



## **VIOLENT CRIMES IN THE CHURCH: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PLIGHTS OF NIGERIAN VICTIMS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*There is floodgate of literature on violent crimes in Nigeria. Ironically, studies are yet to underscore violent crimes committed in the Nigerian Churches today. This paper x-rays the plight of victims of violent crimes committed in Nigerian Churches. The paper reveals that violent crimes committed in Nigerian churches are basically unrecognized despite becoming a recurring event and a topical issue among security personnel, politicians, and ordinary Nigerians. The theoretical framework for the study was the systems theory of Ludwig Von Bertalanffy. Data were documentarily sourced through newspaper publications, textbooks, government publications and internet materials. The study therefore recommends that Church administrators should put measures in place to ensure that lives of Church members are safe. Government should also ensure that those who commit criminal offences should not go unpunished.*

**KEY WORDS:** Church, Nigeria, Plight, Victims, Violent Crime.

### **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Beginning from Enugu to Aba, Awka, Abakaliki, Umuahia, Onitsha and Owerri in the South-East, to Asaba, Port Harcourt, Benin, Calabar and Yenegoa in the South-South, to Lagos, Ijebu-Ode, Akure, Ibadan and Oshogbo in the South-West, to Maidugiri, Kaduna, Kano and Portiskum in the North, there is floodgate of violent crime in the Nigerian churches. Although, the existence of such crimes and their problems have spanned the history of mankind (Ezeanya & Ajah, 2021; Enweonwu, Ugwu, Onyejebu, Arah & Ajah, 2021; Ajah, 2018b; Ajah, Uwakwe, Nwokeoma, Ugwuoke & Nnamani, 2020; Ajah, 2019; Nwune, Ajah, Egbegi, & Onyejebu, 2019; Ajah, 2018a;), they are more pronounced in Churches today.

Funnily, despite the fact that violent crimes committed in Churches are basically unrecognized in the country they are recurring events which affect lives

of many Nigerian citizens. These crimes constitute a serious threat to the nation's security. Recently, foreign and local electronic and print media carried, as their headlines, the massacre of 17 worshippers including two Catholic parishioners at Saint Ignatius Quasi Catholic Parish in Ukpok-Mbalom. These people were in the Church for their 5:30 a.m devotion when they met their doom (Wantu, 2018; Ugwuoke, Ajah & Onyejebu, 2020; Nnam, Ajah, Arua, Okechukwu & Okorie, 2019; Eze, Obi & Ajah, 2020; Eze, Ajah, Nwonovo & Atama, 2021).

In the words of Emeh (2011), the bulk of the causative factors undergirding violent crime and other deviant acts in the country are structural in nature but, somewhat, are reinforced by the obvious failure of institutional response mechanisms. "Starting with the structural crime causative factors, these include; (1) rampant corruption which has not only dwarfed the prospects of remarkable economic growth and development in the country but has also precipitated



abject poverty, deprivation, suffering and despondency among the masses that now fuel crime and violence. (2) Deplorable state of the economy which is attributable to corruption, mismanagement, poor planning, failed structural reform programmes, epileptic power supply and the attendant debilitating economic costs, lull in the manufacturing sector in a petroleum crude driven mono-economy and changes in the international political economy that have tremendously undermined the circumstances for the promotion of a national welfare state. All these crises of development have, no doubt, resulted in lack of much economic growth.

Also, "The aggravation of the widening gap between "the haves" (the rich) and "the have not's" (the poor) is not only getting out of hand and creating a social rift of "them" and "us" but is also spelling trouble everywhere through crime and criminality, including violent crime in the churches, armed robbery and kidnapping which now threatens the safety of the affluent class in the society (Emeh, 2011; Nnam, Effiong, Iloma, Terfa & Ajah, 2021; Ajah, 2019; Anthony, Obasi, Obi, Ajah, Okpan, Onyejegbu, Obiwulu & Onwuama, 2021; Areh, Onwuama & Ajah, 2020; Ukwai & Okpa, 2017; Ajah, 2018; Nwune, Chikwelu, Ajah, & Obiefuna, 2018; Ajah, 2019). Presently, violent crimes in Nigerian churches have put everyone including young and old, rich and poor, male and female, natives and non-natives, at a constant risk

of being potential victims. There is fear of uncertainty. No one can dictate the angle they are emerging. Perhaps, it is also difficult to perceive justifying reasons for committing them.

