

Reporting Religion for Peace and Development: A Guide to Principles and Best Practices

By

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ABSTRACT

The aim of true religion is peaceful coexistence, which may guarantee eternal bliss, but currently, religion is ironically known to be a constant source of crisis in different parts of today's interconnected world. And reporting religious crisis has become a major challenge for journalists across print, electronic and new media. This challenge notwithstanding, there is a dearth of studies interrogating religion-related peace and conflict reporting, especially in Africa and Asia. This paper, therefore, attempts to provide some basic information on the guiding principles, processes, and best practices of reporting religion to deepen scholars' and journalists' understanding of this phenomenon with a view to preventing conflict and promoting peaceful development.

Keywords: Reporting Religion, Religious Affairs, Crisis, Journalism Ethics, Peace and Conflict

1. INTRODUCTION

The word religion is popular in many societies, but its meaning can be quite difficult to arrive at, especially for academic purposes. *The Concise English Dictionary* (2015) however, defines religion as "the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power especially a personal God or gods". While this may be a basic definition, Stibich (2020) presented a different understanding of religion, as some do not centre on a belief in God, gods, or supernatural forces. From his explanation, some religions revolve around prophecies, revelations, and morals, while others involve cultural beliefs and worldviews, among others. However, virtually every religion is meaningful to its adherents and offer a range of practices, including sermons, rituals, prayer, meditation, holy places, symbols, trances, and feasts. Similarly, Sigmund Freud, as cited in Cherry (2020), described religion as a form of wish fulfillment. While pointing out Freud's psychoanalytic perspective view on religion, Cherry observed that people's need to feel secure and absolve oneself of guilt constrains them to believe in God, who represents a powerful father-figure.

These differences in the way people perceive religion often influence inter-religious relationships, producing either peace or conflict or both. For the reporter who is expected to dispassionately report religious activities, peace or conflict, a whole lot of ethical dilemmas arise from day to day, dilemmas for which his Journalism training hardly prepared him enough. This study, therefore, focuses on those details which a religion beat reporter needs in order to approach assignments with greater confidence.

In specific terms, it focuses on the guiding principles, processes, and best practices with a view to answering the following **research questions**: What is the position of scholarly literature on the state of religious affairs reporting? What is the appropriate procedure for understanding and succeeding on the beat? What are the best practices for reporting religion? How can religious affairs reporting be leveraged to prevent conflict and promote peace? What is the best way to deal with journalistic dishonesty?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Religion plays many important roles in modern societies including the improvement of mental peace, education, culture, healthcare, and fundamental human rights (Ugorie, 2017). It provides consolation and encouragement to people, especially during times of uncertainties, insecurities, and dangers; it enhances people's social virtues making them not only to be disciplined, patient, truthful and honest, and to perform their services creditably but also to love others. People with deep religious conviction, are expected to exhibit non-violent, kind, and joyful attitudes to the benefit of their society (Channel, 2020). Among the benefits adherents of religions derive are solace in the midst of problems, general peace, fellowship and emotional support (Ahmed, 2014). It enables them to avoid depression, pick up hope and move on with life.

Religion has been an instrument of enlightenment and civilization all over the world. For instance, the Anglican Communion established many important schools in parts of

Nigeria, just as Justin Martyr established catechetical schools in Ephesus and Rome. In the same vein, Martin Luther and John Calvin persuaded civic authorities to implement tax-supported, universal, compulsory education. Other missionaries collected books and manuscripts to develop libraries. Christianity in particular is credited for the establishment of great institutions such as universities of Marseilles, Bologna, Paris, Oxford, and Cambridge, while Muslims invented the Arabic numerals; created algebra practicals; developed trigonometry, optics, and astronomy (Alvin, 2004; Ugorie, 2017).

