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INSTIGATING THE CANONS OF LAW AND RELIGION FOR CRIME REDUCTION IN NIGERIA

Dr. Adekunbi Imosemi[1], Dr. Abangwo Nzeribe[2], Dr. Ademola Taiwo[3]

[1] Senior Lecturer, Department of Jurisprudence and Public Law, School of Law and Security Studies, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria.
E-mail: imosemia@babcock.edu.ng

[2] Senior lecturer, Department of Jurisprudence and Public Law, School of Law and Security Studies, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria.
E-mail: abangwun@babcock.edu.ng

[3] Senior lecturer, Department of Jurisprudence and Public Law, School of Law and Security Studies, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria.
E-mail: taiwoa@babcock.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

Nigeria is a divergent and multi-religious nation where great importance is placed on religion. The belief systems impact it's followers with morals and values which ought to be adhered to. It is therefore alarming that despite Nigeria's high religious culture, the country is still one of the most corrupt and crime filled nations in the world. This article assesses and underlines the role of Religion in curbing and fighting crimes in Nigeria. The study acutely explores the relationship between crime and religion, and the effect of not giving credence to it. The study uses secondary data analysis to examine the relationship between law and religion, and the role of religion in crime reduction in Nigeria.

The work finds that religion has the capacity to play a great role in the reduction of crime rates, and if the instrument of law and religion is well utilized, crimes will be adequately curbed in the society. The study recommends that awareness be conducted for various religious organizations, especially those with educational institutions, on their role in crime prevention and reduction at various levels in Nigeria.

Keywords: Crime, religion, insecurity, crime reduction.

Introduction

Nigeria ranks on the list of the countries with the most violent activities in it's continent, and in the world. The various categories of criminal activities makes her comparable to Countries like Colombia and Mexico in terms of drugs, Syria, Mali and Afghanistan in terms of Jihadists movements like Boko Haram, and Iraq in terms of the oil conflicts in the Niger Delta. Sadly, these view is shared by both Nigerians in Nigeria, and Nigerians overseas. In recent times, the Nigerian society has been identified with numerous violent crimes and sadly, the consequences of this are usually appalling. This impression and development has become a great source of concern for the government, non-governmental organizations, corporations, individuals, religious organizations and scholars

(Emmanuel Iheajemuzu, 1997). It is generally known that crime emanates from an act of violating the laid down laws of a society. This violation is as much a social problem and it transcends across generations and exists in practically all modern societies (Meveigh 1978). However, the definition and attributes of crime in one society can be different from what is obtainable in another society. Also, from time to time, the attributes and constitutes of crime changes (Ayuk, 2012).

There is no dispute as to the alarming rate of insecurity in Nigeria in recent times. There are numerous security problems across the country and it ranges from terrorist' attacks in the Northern region, to the insurgencies in the Niger Delta, to armed robbery and kidnapping across the country. According to Achumba, Ighomereho & Akpor-Robaro (2013:79) this challenges have made the security of Nigeria a serious issue for the government, with huge amount of money and resources being allocated to security. Despite all the efforts, serious crimes like, armed robbery, terrorism, religious killing, kidnapping, ethnic clashes, suicide bombing, power tussle killing and various other kinds of crimes is highly on the rise and has become easily identifiable with Nigeria. In the Global Peace Index (2012), Nigeria has been constantly ranked low, and this points to the terrible state of insecurity (Achumba, Ighomereho & Akpor-Robaro, 2013). These security challenges is a phenomenon that has affected both the individual and the country's economic, social and political standing, as many have lost their loved ones, properties and investments as a result (Onifade, Imhonopi and Urim, 2013). Nwaze (2011) expressed the view that the high rate of violence and death which was experienced during the civil war still ranks lower than the losses that have occurred in recent times. In considering the causes of the abnormality and crime rates, Onifade, Imhonopi and Urim (2013) argued that a link exists between the increased religious bigotry, ethnic hate, political tussle, and the increasing population of citizens who are dissatisfied with the country, the lack of basic amenities, and its backwardness.

Law has always been the instrument used to maintain peace and order in any society. Colonialism brought the English Laws, after which various Nigerian Laws were enacted. The Criminal Code applicable in the South, and the Penal Code applicable in the North, together with Acts and Laws in various states now stipulate acts classified as offences and thus establishes the Law. It is however widely known that despite the many Laws that exist, there is still a prevalence of Crime and there is no real crime reduction.

