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**Relevance of Interreligious Dialogue Amidst
Multiplicity in The Society**

Negussie Andre Domnic



Relevance of Interreligious Dialogue Amidst Multiplicity in the Society



Negussie Andre Domic^{1*}

¹St. Augustine University of Tanzania, Tanzania.

Website: www.saut.ac.tz

*Correspondence Author's Email: gnad2010@yahoo.com



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“We often hate each other because we fear each other; we fear each other because we don’t know each other; we don’t know each other; because we cannot communicate; we cannot communicate because we are separated.” Martin Luther King.

Abstract

Purpose: The study aimed to examine the relevance of interreligious dialogue amidst multiplicity in the society

Methodology: The study applied desktop review methodology to gather relevant literature.

Findings: We are living in pluralist world, confronted with a supermarket of ideologies and religions. The variety of ideologies particularly religious ideologies and beliefs poses problems when any one of them is regarded as the supreme and absolute truth and the rest of them are considered to be of no use. In the past centuries religious exclusiveness cause enough suffering locally, but today clashes between religious have global repercussions. Today, when the world has attained a great technological progress and scientific achievements, it is disconcerting to say that the people are making disputes in the name of

religion. Thousands of people are killed and nations have been divided. In this era of confusion and distressed life, where we grow more afraid than the previous day, afraid of our neighbors, or folks, our society and other’s beliefs. To protect the humanity form this appalling condition the only solution would be interreligious dialogue which is mandatory if not dynamic for everyone to have the understanding of different religions.

Recommendations: this study believe that education is the most important thing for smooth education dialogue process. Evidence has shown that interreligious dialogue is one of the paths to build bridges among diverse cultural and religious communities that otherwise would be in conflict.

Keywords: *Religion, Interreligious Dialogue, Misunderstanding, Cultural Values*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, civilized people seek to control their conduct by practicing a series of conscious values and some of them are, of course, peculiarly individualistic, or hedonistic, they are based upon individual feelings of pleasure or pain (Ellwood, 1913). Because of this individualistic culture, the world is facing all sorts of problems, such as poverty, corruption, war, crime, unethical life, dehumanization among others. These problems are happening in the era of irreligion. This is the age of the United Nations, the age of human rights, the age of high technology, the age of freedom and democracy and comparatively time when many people are highly educated.

At the same time, it is during this age the educated one are producing a huge and sophisticated weapons of mass destruction. We have all sorts of terrible problems precisely during this age of secular humanism, where international organizations are controlled by secular humanism. This century is polluted by unethical values, egoism, corruption. With the current education system, the higher education cannot give a solution because the higher education itself is polluted. Education system doesn't give priority concerning the sense of humanity, but it is concentrating on the polluted theories. Comparing this time to the past centuries, our century has more educated people, but concerning the value of human being the disastrous century is our century which is validating the same sex marriage. Which means our sense of humanity is polluted by unethical values, and not respect the nature of human being.

The current context of crisis in Africa is not only financial and economic in nature, but also political, social, mental, and even ideological crisis. To mention few countries that are not stable in Africa: Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Niger, Libya, Congo, etc. To solve these problems all the religion has to go back to their original sense of believe and live according to it, which its foundation is love for human being and God. The commitment of higher education institutions is based on the value of religion which is respect of human being. Every education system has to respect the value of human being.

The problem is, if different religious organizations and faiths are not working together, solving these systemic problems remains a big challenge in our society. Dialogue between followers of different religions is of paramount importance today. Undoubtedly, in Africa interreligious harmony is a major need, and lack of it has emerged as a major challenge. Religious diversity presents formidable challenges as a result of ignorance, misunderstanding, prejudice, intolerance, and tension (Wildan, 2020). Lack of knowledge and scarcity of interaction with members of other religions can lead to intolerance that negatively impacts communities and may increase violence. Ethnic and religious diversity is poor when missing openness with other communities (Brie, 2011). Religion divides individuals and communities, also may create enemies between friends, and ultimately leads to misunderstanding and violence.