Religion provides a vital bridge for cross-cultural interaction. In Europe and America, it was religion that laid the ethical and cultural foundations of their civilization, whereas in Nigeria Christianity fought against cannibalism, superstition, the killing of twins, human sacrifice and many other vices (Channel, 2020). Besides the establishment of hospitals and maternities, testimonies of miraculous healing are now commonplace, sometimes even in hospitals aided and confirmed by medical personnel (Alvin, 2004).

Religious Affairs Reporting: Religious affairs refer to events relating to faith, beliefs, or worship systems and Religious Affairs Reporting could be traced to an article published in the Eighteenth century in the *New England Courant* (Independence Hall Association, 2021). In its broadest sense, religious affairs would naturally include religious activities and programmes such as sermons, special worship services, crusades, retreats, special prayer, meetings, missions and missionaries, religious conventions, religious congresses, religious meetings, religious seminars, the coming and going of religious leaders, and death and burial of religious leaders. Others include the miraculous happenings, pilgrimages (to Rome, Israel, and Mecca), inaugurating of religious images, icons, inaugurating of church buildings, church synods, festivals like Christmas and Easter, Idel malud, ordinations, the launch of religious books, special services of songs, the consecration of priests, desecration of sacred objects, moral issues such as abortion and euthanasia, laws guiding religious practices, religious costumes, garments, and fashion (Ifeduba, 2021). The religious Affairs reporter is, therefore, expected to familiarize herself with basic knowledge of these events in order to be able to understand and cover them effectively.

Religious activities also include choir ministrations and orchestras, religious dramas release of religious music labels, publicity stunts like roadshows, religious crises, terrorism with a religious undertone, ecumenical movements, jihads, the rise and fall of religions, cases of adultery and fornication involving church leaders as well as charity works done by religious organizations. The religion reporter should also be in position to review religious programmes and debates, religious book fairs, trends in various religions, religious websites and church elections (Ifeduba, 2021).

Religious affairs reporting on the other hand refers to the art of describing or giving an account of one, some or several of these religious events listed above, ensuring that the report answers the questions on: what happened, how it happened, why it happened, who did it, where he did it and when he did it (Brooks, Kennedy, Moen and Ranly, 2010; Fynes-Clinton, 2013; Al-Hindawi and Ghayadh, 2017). In other words, Religious Affairs Reporting is a form of specialized reporting.

An examination of some of the earliest news reports on religion shows that the reports had always stoked controversy, sentiments and inflamed passions leading to peace or

conflicts (Encyclopedia.com, 2019). Independence Hall Association (2021) stated that *New England Courant*, in 1723, published an article entitled, "Essay against Hypocrites," to mock religion, bring it into contempt and abuse the Holy Scriptures. From that time till the present era religious issues became newsworthy items, playing important roles in public life. Scholars have since observed the delicate nature of religious news. Nisbet (2018) noted that religious reporting requires impartiality and fairness and concluded that a religious reporter must have clear a understanding of religious sects, groups, organisations, institutions, and worship services in different countries apart from employing the five Ws and H principle.

Challenges Peculiar to the Religion Beat: Every beat has some challenges that make it different from others. The religion beat is no exception. There are ten reasons why covering the religion beat should pose its challenges. First, religion is more a business of the heart than a business of the head, which implies that adherents to various religions are often very sentimental about their faith and take exception to mockeries and derogatory remarks. The world could recall the emotional outburst with which Muslims all over the world reacted to the release of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, a book they had claimed that it cast aspersion on their faith.

Second, the reporter must be sensitive to sacred objects and sacrileges. Whereas Christians would condemn or ignore anyone that desecrates the holy Bible, some religious sets in Nigeria have attacked and killed hundreds of people for quoting verses of scripture from the Koran. A reporter, who understands the sentiments attached to such objects, principles, and sometimes, personalities, would do well to handle related issues with care and maturity.

Third, there are words and expressions the use of which could amount to what the Bible described as blasphemy or heresy. As much as possible, the religion reporter who intends to do well on the beat should avoid the use of such words and expressions. Fourth, some religions keep secrets which make people think they are tending towards cultism. Sometimes it is difficult for a reporter to know how to categorize such religions and how to comment on their secret activities objectively. The general guiding principle here is: when in doubt leave out.

