



NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

FACULTY OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

COURSE CODE: CRS837

COURSE TITLE: ECUMENISM

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CREDIT UNIT: 3

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COURSE GUIDE

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Introduction

Welcome to CRS837: Ecumenism. Ecumenism is a three credit unit course for MA students. The course is offered in the MA Christian Theology and Christian Religious Studies in National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). The Course comprises three modules with a total number of 14 units. The course is designed and developed with the appropriate theological accent suitable for Christian understanding and practice of Ecumenism.

The course guide is planned for students of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in the MA Programme of Christian Theology in National Open University of Nigeria. This guide is conceived as one of the several resources to help you successfully complete your course in “Ecumenism,” and ultimately your programme.

The study guide, therefore, provides you with basic information about the entire course, such as the aims and objectives, course material and structure, available services to support your learning, information on assignment and examination. You will also be guided on how to plan your time for the study; the amount of time you should spend on each study unit and your tutor-marked assignments.

It is my hope that this study guide will answer most of your questions. I also advise you to contact your study centre if you have further questions. I wish you all the best in your learning experience and successful completion of this course.

Course Aims

This course aims at helping you gain basic knowledge about ecumenism in addition to the knowledge you should acquire from other related courses. The approach adopted in this course is historical and theological. It acknowledges the import of the Christian scripture, the Church's

tradition and the contributions of theologians on ecumenism. It takes you back to the *raison d'être* of ecumenism as a necessity for Christian witness and service to the world. One of the stress points in this course is that ecumenism goes beyond the peaceful coexistence of churches. It is at the core of the mission of the Church, and a response to the teachings of Christ and the Scriptures. It is a divine mandate and teaching that demonstrates the expression of the life of the Triune God, who calls churches to existence and to follow the teachings of Christ and the apostolic traditions.

Although ecumenism is not primarily geared towards conversion, it does not exclude it. It is about first and foremost about living and working together; first as humans, and above all, as Christians. It upholds the Bible in high esteem as the living Word of God which guides the Christian faith.

The course, therefore, brings to our consciousness the whole essence of the life and the teachings of Jesus Christ. It aims using ecumenism to create a sustainable free and virtuous society where justice, peace and equity would reign. To buttress the importance of ecumenism, the course establishes the connection between ecumenism on the one side, and global economics and politics on the other hand. It teaches us that dialogue is the best option for unity and peace.

Ecumenism is a theological tradition that ought to be preserved by impacting same to subsequent generations, hence the teaching of ecumenism in schools at different levels is considered urgent. The teaching aims at preparing men and women for the challenges of the gospel. The course equally advises us to avoid the danger of slipping into the thinking that Ecumenism is compromise. Ecumenism should not seek to minimize the claims of the gospel for the sake of ecumenical spirit. Faithfulness to our Lord should govern our desire for building a broader relationship not just among the different church traditions but also with people of other faiths.

Course Objectives

You will find out that each unit in this course has stated objectives that it seeks to achieve. Pay close attention to those objectives for a better understanding of the course. However, by the time you are through with the course content, especially when you have studied material with some devotion, you will be able to:

- Define and discuss the concept of ecumenism
- Appreciate the importance and necessity of ecumenism in its wider scope
- Explain the biblical and theological foundation and principles for ecumenism
- Demonstrate the church's contribution in the formation of a responsible society through ecumenism.
- State clearly some concrete areas of the churches' accomplishment in the process of ecumenism: the pursuit of social justice and action, interfaith dialogue, cooperation in diakonia ministry, theological dialogue and fellowship.
- Identify and categorise the different levels of ecumenical cooperation: local, regional, national, international
- Show how ecumenical education can go beyond classroom and help to chart a new course for world peace.

Working through this Course

The 14 units from the 3 modules in this course are designed and presented in strata of a stair-step fashion, erected piece by piece with each unit standing on its own, and at the same time forming additional component that provides a stabilising effect for the whole. The implication is that you are expected to follow the units step-by-step for effective understanding and appreciation of the issues

raised in the course. As a student, you will do yourself a lot of good if you consult the recommended texts and other texts that are relevant to the course. These will help, in no small measure, to broaden your knowledge of the course.

Course Materials

There are four major components of the course, excluding this course guide. These are:

- Study Units
- Self-Assessment Exercise
- Tutor-Marked Assignment
- References

Study Units

This course contains three modules of fourteen study units. They are divided and classified as follows:

Module1		
	Unit 1	The History of Ecumenism
	Unit 2	Theological Grounds for Ecumenism
	Unit 3	The Structure of Ecumenism
	Unit 4	The Goals and Objectives of Ecumenism
	Unit 5	The Sociology of Ecumenism
	Unit 6	Problems and Prospects of Ecumenism
Module 2		
	Unit 1	Principles of Ecumenism
	Unit 2	The Significance of Ecumenism
	Unit 3	Ecumenism and Contemporary Issues
	Unit 4	Ecumenical Bodies/Organizations in Nigeria
Module 3		
	Unit 1	The Philosophy of Teaching Ecumenism
	Unit 2	Teaching Ecumenism in the High School and Tertiary Level
	Unit 3	The Content of Ecumenical Lessons to Contemporary Issues
	Unit 4	Ecumenism as An Instrument for National Integration

Self-Assessment Exercise

In designing and writing of the course, I have consciously generated many self-assessment exercises at the end of each section and subsection in order to assist you to test your level of understanding. This is also in agreement with the nature of the course design, which gives you the advantage of approaching the issues in ecumenism from many different perspectives. Thus, the self-assessment exercises are to your benefits. Do not hesitate to test yourself with them as they will help to sharpen your understanding as you progress in the course. They will also reinforce your understanding of the material.

Tutor-Marked Assignment

There are tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) at the end of every unit. You are advised to solve the assignments and submit your answers to your tutor. At the end of the course, the tutor-marked assignments will carry 30% of the total marks of the course. I strongly believe that the tutor-

marked assignments, together with the self-assessment exercises, will assist you in achieving the stated learning objectives of the individual units and of the course in general.

References

At the end of each unit, you will find references and list of books for further reading. It makes easier for you to identify relevant literature relating to each unit. You will gain much if you can read such books and similar ones on the topics treated. Reading the books will help to build your knowledge and thereby enhance your understanding of the course.

Assignments

As occasions demand, you will from time to time, have assignments to write. If I were you, I will equally take the assignments serious, knowing that they may constitute a part of my final performance in the course.

Assessment

Your assessment in this course will come in two forms: the tutor-marked assignments (TMA) and a written examination—end of semester examination (ESE). The tutor-marked assignment which will be organised by your tutor carries 30% of the total marks for the course, and the end of semester examination 70%.

Final Examination and Grading

Your final examination, which carries 70% of the total marks, comes at the end of the course. This will constitute a two-hour examination, where you will be asked questions on the issues that you have already encountered in the course of your study.

Course Marking Scheme

The total marks accruable to you from this course are broken down as follows:

Assessment	Marks
Assignments	Four assignments of 10% each, out of which the best three is selected to make up 30% of the total marks
Final Examination	70% of the total course marks
Total	100% of course marks

Course Time Schedule

This course is designed to cover 15 weeks outside the first week which is dedicated to the studying of this course guide. You are expected to complete the assignment for the unit at the end of every week (beginning from week 2), and submit the same to your tutorial facilitator. See the table below for the study plan. However, your tutorial facilitator may decide on the number of assignments taken from the assignments at the end of each unit.

Each study unit consists of one week's work and should take you about two hours to complete. The unit is structured to include: specific objectives, guidance for study, reading materials, self-assessment exercises, and tutor-marked assignments. All these are to assist you achieve the stated learning objectives of the individual study units of the course.

Module	Unit	Title of the Study Unit	Week's Activity	Assignment
		Course Guide	1	Course Guide Form
Module1				

	Unit 1	The History of Ecumenism	2	Assignment
	Unit 2	Theological Grounds for Ecumenism	3	Assignment
	Unit 3	The Structure of Ecumenism	4	Assignment
	Unit 4	The Goals and Objectives of Ecumenism	5	Assignment
	Unit 5	The Sociology of Ecumenism	6	Assignment
	Unit 6	Problems and Prospects of Ecumenism	7	Assignment
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Module 3				
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	Unit 3	The Content of Ecumenical Lessons to Contemporary Issues	14	Assignment
	Unit 4	Ecumenism as An Instrument for National Integration	15	Assignment
		Revision	16	Revision

How to Get the Best from this Course

In distance learning, the study units replace the university lectures. You are, therefore, expected to read through the course on your own and at your own time. Another aspect of this is that you do not read at the prompting of your tutor. You read when you decide to do so. Since there is no lecturer for you in this course, the study unit tells you what to do at each point. It will benefit you immensely if you obey its instructions.

The units are arranged in a common format. The first item of every unit is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit, and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. What follows next is a set of learning objectives. These objectives, as already stated, let you know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. These learning objectives are meant to guide your study. You are advised to go back to the stated objectives at the end of every unit, to know whether you have achieved them in the course of your learning.

The self-assessment exercises at the end of the units are to help you to assess your understanding of the units. Do not neglect them, for the way you answer them provides you with a mirror to gauge your performance in the course.

Tutors and Tutorials

Your tutor will provide a human guide for you in the course of this work. However, you are to have only fifteen hours of contact with him in the course of your study of this course. Pay close attention to your tutor. If you have any question to ask as regards the course it is your tutor that will provide the answer. He will also mark your tutor-marked assignments. You should try as much as possible to attend all the tutorials. Doing so will be of benefit to you.

Summary

It is the thinking of the designer/writer of this course that at the end of the course you should have been equipped with basic theoretical and theological knowledge of ecumenism as understood in the Christian context. This course helps you to appreciate more the necessity and urgency of ecumenism, not just for the churches, but for world peace. The course challenges you not only with the acquisition of the true knowledge of ecumenism, but also to speak for world peace, to defend and project its values.



MAIN COURSE

MODULE 1.

UNIT 1

Content

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- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Definition of Ecumenism
 - 3.2 Initial Controversies, Divisions and Early Ecumenical assemblies
 - 3.3 The Growth of Ecumenism
 - 3.4 The scope and limits of Ecumenism
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This section is to introduce the student to the issues that led to the early beginnings of Ecumenism. At the end of the lesson the student should be able to know how Ecumenism began in the early church. The student will be abreast with the controversies that created divisions among believers of the same faith when the church was still young. The student should be able to also see the continuity of this development into the 21st century. The growth of Ecumenical assemblies cuts across regional and international boundaries. Though Ecumenism started as a small assembly, it has grown into a large body comprising almost all churches or Christian traditions around the world irrespective of theological differences.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

- At the end of this unit you should be able to:
- Identify the causes of Ecumenism from the early centuries of the church.
- Enumerate the issues that brought about divisions in the church.
- Show the necessity and importance of coming together to solve our common problems.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Definition of Ecumenism and Its Genesis

The word “Ecumenism” comes from the Greek word oikoumene meaning the “inhabited earth.” Ecumenism understood broadly relates to “the interfaith movement striving for greater mutual respect, toleration, and co-operation among the world religions. Ecumenism as interfaith dialogue between representatives of diverse faiths, does not necessarily intend reconciling their adherents into full, organic unity with one another but simply to promote better relations. It promotes toleration, mutual respect and cooperation, whether among Christian denominations, or between Christianity and other faiths.” But understood narrowly, this word has reference to the world-wide church of the same faith. Darril Hudson (1969:4) defines Ecumenism as “the Christian international organizations formed to carry the church’s concern for political, social and economic issues into the international

arena.” Ecumenism could be defined as the universal assembly of various Christian traditions or denominations. The concern of these various denominations is to forge a unity of the church despite their confessional differences.

The first Christian assembly was in 325 AD in Nicaea when all churches at that time gathered to deal with the Arian controversy. Since then several assemblies were held to deal with issues that threatened the peace and unity of the church. As Christianity grew, various traditions emerged within the universal church the church as the one body of Christ was divided between the West and East on theological and political grounds in 1054 AD. The Western church was also split, first into two broad sides, namely Catholicism and Protestantism in 1517 AD. Again, Protestantism was split into various denominations on the basis of issues of biblical interpretations and theological conclusions. As events of wars and discrimination grew worse, churches saw the need to come together and seek ways of agreement between one another irrespective of confessional differences. The objective of this convergence of churches around the world as one body was to influence world governments in seeking mutual understanding and peaceful relationship between nations. The first major peace Ecumenical assembly was held at Hague in 1907, though the World council of Churches held its first meeting in 1948 in the context of the world wars.

3.2 Initial Controversies, Divisions and Early Ecumenical Assemblies

The major issues that brought about controversy in the fourth century were Trinity and Christology. On the Trinity, it was the issue of the Filioque as settled by the council of Constantinople in 381. The church attempted to interpret the personal and divine attributes of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit recognizing that there are three persons in one God head. The real problem, however, was how to understand the relationship between the three persons. By their economic manifestation, the Father sent the Son into the world to save the world. And the Son promised that he would send the Holy Spirit after he had gone: “But if I go I will send him to you” and “he will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:7). yet in another place, Christ says, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper” (John 14:16). Also he says “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things” (John 14:26). In the light of these passages, the early church consented that the Holy Spirit proceeds both from the Father and from the Son (filioque). The Eastern Orthodox church of Constantinople rejected this interpretation holding that the Holy Spirit proceeds only from the Father. This created a division between the Western and the Eastern Church.

This also had direct connection with Christology. The church affirmed that Christ is God having the same substance with the Father. But Arius, a presbyter in the church of Alexandria taught extreme subordination of the Son to the Father. He affirmed absolute monotheism so that the Son cannot be of the same substance with the Father as an equal. Also Christ could not be without a beginning since it would make him another God like the Father. Therefore, the Son has a beginning and was created by the Father out of nothing. Arius argued that “God has not always

been a Father” and “Once God was alone, and not yet a Father, but afterwards he became a Father”(Pelikan,1975:195).The Son did not exist eternally with the Father. The Word which is the eternal reason of the Father was in the beginning with the Father but this is different from the Son. In essence, Arius taught that the Son was a creature. This sparked a major division between those who were against Arius’ teaching and those who supported him. In 325, the council of Nicaea was summoned with delegates who came from all the churches. This was debated and Arianism was condemned by majority members. The church affirmed the consubstantiality of the Son and the Father: “true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance (homoousios) with the Father.” After Arius, Christological controversies continued in respect of how to understand the relationship between the two natures of Christ.

Several views were developed in an attempt to understand the two natures of Christ, how they relate in the one person of Christ. Apollinarius denied that Christ had a rational soul. Docetism taught that Christ was only divine but not truly human. Eutyches taught a single nature of Christ without distinction between the divine and the human. The most controversial of all was the Nestorian view. Nestorius taught a division of the two natures of Christ. Cyril opposed Nestorius and taught a doctrine of the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ. This was a Christological division between the Alexandrian and Antiochene theologians. The Alexandrian theologians were of the Nestorian extraction which taught a Logos – man while the Antiochene theologians taught a Logos – flesh. The growing heat of the controversy led to the council of Ephesus in 431 where Nestorius’ teaching was condemned. But the controversy did not die down until the council of Chalcedon was summoned in 451 where Nestorius was again condemned and the church affirmed the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ without division or confounding. The early Christian councils were concerned with resolving conflicts in order to restore broken fellowships.

But the great Schism of the church took place in 1054. The filioque issue had already prepared the ground for disunity between the Eastern Church and the Western church. Some political issues also arose as both blocks were claiming superiority over each other when the Roman Empire was divided into the Latin and Greek speaking zones. “Rivalry developed in Slavic regions between Latin missionaries from the West and Byzantine missionaries from the East, who considered this territory to be Orthodox. Disputes over authority became even more heated in the 11th century as Rome asserted its primacy over all churches. Lesser matters related to worship and church discipline—for example, married clergy (Orthodox) versus celibacy (Roman Catholic)and rules of a shaven head and tonsure—strained ecclesial relations. The tensions became a schism in 1054, when the uncompromising patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Cerularius, and the uncompromising envoys of Pope Leo IX excommunicated each other” (Encyclopædia Britannica 2009 Student and Home Edition. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2009).

3.3 The Growth of Ecumenism

Though Ecumenism started as a small assembly of churches within the Roman

Empire in the first four centuries, with the global expansion of Christianity it became a global phenomenon. More controversies and church separation continued in the history of the church. The Western church was split into Roman Catholic and Protestantism in 1517 Reformation. The major point of disagreement and separation was on justification. The question was: How does one get right with God? Catholicism taught justification by works in addition to the accomplished work of Christ. Catholicism insisted that salvation could be earned by the sacramental means by the work done by the believer as well as the priest's pronouncement of absolution from sin and guilt. The issue of indulgence was introduced as an easy means of justification which could be done even for the dead.

Martin Luther who championed the Reformation rejected that interpretation and posited from Scripture that justification is by faith alone (*sola fide*). For Luther as for other Reformers such as John Zwingli, Philip Melancthon and John Calvin, justification is a judicial declaration of God regarding the status of the sinner before God. Justification has a contrast in condemnation. If condemnation is a judicial declaration on account of human sin, so also is justification is a judicial declaration on account of righteousness that has come to us from God in Christ Jesus (2Cor. 5:21; Rom 1:17; 1Cor. 1:30). Justification is a gracious act of God toward the sinner who has put faith in Christ rather than by the sinner's righteous acts. No one could merit God's mercy by meritorious deeds since we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). The problem that one has to avoid in understanding this matter is to distinguish justification from sanctification. While sanctification is the moral transformation as one grows in grace, justification is God's final decision regarding one's standing before him. Sanctification is not the ground for justification but one of the benefits of being united with Christ by faith. Other issues of conflict also developed subsequently between Catholicism and Protestants such as: the number of sacraments and their character, the nature of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, authority of Scripture versus authority of church traditions among others.

After the Reformation, theological controversies leading to divisions continued to grow. John Zwingli sharply disagreed with Luther on the nature of Christ's presence in the elements of the Eucharist (Holy Communion) and the nature of state and church relationship. Zwingli believed that the bread and wine are only memorial symbols of the suffering and death of Christ, not actually having the presence of Christ in them. Later, Calvin also differed from Luther on the nature of Christ's presence in the bread and wine. While Luther taught the physical presence of Christ in the elements Calvin taught that Christ's presence was only spiritual since Christ's physical body was only contained in heaven. Christ's omnipresence was only in his capacity as God, not as man, and as such his body could not be present everywhere at the same time. This created a gulf between those who followed Luther as they were called Lutherans and Reformed (or sometimes Calvinists) for those who followed Calvin and his contemporaries who held the same opinion.

As the Reformation spread in different places people freely expressed their

theological views and church traditions. Different denominations were formed and in many cases they were associated with nationalities such as the cases with Roman Catholicism, German Lutheranism, English Anglicanism, etc. The events of local, regional and global wars and tensions in the mission fields were all craving for Ecumenical assemblies to address some of the thorny issues. The concern of the global church on the events around the world pressed further the necessity for Ecumenism.

Also missionaries encountered numerous problems in the field. Some felt the need to have an ecumenical assembly of all denominations who had missionaries in the field to resolve these issues of interest. In 1805, William Carey attempted this move to call for an international conference which met in 1810 in Cape Town. This eventually led to the foundation of several ecumenical organizations that brought the Protestants, Roman Catholics and Orthodox together. Several other fellowships such as Evangelical Alliance, Young Men's Christian Association, Young Women's Christian Association, Student Christian Movement and other denominational fellowship were founded in the 19th century.

