Full Length Research

Stewardship of Librarians in Academic Libraries of the 21st Century: a proposal for a theological doctrine approach

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This paper focuses on Stewardship of Librarians in Academic Libraries of the 21st Century: a proposal for a theological doctrine approach. The roles of academic libraries especially in the 21st century need to be strengthened in line with developments at the global level. Academic Libraries are key players in the development of an informed and knowledgeable society, not just as providers, but also as storage and information retrieval centres. An informed and knowledgeable society cannot be established without a comprehensive integrated information services. The academic library remains a significant element of the source of information to students, lecturers and researchers, even though the current focus is on information and communication technologies for transforming the economy for national development. Librarians in academic libraries are expected to help users solve their information needs by every means possible but, this seems not to be effectively done any longer. Morale seems to be very low as some users are left to help themselves with little or no professional assistance. This study therefore proposes a theological approach to work by librarians for effective service delivery in academic libraries, as working unto the lord.

Key Words: Libraries, librarians, service delivery, stewardship, theological doctrine

INTRODUCTION

Library is as old as when God created the earth. In Gen. 1:3, God says *"Let there be light", and there was light*. This was the first oral information in the world that was preserved and documented up to today by a librarian at that time, and of course Angels of God were the Librarians at that time. The academic libraries we see today are no longer libraries in the Dark Age where you see libraries as a place where books are kept for reading.

Nowadays, academic libraries have assumed the status of banks. Academic Libraries have changed from being "custodian of books" to "information providers". A library is a storehouse of information and the seat of knowledge. This simply means that a library is effectively an open door to the wisdom and experience of mankind.

Reitz (2009) describes a librarian as a person responsible for the management of a library and its contents, including the selection, processing and organization of materials and the delivery of information,

instruction and loan services to meet the needs of its users. According to Ononogbo (2012), librarians are those that are trained to carry out core duties of a library beyond the day-to-day routines of library officers and library attendants. Cataloguing, classification indexing, collection development, serials management and readers' services are some of the duties that librarians do (Ezeani, Eke and Ugwu, 2012). According to LRCN (2013), being a librarian encompasses a wide range of areas; technical skills, interpersonal skills, subject area knowledge, ICT skills, current awareness services or selective dissemination of information skills, and conservation and preservation skills. By this definition of LRCN (2013), it means that a librarian has some skills with which he will use as stewardship to render services to his or her users. Librarians are expected to be alive to their duties in the provision of information in different formats to their users especially in the academic institution where research is paramount, and not until this is done, the library would not be said to be performing her assigned roles of information provision and dissemination (Nworie, 2012). But, in a position whereby users are not attended to by professional librarians maybe for lack of motivation, negligence or insubordination etc, or expecting users to pay some bribe before they will be attended to, is very wrong. It does not tell well of the library and the users altogether. Librarians have the morale obligation under the professional ethics to assist users meet their information needs which the writer termed theological doctrine of stewardship.

The Theological Doctrine of Stewardship

The term theology means the study about God and His relationship with man and the world He created. The theological doctrine of stewardship defines man's relationship with God in relation to how he serves God with his talent, time and resources and his fellow man. It identifies God as the owner of everything. God created man as the manager of His creation. God makes man His co-worker to manage all aspects of human endeavours including librarianship. The apostle Paul in the Holy Bible explains it best by saying "for we are God's fellow workers; we are God's field; we are God's building (1 Corinthians 3:9). The concept of stewardship dates from the beginning of time when God entrusted the earth to Adam and Eve and their offspring (Gen. 1: 26-28). According to Hornby (2010), a steward is defined as someone who manages property, finances or other affairs. In other words, a steward is one who is in charge of household affairs of a large estate, club, hotel or resort. Basically, a steward is not therefore an owner, but one who has responsibility to the owner to treat his property with care and respect. It is the responsibility of a steward to manage wisely. The Bible book of Luke 16:1-

13 also gave the account of unjust steward who took advantage of his position to aggrandize himself.

