

DTS JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES

Vol. 3. No.1, 2023

DYNAMIC THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
AFFILIATED TO HARVEST BIBLE
UNIVERSITY, USA

Published by Dynamic Theological Seminary, Kwale,
Delta State, Nigeria

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THE POTENCY OF CHRISTIAN COUNSELLING
IN CHECKING CULTISM AMONG THE YOUTH
IN THE UKUM LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF
BENUE STATE

BY

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ABSTRACT

Cultism has become a disturbing phenomenon in Nigerian society today, inclusive of Ukum Local Government Area of Benue state. The security challenge in Ukum is fuelled by the activities of the erring youth who disguise themselves in the forests and strike day and night killing, maiming, looting and causing arson in the country. The paper identified family influence, lack of fear of God in children, the influence of radio, television and the internet, the role of influential members of the society, broken homes and inborn traits of being born cultists as causative factors of cultism. The paper using historical and analytical methods of research explores

how Christian counselling can be used to checkmate the activities of cultism in the area. The work highlights the concepts of Christian counselling and cultism. It concludes that the problems presented by cultism in Ukum require a collaborative approach to arresting the ugly situation.

Keywords: Christian Counselling, Cultism, Youths, Ukum.

INTRODUCTION

One of the major problems bedevilling Nigerian society today in general and the Ukum people of Benue state is cultism. Nigerians and Nigerian youths are swimming in the ocean of cult activities perpetrated by both adolescents and primary school children. Adamu (2011) observed that our institutions of learning are involved in a variety of ill activities. Performance of rituals resulting in ritual killings, holding of secret meetings and involvement in political issues both within and outside the school setting, characterizes the youths of today. All kinds of prohibiting activities such as ceremonial sacrifices, settling of disputes through crude forms and raping have all constituted the core mandate of these groups.

Cultism has eaten deep into the fabric of our society and the ignorant of the youths in promoting cultism has become a source of concern for all well-meaning Nigerians. Presently, learning in schools lacks security and protection because of the activities of the unfortunate generation of students. Life is valueless in the eyes of cultists and they do not respect God. Institutions of learning are in the hands of disgruntled elements that do not mean well for society. The fundamental rights of school authorities have been infringed upon by nonentities whose target is to destroy and kill. Daniel (2013) held that cultism in all its ramifications is a prohibited activity whose rewards are aimed at untimely death. Ajoku (2020) sees a cult as a group of people who cherish and believe in certain ideas and ethical conduct which is known and effected only by the members.

Ukum people in the Sankera axis of Benue North-East senatorial district referred to also as Zone 'A' has witnessed sporadic killings due to activities of the cult groups that operate day and night uncontrolled for more than ten years now. There is a need to evolve ways of arresting the situation as physical combat by security forces has not brought the desired peace. The need for Christian counselling thus becomes imperative here. It is

against the background of the above that this paper explores the potency of using Christian counselling to check cultism among youth in Ukum Local Government Area of Benue state.

Conceptual issues

The Concept of Christian Counselling

Christian counselling is a type of therapy that integrates traditional talk therapy methodologies with Christian belief practices by incorporating theological concepts (Tiara, 2022). It focuses on the navigation of spiritual concerns and everyday life struggles encountered by Christians. Christian counselling can be embedded into one's usual sessions with a therapist or psychologist if this arrangement has been discussed with the client and mental health professional. It can also be administered by a spiritual leader such as a minister of God. Hunter (1990) viewed Christian counselling as the practice of talking with individuals, couples, and families to increase their understanding of emotional and religious conflicts and to help resolve problems using Christian religious injunction and other related resources. The Association of Christian Counsellors (ACC) (2019), viewed Christian Counselling as including activities that “seek to help individuals towards constructive change and growth in any or every aspect of their lives, through a

caring relationship and within agreed relational boundaries, carried out by a counsellor who has a Christian world view, values and assumptions". In the opinion of Corona (2017), Christian counseling offers clients an intersection of theological foundations, philosophical moral grounding and evidence-based clinical skill applications. Christian Counsellors integrate modern psychological thought and methods with traditional religious training to address psycho-spiritual issues in addition to the traditional spectrum of counselling services (Benner, 2003).