The 20th century saw the explosion of ecumenical movement. Rusch (1985:26) says "The early twentieth century has often been described as the moment of birth of the ecumenical movement." Though this is true, the roots of this explosive ecumenical movement predate the 20th century. Today, Ecumenism can be counted in terms of various confessional assemblies converging from time to time to deliberate and take decisions and actions towards global challenges. This development has been very helpful to all nations internationally, regionally and locally. Churches in America, Africa, Europe, Asia and the Arab world unite in Ecumenism for a common goal which is to glorify God, strengthen missions and reach out in dialogue with people of other faiths. The history of the causes of controversies and divisions and all the ecumenical attempts at narrower to wider levels can be traced from the 2nd century down to the 21st century. This shows tireless commitment of the universal church to see itself as one though with diverse expressions and practices. The vision of Ecumenism stresses the following:

1. "focus not only on overcoming barriers to ecclesial communion but on realizing genuine community among all humans under God;
2. Show greater awareness of how racism, sexism and other forms of injustice and discrimination divide both church and world;
3. Pay as much attention to cultural as to confessional differences;
4. Show greater willingness to claim diversity as constitutive of Christian community; and
5. Speak not only of communion service to those in need but of the shared struggle for social transformation in response to the gospel. (Kinnamon: 199, 9).

3.4 Formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC)

The Life and Work movement and Faith and Order Movement were formed after World War I to deal with the practical issues of church and beliefs and how to bring all churches to reunion. These two organizations started working towards having a

single organization. But the actual formation of the World Council of Churches came by the initiative of the Church of Constantinople when it met in 1919 and considered the necessity of forming the “league of churches” for the purpose of “fellowship and cooperation between churches”(W.A.Visser’tHooft:1982,1).The Patriarch of Constantinople made this call for ecumenical assembly “unto all the Churches of Christ everywhere.” The synod of Constantinople accepted this proposal and appointed a committee that would work out practical steps towards actualizing this vision. Following several conferences were held at Lausanne (1927), Stockholm (1929), Oxford and Edinburgh (1937) to strengthen this development of the fellowship of churches. The World Council’s constitution was drafted in 1938 at Utrecht. The first meeting of the World Council of Churches took place in Amsterdam in 1948 under the banner: “Man’s Disorder and God’s Design.” Various sub-groups of the ecumenical assembly made presentations on a number of issues of the Christian Gospel around the world. There were delegates from 147 churches from 44 countries around the world.

On its membership: “The WCC's members include most Protestant and Eastern Orthodox bodies but not the Roman Catholic church. The Southern Baptists of the United States are among Protestant non-members. The controlling body of the WCC is the assembly, which meets at intervals of approximately six years at various locations throughout the world. The assembly appoints a large central committee that in turn chooses from its membership an executive committee of 26 members, which, along with specialized committees and 6 co-presidents, carries on the work between assemblies. The headquarters of the council, in Geneva, has a large staff under a General Secretary” (Encyclopedia Britannica). The vision of the World Council of Churches was spelt out in three distinct ways. First, it was a vision which demanded that “churches accept full responsibility for the fulfilment of the ecumenical task.” Second, the mandate of the church has a dual view: to “encourage churches to cooperate in service to each other and to the world” and “to attempt to give expression to their unity.” Third, that unity is “based on the action of the Lord Jesus Christ who gathers his people together” (Hooft, 87-89). The name “World Council of Churches” was proposed by Samuel McCrea Cavert of the Federal council in the United States. The World Council of Churches is not a church and neither does it order churches into certain actions but it is an organization that “works for the unity and renewal of the Christian denominations and offers them a forum in which they may work together in the spirit of tolerance and mutual understanding”(Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009 Student and Home Edition. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2009). The World Council of Churches has its own distinct structure by which its mission is pursued. “The work of the WCC is divided into three main divisions: church relations, ecumenical study and promotion, and inter church aid and service to refugees. Under these divisions are a number of groups and commissions, such as faith and order, the commission on the life and work of the laity in the church and on the cooperation of men and women in church and society” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009 Student and Home Edition. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009).

4.0 CONCLUSION

Ecumenism began as a mustard seed with the then Christian world when all churches were gathered to resolve disputes. Today, this movement has grown tremendously universal with various denominations coming together to seek understanding among themselves for kingdom proclamation. At first it was difficult for some churches like Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy to join forces with others. Now Ecumenism is a world-wide fellowship of all churches.

5.0 SUMMARY

You have been led through the historical development of Ecumenism from the 4th century to the 21st century. We have tried to show you the issues that led to the divisions in the one universal church and the several attempts that were made to maintain the unity of the diverse church. Ecumenism is now a global family of God that seeks fellowship of all members and has a single fellowship known as World Council of Churches apart from distinct fellowships.

6.0 TUTOR – MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss what you understand by the term “Ecumenism.”
2. Explain some of the issues that led to the beginnings of Ecumenism.
3. How was the World Council of Churches formed?
4. Explain the vision of Ecumenism

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 2 THEOLOGICAL GROUNDS FOR ECUMENISM

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you have examined the meaning and the historical development of ecumenism. In this unit, you will examine the other aspects of ecumenism, especially, the theological aspect. Ecumenism has its theological foundations. Thus, we shall explore those grounds so that we can better appreciate the struggle of the church in this direction. The church without unity is not faithful to Christ, its founder, given the specific instructions that Christ gave to it to be in unity. The church though diverse in expression of faith and practice must also distinguish its form of unity. But such unity must have its basis in God who has purchased the church by his own blood (Acts 20:28). It is a unity that does not necessarily cancel its diversity.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this sub-unit the student should be able to:

- State clearly the theological foundations for church unity as expressed in the ecumenical movement.
- Explain church unity as the very expression of the life of the Triune God.
- Explain church unity as the very expression of Christ's teaching and apostolic practice

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Ecumenical unity as a reflection of the unity of God

God expresses himself as a Trinity. That means he is one God but three persons within the one Godhead. This is called God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Though there are three distinct persons, yet they are not three Gods. This does not mean there are three separate rational individuals but "only personal self-distinctions within the Divine essence, which is not only generically, but also numerically one"(Berkhof, 1996: 87). These three persons have distinct and incommunicable attributes and they also have personal relations. The Father is the Father and not the Son nor the Holy Spirit. Each person is distinguished by his property. The Father is not begotten; the Son is begotten while the Holy Spirit proceeds. All these three are affirmed to be divine,

according to the Scriptures. The church has attempted to explain this unity, though it still remains a mystery. This unity in the Trinity does not destroy the diversity and their diversity does not destroy their unity either. Christ as the Son is distinct from the Father, yet by virtue of their unity he said “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30; cf. 17:11, 22; 5:19; 14:9). The church has affirmed this doctrine by study of various passages in Scripture. The deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit has been established by Scriptural exegesis. That the Scripture does not refer to them as three Gods but one God underscores the unity and mutual co-existence, co-inherence and co-equality that are in the life of God. The Son is of the same substance with the Father. The person Son is eternally generated by the Father and the Holy Spirit proceeds both from the Father and the Son. The Greeks described these as three hypostases who have one ousia while the Latin calls them three persona. The apostolic creed affirms the doctrine of the Trinity. The unity of the three persons derives from their sharing in the one ousia and which is externally demonstrated in their work of unity in creation and redemption.

The church is a composition of God’s image bearers. Everything that the church does ought to be in accordance with the life of its creator and redeemer. Therefore, the church though with diverse parts, should also express itself as one. The many parts of the church do not give a description as churches in the sense of that unity. In regards to that unity the church is one as the body of Christ, not bodies of Christ. However, we acknowledge that there are different congregations, local churches and traditions but the church is one. This is unity in diversity.

The three persons that are in one Godhead commune among themselves in such a way that God’s purpose and action are one. Whether it is one person acting, all the persons in God are involved. The act of creation, redemption and consummation are distributed economically to the three distinct persons, yet they all are involved at the same time with one another. This unity cannot be compromised and neither is the diversity erased. We can see that diversity of the personalities of one God does not necessarily cause divisions within God. The distinctions are necessary as they reveal the Triune God and their respective properties and economic functions. It is in this respect that the church is expected to emulate this divine unity as it serves its God. The church cannot operate on its own terms apart from what is revealed to it by God. The unity and diversity of God is the architectonic principle for the church as it exists in the world and calling the world to repentance as one people under God.

3.2 Christ’s teaching on church unity

Christ calls attention to how he wants his church to be. His church must be established upon the life and character of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In his priestly prayer, Christ explicitly lays down this principle on the life of the Trinity: “that they may be one even as we are one” (John 17:21, 22). The unity of the church is also anchored on its headship as it has one shepherd, for “there shall be one flock, one shepherd” (John 10:16). This definition of church unity by Christ is explicit. This is a metaphor that takes the picture of sheep and a shepherd in order to give us a picture of how Christ sees the church. Though this flock has many individuals and groups and cultural variation, it is defined as one by virtue of its one purpose and goal or destiny which is symbolized by its one shepherd. The oneness of the church is defined by the

one head. This unity begins from above, that is from the life and revelation of God. This unity is not to erase diversity but to embrace the oneness of faith and purpose without tension and animosity. The beauty of the diversity is its unity and the beauty of its unity is its diversity.

It is the unity that centers on the absolute truth of God as expressed in Christ. Christ is the point of unity for the church because in him all things hold together (Col. 1:17). The principle of unity of all things especially the church begins with the origination of all things. According to Paul's understanding of Christ's relationship to all creation is first' he is "the firstborn of all things" (Col. 1:15); second, by him, through him and for him "all things were created" (Col. 1:16); third, "in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17); fourth, "he is the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1: 18) and above all reconciles to himself "all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:20). So clearly, the unity of all things and the church in particular is grounded in Christ as the first principle of the unity of all things. For by his death he was going to "gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" and also draw all men to himself (John 11:52; 12:32). This act off as hioning unity of mankind or the church presupposes the divisions within mankind that generates tensions and conflict.

The work of Christ earned a unity that would bring healing and reconciliation against all the issues that divide mankind, so that while we are not necessarily identical, were main one in our fellowship and profession of faith in one Lord and Savior. Christ also inaugurated the unity of the church in the sacramental expression of the Lord's Supper. When he took the bread, broke it and gave to the disciples and also gave them one cup to all drink from it (Matt. 26: 26-29; Mark 14: 22-25; Luke 22: 17-20) that was a foundation laying for the unity of the church, so whether as Jews or Greek the ethnic differences would be relegated to the background as Christ would become the dominant factor for all. It is on this account that the universal church participates in the communion of the body and blood of Christ without denying anyone its blessings. The universal church has realized this fact and has been making efforts to be obedient to the Lord in moving towards this direction of ecumenical unity. Christ also said that a house that is divided against itself falls (Luke 11:17) which stresses the need for unity. Christ was aware of the differences that would emerge within the church which is why he never wanted them to stand against the unity of his own body.

3.3 Apostolic Teaching on Church Unity

In his teaching Paul condemns disunity, divisions and acrimony. He condemns the divisions in the church at Corinth (1Cor. 3:1ff). The principle of church unity in Paul's teaching is one Christ and one baptism which is foundational to subsequent growth and diversity of the church (1Cor. 3:10-11). This church in Paul's time was characterized by divisions over personalities and legalistic rules. Such divisions were capable of destroying the unity, growth and strength of the church. If the unity of a small congregation was vital in Paul's teaching as he condemned its division, then the global church unity would also be in Paul's mind. He reminded the Corinthians that they are "called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Cor. 1:2). Paul has the universal scope of the church in mind so

that the unity of the church is not only the physical identity of individuals in one local church but it incorporates individuals elsewhere who all confess one Lord and Savior. This is the spiritual character of the church. Paul stressed the need for unity so that divisions would not be given a chance to overwhelm the church. Such unity is the outworking of the mind in regards to issues that the church was to deal with: “I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment” (1Cor. 1:10). The required agreement was to replace the possible divisions that would arise. This does not mean people would not have differing opinion over issues but that such differences should not be allowed to degenerate into actual division of the church. Factors that divide the church are to be set aside according to Paul’s teaching.

Paul calls the church the body of Christ (Eph. 1:23; 4:12, 16; 5:23, 30; Col. 1:18, 24; 1Cor. 12:27) by taking the picture of the physical body that has various parts but which all work in unity for the common good of the body. He justifies the diversity of the physical body because all the parts are not identical to each other (1Cor. 12: 14-20). Otherwise, the functions of each part would not be appreciated. Yet this diversity finds relevance only in its unity as the various parts agree with each other in supporting one another. This shows the interdependence of all the various members of the church irrespective of social, economic, political, cultural and geographical placement. Having become incarnate, Christ does not exist apart from his body, and neither can parts of his body exist apart from him and from one another. It is a beautiful web of relationship that knits one another in complement of one another for the edification of the whole.

Also in Ephesians 4 Paul devotes the first 16 verses in teaching the unity of the church which is also the goal of the gospel. Our goal is to attain the “unity of the faith” through speaking the “truth in love.” This has its spiritual foundation by the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. Paul has given a strong message to the Ephesians which is to all churches that demands attention and obedience. Believers are to walk in accordance with their call “bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit- just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call-one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:2-6). Nothing could have been stronger than his words here because the oneness principle is overarching here. When a church disintegrates, it is because it fails at the primary level of “bearing with one another,” and this usually results from pride, rashness, impatience and resentment.

At the Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon the church to complete the revelation of God in Christ (Acts 1) so that the church is not only liberated from its sin and condemnation, but also leads it in its mission to the world. The Holy Spirit created one fellowship of the church in love (Gal. 5:22). The apostle Peter also stressed this fact urging believers to have “unity of mind” (1Pet.3:8).The whole church is portrayed as a building that is growing to a particular goal, which is oneness, and this accords with the teaching of Christ that we be one (John 17:21).

Paul reminds us that Christ is the rallying point of all humanity. He is the head of all things and the church, and the church submits to him (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23-27). The church holds the bond of Christ where Jews and Greeks are partakers of the kingdom of God. We are partakers of one baptism, one Spirit as one body of Christ (1Cor. 12:12-13) and Paul devotes the analogy of the human body to demonstrate how the diversity in the church should also be an opportunity for cooperation and mutual co-existence (1Cor.12:14-26). In the church we are not strangers to one another irrespective of geographical, cultural, social and racial differences. It is by this union with Christ that we all are like a building, a temple that is growing to its peak (Eph. 2:18-22). Citing Karl Barth's view of the church unity, Berkhof says "The quest for the unity of the church must in fact be identical with the quest for Jesus Christ as the concrete Head and Lord of the church. The blessing of unity cannot be separated from Him who blesses, in Him it has its source and reality, through His Word and Spirit it is revealed to us, and only in faith can it become a reality among us."

3.4 The Doctrine of the Church in History

The patristic period understood the church as communion of the saints (communion sanctorum). The church became institutionalized with leadership for the purpose of right direction. Local churches were considered to be parts of one universal church. The church however gave in to worldly corruption and many dissenting voices emerged within it. The early church fathers created the episcopate which was a form of succeeding the apostolic church government. The bishops formed the episcopate by which the unity of the church was established. "The unity of the church was thus based on the unity of the bishops" (Berkhof, 558). In other words the bishops were like custodians of the body of Christ. They were in charge of various parishes, and if they had a disagreement their parishes followed in their trend. If one bishop taught a certain doctrine, he definitely influenced certain people who followed after him. Therefore, if bishops were in disagreement over doctrinal or ecclesiastical issues, it automatically gave room for disintegration of the church. It was therefore important that bishops were in unity, in order that the unity of the universal church was maintained. The unity of the church was an overriding concern for the church fathers so that "the most important aspect of the church for the apostolic fathers is its unity" (Pelikan, 1975: 159).

The Reformers particularly Calvin sought the unity of the church in the "subjective communion of believers" (Berkhof, 560). The Roman Catholics thought it was the true church and unity is found only in its hierarchy, while the Greek Orthodox thought it was the true church but the Protestants moving in the direction of the church fathers thought the true church is the communion of saints (Communion sanctorum). In this sense the church is a unity of the mystical body of Christ with Jesus Christ as its only one Head and one Holy Spirit. Thus "this unity implies that all those who belong to the church share in the same faith, are cemented together by the common bond of love, and have the same glorious outlook upon the future" (Ibid, 572). Considered in its ecumenical sense, the church may be viewed as an organism having its charismatic gifts for the edification of the whole body of believers. (Grudem, 2000: 877) rightly argues for seeking the unity of the visible church but also notes the nature of this unity: "Yet we must recognize that such unity does not actually require one worldwide church

government over all Christians. In fact, the unity of believers is often demonstrated quite effectively through voluntary cooperation and affiliation among Christian groups. Moreover, different types of ministries and different emphases in ministry may result in different organizations, all under the universal headship of Christ as Lord of the church.

Therefore the existence of different denominations, mission boards, Christian educational institutions, college ministries, and so forth is not necessarily a mark of disunity of the church (though in some cases it may be), for there may be a great deal of cooperation and frequent demonstrations of unity among such diverse bodies as these.” This is agreeable as we see all the ecumenical bodies focusing on certain aspect of church ministry which could not have been accomplished by a single ecumenical body such as the World Council of Churches. Although one can see that issues of confessional differences are basic to the formation of distinct ecumenical assemblies, they also serve to function in unique areas that would not have been given attention by one single body such as the World Council of Churches.

3.5 The Significance of Church Unity

Disunity in the world has been as a result of sin. It is the work of the forces of evil that seek to destroy the unity of human race. This has also affected the church, but Christ has conquered the evil forces and has given the church the grace and power to live in unity. Churches living in isolation from one another cannot share in the ecumenical experience. This unity is not a theoretical concept but is expected to have practical value. By the redemptive work of Christ, “Men [women inclusive] from all nations have been knit together into a community in which God dwells through his Spirit and in which all men are united in one great family”(Kee, Young, Froehlich, 1965: 237-238). The unity of the church is the quintessential characteristic of the body of Christ. If the church is indeed the body of Christ, then all its diverse parts must forge together in complement of one another. The New Delhi statement defines unity in terms of “fully committed fellowship” of “all in each place” (Kinnamon and Cope, 1997:79). This spirit of oneness is the outworking of the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are varying in degree and in kind but they all work for one purpose, the edification of the body of Christ. The urgency for church unity is a wakeup call for unity of humanity because if the church does not find itself in unity then the entirety of mankind will wax in broken relationships. The pursuit of church unity as well as that of all humanity through true justice is a divine mandate. Therefore the world-wide church must exist in this fashion in fellowship and confession of one Christ as Lord. It is on this solid foundation that its mission to the world can be accomplished with greater force.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Ecumenism is thoroughly grounded in the biblical teachings of Christ, the apostles and the early church fathers. Ecumenism is the principle of global church unity which demonstrates the spirit of obedience to the teachings of Scripture. The church’s global impact stems from its unity. The diversity of the church is not a contradiction of unity but as all parts of the body have one purpose which is to function to keep the whole person well, so also is the relation between the diversity and unity of the church.

5.0 SUMMARY

Ecumenism is grounded in the life of God. The Trinitarian God lives in unity of three persons as one God. Similarly, the church should both express itself in diversity and unity. The foundational principle of this existence is laid down in the teaching of Christ and the apostles. Ecumenism does not necessarily mean one single organization or one institutional church under one leadership. It rather means the spiritual fellowship of different confessing members under the spiritual headship of Christ. The bond of ecumenical church unity is the one Lord, one Spirit and one baptism. Through this global unity the Lord would accomplish his purpose for allowing the diversity to develop and meet needs that probably would not have been accomplished without the diversity. The Holy Spirit is active in Ecumenism which marks the stamp of God upon the ecumenical project.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain the Trinitarian formula for Ecumenical fellowship.
2. How do diversity and unity work harmoniously for the ecumenical church?
3. What is the advantage of having multiple ecumenical organizations?