Despite the increasing scholarship in understanding the pattern, nature, extent, and implications of violent crime, literature on violent crime committed in the church is certainly lacking. This gap needs not wait further. For example, Emeh (2014) analyzes Nigeria's current violent crime surge. Ekeh (2014) looks at the analysis of the Boko Haram terrorist outrage. Okiro (2005) examines the proliferation of illegal arms and ethno-religious violence in Nigeria. Although, much scholarly literature abounds on violent crime in Nigeria and beyond, there are still critical knowledge gaps as it relates to violent crime committed in the church. Hence, the strength of the present study is to feel this gap. This study underscores violent crimes in the Nigerian Churches today.

### **NATURE OF VIOLENT CRIMES IN THE NIGERIAN CHURCHES**

Violent crimes in Nigerian Churches have taken different dimension. Table one (1) contains statistics of notable crimes in the Nigerian Churches between July 2006 and April 2018. This is 12 years period.

**Table 1: Statistics of violent crimes committed in the Nigerian churches between July 2006 and April 2018**

S/ NO	Date of Committing Violent crime	Place/State where crime is committed	Names of offenders and Victims	Name of the Church
1	22 <sup>nd</sup> July, 2006	Ikeja, Lagos State	Reverend Chukwuemeka Ezeugo, popularly called Reverend King violently murdered and burnt Ann Uzoh in his church	Christian Praying Assembly (CPA)
2	6 <sup>th</sup> June, 2011	Biu, Borno State	Boko-Haram violently attacked worshippers with bullet, killed and wounded many Christians	Church of the Brethren in Nigeria
3	10 <sup>th</sup> June, 2011	Jos, Plateau State	Boko-Haram killed 2 worshippers and injured 48 persons during their prayer.	Christ Chosen Church
4	25 <sup>th</sup> December, 2011	Madalla, Niger State	Boko-haram attacked worshippers in the church with bullets, killed several people, and blew up a car in a suicide bombing. Forty one (41) persons sustained injury.	St. Theresa Catholic Church
5	15 <sup>th</sup> June, 2012	Zaria, Kaduna State	Boko-Haram attacked and killed many worshippers during their prayer	Shalom Church
6	17 <sup>th</sup> June, 2012	Zaria, Kaduna State	Boko-Haram attacked and killed many worshippers during their prayer	Christ the King Catholic Church
7	26 <sup>th</sup> December, 2012	Postikum, Yobe State	Boko-Haram members violently attacked worshippers during their prayer, killing six people, including the pastor, and set the church ablaze.	Church of Christ
8	26 <sup>th</sup> December, 2012	Maiduguri, Borno state.	Boko-Haram members attacked and murdered a deacon and five members of the church.	First Baptist Church