Issues of religious ignorance, intolerance, and tension can be addressed through intentional interreligious dialogue, as a component of interreligious cooperation. No dialogue can be conducted if there is no respect for human rights, rule of law, democratic principles and spiritual values. To recover the human values that we are losing, all the religions have to improve their dialogue, not only theological dialogue, but first of all life dialogue (Russell, 2014).

There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There will be no peace among different religions groups without dialogue. Dialogue between followers of different religious groups is important in propagating peace and corporation among different religions and cultures. The principle of interreligious and intercultural dialogue is oriented towards developing the ability to listen, to respect the diversity of beliefs, and to identify common religious experiences. Dialogue is not just something that takes place on an official or academic level only, it is part of daily life during which different cultural and religious groups interact with each other directly where tensions between them are the most tangible. It is a challenging process by which adherents of differing

religious traditions encounter each other in order to break down the walls of division that stand at the centre of most wars (Abroo, 2020).

Unity in diversity is a major issue in the world of today. Fear and disorder are found all around us. Armed destruction is common. Individualism is everywhere in the world, in African tribalism is a big problem. Stronger power is inflicting atrocities on those weaker than themselves. Terrorism is being carried out in the name of stopping terrorism. The fundamental issue is lack of peace. All efforts to resolve the problems have failed already. Even if the United Nations Charter encourage respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion, and encourage recognition of the interdependence of the people of the world. With the current situation the United Nations appears to be failing.

All humanity is pondering that when, where and how will they be able to achieve peace. The biggest problem of our world is lack of recognition of God and His guidance. Undoubtedly, in today's world inter-community harmony is a major need, and lack of it has emerged as a major challenge. Interreligious and intercommunity harmony must be built on the foundations and concerns that different religious communities share in common. Interreligious dialogue must build bridges of understanding between different religions. There will be no peace among nations without peace among the religions. There will be no peace among the religions without peace among religions.

Theoretical Review

This study was guided by the pluralism theory of John Hick (1922-2012) and interreligious dialogue theory of Karl Rahner (1904-1984). To John Hick the world religions worship God who has been given various names. According to him the world religions are the different human responses to the one divine reality. The religions tradition can be evaluation on the basis of its capability of offering a better quality of human existence. John Hick explains the pluralistic approach towards religions in the following words: it must involve a shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the center to the thought that it is God who is at the center and that all the religions of mankind serve and revolve around God. Hick's emphasis has been on the choice of love of God instead of his judgment. God's love carries universality and leads the whole world to salvation (Hick, 1989; Mao, 2018; Ebrahimi, 2023).

Karl Rahner (1904-1984) developed a sort of modern theology which deeply influenced not only the Catholic Church but also other Christian sects. He is the pioneer of interreligious dialogue and emerged a leading figure of Vatican Second Council (1962-1968). He presented four theses concerning Christians and non-Christian religion: firstly, Christianity claims to be the absolute religion intended by God for all but the human persons meet it when they are seriously confronted by it. in the second place, he discussed the social aspect of salvation. The humans are on the way to salvation through a concrete religion in which they find themselves. Because of confrontation with the Christian message, non-Christian religions are validly leading to salvation. The third thesis recognizes the follower of other religions as anonymous Christian because of their implicit relation to Christ. The fourth thesis reflects upon the idea of mission. Karl Rahner argues that the "unbounded action of the Spirit" and the "non-incarnate presence of the Word" may not only be found outside Christianity, but other religions may be recipients of divine grace and revelation in ways that are unique to them (Rahner, 1966; Dupuis, 2004; Hall, 2005). These theories of John Hick and Karl Rahner aptly guides this paper on "Relevance of interreligious Dialogue amidst Multiplicity in the society"

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study dependent on secondary data as the main source of information. Relevant data was reviewed on the relevance of interreligious dialogue amidst multiplicity in the society. Initially, eighty-two (82) online and hard copy of different sources were collected for this study. Most of these

studies were relevant to interreligious dialogue and intercommunity dialogue in Africa. The author later narrowed down to 45 published works which were used in this study. From these studies, findings on the phenomenon were narrated and interpretations done. Later, conclusion and recommendations on the way forward were drawn.

