

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN CONTROLLING CRIMINALITY AND VIOLENCE AS GROWING PHENOMENA IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY GLOBALIZED WORLD

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Introduction

In the current context of increasing transactional organized crime, in a violence and risk society favoured by certain phenomena of individualism and globalization, it is necessary to investigate what role the church may have in preventing and controlling deeds dangerous to human values.

In this respect, the Church, which has well defined place in the 21st century globalized world, aims to substantially contribute to educating people in the spirit of Christian morality, so that they cannot commit anti-social acts injurious to others and for other values of humanity.

At the beginning of the third millennium, the development of social phenomena is constantly accelerating, causing great changes in science and material progress, but also in the sphere of philosophical concepts, morality and faith, which generates new patterns of behavior and other scales of values in a human society dominated by individualism risks, with all its negative consequences but also globalization risks, which facilitates the unprecedented development of various forms of transnational crime, with particularly high risk for human safety, which is likely to lead to the establishment of feelings of fear, hopelessness, mistrust and violence in the future – all leading to human alienation.

G. Paraschiv on scientific progress opined that science not only improves quality of life physically and spiritually but also involves the risk of using this development results in a negative, harmful way to humans, from this benefiting organized crime, terrorism, drug, human trafficking and exploitation of children, fraud and corruption, currency counterfeiting, money laundering, cyber-crime, environmental degradation, racism and xenophobia, genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

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Crime and fear of crime pervade our entire country, we are aware that the causes of the situation are complex and the way to reduce it must be multi-dimensional. We cannot wait until the situation overwhelms us before responding with a range of measures. The role of the Church in controlling criminality and violence as growing phenomena in the twenty-first century globalized world cannot be overemphasized. We must be conscious of the fact that the Church is an institution with the mandate to cater for the spiritual and physical needs of people. The Church through the word of God molds the moral values of the people and at the same time inculcates the fear of God in them.

In societies that are under stress as a result of political insecurity or other forms of instability, one of the warning signs and powerful triggers of violence that can lead to genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity is the kind of messages in public discourse and the media that spread hostility and hatred and encourage or incite populations to commit violence against specific communities, often on the basis of their religious or ethnic identity. In recent years, there has been an alarming spike in online and offline hate speech and incitement, both in conflict and in peaceful situations.

Finding the means to diffuse incitement to violence and prevent it from reaching its intended audience, "immunizing" the audience from the effects of incitement and presenting alternative messages, can help to prevent and curb violence. This has been a major area of the church's involvement in crime/violence prevention and control through the preaching of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching of the word of God. We shall approach the subject matter of this discourse from three perspectives, namely: Preventive Role, Intervention Role and Re-building Role.

Preventive Role

Politicians often argue that the solution to reducing crime and violence is more of government programs, e.g. building bigger jails. Yet, government cannot adequately address the underlying problems of criminal behavior or fill the holes in people's lives.

The Church starts its role of preventing crime and violence in the society from the family. What families need more than government programs are married fathers and mothers together in the home and faithful churches. Within the families, children learn how to govern their lives.

Churches help to reinforce these principles and strengthen the family in its role. When these institutions are weak or absent from peoples' lives, society becomes increasingly dependent on government to impose restraint.

The evidence is overwhelming that when families are broken, children are more likely to engage in criminal behavior. The Church plays the role of preaching love and submission between husband and wife to keep the families united in line with Ephesians 5:22-25. The Church teaches that there is an authority higher than man-made government and that our rights are gifts from a loving God, not privileges granted by government. Churches inform the conscience about right and wrong, teach that life has a purpose and that individuals are responsible for their lives and the life of others, and cultivate virtues that form the bedrock of a prosperous and peaceful society.

According to research by Ken Blackwell, Senior Fellow for family empowerment at the Family Research Council USA;

- Couples who attend Church regularly together and are more religious have, on average, higher-quality marriages, which can serve as a buffer against societal breakdown and the social ills connected with it.
- Individuals who attend Church regularly, compared to those who attend only rarely or never, are significantly less likely to engage in violent behavior against their partners.
- Research also shows that, for youth, involvement in Church groups activities and programs may protect them against engaging in delinquent behaviours. Youth who participate in Church group activities such as Youth Fellowship, Prayer Group, Bible Study Group, Boys and Girls Brigade/Guild etc, are also less likely to display anti-social behavior.

In the words of Clayton Christensen of Harvard Business School, "...Religious congregations reinforce the principles taught in the home and support the family in its role of raising the next generation. Society thrives when families and religious communities are strong and when the principles they cultivate inform the daily choices and personal conduct of their members".

Among adults, marriage also seems to be connected to lower rates of criminal activities for men. Countries with higher proportion of broken homes or single parent homes tended to have higher crime and violence rates, compared to countries with higher proportions of peaceful and intact

families. The Church most often is the first point of call when issue that leads to marriage break down arises. The Church never shy away from its duty of counseling and prayers in such situations and taking every necessary step to reconcile the couple involved. By this, the Church prevents crime at its early stage through the families that would have been exposed to crime as a result of broken marriages.

Education Through Christian Mission Schools

One of the benefits of Christian Mission Schools is the emphasis on shared values. Being surrounded on a daily basis by like-minded individuals experiencing the same Christian education helps greatly with maturing our children into a responsible adult who understand how to live every day in God's love with equally moral neighbours. Christian ethic and moral principles inculcated in the children in Christian Mission Schools has helped in curbing the crime rate in our society.