Christian counselling uses both psychological and theological resources to deepen its understanding of the pastoral relationship (Hunter, 2005; Benner 2003). It seeks to bring the youth within the context of faith to bear upon the problems in the life of the counselee. It contains the therapeutic application of empathetic listening, discerning insight and practical strategies as well as the careful application of the word of God directly or indirectly to the situations presented to the counsellor. It involves a significant relationship with a genuine, compassionate individual. Together, the client and the counsellor seek truth within the context of faith and then learn to apply such truth to daily living. Christian counselling may include pastoral counselling,

psychology, discipleship, training, therapeutic counselling, family counselling, career counselling, as well as other approaches to the helping process (Christian counselling, 1994).

The Concept of Cultism

Pedro (2019) defines a cult as a group or movement exhibiting excessive devotion or commitment to some person, idea or thing, and recruiting unethical manipulative or coercive techniques of persuasion and control (such as isolation from former friends and family debilitation, use of special methods to heighten suggestibility and subservience, powerful group pressures, information management supervision of individuality or critical judgment and fear of leaving it), established to advance the goals of the group's leaders to the actual or possible detriment of members, their communities or families. Dango (2018) defines a cult as a group of people who believe in certain agreement and ethical conduct which is known and regulate the activities of the members. Stephen (2015) outlines the following characteristics of cult members:

- I. Members indulge in secret meetings at the eleventh hour or odd hours.
- ii. Members acquire dangerous weapons such as daggers, axes, guns, cutlasses, and masks which are used

during initiations or attacks.

- iii. Members have a dress code or pattern
- iv. Members operate with difficult language which can only be understood by them
- v. They have their songs and signs used in communication among themselves
- vi. They are as gentle as a dove
- vii. They operate within the ambit of their constitution

Types of Cults

Casin (2019) listed the following types of cults:

- (i) Cults of the youths: The concern of these is to recruit the youth as their members. They practice what other youths do.
- (ii) Political cults: These types cannot be predicted. Members can swerve to another party, learn which cannot be tolerated in the institution's cult
- (iii) Cults of age group: This type of cult believes in a target goal to achieve development
- (iv) Cults of religions: They operate with a behaviour of a religious group and things are done according to hierarchy.
- (v) Devilish cults: This is a sacrilegious cult where traditional sacrifices are done. Human sacrifice, murders, using of babies for rituals, are all their characteristic features.

Causes of Cultism

Udoh O Ikezu (2015) carried out a study on causes, effects and strategies for eradicating cultism among students in Tertiary Institutions with particular attention to Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra state. The study found corruption in the society, the presence of parents in secret cults, broken homes, inadequate funding, inborn traits of being cultists, the harsh economic situation in the country and the inability of law enforcement officers to prosecute arrested cult members. Similarly, Molagun (2015) identified family influence, ego-boosting for recognition, lack of fear of God in children, insecurity influence of home and video/television, persuasion from notable members of society, and fear of death by security officers also contribute to the state of cultism.

The Potency of Christian Counselling in Checking Cultism Among the Youths in Ukum.

According to Immanuel Kant (1959), morality is a pre-eminent goal and morality is the action that is rational and universally valid as it embodies a law, capable of being applied as a standard to govern the action of all rational beings. Odudele (2006) described morality as a set of beliefs current in society about character and conduct, about what one should try to be and do.

Matthew Arnold cited in Odudele (2006) noted that religion is nothing but morality touched with emotion. Here, the entire conduct of the individual surrounds his moral life cycle. Since religion aids morality in the society, the morally good life is worthy of emulation, while the morally bad life is highly discouraged. This is affected in all religions, Christianity inclusive, therefore, Christian religious practices can be a very effective counselling tool to check cultism among the youth. Melford Spiro cited in Lawal (2003) asserts that religion is a cultural institution which, consists of postulated supernatural beings and patterned interaction. It is in light of the above that Durkheim Emile cited in Dzurgba (2002) defined religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices which are related to separate things that are forbidden. These beliefs are unified into one single moral community known as the church. Religion contributes to the establishment and maintenance of order in society by creating a condition for social well-being, self-discipline, social solidarity, social cohesion, and continuity of knowledge and culture.

Apparently, from a functional point of view Christian counselling as a religious therapy aids moral living and morality. It talks of the rightness and wrongness of action

and the total rejection of evil. Thus Christian counselling is based on moral values which refer to those things in human character conduct and social relations which are judged as good or bad, right or wrong, progressive or unprogressive, noble and ignoble (Nwala, 1980). Therefore cultism is a negative moral act that negates the fairness of life in all its ramifications.