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UNIT 3 THE STRUCTURE OF ECUMENISM

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit we have examined the theological foundation for the ecumenical movement wherein we have seen that the very nature of God calls for unity and that the whole essence of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ is also a basis for ecumenism. In this unit, we would be examining the structure of the ecumenical movement. Ecumenism is a comprehensive concept that does not refer to only one international movement. It takes into account various international organizations or churches that are represented all over the world. These organizations are identified by their traditional theology and practice. Ecumenism can be found at the international level, regional level and local or national level. The local levels reflect international character because they are part of the international assembly. This applies also to the regional level which by virtue of being represented by more countries is closer to them in international body. From the national to the international levels ecumenism serves as a global net that has been knitted together for a common purpose.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Identify ecumenical bodies.
- Discuss ecumenism at the local and global levels.
- Analyse the impact of ecumenical movements in contemporary Nigeria.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Global Ecumenism

It is noted here that Ecumenism-vision and ecumenics-teaching discipline have to do with the dignity of the Church, its nature and mission, and with honesty to the gospel. Ecumenism is an academic, pastoral, missiological, and ecclesial discipline which its objective is to train people to witness Christ's gospel of reconciliation and call the body

of Christ to fulfil the mission of the Triune God and to foster the unity of the church globally. Any survey of the purpose and methodology of ecumenism brings forth the basic nature of the church; its ministry and the character of theological education. Ecumenism is involvement in Christian ministry so as to proclaim Christ. The importance of his ministry was a life service, sacrifice and mediatory love. He incarnated in order to bring people and the entire creation to God. The ministry of reconciliation brings about a new community which has to go on evangelism constantly. The work of the ministry of reconciliation is given to all who are born again or baptized in Christ but particularly to the chosen ones who are called and prepared for that task. The Holy Spirit unites those in Christ together to go out in the world to proclaim the gospel (Crow: 1987: 16).

On the models of Union, the ecumenical tour by the grace of God comes to the peak when the vision of unity is envisaged. The concept of unity, alongside its constitutive elements has to be shown and felt in the form and structure of the church. On this basis Crow says:

In the 1920 Faith and Order's Continuation Committee representatives from 40 countries and 17 churches met in Geneva to make plans for the forth coming world conference on Faith and Order. Theological issue was "the meaning of the Church and what we mean by Unity", or in other words "the Church and the Nature of the Reunited Church". Immediately these ecumenical fathers (no women were visible!) saw that their new "spirit of conference" would eventually had to lead to a consideration of specific sorts of unity. They were clear in rejection any model which countenanced coercion, uniformity, proselytism, expectation of a "return" to a so called mother church, mild federation or mutual toleration, or a "spiritual" unity which did not require some visible expression. All these fall short of what is meant in the New Testament by the unity of the church, they declared (198: 22).

At the first world conference on Faith and Order held at Lausanne in 1927, the discussion dealt with difficult issues gearing towards unity, the nature and proclamation of the good news, the nature of the church, the common confession of faith, ministry, sacraments, and thoughtful provoking topic of "the Unity of Christendom and the Relation Thereto of Existing Churches". The issue discussed was cumbersome in the sense that it has to do with the unity of the church under one canopy on the matters of faith and order, and more so different forms of doctrinal statement and the administration of church ordinances.

The important elements of the proposed united church are:

- i. a common faith, a common gospel worldwide
- ii. Baptism as the rite of accepting people into one church
- iii. Holy communion as a medium of depicting corporate life of the church and its sensitive nature of corporate worship
- iv. The ministry recognized throughout the universal church
- v. liberty of interpretation about sacramental grace and ministerial order and authority
- vi. an opportunity for the performance of the prophetic gift

Some Anglicans and the Orthodox, after thorough arguments they rejected the approval of the report for the fact that freedom of interpretation especially to sacramental grace ministerial orders would adulterate the ancient Tradition (Crow 22).

The second world congress on Faith and Order at Edinburg in 1938 also gave much priority to the models of church unity. About three models or forms of unity were agreed upon by the Edinburg congress: cooperative spirit, common acceptance and intercommunion, the third model is found in organic union which is church's God given unity.

It has become obviously conspicuous that modeling by Ecumenism has an ultimate goal which is unity in diversity pursued universally to establish oneness of the church throughout the globe.

The recent dialogue on specific forms or models of unity is about the New Delhi and Nairobi ideas in the mid-1970s, has been polemical and collegial as well. Now, it is necessary to look at the particular models that gained wide recognition in different quarters.

First and foremost, we shall consider organic or corporate union which has been accepted for long as a model of the Faith and Order movement as well as for others. Organic union is a dynamic model that has given due consideration to the changing cultural condition to the experience to previous decades, therefore has given shape of what is known by this model of visible unity. The essence of organic union elaborates on both an act and state of being which is shrouded in separated church bodies come together in faith, worship and sacramental life, ministry and mission. The basic features which pinpoint the nature of unity as given by organic union are; a model that tries to unite all wings of the church's life and mission into one full-fledged fellowship. Organic union endeavours to find out forms of unity in diversity and a mark to acquire a fellowship in which true diversity is honoured and true unity is enjoyed. It tries to achieve recognition of common structure and order. Organic union is a painstaking act for the fact that churches are demanded to give their confessional or denominational identities to the wider wholeness of the body. Moreover, the shape of the church's unity gotten by organic union is done as a visible sign of the unity of mankind in a specific place (Crow 24).

Conciliar fellowship as a model of unity emanates as an elaboration of organic unity. It has important elements accepted by many churches today as necessary for conspicuous church's unity; the unanimous acceptance of the fullness of the universality of other churches, common proclamation to the same apostolic faith, unanimous sharing of baptism and the eucharist, acceptance of each other's members and ministries, merged mission and service in the world.

Reconciled diversity is a model built up in the mid-1970s during the revival of the World Confessional Families or Christian World Communions. The Faith and Order Commission called these bodies to manifest on their ecclesial identity and to articulate their knowledge of the search for unity. The theological framework on "reconciled diversity" has been the handwork of Lutheran theologians in Europe and the Lutheran

World Federation, the Dar-es-Salaam congress in 1977. This model, just as conciliar fellowship and organic union, absolves constitutive elements of total church unity which are based on the agreement on one apostolic faith, fellowship in baptism and the Eucharist, and unanimous acceptance of the clergy. Those behind reconciled diversity recognized confessional identity of the Lutheran, Reformed, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Disciples, Methodist, Baptist and so on, as the major authentic forms and expressions of the diversity of the body of Christ. In their confessions they manifest various spiritual gifts, and are the important components of the universal church (Crow 25).

Communion of saints is a model which is a slight variation of “reconciled diversity” however, it advocates strongly on the unity in Christ searched by organic union and conciliar fellowship. Its importance is also derived from the theological reflections of the Roman Catholic Church. Before the commencement of Vatican II, Fr Bernard Lambert proposed that forthcoming ecumenical ecclesiology focus on the “typologies of the form of union”, which represent various Christian traditions through which the message of Jesus Christ has been channelled. This model promotes God’s unity Church expressed in diversity and pluralism in a common communion of faith and Church life. This unity is the “plurality of types” abiding in communion such as Roman Catholic, Baptist, Orthodox, Reformed, Anglican and so on (Crow 27).

This model is interesting because of its balanced nature. It evinces sensitivity to the diversity of traditions and spiritualities. However, it equally hinges on communion at the heart of relationship. A communion of communions would be successful if each tradition passes through remarkable change and renewal and each has been an integral part of the whole fellowship. This goes a long way for sister churches to put aside their distinct identities into a common one.

Unity as solidarity is a new model of unity that has shown itself in the ecumenical scene especially from the experience of theologians and churches in Latin America. It has been dynamically developed by the Jesuit professor of theology in El Salvador, Jon Sobrino. To him, unity and universality entail “co-responsibility between local churches”, unanimous giving and receiving, and sharing one another’s burdens. This expensive giving and receiving go a long way to different aspects in the life of the church; liturgy, pastoral duties, and the practice of faith (Crow 27).

The apex of this model is not emphasizing the relationship between diverse confessions, but rather their common togetherness and suffering with the poor. The basic division in humanity going by this model is the alienation between the rich and the poor, between the oppressed and the oppressors.

Ecumenism on the level of the World Council of Churches is significant; the ecumenical organization was founded in Amsterdam as “a fellowship of Churches which accept Jesus Christ as God and Saviour”. The WCC is not a church, nor does it give orders to churches. It works for the unity and renewal of church denominations and provides them a forum in which they may work in unity in the spirit of tolerance and mutual understanding.

The WCC developed out of the ecumenical movement that after World War I, ended up in two organizations. The Life and Work Movement focused on the practical activities of

the church meanwhile the Faith and Order Movement hinged on the beliefs and organization of the churches and the potential problems found in their reunion. In 1937, the Faith and Order Conference at Edinburg and the Life and Work Conference at Oxford agreed the idea to merge the two councils to be one. The WCC's members are mostly from the Protestant and Eastern Orthodox churches but the Roman Catholic are not part and parcel of ecumenism. WCC meets at the intervals of 6 years at different places worldwide. The headquarters is in Geneva. The work of the WCC is partitioned into three main parts: church relations, ecumenical study and promotion, and inter church aid and assistance to refugees. Under these parts are a number of groups and commissions on the life and work of the laity in the church and on the cooperation of people in church and society.

It is estimated that some 351 delegates from 147 churches convened in Amsterdam in 1948 under the theme "Man's Disorder and God's Design". The ultimate interest was for theological agreement and the need for mission work. WCC had series of its meetings deliberating on vital issues affecting the church of Christ and the world in general. Its priorities include what it takes to foster unity, interfaith dialogue is encouraged, the relationship between the unity of mankind and the unity of the church examined, sensitive issues on racism, sexism, human rights, technological revolution and its impact on the quality of life have been discussed in order to proffer solutions (Rusch: 1985:29-31).

The concept of Ecumenism does not mean all various Christian traditions are members of one single and the same confessional international organization. The one basic confession that unites all these different denominations or traditions is the "Lordship of Jesus Christ." There are some confessional issues that are still a problem and various traditions choose to align themselves distinctly as one body. In some cases there are some distinct international organizations that belong to a larger universal body. There are a number of ecumenical bodies some such as the World Council of Churches, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Associated Councils of churches of the British and German Empires, Lutheran World Federation, World alliance for International Friendship Through the Churches, the Universal Christian Council on Life and Work, the International Missionary Council, Reformed Ecumenical Council and World Reformed Fellowship. These are members of the World Council of Churches without losing their distinct identity and neither is their distinct identity a hindrance to their membership of the single body of the World Council of Churches. For instance, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches stated its view on their ecumenical commitment. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches "is only an instrument in the service of more ultimate purposes" which is to "serve the Church Universal of Jesus Christ, the Church which is His body" (Mateus: 2005, 141).

Furthermore, "In the present ecumenical situation, characterized by a potent movement toward ecumenical understanding and unity, the Alliance desires to collaborate closely with the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council as the main organizational expressions of that movement" (Ibid). These various ecumenical organizations have their own headquarters and officials. "The ecumenical movement today is carried out at different levels by churches acting through conciliar bodies

(e.g. WCC, regional ecumenical organizations, sub-regional fellowships and national councils of churches) Christian world communions, ecumenical communities, mission agencies, theological colleges and associations, ecumenical academies and lay training centres as well as agencies/specialized ministries, international ecumenical organizations and many other ecumenical bodies. It is obvious that the ecumenical movement is far wider than any one institution and includes all those who yearn for unity and all those who dream of a common Christian voice on the burning issues of the day.”¹

3.2 Regional Ecumenism in Africa

The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)

The All Africa Conference of Churches was formed in 1963 with a representation of 145 churches in Africa. This fellowship reaches out to the entire African continent through conferences, publications, workshops and seminars supporting individual projects, groups, organizations and institutions. It also shows concern for the poor, sick and refugees that have been ravaged by wars. The church in Africa contributes to the socio-political climate in Africa. Mugambi (1997, 14) while emphasizing the importance of cooperation of churches in Africa also laments the slow pace of unity between the Roman Catholics and other Protestants: “Witness through service will most appealing to African individuals and communities if various denominations demonstrate cooperation rather than competition, complementariness rather than rivalry. The movement towards visible unity between the Roman Catholic Church and various confessional families of the Protestant and Orthodox churches seems excessively slow and cautious.” Mugambi harps on what has been the biggest problem of the church in Africa. The problem tends to shift from doctrinal division, though this has been the foundational issue, to “competition” and “rivalry.” This competition or rivalry to gain more followership or territory tends to be bitter at times. Ecumenism demands a change of this attitudinal trend to one of mutual complement in sharing the gospel and getting involved in people’s lives and struggle with the gospel answering to those needs. It is in this direction that churches can effectively impact on their nations in Africa positively in helping to move the continent forward. African Ecumenism has held conferences in Kampala (1963), Abidjan (1969), Lusaka (1974), Nairobi (1981), Lomé (1987), and Harare (1992).

Sub-regional or local Ecumenical Movements in Nigeria: The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN), Tarrayyar Ekklesiyoyin Kristi a Nigeria (TEKAN), etc.

There are structural levels that are organically connected to the highest international Ecumenism. These ecumenical organizations have regional and sub-regional or national levels by which decisions reached at the highest level are channeled down through the structural levels for action. Also decisions reached from below are channeled up for global attention for action. There is a mutual connection between the international and local levels of Ecumenism. In Nigeria, there are a number of ecumenical bodies that

¹ Continuation Committee on Ecumenism in the 21st century, 2004.

work at different places with different visions and approaches but for one goal which is the proclamation of the gospel, its defense and encouragement for unity of the church in Nigeria against the enemy of the cross. We will specifically focus on two broad active ecumenical bodies that transcend denominational Ecumenism which are Christian Association of Nigeria, **Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN)** and Tarrayyar Ekklesiyoyin Kristi a Nigeria.

Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)

The Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN) came into existence before the Christian Association of Nigeria. The Christian Council of Nigeria held its conference in 1970 where it called for justice and peace in Nigeria. The political and religious bigotry in the country was eating deep into the Nigerian system to the point of causing disintegration. Christians were subjected to prejudice in every aspect of life. Some representatives of the World Council of Churches attended this conference to show the solidarity and connectivity between this local council and the international council.

The Christian Council of Nigeria in its conference emphasized justice and reconciliation in response to the needs of the victims of the civil war. The Christian Council of Nigeria eventually gave birth to the Christian Association of Nigeria that is bigger in scope and operation.

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) is related to the global ecumenism. Tanko argues that a number of ecumenical movements were flourishing in the Southern part of Nigeria in the early 20th century. The Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN) was started comprising all Protestants in the south such as “the Baptists, the Anglicans, the Methodists and the Presbyterians” (Tanko, 1991: 123). This body expressed its unity by establishing a Seminary that trains its workers.

The formation of Christian Association of Nigeria was in 1976 which embraced all Christian churches in Nigeria in response to the need for unity among Christian in Nigeria for common action on issues affecting them. CAN is made of five (5) blocs which are Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN), Tarrayyar Ekklesiyoyin Kristi a Nigeria (TEKAN)/Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN)/Christian Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (CPFN) and Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC). Through these blocs all denominations have avenue of belonging to this national umbrella ecumenical body. Irrespective of here wide coverage, CAN is not a member of World Council of Church (WCC).

CAN also serve to checkmate the moral and spiritual life of Nigeria and propagate the gospel that works to harmonize the various social classes and ethnic groups in Nigeria. It was put together “to address the politico- religious imbalance towards which the Nigerian nation tilted” but its full force was forged in the furnace of religious violence in Nigeria in 1985 by the attempted Islamization of Nigeria into membership of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). The importance of CAN has been to unite Christians in Nigeria against religious violence that is meted out to Christians and non-Christians.

Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN)

This is one of the foremost ecumenical formations in Nigeria, being founded in 1929. It was founded as “fellowship of churches in Nigeria working together to promote the glory of God”. It officially adopted an ecumenical posture as a body that promotes harmony, justice, peace, love and unity in Nigeria. The council comprises of the following mainline protestant churches, Methodist Church Nigeria, The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, The Nigerian Baptist Convention, The Salvation of Army, United Evangelical Church (founded as Qua Iboe Church of Nigeria), The African Church, The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria, Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nijeria, Church of Christ in Nigeria, Church of the Lord (Aladura), The Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim, African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church. In addition the her statutory members, it is also have seven associate members as follow: Christ Church Beulah; Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA); Young Women Christian Association (YWCA); The Boy's Brigade Nigeria; Student Christian Movement; Christian Education Advisory Council and International Bible Readers Association. This is the only ecumenical body in Nigeria that is a member of World Council of Church (WCC).

Tarrayyar Ekklesiyoyin Kristi a Nigeria (TEKAN)

In the north, the churches that were planted by the missionaries under Sudan Interior Ministry and Sudan Urban Ministry (SIM/SUM) came together to form an association that is today known as the fellowship of churches in Nigeria “Tarayyar Ekklesial Kristi a Nigeria” (TEKAN). The missionaries working under the S.U.M founded different churches. The liturgies of those churches were patterned differently. Before the missionaries left they were concerned with how the indigenous churches would be brought together in form of a unity. Finally they thought that it was wise to let all churches be as they were but a common forum for fellowship should be established. This was to allow a unity that would flourish in diversity. This is how TEKAN came to be formed. These churches came from different mission backgrounds such as the British Branch, the Danish Branch, Christian Reformed Church, South African Branch, E.U.B (United Methodist) and the C.B.M. The TEKAN movement could not be a single denomination due to the diversity in doctrine and practice. For instance, “Some TEKAN churches practice infant baptism. If they go to a town where the only TEKAN church there does not, members may find it difficult to get their children baptized. Some TEKAN churches discipline members for smoking and may look upon members from another member church who smoke as unworthy of church fellowship” (Crampton, 1979: 166).

Meanwhile the S.I.M. and S.U.M. have not converged into one denomination but remained distinct missions though in mutual relationship. These relations were built further by the conference of Protestant missionaries in 1910 which eventually gave birth to Northern Missions Council. Under this development discussions on common problems in mission field and dialogue with the Federal government on pertinent issues were carried out. Eventually, this council was replaced by the Council of Evangelical Churches of Northern Nigeria. This comprised the member churches of TEKAN, E.C.W.A., the United Missionary Church, the Anglican Church in Northern Nigeria and

the Qua Iboe Church.

This fellowship first met in 1943 and registered with the government of Nigeria. Its constitutional so defined it creed that held the churches together. This fellowship waxes stronger and its symbol of unity is the Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN), a Seminary that they too established for the training of its church workers. This fellowship meets every year to assess its problems faced in the evangelization of northern Nigeria and other socio-economic and political issues affecting Christians in the north. The existence of TEKAN has helped to sensitize the churches in northern Nigeria to the religious threats against them and how to draw the attention of the Nigerian government to its responsibility in preserving the lives and property of Christians.

The TEKAN has its Women's wing. The Women Fellowship is known as Zumunta Mata which embraces Christian women from all churches. A national ecumenical center has been in the pipeline with its headquarters in Abuja. There is also the Christian Educational Advisory Council (CEAC) based in Kaduna that is directly an arm of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (now World Communion of Reformed Churches). Through these sub-regional bodies developmental programs are carried out such as giving of scholarship for training of church workers.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Ecumenism has its structures that organically serve as a pipeline in reaching down all the levels that are involved. Without those structures, it would be difficult to administer the decisions, the visions and mission of Ecumenism effectively in the global sense. Those structures are therefore necessary for effective global impact of Ecumenism.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit we have seen that Ecumenism has various structural bodies. Some of these structures are ecumenically distinct from one another with respect to their confessions, visions, plans, evangelistic strategies, etc. While there are distinct organizations that are ecumenical in themselves, they also assemble as one body. The structural organization of the various ecumenical bodies spread from international to regional and sub-regional levels through which visions and action plans are implemented. In Nigeria, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Tarrayyar Ekklesiyoyin Kristi a Nigeria (TEKAN) exemplify the regional or local Ecumenism with impact on a number of issues affecting the church in Nigeria.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain the structural character of Ecumenism.
2. Enumerate some of the ecumenical organizations that you know.
3. Identify and describe the impact of ecumenical movements in Nigeria?

