

THE MENACE OF CULTISM IN AWKA SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The menace of cultism in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State in Nigeria includes amongst others; rampant killing of human beings and destruction of people's properties. This work is geared towards positing the havoc cultism had caused in recent times especially between 2018 to January 2023, at the area of study and the solutions to these hazards. The Attachment Theory, Behavioural Genetics Theory, Ecological Systems Theory and the Archbishop Alexander Chibuzor Ibezim's Charge (2023), employed in this work exposes that lack of closeness and love between parents and children, bad behavioural patterns learned from parents by children, negative societal influence on children and the inability of parents to train their children in Godly principles are the major reasons youngsters get involved in cultism which facilitate massive destruction of lives and properties in Awka South Local Government Area in recent times. Again, a reasonable number of these secret cult groups have Adult members that are wealthy and who sponsors their despicable acts. This work focuses on Okpuno and Awka town in Awka South Local Government Area. The qualitative method of data analysis was employed in this work. It streamlined all the gathered data via historical and phenomenological approach.

Keywords: Cult-Minace-Havoc-Killings-Influence-Rampant-Destruction-Youngsters

Introduction

The Igbo tribe of Nigeria that mainly dominates the South Eastern part of the country of which Awka South Local Government Area in Anambra State is inclusive; is well known for peaceful cohabitation, love for one another (exemplified in their kinship livelihood) and high regard for the sanctity of human life. They equally are known to be industrious, thus they acquire so much properties both landed and material. In recent times, this peaceful co-existence and regard and

reverence for the sanctity of human life is being distorted by the menace caused by the despicable activities of secret cult members especially in Awka South Local Government Area.

The term cultism as employed in this study implies that the members of this group ought to be operating in the secret. However as Worlu (2023) pointed out, their actions had graduated from secret-activities to open activities with reference to the Mayhem they cause in Awka South environs. They openly destroy individuals' properties and get involved in incessant wasting of human lives. They carry out these evil activities in the open even without wearing face masks. A compilation of Media reports independently done by Daily Trust (2023), showed that 166 persons were killed in secret cult related activities in 2022 alone. Reckon that these are recorded cases alone. Series of unrecorded cases abounds. This peculiar study for instance realized phenomenologically that between 30th of December 2022 and 2nd of January, 2023, a total number of 26 persons were killed in secret cult clashes within Okpuno and Awka towns respectively.

This study launches out to portray the evil caused by secret cult members in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State between 2018 to January 2023. It will posit as well the reasons for youngsters engagement in cult related activities, reasons for persistence of secret cultism in the area of study and solutions to these menace caused by secret cultism in the area of study.

Pertinent to the foregoing, this work adopted both the primary and secondary means of data collection: The qualitative method of data analysis was adopted in this work in order to actualize its purpose. Out of the nine towns that made up Awka South Local Government area, this work singled out Okpuno and Awka town as its central focus because the menace of secret cult evil activities is endemic and rife within that milieu.

This work adopted the following theories: Attachment Theory posited by Bowlby (cited by Kendra, 2023), to posit that lack of parental love facilitates youngsters engagement in cultism; Behavioural Genetic Theory by Francis Ealton (1822-1911) (cited by Ginger and Janae, 2015), to portray that negative lifestyle learned from parents can lead youngsters to cultism; and Ecological systems, theory as exposed by Sincero (2012), to unravel that societal influence can lure youngsters into cultism as well. Archbishop Alexender Cibuzor Ibezim's charge (2023), presented at the 1st session of the 13th synod of the Diocese of Awka (Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion) was also employed to ratify that secret cult members belong to families and equally have parents, thus parents should endeavor to be training their children in godly manner. The gathered data for this work were analysed and presented through historical and phenomenological approach.

Definition of Terms

The following operational terms were deemed expedient to be defined in terms that are pertinent to the topic being studied.

1. Cultism: Ogunade (2002), portrayed secret cult as an enclosed organized congregation of group devoted to the same cause. It is a closet group upholding a peculiar sacred ideology and series of rituals and rites centering around their secret symbols. Cultic activities are more often than not associated with blood sacrifices; either that of an animal or a human being. He equally pointed out that during initiation rites or during rival groups clashes, blood flows during which many lives are lost in the process.

Ajayi (2015), as it is defined cultism as a ritual observance by a congregation of people whose membership, admission, policy and initiation ceremonies as well as their system of operations are done in secret and kept secret with their activities having negative effects on both members and non-members alike.

2. Menace: It simply means that which very dangerous, harmful and can cause destruction of lives and properties.

Awka South Local Government Area

Awka South Local Government Area is situated in Anambra state of Nigeria. According to Headliners (2022), it is made up of nine towns namely; Amawbia, Awka, Ezinato, Isiagu, Mbaukwu, Nibo, Nise, Okpuno and Umuawulu. The Local Government Headquarters of Awka South is located at Amawbia town.