Nigeria being a multi-religious society, Religion is a part of the foundation of the society. The recognized religions in Nigeria are: Christianity, Islam and Traditional religion. For the Muslims, there exists the Islamic Law and Sharia Courts. There also exists Customary Courts which recognizes customs and traditions that have been judicially noticed. Many Nigerians hold their religion in high esteem. It has been shown that the crime rates in Nigeria tend to reduce during any major religious period, for example, Easter period or during the holy month of Ramadan. The author is of the opinion that the reinforced relationship between an individual and who they profess as God fosters this and helps them to desist from committing crimes. A vast majority of Nigerians keep to their religious doctrines and teachings. If the instrument of Religion can be used effectively, it is the author's opinion that it would ultimately help in crime reduction. The combined use of the instrument of Law and religion can thus be used to reduce and curb crimes as religion is a fundamental part of the survival of Nigeria as a nation. The paper establishes the need for understanding the relationship between law and religion and the need to view them as tenets for crime reduction in Nigeria.

Methodology

The qualitative approach was adopted in this study. The data used was mainly from secondary sources of information. The doctrinal method was used to analyse the framework of Law and Religion and how the effective use of the two concepts can curb criminal activities in Nigeria. The secondary data was sourced from journal articles, books, government publications, and newspapers.

Conceptual Clarification

Crime

It is generally established that most concepts in the field of social sciences are difficult to define. In some climes, crime is seen as any act that results into a disturbance of the norm and leads to threat to the safety of the public. In other cultures, crime is viewed as any act which leads the society to social disorder (Archibong, E., Udobong, R., & Antia, C., 2014). In the sociological sense, crime can be viewed as an anti-social behaviour or act that scatters the generally accepted norm in the community. A norm can be described as a moral or rule which prescribes what individuals should think or do under a given situation (Archibong, E., Udobong, R., & Antia, C., 2014).

In the criminal law sense, crime can be described as an act or an omission which can bring about sanctions in form of death, imprisonment or fines (Adebayo, 2013). This definition is in line with the definition given by Dambazau as he views crime as: "an act or omission contrary to public interest, and which is prescribed by act passed by the parliament in the general interests of the society, and to which prescribed penalty is attached in the occasion of violation and it involves four basic values which are moral wrong, public wrong, law and punishment for the criminal." (Dambazau, 1994). According to Criminologists, crime has two main elements/attributes. The first is: A criminal act which can either be an act or an omission, and: the mental element of the offence which can be referred to as the criminal intent of the crime committed. These two elements must be present in order to establish the existence of a crime (Archibong, E., Udobong, R., & Antia, C., 2014).

Definition of Crime Prevention Criminology

Crime prevention refers to steps and activities which help to curb the occurrence of criminal acts and the emergence of criminal thoughts in individuals. It deals with the root causes of crime. It is different from retribution, as retribution is merely the aftermath of committing a crime and involves the penalties and sanctions for the crime. Crime prevention entails measures which must be carried out prior to the commission of the offence in order to prevent or prohibit the crime (Rashad, 2003).

The Concept of Religion

Religion in simple terms means discipleship, obedience, capitulation, doctrine, sharia, etc., (Alizadeh, 2002). According to Hassanzadeh, "religion is the real program and actual order and blesses the human limits and is achievement of eternal bliss; all its texts and rituals are pure science and original right and includes all creatures in the universe" (Hassanzadeh Amoli, 2009, p 300). Also, religion is viewed as a set of written down instructions which is intended for the purpose of revelation. Further, "Ideology, in general, and religion, in particular, are the substantial manifestations of social life and those who assume that progress in man his knowledge cause these to be eliminated, have known neither the society structure nor the religion nature" (Motahari, 1994, p 598).

The second survey of the United Nations in 1992 established a result on the willingness to commit crimes such as rape, murder, assault, armed robbery, addiction, fraud, among others, in developed countries, Islamic countries and non-Islamic developing countries, and it showed that there is a lower crime rate in Islamic countries when compared to other countries. The average crime level in Islamic countries was 694.2 per a one hundred thousand. In developing countries, it was 1028.5 per one hundred thousand, and in developed countries, it showed 5968.5 per one hundred thousand. By looking at this statistics, one cannot help but recognize the importance and role of religion in the reduction of crime rate for any country (Serajzadeh, 2002, p 117).

The Religious Demography of Nigeria

In Nigeria, it is quite difficult to know the appropriate accurate proportion of religious groups that exists. The national census of 2006 would have been the appropriate channel to establish it, but

religion was excluded from the list of parameters used. Thus, the information that exists is largely based on conjectures (Agberemi, 2005) and projections (Pew Forum, 2008). Nigeria is a country which consists of 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The 36 states comprises of 17 states in the Southern part, and 19 states in the Northern part. Generally, Muslims can mostly be found in the northern part of Nigeria while the Southern part is mostly dominated by Christians. The Muslims can be said to make up a larger, or same portion of population which the Christians constitute. Also, there are a few members of the Nigerian population who practice the indigenous traditional belief, and some others do not believe in religion at all (The International Religious Freedom Report, 2007).