9	15	24 <sup>th</sup> September, 2013	Pastor Dare Adewole gruesomely murdered and buried a two years old girl	Egbeda, Lagos State
10	3 <sup>rd</sup> June, 2014	Benin, Edo State	Pastor Henry Odion, violently murdered his wife with a knife, Patience, in the presence of their six-month-old child.	Mountain of Victory and Fire Deliverance Ministry
11	30 <sup>th</sup> September, 2014	Edukwu, Ebonyi State	Pastor Amos Odorimo connived with Roseline Nwuguru and violently murdered her husband, Nwebonyi Nwugwuru with a matchet	Divine Salvation Ministry
12	10 <sup>th</sup> October, 2015	Dikeukwu, Abia State	Chief Marshal Nwankwo connived with Pastor Emeka Okoye to violently murder 67 years old, one Ukata Iheme for ritual purpose. They also buried him under the church building	N/A
13	24 <sup>th</sup> December, 2015	Uyo, AkwaIbom State	Pastor Gideon Idio, violently murdered a female church member, Joanna Okon by strangling her to death.	God's Power City Church
14	6 <sup>th</sup> May, 2016	UmuogharaEzza, Ebonyi State	21 years old Chukwuka Ben, violently killed and strangled a 72-year-old man, Fidelis Uhwo in the Church.	St. Peter's Catholic Church
15	21 <sup>st</sup> March, 2017	Ewekoro, Ogun State	Pastor Sopeju violently murdered and buried his lover "35 years old Mrs Raliat Sanni" in the church.	Methodist Church
16	4 <sup>th</sup> July, 2017	Aninbaba, Lagos State	Badoo boys violently murdered two children and an adult in the church	Crystal Church of Christ
17	6 <sup>th</sup> October, 2017	Ozubulu, Anambra State	Charles Obi and Dickson Nwaoji masterminded and violently killed 18 worshippers and injured 10 others.	Saint Philips Catholic Church
18	11 <sup>th</sup> December, 2017	Oyibo, Rivers State	Pastor Chidiebere Okoroafor violently murdered 25 years old Uluoma Onweagba (his girl friend), Concilia Ezenwa and 11-month-old Christabel Joseph.	Altar of Solution Church
19	22 <sup>nd</sup> May, 2018	Igando, Lagos State	Pastor Dominic Michael killed Ramat Audu, a church member.	Celestial Church
20	26 <sup>th</sup> June, 2018	Azuri-Okene, Kogi State	Prophet Segun Otaru and two of his pastors, Samuel Olusegun and Yakubu Abdulmuminu violently killed Mercy Moses, a sex worker for money ritual.	Voice of Canaan Church, Cherubim and Seraphim
21	6 <sup>th</sup> June, 2018	Kwall, Plateau State	Herdsmen ambushed and hacked to death two Christians	Evangelical Church Winning All
22	28 <sup>th</sup> May, 2018	Jalingo, Taraba State	Herdsmen violently attacked and shot Father Cornelius Pobah. He was shoot in the leg while two other priests were beaten.	Sacred Heart Minor Catholic Seminary
23	24 <sup>th</sup> April, 2018	Ukpor-Mbalom, Benue State	Armed herdsmen violently attacked and killed two Catholic priests and 17 other worshipers.	St. Ignatius Quasi Parish

Sources: Anthony, Obasi, Obi, Ajah, Okpan, Onyejebu, Obiwulu and Onwuama (2021)

Information in table 1 contains the statistics of recorded violent crimes that occurred in different Churches in Nigeria between July 2006 and April 2018. No one would expect that crimes would have been committed in the Church. This stems from the fact that the Church is a sacred institution where adherents are impliedly expected to be law abiding. Among the numerous cases recorded, Boko Haram incidence accounted for the loss of many lives in many Churches especially in the North-eastern Nigeria.

Pastors/Reverend Ministers were involved in 7 murder cases while the herdsmen killed many worshipers in many Churches especially in both Benue and Plateau states. This is a serious threat to the fundamental rights of the citizens. Sulaiman, (2016 ) argues that any action that infringes upon the rights of citizens is considered as violence.

In the words of World Health Organization (2002), violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, actual or threatened, against another person, or



against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation. Violent act involves threat or actual execution of acts which have actual or potential capacity to inflict physical, emotional or psychological injury on a person or a group of persons (see Short & Wolfgang 1972, p41-43; Cavanaugh 2009, p272).

Ukoji and Okolie-Osemene (2016, p1) argue that homicides globally were estimated at 468,000. Out of these, 36% was estimated to have occurred in Africa, 31% in America, 27% in Asia, 5% in Europe and 1% in the tropical Pacific region. In Nigeria, the country is presently caught in the web of violent crime dilemma. Notable in this regard are the rising incidents of rape, armed robbery, murder or assassination, kidnapping and terrorism, which are ravaging the country like a tsunami and spreading enormous fears and anxieties among the people (Ajah, Nnam, Ajah, Idemili-Aronu, Chukwuemeka & Agboti, 2021; Ajah, Ajah & Obasi, 2020; Ukoji and Okolie-Osemene, 2016).

