

## **ECUMENICAL APPROACH TO HUMAN RELATIONS**

By B.U. Menkiti

The term "ecumenism" originally came from the Greek word 'Oikoumene' meaning "the universal, the inhabited world" and has always been broadly used even though it has a variety of meanings attached to it. (Kryanev 1983:5). Ecumenism thus appeared as a "geographical idea." It later gained religious connotation and translated itself into Religious Ecumenism. This began to gain prominence and in the 20th century it has come to be used primarily to mean the movement to unite all Christian churches. But (Anih 1987:128) writes that religious ecumenism does not mean one church absorbing another or forming a new political structure with a new constitution but that the churches continue doing their own thing as partners to the same tune. This means each church using its own mode of worship, prayer and sacrifice to the greater glory of God and for the good of mankind. Thus ecumenism as far as religion is concerned is not preaching fusion or merging of all churches into one but for respect for the belief of the members of individual churches.

Later the Romans stretched ecumenism beyond religion. They began to use the term 'occumenicus' to indicate a political concept. Thus occumenicus was employed by the Romans to indicate the totality of people under the Roman Empire. Here the word ecumenism denotes inclusiveness ... without exception. But the term ecumenism as used universally by the Romans became individualised when John IV the Faster, Bishop of Constantinople (582-395) had the title 'Ecumenical Patriarch' attached to his name when he was under Emperor Maurice. This generated a lot of

protests from Rome but without any visible positive result. Since then people started using the word ecumenism in relation to individual human being. Thus at times you hear people talk of ecumenical worship, belief attitude, child, man or woman. Here in I.E.C.E we have a pamphlet on 'Growing in Ecumenical Attitude.'

From the above, it does appear from my own point of view that ecumenism has two dimensions.

(a) Religious dimension when it is used to denote a movement towards tolerance and respect for beliefs of various religious groups without these religious groups fusing or merging to form one distinct church.

(b) Secular ecumenism involving some sub-dimensions seeks for better understanding of oneself; of human kind individually and collectively and helping one another to make the universe a better place to live in. Secular ecumenism thus appears to accommodate political, social and moral sub-dimensions among others. Political aspect of secular ecumenism involves how the people in a geographical location should be better governed and adequately provided for.

Social sub-dimension seeks the best way for people to socially interact with one another for better human relations. Moral aspect teaches on areas of norms and values of various social groupings - directing the activities of the people to abide by the set standards. These two, religious and social dimensions are of course interwoven, not wholly compartmentalised. One dovetails into the other.

Human, means - of man or mankind (or human kind, a human being, human nature. Hornby and Covie (1981:416). This means every man and woman in the inhabited world.



Relations in the context of this paper means - dealings; affairs; what a person, group, or country has to do with another. Hornby and Covie (1981:711).

Human relations call to mind how we deal and associate with our fellow human beings. Are we mindful of other people's rights and privileges? How do we approach others' visible stressful situation? How do we treat or respond to aggressive situation or behaviour? In general do we see man in part stressing on what he does right or wrong, or do we see the totality of his individuality and uniqueness as a distinct human person? These and perhaps other questions will help make this paper clear.

Not losing sight of the original meaning of ecumenism - this universe, the inhabited world, is a stage where human kind play their various parts as a religionist, politician, doctor, teacher, student, lawyer, engineer etc. "It is therefore of basic importance to recognise that human relations do not exist in a vacuum." "No man is an island unto himself and it is equally true of social groupings whether it is the family or a social class." Torrington (1972:306). There are conglomeration of interactive activities going on, either person to person or in groups.

How do we approach human relations in the ecumenical way? Love is at the centre of ecumenical approach to human relations. Here I mean God inspired love. St. Paul sees love as the most excellent way. In 1st Corinthians, Chapter 13 verses 4-7 he writes "Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud, it is not rude .... It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." Jesus in one of His sermons commanded His listeners to love God with their whole heart... and love their neighbours as themselves. He meant that human kind should keep the above commandment. If we have love for one another we should always seek to exhibit the qualities of love above as enunciated by St. Paul.

Love binds people together just like ecumenism seeks to unify people of various creeds, cultures, status and class. Love should encourage us to show love to all humankind and when this manifests in us we then begin to exhibit some kind gesture towards others: be patient with people we cannot easily please or understand, tolerate people who have different shades of opinion from ours, envy no one but glory in their success. There should be no room for pride in us. Love should be so blended with the human nature in order to produce infinite series of positive actions and reactions which will help change our attitude for better.

Human relations involve attitude, behaviour/action. Behaviour involves a way of behaving; manners (good or bad); treatment shown towards others. Behaviour; has covert (hidden, disguised) and overt (done or shown openly, publicly) connotations. Action involves process of doing things; movement using energy influence. Attitude is a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to a class of objects (Sarnoff) in Greenwold et al (1960).