Thus, it can be said that there are two main religions in Nigeria: Christianity and Islam. For the Islam, the major form of Islam is known as the Sunni, although there are also those who are Shia adherents. For the Christians, there are various denominations and they include: the Baptist, the Roman Catholic, the Methodist, the Seventh Day Adventists, The Jehovah's Witnesses, the Presbyterian Church, and many other Pentecostal churches. These Pentecostal churches are mostly indigenous to Nigeria and were not brought into Nigeria as a result of colonialism. There are also several Evangelical mission churches.

The Link Between Law and Religion

The primary connection between Law and Religion is most clear when viewed from the point of view of the control theory (Hirschi, 1969; Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990). In line with most religious traditions, the control theorists take the inspiration for crime for granted. The pursuit of self-gratification is one of the nature of Man, hence, there is a drive to violate another person's rights for the sake of one's pleasure. However, an effect of the process of socialization is that it enables one to develop a bond to other people and thus become able to curb the personal interests which are adverse to others. As a result of this relationship with others, we tend to get more involved in pursuing only legitimate conducts. Ultimately, this helps us develop a good sense of right and wrong, and reduces the chances of getting involved in crimes and illegal activities. The idea of religion can be made to influence this social attitude. Thus, in most cases, people who have religious beliefs and are dedicated and involved in religious activities for example, the Golden Rule and the instructions of the Ten Commandments are prone to have a grounded belief in the legitimacy of the Criminal Law applicable in their society. Also, an effect of religiosity is that it can culminate to a greater bond and relationship with one's family, participation in conventional conducts, avoidance of social ills and bad conducts like use of drugs and drinking of alcohol, and association with good peers (National Public Radio, 1999).

Further, belonging to a social group, for example, a faith-based network may give a level of informal social influence and hold. This is because in such a group, there will be grown ups who are on the look out for the attitudes of the teenagers or youths, also, most youths will be concerned with being able to get acceptance within the group which they may not have elsewhere. However, despite this, most criminologists have overlooked the role of religion in curbing or reducing crimes in the society. In the same vein as the role of health and religion, in recent time, more attention is now been given to the role of religion in controlling criminal attitude (Larson and Larson, 1994).

John Dilulio's "Jeremiah Project", was used by Byron Johnson and David Larson (1998) to conduct what they described as a "systematic review" of the research works on "religion and juvenile delinquency". Three-quarters of the research work revealed that in situations where there was some measure of religiosity, it had an adverse outcome on delinquency. This means that there was a reduced delinquency where there was high religiosity measures. The authors found that the nine studies that adopted the complete measures of religiosity established that religion reduced delinquency (Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1996). There was a contrast in this study and in the study where simpler degrees of religion like, mere attendance in church, was used. However, with regards to the effect of religion on criminal activities, they all found that religion

resulted to a decrease in crime. Thus, the studies by Larson and Johnson showed that the more involvement in religious belief and activities, the lesser the crimes.

Larson and Johnson (1998) further conducted original analyses on the effect of religion on delinquency. The focus of the first research was on information from the survey carried out be the National Bureau of Economic Research on youths of African-American descent. The study showed that religious belief measured by frequency in church, had direct and indirect outcomes. The direct outcome revealed that frequency in church decreased crime and use of substance (Ibid). The indirect outcome showed that frequency in church related to other conventional conducts and relationships which are connected with decreased crime. The researchers also used information from the National Youth Survey to analyse the same issues for youths of urban African-American origin. The result was the same as that earlier mentioned as it revealed that religion resulted to lower involvement in crimes. The authors indicated that the results are in line with the point of view of social control and that religious beliefs acted as a "resiliency" point that ensures that individuals are prevented from getting involved in criminal activities.