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UNIT 4 THE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF ECUMENISM

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we have examined the African Regional structure of the ecumenical movement as well as the local structure that can be found on ground in Nigeria. In this unit, the goals and objectives of Ecumenism are described. In this direction, the dialogical aspect of Ecumenism has been a great weapon of achievement. Much has been accomplished in the areas of cooperation in the work of evangelization of the world, pursuit of social justice and action, interfaith dialogue, cooperation in diakonia ministry, theological dialogue and fellowship among churches. The dialogical developments among churches have been a great accomplishment in Ecumenism. The importance of dialogue in Ecumenism cannot be over-emphasized. For “within the last twenty years, ecumenical dialogues or bilateral conversations have been an effective tool for ecumenical advancement between certain churches. They have been able to put centuries-old conflicts into a new light and thus have enabled churches in varying degrees to move beyond these controversies (Rusch: 1985, 91). While ecumenical dialogue has recorded remarkable progress, its hope largely depends on churches taking their conclusions very seriously.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of the study of this unit you should be able to:

- Identify the contributions of Ecumenism towards attainment of cooperation among all churches.
- State the goals that Ecumenism is pursuing in global evangelism and cooperation.
- State the accomplishment of ecumenical movements. Evaluate the achievements of the ecumenical movement.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Goals and Objectives of Ecumenism

The goals and objectives of Ecumenism are defined in terms of charting a course of unity and harmony in the universal church through dialogue and fellowship. By

accomplishing this, the church can extend this model to the world governments for the purpose of multilateral relations. This international confederation of churches intends to communicate the Gospel through active involvement in matters affecting humanity globally such as injustice, discrimination, poverty, hunger, disease and the promotion of peace globally. Ecumenism calls for breaking through barriers and reaching out to one another. "It is a call to bear witness to unity by making an optimum use of the abilities, history, experience, commitment and spiritual tradition of everyone involved. This includes submission to one another and the search to understand the will of the Lord in a spirit of repentance and reconciliation."² These goals and objectives are defined around current concerns: "It is a world of brilliant new technologies and a world in which millions of people suffer from hunger and die from rampant violence. The environment is threatened with destruction because of disrespect for creation. People in many regions are increasingly embracing the view that another world is possible. They are seeking a world undergirded by a deep sense of spiritual discernment. The growth of civil society is transforming communities and nations. Those who have traditionally been marginalized and excluded are struggling to make a more just and peaceful world possible."

3.2 Building an Ecumenical Culture through Dialogue on Theology and Practice

Evolving an ecumenical body that waxes stronger requires a number of visionary reconstructions one of which is developing an ecumenical culture. One of the biggest problems for globalization of any sort is that there is no global culture. What then is the possibility of evolving an ecumenical culture? The ecumenical movement would look in certain areas of collaboration. This can be done through dialogue. Such dialogue would center on the common problems that believers are facing world-wide. Rusch (1985, 69) observes that "Dialogues have taken place in the ecumenical movement since before 1960, but it is actually within the last twenty-five years that they have assumed special importance. Significant conversations occurred earlier between Anglicans and Old Catholics, Anglicans and Orthodox, and Old Catholic and Orthodox." Such dialogue has also taken place between Anglicans and Lutherans. This dialogue centered on church mission, doctrine and order especially in areas like "sources of authority, the church, the Word and Sacraments, apostolic ministry, and worship" (Rusch, 1985, 77). A number of meetings have taken place between the two churches.

The Lutheran World Federation has also engaged in dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church in the United States. This dialogue sought to understand are as of differences pertaining especially to doctrine of the Nicene Creed, baptism and Eucharist. Both churches agreed on pursuing church unity as Christ wills the church. Then there was also a Lutheran and Reformed dialogue. "The goal of the dialogue was to explore the theological relationships between the Lutheran and the Reformed churches to discover

² World Council of Churches *Report of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the World Council of Churches*, August 2002.

to what extent differences that have divided these communions in the past still constitute obstacles to mutual understanding” (Rusch, 1985, 89). This dialogue focused on understanding the positions of both sides on “the gospel, confession, and Scripture, on Christology and the Lord’s Supper, on justification, on Law and Gospel, on creation and redemption, and on ethics” and agreed that their actual differences should not be an obstacle to their mutual fellowship (Rusch, 1985, 89).

Since church Ecumenism is also concerned with making dialogue with people of other faiths, the above dialogue in view is a kind of an in-house dialogue between members of the same faith, though different traditions. These dialogues may be easy to be initiated at the international, regional and local levels. And the need for dialogue among members of the same faith is “most suitable for those churches which possess a strong tradition of, and high regard for dogmatic theology, doctrinal decisions, formularies, and a well-structured liturgical tradition” (Rusch, 1985, 71). The reason for this categorization of churches that are more in need of dialogue is that the above grounds for dialogue have been responsible for bitter divisions and hence the need for creating an atmosphere of understanding and tolerance. There would be shared visions, opinions, strategies, policies and implementation. This dialogue is not intended to win over converts of other confessional churches but to create an understanding that promotes, love, tolerance, respect and cooperation in ways that honour the Lord.

The church needs unity in areas of theology and fellowship. This unity is at the basic level where the confession of the church does not contradict itself in confessing the one Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The apostolic teaching that has been described as the Apostolic Creed is the basis of the unity of the church. The Eucharist also demonstrates the oneness of the church as people of all cultures and different socio-economic backgrounds all partake of the Eucharist. This should result in fellowship of churches with a common goal of praise and adoration to the only living God. Bauna P. Tanko rightly observes that ecumenical dialogue should focus on “the mystery of Christ and his church” in order to “discern the common elements in their different ways of approaching the revealed mystery and of translating it into their thought, life and writing” (Tanko: 1991, 19).

3.3 Christian Social Action for Justice and Reconciliation

One of the important areas of concern for Ecumenism is justice and reconciliation. Ecumenism seeks the enthrallment of justice and reconciliation in many societies that are bereft of these virtues for the smooth growth of the society. With justice, reconciliation and peace the gospel can advance more speedily. The question that is ideal to be asked in pursuit of justice is: “would not a condition of justice be sufficient to cause the greatest efforts toward progress, and the greatest possible equality that is compatible with individual responsibility? Would not this be in accord with the concept of individual responsibility which God has willed in order that mankind may have the choice between vice and virtue, and the resulting punishment and reward?” (Bastiat: 998, 26). This argues for creating an enabling environment for everyone to engage in his/her responsibility towards a free and virtuous society for the common good of all. Once everyone becomes responsible in the collective sense of it, then the society can have a justifiable system of operation in making choices and bearing

responsibility for them.

In many places around the world, problems arose where minorities were denied their rights in certain aspects of life. In Europe, some people faced persecutions where religious liberty was not granted. The New Testament church shows that people who were by Jewish culture socially degraded received new status in the Christian society. Christians came from all levels of the society, the upper-class and the lower-class. Wealthy people who got converted served the church alongside their slaves or servants. The dawn of the Gospel message brought servants their spiritual liberation and the poor also rejoiced that they were worthy of excellent promises. This made the church realize its new calling unto serving all without reproach. The church was one doing all things harmoniously such that it was out of concern for social justice that the office of deacons was created to serve the needy that were being neglected due to commitment to preaching of the Word. A new community was found that its life was defined by new principles that transcended human norms.

The ecumenical church has sought to apply Christian principles to social and industrial affairs where social injustice was perpetrated in order to remedy situations that were dehumanizing certain humanity. Issues like slavery, racial discrimination in white majority lands, traffic in women and children all demanded ecumenical attention. Yet the church of Jesus Christ has found itself in divisions that were borne out of bitter oppositions and enmity. This inflicted wounds throughout the history of the church. The goal of Ecumenism is among other things to seek to heal those wounds. There is also social injustice around the world of which the church is not exonerated. The church in the advanced world has not shown adequate care, love and concerns for the plight of people in the majority world. This attitude does not encourage Christians who are suffering in these parts of the world. The challenge for the global church to see itself as one with the other suffering members requires a radical response by the churches in the advanced world.

There have been hurtful experiences of racial and social discrimination, economic disparity that keeps others super rich while others abject poor, political instability and brutality against those who disagree with government views, disease and poverty, etc. All these call for the voice of the church and action for change that the Gospel will be made relevant to the people of different cultures and backgrounds. Justice cannot be promoted by any other way but by standing firm with the prophetic word of God in addressing all aspects of life. As Crow (1982, 65) rightly says, “The true paradigm for the church is unity with justice,” and true justice demands repentance and reconciliation where injustice has been perpetrated. The mission and vision of Ecumenism open up to “where young people have opportunities to both join and lead certain aspects of ministry. Women too have opportunity for shared vision and responsibility.” The ministry of healing and reconciliation are corporate involvement by all as the church with one voice confronts the injustices and violence of the world as exemplified by Christ.

3.4 Facilitation of Diakonia Ministry among Churches in Missions

In many parts of the world there are the disadvantaged people. Some of these

include orphans, widows, social outcasts and the down trodden. Such people struggle with livelihood and they need the love of Christ to be extended to them practically in order to bring self-realization to them as people created in the image of God. The diaconal ministry of the global church brings in the marginalized and excluded, and builds an inclusive community where love is the principle of inter-relationship. Such loving relationships are built on mutual trust in order to strengthen all parts of the ecumenical family. This gives an opportunity where believers can be supported in practicing responsible stewardship. Furthermore, this also grants the wonderful privilege for churches and Christian organizations to be mutually accountable to each other. In this spirit, diversity of traditions will be seen positively as a source of creativity where hospitality is shown to people of different colors, faiths, culture, socio-economic placement.

3.5 Facilitation of Interfaith Dialogue

Interfaith dialogue is necessary if the church is to reach out to people of other faiths and share the gospel of salvation in Christ with them. The World Council of Churches has encouraged this attitude of dialogue with people of other faiths in order to create understanding for sharing the gospel. Christian missions have come face to face with the reality of other religions that need to hear the gospel of Christ. It has been a struggle for the church over the years to come to terms with the gospel in relation to people of other faiths. The World Mission and Evangelism was given a mandate to help in creating ways for such relationship which resulted in the emergence of Guidelines on Dialogue in 1977 at a conference in Thailand. Various groups today have tried to establish interfaith dialogue especially between Christians and Muslims, Christians and Hindus, Christians and Buddhists and Christians and Jews.

The World Council of Churches advocates a form of religious dialogue that has implications for the uniqueness for the Christian faith by arguing the purpose of the dialogue which is “to promote an awareness of our neighbours as people of living faiths, whose beliefs and practices should become integral elements in our theological thinking about the world and the human community. In other words, this study is a call to Christians to make theological sense of the faiths of their neighbours” (WCC: A Study Guide, viii). This means we are to open up to the gospels of other faith because “when the faith of our neighbours informs the way we observe and understand our own beliefs, we are bound to be challenged to seek new dimensions of our own faith” (Ibid). Good as this understanding may be, it stands against the mandate to interact for the purpose of not only sharing the gospel but also making disciples for Christ. The direction of the World Council of Churches in this compromises the claims of the gospel as the only way of salvation and the force to proclaim this gospel to unbelievers if we are to only learn from people of other faiths in order to enrich ours. Truly we face the challenge of pluralism and claims of other religions similar to Christianity and relativism, yet the Christian faith stands unique because Christ died for the sins of the world which no other religious leader claims. The idea of learning to live together in a peaceful relationship with people of other faiths should not envelop our call to witness to them about Christ. We should love our neighbours but it will only be true love if we do not withhold the truth that saves from them. We should however, communicate this

truth in love and humility and not as condemning their beliefs but as leading them out to the true knowledge of salvation.

A number of strategic approaches are continually being adopted for dialogue especially with the Muslims. One recent effective method is called “the Camel” which is to “draw out the person of Peace” (Greeson: 2004, 51). This is using the Quran as a bridge to the Gospel. This is most needed in Nigeria for our interaction with our Muslims friends in a friendly manner for greater results. The methods of interfaith dialogue should consider one’s local religious situation and the world at large with regards to where religious conflicts erupts the most, the involvement of the church in dialogue and personal experience in relating to people of other faiths.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The goals and objectives of Ecumenism are very important, not just for evangelism but also for peaceful co-existence. These can only be accomplished if the universal church realizes Ecumenism as a divine call to live as such. It is through Ecumenism that social justice can be pursued with a stronger force and diakonia ministry would have more impact upon the world. The poorer parts of the world are suffering socio-economic injustice, bad leadership, poverty, hunger and disease which require the active contribution of the universal church in order to alleviate these problems.

5.0 SUMMARY

The goals and objectives of Ecumenism are placed within the context of multilateral relations. The world is becoming more and more a global family and the church needs to be at the foremost of drumming this reality through its gospel of love, tolerance and peace. The church needs to be a creative force in the history of humanity in forging an identity that shapes the thinking and action of the brotherhood of mankind. Ecumenism is therefore, the best medium for achieving all this. Through this, social justice, theological dialogue, interfaith dialogue and many other positive developments would be achieved.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- a. Briefly describe the goals and objectives of Ecumenism.
- b. In what ways can Ecumenism contribute to social justice and reconciliation around the world?
- c. Explain the importance of diakonia ministry.
- d. What is the involvement of your church in religious dialogue?

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UNIT 5 THE SOCIOLOGY OF ECUMENISM

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The sociology of Ecumenism focuses on the mutual interaction between the church and society. The church has received a task of transforming the society into a better place for God's people. Such task is anchored on the love of God for mankind that he created in his image. The goal of the kingdom message is renewal, so that the blessings of God would be experienced by all. This can be done building a just society where God's rule is supreme. God is sovereign over all. He has given a cultural mandate to mankind to rule the creation in justice so that his glory may be uplifted in the world. The life and teachings of Christ have given birth to developing a responsible society.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Identify the importance of a responsible society.
- State the biblical principles for developing a responsible society through justice and freedom.
- Map out ways of contributing to a just and free society.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Building a Responsible Society

The principle of a responsible society is hinged on the mighty acts of God in creation. God has acted in human history and has given a cultural mandate to humanity to keep and maintain world history to his glory. God's purpose for humanity and the entire creation is to have abundant life. The total sum of God's expression of his will to humanity is to love him and also love fellow humanity. This command focuses on just and responsible social action. In its report on the "Social Questions—the Responsible Society in a World Perspective," the Evanston Assembly augments this point: "Man and all the powers of this world are under the sovereignty of their maker who calls men in families, societies, nations, and all human groups to responsibility under Him. From Christ, men receive the direction for their service, the obligation to share heartily in the world's work and daily tasks, and the responsibility to seek a better social and political life" (Kinnamon, 283).

Thus a responsible society is defined as a society “where freedom is the freedom of men who acknowledge responsibility to justice and public order and where those who hold political authority or economic power are responsible for its exercise to God and to the people whose welfare is affected by it” (ibid). The plan of this action is to be carried out in small groups as well as in large groups beginning with the family. This calls for growing healthy families and prevention of family breakdown. The church is also concerned with economic life so that economic policies, wealth distribution, monopoly and irresponsible business practices are condemnable in accordance with Christian principles. The church is called to declare and pray that the kingdom of God come, so that his rule for both spiritual and social order is to be established. Christ claims all authority in heaven and on earth, and we are called to bear this witness to all inhabitants of the earth (Matt.28:18-20).By responding to Christ’s demands the society would experience holistic transformation. Bilheimer (1989, 164) explains the implication of praying for the kingdom of God to come as conveyed in the Amsterdam accord that “we seek in every age to overcome the specific disorders which aggravate the perennial evil in human society, and that we search out the means of securing their elimination and control.” In other words, the church strives harder to bring transformation that can only result from the gospel impact upon the sinful hearts of humanity. This view takes into serious recognition the prevalence of the negative impact of sin which requires repentance and change of attitude of men and women in their relationship to one another and the physical world. This change comes by preaching of the gospel, prayer and action.

3.2 Church and Society

The vision of Ecumenism was reshaped by focusing on the relationship between church and society. The controlling agenda was evangelization of the world. This idea was intended to yield fruits that will make a better world that would be less inclined towards destruction of humanity as unleashed by the World Wars. The believer’s attitude to the world should reflect Christ’s concern for the fallen society and also one’s relationship to Christ. Christ has given the mandate to transform the society in order that the blessings of God would be enjoyed by all. This is a unique mandate that the church cares for the poor and vulnerable. This mandate is spiritual being given by the Lord himself so that biblical justice is the only yardstick for social balance. This is the hallmark of the Christian in a fallen world that undermines the love of God for the world. Lupton (By Faith: June 2006) “Christians who believe that their highest calling is to love God and love their neighbor are the very ones equipped to infuse into our culture both values and actions that will have redemptive outcomes.”

3.3 Church Unity and Unity of Humanity

The whole world is a broken world as it manifests forms of disparity among humanity. There is social, economic, racial, political, religious, and cultural discrimination which has polarized humanity into various competing and sometimes acrimonious groups. The church itself has fallen into these unfortunate traumatic divisions. The dynamic structures of human society continually affect the church’s unity and the church has to strive to remain the unique voice of God to the unity of mankind. Divisions among the human race that breed evil practices against one another have to be challenged by

the church. For the church to have a strong voice of condemning these human divisions it must first deal with its brokenness. By and large the reality of globalization, pluralism and the quest for the survival of mankind is becoming a glaring challenge for everyone (Crow: 1987, 17-19). Therefore Christian unity is “an essential part of the gospel and a responsibility of all Christians. Grasping this vision involves discovering what it means to believe that God has already made us one in Christ and to make those decisions that will draw the whole people of God into a vibrant, witnessing community” (Crow: 1982, 5). The unity of the church is the defining mission goal of evangelism. And in doing this, those things that divide the church and consequently divide humanity must be radically addressed. This must be a hard tackle of those realities that have divided the human family. It is not enough to speak of Ecumenism in the sense of one fellowship, theological consensus, ministry and sacraments without addressing oppression and conflict in the world.

3.4 Cultural Mandate: Politics and Christian Faith

Ecumenism is concerned with good governance. Politics is an avenue for service. Too much of what happens in African countries has raised ecumenical concerns. Africa is ridden with poverty and disease. In many African countries, there is hunger and poverty which compounds health problems. The growth rate of African countries is average and this is due largely to the poverty situation. Kinoti (1994:15-16) says, “One out of every three Africans does not get enough to eat. A study covering the period 1988-1990 showed that some 168 million Africans were victims of chronic hunger. This was an increase of 40 million people in just one decade. Tens of millions of African children suffer from malnutrition, which means retarded physical and mental development, disease, disability and death.” This is an embarrassing fact and African governments do not seem to have a way out of this menace. The economy is very bad because of bad governance. Poverty and disease can only be reduced when governance is good and focused. Good governance seeks to address the problems of the people in order to bring relief.

In this poverty-disease ridden context the church has the opportunity to share the gospel through works of mercy. This can happen when the church makes efforts to set up relief schemes through which it can reach out to those who suffer poverty, disease and wars. The church in Africa can also seek to persuade governments to imbibe good governance.

It is also incumbent upon Christian politicians to see that their calling into politics is an opportunity to seek ways of serving the people through good policies that can help to bring speedy relief to the suffering masses. A true Christian is one who is defined by his faith in Christ. A Christian is a Christian by faith and deed. The principle of godliness should inform the manner in which politicians should handle the resources of the state for the common good of all. The principle of godliness should have impacted Christian politicians in resisting corruption that has been destroying the African economy and subjecting the people to perpetual abject poverty.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The problem of societal ills calls for the church to rise up to its responsibility in helping

to build a responsible society. In Africa especially the level of poverty is quite alarming and the church in conjunction with governments must address this problem in radical terms. Our society is having an ever increasing rate of crime as a result of poverty. This crime wave is bound to increase in years to come if employment opportunities are not created while poor health and poverty rages on. Ecumenical efforts must be geared towards ensuring a free and virtuous society where there is justice and equity for all. It is up to churches at the regional and local levels to consciously develop programs that would turn the attention of the governments in this direction.