A steward is expected to be faithful, knowing that he/she will give account of his/her stewardship to the one who appointed/employed him. The question now is, as librarians, are we faithful to what is entrusted to us? Do we provide relevant information to user, store recorded knowledge, process recorded knowledge, disseminate proper information and come to work early or late, shelf our books, state the right cost of materials acquired for the library etc? Yet, many of us expect much from the system. Nevertheless, many librarians are doing much. In Gen. 2:15, the Lord God placed man in the Garden of Eden as its gardener, to tend and keep it, so also librarians are employed to tend and care for library facilities and its users; in order for them to receive good commendation from the employers as much as the faithful servant would receive from the Almighty God. Therefore, we should align ourselves with the theological principles of stewardship. God put Adam and Eve in the garden in order "to till and to keep" the land. The word "till" could be translated to mean "service" while "keep" could mean to preserve for future generations; hence the mandate "to serve" and "to preserve" place librarians in a position to render services and preserve information resources for posterity.

Librarians and Stewardship

Provision of Library Resources and Stewardship

A librarian is saddled with the responsibility of developing and managing collections of books and journals (both print and electronic), as well as websites, databases, e-contents and other types of information carriers.

Libraries resources are the totality of information resources that form a library collection. The resources are acquired to satisfy the information needs of the library users and accomplish the objectives of the parent institution. Academic library should house all types of literature to help users develop positively and become keen readers in the future (Akanwa, 2013). Selection of information resources for acquisition in academic libraries is a critical activity in resources development and management. It is necessary for a librarian to select from the available and existing resources to satisfy the information needs and objectives of the host institutions. Selection of information resources is not an easy one especially when it comes to the selection of academic library resources.

For effective selection of academic library resources, adequate understanding of users and their characteristics, habits and requirements is essential. According to Iwuji (2005), selection is the act of deciding

what materials should be added to library collection and in what quality. Selection is an intellectual activity; it demands extra carefulness, caution and attention. The se*lection of information resources* could be by purchase, exchange, gift, donation, photocopying, bequeathing and legal deposit. Selection is the process of deciding which materials should be added to a library collection (Unegbu, Nwanekezie and Nworie, 2019). Gregory (2011) exerts that the following rules should be followed when selecting materials to be added to library collections:

a. Information resources are best selected on the basis of suitability for inclusion in the collection.
b. The collection should be an unbiased source of information that represents as many points of view as possible.
c. Subjects should be covered in a manner appropriate to the library's anticipated user's needs.
d. No materials should be excluded from the collection because of the race, religion, gender, origin, sexual preference, or political view of the author, the materials or the use.
e. Consideration of the authoritativeness of materials- this can be determined in part by the credentials of the author.
f. Accuracy and timelines of materials.
g. Adequacy of scope and depth of coverage of the items for the purpose and audience.
h. Appropriateness of style, aesthetic qualities, technical aspects, and physical characteristics.

The principles of stewardship as specified by the Bible require us to be faithful in stating the exact costs of materials acquired for the library, whether books or electronic equipment. Moreso, rendering the services/duties that we are employed to render (online and traditionally). Furthermore, we must not be biased in selecting materials for acquisition. We must select materials that are relevant to the needs of our audience; authenticity of source must be considered while allowing faculty members to make input in the selection process. The goal of the academic library as well as the general objective of the parent institution must be borne in mind while acquiring materials for the library.

Provision of Access to Information and Stewardship

Libraries are major sources of information in the society. So also is the academic library in an institution. It is the responsibility of librarians to ensuring that users access information they need in the library regardless of age, religion, ethnicity, language, economic status and physical limitations. Information must not be hoarded from users who need it (Vincent and Amanze, n.d). We should use strategies based upon the principles of universal design to ensuring that library policy, resources

and services meet the needs of every user. We must guard against any form of discrimination when dealing with users. We should be able to identify users' needs and locate relevant materials that meet their identified needs. As stewards we must not give out personally identifiable information of users in their custodies. Showing undue favouritism is not a quality of a good steward. As stewards, we must not exert undue influence over our subordinates and patrons (Luke 19:8).