Fifth, in some societies and communities the line separating religion from politics is thin. An experienced reporter should know how to handle issues that border on state meddling in religious affairs or religious bodies meddling in state affairs. At the back of his mind, however, should be the fact that freedom of worship is a fundamental human right.

Sixth, there are times when beliefs among religions seem to conflict. Even within the same religion like Islam and Christianity, doctrines could vary from sect to sect or denomination to domination. The reporter should not take sides in the event of a controversy or debate regarding such doctrines. He should rather handle the challenge with maturity and should rely on what their scriptures say rather than individual interpretations of it.

Seventh, some reporters think that the religion beat is dull and financially unrewarding. This thinking is more rampant among corrupt reporters who would rather cover other beats where chances of receiving brown envelopes are higher. Churches are not likely to

bribe any journalist for favours, but any reporter who has covered religion for a reasonable length of time would tell you that the beat has its own benefits. However, it is recommended that a religion reporter should endeavor to understand various religions and their beliefs.

Different Religions and their Beliefs: The Pew Research Center (2012) stated that 84% of the world's population has religious affiliations, some of which represent monotheism or the belief in a single god, while others represent polytheism or the belief in multiple gods. The demographic study revealed more than 5.8 billion religiously affiliated adults and children around the globe. The demographic study indicated 2.2 billion Christians (32% of the world's population), 1.6 billion Muslims (23%), 1 billion Hindus (15%), nearly 500 million Buddhists (7%), and 14 million Jews (0.2%) around the world. Also, more than 400 million people (6%) practice various folk or traditional religions, including African traditional religions, Chinese folk religions, Native American religions, and Australian aboriginal religions. An estimated 58 million people, which is slightly less than 1% of the global population, belong to other religions, including the Baha'i faith, Jainism, Sikhism, Shintoism, Taoism, Tenrikyo, Wicca, and Zoroastrianism.

Table 1: Religions and their Beliefs

S/N	RELIGION	BELIEF
1	Atheism	Atheists are people who believe that god or gods are man-made constructs.
2	Baha'I	One of the youngest of the world's major religions
3	Buddhism	A way of living based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama
4	Candomble	A religion based on African beliefs, originating in Brazil
5	Christianity	The World's biggest faith, based on the teaching of Jesus Christ
6	Hinduism	A group of faiths rooted in the religious ideas of India
7	Islam	Revealed in its final form by the Prophet Muhammad
8	Jainism	Ancient philosophy and ethical teaching originating in India.
9	Jehovah's Witness	A Christian-based evangelistic religion movement.
10	Judaism	Based around the Jewish People's covenant relationship with God.
11	Mormonism	The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
12	Paganism	Contemporary religion usually based on reverence for nature
13	Rastafari	A young religion founded in Jamaica in the 1930s.
14	Santeria	Afro-Caribbean syncretic religion originating in Cuba.
15	Shintoism	Japanese folk tradition and ritual with no founder or single sacred scripture.
16	Sikhism	The religion was founded by Guru Nanak in India in the 15 th Century CE.
17	Spiritualism	Spiritualists believe in communication with the spirits of people who have died
18	Taoism	An ancient tradition of philosophy and belief rooted in Chinese Worldview
19	Unitarianism	An open-minded and individualistic approach to religion
20	Zoroastrianism	One of the oldest monotheistic faiths, founded by the prophet Zoroaster.

Source: BBC Religion

From this list, it is easy to understand how difficult the work of a religious affairs reporter could be, especially if he or she happens to be a young reporter. His or her difficulties can assume confusing dimensions when he or she encounters worshippers whose beliefs and worship systems are either secret or partly secret. Reporters frequently grapple with religions that have no clear-cut system, at least, not any that is recorded in any book for the reporter to read. Some religions are intricately woven with other aspects of the adherents' culture and norms, so much that reporters have tough times trying to figure out where the religion begins and where the other aspects of the culture end.