5.0 SUMMARY

We have seen that for the well-being of humanity, the need for a responsible society is ardent. We need a responsible society where everyone finds opportunities and ways of fulfilling their aspirations in life. For this to be attainable, the church must work together with the society in instilling the principles of just society as God demands. The church has been given the cultural mandate to turn the society into a better place for all. The relationship between church and society must be directed in accordance with the teachings of Scripture. Christians can help to change the bad ways of our society by matching their political engagement with their faith, so that justice and fair-play will be made to be a cultural value. Both church and government should cooperate in creating genuine poverty alleviation programs that are run according to just and transparent rules. By establishing this as a cultural orientation, it will in the long run help to reduce poverty and also check the rate of diseases.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- a. How can a responsible society be built?
- b. Is there any relationship between church unity and unity of humanity?
- c. How can the church influence good politics?
- d. Are church and society complementary in building a just society?

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UNIT 6 PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF ECUMENISM

Contents

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
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 - 3.2 Financing Ecumenism
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Like every other organization, Ecumenism as a constituted movement has its own problems. These problems arise out of the multiplicity of Ecumenism, funding issues, theological and cultural issues and they challenge the smooth movement of Ecumenism. Each of these issues poses a considerable problem and they are interrelated. For instance, multiplicity of Ecumenism is connected to the problem of funding and they in turn are connected to theological and cultural issues that bring about divisions. Nevertheless, unity in the context of these challenges makes the task of Ecumenism enriching. The effort to forge a unity of the global church brings various experiences to vision and mission of Ecumenism as we shall see later. It means the prospects of Ecumenism are worth its pursuit.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Identify the factors responsible for the success achieved by ecumenical movement
- Examine the problems of Ecumenism
- Suggest ways that can help the ecumenical movement advance
- Suggest ways of charting a course for global church unity
- State the factors that bring about diversity in the life of the church

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Multiplicity of Ecumenism

Ecumenism has its own challenges. One of the major challenges of Ecumenism is its multiplicity. There are various ecumenical organizations. Though the World Council of Churches is the biggest movement incorporating all major Christian denominations there are also some organizations which assemble distinctively on theological or confessional and liturgical grounds. Denominations seek their own distinct ecumenical identity and form international bodies with defined missions and goals that are not exactly the same with others. They have several levels of global connection in continents and nations. Some of these are the Lutheran World Federation, Reformed Ecumenical Council, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, The Vatican Council, The Anglican

Communion, The Baptist Convention, etc. With this plurality within Ecumenism, there are certain reservations that some of these organizations have in standing wholly on the principles and practice of World Council of Churches.

These reservations are cumulative over the centuries of disagreement and they are not easily overlooked for the sake of unity. They are all based on biblical convictions of the denominations or traditions. For instance, some churches question the legitimacy of being in association with other churches that lax in doctrinal and ethical matters such as those who tolerate and promote gay rights. Some churches tolerate or accommodate gay marriage and gay priests. Some abhor this practice and find it difficult to fellowship with churches that endorse it. Even within the same denominations that endorse this practice, other groups within which reject it break away from those who accept it. Therefore it becomes more difficult for other churches that do not tolerate this to come together at the ecumenical level for the sake of Ecumenism. This situation weakens the unity of World Council of Churches in its drive for unity as some argue that they cannot sacrifice their own version of truth for the sake of unity. In essence, theology and practice continue to be critical matters for church unity since some churches are not willing to sacrifice their or standard for Ecumenism.

The point of contention for those who find it difficult to be in ecumenical fellowship with other churches is why they would have to give up their own doctrine and life instead of those who practice what is unacceptable to give up their own ways and join the fellowship. It appears like the church is losing its own ground to secular or cultural influence for the sake of unity. Should culture define the life and theology of the church or the church defines its own life including that of culture? How can the church reconcile all this and wax stronger in ecumenism?

3.2 Financing Ecumenism

Closely in line with the above matter of multiplicity is the financing of Ecumenism. Since Ecumenism is weakened by theological and ethical issues, the allegiance of some of these other organizations to the bigger assembly becomes problematic. The World Council of Churches has numerous tasks that require huge budgetary sums. Its commitment is in the areas of Christian education, social works, health and food for the needy in war-torn zones and places where persecutions against Christians are rampant. Since Ecumenism is not one but many, it becomes a challenge for members of one international ecumenical movement to fund its projects and also fund the projects of another such as the World Council of Churches. Sometimes this funding is from certain individuals who belong to two or more of the ecumenical organizations. But this challenge also has another dimension to it. Some ask how they can fund an organization that they have reservations about its membership. For those who are anti gay marriage, it is more difficult to fund ecumenical organizations that include these groups even as it has been difficult for them to share in fellowship with them. These organizations are also saddled with their own responsibilities that border of funding, so it becomes difficult to fund them and also extend funding to the bigger organization. What are the ways by which Ecumenism can overcome this? Are there certain tasks that can be shared among some of these organizations in order to reduce concentration of issues on only one body such as World Council of Churches?

3.3 Theological and Cultural Issues

Another matter that brings challenges to the strength and unity of Ecumenism is theological. This aspect is very critical because that is what defines these distinctive churches. Theological interpretations have cultural currents which cannot be easily universalized. There have been agitations for contextualization of theology in order to make it relevant to the people's group and their needs. Doing local theologies take into account cultural, social, economic and political factors, and reactions have often trailed Western theology. For instance, how can people from different backgrounds where gay is acceptable and not acceptable having a common ecumenical fellowship? An ecumenical theology should seek to address all these concerns so those who do not share in certain cultural givens are not dragged into accepting what is convenient for others.

In Africa, theology must take into consideration the people's situation in order to bring about their liberation. The African context has the experiences of slavery, poverty, wars, disease, hunger, and political instability, economic shambles due to growing corrupt practices, religious terrorism and cultural issues. All these issues require theological tackling in a way that brings re-orientation of the African people. This will help the African Christian to rediscovery his/her own self as the image bearer of God who deserves better experience in life and is respected by people of other races on terms of equality. The African theological voice must be heard and respected. This means issues such as gay rights must not be forced on the church in Africa because of Ecumenism. Ecumenism, though good can be used as a way of taking captive African thought on certain theological issues where western thought may dominate, and this is what ecumenical movement must resist if such unity is to be real. The richness of Ecumenism is when theological views representing the diversity of humanity are listened to and embraced in appreciation. We need to see and hear what God is doing in the history of other people no matter their condition. God who acted in the past history of his people is still active in the history of his people in different situations and places.

3.4 Unity in the context of challenges

There are some fundamental problems that militate against ecumenical unity which are largely cultural, social, political and historical in nature. Though there are challenges facing the ecumenical assembly the unity that is needed as hope for the movement can be forged through constant meetings of churches in order to "speak with authority on issues of common concern" (Kinnamon, 79). Without the existence of ecumenical movement addressing the global issues affecting humanity, things would have been too messy. Ecumenism as a unity in expression gives its voice against violence, terrorism, and demands justice for the oppressed. The Nigerian experience shows that Christians need unity in order to resist total humiliation by the enemies of the cross. It was at a time of attempts to Islamize Nigeria that the Christian Association of Nigeria took its lively existence in order to address common concerns of the church. This unity that is expressed in associations seeks to enrich our diversity with mutual understanding and better relationship. With this unity, the church can have true inter-church dialogue on issues that divide it.

4.0 CONCLUSION

As every organization has its peculiar problems, so also Ecumenism faces its own challenges. But these challenges also present opportunities for growth unto actualization. The global church can wax stronger amidst those challenges. The ecumenical movement can find ways of moving ahead and accomplishing its mission to the world through good coordination and harnessing of its resources.

5.0 SUMMARY

The challenges of Ecumenism are real. These problems are unavoidable because of the multiplicity of ecumenical organizations, which weighs heavily upon funding. The sub-ecumenical bodies are also members of the one assembly that is called World Council of Churches. For instance, if churches which are members of World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) are also members of the World Council of Churches, they have double duty of funding which sometimes makes it difficult for good funding. This makes some of the projects to suffer insufficient funding. There are also cultural issues and theological-confessional issues that affect the unity of Ecumenism.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Briefly mention some of the problems that Ecumenism is facing.
2. Suggest practical ways that Ecumenism can overcome some of these problems.

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MODULE 2

Unit 1	Principles of Ecumenism
Unit 2	The Significance of Ecumenism
Unit 3	Ecumenism and Contemporary Issues
Unit 4	Ecumenical Bodies/Organizations in Nigeria

UNIT 1: PRINCIPLES OF ECUMENISM Contents

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 - 3.2 Theological, Liturgical and Pastoral vistas for Ecumenism
 - 3.3 Spirituality and Morality
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1.0 Introduction

Ecumenism must be guided by certain principles that make ecumenical convergence and fellowship worth its calling. Here the principles are defined in terms of the purpose for which God has made the church that befits the body of Christ. The purpose of creating mankind is for God's glory and the church worldwide must exemplify this fact. From this basic point the theological expression of the church, the pastoral character of the church and its worship or liturgy must all reflect this fundamental point, namely, the glory of God. The practical context for manifesting the glory of God is the spirituality and morality of those who are called by his name. Therefore, Ecumenism in its quality must emphasize these core realities as its governing principles.

2.0 Objectives

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Identify the principles upon which ecumenism is premised.
- Identify the relevance of ecumenism in terms of the reason for the redemption of the church
- Suggest ways of making the ecumenical impact felt in all the churches.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 God's Glory as the Basic Principle

The glory of God forms the primacy for Christian living and expression. The ecumenical assembly cannot express itself adequately with the glory of God being its basic principles for existence as the body of Christ. When churches gather, it is not merely a social gathering for exchange of pleasantries but a gathering of the people for God and to the glory of God. God as the Father of all is the rallying point of all humanity. The expressive principle of relationship as given by God in his word is love. When Christ said "Love the Lord your God with all your heart" and "Love your neighbor as yourself" this grants that God is the basis of our love for one another. By being created in his own image, he demands that we live our lives to his glory and this begins with practical love.

On this note, all ecumenical organizations have to fine tune their agendas in the direction of the glory of Christ. This consists with the calling of the people of God who are to live for him. Our diversity is part of God's beauty of the creation and when we

realize this we would strive to make be in unity for our common good and his glory. Therefore, the diversity that exists in Ecumenism is to the glory of God. If the diversity is set within the context of the glory of God, Ecumenism will seek the elevation of God's glory while human appetites will be minimized.

3.1 Theological, Liturgical and Pastoral vistas for Ecumenism

Apart from the glory of God as being foundational to ecumenical well-being, the other vistas or principles that would be needed for an effective Ecumenism are theological, pastoral and liturgical. These three aspects have been areas of church divisions. The theological is the confessional standards that we subscribe to, and the pastoral is the active guidance of the leadership in enriching people's lives. The pastoral takes the theological and puts into liturgical so that the practical life of the church is lively, not just theoretical. Doing theology in these three aspects should be in such a way that everyone would seek to be faithful first to God by way of being consistent with the apostolic doctrine. The theological would take into account diverse contextual issues affecting different groups of people such as the racially discriminated, gender issues, poor and down trodden, economic and political issues. The pastoral aspect would seek to address personal issues affecting individual members and how they can be resolved and bring healing to those who are hurt. There is much brokenness around the world that needs the pastoral antidote through the application of God's word to the whole person for renewal and hope. It is from this point that our worship can truly flow with love from the heart towards the living God and fellow neighbor. Then all the means of grace would be relevant to all. When churches meet at the ecumenical level, they should share in their experiences and how to tackle the problems facing humanity using the theological, pastoral and liturgical resources.

3.2 Spirituality and Morality

Spirituality and morality are important aspects that have been instrumental to current controversies in many churches. Spirituality is a person's disposition towards the precepts of God which controls his/her commitment and overall attitude. The spirituality of a person has direct impact on the person's moral life. The aspect of morality is not necessarily moralism but it is the self-controlling factor that makes one to imbibe the principles of conduct. Ecumenism has to emphasize the importance of spirituality and morality for its members because morality is become a big problem. Issues of gay are fast becoming a normative reality which is considered a taboo in many cultures. Scriptures too condemn the practice of sexual immorality and believers who believe that Scripture is the word of God must refrain from such practices (Rom. 1:24, 26-27; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:3, 5). Moral chastity strengthens the church in its message. But the lukewarm attitude of the church in condemning the sin of gay marriage can weaken the Christian message to the fallen world which its morality is debased. Christians can only be effective in their message when they have no issues of conscience condemning them. Spirituality and morality are the hallmark of a new person who emerges from the spiritual and moral decadence of the sickening world. This concurs with Paul's exhortation to believers (Eph. 4:17-24; Col. 3:7).

Ecumenical movement should strongly emphasize spirituality and morality. These are important because the church can only stand strong when its spiritual and moral life

consists together. Many churches have run into problems as a result of this non-committal attitude and this has weakened them. And when the church becomes weak, the nation also becomes weak. This is the case because many national leaders are the product of the church. When the church stands strong in terms of its morality and spiritual commitment it produces men and women of credible character that can be entrusted with national responsibilities. The problem of corruption usually develops from moral decadence. Moral decadence flares up when the church fails to stand strong as the exemplary body. This is why Ecumenism should strongly emphasize this aspect in fellowship of churches. Such things that are condemnable by Scripture should not be watered down for the sake of unity but unity can only be truly achieved when truth is set at the background. Scripture is the reference point for all believers and the rule of faith. This spiritual and moral emphasis should combine with cultural values that cherish impeccable attitudes. In many cultures especially the African, homosexuality is considered a taboo. Scripture also condemns it. When this is taken on these horizons, the church and state can produce men and women of moral integrity for the good of the society. The good of the society can only be truly achieved if family values and integrity are also maintained. Abhorring gay practice protects the integrity of marriage and family values. A church and a good society cannot do without good family backgrounds that have moral integrity.

4.0 Conclusion

The principles of Ecumenism should seek to place God at the center of faith and practice. Ecumenism is not about strategizing on how to win other churches over to the confessional standards of other churches. It is about learning to live and work together for the cause of the gospel in our diverse expressions and cultures. Therefore, the overarching principle is the glory of God upon which further theological pastoral and liturgical principles that are set in faithfulness to Scripture.

5.0 Summary

We have seen that the glory of God forms the basis for Ecumenism, because it is God who calls us to fellowship and unity. Our theological, liturgical, spiritual and moral lives should be framed in light of the whole person. These three aspects are interwoven and they are essential to the growth of the Christian. These aspects should blend the spiritual and moral life of a Christian in such a way that his/her transformation should affect the secular world in seeing the glory of God. This is what Christ meant by saying let all men see your deeds and glorify the Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16).

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

1. Explain the most basic principle for Ecumenical worship.
2. How should the theological, pastoral and liturgical worship help in the ecumenical fellowship?
3. Explain the importance of the spiritual and moral dimensions in strengthening ecumenical fellowship.

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UNIT 2: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ECUMENISM

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 - 3.2 Christian Political Leaders and World Peace
 - 3.3 Conflict Resolution as a Global Challenge
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 Introduction

The significance of Ecumenism lies in what it stands for—that is, its purpose and goal. Ecumenism is a definition of the spirit of global church unity, seeking to bridge gaps that have stood between churches or traditions for centuries. The impact of Ecumenism in the history of the church shows that it is relevant in all situations at all times since its inception. It is the consistent attempt of the church to find solutions to its problems of disagreement, intolerance and separation. Many denominations and individual persons have labored strenuously to create an atmosphere that helps the church to wax stronger as one family. The necessity of Ecumenism has been acknowledged by those who feel its impact on global trends that affect the entire humanity. Through Ecumenism certain policies have been challenged in different parts of the world.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit you should be able

to: State the values of Ecumenism.

- Evaluate the impact of ecumenism on issues affecting mankind globally.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 The Ecumenical Imperative

The significance of Ecumenism stands against the backdrop of great divisions that took place in the history of Christendom. By the ecumenical spirit we are able to appreciate the need for pursuing reconciliation amongst dissent groups both in the church and in the world in general. The Western and Eastern Church separated in 1054 and the Reformation also brought about division between Protestantism and Catholicism. These divisions were avoidable if the spirit of unity and tolerance was paramount in the hearts of the early and Reformation Christians. These divisions were caused by disagreement on opinions. In any given situation differences of opinions should not necessarily lead to separation if unity remains a cardinal viewpoint of everyone

involved in a dispute. Oliver Onwubiko (1999: 1) states that “a profitable practice of ecumenism must have a sense of Christian mission for unity influenced by love for the Church.” This ecumenical unity is a necessary task of the Church’s missiological agenda. It is on this note that the World Council of Churches is actively conducting programs that captures the true life of the Christian Church. “The witness and programs of the WCC include faith and order, mission and evangelism, refugee and relief work, interfaith dialogue, justice and peace, theological education, and solidarity with women and the poor. What distinguishes the WCC constituency is the forceful involvement of Orthodox churches and churches from the developing world. Through their active presence the WCC, and the wider ecumenical movement, has become a genuinely international community.” The effort of the World Council of Churches and other international ecumenical assemblies at reconciliation and unity is laudable. It may be stated that without the effort of the ecumenical bodies, it would have been difficult for certain missionary accomplishments that result from ecumenical brainstorming on how to deal with issues affection missions. Ecumenism has also been effectively responsible for bilateral relations between nations.

3.2 Christian Political Leaders and World Peace

The governing concern of Ecumenism is also to establish connection with political leaders in pursuing global peace initiative. The stability of the world can only be good for the Gospel to thrive. It was during the Roman Peace (Pax Romana) that the Gospel made its successful giant strides in the Roman Empire. Such peace is needed even in our contemporary missions and evangelism. In situations where there is tension or conflict, the risks of carrying the gospel to people are high. In some cases people who are deeply immersed in conflict are averse to the gospel because they feel it might be an external intrusion or a way of subjecting them to intimidation.

In many countries many politicians are Christians and they are required to imbibe the principles of faith and godliness in their political career, so that good governance would come to the people. This will help to lessen world tensions and conflicts. This political peace order is to be pursued between nations and peoples of the world who live in relation to one another. The role of Ecumenism is mediating peace and creating ways of lessening tensions is urgent and imperative. It is the unity of the church that can be good model for inculcating into all humanity the fact that we all are one human family of God, and that we need one another in order to live. The principle of fellowship with one mind and one spirit is as old as mankind itself. It is on the basis of this insight that the Psalmist says, “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!” (Ps. 133:1). The opposite result of unity which is disunity is disastrous to mankind.

3.3 Conflict Resolution as a Global Challenge

Considering that we are living in a global village, the nature of certain conflicts requires global concerns and attention. Conflict resolution is a global challenge. Christians have to address conflicts from a biblical perspective so that such resolution heals wounds, convicts and causes repentance among the parties involved. Christ Jesus has laid down a model for conflict resolution in Matt. 18:15 where if you brother sins against you, your first approach is to sit down with him to sort it out. The church can have a stronger voice among world leaders and people who are involved in disputes at the

ecumenical level. Love talk should be encouraged among people of different backgrounds and faiths. This would lessen tensions where things could have fallen apart. On the global ecumenical standpoint, regions and sub-regions can initiate peace resolutions.