Ironically, the upsurge of violent crime committed in the church is a topical issue but not yet recognized in Nigeria. The throes of violent crime in the church is traceable to a lot of factors like the quest to get rich quickly, poor parental upbringing, poverty, greed, ethnic differences, weak regulation of church activities and lapses in crime control model of our national security. Indeed, Osawe (2015) rightly observes that “violent crime portrays the inability of government to provide a secure and safe environment for lives, properties and the conduct of economic activities considering the alarming increase in criminal activities in Nigeria such as armed robbery, terrorism and other related crimes”.

Apparently, from Catholic to Anglican in the orthodox, to Living Faith church (Winners Chapel), Redeem Christian church, Christ Embassy and Deeper life church in the protestant, violent offenses across the church are part of the challenges confronting Nigeria citizens. In this light, Nigeria societies have grappled to curtail the increasing incidence of rape, armed robbery, murder and kidnapping in the churches today. Just in 2016, local print and electronic media carried, as part of their headlines, the arrest and prosecution of Rev. Fr. Anthony Ochigbo, Parish priest of Church of Assumption, in Asokoro suburb of Abuja. Rev. Father Ochigbo was charged on forceful rape of 10 years old minor in the church (Odunsi, 2016; Nnamani, Ilo, Onyejebu, Ajah, Onwuama, Obiwulu & Nzeakor, 2021; Ugwuoke, Ajah & Onyejebu, 2020).

In summary, events of past few years have shown the spate of violent crime committed in the church which has assumed a debilitating proportion. Particularly, in the South-south, South-east, South-west and North central regions of Nigeria, these regions are currently enmeshed in violent offenses across the churches in Nigeria. Funnily, the government whose duty is to protect the victims is reactive instead of being proactive.

## CAUSES OF VIOLENT CRIMES IN NIGERIA CHURCHES

The economic condition in Nigeria is not favourable for desperate, miracle seeking and gullible individuals to achieve their aim, worsened by frustration which looks like endemic in the country. Indeed, the frustration experienced by miracle seekers and miracle givers breeds ground for violent crime. It is in this light that Ajah and Okoro (2017) rightly observe that salaries are not paid at and when due both state and federal work sector. Accordingly, in an attempt to alleviate their financial burden and meet their daily and desired needs, the victims become vulnerable to harm and violence. Similarly, the perpetrators of such crime capitalize on the gullibility of desperate miracle seekers, particularly women, most of whom are experiencing delay in childbirth or in need of husband who see prophecy as an umbrella of fortune under which they can hide to mine gold and silver to perpetrate their evil.

Accordingly, “our belief system of finding spiritual answers to life challenges has contributed to the spiritual boom. The prosperity theology and the desire of our generation to fast track prosperity make us vulnerable and make many people susceptible to the manipulations of mind control practitioners. When life becomes challenging and we face problems relating to finances, families, relationships, sicknesses, unemployment and deaths, we become vulnerable to criminals”(Owusu-Koranteng, 2014).”It in this light that Hanegraaf (1993) passionately argued that modern-day Christianity is in crisis. He asserted that the Church is undergoing a major transformation and that millions of Christians have embraced another gospel, another Jesus, a gospel of false promises of prosperity, wealth, healing, signs and wonders. He attributes the problem to lack of sound biblical training and Seminary education.

Accordingly, Ajah and Okoro (2017) observed that the uncertainties associated with the government’s policies have not only provided the breeding ground for



violent crime perpetrators but created panic that led to the loss of foreign direct investment (FDI). Indeed, a perusal of literature does show that government neglect, oppression, domination, exploitation, victimization, discrimination, marginalization, nepotism and bigotry are some of the predisposing factors to violent crime (see Salawu 2010, p348; Nwune, Ajah, Egbegi, & Onyejebu, 2019).

