

Curbing religious conflicts through inter-religious dialogue initiatives: exploring the provision of library and information service option

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper was to explore how the provision of library and information services can help in the curbing of religious conflict through inter-religious dialogues. The study use literature review, oral interview and semi-structured interview to generate data for the study. The highlights of the paper indicates the various forms of religious conflict prevalent in modern society; justification for inter-religious dialogue initiatives; the role of libraries and information centres (LICs) in curbing religious conflicts; the challenges to curbing of religious conflicts through efficient delivery of library and information services (LIS). The various roles expected of library and information science professionals in the inter-religious dialogue initiatives include - organizing of inter-religious dialogue campaign, partnering with media houses in disseminating information that promotes and facilitates inter-religious dialogue initiatives, reaching out to religious leaders for sustainable collaboration for effective and sustainable inter-religious dialogue initiatives. The challenges to provision of library and information services as tool for curbing religious conflict includes low level of partnership drive; low perception

about librarians and library services, and stereo-type form of training acquired by librarians in library schools. Recommendations were made in line with the identified challenges. The paper concludes that curbing of religious violence through inter-religious dialogue is a non-negotiable factor in the development of any society that wants to achieve meaningful development; and librarians cannot be ignored in inter-religious dialogue initiatives as they integral component of the information infrastructures of any society.

Keywords: Conflicts, Dialogue, Information Services, Library Services, Inter-Religious Dialogue Initiatives, Religious Conflicts

1.0 Introduction

Religion is a faith-based process that is capable of impacting on governance and the behavioural attitudes of every believer. It can be referred to as “a search to importance in ways that are connected to sacred which are found in a religious ‘model of scriptural beliefs’”. Moreover, religious beliefs and values are significant component of the daily lives of many families and communities in the country (Labilam, 2016; Yesufu, 2016; Kukah, 1993, as cited in Omotosho, 2014). Religion apparently seeks to promote peace within and outside religion (Labilam, 2016). However, economic development and societal well-being can only be achieved in an environment where multi-culturalism and multi-religiosity are guaranteed (Sampson, 2012.). Practically, every known religious tradition, notions of human values such as social justice, peace and striving for harmonious co-existence, has been recognized by both the great personages and founders as constitutive of the belief system in a society (Daniel 2010). Religious difference, represented by participants, is a significant marker for an activity to be called interreligious. Religious practice comprises a huge number of variables, such as religious institutions and all facets of agency (Grung, 2011; Basedau, Pfeiffers&Vullers, 2014). As strong and problematic inter-religious conflict may seem, there will always be a place for dialogue no matter the cause of the conflict and the parties involved therein. Dialogue therefore, is necessary for resolving any form of conflict.

Dialogue is essential for understanding human existence. It is not only a means, but also an end in itself. It is significant as humans are in continuous communication with one another (Mladenovska-Tesija, 2014; Incerti-Thery, 2016). The dialogue of everyday living among adherents of both religions plays a significant role in creating respect, esteem and the courage to reach out to the other as neighbour. Without dialogue, the world slides down the dangerous slope of war, tensions, hate and isolation (Umaru, 2013; Ghibanu, 2018). Dialogue as a process must take place in a conducive atmosphere of trust and readiness for harmony (Toki, Gambari and Hadi, 2015). Dialogue in day to day activities is the most frequent form of dialogue as people engage with one another in the daily interactions of life (Umaru, 2013). However, dialogue can be adopted through different approaches depending on the situation and one of the approaches that can be adopted is inter-faith or inter-religious dialogue.

Interfaith dialogue can be a means to bolster policies protecting and promoting minority rights ad multiculturalism in diverse societies. Also, inter-religious dialogue can be a useful tool to establish tolerance. Inter-religious dialogue acknowledged all faiths and shared experiences, needs and longing (Brajovic, 2006; Hayward, 2010; Omotosho, 2014). There is a renewed horizon at global level to give inter-religious dialogue a significant consideration as an effective ecumenical strategy for peace building among diverse religious groups in a political community (Toki, Gambari and Hadi, 2015).