These peace resolutions can also be taken at the curricular level so that more people can be trained for peace conciliation. Students at the high school to tertiary levels of learning should be introduced to the ecumenical efforts for peace conciliation and peace initiatives. This would eventually cultivate a new culture of understanding and tolerance. The world needs a new orientation towards tolerance and understanding amongst one another. At the higher level of studies, Christian higher education should undertake this challenge to draw a curriculum that helps students who are going to be leaders of tomorrow comprehend issues that breach peace and ways of handling them. Some Christian organizations such as the Peacemaker ministries in U.S. have been organizing peace conferences every year to train people from around the world for conciliation among believers. Such ministry efforts have helped not just corporate bodies but also families and individuals. The concern of ecumenism for global Christian unity is not just for organizations but also for individual persons. In order to attain true and enduring global peace both for the church and society, individuals cannot be ignored. Individuals and families form the nucleus for broader relationship on all issues. Therefore if things get well from the nucleus they will get well also at the apex level.

4.0 Conclusion

Ecumenism is both necessary and important for Christian witness and service to the world. There is a saying that “united we stand but divided we fall.” Ecumenism serves as a point of a united position in the service of mankind to the glory of God. There is global need for political and economic stability and the church cannot shy away from initiating ways that can achieve these. It is by so doing that the impact of the gospel can be more felt.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, we have seen the history of the divisions within the universal church and the need for ecumenical convergence. The divisions in the church could render the Great Commission of the church less effective. There are issues around the world that demand a collective voice of the church through one assembly. Ecumenism therefore stands the great opportunity for the church to address some of the concerns of the world such as peace and conflict resolution.

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

1. Critically analyse the value of Ecumenism in the context of the genesis and development of the divisions in the church.
2. What contributions can Ecumenism make with respect to peace resolutions?

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UNIT 3: ECUMENISM AND CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL ISSUES

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1.0 Introduction

The world today is enmeshed in various uncertainties due to prevailing troubling events. Issues of economic concerns have been factors that breed tensions and conflicts. There has been gross imbalance in global economic distribution of wealth due to control by stronger economies of the world. The ecumenical movement has a huge role to play in securing economic freedom of the weaker nations from the advanced nations. Also the religious factor which threatens global security of lives and property deserves ecumenical attention. The ecumenical organizations have been making great efforts in entering into dialogue with other religions for understanding and tolerance. Terrorism in religion deserves complete condemnation because it does not recognize the dignity of human life. The study of ecumenism calls for re-orientation in religious views and practices in order to guarantee human security and freedom.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit the student should be able to:

- Identify the problems in current global realities that call for the church's response in bringing changes for a better world
- Identify groups of people that are usually affected by current global realities
- Suggest practical ways of replacing this ugly development with more positive ones.

3.0 Main content

3.1 The Gospel and Contemporary Global Issues

All around the world, there are tensions and conflicts that are rooted in the socio-economic and political imbalances. These imbalances affect the lives of the people who are bound to react in various ways with time. The Gospel comes within the context of the people's experience. Ever since the dawn of civilization some of the issues affecting humanity revolve around economics and politics. The survival and dignity of humanity hinge much more on the means of survival. Man was created in the image of God and given all the resources in the universe for his well being. These resources are to be harnessed for the development of mankind to the highest level possible, so that though humanity depends on them, they are not masters but servants of humanity. But when humanity sees these as means of waging war of survival against

others, they become ways of segregating others as being more superior over those who are at a disadvantage. In many parts of the world this has led to class distinctions between the most advantageous and the less advantageous. This has been responsible for the on-going discrimination between whites and blacks, in which, case blacks have always been seen as second class human race. In various countries such discrimination is seen among stronger or majority tribes and minority tribes. It also places men over the women. In religious dominant cultures certain adherents of a religion are given more privileges over the others.

In such situations of struggle for resource control, nations compete with nations as do corporate organizations and this goes down to the lowest level of individuals. This results in economic imbalances around the world as stronger nations dictate the economies and economic policies of weaker nations. Bigger corporations also control global economic effects both positively and negatively. Since production of materials is in the hands of the corporate organizations they control economies to their own advantage whether they affect the less advantage nations and groups or not. The negative effects hit mostly the majority world where majority of Christians are living in abject poverty and disease. Peter Tanko (1991: 33) has rightly argued thus: “When man is subordinate to economics instead of economics to man, it leads to the degradation of man and thus, the impoverishment of human dignity.” In nations where judicious wealth is not entrenched in the culture but rather dubious means become the opium of the wealthy. In many cases this has led political office holders to get the erroneous impression that politics is about their own survival rather than the survival of all. This has bred untold corruption at all levels especially in Nigeria and other African nations that accommodate corruption as means of fortune.

Economics and politics are closely tied such that for an economic emancipation one has to struggle to be a politician. These are issues that require global solutions by the ecumenical assembly of churches. “Ecumenical dialogue on economics should have humanity at the center stage” (Ibid). The ecumenical organizations need practical and workable ideas that can be placed in dialogue with nations especially the advanced nations. The basic principle of Christian economics is brotherly love that is manifest in meeting the needs of others even as denying them of well being is cruelty. Weaker nations should also be challenged to rise up to deliver their own people through conscious efforts at stemming the corrupt systems that lead to their own disadvantage. The ecumenical movement admonishes political and economic leaders to see the dignity and integrity of all mankind in such a way that there is genuine freedom and equity for all. Christians in the advanced countries should not play cool to the approval of their governments when they have a strangle hold on the African economies. For a truly global church unity and transformation through gospel proclamation, Christians in advanced nations should radically counter their government policies that do not warrant the growth of African economies.

3.2 Global Religious Terrorism and Conflicts

Current religious violence that is being experienced globally calls for ecumenical response in seeking ways of minimizing it. Many of the terrorist’s attacks around the world are religiously inclined. The 2001 9/11 attack in the U.S. by Osama bin Laden

was the expression of Bin Laden's religious convictions against America. His actions are not divorced from his religious commitment. He deems everything Western as hateful and subject of elimination. The Iraqi suicide bombers are religious extremists. They have been waging wars against other religious sects within the same Islamic religion.

In Nigeria, series of religious violence against Christians and non-Christians have been increasing since 1987. Rather than a haven for peace makers, religion has been used by some for evil purposes, though they argue that they are fighting those whom they consider to be evil and intolerable. There is global connection to this violence as the case in Nigeria shows. For instance, those who terrorize innocent citizens in Nigeria identify with the "Talibans" of Afghanistan or call themselves Boko Haram. The ecumenical movement needs to chart effective ways of dialogue with people of other faiths in order to create understanding and respect for one another. Religious freedom is critical to peaceful co-existence as "religious persecution and intolerance" are "sources of war" (David H. Miller: 1928, vol.2, 105) which Ecumenism could labor to avoid.

In his letter (Aug. 18, 2009) to the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Abubakar Tsav condemns Islamic religious violence: "God Almighty commands us all to live together in peace and to love our neighbours as ourselves. People who fight others in the name of religion do not believe in God. What can we do to change the situation? It is impossible for government to prone down the number of churches and Islamic sects, because the 1999 Constitution guarantees freedom of worship and association. It is equally wrong to regulate preaching, because this also violates fundamental rights of the people involved and is a rape on democracy. We all need to respect the constitutional provision which provides fundamental rights to worship and association. We must respect and tolerate all religious opinion provided they do not pose a threat to peace and security. The appointment of people to public offices based on religious beliefs rather than merit is also wrong. This is further compounding our problems and dividing us further apart. Each person has his/her grave and will be judged by God according to his/her deed on earth. So why are we politicizing religion? This should be our personal affair." Religion and politics have been mixed dangerously by some as Tsav condemns it. It is alright for one's public conduct to be guided by his/her own faith such as not stealing public funds as any true religion should prohibit. But when people are being discriminated against in the name of religion, then this comes out of wrong motives.

4.0 Conclusion

Ecumenism is growing in the context of global trends that make it even more relevant if it brings its vision and mission to bear upon the world. There is agitation for global economics which inevitably connects to global politics. The church must respond to these issues as its commission to the world.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, we have seen the connection between Ecumenism and current global trends. These trends are primarily economical, political and religious. It is the task of Ecumenism to help in bringing ways that would help less economically buoyant nations

which depend on stronger economic nations to have their own break through. Stronger nations should not use their strength against the weaker nations in a way that would become neo-slavery. Humanity should be the goal of every economy, not vice versa. Ecumenism should also seek ways of addressing religious terrorism in order to make dialogue more relevant and productive.

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

1. What are some of the current global trends that need the urgent attention of ecumenical movement?
2. Is global economy feasible?
3. What are the problems with global economy?
4. Discuss the religious implications of Boko Haram.

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UNIT 4: ECUMENICAL BODIES/ORGANIZATIONS IN NIGERIA

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 - 3.1 The Function of Ecumenical Bodies in Nigeria
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1.0 Introduction

The need for interreligious dialogue in Nigeria is overarching. Nigeria has two major religions that have always been in tensions and conflicts. This development threatens the peaceful co-existence of Nigeria. The way forward for peaceful co-existence is dialogue that seeks better understanding and tolerance for one another. This dialogue should be extended on all issues that concern both religions such as theological, economics, morality, terrorism and politics.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify ecumenical bodies in Nigeria.
- Explain the functions of these ecumenical bodies.
- State the aims of reaching out to Muslims in dialogue
- Suggest some practical ways for achieving better results.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 The Functions of Ecumenical Bodies in Nigeria

When missionaries established churches in Nigeria in the late 19th century several attempts were made at forming a union of churches in the sense of Ecumenism. The union of churches was to be between the North and South, but this was not the agenda of some founding missions, so it did not materialize in the way that it was intended. Religious crisis in Nigeria has forced the church to reclaim its call to oneness of the body of Christ. The context in which ecumenical spirit grows in Nigeria is religious bigotry that has enveloped the country for years now. In the North where it is predominantly Muslim, Christian churches that hitherto were not coming together for fellowship have seen the need for unity. Ralph Madugu (2009:29) reports about the development of this Christian unity in Plateau state citing Kaigama, the state Chairman of CAN: “According to him, Unity Service has become a regular feature of CAN in Plateau State which draws Christians together from various denominational groups to witness publicly the unity of the Church stating that the prayer of Christ for unity in John 17:21 was not wasted.” Furthermore, “we declare without fear or shame that

we are Christians for unity and peace. We are in love with Jesus, the Author of unity and the prince of peace. We are serious about our faith which is built on the Trinity.” This development is evidence of the importance and necessity of Christian unity that protects the interest of the gospel in Nigeria. Christians can only stand strong against the prevailing attacks on Christians when they express their unity in faith and fellowship.

When the church stands together, it can also help the entire society to see itself as one and as heading to a common goal. The unity of the church as an ecumenical expression does not become an avenue for mere social gathering but is essentially a spiritual refreshing experience when they gather in spirit and in truth. By seeing itself in this way, it can impact positively on the society. Kaigama is reportedly of the view that “all Christians must brace up for spiritual renewal and be light and salt to the society as agents of reconciliation, justice and peace, noting that it would be wrong for CAN to be used as a social club, an opposition group or an alliance with partisan political parties” (Madugu, 2009:30). In the late eighties, the nine churches of TEKAN came together and drew the attention of the Federal government of General Babangida to the imbalances in handling religious issues and political appointments that favoured Muslims over Christians. TEKAN agitated for a number of changes that would move the country forward. These include political arrangements, economic policies, Health care delivery system, diplomatic relations, census and constitutional matters that bordered on secularism of Nigeria, more particularly the Sharia controversy. The prevailing circumstances negated the unity of Nigeria as a nation because of tribal divisions. TEKAN challenged the nation on this need for unity: “The blood of Jesus has made us one. If our government cannot unite the nation because of these tribal differences, Christianity can overcome them and unite the nation because we are redeemed by the same blood (TEKAN, 1987: 66).

In the South, the convergence of several other churches gave expression to church unity. Among these bodies are the Church Union Movement in Nigeria (CUMN), United Gospel Churches Association of Nigeria (UGCAN) and the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN). The emphasis of these fellowship bodies is best described as a mood rather than doctrinal or confessional concerns. The fact that they are the body of Christ calls for acceptance of one another in fellowship. The formation of the UGCAN took pains over the years and finally realized its goal. The Evangelical Union of Southern Nigeria was adopted for its conference name in 1911 which invited Presbyterians, Primitive Methodists, Niger Delta Pastorate, Qua Iboe Mission, Yoruba Anglicans, Wesleyans, the Dutch reformed Church, the S.I.M., the Basel Mission and the British and Foreign Bible Society. The ecumenical spirit in Nigeria was warmly appraised: “Negotiations for unity in Nigeria benefitted so much from all the advantages brought by the ecumenical revolution that some critics later argued that this intense awareness of participating in a world-wide movement bred incautious hurry” (Kalu, 1978:11).

Christian Council of Nigeria operating within the circle of the mainline protestant churches is serious engage in the campaign on Ending Violence Against Children (End-VAC) in partnership with UNICEF to different focal states in Nigeria, handle campaign on awareness on Food Security, Campaign on Awareness of HIV/AIDS among CCN

Schools, teachers, youths, women and young pastors. Partaking in election monitoring to ensure good governance and that democratic principles are observed during elections in the country. CCN has contributed immensely to different advocacies in Nigeria through her Institutes of Church and Society located in Jos, Plateau State and Arochukwu in Abia State.

3.2 Christianity and Islam in Dialogue

We begin here by considering a definition of religion. According to the Wikipedia, “A religion is an organized approach to human spirituality which usually encompasses a set of narratives, symbols, beliefs and practices, often with a supernatural or transcendent quality, that give meaning to the practitioner's experiences of life through reference to a higher power or truth.” The beliefs and practices in religions often cause the tendency for competition of truth-claims among adherents of the same religion or different religions which consequently invoke tensions. From the teaching of Jesus Christ, we have seen that he engaged the religious teachers of his own time in clarifying some issues of contention. For instance, when he was accused of breaking the Sabbath by healing someone on it he asked the religious leaders whether it was good or not to save a life on a Sabbath (Matt.12:9-14). The church must follow the example of Christ by not avoiding dialogue or interrelationship with people of other faiths but engaging them respectfully for the purpose of helping them to realize important things beyond what they have already known. We have also seen Paul's approach towards interreligious dialogue. He engaged the men of Athens who worshipped many gods and even built a temple to an unknown god (Acts 17:15-34). Paul found a point of contact where he engaged the non-Christian religion in a dialogue. The Christian religion has opportunities to share with the non-Christian religions.

This becomes necessary as we constantly face violence in Nigeria. The need for learning to live with one another is a matter of necessity as we live in one world with pluralism. Religious violence has threatened the peaceful co-existence of Nigeria as a nation and it is bound to continue this way which demands dialogue. According to Johan Galtung, "Every religion contains, in varying degrees, elements that contribute to peace or war. For the sake of world peace, dialogue within religions and among them must strengthen the peace making elements within them" (“Religions, Hard and Soft”).³In Nigeria, the church has to make it a point of duty to initiate peaceful dialogue through which both religious adherents listen to one another. If religion is a divine institution, then God must himself be present in our dialogues and he would make converts himself through those dialogues. It is not right to force people into accepting one's religion. If God is truly present in a religion and dialogues are initiated and well presented. The work of conversion belongs to God alone who can use such opportunities to cause repentance to others. Religious dialogue does not go empty at the end of the day. God acts in his own way to bring people to faith. When Paul dialogued with the people at Athens, the result of his speech was the powerful intervention of God himself.

³ Cited on May 5, 2009 on <http://www.crosscurrents.org/violencespecial.htm>.

3.3 The Goal of Christian-Muslim Encounter

Interreligious dialogue is intended to first of all create awareness towards one another for better understanding and relationship. Religious dialogue has a number of goals in view. First, it aims at attaining unity of humanity. Khodor (1997, 401) argues that “The increasing need for unity makes dialogue imperative if we wish to avoid a de facto syncretism of resurgent religions all claiming universality.” To him, this unity is what places us together so that we can begin to talk among ourselves. But when others are excluded, it gives them more opportunities to form a resistance against Christianity and make equal claims as does Christianity. Apart from that unity, Ecumenism also focuses on peace and love. The peace that Ecumenism yearns for is grounded in the psychology and sociology of religion, so that when we understand ourselves and our expressions we see our common problems and needs as one people created by God. Genuine dialogue is not mere talking to one another or exchange of information but it is much deeper – that is “out of our talking and our relationships arises a deeper encounter, an opening up, in more than intellectual terms, of each to the concerns of the other” (WCC, 407). Dialogue also goes an extra mile reaching “across differences of faith, ideology and culture, even where the partners in dialogue do not agree on important central aspects of human life” (Ibid). Ultimately, dialogue produces fruits that help us keep to the ethical tenets of not defacing the image of one’s neighbor as the Old Testament law says “Do not bear false witness against your neighbour” (Exod. 20:15). In dialogue Christians are required to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:14-15) in order to convince the unbeliever of the need to embrace the salvation that Christ offers. The act of conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit, so Christians do not force people to believe. Any true religion should leave the act of conversion to God.

3.3 Applying the World Council of Churches Guidelines for Inter-Religious Dialogue in Nigeria

The World Council of Churches recommends certain guidelines for interreligious dialogue globally which can be applicable to the Nigerian situation. The point of these guidelines states thus: “These guidelines are offered to member churches of the WCC and to individual congregations in awareness of the great diversity of situations in which they find themselves” (Ibid, 410). Five guidelines have been set out: 1. Churches should seek ways in which Christian Communities can enter into dialogue with their neighbors of different faiths and ideologies. 2. Dialogues should normally be planned together” so that these may focus on “theological or religious, political or social.” 3. Partners in dialogue should take stock of the religious, cultural and ideological diversity of their local situation. This will create conditions for smooth dialogue. 4. Partners in dialogue should be free to ‘define themselves.’ This is by witnessing to “their faith in their own terms.” 5. Dialogue should generate educational efforts in the community. 6. Dialogue is most vital when its participants actually share their lives together. 7. Dialogue should be pursued by sharing in common enterprises in community. 8. Partners in dialogue should be aware of their ideological commitments. 9. Partners in dialogue should be aware of cultural loyalties. 10. Dialogue will raise the question of sharing in celebrations, rituals, worship and meditation. 11. Dialogue should be planned and undertaken ecumenically, wherever possible.

4.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, Ecumenism has been aware of the tensions involved in dialogue. The tendency for passing judgment on people of other faith may hamper progressive dialogue. The ecumenical movement tries to make Christian witness restrain from its absolute claims in order to accommodate the thoughts, beliefs and practices of others. This may as well be enriching to the Christian witness. The goal of dialogue according to the World Council of Churches is not to make converts over to Christianity but to listen to one another, since God's truth is universally present in other religions as well. Yet the problem with this is, how can Christians be both faithful to Christ, when he commanded that they make disciples of all nations and at the same time head in the direction of World Council of Churches in just listening and getting well informed without trying to win over to the Christian faith?

5.0 Summary

Inter-religious dialogue in Nigeria is a necessity because our situation demands it in order that we might live in peace. Religious violence has often marred the growth of this dialogue. Dialogues have been undertaken but whether they have been helpful in Nigeria is quite another matter. However, Christians must endeavor to have interreligious dialogue with the Muslims. And Muslims should also be willing to respect the differences in opinion. In the Nigerian context, it is not Christians who undermine Muslims but vice versa. The guidelines suggested by the World Council of Churches may apply helpfully to the Nigerian situation if taken carefully.

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

1. Identify and explain some of the ecumenical bodies in Nigeria
2. What are some of the functions of these ecumenical bodies?
3. How can the guidelines of the World Council of Churches be applicable to the Nigerian context of religious dialogue?

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MODULE 3

Unit 1 The Philosophy of Teaching Ecumenism

Unit 2 Teaching Ecumenism in the High School and Tertiary Level

Unit 3 The Content of Ecumenical Lessons to Contemporary Issues

Unit 4 Ecumenism as An Instrument For National Integration

UNIT 1: TEACHING ECUMENISM

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1.0 Introduction

Ecumenism deserves a place in academic curriculum. It is our view that it be included in high school curriculum at the most basic level. This will enable young people get oriented in the direction of ecumenical development just like other subjects. At the tertiary level, Ecumenism should be considered a degree awarding course of its own. Ecumenism is a vital aspect that deals with issues of global concern and requires the involvement of all in pursuing unity of mankind, peace and justice.

