths and country as a whole. In doing this, everyone has a role to play. What “everyone” here means is that parents, teachers, school authorities and government have their parts to play in ensuring that cultism is dealt with.

Some of the ways through which cultism can be prevented include:

1. Parents should give their children a good orientation at home about obedience to rules and regulations. Aside doing this, the parents should inform them about the consequences of going contrary to those rules.
2. Parents should try as much as possible to show good example to their children so that they are emotionally balanced.
3. Every secondary school should have an active and effective counseling unit where students will be shown the repercussions of cultism and given advice useful to them.
4. Punishments for arrested cultists should be put in place according to the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This helps to serve as a deterrent to others.
5. Parents should pay more attention to the children’s upbringing and educate them properly on acceptable standards of behavior.
6. Schools should sensitize student bodies against cultism and encourage them to form vanguard group to resist it.
7. Civil society should embark on advocacy programs that would sensitize the youths on the danger of cultism.
8. The media should be encouraged to protect programs against cultism among the growing youths.

If the above listed measures to prevent cultism are taken into consideration, cultism will become a thing of the past.