Chapter 14
Religious Libraries in the Library and Information Science Matrix:
A Historical Overview

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ABSTRACT

Religious libraries have evolved through time and space and their contributions to the present day libraries have not been given a thorough coverage in the corpus of librarianship. While the aforementioned libraries have taken various forms throughout their histories in supporting their broader institutions' missions and have had various kinds of relationships with other types of libraries, their contributions deserve great attention in order to unearth the roots of present day librarianship. This chapter explores the development of religious libraries and how they remain a force to reckon with in the the history of librarianship. Using literature review, the chapter explores the evolution of religious libraries in the context of religion and how such institutions can contribute towards global peace.

INTRODUCTION

Libraries are critical institutions whose services permeate every aspect of human life (Kumar, 1998). The pervasive nature of libraries make them indispensable institutions for the socio-economic, cultural and spiritual development of humankind. Libraries are the foremost cultural hubs that provides unrestricted space for the search of knowledge. While much has been written on other types of libraries, for example, public, school, special, legal, and academic, it is saddening to note that not much research has focused on

religious or often referred to as theological libraries. The libraries mentioned above have taken various forms throughout their antiquities in their endeavour to support their broader institutions' missions and have had multi-faceted interfaces and relationships with other types of libraries, for example, interlending or resource sharing, research and education and training.

Furthermore, the area of religious libraries has not been given adequate attention in the curricula of both undergraduate and in some instances, postgraduate studies thus creating a deficit in terms of knowledge and specialisation. Eliceiri, (2014) argued that literature treatises discuss "theological" libraries, generally meaning seminary libraries. The terms seminary libraries is synonymous with theological libraries in academic institutions, while the term congregational libraries refers to but not limited to denominationalised synagogue, church, and parish libraries. The religious groupings in the world are numerous ranging from but not limited to Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATR). These religious institutions including their libraries are affected by the seismic technological development in the Information and communication landscape and this is one motif that the article explores. Religious institutions rely on sacred texts to propagate their religious beliefs, for example, the bible for Christians, the Bhaghawad Geeta for the Hindu, the Koran for Islam, the Guru Granth for Sikhs and the Kebra Nagasti used by Rastafarians among many others.

The continuous escalation of religious conflict has prompted the authors to explore how interfaith dialogue through libraries could be the magic bullet for accommodating, beneficial, and positive interaction between people of different faith and traditions. The interlocutors involved in interfaith dialogue should strive for understanding each other in order to build bridges for peace and prosperity. Religious libraries occupy a strategic position as the key pillars of ecumenical and inter-religious relations or inter-belief dialogue which according to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Dialogue and Proclamation, no. 9 was described as "… dialogue means all positive and constructive Interreligious relations and connections with individuals and communities of other faiths, which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom. It includes both witness and the exploration of respective religious convictions …" Popovska, Ristoska, and Payet (2017) emphasised the importance of tolerance, respect and knowledge sharing as the basis for sustainable world peace. Kopel, Gorga, Thomas, Strickland, and Wunsch, (2020, April) highlighted the value of the growing interfaith movement that is working towards bringing worldviews together to challenge, investigate, and draw human beings from various religious and spiritual backgrounds toward an amalgamated voice to address modern social and political challenges. Religious libraries can be the antidote for world peace. Library services appeal more to the neurological processes of thought and mind that determine human cognition and perception. Access to knowledge relating to other religions and cultures is useful in promoting cultural literacy and world peace, hence the importance of religious libraries in the Library and Information Science matrix.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Religious libraries occupy a significant space in the evolution of libraries, archives and related fields; however, their status is not reflected as a foundation for Library and Information practice. While such institutions have contributed to professional librarianship through knowledge and skills relating to but not limited to cataloguing, classification, indexing, preservation and conservation, their efforts have not received adequate recognition within the profession. Religious libraries hold the answers to contempo-

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