There are three major streets that span Awka South Local Government Area which are; Zik's Avenue, Works Road and Arthur Eze Avenue. In the past, the people of Awka South Local Government Area were well known for blacksmithing: today, they are respected among the Igbo people of Nigeria for their scientific, technical and business skills. According to the National population commission of Nigeria (Web), of 21st March, 2022 population projection, National Bureau of Statistics (Web), Awka South population is 270,300 (ie Two Hundred and seventy thousand, three hundred).

Synoptic Account of the Menace of Cultism in Awka South Local Government Area between 2018 to January 2023

Abinitio, people used to believe that cultists only operate within the Nigerian tertiary institutions. The general belief is that old students always attempt to initiate newly admitted students that are still innocent, whereas some other students that have been there in the campus get initiated because of low self-esteem, for fame, wield some strange powers known to them or even to feel among. Thus scholars like Oyemwinmina and Aibieyi (2015), admitted that cultism is one of the virus that has aided in destroying the sanity of the Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Recently, the reverse is the case. It is as if there is a paradigm shift. Cultism have invaded the streets, villages, hamlets and almost every nook and cranny of the Nigerian societal abodes. These cult groups initiate youngsters of even 12 years of age. They are in the primary and secondary schools, Adebumiti (2021), revealed that in 2016, police in Delta state apprehended 28 primary and secondary school pupils and students respectively, aged between 13 and 16 for cultism. He also recorded that the initiation rate in Lagos state of primary and secondary school pupils and students into cultism was so much that the police in the state in 2018 appealed to the state government to declare a state of emergency on cultism in its primary and secondary schools. I. Obiorah (personal communication, July 19th, 2019) exposed that a youngster killed at Okpuno in July 2nd, 2019 was only 14 years of age; and is already a member of a cult group called Eiyeye confraternity. A. Okposi (personal communication, March 17th, 2018), intimated that cultism in Tertiary Institutions is no longer as deadlier as what is being experienced in the streets and within the societies. His observation is that the rate of killings in the communities is becoming too scary.

In 2018 for instance, Eze (2018), recorded that the police in Anambra state in the month of June declared that 16 persons were killed in a two weeks gun battle between two rival cult groups in Awka, the state capital. He went ahead to point out that according to the police report, 35 suspected cultists were arrested then for allegedly being involved in the clashes.

Eze (2018), in his report posited this:

The commissioner of police in the state, Garbage Umar, ... He raised alarm over the increase in cult related activities in Awka. He said he fears that a confession by one of the suspects, that over 90 percent of youth in Awka and Okpuno town, including students, Artisans, okada and tricycle riders were cultists, may not be far from the truth. (p.1.).

During this period in 2018, it was evidenced that for a duration of 6 months the Black Axe and the Vikings fraternity in Awka and Okpuno town were enmeshed in a superiority war, leading to the death of members from both groups.

According to Eze (2018), one of the cult suspects in an interview with journalists confessed that most of the commercial motorcyclists and tricycle operators in the capital city of Awka were all members of one cult group or the other. The suspect by name Chukwudi Machie confessed that “over 92 percent of young people in Awka and environs are members of one secret cult or the other. We recruit them young” (p.2.).

It became obvious that at some point in 2019, residents in South East especially within Awka and Okpuno town became worried as it is possible that one may become a victim of a stray bullet shot during cult clashes. J. Ononime (personal communication, September 10th, 2019), pointed out that up to 7 persons within the month of August were victims of stray bullet shot within Okpuno and Awka town. Okoroafor (2021), recorded that on a peculiar Sunday being April 18, 2021, three young men were shot in cold blood by suspected cultists in different parts of Awka, the capital of Anambra state. While on Wednesday, April 7, 2021, two youth were shot dead in Okpuno in what locals said was a cult war. At some point in 2021, suspected cult killings became a menace in Awka, despite the series of the arrest reportedly made by police in the state. Residents of Awka and Okpuno respectively became stricken with fear as they wondered if the killings were actually cult related or outright assassinations. Ononuju James (cited by Okoroafor), once declared in 2021 that the Anambra State Government and the Police Command might have finally lost the fight against cultism in the state.

Chukindi (2021), recorded that in 2021 December, a man identified as snoop, who is also the leader of tricycle riders in Awka North and Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra state was kidnapped and later killed by cutting off his head and using it to play football. Two policemen that were with the said snoop were equally killed at the point where Snoop was abducted on the road that leads to Okpuno while and unidentified lady was killed by a stray bullet.

