

The Dangers of Cultic Involvement

By Reuben Kigame

There are numerous false religious movements operating in Kenya and around the world in the name of the dissemination of God's truth, but which may be the source of lifelong poverty, family breakdown, mental derangement, college dropout, physical illness or varying manifestations of bizarre behavior in your life. Today, if I went to a college lecture hall and asked a Christian student to quit his education and simply sit at home waiting for some divine revelation, hardly any student would agree. If I came to your home as a married wife and told you to leave your husband because he is not God's will for your life, you will probably call the police to arrest me, or you may phone your Pastor and tell him that I was forcing you to break vows you made before God. If I asked you to close your business and give me all the money, you would probably beat me up. Similarly, if I asked you to drink my urine or sip from a bottle of iodine, you would invoke the law.

Yet, one or two years from now, numerous people—learned and unlearned, rich and poor, leaders and the led—will have succumbed to each of these scenarios with varying degrees of detail. I know a student at the University of Nairobi who quit Architecture just before the final exams believing that God was asking him to go and simply wait for His will at home. I know a gentleman who used to work with the Postal Corporation of Kenya who quit his job citing the fact that the world was about to come to an end and that there was no need to keep working. I know several ladies who used to attend the meetings of a Nakuru-based “prophet” who were constantly asked to leave their husbands and surrender their wedding rings because those husbands were not God's will for their lives. Some J.W. leaders have been known to ask wives or husbands to quit marriage where their spouses did not want to be Witnesses. It is now common knowledge that, before the Kanungu inferno on March 17, 2000 where nearly one thousand people died, the mastermind of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God, Credonia Mwerinde, had asked members to sell their properties, close businesses and give their possessions to her since the world was ending with the turn of the millennium.

So, what is it that would make someone disbelieve and refuse to do the above now, but one or two years later not only do them, but also encourage others to join such misleading movements? It is one little thing: “God talk.” As soon as the name God is mentioned, many of our critical eyes and ears close and our curiosity antennae shoot up. It is much easier when such God talk is packed with some promise of material prosperity or social status. In some cases, it is about the promise of spiritual status, where one is promised to ascend the spiritual ladder, becoming more popular than the other novices who attend the same fellowship. As long as the Bible is mentioned, many shed their critical skin and “kiss their brains goodbye.” So, a student or professor may be the sharpest mind on campus, but the use of spiritual jargon and promises reduces them to

zombies. Right here is the importance of studying the Bible regularly so that spiritual quarks and masqueraders do not end up using Bible passages out of context to lure unsuspecting faithful into their webs.

Let us quickly cite some of the greatest dangers of involving oneself in a cultic movement:

1. Cults can lead you to the grave. Usually through apocalyptic (end-time) sermons that emphasize the imminent return of Christ, but primarily that the world is about to end, such groups have hypnotized the faithful to drink poison, as in the case in 1978 in Jonestown, Guyana where Jim Jones led 913 people to drink poison in the name of “Holy Communion” at the close of the age. The Kanungu inferno led nearly 1,000 followers of Joseph Kibwetere to their death. Had the House of Yahweh not been busted in Kenya several years ago, many would probably have perished. Some of the cults will seclude people without food or encourage them to undertake endless fasts which end up malnourishing them and/or leading them to death. In a world with suicide bombers who believe they are doing God a favour—educated and uneducated alike—we cannot overstate this point.

2. Cults can break your home. In the early 1990’s I knew a man in Thika whose wife attended a cultic meeting. She was indoctrinated to the point of seeing her family as enemies of God’s mission in her. She left home when her daughter was a couple of months old. When she saw the light, the daughter was nearly ten years. Friends and relatives, the police and other well-wishers had been mobilized in trying to bring her back home to no avail. We have stated above instances where cult groups literally encourage separation and outright divorce. I was speaking in Ang’urai, Teso, several years ago when I was told of a group that was literally tearing homes in the name of God. In some instances, women were encouraged to leave their husbands and become the cult leader’s wives. Cults may break your marriage tomorrow.

3. Cults can make you poor overnight. The so-called Prosperity Gospel is all over many Christian media houses. Greedy men and women masquerading as ministers of Christ clean people’s bank accounts and simply enslave people’s incomes in the name of giving to God. Scriptures such as Malachi 2:16 and Luke 6:38–39 are abused to rob thousands of hard-earned cash and other resources. “Give until it hurts” and “Do not give God that which costs you nothing,” “Test God and see if He will not bless you” and, more commonly, “Bless the servant of God” are used to con the faithful. The problem is that, as many give away their bus fares, salaries and property, only those who are given prosper, not the givers. The easiest way to get believers on this one is the misuse of the Scripture in Mark 10:29ff where they are told that if they give they will get back sixty-fold and a hundredfold. Once again, many believers are so enticed by the prospect of receiving that they are easily duped into parting with choice resources. We have to be very careful about the numerous deceptions that promise quick returns. The common

English saying suffices here: If a deal is too good, think twice. The reason why a pyramid scheme like DECI deceived many is because it came in the name of God. Beware of cash for prayers. Be vigilant about “planting seed money” and the recent madness of buying repackaged anointing oil. These are economic games, not spiritual investments.

4. Cults can lead to physical and psychological diseases. Many living in cult colonies are fed on very poor diets leading to malnutrition. Some professionals, having lived under such cult colonies, end up having serious hallucinations and other mental disorders. Some have become social misfits. In some cases, especially in the Nyanza region of Kenya, some faithful have moved in with cult leaders and contracted HIV AIDS. In Uganda and occasionally in Kenya, the authorities have had to move in and rescue victims of such colonies. Extreme cult behavior has led members to start barking like dogs or roaring like lions in the name of spiritual enlightenment or even heightened experiences of worship. The commonest result, though, for many of the cult victims, is depression, which often leads to death.

Let us close with a few suggestions to contain the dangers of the cults.

First, parents should begin teaching their children the Word of God from very early. Bible studies at the family table are the most effective. When children know the Bible in and out, it is very hard for them to be duped. Parents in teaching the Word will be enlightened in God’s truth as well.

Second, everyone should own and read the Bible. Those with illiterate parents or members of the family should do all they can to contact Bible societies for audio Bibles or the Bible in picture form. Those with visually handicapped children should approach institutions such as the Kenya Union and the Kenya Society for the Blind for Braille lessons so that such children can read the Bible for themselves.

Third, we must develop a critical mind and learn to question something before believing or adopting it. Curiosity is one of the commonest luring methods into the cults.

Last, let us avoid quick fixes and the sheer desire to prosper without working for such prosperity. We must remember that God is not like an ATM machine. We must learn to worship Him, knowing that He is a God of truth. Most of all, we must run away from groups that seem to entice through stylistics, charismatic dramatics and entertainment. If we love the Word, we will easily detect the counterfeit.

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