The good news, however, is that no reporter would have the singular misfortune of covering and reporting only such religions. The news selection principle that focuses attention on the "most important" and the "most prominent" is always there to guide his reportorial instincts to the more prominent religions like Christianity and Islam. Nevertheless, every religion reporter should do well to get acquainted with the doctrines and systems of worship adopted by the odd and far-flung religions for that exceptional day when duty would demand that he writes about them.

3. METHODS

This study relied on extant literature on religious communications and insights gained from over twenty years of teaching and industry experience by the authors. Constant comparative analysis of data collected from books, research articles and websites was employed to isolate the guides from the processes, the processes from the best practices and the best practices from the peace and development dimensions.

4. RECOMMENDED GUIDES AND BEST PRACTICES

Qualities of a Good Religion Reporter: In response to the peculiarities and challenges associated with the religion beat, scholars have suggested some guiding principles and pointed out best practices. Diane (2016) recommended that a religion beat reporter should have good understanding of a wide range of religious traditions, be precise in their choice of words and pay attention to nuances. Where these principles are not followed, religion journalists usually get more audience complaints from religious stories than they get from other types of stories.

Since many issues around religion relate to scriptures, religion reporters must become knowledgeable about scripture, or at least know the experts they can rely on to interpret debates over scriptures. For this reason, religion reporting depends heavily on interviews. The reporter must cultivate sources that are in position to respond quickly to issues, breaking news, shootings at houses of worship, faith-related terrorism attacks, hate crimes, court rulings, and legislation involving religion.

A reporter is required to have his or her nose to the ground, but the modern day religion beat reporter is advised to also have his or her nose to the cyberspace and be alert. The reporter should not be biased in reporting issues, because, in addition to being perceived as partisan, or as having vested interest, it could be counted against him as a sin.

A good religion reporter writes only what he has witnessed and what he is sure of. He or she must abide by the ethics of the journalism profession. He or she must be fair, objective and should write disinterestedly and factually; avoiding editorializing and making effort not to inject his or her own opinion into religious facts, issues, and doctrines.

A good religion reporter must provide complete and authentic information; approach each assignment with a great sense of responsibility; exercise care in handling sectarian, denominational, and other sensitive religious issues; balance his or her story to present all the sides to a story, and try not to be influenced by fear or favour. Itule and Anderson (2008) described this subject as "Traits of Good Writers" and the following outline is adapted from their fourteen traits:

[i] Good religion reporters see the religion beat as a storehouse of story ideas, not a dry beat where nothing happens. [ii] Good religion reporters prefer to discover and develop their story ideas. They would rather go for the offbeat than rely on conventional assignments.[iii] They are voracious collectors of information. That is why they are always prepared with notebooks, tapes, cameras and other devices. They spend much time and creative energy working on their leads [iv] They immerse themselves in the story of the day. They live it, eat it, sing it, drink it, and dream up ideas until an acceptable story is born. [v] They develop personal strategies and, sometimes idiosyncrasies that help them build momentum during the writing process. Some smoke, some take a walk, some engage in daydreaming [vi] They love to write, rewrite, recast and rewrite again until a clean copy is made out of all that. Good religion writers are constantly searching for the human side of the news, "for voices that enliven the writing". [vii] They understand that reporting is a transaction between the reporter and the reader, so they write to maintain their standards and to satisfy their readers. [viii] They love to be creative and inventive and love editors who tolerate experimentation. [ix] Good religion reporters are life-long readers. They read wide and delve deep into religious literature. [x] They don't stop to worry about sustaining the interest of their readers. They distribute the meat of the story from the lead down to the conclusion, making it impossible for the reader to stop midway.