The height of this cult killings occurred on 26th February, 2022 when according to Sahara Reports (2022), armed men suspected to be members of a secret cult on Saturday invaded a burial ceremony in Ebenebe, Awka North Local Government Area of Anambra state, killing about 20 persons. This gathered that this incident occurred at the burial of a suspected leader of a cult named Ozo: While the corpse was lying in state in his compound, some suspected cultists arrived the scene and sacked mourners, shooting at them. Even though this happened in Ebenebe, the said Ozo being buried was killed in Awka. Nzeagwu (2022) recorded on Tuesday, March 15, the same cult group that massacred about 20 persons in Ebenebe, launched another attack on a UNIZIK vigilante group at miracle junction, Ifite, Awka. Police operations were mobilised immediately to lay ambush for the gang as they fled from the scene.

2022 New Year Eve in Awka and Okpuno axis was saddened with bizarre occurrence of cult killings. Not less than 10 persons were killed on 31st night between 8pm and 11:00pm. Two persons were killed around second market axis of Ifite, Awka. Four persons were killed at Okpuno. While another four persons were killed at Eke Awka market axis. So many people were unable to attend the cross over night services of that day as a result of these killings. Abdullahi (2023), recorded that rival cult groups clashed in Okpuno, Ifite Awka and Obosi communities of Anambra state between 30th December, 2022 and 2nd January, 2023. According to her record, Gunmen killed five persons in this cult groups clashes in Idemili North and Awka South Local Government Areas of Anambra State. She quoted Christian Aburime, Chief Press Secretary to the governor of Anambra state as underscoring that one Ike Okolo, president-general of Obosi was killed by gunmen at a fuel station in Obosi community; while four others were murdered in Obi Maduka's compound within Nodu town square in Nodu Okpuno.

The foregoing account on the menace of cultism in Awka South Local Government area has posited to the fur that the dangers of cultism is no longer relegated to the higher institutions of learning in Nigeria but is now endemic in the communities in Nigeria. It will be pertinent to reckon that Chukindi (2019), affirmed that the police in Anambra state once arrested some top politicians alleged to be sponsoring the unending cult related killings in the state. The puzzle still remains whether they were prosecuted because cult related killings in Anambra state has not reduced rather is still on the increase.

Theoretical Framework

All the theories adopted in this work will be postulated in full here. Each one will be streamlined to how it aids in and fits in actualizing the goal of this peculiar study.

The Attachment Theory

The central focus of the attachment theory is on relationships and affinity especially a prolonged one between people including that between a parent and child and between romantic partners. According to Kendra (2023), it is a psychological exposition for the emotional affinity and union between people. Kendra pointed out that this theory suggests that "People are born with a need to forge bonds with caregivers as children. These early bonds may continue to have an influence on attachments throughout life" (p.1.).

Kendra (2023), noted that it was the British Psychologist John Bowlby that first promulgated attachment theory. Bowlby (cited by Kendra), described Attachment theory as a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (p.1.). Thus Bowlby was interested in understanding the anxiety, stress, distress and the negative influence that children experience when separated from their primary caregivers.

Ferguson and Heene (2012), pointed out that Great philosophers like Sigmund Freud suggested that infants become attached to the source of pleasure. Infants, who are in the oral stage of development, become attached to their mothers because they fulfill their oral desires and requirements. Other foremost behavioral theories as Reiss (2011), pointed out indicated that attachment was simply a learned behavior. These theories posited that attachment was actually the evidence of the feeding relationship between the child and the caregiver. Because the one that tends the child feeds the child and provides nutrition, the child becomes bounded to such a one. Thus Bowlby (cited by Kendra, 2023), declared as Kendra noted:

Bowlby observed that feedings did not diminish separation anxiety. Instead, he found that attachment was characterized by clear behavioral and motivation

patterns. When children are frightened, they seek proximity from their primary caregiver in order to receive both comfort and care. (p.2).

Roben, Moore, Cole, Molenaar, Leve, Shaw and Neiderhiser (2013), stated that Attachment is a passionate connection with another individual, this connection ought to be nurtured from some in order to avoid the negative end of separation and losing grip with the person such as one is connected with entirely. Advancing further to expose the Attachment theory, Bowlby (cited by Kendra, 2023), intimated that the earliest bonds formed by children with their caregivers have a tremendous impact that continues throughout life. He suggested as Kendra noted that attachment also serves to keep the infant close to the mother, thus improving the child's chances of survival.

Bowlby (cited by Kendra, 2023), viewed attachment as a product of evolutionary process, while the behavioural theories of Attachment suggested that Attachment was a learned process. Bowlby and others as Kendra affirmed, proposed that children are born with an innate drive to form attachments with their caregivers. Thus throughout history, children who maintained proximity to an Attachment figure were more likely to survive adulthood. Through the process of natural selection, a motivational system designed to regulate attachment surfaced. Kendra (2023), in view of the afore-stated declared:

The central theme of attachment theory is that primary caregivers who are available and responsive to an infants needs allow the child to develop a sense of security. The infant learns that the caregiver is dependable, which creates a secure base for the child to then explore the world. (p.3).