The modern trend of the 21st century is the application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to librarianship. Librarians in carrying out their God ordained responsibility of providing access to library resources are required to create awareness of the available materials in the academic library through the use of mobile technologies such as QR codes, social media like twitter, facebook, instagram etc by tagging different groups of the institution to the awareness notice. Arrival of new materials in the academic library can be given free access to, for some weeks before restrictions are imposed. By doing so, many users of the academic libraries will overcome illiteracy. For it is in the lack of knowledge that people perish (Hosea 4:6).

User Education and Stewardship

The concept of user education has been variously referred to as library instruction, bibliographic instruction, library orientation, user training, library user skills, introduction to library studies, use of the library, reader advisory services, library outreach, library literacy, study skills and information use. Any of the terms above could be used provided the purpose remains the education and training of the user on the use of the academic library. User education is about all activities involved in teaching users how to make the best possible use of library resources, services, and facilities, including formal and informal instruction delivered by a librarian or other staff member one-on-one or in a group.

One of the hallmarks of user education is the sense of security and confidence which it instills in potential users while at the same time conferring confidence in their library and information seeking behaviours. For instance, fresh undergraduates who have not used library resources before would be intimidated at the first encounter with a library. User education creates confidence in the students in the retrieval and utilization of library resources. Students become aware of the information potentials of the library and can run to the library in time of information need such as writing term papers, doing take-home assignments and even preparation for examinations. Uhegbu (2007) has given five major aims of user education as:

i. To enable the student, make effective use of the college and other library sources.

ii. To make the student aware of printed and non-printed sources of information and the structure of the literature in his discipline.
iii. To contribute to the personal and intellectual development of his ability to continue autonomous learning outside the formal education context;
iv. To provide the student with the capacity of researching any given problem; and,
v. To enable the student to control the varied information available and regularly used by him to solve academic and later professional problems.

Applying the principles of stewardship, we must ensure that effective use of library collections is of paramount interest to us and therefore, we should put in our best to train our users in order for them to acquire the skills required of them to explore their libraries. To achieve this objective, we have to instruct the students on how to use the academic library. We have to familiarize the students with the techniques of library use and information retrieval. We must at all-time guard against the assumption that students would always find what they want. We must be quick to communicate with users and also develop feedback mechanism by which users' perception of our services and operations can be evaluated.

With the invention of ICTs, user education can also be done online through webinar, zoom or Skype etc. Guidelines can also be delivered to the users through emails, whatsapps and other social media handles with the intention of acclimatizing the users with the resources and procedures of the academic library.

Library Management and Stewardship

Management is the art, or science of achieving goals through people. Since managers also supervise, management can be interpreted to mean literally "looking over" i.e. making sure people do what they are supposed to do. Managers are, therefore, expected to ensure greater productivity or, using the current jargon, "continuous improvement" (Ansoff and Mcdonell, 1990). More broadly, management is the process of designing and managing an environment in which individuals, working together in groups, efficiently accomplish selected aims. In its expanded form, this basic definition means several things, people carry out the managerial functions of planning, organizing, staffing, leading, and controlling. *Second*, management applies to any kind of organization. *Third*, management applies to managers at all organization levels. *Fourth*, the aim of all managers is the same to create surplus. *Finally*, management is concerned with productivity. This implies effectiveness and efficiency. Thus, management refers to the development of bureaucracy that derives its importance from the need for strategic planning, co-ordination,

directing and controlling of large and complex decision-making process. Essentially, therefore, management entails the acquisition of managerial competence, and effectiveness in the following key areas: problem solving, administration, human resource management, and organizational leadership.

First and foremost, management is about solving problems that keep emerging all the time in the course of an organization struggling to achieve its goals and objectives. Problem solving should be accompanied by problem identification, analysis and the implementation of remedies to managerial problems. Second, administration involves following laid down procedures (although procedures or rules should not be seen as ends in themselves) for the execution, control, communication, delegation and crisis management. Third, human resource management should be based on strategic integration of human resource, assessment of workers, and exchange of ideas between shareholders and workers. Finally, organizational leadership should be developed along lines of interpersonal relationship, teamwork, self-motivation to perform, emotional strength and maturity to handle situations, personal integrity, and general management skills. As a process, management refers to a series of inter-related functions. It is the process by which management creates, operates and directs purposive organization through systematic, coordinated and co-operated human efforts.