Diane (2016) also outlined the qualities of good religion beat journalists. Among them are: [i] They have respect for the role of faith in people's lives. It does not matter his or her religious affiliation, he or she should not cast aspersion on other people's regions. [ii] A religious journalist should have immense curiosity about religion and a willingness to learn about it. He or she should not only learn the peculiarities of every religion but he or she should also keep learning about it. [iii] A religious journalist should abide by the sense of fairness and balance. The news report should not be biased. Rather, there should be an understanding that in a story, there can be more than two sides to it. [iv] In every story, a religious journalist should not push for his or her religious viewpoint. This is to help him or her to be objective in the news presentation. [v] A religious journalist should commit to cover all kinds of diversity of faith, both within his or her religion and outside of it. It should also apply to ethnicity, gender, economic status, and geography. [vi] A religious journalist should have the willingness to spend time with all sorts of people in the places where they live, gather and worship. He or she should not isolate anyone irrespective of the person's religious affiliation or denomination. [vii] A religious

journalist should have the willingness to encounter language and cultural challenges. He or she should appreciate other people's culture and their belief system, including their underlining challenges. [viii] A religious journalist should have strong news writing skills in order to skillfully present news without inciting people against other people's religion.

Sources of Religious News: Sources of religious news may be classified into conventional and unconventional sources in line with the categorization made by Strentz (1989). Conventional sources include the regular beats such as the ministry of culture, department of religious affairs, the secretariat of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (P.F.N), for instance, public relations or promotional sources, news conferences and events, public records, the records, events, and meetings stated above could include the following: church office records, church bulletins, newsletters of churches, religious societies and missions, publicity materials such as handbills, posters and notice boards of religious organizations. Unconventional sources include websites, weblogs otherwise known as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, contacts with majority groups on and offline as well as online newsgroups and online religious communities.

Hints on How to Handle Religious Leaders as News Sources: Brooks, Kennedy, Moen and Ranly (2010) provided the following hints on how to handle religious leaders in their position as news sources:

[i] A religious journalist, even if he or she is of the same faith as the source of news, should not forget that he or she is an observer, not a participant. So, he or she should not lose the critical distance a reporter must maintain from his or her source.

[ii] Though he or she must be respectful, he or she must remember that a member of the clergy who demands deferential treatment just might be hiding something behind that "ecclesiastical smile."

[iii] He or she must note that the emotional intensity with which many people hold their faiths can cause an unlikely person to be economical with the truth.

[iv] He or she must realize that all sources have point of view, programmes to sell, careers to advance, opponents to undercut. It is likely and legitimate that they will try to persuade you of the merit of their viewpoints, try to sell their programmes through the columns of your newspaper and strive to shape the news to help their career. So, the religion beat reporter must be wary of these efforts of such news sources to use him/her to achieve their objectives.

Guide to Illustrating Religion Stories and Articles

Gabriel (2011) stated that one picture can authenticate a story of more than a thousand words. This is especially true when the need for evidence arises in controversial or questionable circumstances. Photographs and illustrations are generally employed in news production to support the text, as a witness as additional evidence, or sometimes as the only means of telling an otherwise complex story.

To perform these functions effectively, the religion writer, unlike the city reporter, is restricted to several, sometimes, sacred symbols, icons, and objects. In the course of his duty, the religion reporter will need to use pictures of persons and buildings, drawings,

cartoons, religious icons, and symbols such as the cross, the crescent, stars, totems, etc. Knowing when to use each type is crucial. The reporter is, therefore, enjoined to take note of the following:

Pictures of personalities: When you have a story with a headline that reads "American Priest Abuses Children Sexually", while the picture of the priest will be appropriate and revealing, pictures of the children will be inappropriate because they are innocent minor and need to be protected.

Pictures of church buildings and mosques: In a situation where a rich king stole away to wed his seventh wife (a 13-year old girl) in a small church in a remote village, a picture of the church will be absolutely important just as a reporter is expected not only to write about churches or mosques destroyed by religious extremists but to illustrate his report with photographs as supporting evidence.