In his treatise, Kwaja (2009, p107) identifies fragility of the institutions of the state in terms of their ability and capacity to manage diversity, corruption, rising inequality between the rich and poor, gross violation of human rights, environmental degradation, contestations over land, among others, as the underlying causes of violent offenses in Nigeria since the enthronement of democratic rule in 1999. Danjibo (n.d) believes the failure of governance is responsible for the recurring sectarian violence in Nigeria. also, Achunike (2008: 287) and Ajah (2018) opined that the wrong perception of other people's religion or faith, wrong religious orientation, the low literacy level of religious adherents, selfishness on the part of religious personalities, pervasive poverty, government involvement in religious matters, among others, breed ground for violent offenses in the church. Finally, little or no censorship of the critical content of religious sermons has enhanced violent offenses across the church.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study is the systems theory of Ludwig Von Bertalanffy. This theory is an interdisciplinary approach that was based on the principles from biology, physics and engineering but later extended to numerous fields including sociology and philosophy.

This theory views the society as a cohesive conglomeration of interdependent and interrelated parts which could be natural or man-made. In the words of Beven (2006), "Every system is delineated by its spatial and temporal boundaries, surrounded and influenced by its environment, described by its structure and purpose or nature and expressed in its functioning. In terms of its effects, a system can be more than the sum of its parts if it expresses synergy or emergent behavior. Changing one part of the system usually affects other parts and the whole system, with predictable patterns of behavior. For systems that are self-learning and self-adapting, the positive growth and adaptation depend upon how well the system is adjusted with its environment. Some systems function

mainly to support other systems by aiding in the maintenance of the other system to prevent failure".

Within the context of this paper, the essence of the church is to ensure social harmony and progress. This is enhanced through strong regulation by the government to ensure descent lifestyles. Thus, it is the obligatory responsibility of the government to protect the citizens through regulation of religious practices, provision of security and basic social amenities like good quality education, medical services, employment opportunities and so forth. Ironically, it seems that the government has failed to achieve this obligation which makes the church to be prone to corrupt practices and insatiable quest for material wealth which has attracted floodgate of criminals into the fold.

Similarly, "many of our present day churches provide refuge for criminals. With its reverential and unsuspecting status, many of the churches have become den and hideout for robbers and ritualists who deal in human parts" (Iheanacho, 2009 page111; Ajah, Dinne & Salami, 2020; Ajah & Onyejebu, 2019). The recent Pastor Dominic Micheal 2018 and Prophet Segun Oturu 2018 saga give credence to the above assertion. Indeed, several cases of physical, sexual, emotional, mental, moral abuses other immoral practices have become degrading features of contemporary Nigeria churches.

## CONCLUSION

The development in the contemporary Nigeria churches is a degenerating spiritual fervour and regrettable tale of contradictions. Thus, There is astronomic quest for material wealth by church leaders and followers and a good number of churches have become grooming ground for violent offences which is worsen by government failure to protect life and property. In addition with the uncertainties associated with the government policies.

Nigeria needs revolution in the religion institution in order to help inculcate descent lifestyle. Nigerians should imbibe a sense of patriotism. Every Nigerian should treat Nigeria as a personal property, with this attachment of value, Nigerians would be interested in seeing the country succeed and not merely caught up in their personal pursuits, this would be the first step towards bringing about a very great Nation. The Nigerian people were relatively aloof when it comes to the engagement of public office holders. A people that do not engage their leadership would not receive the best of leadership, constantly engaging public office holders and constructively questioning policies and actions would improve the nation. Budget





expenditures must be scrutinized by the people to ascertain the progress and sincerity of the administration in power, this would help the citizens make their decisions at the polls and ultimately lead to the ascension of credible leaders with concrete plans on how to solve the problems of the country.

### Recommendations

In this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Church administrators should put measures in place to ensure that lives of Church members are safe.
2. Government should ensure that those who commit criminal offences should not go unpunished.

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