Evans, Cullen, Dunaway, Burton (1995) also shares the same view as Larson and Johnson (1998). Their study finds that religion means a lower degree of crime and illegal activities. The authors embarked on an analysis with a focus on religion and adult crime. Their research made use of scales of religiosity on the basis of beliefs, religious activities and salience. The authors also took into consideration the effects of participation in religious groups and membership of a denomination. The study also put secular controls like fear of penalties, relationship with others, and demographic and society attributes into consideration. The study established that religiosity characterized by attendance in church, listening to religious audio and video programmes, and the study of religious books, resulted into a reduces level of criminal acts. Evans and Colleagues further observed that although the personal link between religion and crime is obvious in the research, it is possible that "religious behavior is entangled with and reinforced by association with other believers, religious friends, family members, and fellow parishioners" (Evans, Cullen, Dunaway, Burton, 1995)

Self-Control and Religion: It's Role in Crime Reduction

Beliefs, values, ideologies and attitudes are internalized tools, capable of influencing a person's behaviour and actions. Every individual who have internalized the good set of beliefs, attitude and values is more likely to not take part in criminal activities due to the high moral standards. Religion can be viewed as a good example of a structure that incorporates these attributes. Hence, individuals who have imbibed these elements have a degree of self-control. Akers and Sellers (2013) thus stated that: "the differential tendency of people to avoid criminal acts whatever the circumstances are less likely to engage in criminal/deviant behavior." On the other hand, people who do not possess these internalized tools, and hence, have a low degree of self-control will be more likely to take part in criminal activities if and when faced with an unlawful or criminal opportunities (Akers and Sellers, 2013). Thus, the development of self-control in a child from childhood, (through the help of socialization and varying parental doctrines), largely determines the tendency of a person to avoid engaging in criminal activities. Once this occurs, the attributes more times than not, remains in such a person throughout his/her life, and can hardly be changed (Ibid). Researchers have analyzed the connection between Law, Religion and Self-control and arrived at the consensus that self-control, morality and religion influences the tendency to engage in criminal activity (Welch et al. 2006; McCullough and Willoughby 2009; Kerley et al. 2011; Laird et al. 2011; Reisig et al. 2012).

Welch et al. (2006) made an analysis on whether the link between religiosity, i.e., meaningfulness of doctrines, constant prayers, religious interpretation, religious service frequency, e.t.c., and future misbehaviours, i.e., theft, tax evasion, assault, gambling, and so on, was spurious or connected with the level of self-control. The study primarily was based on the assertions of Gottfredson

and Hirschi that the connections between "social variables and force, fraud or analogous imprudent acts" develop by "antecedent effect of self-control" (Ibid). Also, religion helps people to internalize and adopt basic fundamental principles that guide and direct their actions and behaviors in the right direction.

According to Welch (2006), religion and self-control were established to "operate independently of one another", aided by factors such as educational level, race, age, gender, and residence. Thus, a high degree of religious values and self-control reduce the probability of engaging in bad conducts. Kerley (2011) further established that religiosity such as listening to religious programs, attendance in church and private prayers reduced crime rates. The rate of criminal activities and behavior was affected by the self control and religiosity of people. Antonaccio and Tittle (2008) in their study found that self-control has a negative impact on criminality, net of the control elements, and morality has a stronger connection with criminal propensity, net of the same control elements. Religion can be described as the rate at which people engage in religious activities, the level of integration of one's doctrines in one's live, i.e., devotion, the engagement in prayer sessions, and the acceptance of the particular religious belief (Reisig et al. 2012). Quite a number of social vices and ills which are crimes under the criminal law are forbidden by most religious societies but are still not totally shunned by the community. Religion has the effect of inhibiting misconducts and crimes even without self-control. While Self-control strongly helps to indicate whether or not a person will partake in criminal acts, religion also serves its role of inhibiting criminal activities. Thus, the combination of values, ideologies, beliefs, attitude and moral doctrines can help to curb participation in criminal activities and ensure that crimes in the society are significantly reduced. Variables like morality and religion have a great chance of determining the nexus between crime and religion and ultimately help in its curtailment.

Effect of Religion on the Community.

Furthermore, apart from the outcome of individual religious beliefs on the level of participation in criminal activities, it has also been established that the degree of participation in religious activities in the community also affects the rate of crimes. Stark, Doyle, and Kent (1980) analysed the connection between membership of a denomination and obedience of the Law in 193 metropolitan societies. They were able to establish that the more the church membership, the lesser the involvement in crime of the community as a whole, i.e., such communities have low crime rates. Olson (1990) too the research further by examining every country in the Northeast, West and Midwest of the United States. By so doing, the analysis was made to include both urban and rural areas. The result gotten was similar to that derived by Stark et al, as it established that membership of a church resulted into lesser crimes in the community. Thus, it can be concluded that membership of a religious organisation is a form of social control which helps in reducing crimes in the society. As stated by Evans et al. (1995:199) "Crime rates are generally lower in regions of the country where the religious ecology is dense."

The Social Role of Religion in Nigeria: A Tenet for Crime Reduction.