Cartoons: Some stories have grave legal implications. When the use of a photograph will incur libel suit, a cartoon or drawing may do the job. Cartoons are also appropriate to add humour to a point that must be driven home.

Religious icons/ symbols: When the subject is simply Islam or Christianity, the symbol of the religion may be sufficient to depict and give life to all the abstract ideas and doctrines. The cross will be easily associated with Christianity while the crescent will be associated with Islam. Other religions also have their symbols.

Understanding religious icons / symbols: There are some intricacies to observe in the use of religious icons and symbols. There are contexts where Moslems expect that the reporter should use the crescent correctly – with a star. The cross is not just a vertical stroke crossed in the middle by a horizontal one. The point of intersection must be above the middle for it to pass for a Christian cross. The Indian sects that worship cows would rather have you use a healthy cow than a bony cow. Some words like "catholic" are associated with certain organizations (e.g. the Roman Catholic Church). Other denominations have the word "catholic" in their names.

The reporter should therefore differentiate between Roman Catholic Church and other Catholic churches and avoid the use of the expression "catholic church". Moslems use beads to pray while Roman Catholics use a similar object – chaplet. The religion reporter should understand the difference. Anglican priests, catholic priests, and many others wear white (Suppliss and cassock). These should not be mistaken for the white garment. Not even all-white garment churches are celestial churches of God. The cherubim and Seraphim also wear the white garment and walk barefoot. The difference must be understood by the religion beat reporter.

Related to the issue of icons and symbols, is the use of totems by some religious groups, especially in Asia and Africa. Again, it must be noted that adherents to different religions hold such totems in high esteem and often adore them. Though it sounds bizarre in this day and age, they can always argue that they are entitled to their beliefs.

Guide to Writing Religious Affairs Stories

A reporter who has received basic training in reporting and understands some of the principles already discussed in this chapter is expected to be in a position to write a balanced religious affairs story. To see how some of the principles were applied by other journalists let us analyse a story published on page 12 of *The Guardian* of October 07, 2008.

Vatican Suspends Bishop for Adopting Woman

The Vatican has suspended a Roman Catholic Bishop in Southern India after he adopted a 26-year old woman, according to a senior Church official. Also, Bishop John Thattungals' conduct will be investigated by a three-member committee of bishops.

Thattungal, 58, will be barred from performing any religious or administrative duties until a formal inquiry into his conduct is completed, said the Rev. Stephen Alathara, a spokesman for the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council, in a telephone interview from the southern Indian city of Kochi.

Alathara, according to the Cable news networks (CNN) said the Bishop's adoption of the woman earlier this year had upset other priests in the Kochi diocese.

"The majority of the priests were unhappy and asked for his resignation" he said, adding that the Vatican ordered the suspension on Thursday.

The above story is well written and straight to the point, but there are a few things to learn from it: The newspaper got the story from CNN, a broadcast medium, which is not expected to broadcast lengthy stories or provide much background. The story is a foreign story reported on the foreign news page of the newspaper without any attempt to provide a local angle.

The things a newspaper reporter can do to make this story useable as a news feature include recognizing the following uses and gratifications: Readers would need to know something about the adopted woman. Is she a student? Is she a widow? This information should be provided. Readers would need to know the priest's reason for adopting the woman. Is he hungry for a wife? Is he thinking of having a nuclear family? Is he adopting her for sex? Readers would like to know if the parents of the woman are Catholics and if they agreed with their daughter to defile the priesthood. Since the Catholic Church is a worldwide organization with millions of members in Nigeria, it would not be out of place to explain what their rules say in connection with adoption for Reverend fathers and relate it to the kinds of adoption approved by the Bible.

How does the reporter get all these details from local sources such as Reverend Fathers, Catholic Secretariat etc.? The beat reporter would need to read up available rules on adoption, especially for priests. He should get out of the office or use the telephone to talk to experts and get their views. He has to be alert and persistent to receive a useful answer from a priest over such issues.