Library and information science professionals by reason of their training and jobs, do provides social oriented services, this apparently provides the justification for the need to advocate that librarians should contribute positively to the expected changes in the society, hence the need to explore the provision of library and information services as options to facilitating inter-religious dialogue in the society. This implies that library and information professionals occupy a central place in the implementation of inter-religious dialogue in any society, especially areas prone to inter-religious conflicts. It is on this premise that the study aimed at advocating for the use of library and information services to curb religious conflicts and promotes inter-religious dialogue initiatives. The specific objectives of the study are, to: discuss the justification for inter-religious dialogue initiatives; identify the various roles that library and information science professionals can play towards promoting inter-religious dialogue initiatives; explore the challenges to provision of library and information services as tool for curbing religious conflicts and promoting inter-religious dialogue; and make recommendations in line with the findings.

The document analysis approach was adopted in this paper. Literature relevant and related to the study were identified, sourced and evaluated. Inferences were drawn upon based on the literatures review and brainstorming with professional colleagues in formal and semi-informal setting.

2.0 Conceptualization of Key Concepts

The key concepts of this paper such as religion, dialogue, religious violence and inter-religious dialogue are hereby explained as follows:

2.1 Religion

Religion is not just an individual phenomenon. It has a social dimension that offers each believer a sense of belonging to a community of fellow believers. It connotes a link or a relationship between man and a being that exists which is greater than man. In other words, man and religion are inseparable in all human cultures (Umaru, 2013; Sulaiman, 2016). Religion could serve, and has indeed served as an instrument of social harmony in many civilizations. It forges strong bonds between people in the same community, makes life more vigorous or lively and creates feelings of euphoria to promote perceptions of well-being and confidence. It can also build bridges between human beings, but as well they can build new walls (Sampson, 2012; Bazuin, 2013; Pejic and Mijovic, 2018).

Religion throughout the world is emotionally driven. It is intricately intertwined with social, cultural and historical elements of civilization, which connect humans with the way they perceive reality, make sense of social phenomenon, engage Divinity and approach the invisible realm (Lenshie&Akipu, 2014; Sofian, 2017). Religion is also an institution insomuch as it has become a value system embedded in the very fabric of life that service to regulate and influence social, political and other relationships (Baziun, 2013). Religion can define reality, constitute communities, nurture powerful emotions, generate commitment, resocialize and reorganize the self, radically devalue the existing order, impose obligations, offer rewards and sanctions, furnish justifications, and intensify threats and dangers (Brubaker, 2015). Religion as noted by Ibenwa (2014), is better described as man's awareness of the existence of a super nature being whom he believe to be his creator and controller of the universe and his willingness to worship Him through intermediary in solitariness and in group. Moreover, religious organizations can act as conflicting parties, as by standers, as peace-makers and peace builders. They are rich sources of peace services. They function as a powerful warrant for social tolerance, democratic

pluralism, and constructive conflict management. They are peace builders and peace-makers (Omotosho, 2014).

2.2 Dialogue

Dialogue refers to seeking cooperation with others for the pursuit of common goals or peaceful co-existence in a community. Dialogue requires a balanced attitude. It is seen as an attitude of respect and friendship, which permeates or should permeate all those activities constituting the mission of the religion (Brajovic 2006). Zago (2007) as cited in Wandusim (2015) views “dialogue” as a search for mutual knowledge and enrichment. When dialogue goes well, allowing participants to engage with other perspectives and reach greater mutual respect and understanding significant positive change can result (Hayward, 2010). Kolawole (2010) in Toki, Gambari and Hadi (2015) views dialogue as the act of seeking ideal development through reasoning and discussing a problem with a view to correcting the parties involved. Dialogue is an actual existential need and a responsibility that the current generation has for the future (Ghibanu, 2018).

Dialogue is about adapting a mutual approach that brings about an end to existing or intending conflict. It is a key to development as conflict is an impediment to developmental progress. Sulaiman (2016, p.97) buttressed that the aim of dialogue should not be to obliterate the identity of a participating religious group, rather, its objective should be to discuss the various aspects of the problem that pose as threat to the peaceful co-existence between different religious groups. Dialogue includes purposeful activities of collaboration between religious institutions in favour of social peace and prosperity (Omotosho, 2014).

2.3 Religious Violence

Conflict denotes clash, contention, confrontation, battle, struggle, controversy or quarrel. It may either be violent or non-violent (Uhunmwangho&Epelle, 2011). Conflict is as old as mankind and it is a salient feature of the human society (Folarin, 2015). Religious conflict as a term has been variously defined and being diverse, they all convey the single meaning of disagreement between the two or more religious groups (Ushe, 2015). Folarin (2015:10) further states:

Conflict is inherent in society because the latter is structured to produce conflict; just as it is inbuilt in the human nature to have flashes of temper. There have always been the haves and the have not, the strong and the weak, the dominant and the vulnerable, a situation that is often accompanied by perpetual struggle between the divides. These are the stimulating factors in local and international conflict, as well as the basic characteristics of the global human society.