2.0 Objectives

- At the end of this unit you should be able to:
- Identify the role of Christian education in Nigeria.
- Demonstrate adequate understanding of ecumenical education. Identify the necessity of ecumenical education.
- Engage in dialogue among other students for the purpose of building experience and interaction beyond the classroom.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 The Role of Christian Education in Nigeria

Christian education in the southern part of Nigeria came faster due to early contacts with missionaries and European traders. With the conquest of the south by the British government, Christian education was also established. "In those parts of southern Nigeria which had had contacts with missionaries the British administrators found a system of mission education which was fairly swiftly extended to other parts of the South" (Crampton, 1979:98). Unfortunately, the British government did not allow Christian missions to provide their own education in the North in order to protect Islamic interest since it was their domain. The government was hesitant in creating an atmosphere for Christian education though they were more inclined to providing Western education. Due to this suppression, Christian education suffered taking off with

serious impact. Many Christians at that time could barely go beyond their primary schools in the north. Most of the “Middle schools” that were set up by the government were occupied by Muslims which explains why Muslims in the north advanced more in government than their Christian counterparts. Religious instructions were banned in many schools.

Eventually, voluntary agencies got an opportunity to establish their own schools which also gave an opportunity for Christian schools. But government kept interfering with administration of those schools sometimes by direct takeover of everything so that the objective of voluntary agencies to produce exemplary citizens through teachers of credible character was at times defeated. As time went on Christian Religious Instructions were allowed to be taught in government schools, though this suffered insufficiency of teachers in this area. The Christian Reformed Church Mission was stern on its resolve to produce Christian leaders of impeccable character and they reacted to government grants-in-aid “we would advise our Sudan missionaries to keep clear of government subsidies in education if that is possible. It might be possible for us to accept government aid, if there is no interference with the religious quality of the instructions given and that we retain the right to dismiss teachers who are unsatisfactory from our point of view” (Smith, 1972:105). The mission was emphatic that their schools were Christian schools for the purpose of maintaining high Christian standards. Subjects were to be taught within the context of Christian worldview.

Roman Catholic Mission and some churches within the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN) took education seriously, because to them, education was the gateway to holistic life. Hence Agha U. Agha (1996:255) points out that, “Presbyterian educational practice in Calabar tried to be democratic, offering equal opportunities to all to acquire basic cognitive skills.” When in 1927 some of the mission’s schools were closed down by the government, the church Sunday School served a dual purpose in the provision of regular classroom education and Sunday School education.

In the late 70s into the 80s Christian education flourished and has contributed immensely to the intellectual development in Nigeria. Many prominent leaders in Nigeria have passed through Christian schools and have received Christian education that has helped to shape their spiritual and moral values. Writing way back in the sixties, Marioghae and Ferguson (1965:96-7) concur: “The result of this stupendous work is that Christianity plays a far larger role in Nigeria than the proportion of Christians would lead one to expect. Christians are a tiny minority, even in the southern Regions, but there must be very few leaders in any field in southern Nigeria who have not been ‘Christianized,’ who have not, that is to say, been through a Christian school and confronted with the Christian way of life.” The impact of Christian education in our time has far grown to a level that it could be said without Christian education we would be backward three decades. Today many Christian schools are spread all over the country producing great men and women in all academic disciplines that have taken Nigeria to its present height in the comity of nations. “Education, the enlightenment of the mind, the sharpening of the intellect – all these are excellent things. We are called to love God with our mind; it is a dimension which Jesus adds to the commandments of the Old Testament. Had it not been for the work of the Christian Church in education

there would have been virtually nothing until recently; Nigeria could scarcely have taken the place she holds among the nations of the world” (ibid., 98). Through Christian education many Christian societies such as Fellowship of Christian Students, Inter-Varsity Fellowship, Scripture Union and Young Men Christian Association have influenced the lives of many who are great citizens of this country.

The Church in Nigeria should as a matter of urgency work hard and consciously to see that Christian schools do not only proliferate for the sake of business enterprise but also ensure that they maintain the highest standard of education. The standard of education has been falling recently and only Christian schools can salvage that situation. This is a serious challenge that requires an ecumenical approach in order to encourage and complement individual churches and Christian organizations in the country to develop this as a core vision and value. This education should be comprehensive in scope considering the whole person that is the physical, mental and spiritual given the fact that spiritual or Christian education is co-extensive with life. The challenge of realities of life and the centrality of Christ in the issues affecting our lives must be taught to everyone whether in high schools or tertiary institutions. Christian education should be conducted not only in institutions of academic learning but also in churches and workshops and seminars.

3.2 The Philosophy of Teaching Ecumenism

Knowledge brings freedom and enlightenment and humanity continues in the quest for better understanding in order to make the world a better place to live. When people realize what Ecumenism stands for, their attitude will change in terms of relationship and fellowship with one another. Amirtham (1987, vii) explains the purpose of teaching Ecumenism as twofold: First, to do so on its own merit as a discipline, to pursue research on what has divided the churches in the past, the current situation in inter church negotiations and the contemporary issues facing the ecumenical movement.

Secondly, to bring in the ecumenical perspective, the unity of church and unity of mankind, in all the disciplines and the totality of the teaching and learning experience. No church or school can afford to do theology in isolation.” The philosophy of Ecumenism is the pursuit of unity through understanding and cooperation with one another. First, people need to understand the need for personal and corporate relationship with one another because we have come to realize that we are living in a global village, no longer in isolation from one another. Second, unity is no longer an option but a necessity for humanity, so that we all have to realize that our fellow neighbors deserve to live in freedom. Third, listening to one another and tolerance are key attitudes to living together and appreciating our diversity in all respects. Therefore, this requires a thorough orientation of everyone globally in order that sustainable sense of tolerance and unity is achieved. But to achieve this must be best through teaching. Like other subjects that create awareness to students over certain facts, Ecumenism as a subject can help to inculcate in young people the philosophy of inter-relationship. The teaching of Ecumenism should not necessarily be restricted to theological Seminaries but to all Christian schools. This can be done with a view to building a culture of tolerance, friendship and peaceful co-existence. The teaching methods in schools should be to present the ideological challenge of other living faiths

and socio-economic issues to the Christian faith. The students should be able to grapple with the realities of life in the light of the Christian faith so that conscious and deliberate efforts are made in response to those challenges. The contrasts between Christianity and other religions should be presented objectively so that students can form their own opinions on the basis of critical considerations.

3.3 The Necessity for Ecumenical Education

A good society demands good character formation that respects its social and cultural values. Christian education in the ecumenical perspective broadens the perspectival and contextual horizons of youths who are being prepared for future tasks within the nation and the world at large. These youths are to engage responsibly the environmental, social, psychological, political, economic, technological and other contemporary issues in a godly way as people who are accountable in their stewardship. The need for ecumenical leaders both for the church and the wider society is ardent so that they would promote the Christian faith within the “framework of intercultural and inter-confessional encounters” (Crow, 1982: 91). Courses should be developed that in such a way as to impact heavily upon “African religion and culture, the church’s role in human development, the prospects of peace, the family crisis, the bible in today’s world, healing, death in different cultures and the shape of Christian unity” (ibid, 92). Our global relationship calls for the necessary equipping of the young men and women in developing ways of constructive engagement on issues that unite mankind to the glory of God.

Ecumenical education should be cultured in Christian worldview, so as to inculcate in men and women the sense of being responsible people in the world that matters to God who demands our accountability for our cultural mandate. Abraham Kuyper rightly observed that the Lordship of Christ is “always everywhere” so that “There is not a single inch of the whole terrain of our whole existence over which Christ does not proclaim, ‘It’s mine.’” The contribution of Christian education is to impact on the school front, home, church and society. Ecumenical education is intended to deepen the students’ knowledge of the Christian faith in God as it relates to spirituality and practical issues for a fruitful encounter with others whether believers or not. The students would be given opportunities to know about churches other than their own as well as other faiths and how to interact with them. Schools that have ecumenical education should create facilities for students to develop their ecumenical skills such as writing in journals, debates, reviews and news.

4.0 Conclusion

Christian education has played a major role in enlightening and advancing Nigeria to her current status as a developing nation. Teaching theology in the ecumenical perspective should be one of the core values of schools in the contemporary global setting. Theology should be made simple for students to understand and how they can make critical comparative study of other faith claims in light of Christianity. The philosophy and necessity of ecumenical education should be concerned with contemporary challenges that require well equipped people to handle matters in such a way that the unity of the church and mankind would be achieved. Yet Ecumenism should not seek to minimize the claims of the Gospel for the sake of ecumenical spirit.

Faithfulness to our Lord should govern our desire for building a broader relationship not just within the different church traditions but also with people of other faiths.

5.0 Summary

We have explored the importance of teaching Ecumenism in schools. This will enhance greater sense of relationship with one another as we also seek to dialogue with one another. Ecumenical lessons should afford the students the opportunity to get involved in policies and actions that seek to impact on global issues affecting the unity of humanity. The curriculum should be student centred.

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

1. Discuss the impact of Christian education in Nigeria
2. Discuss the philosophy of teaching Ecumenism.
3. What is the goal or value of teaching Ecumenism?
4. Explain how students can be involved in Ecumenism.

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UNIT 2: TEACHING ECUMENISM IN THE HIGH SCHOOL AND TERTIARY LEVELS

Contents

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Teaching Ecumenism as History
 - 3.2 Teaching Ecumenism as Theology
 - 3.3 Teaching Ecumenism in the High and Tertiary Schools
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 Introduction

In the efforts to survey theological framework for ecumenism concentration is given fully to the theme of unity and togetherness in the Bible and to the perception and experience of oneness practiced by the early Christians. The significant aspect of that oneness was their belief that, they as a body were to live as God is one, so to emphasize the unity of the Church entails searching for the oneness of God. To teach courses on ecumenical themes in tertiary institutions students are expected to read a history of the ecumenical movement, a concise account of the theological perspectives of ecumenism, more so an account of the structure, ideas and history of the world Council of Churches (WCC). With this development, the student is required to have a sense of in-depth idea and perspectives of the ecumenical movement. In fact, this will go a long way in laying a solid theological foundation for ecumenism.

The basic purpose of teaching ecumenism, especially in the high school as elaborated here has been the ability to grapple with the development of the theology of ecumenism, which will stimulate the students to know that the ecumenical movement is necessary for the Church and an effort towards manifesting the core of the gospel through a body, which focuses on the confession of God's grace and care for humanity, the glorification of God's presence, and the discipleship which is a living testimony to God's work.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Identify the significance of the theology of ecumenism as reflected on the major models of unity in Christ
- Examine the role and the events of the World Council of Churches (WCC) as regard ecumenical movements
- Explain vital theological and biblical concepts like Eucharist, faith, justification by faith and balance its diverse views.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Teaching Ecumenism as History

Ecumenism is a historical development. Teaching Ecumenism therefore begins with its

definition and history. Both early and modern Ecumenism could also be discussed as a Christian movement that is focused on the unity and renewal of the Church and its union with God's mediatory role and renewing mission worldwide.

The onset of contemporary ecumenism emanate from the world missionary congress conveyed in Edinburg in 1910. The visionary priorities of that conference were tremendous; common service, common fellowship and common witness. Common service has been concerned for discussing those issues that devastate human community found initially in the Life and Work movement with its first conference in Stockholm in 1925. The concern has been shrouded in strenuous efforts to foster inter church support, to enhance common Christian response to the casualties of war, poverty, oppression and natural disaster. More so, they wanted to enlighten the churches to kick against economic and social injustice as well as racism and sexism. Common fellowship concern has been that of fostering church unity which found its initial expression in the Faith and Order movement which its first congress was held in Lausanne in 1927. Faith and Order efforts have been geared towards doing away with impediments to the unanimous acceptance of members and ministries. Also, the efforts to overcome hindrances to shared celebration of the Eucharist, assisting the Churches to express deeply the apostolic faith in their ecumenical partners and finding ways of passing resolutions together. Common witness has been the concern for cooperative mission and evangelism which had its roots in the International Missionary Council which its first congress was held in Jerusalem in 1928. From this Council emerge interfaith relations that become the modern ecumenical consciousness (Kinnamon: 1997:2).

Discussing Ecumenism as history will focus on the major levels of ecumenical development: the international which considers the assembly of all nations; the regional or continental which focuses on Africa; and the local or national which focuses on developments in Nigeria. This history includes issues of ecclesiastical, societal, political and economic contributions of the church towards them.

3.2 Teaching Ecumenism as Theology

Ecumenism can also be taught as a theological discipline. Its emphasis in this respect could be on issues that brought about divisions in the Church and be directed towards unity. Missions and other relevant sub-theological disciplines may come under this major division of theology. Ecumenical movement stresses togetherness among Christians and most importantly, she encourages churches by all means to be renewed, transformed immensely by receiving the gifts that others bring into the one body of Christ. The organizations in support of the afore-mentioned include the World Sunday School Association, which was later known as World Council of Christian Education and Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

We have observed very closely that, at this tertiary level of academic pursuit, ecumenical historicity is important to articulate its foundation and fundamental elements found therein. Modern ecumenical movement can be partitioned into three periods. It began with the Edinburg mission conference in 1910 and waxes stronger with the inaugural assembly of the WCC in Amsterdam in 1948. The visionary persuasion was influenced by charismatic brethren Mott, Germanos, Soderblom and Temple. At this

moment the rediscovery of the whole Church as a significant component of the gospel was strong. The second phase starts from the Amsterdam meeting in 1948 to the World Council's fourth meeting after twenty years in Uppsala. This period is recognized by the cold war, the abolition of colonialism and the rise of self-awareness on the side of newly-independent nations and their churches. Here the focus has been rediscovery in and for the world. The third phase is the period from 1968 hitherto, has been apparently organized by the experience of pluralism. It has been dominated by the dialogue of cultures and ideologies within today's global church and the differences within humanity; the rich and the poor" (Kinnamon: 1997: 4).

Moreover, on the theological level, the first two phases of the movement were highly Christocentric as depicted by the WCC's basis as a "fellowship of Churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures". The interest was directed on the Church as the catholic body of Christ and on confession of Christ all over the entire earth. Statements from these periods place high esteem on the divinity of Christ which was essential at that time when global society was in disarray due to conflict worldwide. By the end of 1960s, precisely, attention was highly placed on the Trinitarian nature of God, injunction with continuity presence of the Spirit in creation and the humanity of Christ as well as his suffering (Kinnamon: 1997:4).

3.3 Teaching Ecumenism in the High and Tertiary Schools

Ecumenism can be taught at the high school level. It can be done creatively by introducing it at a simple level for students to understand the needs of the student for it as he/she grows to interact with different people. A careful analysis of the need to introduce this as a subject at the secondary school level can be done in such a way that it will awaken interest in students. The relevance of this should be developed to meet their age limits, needs, experiences with a number of practical exercises involving dialogue. The developmental process of the child should be matched developmentally in terms educational orientation. The concepts that arise from the subject of Ecumenism should be conveyed in the students' everyday experiences, feelings and usage. The teacher should be able to handle this in such a way that it will spark in the students intelligent, creative and constructive questioning and understanding of ecumenical issues.

The aims and objectives at the secondary level should be stated clearly with these lection of learning experiences. Every process of teaching and learning should be evaluated regularly by getting feedback and then integrating these learning experiences together with the content of this ecumenical subject. The curriculum should be thematic according to the learning experiences of the students. Following the suggestions of Grimmit (19730, Groome (1980) and Ilori (1990) for religious education, Mkena (2004) enlists some helpful objectives that can be applicable to the teaching of Ecumenism in high schools. These are:

1. To foster in the young persons a knowledge and appreciation of the moral values needed to live a religious life (and we add in the ecumenical sense).
2. To enable the students to develop good personal character: discipline, self-reliance and self-acceptance with attitudes which reflect authentic religious (and ecumenical) values.
3. To develop attitudes and values which make for a mature and responsible member of

- a community such as love, respect, reverence, honesty, generosity and service.
4. To equip students with skills for analyzing, reflecting on and responding to significant personal, community and traditional experiences. Thus learning to cope with tensions arising from conflicts between some traditional practice and religious values.
 5. To enable the students to develop the moral behavior and those values that foster national unity and development, e.g. self-reliance, respect for human rights and property.
 6. To enable the young persons express accurately and respectfully what other religions believe and practice, so as to reduce prejudice and intolerance.
 7. To enable each student to have a proper understanding of what is meant by a religious (in the ecumenical sense) approach to life.
 8. To explore the place and significance of religion in human life in order to make a distinctive contribution to each student's search for a faith by which to live.
 9. To give the students a religious view of life and then allowing them freely to make up their minds how that view should express itself in belief and practice.
 10. To enable the students build up a worthwhile sense of direction in life and to achieve a valid perspective on the whole business of living.

The same objectives that apply at the high school level may be applicable at the tertiary level only with a degree of difference in the content load and expression as well as methodology of teaching. The Nigerian higher institutions should include courses on Ecumenism in their curriculum so that graduates who major in it can teach at the secondary school level. There is need to prepare a team of Christian leaders whose worldview and life system can fill "the leadership roles of society" in the spirit of righteousness and godliness to "work for justice and peace"(Lont, 2004:68). Accordingly, ecumenical movements in Nigeria should work conscientiously with the government and voluntary agencies to provide "an area for teaching, learning and scholarship that has stability born of purpose and is marked by performance" (ibid.).By this, the students will develop personal skills in ecumenical involvement in order to bring the desired change for a better world. For this to be worked out effectively "a commitment [should] be made by all Christian higher education faculties to teach more effectively to increase the Christian church's and community's depth of understanding of all the disciplines" (ibid. 70). Being more the responsibility of the church, it should take a leading role in developing leaders for the church and society by giving the best effort.

4.0 Conclusion

Teaching ecumenism in schools especially at the high school level could be a new but worthy of exploration. Teachers can be trained in this respect to handle courses on Ecumenism, particularly in dealing with sub-divisions thereto. If it is properly handled, it can be enriching with greater impact.

5.0 Summary

Teaching Ecumenism could be split into two major areas. These are teaching Ecumenism as history of a movement and as a theological discipline. The centrality of Christ should be emphasized in the teaching of Ecumenism.

6.0 Tutor-Marked assignment

1. Explain the two major divisions of Ecumenism.
2. Explain the center of ecumenical theology.
3. What is the role of the church in ecumenical education?

7.0 References for Further Reading

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UNIT 3: THE CONTENT OF ECUMENICAL TEACHING

Contents

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Basic Content of Ecumenical Teaching
 - 3.2 The Methodology of Teaching Ecumenism
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Study

1.0 Introduction

To teach ecumenism on this elementary level requires a lot of skills to use the Scriptures with specific ecumenical orientations. Carefully selected topics should be outlined systematically in order to show coherence in the work. It is the introductory part which provides the reader with the starting point to grasp the basic knowledge.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- State the basic content for teaching Ecumenism in schools
- State the matrix for global management of Ecumenism
- Explain how we can respond to ecological issues ecumenically
- Discuss the relationship between ecumenical theology and history.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Basic Content of Ecumenical Teaching

Ecumenism should be considered as a broad subject under which missions, evangelism and interfaith dialogue should be included as sub-divisions. This is in keeping with the concept of Ecumenism as a movement. According to Rusch, William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury Emeritus called the ecumenical movement as “the great new fact of our time” (1985:35). This is for the fact that, after centuries of separation and hostility, Christians have started to re-assimilate the elementary biblical truth that, the church as God’s people and the body of Christ must serve as an example in this world to see how God assemble people from all the corners of the earth so as to live as a new creation. Churches now having a large number of people should involve one another in Councils of Churches, theological chats, different forms of mutual mission, common prayer, and other illustrations of ecumenical life.