5. USING RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS REPORTING TO PREVENT CONFLICT AND PROMOTE PEACEFUL DEVELOPMENT

No major religion has been exempted from complicity in violent conflict. Yet we need to beware of an almost universal propensity to oversimplify the role that religion plays in international affairs. Religion is not usually the sole or even primary cause of conflict. With so much emphasis on religion as a source of conflict, the role of religion as a force in peacemaking is usually overlooked. Religious affiliation and conviction often motivate religious communities to advocate particular peace-related government policies. Religious communities also directly oppose repression and promote peace and reconciliation. Religious leaders and institutions can mediate in conflict situations, serve as a communication link between opposing sides, and provide training in peacemaking methodologies. This form of religious peacemaking garners less public attention but is growing in importance.

Inter-faith dialogue is another form of religious peacemaking. Rather than seeking to resolve a particular conflict, it aims to defuse interfaith tensions that may cause future conflict or derive from the previous conflict. Interfaith dialogue is expanding even in places where interreligious tensions are highest. Not infrequently, the most contentious interfaith relationships can provide the context for the most meaningful and productive exchanges.

Given religion's importance as both a source of international conflict and a platform for peace, it is regrettable that most governments are so ill-equipped to handle religious issues and relate to religious actors. If they could insert themselves into international conflicts or build deeper and more productive relationships with countries around the world, they need to devise a better strategy to effectively and respectfully engage with the religious realm.

Smock (2008) pointed out that religion, in recent decades, has assumed unusual prominence in international affairs, a situation which he said has halted and probably reversed an earlier global drift toward secularism. He predicted that history would perceive religion as "the prime animating and destructive force in human affairs, guiding attitudes to political liberty and obligation, concepts of nationhood and, of course, conflicts and wars." The article cited statistics from a public opinion survey in Nigeria, which demonstrated that Nigerians believed religion to be more central to their identity than nationality.

Toit (2020) recommended that journalists reporting sensitive conflict issues should sustainably manage or resolve the needs and interests of all parties involved to their satisfaction, make a positive contribution, which must enhance peaceful management and resolution of conflict, should understand the nature of conflict so that they can be better equipped to report the events and processes, should create conditions that can facilitate peaceful management and resolution of conflict and should constantly reflect on the impact of their work and the degree to which they have met the needs of their audiences. He also outlined some ways that journalists can contribute to the peace-keeping, peace-building, and peace-making in the society (Toit, 2020). Among these factors are:

Provision of a channel for communication between parties: Religion reporters should constantly provide opportunities for parties in conflict to communicate. Communication should not only be among them but also with other people who are not directly involved in the conflict. As much as possible, they should speak with people representing different parties in a conflict and also other people, who are not in the conflict.

Provision of information conflicting parties need to make wise decisions: Religion reporters should provide people with the information that would help them to make informed decisions. As Toit (2020) observed, some conflicts occur because parties do not have complete information about the situation, and it is certain that adequate information can help them to resolve issues before they get out of hand.

Educating parties in the conflict: Religion reporters are in position to inform people about different ways of dealing with conflict, providing insight into how other conflicts were solved amicably, or sometimes using conflict management specialists to share ideas on strategies of conflict resolution.

Creating an Atmosphere of Trust: Religion reporters should create conditions that can allow parties to build trust among themselves. They should publicize commitments made during negotiations to enable communities and stakeholders to hold leaders accountable for their promises.

Counteracting misperceptions: Religion reporters, through constant interaction with the audience and talking to different sides about a conflict, should learn about how they feel about each other to understand whether people have misperceptions about each other, which may have resulted in the conflict. In such situations, his immediate communication objective would be to clarify the misperceptions and promote better understanding.

Analysis of conflict: There are times when a reporter needs to carefully analyse the situation, presenting all the different angles as well as causes and effects to help the readers, listeners, and viewers to understand the underlying causes of a conflict and what should be done to manage and resolve the issue. In such cases merely reporting the issue without in-depth analysis would not be of much help.