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The early model of dialogue is linked to the Socratic method of questioning, which challenged individuals to articulate their own opinions on how the world works. According to Zappen (2004), Plato asserted that, 'dialogues' were rooted in a rhetorical tradition that promoted persuasion as a medium for conflict reduction. Through this process of questioning and discovery, participants eventually came to a common meaning and mutual framework that transcended individual ideologies (Zúñiga jkk, Nagda, Chesler & Cyton-Walker, 2007)

Dewey (1938), recognized that dialogue has a different purpose and approach than other forms of communication. Debate encourages proselytizing, and mediation seeks resolution, while dialogue strives to promote understanding (Dessel & Rogge, 2008). According to Buber dialogue is the means of acceptance of otherness. In dialogue there cannot be place for domination, victory or eliminating someone from the present, but it is an event which exists between people who are without mutual reservation. The people will turn towards each other in authentic togetherness. The sphere of interhuman is one in which a person is confronted by the other (Górzna, 2014; Habermas, 2015). Dialogue is a way of life in which we become more human by treating others as human practically, it does not have an order and cannot be controlled. The characteristics of ethical dialogue as: openness, appreciation of difference, acceptance of conflict, mutual respect and trust, sincerity, honesty and a willingness to admit errors (Russell, 2014).

Another perspective on dialogue came from a physicist focusing on the effects of dialogue by Bohm. According to him dialogue has an integrative principle for organizing knowledge. In discussing specialization within science, Bohm claims that fragmentation can be overcome by the fact that there is a background of ideas that extends across the sciences without limit. What inevitably invites dialogue is the spirit of creative free play within scientific communication are long-range connections between the ideas, approaches, and methods. Through dialogue he believes, we might just discover a new holistic meaning for ourselves in nature (Bohm, 1980; Dabrowski, 1995).

Most of literature has one of the approaches concerning interreligious dialogue. The first approaches interreligious dialogue as an individual endeavor, which takes the line of hermeneutic processes of individual learning and understanding. The second approaches tend to use the individualized concept of interreligious as a basis for transnational or transregional generalizations. They discuss the structures as well as the impact of interreligious activities, without systematic references to differences in various socio-cultural contexts.

Paul Hedges underline that, dialogue is such a complex process that one has to distinguish several dimensions of it so that dialogue can be applied efficiently. One of the most influential of these typologies was published by Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples entitled 'Dialogue and Proclamation' in 1991. The document classified in to four dimensions the individual interreligious dialogue activities as dialogue of life; a dialogue of action, a dialogue of theological exchange and a dialogue of religious experience. According to several authors, even if there have been isolated cases or experiences of interreligious dialogue in history, such as Ashoka the Great, Saint Francis of Assisi, or Akbar the Great, their impacts were sometimes partial, instrumental, personality-dependent, and geographically limited, and had little continuity.

Twentieth century history has witnessed multiple reflections through which religious individuals and institutions stopped considering themselves as the ultimate truth and started recognizing that, truth

may have different expressions and forms. Among these, there is the World Council of Churches founded in 1948 and the non-governmental organization (NGO) Religions for Peace founded in 1970; recent decades have also witnessed Islamic communities and representatives massively endorsing interreligious dialogue, as is the case of the KAICIID Dialogue centre founded in 2012 (Campdepadrò-Cullell, Pulido-Rodríguez, Marauri, & Racionero-Plaza, 2021).

Institutions and academic organizations depict different types of interreligious dialogue pursuing or achieving different kinds of goals or outputs. Most of them endorse the Vatican Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue classification of the dialogue of life, the dialogue of action, the dialogue of theological exchange, and the dialogue of religious experience. Interreligious dialogue will seek to embrace truth and wisdom in the reciprocal interaction that is marked by love (Campdepadrò-Cullell, Pulido-Rodríguez, Marauri, & Racionero-Plaza, 2021).

Each religion must recognize itself in its portrait because there is no abstract or neutral collection of values and norms against which to measure or judge a particular religion; yet each religion expresses, tells, and talks with its values and metaphors. Religions are struggled to answer the same questions by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language, try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing ways, comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. Through dialogue we can recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values (Paul VI, 1965).