After centuries of mission work, the Christian faith today discovers itself at home on all continents and in almost every nation. Whenever Christian communities in other parts of the globe are facing one thing or the other be it natural disaster, racial oppression and so on, other parts of the global church should respond with outstanding aid and concern.

After centuries of Christendom, the presentation of Christianity in the Western garb, the Church in most parts of the globe has begun to get its prophetic voice (Kinnamon 1).

The opportunities for teaching the Bible in ecumenical perspective have covered important areas:

Inter-religious dialogue

The southern part of the world to which Christianity started to relocate statistically has other religions like Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, tribal religions and more so. Mbiti says “these religions have been part and parcel of the history, culture, worldview, spirituality, ethics and the general orientation of life”. The Bible is one among the sacred Writings of the world; therefore it should be approached as such. Some of the sacred Writings are transmitted orally. The Bible talks about issues on human themes which other religions do too. Nevertheless, the Bible is also outspoken on basic issues of dialogue, so it has to address adherents of other faiths. The areas to address are; creation, scriptures, Christology, salvation, mission and evangelism, spirituality, community, hope and vision. Which biblical passages talk about these topics? How can we ascertain side by side the meaning of these passages with that of other sacred writings? What do people of other faiths respond to these topics? What light does the Bible illuminate on the passages of other sacred Writings? (Amirtham: 1987: 34-35).

Peace and Justice

These are the basic ecumenical contemporary issues the world faces today at large. In fact, they go beyond Christian boundaries. Politicians do engage in dialogue on it constantly. Now, the Bible as ecumenical book, its responses to these issues would illuminate its clear-cut teaching about them. Hence, other religions also have their approach on these issues, how do we house their views in our ecumenical community?

The Bible in Ecumenical Services and Activities

Continually in large numbers, Christians all over the world come together for church worship and united activities. These are better chances for teaching and applying the Bible in ecumenical perspectives. Local and International conferences can better be used to teach the Bible in ecumenical perspectives. With this, Christians all over the globe will be more edified and enlightened. Christians need to be more open to issues that surround them, so that they can respond in a more effective way that proclaims the message of Christ.

Ecumenical Response to Nature and Ecology

This is another important contemporary issue which accommodates questions about survival for human beings and nature in general. Ecumenism is a comprehensive developing worldview that should be extended to the environmental concerns. When God created man, he gave him cultural mandate to keep the creation. We should be deeply concerned with what happens to our environment. Nature presents questions that go beyond national, cultural and ecclesiastical circles. The major concerns here are the responses the Bible has for nature, the contribution of other religions to the understanding of the link between God, mankind and nature, and how do we deal with ecological songs like that of Psalm 104. We should learn to treat nature with care so that we can stop causing damage to nature, because erroneous views of other people

misled us over the past two centuries to involve in ecological degradation which its consequences we are facing today.

Ecumenism needs to take our relationship to the entire creation beginning with our human relationship to one another from the perspective of God. We should have continuity with the Early Church, especially the Eastern Orthodox and the theological and spiritual implications of “an Orthodox view of the environment.” The basic question is how we interpret the world around us and inside us. Our attitude has been to examine, experiment and exploit the world and other fellow humans instead of transforming it. There are deep contradictions among Christians who generally condemn oppressive and racial systems, but turn around to condone racial, religious and economic disparity in their own society.

Our attitude towards the creation should be the same with towards ourselves in relationship. There is a close connection between our relationship to the creation and to the poor. The creation shares in our flesh and this should inform us to love it since no one hates her own body (Eph. 5:29). We share so much in common with the earth that we cannot damage it without damaging ourselves. That all things are in God even strengthens the fact that we are one. And we should have “a heart of love for humans, birds, beasts, and other creatures. When relationship with everything in the creation is asserted without discrimination, we are in tune with the purpose of creation.

Despite the present state of affairs there is still hope for the shattered image of the creation: “An image, even if shattered, combined with a realistic task can truly change this world, for there is a beauty beyond the shattered image, an ancient beauty that requires reconstruction and transformation” (Chryssavgis, 13). An urgent need to heal our relationship with the creation is thus summoned. So much is derived from the Orthodoxy – its teaching on “creation as the incarnation of God in the widest and deepest sense.” But the question is, would Orthodoxy’s theology have been the same if it had woken up in the day of science and enlightenment as the Western church? How is God at work in the world and how should that inform our attitude to the world? How may the church take an incarnational approach to the creation? Is salvation individual or universal? The care of the church has to be for everything that is created whether human or non-human, in fact to be faithful to the creation.

The paradigm that Christ set is that he assumed flesh that the world might be reconciled and deified and creation share in the divine nature. Here lies the sacramental principle, namely that Christ is “present in all times” and “in all places.” This also draws on the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the creation, in our human hearts and history. God overcomes the ontological gap between the created and uncreated and is within time and space, as well as he is in heaven. There is an invisible dimension to all things visible. Think of instances of Bethel (Gen. 28: 10-19), the burning bush (Exod. 3:1-6) and the Jericho war (Josh. 5:15).

If the world is a sacrament by virtue of God’s presence in it (all things), then there is a countless number of sacraments! Human salvation and cosmic transfiguration can be achieved by cooperation between Creator and creation. There is a dialectical understanding of the sacramental idea. “A sacrament is that which reveals life and the

world as a movement incorporating Alpha to Omega, as transition from old to new, as Paschal or Passover from death to life” (ibid). God is described in relation to the world as “encosmic” (at one and the same time in the world), “pericosmic” (around the world) and “hypercosmic” (above the world). Therefore, creation is from God. Every part that the world has obtains from God. The incarnation of Christ is the last of the many theophanies that have taken place before in the creation, and this divine self-emptying is the essential character of God. The incarnation is in response to the fall. The incarnation has both cosmological and historical significance.

What attitude should we have towards creation? We should imbibe the principle of the ascetic dimension whereby the excess of consumption and abuse of the world are corrected. This is a communal attitude that leads to a responsible view of material things. By this, the terrestrial development and environmental sustainability come to a balance. The basis for this is the fact that “Everything is full of God.” This leads to the understanding of divine transcendence and immanence as both ideas cohere together in the creation. The God beyond makes himself available in the creation. This is understood as “difference-unity” model. God is both apart from and part of the creation.

The sacredness of the creation is also found in the sayings of the “Desert Fathers.” This practice of the “Desert Fathers” was developed in Egypt, Syria and Palestine as an ascetic life. The land is crucial to humanity and its desert had something unique in the experience of these “Desert Fathers and Mothers.” Desert was viewed as a place for both temptations and transfiguration. It is the love of God that pushed them into the desert, so that they would put to death the desires of the flesh. In the sense which the desert serves it was identical with the church. In a sense, the desert is the center of creation where personal communion with God was experienced. Prominent among the Desert Fathers is Anthony who was calmed by the desert experience. In the desert, one encountered temptation. Temptation was a critical part of the experience with God, without which one cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. God’s presence in the land is paramount, and it should inspire us in our ecumenical drive to pursue unity and responsibility to one another and the entire creation.

Bible and Culture

As many as the translations of the Bible into other languages, the more cultures it comes into. Ecumenical approach is an encounter across cultures. The Bible has to give more elaborate teaching on the question of culture whenever Christian faith is introduced in a given culture and other cultures that had received the gospel for many years. For instance, missionaries have condemned the custom of polygamy in African context and other communities where Western missionaries evangelized. These same people with other African converts translated the Bible into native languages. Christians study it in their cultural perspective and find out that, among other things, pious pillars of faith in the Old Testament were polygamous like Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David and host of others. The Bible they read does not condemn polygamy so contextualization is very a sensitive area to be handled diligently (Amirtham: 1987: 35-36).

The Sacraments: Baptism and Holy Communion

The sacraments are the institutions initiated by Christ which are rooted in his ministry. It is incorporation into Christ who is crucified and raised as Lord. It is entry into new covenant between God and his people which is the gift of God administered in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Holy Communion or Eucharist is an institution of Christ as a gift from the Lord. It is the new paschal meal of the church, the meal of the new covenant that Christ gave to his disciples as a remembrance of his death and resurrection as the expectation of the Supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19.9). The ecumenical lessons drawn from these sacraments should be for believers to get its biblical root meaning and be edified (Kinnamon 182-83).

3.2 The Methodology of Teaching Ecumenism

Ecumenism is an integrative and interactive focus for theological and wholistic approach to the historical study that lends itself to the theological foundations of unity and diversity within the church. The divisions that characterize the history of churches and the attempts to manage them are the basic thrust of ecumenical study. In the teaching and study of ecumenism there is the necessity of exploring the methodologies that are relevant to conflict resolution and reconciliation, and examination of the history and character of ecumenical initiatives. Important distinctions are to be made between teaching ecumenically and ecumenism and also proposing a number of strategies for developing courses in ecumenism. In doing this, particular ways should be identified and the challenges that avail to ecumenical curriculum in the higher institutions. These must involve the ability to critically analyse the ecumenical agenda, purpose and goal in view of what has already been established in the history of ecumenical movement. Ecumenism at the tertiary level should be grounded in the department of Church History. This should be done in such a way that Ecumenism becomes a point of analysis of various religions, the role they play in national and social integration in Nigeria. The content of the course and the set objectives should be considered within the context of the Nigerian situation, so that it will provide the students with vast resources for developing practical ways of making harmonious interaction with people of other faiths and denominations. Accordingly, "Ecumenical principles for teaching and writing church history (curriculum and text books, respectively) will be explored through the lenses of time and space." This should be done with a broader perspective of Ecumenism beyond the confessional spectrum regarding time and the geographical dimensions. This should create an avenue for research into detail events in the history of the global church in order not to miss some important developments that have relevance to ecumenical issues. There should be a critical assessment of continuities and discontinuities that are critical to understanding the complex dimensions of ecumenical agenda.

4.0 Conclusion

At this juncture, ecumenism is seen as prudent movement primarily driven by committed individuals through conducting councils led by official church representatives. They come together to promote unity in spite of their different backgrounds. It goes a long way to encourage renewal of doctrines by individual

churches as they continue to understand biblical injunctions. The Bible is always held in high esteem as the living Word of God which throws light on many issues affecting us in relation to Christian faith. The World Council of Churches has been the avenue through which biblical and world issues are channelled for discussions and more insight.\

5.0 Summary

The basic thrust of Ecumenism is a tendency toward worldwide Christian unity or cooperation concerned with the unity and renewal of the Church and its relationship with God's reconciling and renewing mission throughout creation. The ecumenical movement tries to recover the apostolic sense of the early Church for unity in diversity, and it confronts the frustrations, problems, and ironies of the modern pluralistic world. It is a live lyre-examination of the historical sources and destiny of what followers understand to be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ. The World Council of Churches has been the chief avenue through which biblical and worldly issues are channelled for thorough discussions and the efforts to proffer solutions.

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

1. Explain how ecumenism can fit in to a high scholar university/College curriculum.
2. What are the basic content for an ecumenical class?
3. How can the Bible address satisfactorily the issues that are handled by other World religions?

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UNIT 4: ECUMENISM AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION

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1.0 Introduction

Teaching Ecumenism in schools can be a great step towards achieving the set goals and objectives of Ecumenism. This should be student centered. More text books should be recommended for the study of Ecumenism in schools. Many text books that have been written are only for higher institutions. There is therefore the need for developing books on Ecumenism that are less sophisticated for high school students.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Identify the problems Nigeria's unity.
- Explain ways of changing the orientation of Nigerians through ecumenical education
- Apply the ecumenical lessons to practical situations
- Engage in practical discussion with other fellow students on ecumenical concerns and national development.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Ecumenism as an Instrument for National Integration

The Nigerian state is in dire need of a true sense of oneness. The development of ecumenical education should focus on how to impact the church and the society in realizing the need for true sense of national unity. Nigeria has been dogged by tribal sentiments to the disadvantage of national consciousness and patriotism. This has affected virtually all aspects of the life of the nation. Nigerians hardly see themselves first as Nigerians before thinking about their narrow points of origin. The country has been compartmentalized into Southern and Northern blocks, major tribes and minor tribes, Muslims and non-Muslims and this always results in tensions, conflicts, violence and destruction of property. The socio-economic and political aspects of Nigeria become the playgrounds for this disharmony.

This disunity does not spare the church. The Nigerian church is not only divided on denominational and confessional lines, but is also caught up in the tribal sentiments

such that even in one denomination this clearly plays out on a number of issues such as promotion and key appointments. Kalu (1978: 66) laments how the Church Union Movement of the 1867-1966 failed in its vision to epitomize Christian unity due to socio-economic and political problems that engulfed the Southern church. There were cracks within that church which resulted in suits and counter suits against one another of the same Christian family. The acrimony that developed between the Methodist Church and the Presbyterians zoomed into ethnic jealousies and things simply fell apart (ibid,78). This has affected Christian Association of Nigeria as well. Ordinarily Ecumenism is a philosophy that embraces all churches that want to be in one association. However, CAN was hesitant in allowing more churches in Nigeria become its members. Tanko (1991: 133) justifies this on the grounds that “it will encourage the breaking away of members from the mainline churches and the formation of new Christian bodies, thus making the task of ecumenism more cumbersome.” This however sounds hollow and contradictory to the global ecumenical desire to have all churches unite in one body. Again, Christian Association of Nigeria is not a church such that other churches may break away to join it in forming one church. Christian Association of Nigeria is an ecumenical movement which should encourage all churches to join in membership. Churches that join Christian Association of Nigeria are not local congregations but mainline denominations and in this wise the idea of churches breaking away from mainline churches does not even arise. Christian Association of Nigeria generally has suffered weakness in its rank and file due to fear of domination or loss of control by the dominant members. The strength of Christian Association of Nigeria derives only from the persisting Muslim violence against Christians without discriminating who is safe or not. Christian Association does not possess strength on its own right due to the tendency for disunity among Christian denominations especially between Catholicism and Protestantism. But Christian Association of Nigeria should have been better than this on its own merit rather than by circumstantial derivative.

This disunity is deeply entrenched in the Nigerian system and cultural attitude. Since the independence, Nigeria’s search for identity as a nation has always been a mirage due to ethnic and political factors. Isichei (1983: 468-486) explores the way violence has trailed Nigeria’s historical development as a nation due to ethnicism and struggle for political power with the attitude of the more powerful trying by all available means to undo their opponents. For a better country, Nigeria needs to be oriented in the spirit of Ecumenism. This is the challenge of the church in Nigeria. Nigeria can only thrive as one nation on the platform of unity. A disunited nation is liable to crumble any time given time and persisting unhealthy circumstances.

One of the effective ways of changing this phenomenon for a better and stronger Nigeria is to invest in the youth who are the future national and religious leaders. A new orientation has to be introduced at the character formation period of children and youth so that they can develop a mentality and attitude of appreciating the reality that they come to have as their own nation. The unity of the church and the people of Nigeria and patriotism should be the focal point of ecumenical education in Nigeria.

3.2V Student Centred Curriculum

The curriculum of any subject at all should be student-centred so that it impacts fully on

the students in order that, it may bring out what is in him/her. West (1987, 92) opines that students are given the opportunity to “rethink their own traditions and their own convictions, theological and social, in the light of encounter in the class.” Since the students are leaders of tomorrow this approach would help to build a new cultural mentality that will embrace changes that anchor on mutual respect and tolerance of different worldviews and faiths. The Lausanne Covenant (Kinnamon, 1997, 362) argues that “In every nation and culture there should be an effective training program for pastors and laymen in doctrine, discipleship, evangelism, nurture and service. Such training programs should not rely on any stereotyped methodology but should be developed by creative local initiatives according to biblical standards (Col. 1:27, 28; Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5, 9; Mark 10:42-45; Eph. 4:11, 12).” Students should also be given opportunities to be involved in some practical projects of Ecumenism which have to do with policy and action within churches. In a school setting where various ethnic groups are represented with various belief systems, cultural values, traditional practices and social backgrounds, ecumenical teachings can be made practical by getting students learning how to dialogue among themselves for better understanding and relationship. This should expose students to practical services in the community so that they would begin to develop initiatives for future community or global involvement in contributing to unity and peaceful co-existence. Since we live in a global village and Ecumenism is a global development, teaching Ecumenism should seek partnership with institutions in other countries for mutual exchange of ideas and development.

Ecumenical study should be an area of intense research for the purpose of developing new ways of inter-personal relationship within the Christian family and how that relationship can be extended to the unbelievers and people of other faith. This should be done in such a way that, it will not compromise the Christian gospel but rather make it relevant to people’s lives as a necessary option to their aspirations for life fulfilment. The Nigerian universities in partnership with churches and other non- governmental organizations should have centers for ecumenical research in order to develop specialty. This will enhance more research and publications. This will help to bring more enlightenment to the need for mutual existence of the people of Nigeria which may become a great asset to the international ecumenical movement. High school students who are introduced to ecumenical study would pursue further study in this at a higher level. Nigeria needs ecumenical leaders who are well knowledgeable in the causes of disunity, tensions and conflicts within the nation and internationally so that they can also work towards proffering solutions to those problems. The focal point of ecumenical movement is actualizing the unity of the church and fellowship and unity of the entire humanity. It is a most needed direction in life since our nation and the world at large are always engulfed in tensions and conflicts. This requires not just some efforts but all and best efforts. It also requires the commitment of every true Christian to seek this path since peace making is an integral part of the teachings of Christ. Ecumenism should be framed in such a way that its scope is grounded in the concept of the whole gospel. It is the whole gospel that caters for every aspect of human reality so that the impact of the gospel is felt positively in order to bring changes in human lives that produce true freedom and happiness. For this reason, the church has a great task of working consciously to draw a comprehensive intellectual campaign in order to

create a new awareness and orientation for the people of Nigeria through ecumenical study.

4.0 Conclusion

Ecumenical teaching is a clarion call of the movement in order to prepare men and women for the challenges of the gospel. This should be worked out carefully in order that students at both secondary and tertiary levels of study will benefit according to their intellectual strength.

5.0 Summary

We have argued that Ecumenism should be taught in schools beginning at the high school level in such a way that it will be relevant to the needs of the students and the society. As students grow into taking responsibilities, they need this early formation to brace up for greater challenges as they study further. Therefore, Ecumenism as a course should be student centered. Ecumenism can be a great instrument for national integration and development if given proper attention.

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

1. Explain how Ecumenism as a course should be student centered.
2. How would this study help in developing cultural values that are beneficial to the unity of mankind?
3. Do you think students should decide the content, method and style of learning process?

7.0 References/Further Reading

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EDITORIAL NOTES

1. I have reviewed the work and seen that it is good enough for academic purposes at a Bachelor Degree level.
2. I have indicated few places where there are grammatical and punctuation challenges, and corrected them accordingly. These are indicated in RED ink and other comments made on the side with explanatory notes. Please, effect these corrections.
3. Included in this review is one of the major ecumenical bloc of CAN in Nigeria, which is the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN). This was founded in 1929. It was CCN in conjunction with Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) to pioneer the formation of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). CCN is the only ecumenical body in Nigeria that is a member of World Council of Churches as a bloc. They are a major ecumenical bloc in Nigeria and should not be ignored in any ecumenical study in Nigeria.
4. More lights has been shed on the constitution of CAN, that is the five blocs that make up CAN – Catholic Secretariat, CCN, TEKAN/ECWA, PFN/CPFN and OAIC
5. Two reading materials have been added to boost the knowledge of the students. These are:
Agha, A. U. (1996). *Unto These Little Ones: Children Education Programme in the P.C.N.* In O. U. Kalu (Ed.), *A Century and Half of Presbyterian Witness in Nigeria* (pp. 249-277). Lagos: Ida-Ivory.

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