Identification of underlying interests: Religion reporters should help the parties to understand the underlying interest within a conflict. This is because if parties can understand all the interests at work, they would be in position to accommodate the other party's interests or compromise theirs for the sake of peace.

Expression of emotions: Religion reporters can provide communication platforms as emotional outlets to help the parties in a conflict to express their feelings through the media. It is said that it is better to jaw-jaw than to war-war. Thus, media space provided should help them to talk about their frustrations and their fears without using the platform to insult and attack opponents.

Empowering parties: In times of conflict, religion reporters can give voice to marginalised groups, thereby helping the weaker groups to debate, converse or negotiate with stronger groups on a more equitable footing. He may achieve this by observing the equal space and equal time doctrine because when the news coverage is balanced, weaker groups are empowered.

Broadening the search for solutions: Though it is not the journalists' job to tell parties how to deal with their conflicts, journalists can help them to identify possible solutions to their conflicts. Journalists, as impartial observers, can sometimes see solutions to the conflicts, which the parties may not be aware of. There have been many instances when journalists proposed possible solutions to conflicts through powerful editorials and commentaries.

6. DEALING WITH JOURNALISTIC DISHONESTY

Journalistic dishonesty has never been of greater concern to the world at any time more than the 21st Century when there is an upsurge in cases of fake news, misinformation and disinformation. The Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics established four basic principles on how to handle journalistic dishonesty, according to Munson (2006). They encourage journalists to seek the truth and report it, minimize harm, to be accountable and act independently. Detailed explanation of these principles is presented with minimal editing:

Seek the truth and report it: Journalists should be honest, fair, and courageous in gathering news. They should also report and interpret information. They should:

Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent errors. Deliberate distortion is never permissible. Diligently seek out subjects of news stories to allow them to respond to allegations of wrongdoing. Identify sources whenever feasible. The public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources' reliability. Always question a source's motives before promising anonymity. Clarify conditions attached to any promise made in exchange for information. Keep promises. Make certain that headlines, news teases and promotional materials, photos, videos, audios, graphics, sound bites, and quotations do not misrepresent. They should not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context. Never distort the content of news photos or video. Image enhancement for technical clarity is always permissible. Label montages and photo illustrations. Avoid misleading re-enactments or staged news events. If re-enactment is necessary to tell a story, label it.

Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information except when traditional open methods would not yield information vital to the public. The use of such methods should be explained as part of the story. Avoid plagiarism at all times. Tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so. Examine their cultural values and avoid imposing those values on others. Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, or social status. Support the open exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.

Give voice to the voiceless, noting that official and unofficial sources of information can be equally valid. Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be labeled and not misrepresent facts or context. Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two. Recognize a special obligation to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open and that government records are open to inspection.

Minimize harm: Ethical journalists treat sources, subjects, and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect. Journalists should therefore show compassion to those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Exercise cautious sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects. Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief; recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort, and that pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance.

Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention, that only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy. Show good taste and avoid pandering to lurid curiosity. Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects or victims of sex crimes. Be judicious about naming criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges. Balance a criminal suspect's fair trial rights with the public's right to be informed.

Act independently: Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know. Journalists should: Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived. Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility. Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel, and special treatment, and shun secondary employment, political involvement, public office, and service in community organizations if they compromise journalistic integrity. Disclose unavoidable conflicts. Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable. Deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage. Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; avoid bidding for news.

Be accountable: Journalists are accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers, and each other. Journalists should: Clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct. Encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media; and admit mistakes and correct them promptly. Expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media. Abide by the same high standards to which journalists hold others.

CONCLUSION

With the exhaustive guides to news sourcing techniques, writing styles, integrity lessons and examples, there is no doubt that reporting religion professionally would contribute immensely to peace-building thereby reducing tension and conflict in communities and the world at large. The religion beat reporter would therefore do well to imbibe these principles in order to be part of the solution to world peace and not a catalyst to global conflicts.

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