Ecumenism should colour our attitude and behaviour towards one another. It should also manifest in whatever walk of life we find ourselves. Are you a medical doctor, a teacher, a nurse, a trader, a clergyman, a civil servant, a tradesman, a student, a parent etc.? How do we deal with people we meet in our work places? Do we treat them in a human manner, with understanding? How honest are we with them and how do we react to their not so pleasant attitude. Rendering assistance to the needy; helping others solve their problems, making other people happy; respecting other people's belief, opinion, privileges and rights; tolerating one another's weak aspects are areas of positive approach to human relations. Are we courteous to people; how truthful are we and do we co-operate with others to achieve positive results? Do we as civil servants perform our assigned duties without asking for bribe? Am I the medical doctor who capitalises on the ignorance of the



patients and my inordinate ambition to get rich quick, inflate the cost of my drugs and services. Or am I that teacher who never thinks about the academic and moral attainment of my students? Do I as a politician seek for and place the common good of the people above my personal interests? As a student do I bully the younger ones or do I see them as people with a common goal?

All human beings in this inhabited world play various parts. Depending on the disposition of any given individual, these parts tend to be negative or positive. Some psychologists have considered some concepts which predisposes people towards reasonable functioning in their social setting and by extension, religious setting. For Adler the concept of social interest means "the sense of human solidarity, the connectedness of man to man ... the wider connotation of a sense of fellowship in the community Wolfe (1928). Social interest if well developed will dispose an individual to relate well with people while at the same time he will experience a sense of belonging. This will culminate into his style of life. Sheldon (1940) theorised on constitutional psychology using body type as a reference. For him the endomorph - a person of large size - "is very social .... physical comfort." He also has mesomorph and ectomorph sizes each exhibiting varying temperaments distinct from the endomorph. Allport in his trait theory (Hjelle 1981:312) has his social category which notes that social individual has his value on love of people. His attitudes ... selfless and sympathetic. Murray's theory of human motivation borders on psychogenic needs which include affiliation which is the need to draw others to self, to be with and do things with others. All the above theories border on those aspects of personality development and dynamics that aid individuals to relate with one another. So psychology like other social sciences took care of human relations from various theoretical stand points.

Though healthy human relations should permeate our everyday dealings with other men, how often do we take these people into

consideration as we carry on our day to day functions? Do we stop to think that there are others equally carrying on their various assignments along side with us. Do we help to make the environment conducive for them? Sometimes these things do not happen the way they should. Our attitudes tend to create problems and at times disharmony. Torrington (1972) writes that there is at present a widespread loss of confidence towards one another. The problem of confidence and the task of creating a justified confidence are real indeed. The problem and therefore the task both have extrinsic aspects. Extrinsic, (external) these are pervasive and determinant factors at work in the society that are outside the direct influence of the individual though he is being influenced by what happens around him. These factors can manifest in the form of negative attitude and behaviour exhibited by people towards the individual. These can be in form of aggression of various dimensions. Man therefore shall not be wolf to man. Intrinsic (internal) are factors within the individual influenced of course, by what happens in the society. The intrinsic factors may relate to the genetic/biological make up of the individual to those behaviour the individual exhibits without any external intervention. They originate from the individual. These two aspects are subtly related. There is a continuing symbiotic interaction between them. Human relations is reciprocal. One person emits behaviour and another reacts.

It is necessary that people should study especially through observation those factors that make each person unique; (this should be done as people interact with one another) why people behave the way they do, how they react to stressful situations. Why are some people more tolerant than others? Why do some of us exhibit aggressive behaviour at the slightest provocation? And why are some people more amiable than others? If we seek answers to these questions then we should be in a better position to understand the individual's uniqueness and so be able to relate well with him.

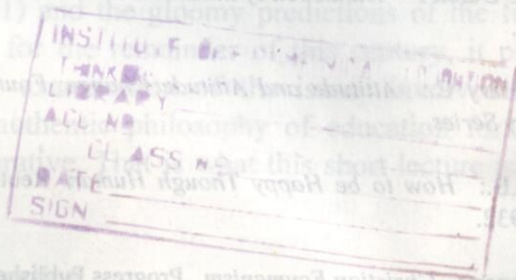


This in turn will promote a better human relationship when we consider others their intrinsic factors, their reaction to the extrinsic factors and then try to blend our attitude and behaviour to come to equilibrium with those of others, the result will be good human relations. But when we consider an individual as a human being and as part of the inhabited world who needs and deserves better human interaction for his comfort and well being, then we are approaching human relations in the ecumenical way. So in our attitude, actions and relationships we shall always see man as part of the inhabited world which all of us share and so behave in a kind, honest, patient and human manner.

For Cutlip and Centre (1978:311).

Attitudes and practices of interdependence, co-operation, collaboration and unification are not automatic. They need to be stimulated.

Therefore a platform for continuing effective relationship is based on an admission of interdependence among all who share in the well being of mankind.



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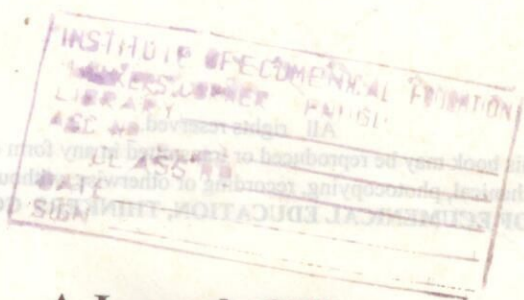
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