Violence is a form expression of conflict, and it can be direct or structural, unattended crises lead to conflict (Urhiewhu&Aji, 2015). According to Sulaiman (2016), religious violence is violence that is motivated by or in reaction to religious precepts, texts, or doctrines. This to him, includes, violence against religious institutions, people, objects, or when the violence is motivated to some degree by some religious aspect of the target or precept of the attacker. Omotosho (2014) reiterated that religious conflicts are fast becoming a common feature of society, in spite of socio-economic development coupled with the gains of democracy. Religious conflicts occur when there is opposing idea, opinion, feeling and wishes between two or more religious group (Ushe, 2015).

2.4 Inter-Religions Dialogue

Interreligious dialogue as a field in the making is moving between compartmentalization and complexity, with the risk of reproducing dichotomies between the religious and non-religious, religious women and religious men, the majority and the minority and between those who regard religions as stable and those who regard religious as more fluid (Grung, 2011). Inter-religious dialogue involves people meeting and getting to know their different religious traditions. The most common form of inter-religious discussion is when two individuals, be they friends, neighbor or acquaintances, discuss their religious beliefs in a casual setting (Brajovic, 2006). According to Omotosho (2014), inter-religious dialogue is a particular way of interacting with others through which all who are involved can be transformed. Interreligious dialogue has to explore and strengthen mutual religious understanding as an essential step for peace (Umaru, 2013).

According to Chauldhari (2016), the term inter-religious dialogue refers to positive interaction between people of different communities. It also refers to as interfaith dialogue, which is about people of different faiths coming to a mutual understanding and respect that allows them to live and cooperate with each other in spite of their differences. As noted by Abdoolet *al* (2007), in an inter-religions dialogue with believers of other religions, one has to take account of each of these layers of one's own and of the others religions. We have to keep in mind that all the religions levels are involved when for instance, the participants share something apparently superficial about their religions lives or their faiths, such as when they tell about their food and drink customs at the cultic or ritual level. Inter-religions dialogue has to do with a relational disposition between and among different religions or faiths (Wandusim, 2015). Interreligious peace building seeks to bridge the divisions that occur between different religious (Ehmer *et al*, n.d.). Interfaith dialogue is commonly understood as aiming to facilitate understanding and tolerance between different religious communities or traditions (Bagir, 2008). Hayward (2010:21) writing on interfaith dialogue states:

Interfaith dialogue is increasingly offered as a concrete means to bridge inter-communal divides, build coalitions, and challenges the social psychological dynamics that can be a particularly useful tool for building awareness among majority communities about the experiences and needs of minorities and for bringing simmering tensions to the surface, and addressing them in a potentially constructive manner.

Similarly, inter-religions dialogue offers the opportunity to conjugate the effort of the major religions of the world in matters of common interest, such as issues of ecology human right etc ,above all, fosters mutual respect, the elimination of proselytism and of religious conflict (Ghibanu, 2018). Moram (2006) as cited Ghibanu (2018) reiterated that inter- religions dialogue does not aim to create a single religion- that would not be possible, but to enable cooperation among the great religions of the world in matters that regard the defense and protection of human life and dignity or of the integrity of creation, for better knowingness and understanding among believers. One of the aims of inter-religious dialogue is to reduce false perceptions of difference and culture gaps (Omotosho, 2014). In interreligious peace building, the major objective is to change the participants' world-view, particularly attitudes and behaviours towards the "other" (Abu-Nimer, 2001). Though, inter-religions dialogue takes many forms, but is essentially a conscious attempt to build bridges of understanding, respect harmony, and friendship among religions communities (Chaudhari, 2016).

All religious communities must understand that there is no alternative to inter-forth dialogue, as there can never be a universal religion or an exclusive society for adherents of a

particular religion (Sampson, n.d.). Inter-religious relations, in most circumstance, have been marred by acute level of religious hatred, intolerance and violence since the end of the cold-war (Lenshie&Akipu, 2014). To qualify as an inter-religious dialogue, an activity must be primarily “inspired by religious vocation” which, besides its mystical dimension, must have a comprehensive social profile (Brajovic, 2006). Religious leaders are in a position to harness the identity of their religions in relation to moral issues for interreligious dialogue (Labilam, 2016).