Kendra (2023), asked a rhetorical question as to what determines a successful attachment: Behaviorists suggest that it was food that effected the attachment behavior, some suggest that it is a learned process; Bowlby and others illustrated that nurturance and responsiveness were the base determinants of attachment. The Attachment theory actually is the foundation for the understanding of paternal and maternal deprivation which can easily affect children adversely as they grow and subsequently lead to seeking for groups such as secret cult groups to discover themselves and belong to a so collected family that protects them. Attachment is fostered by the deep care of parents for the young children and the children's deep sense of love from and for their parents. However, at the long run, this bond must be nurtured for it to be sustained. Parents must maintain and keep being close and playing several roles in the life of their children; not just as mother or father figures; but with deep undiluted love for their children, as siblings, friends and even colleagues. Parents should be so connected to their children to the point that they serve as best friends to their children. Youngsters hardly hide their true selves from parents that they are bonded to. This will go a long way in curbing secret cultism within the Awka south local government towns and villages.

Behavioral Genetics Theory

This Theory is also known as Psycho-genetics Theory. It is the study of influence of an organism's genetic composition on its behavior and the interaction of heredity and environment insofar as they affect behavior as declared by Plomin (2019). The puzzle of the determinants of behavioral abilities and disabilities has commonly been pointed to as the "nature-nurture" controversy. According to Ginger and Janae (2015), the bond between behavior and genetics heredity can be traced to the study of the English scientist Sir Francis Galton (1822-1911), who put together the phrase "nature and nurture". According to Plomin, Galton studied the families of outstanding men of his time and affirmed just like relation Charles Darwin, that mental

powers flows in families. Galton was the first to use twins in genetic research and set off many of the statistical methods of analysis that are in use presently.

In the study of Leve, Neiderhiser, Scaramella and Reiss (2008), it presupposes that children can inherit negative or positive character traits from their parents especially wherein they have no other individual close to them to influence them within a peculiar given Milieu. Thus Narusyte, Neiderhiser, Andershed, Onofrio, Reiss Spotts and Lichtenstein (2011), added that Behavioural Genetic Theory takes a different approach to explaining behavior as it focuses on genetic inheritance and environmental contributions to behavior or particular characteristics. This is why Slatcher, Mehta and Josephs (2011), pointed out that the target of behavioural genetics theory is to grasp both genetics and environment influences on human behavior. Neiderhiser, Reiss, Lichtenstein, Spotts and Ganiban (2007), for instance postulated that through statistical analysis of twin and adoption studies that compare individual's characteristics behavioural genetics estimate that for a variety of cognitive and personality variables, the heritability between parent and child is indeed significant and in the range of 30% to 60%. Nongenetic factors including the environment and measurement error, accounts for the differences. The point in Behavioural genetics theory is that parents behavior can influence the children's own at the long run.

The Alchemy of evil running in the blood and being inherited by young ones from their parents can never be overemphasized, taken for granted nor seen as superstition. Parents then should try as much as possible to be good examples and serve as role models to their children. This will aid in reducing the rate at which youngsters enroll and get initiated into cultism in Awka south Local Government Area. As long as Youngsters emulate positive and gainful way of life from their parents, they seldom derail from such good standard of life.

Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological systems Theory as Sincero (2012), expressed, is equally known as Human Ecology Theory. This theory states that human development is influenced by various habitats that mankind finds Himself. Kendler and Baker (2007), pointed out that this theory was propounded by Urie Bronfenbrenner. This theory helps to throw more light when one for instance compares how one behaves when in the close observation or guidance of one's parents, guardians or superiors and when one is far away in a place one is not known and outside the range of observation of superiors, parents or guardians. Again, it equally accounts for the varying degrees of behavior of persons and their divergences with special relation to the neighborhood they hail from. A youngster from a Ghetto neighborhood may tend to be wild and a youngster from Government Reserved Areas may tend to be mild and more co-ordinated.

Sincero (2012), postulated that the ecological system theory holds that human beings encounter different environment throughout their lifespan that may influence their dispositions and behaviors in varying degrees. These environmental systems according to him includes "Micro system, the Mesosystem, the Exosystem, the Macro system and the Chronosystem.

The Micro System

The micro system represents the basic and direct environment one is exposed to from the cradle. Typical of persons in ones micro system are one's family, friends, classmates, teachers, neighbours, as well as other people that have direct contact with one. This is where a person experiences one's initial social relations that make one human. This theory thus indicates that in this peculiar system, mankind is not just a recipient of experiences they acquire but are equally contributing to the building and formulation of such environments. Thus building a

healthy and sanitised society is a joint effort of everyone in every given society. One's actions and inactions will go a long way in shaping the society and determining what kind of society it is bound to become.

The Mesosystem

According to Sincero (2012), the Mesosystem involves the relationships between the microsystems in one's life. This implies that one's family experience may be related to one's school experience. For instance, if a child is neglected by the child's family or parents, such a child may have a low chance of developing positive attitude towards the teachers in school. Also, the child may feel awkward in the presence of peers and may resort to, withdrawal from a group of classmates. It is obvious that one of the reasons youngsters get initiated into cultism is low self esteem. This theory definitely accounts for that.