Management is another word for "stewardship." "Stewards," or "managers," are responsible over something entrusted to them by someone else. Management is the process of accomplishing God's purposes and plans through proper use of human, material, and spiritual resources (John, 2010). In the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30, the servants were accountable for all that were entrusted to their care. Their master had a plan, communicated it to them, and they were to fulfill it by investing the funds they were given. In Prov. 16: 1-3, God instructed us to have plans in order to be efficient and effective in our given assignment. In the same vein, we are employed to manage library resources, to enable our parent institution achieve its set goals and objectives. Therefore, we must be faithful in performing our managerial role and not to be self-centered nor doing eye-service. We must ensure that the right candidates are recruited and properly managed. We must from time to time educate our staff and library users on how to care for the library resources, building, furniture and equipment.

The manager can from time to time pass on information and messages to his or her subjects online, through webinars, telephone calls and give them season's greetings. These can create enabling environment for efficient library service delivery.

Knowledge Sharing and Stewardship

The term Knowledge is a derivative of information. Knowledge is information that is relevant, actionable and based at least partially on experience. Therefore, knowledge in whatever form it may appear is information charged with enough intelligence, experience, idea, insight, content, interpretation and reflection. It is a source that is not easily replicable and accessible. Unagha and Unegbu (2015) identify two basic types of knowledge: *tacit and explicit knowledge*. This is a complex form of knowledge. It has two dimensions namely; technical and cognitive. This is personal knowledge, which is in human mind. It is difficult to formalize and also difficult to communicate. It cannot be shared or easily codified. It is deeply rooted on individual's expertise. According to these authors, tacit knowledge is highly personalized, embedded in a person's mind, brain and daily work practice and is quite difficult to transfer. It is difficult to express in words or to codify in documentation. Explicit knowledge involves ensuring that people have access to what they need, that important knowledge is stored and that the knowledge is reviewed, updated, or discarded. It is usually found in databases, memos, notes, documents, etc. Both tacit and explicit knowledge are usually shared among human.

Librarians and information professionals are to be of good support to others in their search for knowledge by ensuring high level of professionalism and good image making in the way they treat or relate with users. As the Bible made mention of knowledge, it also speaks of knowledge sharing among people. Jesus Christ himself attested to this fact when He stated: "There is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving" (Acts 20:35). Here, giving is one way to share and this is expected from fellow humans. Knowledge sharing helps to appreciate the value of knowledge itself. An individual may post a topic to request for a specific knowledge; while someone else who possesses the knowledge may reply to the question by providing the knowledge required. Sharing knowledge means sharing wisdom with someone else. Knowledge, like happiness, grows with sharing.

As LIBRARIANS, we should be humble enough to learn from others and share all the practical knowledge and information that we possess. By so doing, the whole society can prosper as a single unit. Similarly, knowledge should not be hoarded, but should be shared and spread among others. Today, information resource managers should encourage the sharing of knowledge so that each and every one in the society is aware and possesses some basic knowledge that can be used to better their lots. This is even made easier today with the application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in academic libraries. There is the presence of social media, websites, electronic resources and databases etc to enable sharing of relevant knowledge to users in this 21st century. Sharing of relevant knowledge is a theological injunction which is similar to building faith. Faith comes by hearing and by hearing the word of God (Rom 10: 17).

CONCLUSION

Every good endeavour/profession in life is God-induced. It is the intention of God that every steward be found faithful (1 Cor. 4:2). Librarians as information managers are expected to serve their users well and faithfully in all the sections and departments of the library. Even in this 21st century, with the emergence of information and communication technologies, librarians are to serve better. The administrators of academic libraries are much more expected to see that people under them are mentored well and with love so that work under them will move well and smoothly. Mentorship should be taken seriously as well as staff welfare. When these are properly taken care of, librarians will be much more motivated to work. Furthermore, continuous training of staff and sponsorship to conferences and seminars should be intensified for effective and efficient delivery of services in the library. Nevertheless, librarians should see their work as divine and God ordained and put in their best to render quality services to users especially in the academic libraries where research and scholarship that shape the society are carried out, knowing fully well that God will demand stewardship from every one of us.

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