The ability to recognize the role of social justice in any society amounts to the recognition of the existence of God and his part in the affairs of he world. This leads to advancement and progress. The general belief held by many is that God is the maker of man and the maker of everything good on earth. The awareness of the existence of God also interprets as the existence of social justice. A major part of religion is the teaching that man was created by God, and man ought to rely on God for everything, and after life, man has a duty of reporting his journey in life. Also, religion helps man to know that he has obligations to his/herself, as well as to every human being, and also to the community he is a part of. This is a function of social justice. Further, the three main religion in Nigeria are in agreement that all humans are dependent on God and need to be guided by an ultimate being, which could be God, Allah, or gods (Aremu 2003).

According to Ezeanya (1980) "to attempt to build a nation without God is to hope to construct a massive structure upon the foundation of sand, such building will collapse at the slightest gust of wind and the fall will be great." Hence, one of the primary function of religion is the promotion and building of a society. Religion thus functions to make people aware that social justice, legality and a sound society, is not merely a man thought action, but is a God planned action. Generally, it is said that Peace is the absence of war. Okwueze (2003) believes that: "it is not merely the absence of war nor can it be reduced solely to be maintenance of a balance of power between enemies nor is it brought about by dictatorship. Instead, it is rightly and appropriately called, an enterprise of justice, peace results from that harmony built into human society by its divine founder and actualized by man as they thirst after ever-greater justice." Religion helps in securing the peace of the nation when rightfully followed. This is achieved by creating awareness of the ethics of good and bad in the minds of people.

Agha (2003) stated that "conscience is defined as a faculty of the human mind responsible for different capabilities or abilities which the human being attempt to exhibit." A person therefore decides to make a choice between right and wrong as a result of the morals embedded in him/her. These morals are mostly taught and spread by religion. Usman Dan Fodio (1754-1817), a prominent leader and Muslim scholar explains that conscience is just like an open wound, and it is truth alone that can heal it. Codes of Conducts and Laws are of utmost importance to human beings living in a society, where everyone has a chance and freedom to pick between good and bad. This freedom allows humans to do according to what he deems fit, i.e., as he wills, and this will lead to conflict and ultimately anarchy and chaos. Religion's role is to continually bring awareness to all and appeal to the minds of members of the society to embrace peace and not conflict.

Also, "No society can live without morals." Morality is made up of a set of standard values which all reasonable human agrees with (Ibid). Religion then helps to spread this set of rules to guide man on the activities to partake in and those to stay away from. Religion can thus be seen as aiming to promote and advance justice, education, hard-work, diligence, honesty, discipline, and legality. However, it should be noted that overtime, religion is now being used to promote violence under the pretence of doing that which is the will of God. It is misplaced teachings and should not deter one from acknowledging the good role religion can play in the society and in ensuring that criminal activities are substantially reduced. The teachings of religion when followed appropriately ensures that every individual seeks the good of another, without strife or hate. This functions to dissuade a person from wanting to kill, steal, rape, or otherwise harm another person.

Recommendations

Awareness should be made to both private and public school's religious organizations on their role in the prevention of crime in the society. Every individual spends most if his/her formative years in school, thus the school can help to ensure that an individual's religious belief is nourished to enable it serve as an effective social control mechanism. Also, various Families should ensure that their children are well educated and informed about the Law and religious training to the best such a child can understand.

The author further recommends that religious organizations in both urban and rural areas should make available free centers for religious, legal, educational, and ethical counselling. This will help to ensure that most individuals have someone to confide in at every point in time without having to bear financial burden.

It is recommended that attention be given to the socialization process of any individual into the school, church, universities or work place. More times than not, individuals who feel loved and welcomed in their societies and places they spend their time tend to have a higher moral tendency and regard for the Law.

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Also, training, research and scientific conferences should be set up for religious organizations to inform them on the role and benefits of religious teachings and activities in curbing and reducing crimes at various levels of life.

Conclusion

As earlier stated, Nigeria is a multi-religious country with more than three religions. However, Islam, Christianity and Traditional worship are the three main religious beliefs practiced in Nigerian communities. As a religious Nation, the rate of crime and illegal conducts is quite alarming. The various religious beliefs in existence all have a set of attitudes, ideologies, values and morals which they preach. This morals more times than not does not support many of the social ills, vices and criminal activities in existence. Research by various scholars have shown that individuals and communities who are religious tend to have a reduced crime rate. Hence, it can be stated that religion ought to influence people's tendency to commit crime, and ultimately influence the society. The teachings in the various religions do not support crimes and the Golden Rule and Ten Commandments specifically forbids acts such as killing and stealing. Therefore, the author believes that if the instrument of Religion can be used appropriately, it can help to reduce or curb criminal activities among the Youths and the adults. Thus, the appropriate use of Law and Religion can be used as instruments for crime reduction in Nigeria and the world at large.

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