One of the main reasons families consider a Christian education is to help their children cultivate a closer relationship to God. Christian Schools integrate a Christian worldview into her teaching and learning with the hope that the students will adapt a Christian worldview. It is through the teaching of a biblical worldview that the students understand that the world is much larger and they begin to think globally. Our Mission Schools take very seriously the cultivation of a deep understanding and appreciation of the importance of living out one's convictions and sharing them with others in an inviting and winsome way. By rolling out youths whose character has been molded in a Christian way, it is obvious that the tendency of their getting involved in criminality and violence will be very low no matter the situation.

Intervention Role:

Prayer

The first weapon of intervention by the Church against crime and violence which is a growing phenomenon in this 21st century globalized world is PRAYER. The Church can never be satisfied with the crime and violence rate in our society today and therefore cannot keep quiet or shy away from praying for divine intervention. Like Jacob and Habakkuk, the Church is wrestling with God in prayer, asking God to move mightily to change the circumstances that cause people to succumb to criminality and violence.

The Lord's Prayer as recorded in Matthew 6:9-13 directs us to pray for heaven to invade the earth, when we pray this line "your kingdom come,

your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”, we are acknowledging that this world is broken but there is another world which is perfect in every way. We are asking our Father to send His power – which is just and excellent-into this sinful world. We should remember we serve a God who is mighty to save and act on our behalf.

Archbishop of Port of Spain, Archbishop Edward Gilbert speaking on the topic “Mobilizing the entire Community to reduce crime” said:

“There is indiscipline in many areas of life. We call the country back to the virtue of discipline- even in acts that may not appear to some to contribute to the level of crime, such as ‘breaking’ traffic lights, not wearing seat belts, littering the environment and so on. We pray for a conversion of hearts so that each small act of discipline will help to build our nation”.

Prayer is the key and the Church is not sleeping.

Preaching and Teaching

The Church through its preaching and teaching in the Churches, Television, Radio, social media, newspapers, magazines etc condemns crime and violence in which ever form. The Church preaches universal messages of peace and respect that are aligned with international human rights standards, based on the Word of God that brings men to repentance which leads to salvation.

In addition to preaching and teaching of the word of God, the Church engages in peaceful protests, rallies and demonstrations to expose, challenge and eradicate criminality and violence.

Mediation

The Church is equally actively involved in Mediation and Conflict Resolution that in no small measure has helped forestall peace in many violence situations. Many Church leaders have been highly involved in mediation processes. In fact, ecumenical groups have played a behind-the-scenes role in some of the world’s most successful peace efforts. High-level mediators like Archbishop Desmond Tutu helped lay the groundwork for peace agreements, from mediating between rival South African factions in the 1990s to averting a bloodbath in Kenya in 2008. The World Council of Churches and All African Conference on Churches have also played a role in mediating peace agreements since the 1970s, needless to talk about my personal involvement in mediating in crisis and violence situations as Bishop and Archbishop for over 30 years now putting my life in danger. I give all the

glory to God for all the successes achieved. The Vatican have also been involved in mediation processes in many parts of the world restoring peace in many violent parts of the world.

Re-Building Role

Re-building programs of the Church are focused on individuals who have committed criminal acts, individuals affected directly by violence and communities affected by violence.

The Church has a long tradition of formal involvement in Prison Ministries. The Prison Ministries of the Church has played a major role in transforming the inmates. A survey by U.S. Department of Justice in 1993 and 1997 examined inmates participating in Prison Fellowship programs in four Prisons in New York State, USA. Using a matched comparison group, they found that inmates involved in Prison Fellowship had a lower rate of recidivism than inmates who did not participate in the program. They also discovered that inmates most active in the Fellowship program had significantly lower rates of re-arrest in the year following release. Prison Ministry's effect on recidivism rate should be good news to the world.

- The Church builds Chapels in most of our Prisons and attaches Chaplains who see to the spiritual transformation of the inmates in addition to donations for their well being. These are done to make them fit in as good citizens after their release and as a way of crime control.

As Professor Byron R. Johnson wrote in his book *MORE GOD, LESS CRIME*, Young men who go to Church regularly are less likely to be involved with alcohol, drugs and crime.

Similarly, released convicts who are involved with a local congregation are less likely to commit further crimes. The Church is also so much involved in rebuilding processes in Communities affected by violence through relief materials, financial assistance and preaching messages of hope, forgiveness and reconciliation that promote healing memories to individuals affected.

Conclusion

The importance of intermediary institutions like the Church in helping to solve societal problems cannot be overemphasized. But the actions and effects of intermediary institutions are often modest and difficult to

measure, which is why they are easy to overlook or dismiss. We tend to favour big government “solutions” that are bold, centralized, expensive and all too often infective. We need to recognize that modest actions which have a marginal effect can, over time and combined with other efforts, have a substantial impact on seemingly intractable global problems of criminality and violence.

The Church’s involvement in controlling criminality and violence in this 21st century is meant to contribute to the moral and spiritual development of people, to the enrichment of the knowledge about life and how it should be lived.

It must be said that the youth are venting their anger on the society because they have been neglected and relegated to the background. Unless we reach the youth and children now – that we are moving to technology age by 2030 by declaring a state of emergency on youth and children who has all it takes to turn Africa around positively, we shall all shear in the explosion of the time bomb.

Social reformer Fredrick Douglass said: “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men”.

We should as a matter of urgency invest in our children and youth now, by fixing them on scheme of things in our policymaking and governance.

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Fredrick Douglas Quotes "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men". Copyright 2001-2019 Brainy Quote.