The Exosystem

An Exosystem refers to one or more habitats that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect or are affected by what happens in the setting accommodating the developing person. According to Newman and Newman (2020), they gave an instance wherein a woman gets promotion at work which implies more travel and time at corporate conferences; thus resulting in her partner spending more time at home in caring for the children. The children in turn will have fewer opportunities to interact with their mother. It is obvious that the woman's partner and her children have no contact with the woman's work setting, but decisions made there have an impact and influence on their lives.

Roberto (2016), affirmed that the exosystem involves social settings that are not directly experienced by a person but are paramount social settings for significant others, such as the target person's folks, spouse or even friends. Such environment "external" to the developing person are pointed to as exosystems. Sincero (2012), throwing more light to it from a peculiar dimension declared that the exosystem is the setting in which there is a link between the context wherein the person does not have any active role, and the context wherein the persons is actively participating. He gave an instance wherein supposing a child is more attached to his father than his mother. If the father should travel abroad to work for some long period of time, there may be a conflict between the mother and the child's social relationship, or on the other hand, this event may result to a tighter bond between the mother and the child.

The point to be sifted here is that the Exosystem may create a situation of children having or experiencing being raised by an absentee mother or father. Single parenting affects youngsters negatively more often than not. A situation of paternal or maternal deprivation is often created under the Exosystem. Youngsters experiencing this may feel unloved by one of the parents even though the parent involved is actually striving to make ends meet. The one out of many resultant effects is taking to negative lifestyle which getting initiated into cultism is one of such options.

The Macrosystem

Heimer and Zahm (2008), pointed out that a macrosystem is the broad, all-encompassing influences that impact the child and all the systems that surround the child. Examples of macrosystems include Education system, the law systems, the cultural systems and the geographical location in which a child is raised.

This singular explanation of what a macro-system is by Heimer and Zahm (2008), brings to the fur that the school, the geographical location which a child is raised and the sanity of the

government at the helm of affairs in a peculiar terrain can influence a child. A government that promulgates policies that are harsh may inflict economic depression in a country. Unemployment, general hardship, poverty and hunger which are some of the negative effects of bad governmental policies can drive youngsters into thug way of life and cultism.

In his explanation, Sincero (2012), intimated that the macro-system setting is the actual culture of an individual. The cultural contexts involve the socioeconomic status of the person and the family, the ethnicity or race, and living in a still developing or a third world country. For instance, being born to a poor family makes a person work harder every day. This behooves that the macro-system includes the culture or worldview a child absorbs. The ideas, customs and social behavior which influence a child or young person's identity, values and perceptions. Children who live in wealthy families will have different experiences compared to children living in poverty. This is why the family as the basic social institution is extremely important in inculcating good manners to youngsters. Inculcation of good manners ought to start from the cradle. Whether a child comes from a wealthy or poor family background, parents should always teach them and get them acquainted with the verities in both sides of the worlds and how to cope and maintain balance.

The Chronosystem

Huerta and Gomez-Parra (2020), exclaimed the chronosystem includes the transitions and shifts in one's lifespan. This may also involve the socio-historical contexts that may influence a person. Example is how divorce as a major life transition, may affect not only the couple's relationship but also their children's behaviors. Other examples are the birth of a new sibling when the child is 8 years old; the separation and remarriage of the child's parents to other partners when the child is a teenager; the child being diagnosed with leukemia at four years of age; moving to a new location when the child is 10 years of age; and so many others that can influence a child.

Sincero (2012), in trying to highlight on how the chronosystem can affect a child pointed out using divorce case; that such may affect not only the couple's relationship but also their children's behavior. Parents in this dispensation must be wary of their decisions. Irrespective of the fact that one should not be living in bondage because of the marriage union, one must understand that one of the reasons the marriage union was institutionalised by God Himself is for procreation. Adults in marriage must learn to sacrifice their own joy and welfare for that of their children. Parents must learn to live for their children. These youngsters are the future of tomorrow and when they are not properly guided and counseled when they are facing peculiar health challenges, difficulties and academic challenges, they may diverge to the extreme end of negative life style options. Children must be considered when parents are taking decisions. The marriage institution which is characterized by selfishness should be checkmated by adults in marriage themselves. Every marriage can work if more effort is added with understanding, devoid of pride and selfishness, while totally avoiding having alternative measures at the base of one's mindset.