3.0 Causes of Religious Violence and Justification for Inter-religious Dialogue Initiatives

Religious conflicts have the capacity to threaten the survival and stability of any state. Sulaiman (2016), reports that apart from undermining the stability order, religious violence tends to dent the image of the country in the international community. This sometimes forced some countries to issue travel warning advising their citizens not to travel to such crisis-filled nations of the world. Interreligious conflicts are mainly driven by identity overlaps, while conflicts over theological issues result from an aggressive religions discourse. Inter-religions conflicts lead to a number of adverse effects. The foremost is loss and destruction of life and property (Basedau, Pfeiffer &Vulters, 2014; Moywaywa, 2018). Casimir, Nwaoga and Ogbozor (2014) concludes that it is not true nature of the religion that causes the sectarian violence (though it is factor) but other factors are used by the group causing the violence to hide under religion. Inter-religions dialogue stresses the need for reciprocal interactions and influences religions, spiritual and humanistic traditions. It also fosters mutual respect (Omotosho, 2014). As the world currently witnesses violent conflicts on a daily basis, how we respond to conflicting views in communication is an infinitely important matter for human co-existence (Incerti-Thery, 2016). According to Hayward (2010), effective interfaith dialogue moves participants beyond superficial levels of engagement, namely mere platitudes seeking to avoid offending anyone or a series of speeches offered, between which there is little conversation, and into a more profound interaction in which participants can honestly reflect on and struggle together over potentially sensitive and provocative issues (p.22). As expressed by Ghibanu (2018), a relationship of dialogue and cooperation can only bring good to our world and testify about the fact that religion means good, light, hope, peace, open-mindedness, generosity and truth (Ghibanu, 2018)

Nevertheless, inter-religious conflicts are brought about by a number of factors depending on the environment and the context. According to Lenshie and Akipu (2014), the motivation of religion to violence does not occur in a vacuum, these are conditions that necessitates its occurrence, which can be internal, external or both, depending on the manifest reality. They further assert that, internally, religious violence can occur when particular adherents perceive that their belief system is superior to other religions or a when a sense of religious deprivation is nurtured or alternatively, a competitive equality with other religion is established. Sulaiman (2016) noted that the incessant nature of violence in the country also has the impact of breeding social miscreant and criminals who by their access to weapons of war (which are usually sophisticated) become terrors to both their immediate community and the larger society.

Inter-religious dialogue facilitates peaceful coexistence and also serves as effective advocates for the prevention of religious conflict locally and regionally (Omotosho, 2014). Religious leaders and preachers can advance the cause of peace within their faith communities when they are educated and trained in their own faith and other faith traditions (Umaru, 2013). Religious understanding of right order exists at personal, familial, communal, societal, and cosmic levels (Brubaker, 2015). Sulaiman (2016) highlighted on the fact that no disputing in

the fact that the problem of religious violence casts a serious doubt to the stability order of the country. This no doubt does necessitate the need for inter-religious dialogue initiatives for peace and order to be restored. Moreover, no religion can effectively thrive in the atmosphere of conflicts, no matter how genuine and relevant such religion is to the society. Prevention and resolution of conflicts are critical priorities in the nation's socio-economic development (Omotosho, 2014). Sulaiman, (2016) explicitly identified a number of factors as reasons responsible for incessant religious violence with reference to Nigeria, and these includes - the theological factors, religious intolerance, religious fanaticism, unbridled action of the press, aggressive or militant preaching/evangelism, poverty, wrong religious orientation, literacy level of religious adherents, selfishness on the part of religious personalities, external influence in religions. Though, these causes of religious violence were identified with reference to Nigerian nation, same can be applicable to other nations.

4.0 Roles of Library and Information Professionals in the Inter-Religions Dialogue Initiatives

Library and information science professional are expected to play the following cardinal roles in the inter-religions dialogue initiatives:

i. ***Organizing of inter-religions campaign:*** librarians can organize inter-religious campaign, whereby members of the society and various religious groups would be fully sensitized on the need for sustainable peace and tolerance of members who holds opposing or different faith beliefs. These campaigns can be actualized through the use of media houses, reaching out to the youths and other viable means that can facilitate effective inter-religious campaign.