The Role of Religion and its Function

There are different aspects of religion such as, internal, external, individual and social. In religious consciousness and emotional element is preset. The emotional elements are ideas, thoughts and feelings. Not only that, it also concerns man's relation to God. These emotional elements as well as intellectual elements are referred by internal aspect. Apart from this an important aspect of religion is practical activities such as, rites and ceremonies. These practical activities are different way through which men express their religious feelings. These practical activities are referred in external aspect of religion. Religion is, in fact, an individual matter. It is individual who acquires religious experience and he has conviction on it. He personally realizes religious experiences in his life. To a social philosopher, social aspect of religion is more important and carries greatest significance. This social aspect is emphasized by all the great religions of the world. It is because of the fact that religion plays an important role in maintaining social unity, its promotion and maintenance (Nath, 2015).

Many human societies have left us historical evidence of their systems of belief, whether it was worship of the sun, of gods and goddesses, knowledge of good and evil or of the sacred. Whatever the veracity of the truth claims in a religious system, and whatever the possibility that religion may have been invented by human beings as a collective fantasy, Durkheim and other sociologists have argued that, religion functions primarily as a means of social cohesion. This functionalist perspective, as it sometimes called, understands the role of religion as that which helps human societies to organize themselves engaging a sense of unity and purpose around shared belief and practice (Luttio, 2017). We might go on with a whole list of religious concepts, and we should find no difficulty in showing that psychologically they are socially derived; that they are projections of social values; and that their main function is social. Religion is identified with the most intimate and vital phases of social consciousness, that is, the consciousness of groups of the continuity and solidarity of their life (Ellwood, 1913). We are not warranted in affirming that, morality of a high type cannot exist in individuals without religious beliefs of some sort, for that would leave out the influence of inborn tendencies and of habit upon human nature, yet we can say that, practically morality has never subsisted in human society without religious sanctions.

In all ages and among all people, religion has been a powerful instrument of social control, because it adds a supernatural sanction to conduct. Everywhere in primitive society, after institutions of a certain type have been established, we find that religion comes in to sanction them and to give them through

its sanction great stability. Religious values commonly attach themselves in such early society to habits of action which have been found to be safe and to conduct to individual and group welfare. They reinforce the habits and so also the institutions founded upon them. Without the religious check the human race would have been borne to destruction by the extravagant vagaries of unbridled reason. Both feeling and reason as essentially individualistic, needing the restraint of some ultra-national force such as religion (Ellwood, 1913). Throughout history, religion has continued to be a central part of societies and human experience, shaping how individuals react to the environments in which they live (Oluwaseun, David & Issa, 2014).

Sociologists study religion as both a belief system and a social institution. As a belief system, religion shapes what people think and how they see the world. As a social institution, religion is a pattern of social action organized around the beliefs and practices that people develop to answer questions about the meaning of existence. As an institution, religion persists over time and has an organizational structure into which members are socialized. From the functionalist perspective of sociological theory, religion is an integrative force in society because it has the power to shape collective beliefs. It provides cohesion in the social order by promoting a sense of belonging and collective consciousness. While Durkeim and Weber concentrated on how religion contributes to the cohesion of society, Karl Marx focused on the conflict and oppression that religion provided to societies. Marx saw religion as a tool for class oppression in which it promotes stratification because it support a hierarchy of people on earth and the subordination of humankind to divine authority (Oluwaseun, David & Issa, 2014).

Religion in paly a great role in developing society especially in ethical spheres. The ethical prescriptions are consistent with religious doctrines and that provide guidance for ethical conduct in society are the essence of religious involvement in social responsibility. Religious affiliated individuals make ethical decisions in terms of judgement, action, and behaviour based on the individual's religious values. These values include fairness, truthfulness, and trustworthiness. Therefore, religion infuses society with moral fiber to act responsibly, driven by a moral conscience. Religion is not merely a divisive force in the affairs of humankind. It can unite people across ethnic, racial, and political lines through a common allegiance to their Creator. To the extent that religious ties can, in fact, provide common ground and a complementary, if not common, world-view and morality between opposing nationalities or ethnic groups (Beyers 2021).