Archbishop Alexander Chibuzor Ibezim's Charge (2023)

This charge with the theme "Running the Christian Race: Implications for the Family in Perilous Time", was presented to the 1st session of the 13th Synod of the Diocese of Awka. In this charge, Most Revd. Alexander Chibuzor Ibezim declared that the family is at the core of God's covenant purpose. Man that was created in God's image was not rooted in isolation but in family relationship; hence God created the woman Eve from Adam's ribs and instructed them to go and procreate. Archbishop Ibezim maintained that the "the family is the first church,

where the child is weaned and raised on the laps of faith and godliness” (p.36). He stressed that family is the very first center for training in character: it is also the first social community where the children learn how to interact in a social setting. He summed up his thoughts on the family viz:

- Family is a basic part of the divine structure for perpetuating godly seed; thus increase and multiplication is by families and not isolated individuals. He enjoined that single parenthood cannot be by deliberate design. Childlessness and divorce are aberrations that warrant divine intervention. It behooves then that man is created for community.
- What children observe and capture at home often influence them later in life. In other words, society and later life often emphasise what they have been taught at home.
- Family is the super structure through which the culture of Truth and Godliness is transmitted even to the unborn generation.
- Family is the place where one’s love for God and humanity must first be exemplified. Implying that; Godly men are called to love their wives, humble and virtuous women are to submit to their husbands, parents are to jointly love and appreciate their children, wise and good children are to obey their parents, and honest and sincere servants are to serve their masters in all sincerity.

Against these background, Archbishop Ibezim submitted in his charge that the Devil is attacking and striving to destroy the family via the following aberrations fostered by modernization and globalisation viz:

- Absence of Unity: The Devil always stirs this through various means in the family. Most times you notice couples divorcing as a result of “irreconcilable differences”, this terminology is actually diabolic and makes no sense. Divorce affects children adversely.
- Absence of Joy: Archbishop Ibezim admonished here that in joy there is peace, love, harmony, progress, testimonies, breakthroughs and atmosphere that draws Divinity. The Devil as he insisted, may bring sorrows in the family through crippling business, delays in job establishments, promotions and child bearing, birthing physically challenged child, raising character and academically deformed children and the likes: The understanding that they are temporal challenges, helps the family not to be swayed by those tricks but to trust in God and tackle them in prayers.

Furthermore, Archbishop Ibezim in his charge posited that some of the aberrations of globalization and modernisation that destroys the family union wherein Godly children ought to be raised for human kind to enjoy a peaceful and sanitized society are as follows:

- Increase in Divorce: He stated that a recent survey observed that 85% of children that exhibit behavioural disorders come from fatherless homes. The rate of divorce is increasingly becoming alarming in the contemporary epoch. Divorce as he stated, is one of the key factors to raising ungodly factors to raising ungodly seeds that exhibits bitterness and pain in the society. As he pointed out, it takes the man and woman to train godly children except in cases where death occurred.
- Co-habitation: This is a situation where a man and a woman live together without legal backings. It is gradually gaining ground as Archbishop Ibezim observed. Co-habitation is not the plan of God for establishing a family. Children raised under such families that have no legal backings and the parental blessings more often than not end in the bad side of life.
- Freedom to the children: The Archbishop Ibezim observed that in recent times, some families allow their children to be at liberty to make choices as they deem fit. Parents have little or no control over their affairs. They call it freedom but the devil is actually leveraging on it to manipulate the children into becoming anti-Christians even in the

Christian homes. This has endangered the lives of teenagers and youth in our time. This facilitates much initiation of youngsters into cultism since they sense that they are of age and can account for themselves.

The Archbishop Ibezim's charge as surveyed clearly exposit that once the family posits unhealthy atmosphere for quality upbringing of children in character and in learning; it will affect the society because the family is the nucleus of the society. In depth and sincere efforts should be made by both the church and state to call parents to order for creating a sound and godly family with healthy atmosphere of the child's upbringing. It is obvious that a good number of youngsters that enroll into the cultism are raised in chequered and ungodly homes.

Reasons for the Prevalence of Cultism in Awka South Local Government Area

The gathered data so far in this work portray that the reasons for the persistence of cultism in Awka South Local Government Area are as follows:

1. There are politicians that sponsor cultism in Awka South Local Government Area: These politicians serve as God fathers in various political parties in Awka South. These men are very wealthy and influential and are seldom charged to court for prosecution when apprehended. In Chukindi (2019) report, it is obvious that this is a living reality. When these influential men that serves as king makers in the Area sponsor cultism and are even members of some cult groups, the attempts to combat cultism in the Area will always result in a wild goose chase. To buttress this more, Chukindi (2021), affirmed that there may be no end in sight for the persistent cult clashes in Awka, the capital of Anambra state: This is so because known sponsors of cult groups in the capital city have remained untouched, as some of them have been identified to be top members of a ruling party in the state; while others are known to have the ear of the government of the state. According to him, investigations in Awka portrays that just as the security operatives are working hard to contain the activities of cultists, more people are on a daily basis being initiated into cult groups in the state, with the Vikings cult group said to be the most popular and highly populated among them.
2. Arrested cult members who are apprehended for alleged murder are seldom charged to court for murder in order to be prosecuted: Chukindi (2018), once reported that the police commissioner in Anambra state is threatening to arrest and charge cult suspects with murder if parents and guardians failed to play their role of leading their wards aright. One wonders, are they supposed to be threatened or just be charged to court when sincerely apprehended. The case of cultism in Awka south local government area should not be taken for granted. Much sermon and political rhetoric should not be reflected in such stance. The response to the menace of cultism in Awka South local government area should be met with decisive, strategic and calculated action by the police.
3. Parents no longer serve as role models to their children: The family which supposed to be the first point wherein youngsters receive both formal and informal quality training on good manners and lifestyle, no longer holds the proper atmosphere for such quality nurturing of youngsters. A look from what was gathered from the Attachment and Behavioral Genetic Theory posits that most parents do not get involved in their children's lives. They are so withdrawn and more often than not do not even portray good habits and characters for their children to learn from. Little wonder Aroh (2021), recorded that Mr Owolabi, represented by the assistant commission of police in charge of operations in Anambra state, Emmanuel Ogbonaya said "cultism is the mother of all the crimes being committed by the youth... Parents should also take issues of cultism seriously by inculcating good moral values in their children" (p.1).

4. Cultists initiate very young people into cultism in Awka South Government Area: According to Chukindi (2021) and Nseyen (2021), reports respectively, suspected cult groups arrested at various times in Awka and Okpuno town respectively have amongst them youngsters between the ages of 17 and 25 years of age. E. Nwafor (personal communication, May 17th, 2023), intimated that youngsters as young as 14 years of age are being initiated into cultism. O. Okoro (personal communication, May 25th, 2023), stressed on it that cult groups have even invaded not just secondary schools but even primary schools; He pointed out that most of the despicable acts of cult groups are not even recorded nor registered anywhere. It is worthy of recalling that Aroh (2021), quoted the Anambra state police commissioner; CP Chris Owolabi as declaring that over 90 percent of cult related deaths and activities in the state were not recorded. One wonders the extent of damage cultism is doing in the life of even children in Awka South Local Government Area. In all, when youngsters of the age of 12 years are initiated into cultism, one sees that the cult groups are simply trying to secure the future of their cults. Cultism persists in Awka south as a result of this evil visionary strive.
5. A state of lawlessness is evident in Awka South Local Government Area: It may sound funny but this is the truth. The Igbo culture forbids shedding of blood. When youngsters kill each other at will in the streets and goes scot free; it is a clear indication that such terrain is lawless. They take laws into their hands and decides who gets to live or die as gods. The lawlessness is so much that there is no longer respect for elders. Youngster can unleash insults on their elders and people around will even advice the elder to ignore such outbursts for fear of being killed peradventure such particular youngsters is a cult member. PM NEWS (25th March, 2018) recorded that An Ibadan-based Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), Richard Ogunwale, said that the rising wave of cultism could be attributed to the fact that Nigerians flouted the rule of law with impunity. According to him, law and order have broken down and people no longer respect the law because of the malaise of “godfatherism”: Lawlessness is at it’s rife in Nigeria in recent times. The sun News (1st February, 2023), and Onuegbu (2022), all attested to the fact that the recent hike in cult related crimes in Anambra state and Awka South Local Government Area in particular is as a result of lawlessness. The Ecological Systems Theory posits to the fur that when the society is corrupt and unhealthy, children that are being raised in such a society will definitely be influenced by such a state. However, it must be registered that this lawless state is created by not only the weakness of the security forces, but also the freedom that parents unduly give their children to decide for themselves. More so the attacks on security forces by the members of the IPOB (Indigenous people of Biafra) in killing and attacking police and military bases/stations in the South East equally contributed to the hike in the state of lawlessness evidenced in Awka South Local Government Area.

Solutions to the Menace of Cultism in Awka South Local Government Area

This work has exposed so far that the menace of secret cultism in Awka South Local Government Area is so much that it should not be ignored. If nothing is done about this, in the near future one will find it extremely difficult to just walk out in the open without being scared of untimely death. In lieu of all that has been posited in this work, the work proffers the following solutions on how cultism will be tackled in Awka South Local Government Area.

1. The fight against secret cultism should be a joint one: Every individual in the society should be involved in the strive to eradicate secret cultism in the society. Concerted efforts should be employed by the family, government, secret services and every person in the society towards wiping away the prints of cultism from the sands of times in our milieu. The residents of each setting must learn to call a spade a spade. Cultists must

be sought out and reported to the appropriate quarters. Cults hide outs and meeting places must be exposed and reported to the governmental authorities. Every individual in the Awka South Local Government Area must be on high alert for cult activities within their area and report to the security services.