Christian counselling can be used to check cultism among youths in Ukum using the following strategies:

Applying family counselling Approaches: Rao (1981) in George (2009) identified different types of family counselling approaches including:

- **Conjoint family counselling:** Here, the counsellor meets the family and understands the patterns of interaction within the family. The focus is on a family problem, holistically as members of the family are dealt with individually.
- **Multiple impact counselling:** This is a situation where several counsellors work with individual members of the family intensively over a while to resolve the lingering problems threatening the stability of the family. The focus is on the family system.
- **The network counselling approach:** In this case, the counsellor starts working with the family unit

and proceeds towards the neighbouring friends, relatives, and others. The objective is to create a social network for the individual member of the family in distress. The network counselling approach is very common among Nigerian families and works very well.

- **Multiple family counselling:** This one involves a number of concerned families who are brought together and counselled simultaneously. It provides different families with opportunities for observation, imitation and identification with other families. It results in social facilitation and a reduction in social inhibition.
- **Pre-Marriage counselling therapy:** This counselling therapy is organized for a couple who are thinking of starting a family. Some couples seek counselling before they get married. The counsellor will discuss their plans about careers, children and management. The goal of pre-marriage counselling is to determine if there are any significant differences in lifestyle that should be addressed before the wedding ceremony. Some churches require pre-marital counselling before permitting a couple to be joined in the church.
- **Preventive therapy:** This type of counselling is done to help prevent problems from occurring in the

future. A family counsellor is trained in the types of negative family dynamics that can occur and how they can affect individual family members. The counsellor can teach family members how to work, love, live and work together in a more positive way to prevent future problems. Thus, a stable family is an insurance cover for a stable society.

- **Family therapy:** This is organized to fix problems, resolve issues, repair relationships, increase family health, or take the family's functioning level to a higher level. Minnel (2000) states that family counselling includes the immediate family where the counsellor will gauge the reactions of not just the couple, but the children and other family members as well. All members of the family are encouraged to speak out during these sessions. The counsellor will gain a better understanding of the family dynamics and the couple will see how their feeling affects the household. Family counselling can also be used in combination with couples, individuals or group members, in which case, the counsellor after meeting an individual or in a group as the case may be.

Christian guidance counsellors need to extend their work, especially in Ukum, to include:

- 1. Child study:** This is necessary for the detection of the origins of problems noted in the lives of erring youths. It also entails academic counselling, in addition to maintaining regular contact with parents/guardians of erring youths.
- 2. Discipline:** One of the major Christian religious and moral values of the society is discipline. Maintenance of discipline at home, in school, and all places by the parents, teachers and top government functionaries on the younger ones are very essential. There is a need to caution here that a morally bankrupt parent, teacher, youth leader or top government functionary cannot give any effective disciplinary precautions on the erring one. The person must first be disciplined.
- 3. Encouragement of Religious Activities:** Certain religious activities offered by some international organizations like the Boys Brigade (BB) and the Girls Brigade (GB) are useful for moral upbringing. These are non-partisan, non-denominational organizations that aim at training the mind, body and spirit for the good of the society. Some churches equally have in build religious activities like Sunday schools, catechism classes, seminars and symposiums which are meant for the moral and spiritual training of the mind.

4. Solid parental care: The home is the starting point of any training, negative or positive. Children are best nurtured, moulded and tutored by both parents to enhance a good upbringing at home. The home provides the desired moral training that is needed to take our youths out of cult activities.

Conclusion

The problems presented by cultism to the society and Ukum people, in particular, are not insurmountable as discussed in this paper. It only requires a collaborative approach of all the stakeholders in this project: the home, the community, political leaders, traditional leaders, Christian leaders, the youths and government agencies to call a spade a spade. The issue of cultism shows the level of moral decay in our society. There are some strong environmental influence that motivates the youths to belong to a secret cult, but these are preventable. Poor parental/home upbringing, high level of immorality, lack of disdain for the sanctity of life, political class manoeuvres and decay in moral values of the society and the church are among the environmental problems motivating the youths to join secret groups. Nevertheless, parents, church leaders and the society in general should be vigilant and strengthen the core values of hard work, honesty, love, and dedication to arrest the

social junta called cultism.

Recommendations:

In the light of the discussions in this paper, it is recommended that:

- A viable Christian guidance and the counselling centre should be established by at least every Christian denomination that operates within Ukum local government in every council ward. Such centres should be well-funded for optimal performance. Given that broken homes accounts for cultism, in some cases, Christian counsellors should work closely with families to avoid broken homes.
- Our religious leaders should adopt and embrace community preaching and evangelism approach to win the souls of our youths for Christ. This will keep them away from cultism.

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