ii. ***Partnering with media houses in disseminating information that promotes inter-religions dialogue:*** library and information professionals can partner with various media houses to ensure adequate and proper awareness on inter-religious dialogue. Various approaches can be adopted here, for instance slots on local dialects in radio houses can be used to create awareness on the need for inter-religious dialogue among religious people in rural areas or at the grassroots levels. Through sustainable partnership with media houses, wider coverage on inter-religious dialogue campaign can be achieved easily.

iii. ***Reaching out to religious leaders for sustainable collaboration towards effective sustainable inter-religious initiatives:*** No doubt, religious leaders are highly esteemed and respected in the society, on this note, library and information science professionals can reach out to them on how to carry out and implement sustainable inter-religions dialogue initiatives in the societies. Getting the religious leaders involved in inter-religious will facilitate effective delivery because the subjects of these leaders having seen their leaders aligning with such initiatives are likely to blend accordingly.

iv. ***Inter-religious campaign drive through social media:*** it is obvious that members of the various religious groups in our society are present in the social space, especially in the global world; library and information professionals can implement the inter-religious campaign drive by exploring the social media platforms as a means of reaching out to the populace and creating well organized awareness on the necessity of inter-religious dialogue in contemporary society.

5.0 Challenges to Provision of Library and Information Services as tool for Curbing Religious Conflicts

There are several challenges that tend to limit efforts to curb religious conflicts through efficient delivery of library and information services. In other words, curbing of religious conflicts through provision of library and information services no doubt are not without limitations, and prominent among the limitations are:

a) ***Low level of partnership drive among library and information science professionals:*** Librarians passion for partnership towards information service delivery is still very low. Though, librarianship is a multi-disciplinary profession, library and information science professionals can deliver successfully on any positive agenda in the society if only they can embrace the act of partnership with other relevant stakeholders in developmental agenda.

b) ***Low perception about librarians and library services:*** there is still low perception about the relevance of librarians and library services in the society, especially in developing countries of the world. This low perception ultimately determines the willingness of other professionals to partner with librarians in order to deliver in the inter-religious dialogue initiatives, most especially, when libraries are regarded as social institution and are not profit oriented.

c) ***Stereo-type of training acquired by librarians in library schools:*** The nature of training received by librarians in library schools limit the extent to which they can contribute positively to the inter-religious dialogue initiatives. The training focused more on core and practical library services with little or no attention given to social services even though librarianship is regarded as a social service profession.

d) ***Time Consumption:*** Attempts of resolve religious conflicts requires time. No doubt, time will be spent trying to navigate through the various sectors and religious enclaves in order to reach a compromise. Omotosho (2014) reiterated that conflict resolution and peace-making and building process are very complex and time and resources consuming

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Curbing religious violence through inter-religious dialogue is a non negotiable factor in the development of any society that wants to achieve meaningful development. In which case,our religious leaders must be firm in their approach to inter-religious dialogue, especially by engaging various stakeholders concerned with addressing religious conflicts in modern society.This paper has extensively advocated that librarians should participate actively in the process of curbing religious conflicts through inter-religious dialogue initiatives. The paper established that the provision of books and information resources that promotes inter-religious dialogue, organizing of inter-religious dialogue campaign, partnering with media houses and other stakeholders as well as reaching out to religious leaders can be explored as viable means of promoting inter-religious dialogue initiatives. However, exploring the above viable options are likely to be influence negatively by low level of partnership drive among librarians, low perception about librarians' role in the society, library services as well as the type of training librarians acquired in library schools. The position of the paper is that despite these challenges, it is not that all bleak for library and information professionals as far as ensuring inter-religious dialogue initiative is concerned. In line with the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

i. ***A change in approach to social services:*** Librarians should take library services beyond the walls of the library through corporate and social responsibilities. Librarians must change their approach and begin to see library services as not restricted to the walls of the library.

Ensuring sustainable delivery of inter-religious dialogue campaign will help in changing the low perception about libraries and librarians in the society.

ii. ***Review of library science curriculum:*** It is imperative that library science curriculum should be intensively reviewed to include courses centered on social services, community services and corporate social responsibilities. It is believed that if this is done, it will help in equipping and preparing would-be-librarians in the provision of library and information services not just in the library alone but to the larger society.

iii. ***Establishment of centres for inter-religious dialogue initiatives(CIDI):*** Libraries and information science practitioners can liaise with other stakeholders in the information service industry and allied sectors to establish Centres for Inter-Religious Dialogue Initiative (CIDI). This can be achieved through sustainable collaboration with stakeholder such as religious leaders, traditional leaders, educationist, and ministry of education among others.

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