Religion helps to shape the character of an individual and thereby it molds social life. It brings forth the sense of social value in the mind of people. In obeying the social laws or to respect the elders and to show sympathy towards the feelings of others, or to discharge the social obligations faithfully. Not only this, a sense of fellowship amongst the people belonging to different communities is also taught by religion. Moreover, religion teaches man to love and service to God through service to humanity. In developing moral consciousness amongst people, religion acts as an inspiring factor. Religion enforces uniformity of behaviour and it strengthens social solidarity and thereby acts as an instrument in stabilizing social order. Therefore, religion is the discipline which touches the conscience and helps us to struggle with evil and sordidness, saves us from greed, lust and hatred, releases moral power and imparts courage in the enterprise of saving the world (Nath, 2015). According to Bosch (1991) theology and ethics belong together. Ethics is the hands and feet and face of theology, and theology the vital organs, the soul of ethics. The problem of my own bread is a material issue, the problem of my neighbor's is a spiritual issue. In this respect there is a unified theological perspective, therefore, there is indissoluble connection between theology and social ethics.

If religion has not always worked to the highest social advantage in the past, so in the future it may possibly work to social disadvantage unless properly guided and controlled its development. What religion does depend altogether upon the ideals which it champions. Modern society, therefore, needs a religion adapted to the requirements of modern life. The great need of modern civilization is a

humanitarian ethics which will teach individuals to find self-development and their happiness in the unselfish service of others, and which will forbid any individual, class, nation, or even race from regarding itself as an end in itself apart from the rest of humanity. These are the only ethics which can solve the social problems (Ellwood, 1913).

Interreligious Dialogues

Dialogue is more than an exchange of information, although facts are part of it. It is not dialogue in the true sense of the world if the aim is purely strategic or if it intends to manipulate the other. Moreover, it has to be taken into account that dialogue is characterized by an inherent tension: it requires on firm and reflected identities of those who participate in it. Religious convictions are not to be left behind but are the basis of an interreligious dialogue. Thus, identity and convictions are not to be left behind, but are part of dialogue and may even be deepened and intensified through it. This is what makes its dynamism and fruitfulness.

On the other hand, this identity has to be open toward learning from the other, based on the fundamental insight that our knowledge can never be complete or absolute in a contingent and imperfect world (Gabriel, 2017). Dialogue is not debate. In dialogue each partner must listen to the other as openly and sympathetically as he can in an attempt to understand the other's position as precisely and, as it were, as much from within, as possible. Such an attitude automatically includes the assumption that at any point we might find the partner's position so persuasive that, if we would act with integrity, we would have to change, and change can be disturbing (Swidler, 1985).

The principles of interreligious and intercultural dialogue are oriented towards developing the ability to listen, to respect the diversity of beliefs, and to identify common religious experiences. They ask for openness to difference and the predominance of ethics over dogmatism and towards offering solutions to problems through a critical and participative citizenry. Interreligious dialogue presupposes the willingness to rethink one's own idea in the light of those of others, thereby opening the door to mutual enrichment and transformation (Vilà, Freixa & Aneas 2020).

Swidler presented ten principles for interreligious dialogue: (1) The primary purpose of dialogue is to learn, that is, to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality, and then to act accordingly. We enter into dialogue so that we can learn, change, and grow, not so we can force change on the other. (2) Interreligious dialogue must be a two-side project within each religious community and between religious communities. (3) Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity. (4) In interreligious dialogue we must not compare our ideas with our partner's practice but, rather, our ideas with our partner's ideas, our practice with our partner's practice. (5) Each participant must define himself.

(6) each participant must come to the dialogue with no hard and fast assumptions as to where the points of disagreement are. Rather, each partner should not only listen to the other partner with openness and sympathy but also attempt to agree with the dialogue partner as far as is possible while still maintaining integrity with his own tradition; where he absolutely can agree no further without violating his own integrity, precisely there is the real point of disagreement which most often turns out to be different from the point of disagreement that was falsely assumed ahead of time. (7) Dialogue can take place only between equals both coming to learn. (8) Dialogue can take place only on the basis of mutual trust; approach first those issues most likely to provide common ground, thereby establishing human trust.