2. Parents should take issues of cultism serious by inculcating good moral values in their children: Parents should try to be very close to their children as friends. They should monitor the friends their children keep, their hand sets and what their children do generally with their private times. Parents should equally be in contact with the teachers of their children in school and the school authorities as well. They should make sure that they keep in real touch with their children living both in the school hostels and off campuses.
3. The state government should step in and begin to regulate how much public transporters pay as tax and everything involved in their state and local government financial responsibilities: "Agbero" people or tauts and political god father's should not be allowed to be in charge of the financial responsibilities and requirements of public transporters. The present Governor of Anambra state is trying but he should do more. The Government should own up their state and be in complete charge of state duties.
4. Landlords should know their Tenants very well before they rent out their houses: They should know their occupation, where they hail from and virtually everything concerning their tenants. Official forms should be prepared for this of which copies should be submitted to the secret services and revenue/state estate services within each milieu. Severe punishment should be slated to landlords that fail to comply.
5. The Anambra State Government should immediately enact a law to demolish buildings serving as cults hideout, while the house owner would also be prosecuted.
6. Anyone found taking or selling and hoarding hard drugs should immediately be arrested and charged to cult for prosecution.
7. Arrested cultists should be immediately charged to court for prosecution: This should be taken seriously by the security services and the government authorities. It should not be handled as "business as usual".
8. Parents should equally stop giving their children liberty to live anyway they like: Children must be properly guided. They should be complimented when due as well as properly chastised when it is necessary. The rod should not be spared; if not, the child will rot.
9. Top politicians and whoever is suspected to be sponsoring cult members should immediately be arrested, investigated and charged to court for prosecution.
10. Finally, the Religious institutions with special reference to churches should revert to preaching of core salvation messages. Teachings on Christian discipleship should be enhanced and encouraged. Church leaders should not be carried away by the common trend of empty prophecies and preaching of only prosperity messages. People ought to hear the undiluted word of God when they go to the church. The word of God still has the ability to change the lives of men even that of cult members and those nursing the intentions of getting initiated.

Conclusion

This work has attempted to portray the dangers of cultism in Awka South Local Government Area; the reasons for the prevalence of cultism in Awka South Local Government Area and the solutions to the menace of cultism in Awka South Local Government Area. Room for further research abounds.

However, it is necessary and required to note that these cult groups actually involve themselves in maiming and killing of human beings as well as causing chaos and destruction of lives, and properties for reasons that are even flimsy and funny ranging from struggle for supremacy amongst cult groups and to gain influence in the society, vengeance and revenge, for social identity, when being used as political thugs, as a choice of lifestyle, to simply become notorious and generally noticed by young girls, to instill fear to the populace and their colleagues, unto the fact that they just want to be applauded as being brave. The burning fact that this cult destruction of lives and properties is equally one of the signs of the end time since we are in the perilous times should never be overestimated. Thus inasmuch as one is not to become superstitious, one must get acquainted with the prophecies of the Holy writ in order not to be discouraged and end up destroying one another with blame games, especially when after exhausting all efforts to combat evil like cultism in the present epoch and yet it persists as if one is complacent and had not been strategic in the face of the prevailing evil.

Recommendation

Cultism is a menace to the society especially since it involves the youth who are supposed to be future leaders, hence steps should be taken to eliminate it before it leads to the demise and destruction of the communities in Nigeria especially Awka South Local Government Area. This work recommends the following as regards how to poise the society and ride it of cultism:

- Public Enlightenment Campaign should be organized by the governmental and non-government organisations to educate the youth, parents, and other members of the society on the menace and the resultant negative effects of cultism, through mass media like radio, television, internet, and social media.
- Religion and moral instructions should be given to pupils and students of all levels of education. It should be strictly included in the school curriculum. Churches should always organize spiritual seminars and workshop for the youth. Enough time and energy should be devoted to disciplining the youth in the churches.
- Social media should be checked and censored. The types of videos and Websites that children log into should be censored by the government agencies set up to do so in order that children would not be misled with wrong and dangerous information. There exist even sites on how to murder someone and commit suicide.
- The Government must place embargo on politicians going to schools to campaign. They should equally place embargo on politicians using the youth as thugs. Official security personnel of the state should be assigned to politicians and important persons in the state that actually are qualified and required to wield such. On no account should any person engage the services of ordinary persons as thugs.
- Prompt and visible reward system must be ensured in Nigeria by the government. The system must punish those that are wrong and reward those that do the right thing. Without this, youngsters are encouraged to behave anyhow they want.
- Every primary and secondary school should have an active counseling unit. The guidance and counselors employed therein must be qualified professionals in handling youngsters. This should be geared towards educating and enlightening of students on the dangers and implications of cultism in the society.

Finally, this work encourages parents to keep hope alive in the battle against evil in the society. Parents must stop encouraging youngsters from making money and becoming rich at all costs. Youngsters must be questioned thoroughly when they acquire new items. Parents must keep the family atmosphere healthy for raising quality, responsible; sound and Godly Youngsters in order for our society especially in Awka South Local Government Area to be sanitized and be rid of cultism.

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