

Community, Dignity, Reconciliation

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"Reconciliation" is the last word in the theme of the World Association for Christian Communication's Congress 2001, meeting July 3-7 in the Netherlands.



However, it is "not the ultimate outcome, but rather the starting point, where we get ready to dialogue, to get to know each other as we really are, to try to understand each other and investigate the why of our misunderstandings," asserted the Rev. Carlos A. Valle of Argentina, in the opening keynote Wednesday (4 July).

His address, "Community, Dignity, Reconciliation," pulled together the themes of WACC's first two congresses with that of this congress, WACC's third: "Communication: From Confrontation to Reconciliation." WACC General Secretary since 1986, the Rev. Valle retires at the end of this week's congress.

Reconciliation, he said, presupposes change, begins with respect for human dignity and works to build community. Its goal is a new global ethic, one that supports the preservation of human rights, the emancipation of women, the realisation of social justice and the immorality of war – four themes upon which all the great religions agree.

Some might say that achieving reconciliation is a naïve vision, the Rev. Valle continued. It stands up to economic and political systems that demand full submission to their desires and orders. These systems are the modern equivalent of the old gods who, when their orders weren't carried out, got angry and demanded sacrifices from the people.

"Oppression and subjugation of the weakest is considered a suitable punishment," he said, today taking such forms as the burden of unpayable debt and the imposition of interminable embargoes such as those against Iraq and Cuba.

"These modern gods, in the name of the economy and prosperity, demand unconditional devotion," but in the oldest Christian tradition, the Rev. Valle said, God appears offering restitution and new life. Communication in the service of reconciliation "is communication in the service of truth and justice," he said.

Communication makes visible the invisible, he said – the poverty and marginalisation into which millions and millions of human beings are being pushed, the growing gap between rich and poor. These inequalities "are expressions of a globalising process" that "needs to be challenged for the future good of humanity," the Rev. Valle said.

Some might say that achieving reconciliation is a naïve vision, he said, but he urged his listeners to take heart from the words of Eduardo Galeano: If one can produce just one small change, it means that reality can be changed. For example, public pressure succeeded in convincing drug companies to drastically reduce their exorbitant earnings in favor of making AIDS drugs more widely available.

Other heroes are fostering community, dignity and reconciliation among Rwandan children, Kurds and Berbers, prisoners in Indonesia, the landless in Brazil and rural workers in India. They

are standing up against female genital mutilation and for human rights around the world, from Myanmar to Argentina, he said.

A highly heterogeneous collection of advocates for change have joined in opposition to "a capitalism that has been taken up as a synonym for democracy," he said. They protest against "the god of the market every time the great powers get together."

"Sadly, the media focus on the excesses of the few and not on the demands that lie at the heart of the demonstrations," the Rev. Valle said, the belief that "love, compassion, freedom, human and environmental rights should be the guiding forces in our society. We are determined to help create a world in which these values are stronger than self-interest."

"All these examples – and many more could be given – reveal steps forward in the search for a new community life in which communication has an important part to play to alter this contradictory and unjust world," he concluded.