(9) Persons entering into interreligious dialogue must be at least minimally self-critical of both themselves and their own religious traditions. A lack of such self-criticism implies that one's tradition already has all the correct answers. Such an attitude makes dialogue not only unnecessary but even impossible. (10) each participant eventually must attempt to experience the partner's religion or ideology from within, for a religion is not merely something of the head, but also of the spirit, heart,

and whole being, individual and communal (Swidler, 1985).

Generally, interreligious dialogue is an exercise of learning about those that are radically different from me and my community and learning to coexist with those who subscribe to different beliefs, customs, and worldviews other than my own. It also serves to strengthen my own faith identity. It is one thing to describe my beliefs to another person that already comes pre-wired with a set of similar vocabulary and understanding of social constructs to interpret what I am saying within similar parameters to how I myself perceive it. However, it is an entirely different game when I have to explain my faith to someone outside of my faith. I have to use different vocabulary, I am pushed to own what I am saying, search and find different forms to articulate particular truths. I am stretched. I am also amazed to learn similar teaching of other (Abroo, 2020).

Pontifical Council for inter-Religious Dialogue in its document 'Dialogue and Proclamation' (1991) presented four forms of dialogue: dialogue of life; dialogue of action; dialogue of theological exchange and dialogue of religious experience. The *dialogue of life*, where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations. The *dialogue of action*, in which different religion collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people. The *dialogue of theological exchange*, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values. And the *dialogue of religious experience*, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.

We continue to read in the document that one should not lose sight of this variety of forms of dialogue. Where it is to be reduced to theological exchange, dialogue might easily be taken as a sort of luxury item reserved for specialists. On the contrary all are called to dialogue though not all in the same way. It can be seen, moreover, that the different forms are interconnected. Contacts in daily life and common commitment to action will normally open the door for cooperation in promoting human and spiritual values; they may also eventually lead to the dialogue of religious experiences pertaining to the public interest.

To be effective in interreligious dialogue and religions activities, there is a need for education institutions to play their part especially in the three interreligious dialogue forms (dialogue of life, dialogue of action and dialogue of religious experience). To eradicate religious intolerance, there is a need to address the problem of perception of otherness, rooted in the collective mind. As far as practical science is concerned, the relationship between religion and the philosophy of education is in the strengthening of values (Vilà, Freixa & Aneas, 2020). The philosophy of education, as far as religion is concerned, can be supported and strengthened by religion in the sense of cementing universal values.

Knowledge of the diversity and depth of religious traditions and wisdom affords personal enrichment and mutual recognition, peaceful coexistence and respect, and the prevention of fundamentalist positions. Thus, it is necessary to provide basic education in religious diversity. The development of cognitive competencies related to the knowledge of cultural and religious diversity can be a starting point for overcoming discrimination. Tools for peace and intercultural education are also needed, with a sound pedagogical grounding in the field of ethics education and in values ranging from hospitality (Vilà, Freixa & Aneas, 2020).

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

All conflicts, hostilities, and hatred are in part due to narrow-minded and textual interpretations of religion. The dialogue between followers of different faith traditions is not about conversion. It is the best practical expression of peace and harmony. It does not mean to accept one's religion but it is essential to stand in communal harmony as well as teaching you about the other religions, engaging

in it helps you to understand your own religion better (Wildan, 2020; Abroo 2020). To combat communal hatred and promote inter-community harmony, people of different religions must strive to promote a culture of dialogue. People should work together to make the world better. They should be able to make ways come out of the dangers of the modern technocracy and environmental devastation, energy crises, youth problems, hunger, violent radicalism and decadence of morality and religion. Dialogue between followers of different religions traditions can be an excellent way to heal divisions in society (Abroo, 2020).

The following are some of recommendations:

- i. To engage the educated and the young generation to participate positively with the ethnic and religious diversity;
- ii. We have to teach and learn more in religious diversity and intercultural education;
- iii. We have to make religious differences a factor of cultural enrichment instead of being a source of confrontation, especially through the lenses of mutual understanding, tolerance and acceptance of difference; and
- iv. Education polices have to be oriented towards religious diversity.

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