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Peace in Contemporary Society: From Group Loyalty to Human Loyalty

The paper addresses the problem of how inter-group violence can be effectively checked and an enduring foundation laid for peaceful co-existence in society.

People have been engaged in diverse forms of inter-group violence since the emergence of society [Gray 1976:10] and this has not abated in spite of the various efforts to avert the display of violence in society. The pacifist doctrine, peace treaties and efforts by organizations like the U.N.O have not recorded much success in abolishing inter-group violence. Indeed, humanity is now facing the risk of total annihilation if the problem of violence is not urgently resolved.

The methodology adopted is conceptual and analytical. On the basis of a critical analysis of the concept of war and empirical facts about the phenomenon of war, especially within the African context, we identify loyalty to groups at the expense of more fundamental human values as a major factor underlying inter-group violence in society.

The paper maintains that inter-group violence would be adequately prevented and social peace guaranteed if we develop a sense of ecumenism transcending all group affiliations, and a widespread commitment to the rights, dignity and wellbeing of every person irrespective of race, color, tribe, sex, language, religion or political opinion. These may be achieved by the following:

- Encouraging actual persons and not just groups or governments to interact and communicate across group-divides using "citizenship diplomacy [Smoker and Gruff 1996:19, Pearson, 1972:1140]
- Educating people across cultures on the evils of war, the illusions upon which conflicts are based and the value of peace [Ambler, 1990:200]
- Developing educational programs to teach people about the unity of life, that people across group-divides are more interconnected and inter-dependent than they appear to be [Young, 2000:253,Campbell, 1997:74]
- Informing people about the ways political and group leaders idealize "group interest" and employ propaganda to incite and manipulate people to engage in inter-group violence [Pogge , 1994: 116]
- Teaching the general populace that no genuine human interest can be achieved through wars and that no government, group or leader has any right to ask individuals to do anything that might threaten their lives or well being.
- Persuading people that the human life has an intrinsic value and that people have a fundamental right to life that renders violence immoral.